

Oman, UAE to establish strategic partnerships

HM RETURNS HOME AFTER A TWO-DAY STATE VISIT TO UAE



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home after a two-day state visit to the UAE.

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Tuesday after a two-day state visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The visit was made in response to an invitation by Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), hailed the efforts being exerted by the authorities concerned in both countries to promote the bilateral cooperation in areas of economy and investment.

The two leaders also gave instructions to encourage the public and private sectors to develop and diversify trade and investment exchange, establish strategic partnerships that meet aspirations of the two countries' peoples and enhance prospects of comprehensive cooperation towards the future.

This was stated in the joint communique issued following the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the United Arab Emirates. The text of the communique reads as follows: "As an extension of the bonds of brotherhood and consolidation of the close historical ties between the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman, and as an embodiment of the relations of prosperous cooperation that bring together the two countries and their peoples, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik paid a state visit to the United Arab Emirates as per a generous invitation of Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, on Monday and Tuesday, 13 and 14 Shawwal 1445 AH corresponding to April 22 and 23.

During the visit, discussions were held amidst a spirit of brotherhood and solidarity, which confirmed the outcomes of the state visit made by Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan to the Sultanate of Oman in September 2022. These outcomes launched a new chapter of cooperation and fruitful strategic partnership between the two countries in all spheres. The two leaders touched



Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan led the farewell ceremony for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

on the regional and international developments of joint interest and exchanged viewpoints towards them. They also underlined enhancing coordination of their stances to serve the joint interests and strengthens pillars of stability and security in the region. They reaffirmed their stances calling for stability, security, prosperity and growth for all countries and peoples in the region and the world at large.

On regional affairs, and within the context of the developments taking place in the region, the two sides called on the regional parties to exercise the utmost levels of restraint to spare the region and its people the risks of escalation and instability. They emphasised their position calling for adherence to international laws and resolving differences through diplomacy and dialogue. The two sides also renewed their calls on the United Nations and the UN Security Council to shoulder their responsibilities to consolidate international peace and security.

On the bilateral economic and investment matter, the two leaders lauded the efforts being exerted by the authorities concerned in both countries to promote the bilateral cooperation in areas of economy and investment. The two leaders also gave instructions to encourage the public and private sectors to develop and diversify trade and investment exchange, establish strategic partnerships that meet aspirations of the two countries' peoples and enhance prospects of comprehensive cooperation towards the future.

At the end of the visit, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik expressed his thanks and appreciation to Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, the government and the UAE brotherly people for the warm welcome and generous hospitality. His Majesty wished the United Arab Emirates permanent progress and prosperity. On his turn, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, UAE President, expressed his best wishes of further welfare and prosperity to the Sultanate of Oman and the Omani people." — **ONA**

DEVELOP AND DIVERSIFY TRADE AND INVESTMENT

DISCUSSIONS HELD IN A SPIRIT OF BROTHERHOOD

TALKS TOUCHED ON REGIONAL, WORLD MATTERS

CALL FOR STABILITY, SECURITY, PROSPERITY IN REGION

SPARE THE REGION FROM THE RISKS OF INSTABILITY

Agreements in investment and economic sectors to boost growth

ABU DHABI: The Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Tuesday signed agreements and memorandums of understanding in different fields. The pacts, inked as part of the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the UAE, cover the areas of investment, renewable energy, railways and modern technology.

In the field of investment, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the UAE Ministry of Investment. It aims to explore and exchange investment opportunities in economic and investment cooperation. In the field of modern technology, 'Jusoor' fund project was put

on track, and so was direct investment in technology startups and SMEs (small and medium enterprises) operating in the technical sector. In this context, Abu Dhabi Developmental Holding Company (represented by Lunit) and Oman Investment Authority (represented by the ITHCA Group) pledged to provide \$180 million funding to Jusoor Fund in implementation of an MoU inked by the two parties in 2022.

In the field of renewable energy, Omani enterprises affiliated to Oman Investment Authority (operating in the sectors of green minerals, renewable energy and electricity) signed a framework memorandum with their UAE counterparts. The two sides will begin to conduct feasibility studies

In honour of HM, UAE President hosts luncheon

ABU DHABI: In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), hosted a luncheon at the Beach Palace in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday. The luncheon was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty. It was also attended by some Emirati shaikhs and senior officials.

to implement innovative projects in the respective areas. Three agreements were signed within the framework of the railway network project linking the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates. The first is a partnership agreement between shareholders - namely Etihad Rail, Oman Rail and Mubadala, signals the actual start of the project.

The second agreement deals with awarding civil contracts for a joint network that stems from an Omani-UAE alliance led by 'Trojan Construction Group' (NPC) and 'Galfar Engineering and Contracting.'

The third agreement deals with "awarding systems and integration contracts related the railway network" to an alliance between Siemens and HAC

to supply trains with the latest techniques and technology. The signing ceremony was attended from the Omani side by Abdussalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidi, Ambassador of Oman to the UAE. It was attended from the UAE side by Shaikh Hamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Managing Director of Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Suhail bin Mohamed al Mazrouei, UAE Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Mohammed bin Hassan al Suwaidi, Minister of Investment and Mohammed bin Hadi al Husaini, State Minister for Financial Affairs. — **ONA**



HIS MAJESTY CONCLUDES STATE VISIT TO UAE



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Tuesday after concluding a state visit in response to the invitation of Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, which lasted two days.

