

P12

SAVIO QUICK-FIRE
DOUBLE TAKES GIRONA
BACK SECOND WITH WIN
OVER 10-MAN RAYO



P13

OMAN'S OQGN
AFFIRMS FOCUS ON
HYDROGEN, CCUS
OPPORTUNITIES



P20

ESO AMPLIFIES
ENVIRONMENTAL
MESSAGES AND RAISES
FUNDS THROUGH ART



MUSCAT

OMAN YEAR BOOK LAUNCHED

Acting in cooperation with the Cultural Committee of Muscat International Book Fair's 28th edition, the Ministry of Information on Tuesday celebrated the launch of Oman Year Book 2023, titled "Oman the Vision and the Future". The ceremony took place at the book fair's venue at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Hinai, Head of Oman Year Book's Working Team, said that the annual publication provides a comprehensive account of Oman's progress in various fields of national action. **DETAILS ON P3**

DISCUSSION ON WILDLIFE TRADE BILL

The State Council discussed the Wildlife Trade bill referred by the Council of Ministers at its fourth meeting of the first annual sitting held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Salim bin Musallam Qutn, Deputy Chairman of the State Council. Dr Mohammed bin Said al Hajri, Chairman of the Social and Cultural Committee of the State Council, said that the Sultanate of Oman from the dawn of the blessed renaissance until the present day, has provided great attention to preserving biodiversity. **SEE ALSO P3**

OPINION

P8



Zahir bin Harith al Mahrouqi
Gaza resistance alters world views

P16



Anwar al Balushi
What is the impact of HR analytics on business?

HM RETURNS HOME



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Tuesday, after the private visit he made to the United Kingdom. May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys, grant him good health and wellbeing, and guard him as a source of pride for the Sultanate of Oman and its faithful people! – ONA

Telecom revenues at RO 851 million

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) will carry out 29 field surveys in the wilayats to measure the quality of telecommunication services provided to beneficiaries. This was revealed by Eng Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of the TRA.

During a media briefing organised on Tuesday by the TRA,

Al Ismaili said that the authority has focused on raising the quality of its services through various initiatives.

5G NETWORKS

The programme includes efforts to augment 5G networks and fibre optic connectivity, in addition to initiatives aimed at boosting transition from copper fibre

network to the 5G or fibre optic networks. The total revenues of the telecommunications sector in 2023 stood at about RO 851 million, up by 12 per cent as against the figures of 2022. In the meantime, the total number of workers in companies licensed in the sector stood at 4,167, with a 94 per cent Omanisation rate, said the TRA. **SEE P13**

Low pressure to bring rains

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre said that a low pressure system will affect the Sultanate of Oman from Wednesday to Friday. Heavy rains are expected in the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South.

Active north-westerly wind of up to 35 knots is predicted over most of the governorates. Poor visibility, low temperature and high waves between 2 to 3 metres on the western coasts of Musandam Governorate and the Sea of Oman are predicted as well.

There could also be a noticeable drop in temperatures starting from Thursday until Sunday, coinciding with the activity of the northwesterly winds.

The weather forecast states that clouds will gradually flow and form over the northern governorates of Oman in general. "There is a chance of isolated rainfall, with occasional heavy rains expected in the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South."

During this period, active northwest winds with the speed of 15 to 35 kt are expected to affect most of the governorates. According to weather experts this could also lead to reduced horizontal visibility due to the rising dust and sand.

The sea waves are expected to be from moderate to rough rang-

There is a chance of isolated rainfall, with occasional heavy rains expected in the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South

MET OFFICE

ing between 2.0-3.5 metres on the western coasts of Musandam Governorate and the Sea of Oman, with a noticeable fall in temperatures. For Wednesday the forecast is advection and clouds formation with chance of isolated rainfall ranging between 5 to 15 mm over most of the northern governorates.

The governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, Dhofar and Al Dhahirah are expected to experience southeasterly moderate to active winds with speed of 10-25 knots.

On Thursday and Friday, advection and clouds formation associated with rainfall is expected to continue over the northern governorates of Oman. The intensity of rainfall could range between 10-40 mm and is expected to be concentrated over the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat and Al Sharqiyah South.

RO 151 MILLION FOR LINK ROADS



The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced the completion of 40 per cent of the service roads of Dibba-Khasab road in Musandam Governorate and the link road leading to the Niyabat of Lima at a length of 9 km out of 22 km. The cost of the project exceeds RO 151 million. – ONA

Royal Hospital team removes rare tumour

MUSCAT: A specialised surgical team at the Royal Hospital conducted a 9-hour surgery during which it succeeded in removing a rare tumour from the abdominal cavity of a patient, followed by extensive chemotherapy to eliminate the remaining parts of the tumour.

Dr Amid bin Khamis al Aarimi, Assistant Director General for Medical Affairs at the Royal Hospital, Consultant of Colon and General Surgery, told Oman News Agency that the tumour was engulfing many vital organs, including the right kidney, the right lobe of the liver, the inferior vena cava, the right common iliac artery and the muscles. He said that the difficulty of the operation stemmed



The team during the surgery.

from its rare occurrence, making it a practice that requires high experience and precision.

Dr Amid added that the challenges posed to the operating team included the large size of the

tumour (30x30 cm), its complex location and its proximity to vital organs. He said that the Royal Hospital values the expertise of its professionals and affirms its keenness to provide the best

services to patients.

Dr Amid credited the achievement to concerted efforts made by the team to prepare for the surgery in a manner that secures its success and averts any damage to the adjoining tissues or organs. He said that the patient was in stable condition and recuperating.

Prior to the operation, the patient was reportedly suffering from a solid swelling on the right side of the abdomen that was extending to the right side of the back region, said Dr Amid, noting that this was accompanied by a partial intestinal obstruction, along with pain and weakness in the right leg due to the fact that tumour was spreading to the motor units of the right leg. — ONA



Phone scam: ROP nabs four suspects into revealing bank information under false pretences, leading to unauthorised withdrawals. Legal procedures are underway. Authorities caution the public to remain vigilant against such schemes.

Shura, BGIPU review parliamentary diplomacy

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police arrested four individuals of Asian nationality for orchestrating a phone scam. The duped victims into revealing bank information under false pretences, leading to unauthorised withdrawals. Legal procedures are underway. Authorities caution the public to remain vigilant against such schemes.

MUSCAT: Khalid bin Hilal al Ma'awali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura received on Wednesday the British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union (BGIPU) delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting reviewed relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom. It also explored means of enhancing the bilateral relations in the areas of parliamentary diplomacy. During the meeting, the two sides stressed the importance



The two sides stressed the importance of boosting cooperation between the Shura Council and the UK Parliament. – ONA

of boosting cooperation between the Majlis Ash'shura and the UK Parliament in a manner that pushes the bilateral relations towards wider horizons. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura and some members of the Council. — ONA

Oman, Iran strategic consultations committee meets



The two sides discussed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in the economic and maritime security fields. – ONA

TEHRAN: The Strategic Consultations Committee between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran held its 10th meeting in Tehran on Tuesday.

The Omani side was chaired by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic

Affairs, while the Iranian side was chaired by Ali Bagheri, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs. The two sides discussed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in the economic, consular, cultural and maritime security fields, as well as encouraging investment and tourism exchanges and addressing the obstacles they face in a

manner that serves the joint interests of the two countries. They also exchanged views on a set of regional and international issues of common concern.

In this context, they reiterated their call to the international community to stop the Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza Strip, work on an

immediate ceasefire, lift the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, provide humanitarian needs and hold Israel accountable for its continued violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

The meeting was attended by a number of officials from the foreign ministries of the two countries. — ONA

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IT & Supply

TRA TO PHASE OUT ADSL, FOCUS ON HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) will focus on enhancing the quality of Internet services with several initiatives to be launched this year, this was revealed at its annual press conference on Tuesday.

The plans include rolling out more sites for 5G and moving completely from the low-speed ADSL service to fiber-based home Internet.

Eng Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of TRA, said, "We over achieved the target, which was to reduce the number of ADSL subscribers by 50 per cent. There used to be more than 140,000 subscribers in 2020, and today we are talking about 30,000 subscribers. We are working with all telecom operators to move towards high speed."

He added, "The other element is giving more spectrum to telecom operators, which will enhance the quality of services, which include the phasing out of 3G services and give more emphasis on 4G and 5G."

Al Ismaili said that cybersecurity is a concern for

TRA will launch several initiatives this year, this was revealed at its annual press conference on Tuesday

all telecom operators and they are obligated to invest more in improving their technology to protect the end users. There is a collaboration with other entities in Oman to have a bigger role when it comes to cybersecurity." Other highlights of the press conference were an increase in mobile phone subscriptions in 2023 by three per cent, in mobile broadband by five per cent, in fixed telephone by three per cent, and fixed broadband by five per cent.

The important projects completed in 2023 were the controls for investment in the infrastructure of fiber optic networks, the requirements for preparing an emergency management plan in the telecommunications sector,

and the issuance of controls for public auction procedures for mobile phone numbers.

TRA is focusing on improving telecommunications services for the sectors of education, health, tourism, industry, transportation, environmental sustainability for the telecommunications and postal sectors, and innovation, scientific research, and development in the field of communications.

It has completed the launch of the early warning system in the coastal areas in cooperation with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The number of postal companies increased by 31 per cent, to 63 in 2023, and the total number of workers on permanent contracts was 1,676.

The total revenues of companies licensed in the postal sector in the Sultanate reached about RO 20.6 million by the end of 2023, an increase of 14 per cent compared to 2022.

Starlink Muscat got a licence to provide communication services using satellite systems.

The total revenues of the telecommunications sector in 2023 amounted to about RO 851 million, an increase of 12 per cent compared to 2022, while the total number of workers in companies licensed in the sector reached 4,167 workers, with an Omanisation rate of 94 per cent.

Among telecom operators, Awasr mentioned the launch of the Omani Internet Exchange, linking leading institutions in the industry, networks, data centres, and cloud services in the Middle East and beyond, while Ooredoo launched new data centres at the global level in Suhar, Salalah and Barka, and a communications centre to serve customers with hearing disabilities.

Vodafone reported a 50-per cent growth rate in the subscriber base, while its services can be used in 29 countries with the local tariff.

Minister hails foreign media's role in projecting Oman

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi with a number of Gulf and Arab foreign media professionals.

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and Chairman of the main organising committee of the Muscat International Book Fair, met at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, with a number of Gulf and Arab foreign media professionals participating in covering the activities of the Muscat International Book Fair in its 28th session.

During the meeting, the minister appreciated the efforts made by foreign media institutions in conveying the positive image of the Sultanate of Oman, stressing the necessity of cooperation and communication between various media institutions to exchange expertise, cultures, experiments and knowledge, and to build bridges of friendship and peace between countries of the world, and the role of the media in pushing the wheel of economic, civilisational and social development, in addition to its pivotal role in correcting the global path to strengthen the principles of peace among

peoples.

The meeting touched on the renewed renaissance that the Sultanate of Oman is experiencing under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in all fields, with which the Omani economy has witnessed important and major transformations, in line with the implementation of the Oman Vision 2040. The minister stressed the role of the media in advancing accelerating economic, cultural and social development in every country.

During the meeting, ways to enhance media cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and sisterly and friendly countries were also discussed, including exchanging experiences and media content and supporting cultural and artistic initiatives, in addition to emphasising the importance of the Muscat International Book Fair as a demonstration of cultural and intellectual communication and its role in promoting dialogue between cultures and civilisations. — ONA

State Council discusses Wildlife Trade bill

MUSCAT: The State Council discussed the Wildlife Trade bill referred by the Council of Ministers at its fourth meeting of the first annual sitting held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Salim bin Musallam Qutn, Deputy Chairman of the State Council.

Dr Mohammed bin Said al Hajri, Chairman of the Social

and Cultural Committee of the State Council, explained that the Sultanate of Oman

from the dawn of the Blessed Renaissance until the present day has provided great attention

to preserving biodiversity, considering it as one of the key objectives.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman is replete with a diversity of wildlife species some of which are classified as endangered species. This bill aims to regulate the trade in wildlife species with a view of preserving them. — ONA

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9- R/C building, with an area of 1,572 square meters, it includes hotel apartments and shops (running condition) in wilayat bidyah.

10- R/C Land in Masairah located at centre with area 600m².

11- 4 Industrial plots in Duqm, total area 30,000 square meters.

12- R/C Land with an area of 750 square meters in Duqm.

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Remnants of Bronze Age metal mine unearthed in Dhank

MUSCAT: The University of Warsaw's archaeological mission unearthed remnants of a Bronze Age metal mine in Qumaira, in the Wilayat of Dhank, according to a recent report published by the Archaeology website.

The site functioned actively with tremendous metal exports to Mesopotamia and India during the Early Bronze Age, between about 2600 and 2000 BC. Agnieszka Pienkowska, a participant in the mission, said, "On the ground surface, we found dozens of stone tools used for crushing ore and numerous fragments of furnace walls used for smelting copper."

"The remains of buildings that most likely served as workshops have also been well-preserved," she added.

They also discovered remnants of an Iron Age settlement on a hill in the region. The settlement, inhabited between 1300 and 300 BC, was made up of adjoining houses situated on both sides of a narrow

street.

The fact that copper from this region was exported to both India and Mesopotamia underscores the significance of Oman as a pivotal node in ancient trade networks and enriches the understanding of the economic and cultural exchanges that characterised the Bronze Age era.

Oman Year Book launched

The ceremony took place at the book fair's venue.

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the Cultural Committee of Muscat International Book Fair's 28th edition, the Ministry of Information on Wednesday celebrated the launch of Oman Year Book 2023, titled 'Oman the Vision and the Future'.

The ceremony took place at the book fair's venue at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Hinai, Head of Oman Year Book's Working Team, said that the annual publication provides

a comprehensive account of Oman's progress in various fields.