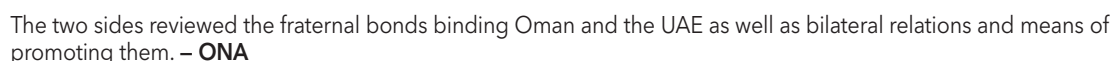
His Majesty the Sultan was received at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth,

Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Shaikh Al Fadl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of

the Internal Security Service, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, Rear Admiral Saif bin Nassir al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman and Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Ja'aboub, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force. — ONA



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Asaad bids farewell to Kazakh Ambassador

MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Tuesday Najmedin Muhametali, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Sultanate of Oman to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to him from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people during his tour of duty.

He wished His Majesty the

Sultan good health, happiness and a long life. He also wished the Sultanate of Oman further development and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

On his turn, HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in enhancing relations between Oman and Kazakhstan, wishing him continuous success.

HH Sayyid Asaad also wished the people of Kazakhstan further progress and prosperity.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the adviser at the office of HH Sayyid Asaad.

— ONA

HM receives message from Bahrain King

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The message was handed over to HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, when he received in his office today Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman. The ambassador conveyed greetings of the King of Bahrain and best wishes of continuous health,

wellbeing and a long life to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He also conveyed Bahrain's Monarch's wishes of further progress and prosperity to the Omani people.

HH Sayyid Asaad asked the ambassador to convey greetings of HM and best wishes of wellbeing, happiness and continuous success to the King of Bahrain and the people of Bahrain further development and growth. They reviewed the bilateral relations and means of promoting them in various spheres, in addition to reviewing a range of matters of mutual interest.

— ONA



Al Khuwair Square project launch on National Day

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Muscat Municipality unveiled details of its Al Khuwair Square project in the Ministries District, which will also feature Oman's tallest flagpole, measuring in 126 meters in height. The project will be launched as part of the 54th National Day celebrations.

The details were unveiled at the presence conference attended by Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat; Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat

Municipality, and Harssha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, a subsidiary of Jindal Group in Oman, which financed this monumental project.

The flagpole will be the highest man-made facility in the history of the Sultanate of Oman, equivalent to a building with 40 floors.

It will be made of iron and also require 135 tonnes of steel.

The outer diameter of the flagpole at the base is 2,800 mm, while the diameter at its highest point is 900 mm. The dimensions of the Omani flag are 18 meters in length and 31.5 meters in width.

The flagpole will be provided with a warning lighting system for aircraft. The project extends over an area of more than 18,000 square meters and will include grass turf, palm trees, paths designated for walking and bicycles, an outdoor exhibition area and a skateboarding area.

The project was also equipped with public facilities such as toilets and 107 parking lots. Al Busaidy appreciated the efforts made by the public and private sectors to implement this initiative and said this landmark will be a must-visit sport for those within and outside

the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Humaidi said, "The Al Khuwair Square project was the result of cooperation between the Governorate of Muscat and the Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel Company, which is considered one of the largest iron producers in the region and the world."

When asked about the congestion that the project will cause in Muscat, he replied that Muscat is considered one of the least crowded cities and that the project's location is well thought out so as not to cause any congestion.

CONDOLENCES

We extend our heartfelt condolences to

Sheikh Adil Said Ahmed Al Shanfari
Sheikh Thamir Said Ahmed Al Shanfari
Sheikh Nazar Said Ahmed Al Shanfari

on the sad demise of their father

Sheikh Said Ahmed Said Al Shanfari

May Almighty God rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant his family members the courage to bear this irreparable loss.



Oman Metal Industries & Contracting Co. LLC



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5-year Schengen visa for Omanis

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

The EU has announced five-year Schengen visas for citizens of Oman that allow them to visit the bloc several times during the period while Albania has allowed Omanis to visit the country without an entry visa from March 6 and December 31, 2024.

The announcement was made by EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, during the opening session of the first high-level Forum on Regional Security and



Co-operation between the bloc and the GCC in Luxembourg. The decision allows Omani

The validity of the passport needs to be more than 5 years to enjoy the full benefit of this new policy. The revised visa rules, known as the “cascade,” provide long-term multiple-entry visas for all eligible applicants

citizens to visit the EU multiple times over five years with the same visa. During the visa validity

period, holders of the visa enjoy travel rights equivalent to visa-free nationals.

GCC citizens can now obtain multiple-entry visas to visit EU countries with a five-year validity with implementation starting immediately. The validity of the passport needs to be more than 5 years to enjoy the full benefit of this new policy.

The revised visa rules, known as the “cascade,” provide long-term multiple-entry visas for all eligible applicants, including first-time travellers.

E-visa must for tourists to Sri Lanka

KABEER YOUSUF
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All travellers to Sri Lanka must carry an e-visa for entry, according to a statement from the Sri Lankan Embassy in Muscat.

The island nation had earlier discontinued the previous visa scheme, Electronic Travel Authority (ETA), and introduced the new e-Visa scheme from April 16. The site to apply for the visa is <https://www.srilankaeva.lk>

When applying for an e-Visa through third parties, the diplomatic mission advises the payments to be made only through official website. “Therefore, it is the applicant’s

responsibility to always ensure that the payments are made by accessing the official e-Visa website, in order to avoid repayments or scamming by third parties,” Mohammed Lebbe, Sri Lankan Ambassador, said.

Citizens of Singapore, the Maldives, Seychelles and Czech Republic are exempted from the requirement of obtaining tourist standard 6-months e-visa to visit Sri Lanka, on the basis of reciprocity.

In any case, all passengers on transit in Sri Lanka are eligible for an e-Visa waiver, if transiting through any of the Sri Lankan airports. The waiver is valid for a maximum of 2-day transit period only.



JOB VACANCY

Applications are invited for the position of **Project Manager** at the proposed Wellness and Rehabilitation Center at Muscat. The selected applicant will have extensive experience and a proven track record in rehabilitation care.

Educational Qualifications:
Postgraduate Degree in Rehabilitation/ Physiotherapy

Experience:
A minimum of 10 years of experience in the operation of Rehabilitation Services.

Interested persons may submit their CV to the office of the DVC (A&FA) at cfo@nu.edu.om before **9th May 2024**.

Candies with immoral pics seized in Nizwa

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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More than 3,000 candies with immoral pictures were seized in Nizwa, which is a clear violation of the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations.

During inspection visits to stores and commercial centres in Nizwa, judicial officers confiscated more than 3,571 items and action was taken.

Taï bin Salim al Junaibi, Director of the Consumer Protection Authority in Al Dakhiliyah, said when asked the owner of the establishment about the reason for doing



this, he explained that it was because he did not know that it was banned.

Shops should ensure that the goods conform to the

specifications and standards before offering them for sale.

The Authority makes an effort to follow up and monitor the markets and is keen to take all legal measures against violators. It also calls on consumers to report any violations they may notice, through various communication channels. To ensure protection of consumer rights, the Authority monitors the stability of markets and ensures the transparency of information provided to consumers. It also works to prevent any illegal or immoral practices, encourage fair practices in the market,

ensure the availability of goods, and monitor the extent of shops and commercial centres’ compliance with the Consumer Protection Law.

The Authority also developed a deliberate and systematic work plan to implement oversight efforts in an intensive and comprehensive manner.

It included inspection campaigns through the formation of field work teams that include judicial police officers and shop inspectors, and setting a clear work schedule for these teams to follow up on the markets in an integrated manner.

CONDOLENCES

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مشاريح علوي ش.م.م
Alawi Enterprises L.L.C.
(The Heirs of Late Qais Al Zawawi)



Oman participates in Umrah and Ziyarah Forum in Madinah

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, is taking part in the three-day Umrah and Ziyarah Forum in Madinah under the auspices of Salman bin Sultan al Saud, Governor of Al Madinah, at the King Salman International Convention Centre, which started on April 22.

The forum, which hosts representatives from almost all countries, is aimed at giving a glimpse into the new projects and services designed to transform travel to holy sites In the country.

The forum is a key part of Saudi Vision 2030, showcasing the country's commitment to improving the experience of Muslim pilgrims (Umrah performers) and visitors (Ziyarah) coming from all over the world.

“We are happy to get to know the additional facilities and avenues of religious tourism in the Kingdom which the pilgrims from Oman can expect in the coming days just as the world is preparing for the holy Haj of this year,” said a representative from the ministry.

The forum has brought together government officials,

travel agencies, pilgrimage companies and businesses from various sectors like healthcare, transportation and technology from across the world.

Attendees can expect lively discussions about new ideas and projects to enhance the pilgrimage journey. There will also be an exhibition featuring innovative products and services from participating companies. The Saudi Ministry will be unveiling exciting new initiatives and partnerships designed to revolutionise travel to Makkah, Madinah, and other important religious sites.

“The Umrah and Ziyarah Forum reflects Saudi Arabia's dedication to making the pilgrimage a truly enriching and unforgettable experience, aligned with the goals of the Pilgrim Experience Programme under Saudi Vision 2030,” said a ministerial representative.

The three-day forum aims to create a welcoming and spiritually uplifting experience that meets the highest international standards. The forum will be a meeting point for decision-makers, industry experts and investors, fostering collaboration between local and international organisations, according to the organisers.



Salman bin Sultan al Saud, Governor of Al Madinah, at the forum on Monday.

MoAFWR officials monitor dams

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is monitoring all the dams in governorates for their periodic maintenance, and ensuring their safety, efficiency and operation.

But the recent torrential rains had been requiring extra attention. Eng Ali bin Mohammed al Abri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Water Resources, visited Wadi Ahin Dam in the Wilayat of Saham in Al Batinah North Governorate, accompanied by the Governor of Al Batinah North, and a number of officials, to inspect the damage as a result of rainfall experienced last week in Oman. The visit was also to meet with the shaikhs and the people of Saham to listen to their proposals and recommendations on the maintenance of the dam. They also visited a number of dams in Al Batinah North.