"Since its first launch in 1979, the book has been keeping pace with Oman's progress, acting as an objective archive of national accomplishments in cultural, political, economic and social fields," Dr Mohammed explained.

He added that Oman Year Book is published in five languages, namely Arabic, English, French, German and Spanish. — ONA



A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE FAIR AND AUDIENCE

'Jalees' is a media centre focusing on providing data, information, and managing social media accounts for the book fair.

Students managing 'Jalees' were selected based on age and media sense that will help them convey the image and event.

The media centres contribute to transforming book fairs into international platforms for cultural dialogue by publishing the news and feedback from the audience.

KHALID AL BALUSHI

@khalid_albalushi94

THE Muscat International Book Fair brings writers and readers together. However, for these events to succeed and capture the attention of the public, the media centres play a significant role. They form an essential part of cultural event marketing, holding great importance in enhancing interaction between writers and readers, and fostering cultural dialogue.

Social and cultural interaction in the fair is further promoted through reports and news published by the fair's media committees in social and traditional media. These media centres and committees highlight authors' meetings, literary workshops and discussions which foster cultural communication between the fair and the audience.

Moreover, the media centres contribute to transforming book fairs into international platforms for cultural dialogue by publishing the news and feedback from the audience. They facilitate the transfer of cultural ideas and concepts between countries, building bridges for international cultural communication.

This extends even to the media level, where the media centre, affiliated to the Ministry of Information, provides an opportunity for local and international journalists to interact and exchange experiences.

Sheikha al Mahrouqi, Director-

General of External Media, said, "Yesterday, we received a group of 15 journalists from Russia, Iran, London, Turkiye, China and India at our centre. Another 13 individuals preceded them, making it a total of 28 people from different countries and media institutions. They were warmly welcomed at the centre, introduced to the services we offer, and assisted in successfully completing their work by providing them with laptops, devices and all the necessary media requirements. The centre is open to all external and local journalists to sit comfortably and complete their work." She added, "The media centre provides an opportunity for journalists to get to know each other and exchange experiences. Actually, we receive requests from media attachés in London, Washington and Egypt. These media attachés suggest individuals to visit the fair in coordination with us, as their participation is essential for highlighting events on an international level."

Al Mahrouqi emphasised, "The centre offers logistical, technical and informational services, along with tourist trips for journalists to familiarise them with cultural sites in Oman. It allows them to convey the true image of Oman, its beauty and history. The centre also facilitates journalists' meetings with key figures creating a hub that brings everyone together under one roof."

Regarding the media committee of the book fair, Ahmed al Hadidi, the team member, explained, 'Jalees'

The media centres play a significant role. They form an essential part in marketing the event and enhancing interaction between writers and readers

is a media centre established in 2014, focusing on providing data, information, and managing social media accounts for the book fair. The team covers cultural events, children's activities and fair sections, publishing news and excerpts from events on social media.

Al Hadidi said, "The team consists of editors, photographers and social media managers responsible for online publishing. The team maintains constant communication with followers, interacts with them and responds to their inquiries. The photography team daily captures moments from the fair's sections, documenting people's interactions with the sections and the joy on their faces

as they pick up their favourite books and move among different publishing houses to keep the world connected." 'Jalees' supervisor Maryam al Hinai said, "I oversee the young participants to make the fair a station that transports them to a more beautiful and broader place. My creative team consists of eight individuals aged between 10 and 14 years. They cover cultural, intellectual and literary daily events. We try to train them in design and editing, and they learn from our colleagues in the profession in various fields."

Al Hinai said, "Students were selected based on age and media sense that will help them convey the image and event."



Muscat Int'l Airport handles 1.2 m passengers in Jan 2024

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The number of passengers passing through the airports of the Sultanate of Oman (arrivals, departures and transit) exceeded 1.41 million in January 2024, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of arrivals through all airports of the Sultanate of Oman increased by 18 per cent, while the number of departures increased by 25 per cent compared to the same month in 2023. The number of International flights arriving and departing through various airports of the Sultanate of Oman was 8,541.

The number of domestic and international air traffic through Muscat International Airport increased by 16 per cent to 8,756, compared to 7,550 flights during the same month of the previous year.

The total number of passengers was also recorded. Domestic and international flights (arrivals, departures and flight transfers) increased by 22.7 per cent to 1.29 million.



The number of arrivals through all airports of the Sultanate of Oman increased by 18 per cent

The number of international flights through Muscat International Airport increased to 8,090, or 16.5 per cent, in January, including 4,044 arrivals and 4,046 departures.

The number of passengers through the airport also rose to 1.2 million, compared to 961,300 passengers in January 2023.

The number of domestic flights through Muscat International Airport was 666, an increase of 9.5 per cent, including 332 arrivals and 334 departures.

The number of domestic flight passengers through Muscat International Airport was more than 89,700.

Salalah Airport recorded an increase in the number of flights by 4.5 per cent in January 2024, bringing the number of international and domestic flights arriving and departing through the airport to 809, compared to 774 flights during the same month of the previous year.

The number of domestic flights increased by 9.7 per cent, international flights by 0.2 per cent, and the number of passengers through Salalah Airport increased by 14 per cent to 120,500 passengers last January.

In Sohar Airport, the number of international flights (departures and arrivals) was

28 in January, while the number of passengers on international flights (arriving and departing) was 1,014.

Duqm Airport recorded a 3.8 per cent increase in the number of domestic flights (departing and arriving) to 54 in January, compared to 52 flights during the same period in 2023.

The number of passengers decreased by 11.5 per cent to 5,370 passengers.

Nationalities, Indian nationals topped the list of passengers using the Muscat International Airport (169,000), followed by Pakistan nationals(48, 000) and Bangladesh nationals (41,200).

Oman Human Rights Commission holds meeting

MUSCAT: Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) on Wednesday held its second meeting of the 1st annual sitting for the 5th term under the chairmanship of Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, OHRC Chairman.

The meeting reviewed drafts of cooperation memorandums to be signed by OHRC with the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW) and some civil society institutions. The meeting also



The meeting reviewed drafts of cooperation memorandums to be signed by OHRC with the General Federation of Oman Workers. – ONA

discussed reports and complaints received by OHRC during the past period. The meeting also touched on the basic human rights conventions to which the

Sultanate of Oman has joined, the reports submitted to international bodies, and other topics related to the promotion and protection of human rights. — ONA

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Sohar University

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Sohar University invites sealed tenders from specialized, experienced and authorized vendors/ suppliers to Supply and deliver different types of buses.

The tender details are as follows:

Tender	Description	Quantity	Fee OMR	Submission Date
004/2024	25 Seater Bus	2	100/-	21.03.2024
	12 Seater Bus – Automatic Transmission	1		
	12 Seater Bus – Manual Transmission	1		

The tender document can be obtained from the Procurement and Contracts Department from 29/02/2024 to 07/03/2024 from 08:00 to 16:00 hrs at Sohar University Main campus after payment of OMR100/- (Non-refundable) at the cash counter located in the Al Khauboura Building. The receipt of payment has to be taken to the Procurement and Contracts Department to collect the Tender Document.

Tender offers must be submitted in sealed envelopes, which should be submitted at the Sohar University premises. Only the tender number should be written on the envelope; no other indications shall be written on envelopes. The deadline for submission of offers is 21/03/2024 at 15:30 hours.

The tenders should be addressed to the Pro. Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance (PVCAF) and deposited in the tender box at the PVCAF Office. The tender box is open from 08:00 to 15:30 from Sunday to Thursday.

Office of Pro. Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance
Sohar University
P.O. Box 44, P.C. 311, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman
Telephone: 26850100 Ext.: 421 & 289 (Procurement and Contracts Department)

Sohar University reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without having to identify reasons.

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Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
85/2024	Hosting and activating the recovery and disaster center	Companies specialized in the field of information technology services (design, installation and maintenance of programs and information systems and equipping information data centers) and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with the excellent/ first and second degree	Monday 18-03-2024 02:00 PM	Sunday 7-4-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
86/2024	Implementing a professional diploma program in the field of autism spectrum disorder based on the 2030 sustainable development goals	Companies specialized in the field of services (education, training and human resources development services) registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent and first degree.				
87/2024	Consulting services works (design and supervision) of Hydrotherapy building in Bidbid	Companies specialized in the field of consulting offices (civil engineering consulting - architectural engineering consulting - quantity surveying and surveying services - electrical engineering consulting - information technology consulting) and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree				
88/2024	Consulting services works (design and supervision) of Hydrotherapy building in Samail	Companies specialized in the field of consulting offices (civil engineering consulting - architectural engineering consulting - quantity surveying and surveying services - electrical engineering consulting - information technology consulting) and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree				
89/2024	Consultancy services of construction of a hydrotherapy unit at rehabilitation center at Izki	Companies specialized in the field of consulting offices (civil engineering consulting - architectural engineering consulting - quantity surveying and surveying services - electrical engineering consulting - mechanical engineering consulting) and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree				

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) . On Wednesday 28/2/2024.

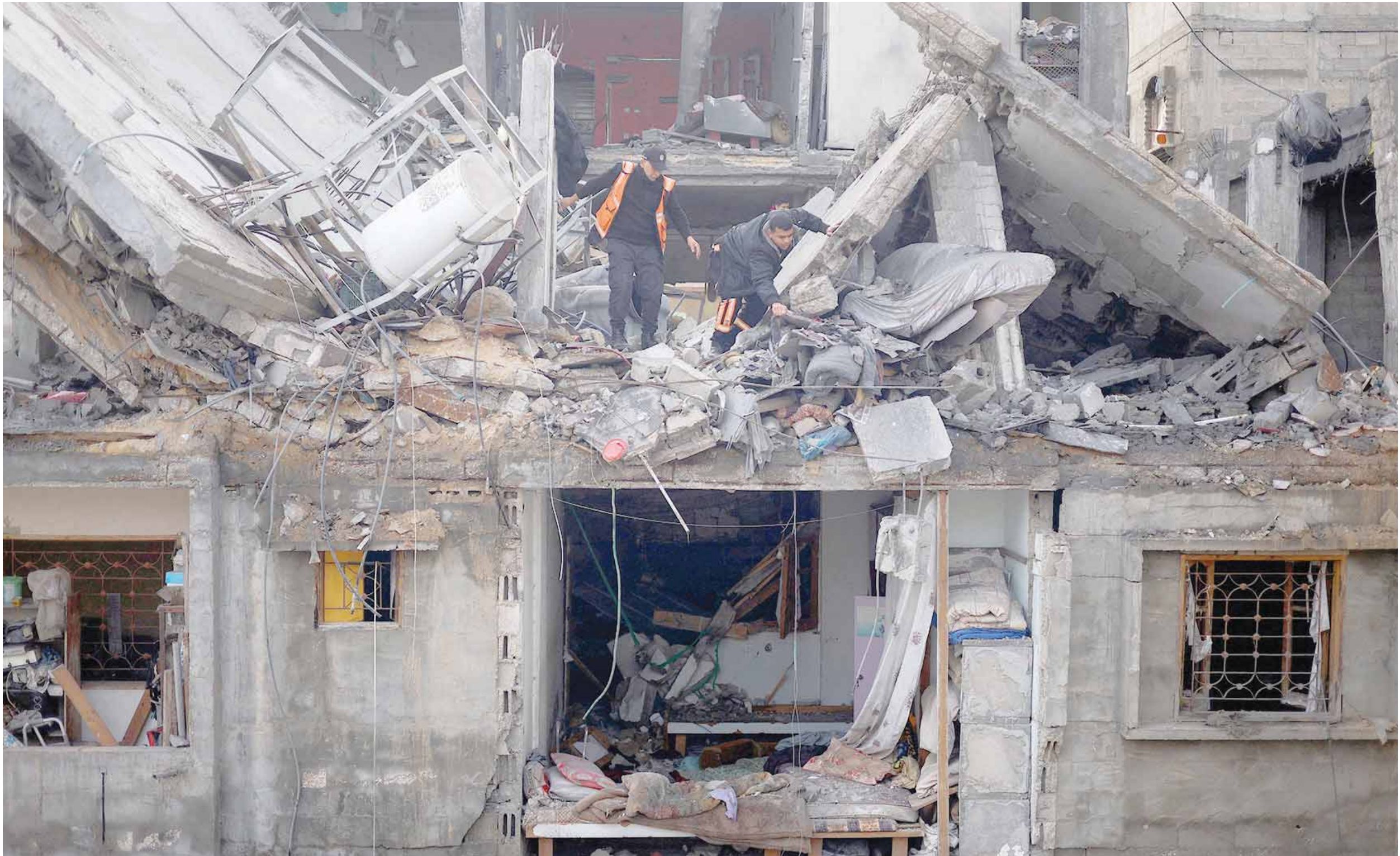
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UN says Israel ‘systematically’ blocking aid access



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Rafah. — Reuters

GENEVA: Israeli forces are “systematically” blocking access to people in need in Gaza, complicating the task of delivering aid in what has become a lawless war zone, the UN said on Tuesday.

It has become nearly impossible to carry out medical evacuations and aid deliveries in northern Gaza and increasingly difficult in the south, said Jens Laerke, spokesman for the United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA.

All planned aid convoys into the north have been denied

by Israeli authorities in recent weeks, with the last allowed in on January 23, according to the World Health Organization.

Making matters worse, even convoys cleared in advance with Israeli authorities have repeatedly been blocked or come under fire.

Laerke pointed to an incident last Sunday when a convoy, jointly organised by the WHO and the Palestinian Red Crescent (PCRS), to evacuate patients from the besieged Al Amal hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis, was blocked for hours and paramedics detained.

Making matters worse, even convoys cleared in advance with Israeli authorities have repeatedly been blocked or come under fire.

“Despite prior coordination for all staff members and vehicles with the Israeli side, the Israeli forces blocked the WHO-led convoy for many hours the moment it left the hospital,” Laerke told journalists in Geneva.

“The Israeli military forced

patients and staff out of ambulances and stripped all paramedics of their clothes,” he said, adding that the convoy, which was carrying 24 patients, remained blocked for seven hours.

“Three PRCS paramedics were subsequently detained, although their personal details had been shared with the Israeli forces in advance,” Laerke said, adding that just one had been released so far. “This is not an isolated incident,” he stressed.

“Aid convoys have come under fire and are systematically denied

access to people in need.”

Such “inadequate facilitation for the delivery of aid throughout Gaza means that humanitarian workers are subject to unacceptable and preventable risk of being detained, injured or worse,” Laerke said.

In northern Gaza, desperate Palestinians have scavenged for food as most aid trucks have been halted, with many people eating animal fodder and even leaves.

“We have no flour or anything. We are experiencing famine,” lamented Umm Tahseini al Masry, a Palestinian displaced to

the Jabalia refugee camp, north of Gaza City. The Jordanian army said it carried out a series of humanitarian aid drops, while Human Rights Watch accused the Israeli government of starving Gaza’s 2.4 million people.

The main UN aid agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, said humanitarian assistance entering Gaza has halved in February from the previous month. Israel’s military campaign has killed at least 29,878 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the territory’s health ministry. — AFP

Qatar pushing for Gaza pause before Ramadhan

DOHA: Qatar is “hopeful” of a Gaza war ceasefire and is pushing for an agreement before Ramadhan, its foreign ministry spokesperson said on Tuesday.

The Gulf state has been a key mediator in negotiations involving the Palestinian groups, Israel, the United States and Egypt.

“We remain hopeful, not necessarily optimistic, that we can announce something today or tomorrow, but we remain hopeful that we can get to some kind of agreement,” Majed al Ansari told a regular briefing.

“Obviously, we said that Ramadhan is going to be a point of contention, it’s going to be a point of confrontation, that we are going to push for a pause before the beginning of Ramadhan.

“We are all aiming towards that target, but the situation is still fluid on the ground,” he added.

Ansari was speaking after US President Joe Biden said a new



A Palestinian boy pushes a wheelbarrow loaded with water containers at a refugee camp in Rafah. — AFP

ceasefire and captives release could start as soon as Monday, ahead of the Muslim holy month that will begin around March 11.

“Till now we don’t have an agreement, we are still working on the negotiations on all sides,”

Ansari said.

Israel’s air, land and sea war against Palestinians in retaliation for its deadly October 7 attacks on southern Israel has killed at least 29,878 people, the Gaza health ministry says.

A one-week pause in fighting in November saw more than 100 captives released, including 80 Israelis who were freed in exchange for some 240 Palestinians jailed in Israel.

Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators met in Doha on Sunday for talks also attended by Israeli and Hamas representatives, state-linked Egyptian media said.

The Doha talks followed a meeting in Paris, without Hamas, where representatives “came to an understanding among the four of them about what the basic contours of a captives deal for temporary ceasefire would look like”, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has stressed that any truce would delay, not prevent, a ground invasion of Rafah in the far south of the Gaza Strip, which he said was necessary to achieve “total victory”. — AFP

Egypt warns of ‘catastrophic repercussions’

CAIRO: Egypt warned on Tuesday that Israel’s planned ground invasion of Rafah in southern Gaza would have “catastrophic repercussions” for peace in the Middle East.

Foreign ministers from Arab League countries told the United Nations Human Rights Council that some nations were turning a blind eye to the suffering in Gaza.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the extreme polarisation exposed by the Gaza war had laid bare the double standards of some members of the UN’s top rights body.

Israel has said a truce with Hamas would delay, not prevent, a ground invasion of Rafah on the Egyptian border, where an estimated 1.4 million Palestinian civilians have sought refuge from the war.

“The world is witnessing the most heinous crimes and violations against the Palestinian people,” Shoukry said.

He called for an immediate ceasefire and urged Israel not to attack Rafah.

“Any military action in the present circumstances would have catastrophic repercussions that undermine peace in the region,” he warned.

Israel’s retaliatory bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza have killed at least 29,878 people, most of them women and children, according to the territory’s health ministry.

Shoukry said some countries on the 47-member Human Rights Council in Geneva were shying away from the firm action they had taken over other conflicts.



Displaced Palestinians, who fled their houses due to Israeli strikes, shelter at a tent camp, in Rafah. — Reuters



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In brief

ROME



MELONI SUFFERS ELECTORAL SETBACK IN SARDINIA

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government on Tuesday suffered its first electoral setback since taking office, as the centre-left opposition gained a narrow victory in a regional vote in Sardinia. The vote marked a breakthrough for the opposition, which has been divided until now but came together to field a joint candidate.

Experts caution about reading too much into a regional vote heavily influenced by local factors, from healthcare to a corruption investigation against the right-wing incumbent.

Nationwide, Meloni's party has been leading opinion polls ever since her election. — AFP

TOKYO



JAPAN PROPOSES LAW TO CLASSIFY MORE INFORMATION

Japan's government on Tuesday proposed legislation that will allow it to classify more information as confidential and ask employees at companies with access to it to undergo security clearance checks.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration says the move would bring Japan more in line with western governments and allow it to share more information overseas.

"I believe a security clearance system will not only strengthen information security in Japan but also increase international business opportunities for Japanese companies," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said. — Reuters

BRUSSELS



EU URGES FARMERS TO REPORT UNFAIR TRADING PRACTICES

The European Union on Tuesday urged farmers and small food suppliers to share their experiences of unfair trading practices amid protests by farmers across Europe claiming they are being short-changed or badly treated by buyers, among other issues.

The EU said that in March it would present several actions to member states covering issues such as market transparency.

Many farmers allege they face a range of problems with buyers. Agricultural ministers from across the EU pledged to do more to cut red tape and help farmers solve the crisis in the sector. — Reuters

EU leaders reject sending troops to Ukraine

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday faced uneasy reactions from European allies and a warning from the Kremlin after he refused to rule out the dispatch of Western ground troops to Ukraine in its fight against the Russian attack.

Macron said after a conference of European leaders that "everything that is necessary" must be done to ensure the defeat of Russia, including deploying troops.

The Kremlin warned of the "inevitability" of confrontation between Nato and Russia if troops from the alliance were deployed in the conflict, which would break a major taboo the West has so far been reluctant to challenge.

Macron had refused to say more about France's position, citing the need for "strategic ambiguity" but saying the issue was mentioned "among the options".

"We are convinced that the defeat of Russia is indispensable to security and stability in Europe," Macron said.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, accused by critics of being too cosy with Moscow, said after the meeting that there was disunity on the issue among European leaders.



French President Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech to open a conference in support of Ukraine with European leaders and government representatives at the Elysee presidential palace in Paris. — AFP

"There are countries that are ready to send their own soldiers to Ukraine, there are countries that say never — Slovakia is among them — and there are countries that say that this proposal should be considered," he said.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of Sweden, which is set to join

Nato, poured cold water on the idea, saying "it's not on the cards at all for the moment".

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said: "What was agreed from the beginning among ourselves and with each other also applies to the future, namely that there will be no soldiers on Ukrainian soil sent

there by European states or Nato states."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that if Nato troops appeared in Ukraine "we need to speak not about a possibility but of the inevitability" of confrontation.

"This is absolutely not in the interests of these countries, they

Macron said after a conference of European leaders that "everything that is necessary" must be done to ensure the defeat of Russia, including deploying troops

should be aware of this," he added.

A Nato official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, emphasised "there are no plans for Nato combat troops on the ground in Ukraine" despite the "unprecedented military support" from the alliance. However the UK issued a somewhat more circumspect reaction, with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesman saying there were no plans for "large-scale" troop deployment to Ukraine.

French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal on Tuesday reaffirmed Macron's comments, saying: "You can't rule anything out in a war".

Macron had also taken an apparent swipe at Germany, which was mocked in the first months of the war for its relatively soft promises of military support. — AFP

South Korea empowers nurses as doctors strike over reforms

SEOUL: South Korea granted nurses new powers and legal protections on Tuesday and launched an investigation into a patient's death, as hospital chaos caused by striking trainee doctors entered a second week.

Major hospitals are struggling to provide services after thousands of junior medics handed in their resignations and stopped working last week to protest against government plans to sharply increase medical school admissions in the face of a rapidly ageing society.

The government said on Tuesday it has launched an investigation after a patient died of a cardiac arrest in an ambulance after struggling to find a hospital.

Emergency services contacted seven different hospitals but "were told there were no trainee doctors", the daily JoongAng Ilbo reported.

"The government is conducting an on-site probe with related agencies into the death," Health Minister Cho Kyoo-hong said.

The government has set a Thursday ultimatum for doctors to return to work, saying that legal action — including prosecution and the suspension of medical licences — will be taken against those who refuse.

The ministry also requested on Tuesday that police launch a probe into people connected to the strike, including five linked to the Korean Medical Association.

The mass work stoppage has resulted in cancellations and postponements of surgeries for cancer patients and C-sections for pregnant women, with the government raising its public



Doctors shout slogans during a rally to protest against the plan to raise the annual enrolment quota at medical schools, near the Presidential Office in Seoul. — AFP file photo

Major hospitals are struggling to provide services after thousands of junior medics handed in their resignations and stopped working last week to protest

health alert to the highest level.

Nurses will now be allowed to perform some medical procedures previously reserved for doctors, and offered immunity from potential lawsuits linked to their new scope of work, Second Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo said.

This "will legally protect

the nurses who are filling the medical vacuum created by trainee doctors' walkouts at hospitals", Park said.

The government said it needed to protect nurses because there were some "grey areas" about what medical treatments could be performed by particular staff.

South Korean President

Yoon Suk Yeol said on Tuesday "medical reform cannot be subject to negotiation or compromise".

"No reasons can justify acts that hold lives and health of the people hostage," he said at a meeting. Polls suggest up to 75 per cent of the South Korean public supports the increase in medical school admissions.

Seoul says South Korea has one of the lowest doctor-to-population ratios among developed countries and the government is pushing hard to admit 2,000 more students to medical schools annually from next year. — AFP

Senegal president pursues talks for new election date

DIAMNIADIO: Crisis talks called by Senegal's President Macky Sall entered their second day on Tuesday aimed at setting a date for a presidential election he postponed, while civil society tried to mobilise support for a vote in the next few weeks.

Senegal is grappling with its worst political crisis in decades after Sall's last-minute deferral of the February 25 election.

The Constitutional Council overturned the delay and Sall on Monday launched two days of talks to set a new date.

The Aar Sunu Election (Protect Our Election) collective of over 100 civil society groups called for city-wide shutdowns across the country and a general strike on Tuesday, demanding the poll take place before Sall leaves office.

Two high schools near the centre of the capital Dakar cancelled classes, a journalist saw.

But overall, the call appeared to go largely unheeded in central districts of the city by late morning.

Public transport continued as normal and the usual crowds filled the alleys of the bustling Colobane market.

Aar Sunu Election is part of a widespread political and civic movement, which galvanised after Sall's February 3 decision to postpone the ballot.

Sall said he called off the vote over disputes about the disqualification of potential candidates and fears of a return to unrest as in 2021 and 2023.

The Constitutional Council, the top constitutional body, ruled the delay unlawful and called for the vote to be organised "as soon as possible".

On Monday, Sall opened a "national dialogue" aimed at reaching a "consensus" on a new date and on what will happen after the end of his mandate.

— AFP



President Macky Sall delivers a speech during the National Dialogue in Diamniadio. — AFP

Cultural diplomacy initiative...



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There are currently 400 students abroad, a part of an ambitious plan to send 5,000 students to learn and share knowledge in many emerging areas, including digital data-based economy and artificial intelligence. We have also a Study in Iraq Programme where many students from abroad are being hosted in our universities,” said the minister of higher education and scientific research at the recent Baghdad Dialogue event, organised at the University of Baghdad, by CARPO Institute and the Iraqi Institute for Dialogue. This vision from Iraq, which has 6,000 years cradle-of-civilisation legacy of Mesopotamian knowledge is an inspiration for other societies around the world to engage in cultural diplomacy. I would argue that many disconnections we are witnessing in every day’s news, in economy and politics, all stem from a cultural disconnection than any other disconnections. We need this today more than ever because of our abundance of constructive connectedness and the urgent need to shift our focus away from destructive conflicts.

What does cultural diplomacy look like?

Cultural diplomacy is much more than official talks about culture. The people-to-people open expression and engagements about knowledge, arts, literature and creativity constitute constructive, intertwined steps in a cultural diplomacy road-map that could bring us closer together. To achieve this our world needs to invest more in cultural exchanges, as much as we invest in construction, technologies and food security.

As the case with building any ecosystem it all started with talents. For the Sultanate of Oman, this means investing in the implementation and scaling up of recently shared Creative Industries Road-map, drawn by an energetic, dynamic team of creatives supervised by the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth. This road-map calls, among other steps, to invest in building the capacity of all creatives, including authors, artists, designers, developers, translators, gamers, chefs among other cultural talents. Building the capacity of such talents will lead to valuable socio-economic gains including creating intellectual property rights - IPRs and useful knowledge for humanity.

Every rial invested in culture returns as valuable

WORLD NEEDS TO INVEST MORE IN CULTURAL EXCHANGES, AS MUCH AS WE INVEST IN CONSTRUCTION, TECHNOLOGIES AND FOOD SECURITY

knowledge, financial and brand equity for the whole society. Today’s much revered Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Islamic, African, European and American civilisations have all made literary, arts and science contributions that made our lives better. This is why establishing venture capital funds that startup and scale-up cultural projects into road-maps are worth inclusion into annual performance budgets.

In the world of entrepreneurship, an entrepreneurship and startups ecosystem’s progress is as good as its smooth flowing connectedness and engagement between its ecosystem players. Similarity, talents capacity building and funding to literature, arts and knowledge stakeholders need to nurture meaningful performance Objectives and Key Results system, accompanied with Key Performance Indicators or KPIs.