The ministry extended its sincere gratitude and appreciation to the public and to those who have been monitoring the dam. The existing dam in Wadi Ahin was set up in 1994 to improve and increase groundwater recharge water level and make it a significant resource available for agricultural use.

The dam's storage capacity is 6.8 million cubic metres. The maximum discharge of the spillway is about 5,600 cubic metres per second. It is equipped with five water drainage gates. The average rainfall in the Wadi Ahin watershed on April 16 had reached 155 mm, and this resulted in water flow during the same day at about 18 million cubic metres, which exceeded the storage capacity of the dam, and had led to a deviation in the course of the wadi.

The main cause of water flooding resulted in damage to the dam spillway with a length of 30 metres, which constitutes 0.5 per cent of the total length of the dam.



Wadi Dayqah Dam draws more crowds

TEXT & PHOTOS BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Wadi Dayqah, which is about 18 km away from the Wilayat of Qurayat, is full after heavy rains. To see the spectacular flow of water, families and groups of individuals are flocking to the dam premises.

The dam is considered an extension of the valleys of Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. It can store 100 million cubic metres. It is 75 metres high and 40 metres long.

The dam waters flow through many villages like Al Mazara, Hail Al Ghaf and Daghmar. The distance travelled by this water is estimated at about 20 km. This water feeds all wells and aflaj for which the Wilayat of Qurayat is famous. “This is my favourite destination. I make sure to visit this site after the rain. The site is characterised by its abundance of water. I also go hiking with my family in the mountains adjacent to this valley. I expect the number of tourists to increase during the coming period, especially since this site has been developed and provides recreational activities such as kayaking in the wide lake,” an Omani from Muscat told the *Observer*.

This site contains many archaeological and geological features. On the tops of the hills there are examples of some



ancient walls and tombs dating back thousands of years. One of the most important of these historical landmarks is the Farmer's Fort, which is located on the southern mountaintops of the village. There is also Al Jazer Tower, which was used for

defensive purposes to protect the village from any military raid. There are also many ancient archaeological aflaj in the village, some of which date back to the pre-Islamic era, the most famous of which are Al Seeh falaj and Al Ghubaira falaj.

This Iranian family on bicycle believes travel refines souls

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Smitten by the hospitality of the people of the Sultanate of Oman, an Iranian family is on bicycles exploring the innate beauty and experiencing the warmth of welcoming people across the country.

The family, comprising a builder and his homemaker wife, along with 18-year son and two daughters aged 10 and 7, took the pains of camping near mosques and sometimes boarding in a hotel during the course of their 10 days peddling in the country.

Reza, his wife Maliah, son 18-year old Daniel and daughters Mahsa and Dorsa were on a ten-day-long-journey on bicycles exploring what makes Oman different and how it stands out from the rest.

“Oman is very far from other countries in terms of hospitality. The culture and tradition are exemplary. We are literally humbled by the hospitality by the people who made us feel at home. People are very friendly and down to earth,” Reza said.

They hail from Yazd, a central Iranian province that has vast deserts and other tourist and heritage places. From Yazd, they came by car to Bander Abbas and from there, they proceeded on a ship to the UAE.

But nothing could dampen their spirit of cycling across the breadth and width of the country, neither the scorching sun nor the hot wind that faced them throughout, a climate far from their hometown of Yazd, the central province of Iran.

“We enjoyed cycling across the country where we found only



good people who were very much welcoming and each day was a stimulant because of the love and care of the Omani people,” Reza said.

“We couldn't go fast because we were cycling day and night but we refrained from food and water during the day. However, Omanis were kind enough to us by offering water and food during the day knowing that we were travellers and we couldn't fast.” The long journey that started on March 12 from the port took 15 days before they could reach Oman visiting the neighbouring UAE for 15 days covering a total of more than 4,000 km by ship and air and 1,500 km by bicycle.

They loaded bicycles on a ship to the UAE along with them and travelled by sea to Abu Dhabi and visited the country for nearly two weeks before they could cross the

border to Oman and at the end of the journey, they returned by air packing their bicycles in the cargo on April 3.

The family, which considers their common passion being cycling, had in the past been to India, Pakistan, Nepal, Qatar, Turkiye and Georgia before they came to Oman and for them visiting countries on bicycle is a life mission.

Their aim was to learn new cultures and traditions and meet with people. People of Oman respect each other and all human beings irrespective of their origin.

“Travel really refines our souls and purifies our thoughts, helping us to take up new challenges and think clearly to go ahead in life. Travel nourishes relations and solidifies our connections with the rest of the world,” Reza said.



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In brief

■ BAGHDAD



IRAQ SAYS ARMY BASE BLAST CAUSED BY STORED MUNITIONS

An explosion last weekend at an Iraqi military base was caused by munitions stored on-site, an investigative committee said Tuesday, ruling out an air strike.

The base housed “barracks and arms depots” belonging to the Iraqi army, the interior ministry and the Popular Mobilisation Forces, the committee said.

“The explosion created a large, irregularly shaped crater at the site of the incident, which was used to store materiel, missiles and explosive materials”, it said. The committee added that “the size of the crater confirms there was an explosion of weaponry and high explosive materials present”. — **AFP**

■ BAKU



ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN SAY HAVE BEGUN MARKING BORDER

Armenia and Azerbaijan announced on Tuesday they had started fixing their border, as part of normalisation efforts that had been locked in a decades-long conflict.

Azerbaijan said expert groups are conducting “clarification of coordinates based on geodesic study of the terrain,” while Armenia ruled out “the transfer of any parts of Armenia’s sovereign territory” to Baku as a result of the delimitation.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that a peace deal with Armenia was closer than ever before, as teams from the two countries headed to the border to start demarcation work. — **AFP**

■ KUALA LUMPUR



MALAYSIAN NAVY HELICOPTERS COLLIDE IN MID-AIR, 10 KILLED

Two Malaysian navy helicopters collided in mid-air during a rehearsal for a naval parade on Tuesday, killing all 10 crew members aboard, the navy said.

The incident occurred at the Lumut naval base in the western state of Perak on Tuesday morning, the navy said.

“All victims were confirmed dead at the scene and sent to the Lumut naval base military hospital,” the navy said.

Several helicopters flying in formation, when one of the choppers’ rotor clipped another before both aircraft crashed into the ground. The navy said it would carry out an investigation into the cause. — **Reuters**



People rush to landing humanitarian aid packages dropped over the northern Gaza Strip. — **AFP**

UN CALLS FOR PROBE INTO GAZA DEATHS

GENEVA: The UN called on Tuesday for an international investigation into reports of mass graves at two Gaza hospitals destroyed in Israeli sieges, saying war crimes may have been committed.

The United Nations rights office said it was “horrified” by the destruction of Gaza’s biggest hospital, Al-Shifa in Gaza City, and its second largest, the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis.

The Palestinian territory’s Civil Defence agency said health workers had uncovered more than 200 bodies of people killed and buried at Nasser hospital, which was besieged by Israeli troops last month.

In early April the World Health Organization said Al-Shifa had been destroyed by an Israeli siege, leaving an “empty shell” containing many bodies.

The UN rights office on Tuesday demanded “independent, effective and transparent investigations into the deaths”.

“Given the prevailing climate of impunity, this should include international investigators,” UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

Hospitals, which are protected under international law, have repeatedly come under Israeli bombardment over more than six months

Hospitals, which are protected under international law, have repeatedly come under Israeli bombardment over more than six months of war in Gaza.

“Hospitals are entitled to very special protection under international humanitarian law,” Turk pointed out. “And the intentional killing of civilians, detainees and others who are hors de combat is a war crime.” The UN rights office said it did not have access to independent information as to what had transpired at the two hospitals.

But spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said efforts were under way to corroborate reports and details given by Gaza authorities.

The latter say 283 bodies were recovered from Nasser hospital, including 42 that had been

identified.

“Victims had reportedly been buried deep in the ground and covered with waste,” she told reporters in Geneva.

Older people, women and wounded were reportedly among the dead, she said. Others were allegedly “found with their hands tied and stripped of their clothes”.

As for Al-Shifa, the Israeli army has said around 200 Palestinians were killed during its military operation at the hospital

Shamdasani pointed to reports indicating that this toll “may be an underestimate”.

Around 30 bodies were reported found buried in two graves in the courtyard of Al-Shifa hospital. “And there are reports that the hands of some of these bodies were also tied,” Shamdasani said.

So far, she said, the UN “can’t corroborate the exact figures” of people killed at the two hospitals, underlining: “This is why we are stressing the need for international investigations”.

The reports that some had their hands tied indicated “serious violations” of international law, she added. — **AFP**

EU lawmakers greenlight new rules in national spending

STRASBOURG: European Union lawmakers on Tuesday backed new budgetary rules aimed at boosting investment while keeping spending under control.

Brussels spent two years negotiating an overhaul of its budget rules that pitted fiscally hawkish states against the bloc’s most indebted nations.

A majority of lawmakers backed the new rules during a session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. It will become official once the EU’s 27 member states endorse the text.

The new rules are “more flexible, more growth oriented, more credible in their implementation”, the EU’s economy commissioner, Paolo Gentiloni, said during a parliamentary debate. He said that, while “not perfect”, the reform was “a good compromise”.

Climate activists argue the rules will limit states’ ability to pour money into important green projects.

“It will force many EU governments to take austerity measures and limit their ability to borrow to finance essential climate, environmental and social policies,” Greenpeace EU said in a statement.

Margarida Marques, a socialist

lawmaker who spearheaded the reform through the parliament, defended the text, insisting “significant improvements” had been made.

“There is no doubt that this deal is much better than no deal and going back to the old rules or having no rules at all,” she said.

The old rules had been suspended between 2020 and 2023 to help the European economy weather the Covid pandemic and then Russia’s assault on Ukraine, which sent energy prices soaring.