Our connectedness need to nurture our socio-economic progress, this is why cultural diplomacy road-maps lead to a better world. Simple initiatives such as ‘Study in Oman’ could be great first steps in a road worth travelling by.

Trump struggles to unify Republicans

James Oliphant and Nathan Layne

Far from uniting the Republican Party as he claims he has, Donald Trump has been unable to win over a substantial bloc of voters he may need if he is to take back the White House in a repeat election match-up against President Joe Biden.

After winning South Carolina’s Republican primary vote on Saturday, Trump is firmly on track to secure the party’s nomination in the coming weeks.

But rival Nikki Haley’s better-than-expected showing in South Carolina exposed weaknesses on Trump’s flank, particularly among more traditional Republicans and moderate voters.

Some experts say those voters are more likely to be alienated by Trump’s hardline policies on immigration and other issues and his racist rhetoric. The possibility of Trump being convicted on some of the numerous state and federal charges he faces may also deter some of those voters.

Trump has recently described migrants as “poisoning the blood” of the country. Over the weekend, he claimed at an event that Black voters like him because of his multiple indictments, comments that triggered a swift backlash.

Haley won about 40 per cent support in South Carolina after taking about 43 per cent of the vote last month in the New Hampshire primary. In both cases, she was bolstered by independents and some Democrats who took part in the primary to back her over Trump.

Haley insists she will fight on and argues that a large swath of Republicans continue to reject Trump. “There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative,” she wrote in a fundraising pitch to supporters on Sunday.

Haley says she will stay in the race through “Super Tuesday” on March 5, when 15 states and one US territory will award delegates to the Republican Convention. Her campaign said on Sunday she had raised a fresh \$1 million since her loss in South Carolina.

Trump lost the 2020 election to Biden, a Democrat, in part because Biden was able to pull white suburban voters, who are often more moderate than rural voters, away from him.

Biden won independents by a sizable gap, 54 per cent to 41 per cent. Millennial and Gen Z voters also favoured Biden. Those same segments of the electorate have gravitated to Haley in South Carolina and New Hampshire, raising the question of whether Trump will be able to reel in those voters once she exits the race. “If you’re Donald Trump, you’ve got to wonder: Am I going to be able to carry those people through? Are they going to show up on Election Day for me in November?” said Dave Wilson, a South Carolina-based Republican strategist. — Reuters

Gaza resistance alters world views



Zahir bin Harith al Mahrouqi

The author is an Omani writer concerned with the Arab affairs. He is the author of *The Road to Jerusalem*

There is a major international change in favour of the Palestinian cause. This change was brought about by the resistance with its legendary steadfastness in Gaza after decades of international neglect. This led to Israel being dragged to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), on January 11 and 12 thanks to the lawsuit filed by South Africa, not the Arab countries, regarding the genocide committed by the occupiers against Gazans.

At the onset of the Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip, the occupying entity received great support from its allies with Tel Aviv becoming a destination frequented by Western leaders to support Israel to realise its goals of eliminating the Palestinian cause, an objective that has not been realised and will not be realised.

The 84-page order signalled that Israel’s actions bear the character of genocide. South Africa had succeeded in dragging the Israeli entity to the ICJ for the first time even though the court’s decision was below expectations. The court ordered Israel to take all measures to limit killing and destruction, and ensure humanitarian aid. The atrocities committed by the occupying entity against the innocent people of Gaza have stirred the global waters that remained stagnant for more than seven decades. For the first time, the peoples of the world came together to protest the Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people in huge rallies in London, Berlin, Paris, Ankara, Istanbul, Washington and other cities.

Thousands of protesters marched through the streets of Washington waving the Palestinian flag and chanting slogans: “Biden, Biden, you cannot hide, you participated in genocide,” and “Your hands are stained with blood.” This was not the only demonstration.

Since the beginning of Operation Al Aqsa Flood and the ensuing barbaric Israeli aggression, many Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, and Jewish associations in America have organised solidarity events with the people of Gaza, demanding an end to the Israeli attacks and stopping American support for Israel. In Paris, thousands of protesters marched demanding a ceasefire and raising banners reading ‘Stop the cycle

of violence’ and ‘Doing nothing, and saying nothing means complicity.’

In this article, I focused on the important world capitals, whose governments back the Zionist entity to indicate that the peoples of the world became fully aware of the game and that they were deceived by misleading media.

Recently, in an unprecedented step more than 800 officials from the US and Europe signed an open letter which included harsh criticism of the Western policy towards Israel and Gaza. They accused their governments of possible complicity in war crimes and considered that there is a danger that their governments’ policies contribute to violations. The signatories accused their governments of failing to hold Israel to the same standards it applies to other countries and of

THE STEADFASTNESS OF THE RESISTANCE IN GAZA CHANGED THE GLOBAL VIEWPOINT TOWARDS THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE SINCE ISRAEL HAS NOT STOPPED ITS CRIMES AGAINST THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE FOR OVER SEVEN DECADES

weakening their moral standing in the world. It called on their governments to use all their influence to reach a ceasefire.

The letter says it was coordinated by civil servants in EU institutions, the Netherlands and the United States and endorsed by staff in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. It does not indicate the names of its signatories, despite its widespread circulation in the international media.

How right were the authors of that letter in saying “the operation did not contribute to Israel’s goal of defeating Hamas, but instead strengthened the acceptance of Hamas, Hezbollah, and other actors”. They attribute this change to Western support for Israel even as the global sympathy with the Palestinians is now at its highest since 1948. The letter also reveals that the pro-Israel policies among American,

British and European leaders are opposed by civil servants including many of those who implement the foreign policies of their governments according to the New York Times which published the letter.

The letter came at a time when an opinion poll by the Associated Press and the National Center for Opinion Research in January showed that half of American adults believe that Israel has gone too far in its war against the Palestinians.

Western official opinions have also begun to move against Israel. For instance, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said that his country could officially recognise the Palestinian state after the ceasefire in Gaza without waiting for the outcome of the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Ireland’s Prime Minister Leo Varadkar disclosed that he is in the process of holding talks with other member states of the EU to review whether Israel violated the human rights clause of EU-Israel Association Agreement.

We read more than one statement from the EU member states on the possibility of joint recognition of the Palestinian state after the end of the ongoing conflict. The Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth confirmed that the issue caused diplomatic tensions between Israel and Britain after the Scotland Yard opened a probe into accusations that Israel committed war crimes in Gaza.

The London Police hung banners at airports in the UK reading: ‘If you are in Israel or the Palestinian territories and are witnessing or being a victim of terrorism, war crimes, or crimes against humanity, you can report to the British police.’ Certainly, this step is considered an important development in the efforts made to hold Israel accountable for its crimes against the Palestinians and comes after years of pressure from activists, human rights advocates and influencers.

The steadfastness of the resistance in Gaza showed the Western peoples that there is injustice and crime against the Palestinian people. It also showed the double standards of the West.

The question that should be raised is: Did the Arabs exploit these variables?

(Translated by Khalid Abdullah)

Coping with climate shocks

Over the years, countries across the world have been experiencing extreme weather events occurring on a frequent scale, leading to tragic losses of life and damage to properties.

In fact, several major international and regional reports suggest that with increased global warming, the atmosphere can hold and release more moisture, meaning more torrential downpours are becoming more common and more frequent.

Flooding as a result of torrential rain risks human life, damages infrastructure, including buildings, roads, and bridges, and devastates livestock and crops. Too much rain has a negative impact on wildlife, the environment, and the economy.

Rains and subsequent floods have become recurrent headlines on the news in recent years, affecting many countries in the Gulf, something the arid region has not seen so frequently in the past. Figures of rainfall in some countries were akin to those normally quoted in annual rainfall terms.

Research shows that heavy downpours have become more common since the middle of the last century, when global warming started to intensify. While torrential rainfalls show no signs of abating despite the fact that climate change brings droughts to some parts of the world, researchers say they may intensify.

Look at the reports of rain last week in the Sultanate of Oman. Flooding was widespread, with flash flooding proving particularly dangerous in Oman's mountainous regions.

The clean-up operation has taken days to finish, with recovery work still continuing, if the reports are to be believed.

Ironically, Oman has seen an increase in the number, duration, and intensity of rains



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OMAN HAS SEEN AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER, DURATION, AND INTENSITY OF RAINS AND SUBSEQUENT FLOODS. THE COUNTY EXPERIENCED 22 EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS BETWEEN 2007 AND 2021, SIX OF THEM CYCLONES

and subsequent floods. Tropical cyclones and storms from the northern Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea have increased in frequency and intensity.

The county has experienced 22 extreme weather events between 2007 and 2021, six of them cyclones. In recent years, the areas at risk have increased almost tenfold in the Muscat area, while Al Wusta is expected to be the region most vulnerable to tropical cyclones in the future.

Rising groundwater salinity due to the torrential rains is a major concern in Oman. Tropical storms have cost the country millions. Al Batinah North is considered the most exposed of the coastal governorates to tropical storms.

Muscat, Sur, and Salalah are also highly vulnerable. According to a study by the previous Ministry of Regional Municipal and Water Resources, Al Batinah's coast is the worst affected, with rising salinity of 40 to 45 per cent shown in water samples from 670 groundwater wells, but the situation is similar in Al Khabourah and elsewhere.

Reports indicate that by the middle of the 21st century, 64 per cent of cultivated land in the Al Batinah South Governorate will be unfit for groundwater irrigation owing to seawater intrusion into the Jamma aquifer from sea level rise.

As a country with high levels of vulnerability to several consequences of climate change, Oman has made notable progress in climate change adaptation and resilience. It approved its National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change in April 2019, focusing its vision on three themes, one of which is climate adaptation.

It foresees a national framework to guide the country's sustainable development and facilitate the implementation of the Oman Vision 2040.

WELCOMING SPRING!



Painters decorate large eggs ahead of Nowruz's new year celebrations in Tehran's Mellat Park on Tuesday. Millions of people across the Middle East, Asia and Eastern Europe celebrate Nowruz new year festival which marks the start of spring. – AFP

Catalytic capital key to green transition

The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28) concluded with a landmark agreement to shift away from fossil fuels and triple the world's renewable-energy capacity. While this is a step in the right direction, how can we ensure that emerging economies have the necessary resources to achieve a just clean-energy transition?

That question has become a pressing one in Southeast Asia. In 2021, at COP26 in Glasgow, eight of the ten Asean countries — Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam — unveiled their updated emissions-reduction plans, setting ambitious decarbonisation targets for 2030 and pledging to achieve Net-Zero emissions by 2050, a decade sooner than they originally planned. But the past two years have highlighted the massive investments required to build green infrastructure in these developing economies. The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that the bloc's member states will require an average annual investment of \$210 billion up to 2050 to meet their climate goals.

It is now abundantly clear that no single country or bloc can achieve Net-Zero emissions on its own, and that a just energy transition will require robust public-private partnerships. According to a 2023 report by the International Finance Corporation and the International Energy Agency, Southeast Asian countries need \$9



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billion in concessional financing per year until 2031-35 to mobilise the necessary private capital to decarbonise their economies.

Southeast Asia, with its numerous island communities and vast coastal areas, is one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions. Its carbon dioxide emissions doubled between 1990 and 2020, reflecting rapid economic growth, and energy demand is expected to triple by 2050, underscoring the need for innovative and cost-effective technological solutions.

At the same time, the growing frequency of extreme weather events, reduced agricultural yields, deteriorating health conditions, and declining tourism underscore the devastating impact of climate change on Southeast Asian economies. The Asian Development Bank projects that global warming could erode the region's GDP by 11 per cent by the end of the century, while Swiss Re estimates that GDP losses could be as high as 37 per cent.

Recognising the urgent need for climate action, several Southeast Asian countries have recently announced a series of climate partnerships with international organisations and investors. During COP28, for example, Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN), Indonesia's state-owned electricity company,

signed 14 strategic agreements to accelerate the integration of renewable energy into the country's power grid, shut down coal-fired power plants, and develop worker training programmes.

Vietnam, acutely aware of its vulnerability to climate change, has taken steps to promote equitable climate solutions. In May 2023, the country approved its new power development plan, PDP8, which aims to boost wind and gas capacity and reduce reliance on coal. It also joined the Coal Transition Accelerator, in which Indonesia, Malaysia, and several Western countries share knowledge, develop new policies, and unlock public and private financing to facilitate its shift away from coal.

While Southeast Asian

governments have endorsed numerous clean-energy initiatives on their own, a coordinated approach is the key to ensuring a just energy transition that stimulates economic growth. By fostering cooperation between the public and private sectors, Asean countries could gain access to the capital and expertise necessary to mitigate perceived risks and transform capital-intensive projects into viable, investible ventures.

But Southeast Asia's shift to renewable energy requires a concerted global effort as well. By 2050, relatively energy-poor emerging economies are expected to account for 75 per cent of global emissions. To meet the world's climate targets, the international community must support these

countries' decarbonisation efforts.

Historically, large corporations and state-owned enterprises have received the lion's share of climate finance in Southeast Asia. But the clean-energy transition enables Asean countries to redirect capital flows towards small and medium-size enterprises, thereby supporting the region's burgeoning startup ecosystem, creating green jobs, and fostering sustainable prosperity.

Given that concessional capital is a finite resource, especially when it comes to funding energy-transition projects, it is crucial to establish appropriate financing structures capable of mobilising early-stage capital. Fortunately, this scarcity offers a unique opportunity to mobilise private-sector participation by leveraging philanthropic capital.

Bridging the gap between philanthropy and investment could help promote the development of new technologies and business models that are on the cusp of commercial viability.

Philanthropic investors with the ability to mobilise private capital have a crucial role to play in advancing Southeast Asia's energy transition. Through blended finance, they could help demonstrate the viability of emerging technologies, businesses, and projects.

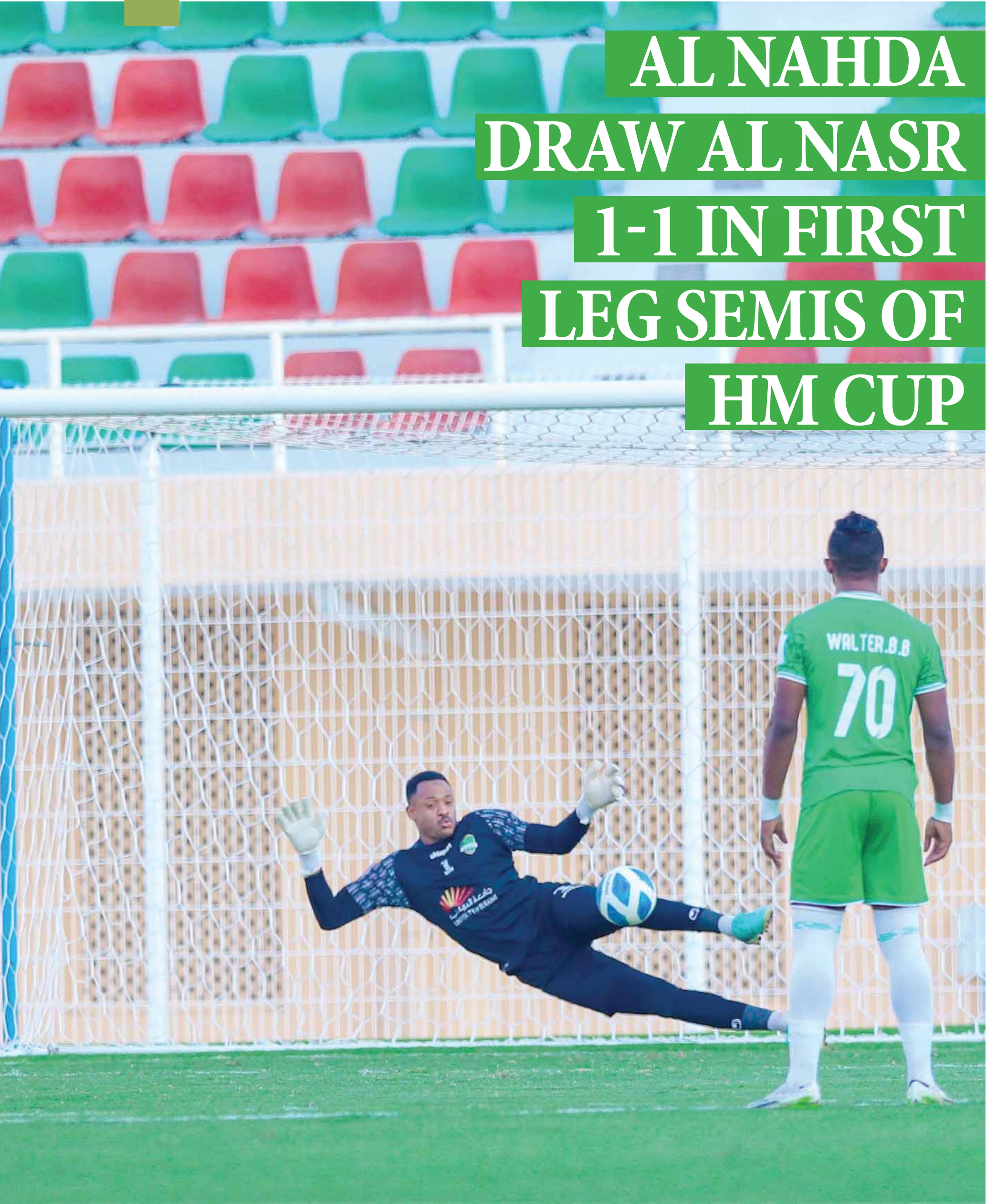
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Asean countries unveiled their updated emissions-reduction plans.

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ALNAHDA DRAW AL NASR 1-1 IN FIRST LEG SEMIS OF HM CUP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 27

Defending champions Al Nahda played out a 1-1 draw with five times winner Al Nasr in the His Majesty’s Cup semifinal first leg match at Al Buraimi Sports Complex on Tuesday. With the draw, both teams will have chances still of qualifying to the final with better advantage for Al Nasr as they will play in home and with one goal away. Both teams will meet in the second leg match of semifinals at Al Saada Sports Complex on March 11.

Al Buraimi representative team and the guests Al Nasr began the match carefully to avoid any early goal that will may put any team in a difficult situation. Al Mundher al Alawi and Essam al Subhi were the main strikers of Al Nahda in the front side, while Coach Mihai depended on Bahrain’s Mahdi al Humaidan and Abdullah Zaher beside the rest players in the starting list. In the 18th minute of first half, Omar al Malki put Al Nahda ahead after he converted a long cross ball from the corner to a goal through strong header. Later, Al Nasr, who reached to semis after they won against Fanja 2-1 in the first leg and 2-0 in the second leg game, worked hard to equalise beside Al Nahda’s attempts to raise the goaling difference but the opening half ended by Al Nahda leading 1-0.

In the following and deciding half, Al Nasr pressed hard towards Al Nahda’s goalie Ibrahim al Mukhaini. After 20 minutes from the second half start and several scoring opportunities, Al Nasr player Mohammed Abdul Hakeem found the target after he received a perfect ground ball inside the box from Carter to covert the ball to the target to make it 1-1 draw.

Following the goal, Al Nahda head coach Hamed al Azani did many substitutions in order to enter fresh players to the pitch. Al Nahda’s Hamood al Saadi missed a golden opportunity to score the second goal for his team after his strong ball hit the bar in the 85th minute. Later, the main referee Yahya al Balushi announced for the end of the match at 1-1 draw between the teams.

The other semifinal match of the His Majesty’s Cup football championship will be held on Wednesday between Bahla and Dhofar at Nizwa Sports Complex and the match will start 5:25 pm. The second leg match will be held on March 10 between Dhofar and Bahla at Al Saada Sports Complex.

Oman to host Gulf, Arab 3x3 Basketball Championships

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 27

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) has unveiled details of hosting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab 3x3 Basketball Championships for U18 Boys and Girls, from March 1 to 4, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Al Mouj Muscat and Oman Sail.

13 teams will take part in Gulf tournament, and 11 teams in Arab tournament, representing Oman, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria and Iraq. Some teams will participate with two teams A, B.

8 teams will represent youth category, with 5 teams



GULF CHAMPIONSHIP

representing girls in Gulf tournament.

The press conference was attended by Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the OBA and Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the tournament, Dr Ali bin Salem al Yaarubi, Vice-President, and Mohammed bin Nasser al Hosni, Secretary-General of the



Association and Director of the tournament.

Through it, the logos of the Gulf and Arab championships were unveiled, clearly reflecting the Oman identity and the characteristics of 3x3 basketball game.

Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi explained that, “The 3x3 basketball game is a type

of basketball where two teams compete on one basket, and each team consists of 3 players. This game is one of the most popular team sports in the world.”

“The International Basketball Federation has worked hard to spread this game, which has contributed to increasing the basketball culture of individuals worldwide. The game started



ARAB CHAMPIONSHIP

in the late 1980s in the United States and is considered the first most popular game there,” he added.

OBA organised several championships in this game to spread it and introduce it to Oman society, to be part of the association’s calendar.

Dr Ali bin Salem al Yaarubi said, “The preparations started

early. The main match court and all its facilities have been set up, as well as training court, working committees hall and changing rooms.”

“The international referees from Oman, GCC and Arab countries have also been selected,” he ended.

A training course for coaches will be held, with the participation of about 20 coaches. The technical meeting is scheduled to be held on February 29.

Mohammed al Hasani explained that the committee has completed all the administrative procedures for the participation of the Gulf and Arab teams, pointing to the arrival of the Gulf delegations starting on February 28.



Murray drops retirement hint after 500th hardcourt win

Dubai: Andy Murray hinted that this could be his last season after he recorded his 500th hardcourt win with a 4-6 7-6(5) 6-3 victory over Canada's Denis Shapovalov in the first round of the Dubai Tennis Championships on Monday.

Murray joined Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, Andre Agassi and Rafa Nadal as the only players to reach the 500th tour-level win milestone on the surface in the professional era.

"Obviously hardcourt has been a great surface for me over the years and 500 is a lot of matches so I'm very proud of that," Murray said.

"There aren't many players that have done that, so, great to get to 500 before I'm done."

It was just the second win this year for the 36-year-old who suffered a first round exit at the recent Australian Open, and Murray has failed to go beyond the third round of a Grand Slam since reaching the Wimbledon quarters in 2017.

Murray, former world number one and winner of three Grand Slam singles titles, lost his second round match in Qatar last week to 18-year-old Jakub Mensik, and during the defeat he

appeared to shout "this game is not for me anymore".

He played down those comments after Monday's win in Dubai, but admitted that the end of his career could be near.

"People read a lot into what I say on the court sometimes and it's not always rational," he said.

"I still love competing, I still love the game. It gets harder and harder the older you get to compete with the young guys."

"It's not easy, I probably don't have too long left but I'll do the best that I can these last few months."

Last month after another first round exit in Montpellier, Murray responded to a BBC article in which a journalist questioned whether his bravely soldering on will damage his legacy.

"Tarnishing my legacy? Do me a favour," Murray responded on social media platform X.

"Most people would quit and give up in my situation right now. But I'm not most people and my mind works differently," he added.

"I won't quit. I will keep fighting and working to produce the performances I know I'm capable of."

— Reuters

INTERNATIONAL SERIES REAFFIRMS DEVELOPMENT OF OMAN GOLF



Eng Munthir bin Salim al Barwani Chairman of OGA (C) received the cheque from Rahul Singh (R) and Cho Minn Thant (L)

MUSCAT: The International Series underscored their commitment to development of golf at the grassroots level in Oman, with a contribution of \$US 25,000 to the Oman Golf Federation in support of its ongoing efforts to encourage more participation in the region.

The presentation was made by Rahul Singh, Head of The International Series and Cho Minn Thant, Commissioner and CEO of the Asian Tour, to Eng Munthir bin Salim al Barwani, Chairman of the Oman Golf Association, on the sidelines of the International Series Oman, the first of 10 upper-tier Asian Tour-sanctioned events

that provide a pathway to the LIV Golf League.

Singh said: "We recognise the important role that The International Series has to play in the wider golf ecosystem, and part of that is giving something back to the host communities that support our tournaments."

"Our contribution to the Oman Golf Association is a sustainable commitment that will help in the development of golf in the region, bringing golf to a wider demographic, enabling the discovery and unlocking the potential of the untapped talent in this region."

Al Barwani added: "This significant contribution will help us in our ongoing quest to bring golf to a bigger demographic, and to provide newcomers with the tools they need to develop and grow their skills, and enjoy this wonderful sport which can form part of a healthy and active lifestyle for all ages."

During tournament week, the Oman Golf Association brought several youngsters to Al Mouj Golf for a special clinic and to experience the build up to the event, which brings big names from the LIV Golf League and the cream of the Asian Tour to Oman.

The Oman Golf Association is committed to the development of golf in the region through two campaigns. The OGA have introduced the R&A's Unleash Your Drive campaign in collaboration with The Golf Foundation, a six-week introduction to the game for primary school children that teaches youngsters golf skills and mental toughness.

A 'Go Ladies' campaign is part of OGA efforts to introduce the sport to females as part of the 'Women in Golf' charter they signed in 2018. The campaign provides lessons to women in four of five golf clubs across Oman.

PSM Ramadhan cricket to return from March 9

MUSCAT: The Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) Ramadhan softball cricket tournament will return to action this year after a hiatus of two years, the organisers said. The tournament will be played at the PSM ground from March 9.

"The PSM tournament used to be one of exciting cricket event in Muscat during the holy month of Ramadhan. It was not held for several years. We will make the tournament's return in a grand way," said Jameel Zaidi, Chief Organiser of PSM cricket tournament.

As many as 32 teams are expected to take part in the tournament and all matches will be played at night. "Apart from the matches, food lovers will also enjoy mouth-watering Pakistan cuisines," Zaidi said.

"It will be a family festival that will attract all communities," he added.

Teams can collect the entry

The PSM tournament used to be one of exciting cricket event in Muscat during the holy month of Ramadhan. It was not held for several years. We will make the tournament's return in a grand way

forms from Pakistan School Muscat after paying an entry fee of RO 50. The last date for submission of entries is March 5, 2024 at PSM Office Muscat from 8 am till 1 pm. "It will be a knockout tournament and the entries will be restricted to 32 teams only on first come first serve basis. Players from Oman Cricket League's Premier and other divisions can also participate," Zaidi added.



SAVIO MOREIRA DOUBLE

TAKES GIRONA BACK SECOND WITH WIN OVER 10-MAN RAYO

Savio Moreira celebrates after scoring his team's third goal. — AFP



There is still a lot to do, but the team needed to win after three games without a win

MICHEL
Girona coach

BARCELONA: Brazilian winger Savio scored a five-minute double as surprise packages Girona beat Rayo Vallecano 3-0 to return to second place in the La Liga table.

Savio helped the Catalans to move above Barcelona and to within six points of leaders Real Madrid with 12 rounds of the season to play.

"There is still a lot to do, but the team needed to win after three games without a win," Girona coach Michel said.

"Today was difficult. The 3-0 score is not what we saw on the field, everything was more even," he added.

Rayo remain 14th in the Spanish top-flight, seven points off the relegation spots after Pep Chavarria was sent off with a quarter of an hour to play.

Ukraine winger Viktor Tsygankov supplied the opener after 52 minutes with a smooth side-footed finish.

Rayo's chances of a win in northern Spain were dealt a blow with 15 minutes to go as Chavarria was shown two yellow cards in the space of 50 seconds.

His first was after a late tackle on Yan Couto before being sent for an early shower for a rash challenge on Eric Garcia moments later.

Savio then made sure of all three points with his injury-time contributions, his second goal the highlight after he slalomed past the Rayo defence down the right wing to score.