There was widespread agreement that there could be no return to the old rules without changes to make them practicable, despite public debt ballooning across the bloc.

Known as the Stability and Growth Pact, the rules stipulate a country’s debt must not go higher than 60 per cent of gross domestic product, with a public deficit of no more than three per cent.

These goals remain in place, though there was fierce debate over how much the limits should be relaxed to give more room for investment.

The new text provides looser fiscal rules adapted to each state, allowing big spenders a slower route back to frugality.

— **AFP**



European countries’ flags appear in front of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg eastern France. — **AFP**

Sunak to announce Ukraine aid during visit to Poland

WARSAW: UK leader Rishi Sunak arrived in Warsaw on Tuesday for talks with Polish premier Donald Tusk and Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg that will focus on Ukraine and wider European security.

While in Poland’s capital, the British prime minister will announce £500 million in additional military funding for Kyiv in its more-than two-year battle against Russia’s attack, his Downing Street office said in a statement.

“Defending Ukraine against Russia’s ambitions is vital for our security and for all of Europe. If Putin is allowed to succeed in this war of aggression, he will not stop at the Polish border,” Sunak said ahead of the trip. A Downing Street spokesperson said Sunak spoke by phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier on Tuesday “to assure him of the UK’s steadfast support for Ukraine’s defence”.

“He confirmed that the UK would provide an additional £500 million in immediate funding to support the highest priority



Britain’s PM Rishi Sunak, Polish PM Donald Tusk and Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg pose in front of soldiers at the Warsaw Armoured Brigade, Poland. — **AFP**

capabilities, including further ammunition, air defence and drones,” the spokesperson said.

On the plane to Warsaw, Sunak told reporters he discussed Ukraine’s air defence needs with Zelensky.

“You’ll see that package that we’ve announced today is the single biggest package that we’ve

ever announced in one day,” Sunak added.

Zelensky has thanked the British leader, saying on social media he was grateful “for such a strong demonstration of support and for the willingness to further develop our defence cooperation”.

Sunak’s visit to Eastern Europe comes as Kyiv pleads with allies to

ramp up supplies of ammunition and air defences desperately needed to repel Russian attacks. Western countries are also under pressure to boost spending on their own defence in the face of Russian threats. Ukraine has for months struggled with a growing shortage of ammunition, with Europe struggling to provide

“You’ll see that package that we’ve announced today is the single biggest package that we’ve ever announced in one day

RISHI SUNAK
UK prime minister

weaponry as Ukrainian forces get pushed back along the front line.

US lawmakers eased the pressure last weekend by unblocking a \$61-billion military aid package for Kyiv following six months of political wrangling.

Ukraine has asked especially for seven more advanced Patriot systems capable of shooting down Russia’s hypersonic missiles — but is keen to get any help it can.

Six nations in the EU — Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Spain — have the US-designed systems. — **AFP**

Are we ready for the Lavender Game?



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Gaming and gamification have been among the most trending concepts in the emerging markets because of the way the brain of the youth population around the world is evolving.

Video games market alone is projected to reach around RO 1 billion globally, and at least RO 300 billion by 2027 based on post-Covid market estimation. While, gaming has been predominantly a benign leisure industry it has taking the darkest turn possible in 2023 due to the ongoing US and EU backed Israeli genocide against Palestine and Palestinians in Gaza.

This war witnessed billions of Riyals investment in infusing three emerging technologies: gaming, artificial intelligence, and military technologies. The result of this has been anything but death and destruction for tens of thousands of lives, led in this case by an evil Ai programme ironically named Lavender, according to an investigative report by a magazine called +972.

We have a chance to recalibrate the three factors driving this violent militarisation of young minds; moral ambiguity, automation, and funding.

MORAL AMBIGUITY
Transitioning from virtual video games to AI powered simulations that autonomously target people in real life based on their background is negatively reinforcing the lack of moral responsibility of people involved in the development and deployment of these systems.

It is imperative that we collectively as human beings develop policies that humanise AI decision making in a way that makes it clear to those responsible for their decisions and their accountability.

AUTOMATION
While the defence industry is credited for some of humanity’s most benevolent innovations such as penicillin and GPS, we now have smart shooter AI systems that facilitate the indiscriminate bombing of children, women and men in the tens of thousands with impunity.

We cannot let automation lead its own development without more human oversight or this will lead to our extinction.

WHILE, GAMING HAS BEEN PREDOMINANTLY A BENIGN LEISURE INDUSTRY IT HAS TAKING THE DARKEST TURN POSSIBLE IN 2023 DUE TO THE ONGOING US AND EU BACKED ISRAELI GENOCIDE AGAINST PALESTINE AND PALESTINIANS IN GAZA.

FUNDING
No market can develop without funding. The ongoing tragic conflicts in Africa, Europe and Palestine are stoking tensions and arms races.

This is especially true in the area of drones and AI targeting guiding systems. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of children are struggling to access proper healthcare, and lack opportunities to access education, setting them up for a vicious cycle of disease, poverty and extremism.