On Sunday, 38-year-old Luka Modric, who was on as a late substitute, produced a blistering strike as Madrid edged Sevilla 1-0 to maintain their unbeaten league run stretching back to September.

On Saturday, Xavi's rejigged Barcelona side thrashed Getafe 4-0 to temporarily climb to second with recalled duo Joao Felix and Raphinha on the scoresheet.

Dutch midfielder Frenkie De Jong and Fermin Lopez were also on target.

Bottom side Almeria twice came from behind to hold Atletico Madrid to a 2-2 draw. The stalemate left the hosts winless this season after 26 matches.

Atletico, who lost 1-0 in the Champions League last 16 first leg tie at Inter Milan in midweek, remain fourth, 13 points off leaders Real Madrid. —AFP



Oman telecom sector 2023 revenues reach RO 851m

MUSCAT: Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, said in 2024, the Authority will carry out 29 field surveys of state centres to measure the quality of telecommunications services provided to beneficiaries.

Al Ismaili added that the Authority has focused during the past period on raising quality through various initiatives to increase the number of 5G networks and fibre optic connectivity, in addition to initiatives to stimulate the transition from the copper fibre network to the fifth generation service or fibre optic networks.

This contributed to better tariffs, greater encouragement for the beneficiary and providing diversity in terms of fixed and mobile service packages, indicating that the Authority balances the sustainability of the sector's growth with providing services at reasonable prices.

He explained that telecommunications companies have a large and important role in the field of artificial intelligence in terms of providing an infrastructure that attracts this field, artificial intelligence services require the presence of strong data centres with the ability



Telecommunications Regulatory Authority officials and guests are pictured during the media forum in Muscat yesterday.

to process data at a better speed, whether as processors or linking with the final beneficiary, so that the speeds are higher, in addition to supporting investment efforts in emerging technologies and the artificial intelligence industry.

During the meeting, statistics of the telecommunications and postal services sectors, projects completed in 2023, the performance of fixed and mobile telephone networks and upcoming work projects were reviewed.

The authority indicated that communications sector statistics

show an increase in mobile phone subscriptions in the Sultanate of Oman during the year 2023 by 3 per cent, in mobile broadband by 5 per cent, in fixed telephone by 3 per cent and in fixed broadband by 5 per cent.

The authority explained that the total revenues of the telecommunications sector in 2023 amounted to about RO 851 million, an increase of 12 per cent compared to 2022, while the total number of workers in companies licenced in the sector reached 4,167 workers, with an Omanisation rate of 94 per cent.

The Authority stated: The number of licenced postal companies increased by 31 per cent, reaching 63 companies in 2023 and the total number of workers on permanent contracts there reached 1,676 workers, with an Omanisation rate of 78 per cent.

The total revenues of companies licenced in the postal sector in Oman reached the end of 2023 to about RO 20.7 million, an increase of 14 per cent compared to 2022.

The Authority indicated that the most prominent projects

completed during the past year were the controls for investment in the infrastructure of fibre optic networks, the requirements for preparing an emergency management plan in the telecommunications sector and issuing controls for public auction procedures for mobile phone numbers.

It also stressed the completion of the early warning system in the coastal states in cooperation with Civil Aviation Authority and operators, and issuing a first-class licence to Starlink Muscat to provide fixed public

THE MOST PROMINENT PROJECTS COMPLETED DURING THE PAST YEAR WERE THE CONTROLS FOR INVESTMENT IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF FIBRE OPTIC NETWORKS, THE REQUIREMENTS FOR PREPARING AN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN IN THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR, AND ISSUING CONTROLS FOR PUBLIC AUCTION PROCEDURES FOR MOBILE PHONE NUMBERS

telecommunications services.

During the current year, the Authority is focusing on improving telecommunications services for the sectors of education, health, tourism, industry, transportation, environmental sustainability for the telecommunications and postal sectors, innovation, scientific research and development in the field of communications.

The transition from third generation service to 4G and 5G and the distribution of new bands to telecommunications companies in the Sultanate of Oman will work to improve and improve communications services during the coming period. — ONA

Forum concludes with strong focus on Al Batinah North's investment potential



The second day of the forum included keynote speeches, presentations and panel discussions highlighting the potential investment opportunities in Suhar.

HIBBA AL KINDI
SUHAR, FEB 27

The two-day Suhar Investment Forum – spotlighting RO 1 billion worth of opportunities in Al Batinah North Governorate — concluded yesterday, February 27, 2024. The event, organised by the Al Batinah North Branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), focused on the promising investment potential of a region that currently contributes about 16 per cent of the country's non-oil GDP.

Speaking at the event, Eng Mohammed bin Said al Masrouri, General Supervisor of the Business Environment Sector, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, highlighted the significance of economic diversification.

"Diversification is a very integral part of economic growth in Oman. We have witnessed a good and positive indicator in the economy so far in terms of investments. We are hoping to foster the growth of a diversified economy combining technology, innovation and knowledge. We are working to achieve this goal to be a strong

and diverse economy according to Oman Vision 2040."

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, shared that the services sector surpassed \$6.88 billion, the industrial sector reached \$3.9 billion, and the agricultural sector amounted to \$428 million in the governorate over the past two years. He also mentioned that the governorate's investment value exceeds \$27 billion.

Khalid al Shuaibi, President, Oman National Investment Programme & Export Development (Nazdaher), emphasised the simplicity of the investment process in Oman.

"When a strategic investor comes to Oman, they need to have a focal point in the investments and strategies for investments.

There is a guidebook for Investors available in different languages to understand the framework in Oman.

Nazdaher is currently estimated at RO 39 million. Nazdaher is a unified platform for investors that provides them all the solutions to their queries and challenges regarding investments in Oman."

Oman's OQGN affirms focus on hydrogen, CCUS opportunities

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 27

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the majority-state owned operator of Oman's gas transportation system, recorded revenues of RO 174 million in 2023, up from RO 160.4 million a year earlier.

Posting its maiden annual financial report as a publicly-traded company following its listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) last year, OQGN – part of OQ Group – also reported an uptick in profits at RO 55.5 million, up from RO 45.6 million in 2022.

"2023 has been a pivotal year for OQGN, marked by significant financial growth, operational excellence and strategic advancements towards sustainability and community engagement," the monopoly operator of Oman's gas networks said in a report of its performance for the year.

Listing improvements in other key financial indicators, OQGN also reported a 4.5% increase in concession receivable and contract assets, reaching RO 1.042 billion as of end-2023.



Oman's gas transportation operator posted revenues of RO 170 million in 2023.

EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) climbed to RO 84 million, up from RO 71 million a year earlier.

Regulated Adjusted EBITDA rose to RO 107 million, up from RO 96 million in 2022, it noted.

On the operational front, the company achieved a "record-setting" delivery of 40.5 billion cubic metres of natural gas in 2023. It also delivered a total of 13 growth projects, with a combined investment of RO 132.5 million, aimed at expanding its operational capacity and infrastructure.

In support of the energy transition under way in the Sultanate of Oman, OQGN plans to leverage its massive pipeline networks and other assets to explore opportunities linked to the new green hydrogen industry, as well as the emerging Carbon Capture, Utilisation & Storage (CCUS) sector.

"Looking ahead, OQGN is poised to expand its core gas midstream services and explore new avenues in hydrogen and carbon dioxide transportation. Our engagement in MoUs with industry partners on hydrogen

and CCUS initiatives positions us at the forefront of the energy transition, aligning with global sustainability trends and Oman's strategic energy goals," the company said.

One such MoU signed with Occidental of Oman (Oxy) last October aims to jointly study potential CCUS projects in conjunction with enhanced oil recovery (EOR) projects at Oxy's production assets in Oman.

Both sides will also seek to develop strategies enabling the deployment of CCUS projects, including carbon capture, the transport of carbon dioxide to Oxy's production assets for EOR, and supporting the development of relevant policies and procedures.

Separately, OQGN has signed an MoU with Belgian-based energy infrastructure group Fluxys to explore cooperation in the establishment of hydrogen and carbon dioxide (CO2) infrastructure projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

Fluxys is an investor in OQGN, having acquired a 4.9% stake during the latter's initial public offering of 49% of its stake.

Sohar Port, TFG Marine sign pact for bunker fuel supply operation

MUSCAT: SOHAR Port and Freezone and TFG Marine have signed an MoU agreement during International Energy Week in London to establish an international bunker fuel supply operation within the deep-sea port in Oman.

Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of SOHAR Port said: “Today’s agreement reconfirms SOHAR Port’s commitment to build a digitalised and transparent bunker operation that meets international standards already introduced in Singapore and soon to be implemented in Rotterdam.

This will enable TFG Marine to establish an international bunker fuel supply operation at SOHAR Port and to offer all grades of bunker fuel to vessels.”

The port’s anchorage areas are located within 4 to 10 nautical miles offshore. With a depth of between 30 to 60 metres, more than 3,000 vessels of all sizes currently call at the port each year.

This will increase as TFG Marine will be able to refuel the fleet of its joint venture owners, Trafigura, Frontline and Golden Ocean, which collectively manage a fleet of more than 700 owned and chartered vessels, as well as third party vessels.

“This is an ideal location for TFG to establish its first bunker fuel supply operation in the Middle East,” said Kenneth Dam,



Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of SOHAR Port and Kenneth Dam, Global Head of Bunkering for TFG Marine signing the MoU agreement during International Energy Week in London.

TFG Marine’s Global Head of Bunkering.

“With the intention to emulate Singapore’s best in class approach there is the potential for SOHAR Port to quickly become a major new physical bunkering procurement location in the Middle East for the world’s shipping fleet.”

TFG Marine intends to start deliveries with a local operating company with its first bunker vessel arriving at SOHAR Port in the coming months. The vessel

will be fitted with a Mass Flow Meter (MFM), calibrated to the ISO 22192 international standard as required by SOHAR Port.

TFG Marine has long been an advocate of the global adoption of calibrated MFMs to bring much-needed transparency to bunkering and encouraging digitalisation in the long-term interests of the bunker industry and helping to further the decarbonisation goals of the shipping industry.

TFG Marine is a leading international marine fuel supply

and procurement joint venture between physical commodity trading company Trafigura Group Pte and shipowning companies Frontline Ltd and Golden Ocean Group Ltd.

Formed in 2020, the company provides modern, simplified and transparent services that bridge every stage of the bunkering process for its customers, supplying over 10 million metric tonnes of marine fuels per annum across 35 strategic bunkering hub locations globally.

NBO launches exciting digital banking campaign

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced an exclusive promotion for its loyal customers.

From February 4 to March 4, 2024, customers engaging in various services through the NBO App will have the opportunity to win one of 20 iPhone 15 devices. In alignment with Oman Vision 2040, NBO endeavours to foster digital banking within the community through this groundbreaking campaign.

Dr Ali Salim al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager — Head-Digital and e-Channels at NBO, said: “Digitalisation is at the core of our strategy, and this promotion is a testament to our commitment to making banking easy, convenient and rewarding for our customers.

Our latest iPhone giveaway aims to encourage cashless transactions and cultivate a digital lifestyle. We are excited to introduce this campaign as part of our commitment to support Oman Vision 2040, envisioning a technologically advanced future. We urge our customers not



to miss out on this opportunity to be a part of Oman’s digital transformation journey with National Bank of Oman.”

The promotion is open to everyone in Oman, providing an equal chance for both current and new customers to win. New customers can open an account with NBO through mobile banking and enjoy a customised portfolio aligned with their unique future goals. Participants can increase their chances by actively utilising a variety of services through the NBO App.

These services include digital onboarding, app activation, local transfers, mobile top-ups, QR payments, utility bill payments, card-less withdrawals, wallet transfers, e-statement requests, Easy Payment Plan conversion, cheque book requests and reward points redemption – all conveniently accessible through the NBO App.

To participate in this exciting promotion, running from February 4 to March 4, 2024, customers simply need to download the NBO App, conduct any of the eligible services mentioned above, and stand a chance to win one of the 20 coveted iPhone 15s.

By fostering a more digitally oriented community, NBO aspires to contribute to the advancement of the country’s progress in the years to come. Comprehensive details regarding NBO’s array of accounts, products, and exclusive offers are readily accessible at www.nbo.om, available through direct communication with the NBO Call Centre 24770000 or via the user-friendly NBO App.

New India Assurance celebrates 50 glorious years in Oman

MUSCAT: Amidst the vibrant tapestry of Oman’s insurance sector, the stage is set for a momentous occasion as New India Assurance’s Oman operations gear up to commemorate their 50th Foundation Day. Under the gleaming stars of Oman’s night sky, esteemed dignitaries and industry stalwarts will gather to celebrate this remarkable milestone.

Neerja Kapur, the visionary CMD of New India Assurance, alongside Mukta Sharma and C S Ayyapan, General Managers from the Head Office, will grace the event with their presence, exemplifying the commitment and leadership that define the organisation.

The event promises to be a convergence of excellence, bringing together a distinguished array of guests. Among them, Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, Ahmed bin Ali al Maamri, Vice-President of the Insurance Sector and Ahmed bin Salim al Harrasi, Director of CMA, signify the importance of regulatory collaboration and industry synergy.

Adding to the grandeur, top officials of the insurance fraternity in Oman, including CEOs of insurance companies and insurance brokers, will join as esteemed invitees, honouring the occasion and New India Assurance’s contributions to the Sultanate of Oman’s insurance landscape.

Moreover, the inclusion of major clients and banking partners underscores the pivotal role played by collaboration and trust in New India Assurance’s journey of success.

Their patronage and support have been instrumental in shaping the company’s trajectory over the past five decades.



Neerja Kapur, the visionary CMD of New India Assurance.

From distant shores, representatives from New India Assurance’s Head Office in Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait and Abu Dhabi will join in solidarity, reaffirming the organisation’s regional footprint and commitment to excellence across borders.

Furthermore, the celebration will be co-hosted by Gaurav Sharma, Chief Operating Officer of New India Assurance Oman Operations and Majid Abdulrahim Jaffer, heading M/S Abdulaziz and Brothers LLC, Chief Agents for New India Assurance, I M Jacob, Senior General Manager and Albert Wilson Raj, Chief Financial Officer reflecting their long-standing partnership and commitment to excellence.

As we gather to celebrate fifty years of resilience, innovation and service excellence, the occasion serves as a testament to New India Assurance’s unwavering dedication to its stakeholders and the communities it serves.

Looking ahead, the company remains steadfast in its mission to redefine benchmarks and set new standards of excellence in the dynamic landscape of insurance.

Tonight, amidst the jubilant festivities and heartfelt reminiscences, we honour the past, celebrate the present, and embrace the future with unwavering optimism and determination.

Here’s to fifty years of excellence and to many more milestones yet to come.

Lynk & Co 03+ unveils paradigm shift in driving dynamics

MUSCAT: Lynk & Co, the premium automotive brand is making waves on the roads of Oman with its performance-packed sports sedan Lynk & Co 03+.

Engineered to redefine the driving experience, the 03+ embodies a perfect fusion of cutting-edge technology, superior craftsmanship and brilliant performance. Lynk & Co 03+ is poised to elevate driving experiences for the people of Oman. Now, owning this model is more accessible than ever, with EMI starting at just RO 168/ month!

This is a great opportunity to avail this unbeatable offer and become a proud Lynk & Co owner!

High performance marvel The Lynk & Co 03+ encapsulates the spirit of racing excellence delivering a seamless and agile



performance. With advanced suspension systems, this car guarantees a luxurious and refined journey, with unmatched control and driving confidence.

At the heart of the Lynk & Co 03+ lies a fuel-efficient 2.0T turbocharged four-cylinder engine, delivering an impressive 195kW and 380 Nm of torque. With a record-breaking

acceleration of 0-100 km/h in just 5.7 seconds, the 03+ effortlessly solidifies its status as a high-performance marvel on the track.

Exterior Excellence
Crafted to captivate, the Lynk & Co 03+ boasts a striking exterior design that commands attention from every angle. Its wide and lowered ride height, sharp lines, and sleek roofline

exude an unmistakable athletic aesthetic. The integration of a Full Carbon Fibre Aeropack, including a carbon fibre front lip & rear spoiler, not only enhances handling stability but also increases maximum downforce to 40 kg, ensuring unrivalled dynamic performance.

Interior Innovation
Step inside the Lynk & Co

03+ and you will enter a realm of luxury and technology. The interior is a masterful blend of modernity and craftsmanship, featuring Alcantara and chrome accents that exude sophistication.

With a 12.8-inch touchscreen centre stack, a 12.3-inch HD digital instrument cluster and a Harman Infinity Audio system with 10 speakers, the 03+ offers an ultramodern driving environment that redefines comfort and convenience.

Driving Dynamics
Whether you are conquering the racetrack or navigating city streets, the Lynk & Co 03+ delivers an exhilarating driving experience. Equipped with an Advanced Driving Assistance System and a 540° full-view system, the car ensures peace of mind on every journey.

Unleash the Thrill
Engage the ‘racing’ drive mode

and race to the next level with Lynk & Co 03+. With power distributed to all four wheels, responsive steering, and dynamic handling, the 03+ conquers every twist and turn with ease, showcasing its true prowess on the road.

The Lynk & Co 03+ is more than just a car; it’s a game-changer in the automotive realm. With its unparalleled blend of style, speed, and performance, the 03+ redefines what it means to drive.

Lynk & Co 03+ model is set to make a lasting impression on the Omani automotive scene, steering in a fresh era of driving excellence, advanced technology, and unwavering safety standards.

Lynk & Co dealerships across the country are offering exclusive launch promotions and test drive opportunities. Visit the new showroom located in Muscat’s Ghala Heights or call 7161 1137 to explore this remarkable vehicle.

These certifications demonstrate their commitment to responsible business practices and maintaining the highest standards in their operations.

M&A boom continues with increased merger deals

London’s M&A mini-boom gathered pace this month with the third potential major takeover deal in under a week that could reshape the FTSE 100.

Warehouse owner Tritax Big Box unwrapped a £924 million offer for its peer UK Commercial Property. Investors in UK Commercial Property are being offered 0.444 new Tritax shares for every share they hold, equivalent to a 10.8 pc premium to share price.

The two real estate investment trusts (REITs) will have a combined property portfolio of £6.3bn and a market capitalisation of £3.9 billion, enough to take the enlarged group onto London’s top-tier stock index.

The recommended all-stock offer will produce the fourth-



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largest REIT in the country.

It came after two deals this month that were also big enough to have implications for the FTSE 100.

The biggest housebuilder in the country, Barratt, offered £2.5 billion for Redrow while DS Smith, the packaging giant, confirmed this month it has been approached over a potential £10 billion offer from fellow London-listed firm Mondi.

The flurry of deal-making stoked hopes in the financial district of London (known as the ‘City’) that the M&A Market was on the way back, with the potential to alleviate possible City job losses.

London’s FTSE 100 rose after fresh inflation data came in unexpectedly steady offering a glimmer of hope on near-term interest rate cuts after labour market figures had worried some

investors.

Governor of the Bank of England (BoE), Andrew Bailey, told parliamentarians that economy was behaving in line with the BoE’s expectations, after the latest inflation figures.

Price hikes remained at an annual four per cent in January (unchanged from the previous month) but lower than analysts – and the BoE – expectations, with energy prices expected to contribute to a slight uptick.

Bailey noted that the upward pressures were present, but “there were some more other things going on which were putting more downward pressure on inflation than was expected so that’s good news,” he said.

The downward movement was “pretty broad-based – a bit of it in energy, some in food but also some in services as well, so that’s quite encouraging,” he said.

Services inflation is one of the main gauges of domestically generated inflationary pressures.

Although the annual rate of services inflation increased slightly to 6.5 per cent due to base effects, monthly prices fell 0.8 per cent.

In all, Bailey said the figures leave the BoE “broadly where we thought we were going to be.”

Although the Bank left interest rates on hold for a fourth consecutive meeting, policymakers have opened the door to cutting rates later this year if price pressures continue to abate.

The BoE is forecasting that inflation will touch two per cent in the spring before picking up slightly later in the year.

However, markets were concerned by figures released on the labour market that showed that wage growth had come in

ahead of expectations in the final quarter of last year.

Analysts did flag some potential concerns with the latest inflation data, too.

January’s data can often be impacted by post-Christmas discounts, and this is likely to have played out in household goods.

Simon French, head of research at Panmure Gordon, suggested that January is “always the hardest month to draw insight from.”

Looking over the longer term, however, inflationary pressures are dissipating in those categories. Chris Hare, senior economist at HSBC said they are in “clear decline.”

Most expect inflation to resume its descent next month at a healthy clip, paving the way for interest rate cuts in the second quarter of the year.

What is the impact of HR analytics on business?



MOHAMMED
ANWAR AL BALUSHI

The author is Academic Lecturer and Advisor, Oman College of Management and Technology

Believe it or not, in today’s fiercely competitive business environment and rapidly evolving conditions, traditional human resources practices often prove inadequate. Various deficiencies such as lack of scientifically based hiring, low employee engagement and motivation, insufficient technical and behavioural training, absence of coaching and mentoring, limited career advancement opportunities, prolonged periods without promotions, increased rates of “soft forced” resignations, and inadequate job security are prevalent in modern organisations.

Doesn’t this inevitably lead to diminished business performance and negatively impact operations? Doesn’t it indicate the need for HR personnel to consider reworking their approaches? So, what is the solution?

Let’s start by posing a question: If you were an HR professional, would you prioritise hiring introverted or extraverted individuals?

How can this be discerned during the interview process? What questions might be asked to determine this? How does the interviewee’s body language indicate whether they lean towards introversion or extraversion?

But hold on! Are you getting confused between “Analysis” and “Analytics”?

Analysis involves looking backward over time, providing a historical perspective on past events, while Analytics focuses on forecasting and modelling future outcomes.

According to Mortensen, Doherty, and Robinson (2015), Analytics is the amalgamation of computer science, decision-making, and quantitative methods aimed at organising, analysing, and interpreting the vast amount of data generated by modern society.

In recent years, Human Resource (HR) analytics has gained significant importance.

Utilised to analyse an organisation’s HR data, identify problems, and devise strategies, HR analytics offers a substantial competitive advantage.

Research indicates that HR analytics allows businesses to transition from traditional spreadsheet-based data repositories to real-time data management, facilitating analysis alongside existing organisational data flows.

Moreover, with the integration of artificial intelligence methods, more businesses are investing in HR analytics, leading to enhanced efficiency and cost savings.

Through the development of HR analytics modules, businesses can effectively manage HR processes, make better hiring decisions, predict employee turnover, and optimise workforce planning for the future.

Modern organisations increasingly prioritise practical HR tools that align with contemporary HR processes, as evidenced by Sooraksa (2021), who underscores the significance of AI in creating excellent HR analytics opportunities.

How effective is your role as an HR manager? This direct question prompted one HR manager to emphasise the need for reengineering HR processes and tools using modern technology and mindset, hinting at an impending transformation in HR practices.

According to Ulrich (2010), HR must evolve from descriptive metrics to predictive



Modern organisations increasingly prioritise practical HR tools that align with contemporary HR processes, as evidenced by Sooraksa (2021), who underscores the significance of AI in creating excellent HR analytics opportunities.

ONE DEFINITION OF HR ANALYTICS FOUND IN RESEARCH EMPHASISES ITS DATA-DRIVEN NATURE, EMPLOYING STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES, DATA MINING MODELS, AND MACHINE LEARNING METHODS TO MAKE PREDICTIONS BASED ON PERFORMANCE-RELATED DATA AT BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL LEVELS

analysis.

Undoubtedly, Human Resources plays a pivotal role in any organisation.

In today’s competitive market, organisational success hinges on aligning business strategies with HR strategies.

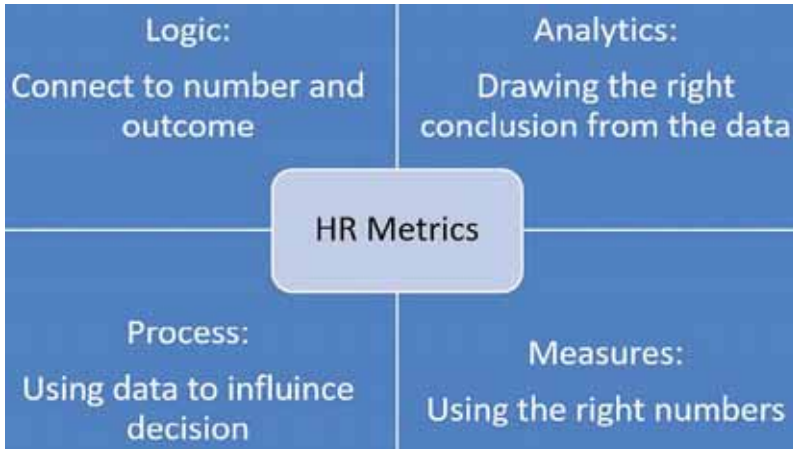
A cohesive link between HR strategy and organisational strategy is essential to maximise shareholder value and employee

satisfaction.

One definition of HR analytics found in research emphasises its data-driven nature, employing statistical techniques, data mining models, and machine learning methods to make predictions based on performance-related data at both individual and

According to the report of Davenport et al. (2010b), sophisticated methods for analysing employee data are increasingly used to gain a competitive edge.

Let’s explore how the LAMP framework contributes to HR effectiveness. Here is the framework:



organisational levels.

As per Masese Omete Fred (2017), HR analytics involves the fusion of quantitative and qualitative data, responding to the rapid changes and heightened competition experienced by organisations.

Under the LAMP framework, HR may focus on thirteen key areas, including monthly turnover rate, revenue per employee, yield ratio, human capital cost, HR-to-staff ratio, return on investment, promotion rate, percentage

of females in management, employee absenteeism rate, workers’ compensation costs, overtime per employee, and average employee age.

Regularly reading the Harvard Business Review (HBR) always deepens one’s understanding of management. In one of its issues (magazine), Harvard Business Review Analytic Services conducted a study involving HR and other executives in 2014.

The findings revealed that organisations were not consistently utilising predictive analytics. Among the respondents, one-third were HR professionals.

The survey indicated that only 9 per cent of the companies included in the study were using predictive analytics to forecast their workforce trends, while 40 per cent of companies were employing data reactively to inform critical workforce decisions.

To conclude this article, how does the HR professional perceive the impact of HR analytics ?

WTO approves services trade rules and overcoming objections

ABU DHABI: The World Trade Organization on Tuesday enshrined new rules facilitating trade in services between more than 70 member states, the European Union's trade commissioner said, despite initial objections from India and South Africa.

The set of rules will streamline authorisation requirements and ease procedural hurdles faced by businesses, according to a press release.

It will help reduce the costs of global services trade by more than \$119 billion every year, it added.

Its integration into the WTO implies all 164 members have approved as per the body's rules which require full consensus.

"Reaching this outcome... and integrating it into the WTO has not been an easy pass," EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said during the WTO's 13th ministerial conference in Abu Dhabi.



Containers at a terminal at a port in the northern German city of Hamburg. — Reuters

"We faced opposition from two WTO members" but a "spirit of compromise" eventually cleared

hurdles, he said without naming any country. WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-

Iweala, meanwhile, thanked "India and South Africa for finding a way forward" calling services the "future of trade."

Global services exports are valued at more than \$6.5 trillion, representing 23 per cent of total world trade, according to the EU.

The latest WTO agreement applies to 71 member states who signed the initiative but businesses from other member states can also benefit.

China, the United States and the EU are among the 71 signatories.

India and South America have not signed. Costa Rica, which led the negotiations on the initiative, called it "a significant milestone" for member states and the WTO.

This "is the first WTO result in the field of services in more than 25 years.