There is a bright side to struggles around the world, they remind us of how change is the only constant and that we are evolving thanks to innovations.

A lovely industry dominated by entertaining games such as Super Mario is now dominated by irresponsible AI targeting systems such as Lavender without a real challenge.

This is absolutely the right time to encourage every developer, especially the younger generation to get our world ready to take extreme violence completely out of the realm of entertainment.

Failure to do so means that sooner or later, you and I will likely be subjected to an AI targeting system without any justification or accountability.

Brazil hopes to use AI to save wildlife from roadkill fate

LUCÍA LACURCIA

In Brazil, where about 16 wild animals become roadkill every second, a computer scientist has come up with a futuristic solution to this everyday problem: using AI to alert drivers to their presence.

Direct strikes on the vast South American country’s extensive road network are the top threat to numerous species, forced to live in ever-closer proximity with humans.

According to the Brazilian Center for Road Ecology (CBEE), some 475 million vertebrate animals die on the road every year — mostly smaller species such as capybaras, armadillos and possums.

“It is the biggest direct impact on wildlife today in Brazil,” CBEE coordinator Alex Bager said.

Shocked by the carnage in the world’s most biodiverse country, computer science student Gabriel Souto Ferrante sprung into action.

The 25-year-old started by identifying the five medium- and large-sized species most likely to fall victim to traffic accidents: the puma, the giant anteater, the tapir, the maned wolf and the jaguarundi, a type of wild cat.

Souto, who is pursuing a master’s degree at the University of Sao Paulo (USP), then created a database with thousands of images of these animals, and trained an AI model to recognise them in real time.

Numerous tests followed, and were successful, according to the results of his efforts recently published in the journal Scientific Reports.

Souto collaborated with the USP Institute of Mathematical and Computer Sciences.

For the project to become a reality, Souto said scientists would need “support from the companies that manage the roads,” including access to traffic cameras and “edge computing” devices — hardware that can relay a real-time warning to drivers like some navigation apps do.

There would also need to be input from the road concession companies, “to remove the animal or capture it,” he said.

It is hoped the technology, by reducing wildlife strikes, will also save human lives.

Bager said a variety of other strategies to stop the bloodshed on Brazilian roads have failed.

Signage warning drivers to be on the lookout for crossing animals have little influence, he said, leading to a mere three per cent reduction in speed on average.

There are also so-called fauna bridges and tunnels meant to get animals safely from one side of the road to the other, and fences to keep them in — all insufficient to deal with the scope of the problem, according to Bager. — AFP

Our path to a sustainable digital economy



Dr Muamar bin Ali al Tobi

The author is an academic and researcher

Recently, the term digital economy has been increasingly mentioned across media platforms and governmental channels. This term is linked to Oman’s national vision, Oman Vision 2040, which aligns with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq’s vision.

The vision is distinguished by its grand national objectives and its purely national formulation, as it emerges from the ideas of Omanis, especially the youth who have had a hand in drafting this vision. This contribution aims to build a renewed renaissance based on pillars that keep pace with scientific and digital developments; this has made the digital economy one of the primary components of Oman Vision 2040 and its main goals.

The question remains regarding what we mean by the digital economy and how this type of economy relates to the traditional economy and particularly to the growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Oman. The digital economy belongs to the global economy in its current concept, which cannot be separated from the reality of digital and technological progress.

This type of economy includes commercial operations that interact with life elements and characters via the Internet. This includes e-commerce, digital banking services, digital marketplaces, data-driven services, and digital currencies, which have seen increased growth and trade recently, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. The digital economy also encompasses industries that rely heavily on digital technologies such as information and communication technologies, digital media and various social media platforms.

The digital economy is characterised by its rapid growth rate, its ability to transcend complex geographical and political boundaries, and its significant impact on traditional activities and industries that are not digitally native. It has the capability to radically change production, consumption, distribution, and logistical processes in general.

We can link some of these concepts and their relationship to economic growth and the GDP in Oman through the document of the National Program for Digital Economy —



The digital economy is characterised by its rapid growth rate, its ability to transcend complex geographical and political boundaries, and its significant impact on traditional activities and industries that are not digitally native.

THE NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR DIGITAL ECONOMY ADOPTS THE 50-5-5 STRATEGY, WHICH SEEKS TO INCREASE THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY BY 50 PER CENT EVERY 5 YEARS BY INCREASING THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY RATE BY 5 PER CENT.

published by the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology— which is one of the main pillars and programs of Oman Vision 2040. This document includes data related to the contribution of the digital economy to the global economy, which accounted for 5 per cent to 15 per cent of the global GDP according to a 2019 statistic, with an estimated \$11 trillion in the global digital economy expected to rise to \$23 trillion by 2025. This increase would boost the global contribution of the digital economy to 24 per cent of the total global GDP. As for the local context, Oman recorded a 2 per cent contribution of its digital economy to the GDP in 2016.