A real success story for this organization," said Costa Rica's foreign trade minister Manuel Tovar. — AFP

UK shop price inflation softens to near 2-year low

LONDON: UK shop price inflation weakened to a near two-year low in February, the British Retail Consortium reported on Tuesday.

The shop price index posted an annual increase of 2.5% on a yearly basis in February, slower than the 2.9% rise in January.

This was the lowest since March 2022. The rate was also below the 3-month average of 3.3%.

Data showed that non-food inflation held steady at 1.3%, the weakest since January 2022.

At the same time, food inflation decelerated to 5.0% from 6.1% a month ago.

The rate hit the weakest since May 2022.

Likewise, fresh food prices gained at a slower pace of 3.4% after a 4.9% rise.

"Shop price inflation has slowed and the underlying trend in prices will be downwards over the next few months," Mike Watkins, head of retailer and business insight, NielsenIQ, said.



A shopper looks at fruit and vegetables inside an ALDI supermarket near Altrincham, Britain. — Reuters

"For high street retailers faced with weaker demand, keeping prices stable over the next few months will be key to encourage customers to spend," said Watkins. — dpa

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OPERA

French soprano Lauranne Oliva poses during a photo session in the National Theater of the Opera Comique in Paris. — AFP

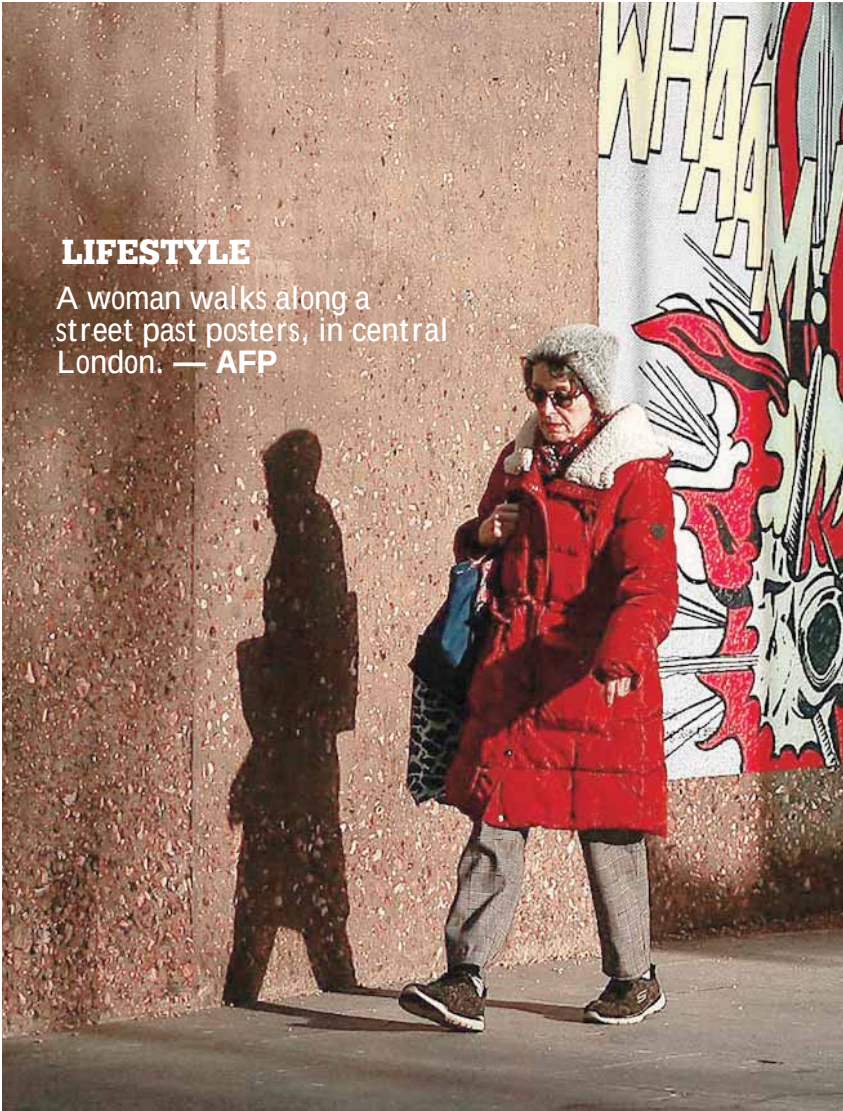


FASHION

Fashion designers Victoria Feldman and Tomas Berzins acknowledge the audiences after presenting creations by Victoria/Tomas for the □omen collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

A woman walks along a street past posters, in central London. — AFP



MUSIC

Italian singer Andrea Bocelli performs during the 63rd Via del Mar International Song Festival in Via del Mar, Chile. — AFP



FILM

US actress/writer Erika Alexander arrives for the Film Independent Spirit Awards 39th annual ceremony in Santa Monica, California. — AFP



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Staff Reporter

Bait Al Ghasham Arab Translation Prize revealed the winners of its first edition, awarding the top spot in the 'Authors' category to Iraqi poet Yas al Saadi for his poetry collection 'Brief News of Obsessions'.

In the 'Translators' category, American translator Marilyn Booth secured first place for her translation of Jean Dost's book 'Safe Corridor'.

The announcement took place during a ceremony at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor, Sultan Qaboos University.

Bait Al Ghasham Arab Translation Prize focuses on translating Arabic literature into English, recognising the crucial role translation plays in building bridges of knowledge and understanding between people, cultures and languages worldwide.

The prize began accepting submissions in April 2023 and closed in July 2023, using dedicated online application forms for each category. The total sub-

missions for the 'Authors' category were 127 works, spanning various literary genres such as novels, short stories, poetry collections, and autobiographies, submitted by participants from different countries worldwide.

After careful examination and evaluation, the judges short-listed five works in the 'Authors' category and announced all literary works submitted in the 'Translators' category as an acknowledgment of their effort and dedication to translating Arabic literature. The judges then unanimously decided the winners for each category.

PRIZE OBJECTIVES

Bait Al Ghasham Arab Translation Prize aims to fill the significant gap in translating and publishing contemporary Arabic literature into English. It strives to introduce English-speaking readers worldwide to the richness of modern Arabic literary production and empower Arab authors to reach a global audience.

The need for translation has become apparent with cultural openness among people, facilitating understanding in their business, economic matters and knowledge exchange.



Throughout history, from the civilisations of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt to the Roman era, and the Renaissance in Europe, translation has played a crucial role in reshaping human concepts, advancing sciences and knowledge, and fostering experiences, contributing to the development of human existence and promoting its growth towards coexistence and mutual understanding.



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THEATRE

Review: In 'Pericles,' Taking the Cruise of a Lifetime

"Pericles" is a bit of a mess. Spanning decades and traversing the ancient Mediterranean like some deeply misbegotten Carnival Cruise, this Shakespeare play mingles comedy, tragedy and Christian allegory. There are two assassination plots, two shipwrecks, a brothel, a riddle, a tournament and some very convenient pirates. Deliberately anachronistic, it was described by Ben Jonson, a rival playwright, as a "mouldy tale" and "stale."

So, who better to face down this confusion than a company called Fiasco? A devised theatre ensemble founded by half a dozen Brown University Master of Fine Arts graduates, Fiasco has a soft spot for Shakespeare's less loved works. The company broke out in 2011 with a production of "Cymbeline" and later staged "The Two Gentlemen of Verona."

(Fiasco's 2017 production of a crowd-pleaser like "Twelfth Night"? An outlier.)

Rather than relying on the published text of "Pericles," Fiasco has set much of the poetry to music — sometimes supplying original words — and interpolated passages from a prose version by George Wilkins, a pamphleteer and publican. (Wilkins is often cited as the play's co-author, mostly because scholars disbelieve that Shakespeare could have written anything as patchy as the first two acts.)

Ben Steinfeld, a company member and the director, stages this revised text at Classic Stage Company using Fiasco's poor-theatre playbook — a mostly bare stage furnished with charisma, invention, spirit and song. "A miracle may come your way," an early number promises.

Through the hectic first half, this approach falters. Pericles (Paco Tolson at first, then Tatiana Wechsler, Noah Brody and finally Devin E. Haqq) goes to so many places in such a short time that characters and climes blur, especially without the help of scenery to differentiate each country. As Steinfeld's narrator admits, "Now this is just an empty space/It's hard to give a sense of place." (No set designer is credited, though Ashley Rose Horton designed the vaguely Grecian costumes and Mextly Couzin the golden lighting.)

The stagecraft can feel scanty — a satin sheet stands in for a shipwreck — although the extra-textual moments, like the jousting tournament, are staged with the most vigour. And while the idea of having four actors play Pericles in turn is wise to the ways that a human might change over a lifetime,

it saps interest in and identification with the character.

Midway through, "Pericles" finds its sea legs, mostly because the action shifts to Pericles' daughter, Marina, played by the luminous Emily Young. This also signals the play's move away from struggle and loss and toward redemption and joy, more natural keys for Fiasco, which has always excelled at comedy. The brothel scenes, in which a chaste Marina reforms would-be customers, are sprightly. And the ending, among Shakespeare's best, is suitably moving. But the chief delight here, as in any Fiasco show, is watching the actors work with such fluency and in such communion, supporting and enjoying one another's work. That's not quite a miracle, but it's reason enough to set sail.

—NYT



ART

West Bank Museum Showcases Gaza Artefacts as Symbol of Solidarity Amid Devastation

IN A MUSEUM located in the West Bank under Israeli control, artworks from Gaza are showcased as a continuous artistic expression of solidarity with the conflict-affected Palestinian region.

"This is not an exhibition," reads the sign at the entrance to the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, near Ramallah, showcasing art and heritage from the Gaza Strip.

Alongside contemporary pieces, the works include old, traditional paintings and costumes, as well as archeological artefacts, said board member Ehab Bessaiso, a former culture minister.

He added that the museum had launched the initiative to "preserve Palestinian heritage work in Gaza, which has faced destruction due to the war."

Fighting has raged in Gaza since 7 October 2023 when Hamas, a Palestinian Resistance Movement against the Israeli occupation, carried out an unprecedented attack southern Israel.

Gaza's bloodiest war has devastated the coastal territory, with its cultural heritage just one of the many casualties

of war.

Bessaiso said the museum had received "the works of hundreds of artists" from Gaza that had been held in West Bank universities and cultural centres and by individuals.

The display presents "the Gazan artistic scene in a new way," which helps "to face the challenges and difficulties which artists and culture are confronting in Gaza amid the destruction and siege," he said.

In a January report, the Palestinian Culture Ministry said 24 cultural centres in Gaza had been destroyed "in whole or in part" since the start of Israel's indiscriminate attacks.

They include the Arab Orthodox Cultural and Social Center, the Rashad Shawa Cultural Center — which includes a theatre, library and printing presses — and the Al-Sununu for Culture and Arts Association in Gaza City.

Historical buildings such as mosques, churches, the old Phoenician port and the Al-Qarara Cultural Museum have also been destroyed by Israel. — ONA

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ESO amplifies environmental messages and raises funds through art

By Yeru Ebuon

Art has a unique power to communicate complex ideas making it a potent medium for amplifying environmental messages and fostering conversations crucial for the protection of our planet. Through its unique ability to evoke emotions and visualise abstract concepts, art engages diverse audiences, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) successfully launched the first-ever ESO Art 2024, an exhibition that aimed to harness the power of creativity to support environmental conservation initiatives. Held at the Al Luban Hall of Crowne Plaza in Al Qurum, the exhibition opened its doors on Sunday night, February 25, to a diverse audience of artists, art enthusiasts, media representatives, and prominent members of Omani society.

ESO Art 2024 brought together more than 20 passionate artists, each dedicated to the cause of conservation and animal protection. Under the theme of environmental preservation, artists showcased a diverse array of works spanning various genres, including creative photography, mixed media, abstract, and surrealism. This unique convergence of artistic expression underscored a collective commitment to raising awareness about pressing environmental issues and celebrating the beauty of nature.

With dozens of art covering the walls of the hall, it was easy to get lost in the different messages memorialised on canvas. Traditional visual arts mediums

like painting and drawing offered endless possibilities for artists to depict environmental themes and for this exhibit. The artists depicted animals and the environment either realistically, in abstract, or through symbols and myths.

One of the defining features of ESO Art 2024 is the profound generosity demonstrated by participating artists. In a remarkable display of solidarity, each artist has pledged to donate 50 per cent of the proceeds from the sale of their artwork to support ESO's conservation causes. This philanthropic endeavour reflects a shared belief in the importance of safeguarding Oman's natural heritage for future generations.

Among the esteemed artists who contributed to the exhibition are some of Oman's most prominent and active creators, including Alia Al Farsi, Rebecca Nigrinis, and Anna Dudchenko. Notably, Anna Dudchenko played a pivotal role in catalysing the event, leveraging her passion for both art and conservation to rally fellow artists around the cause. According to an ESO representative, Dudchenko's unwavering dedication was instrumental in bringing the exhibition to fruition.

Commenting on the successful launch, a representative from ESO shared, "This idea stemmed from the initiative of a dedicated volunteer named Nasser al Khanjari, who envisioned an art event to inspire photographers and artists to create works centred on nature and the environment." The representative also lauded Anna Dudchenko's invaluable contributions, highlighting her role in

galvanizing support from the art community and orchestrating the captivating displays showcased at the exhibition.

ESO Art 2024 marks a significant milestone in the intersection of art and environmental conservation in Oman. As the first of its kind, the exhibition serves as a platform for engaging diverse segments of the Omani community in the conservation journey. By fostering dialogue and fostering a deeper appreciation for nature through art, ESO aims to mobilise collective action in safeguarding Oman's precious ecosystems.

The exhibition will remain open to the public throughout the week, offering visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the captivating artworks on display. ESO extends a warm invitation to all individuals to visit the exhibition, appreciate the artistry on offer, and consider supporting the initiative in furthering the cause of environmental conservation.