The National Program for Digital Economy, according to the summary of the document referenced above, is based on several pillars. The first is the imposition of smart governance

to become a reality that leads to the facilitation of procedures and services of all kinds through advanced digital systems. The second pillar aims to achieve the existence of a digital society that strives to enhance digital capabilities in the community, promote digital innovation and support it. The third pillar is to expand the digitalisation of businesses by activating them with advanced digital tools such as artificial intelligence systems, the Internet of Things, cloud and quantum computing; to include digitisation in key sectors like tourism, health, education, and logistics.

The National Program for Digital Economy adopts the 50-5-5 strategy, which seeks to increase the contribution of the digital economy by 50 per cent every 5 years by increasing the information technology rate by 5 per cent.

This strategy stems from the principle of keeping pace with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which began its practical steps in 2021 and is expected to complete its journey in 2040. It is anticipated that through this journey, the contribution of the digital economy to the GDP will rise from 2 per cent to 10 per cent by 2040, reaching an information technology rate of about 30 per cent to 35 per cent. The programmes related to this national program are divided into three branches starting with the national program, which is long-term and is expected to be achieved by 2040.

Oman-UAE ties get a fresh boost

The Sultanate of Oman and the UAE have always been keen on strengthening the bonds of brotherhood, good neighbourly relations and social and economic ties between the leaderships and peoples of the two fraternal countries.

The historical ties between the two countries are manifested by a number of milestones including the historic meeting between the late Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan and the late Sultan Qaboos in 1968. Further, the visit of late Shaikh Zayed to Oman in 1991 became a landmark turning point in the cooperation between the two nations.

Significantly, the bilateral relations have not stopped with previous leaderships, instead they have been continuing with more confidence. This is evident from the mutual visits and talks between the leaders of the two countries in the recent years.

Only about five months after assuming the presidency, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed made a visit to the Sultanate of Oman in late September 2022.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik was the first leader to arrive in the Emirates to offer condolences on the demise of late President Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan in May 2022.

Now, reflecting on historical relations is the current latest visit by His Majesty the Sultan to the UAE and the consequent high-level talks and deals.

As reported by the Emirati news agency WAM, the visit “epitomises the unique and extraordinary bond between the UAE and Oman, bolstered by a shared history, societal closeness, and a genuine commitment to enhancing cooperation and coordination across broader and more comprehensive avenues.”

The visit is expected to pave way for a surge in trade and investment opportunities across various sectors, fostering greater economic cooperation.

The enthusiasm with which HH Shaikh Mohammed received His



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

Majesty the Sultan was evident when he wrote on ‘X’, formerly Twitter, “I had the pleasure of welcoming my brother Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the UAE today and discussing with him the deep and longstanding bonds that unite our two nations.”

The two leaders signed a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding covering investments in key sectors such as renewable energy, railways and modern technology aimed at further strengthening relations between the two neighbouring countries.

The announcement for the actual start of work on the “Jusoor” Fund, and the activation of direct investments in emerging technology companies and small and medium enterprises, is expected to pave way for further boost in the technical sector.

So is the memorandum of understanding for investment between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the UAE Ministry of Investment that aims to explore, identify and exchange investment opportunities.

Companies in the field of renewable energy in both countries will benefit from the memorandum of understanding to begin work on feasibility studies to implement innovative projects in the respective fields.

The two sides also discussed several regional and international issues of common interest, most notably developments in the Middle East and efforts to contain tensions and prevent escalation, as this entails a serious threat to security and stability.

Oman and Etihad Rail Company, a joint venture between Oman Rail and Etihad Rail, is overseeing the mega \$3 billion project to build a railway link between Oman and the UAE that was announced last year.

The UAE is one of the most important trading partners for Oman. The volume of trade and investment exchange between the two countries over the past years reflects the depth of the economic partnership between them and its promising prospects.

SIGNIFICANTLY, THE BILATERAL RELATIONS HAVE NOT STOPPED WITH PREVIOUS LEADERSHIPS, INSTEAD THEY HAVE BEEN CONTINUING WITH MORE CONFIDENCE. THIS IS EVIDENT FROM THE MUTUAL VISITS

THE MOON BEHIND THE EIFFEL!



This photograph taken in French capital Paris on Tuesday shows the April’s full moonset, also known as the Pink Moon, seen behind the Eiffel Tower. – AFP

AI holds the key to resilient cities

The cities that some 4.4 billion people call home are increasingly at risk of catastrophic climate-driven events. Rising sea levels and flooding threaten coastal megacities like New York City and Jakarta, and extreme heat waves, like those that afflict cities across South Asia and the Middle East each year, are projected to become more frequent and severe.

While our built environments and infrastructure are being tested by unpredictable weather and changing populations, many urban communities are facing heightened climate-related health and economic risks. Dangers such as air pollution and natural disasters can be especially acute in developing countries, where they threaten to drive more people into poverty.

At the same time, cities contribute disproportionately to the broader challenges we face today. Cities already account for an estimated 70 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions and 78 per cent of energy consumption, and these figures could grow in an urbanising world.

According to UN-Habitat, the share of people living in urban areas is expected to increase to 68 per cent by 2050.

Clearly, cities will play a central role in how the world addresses climate change. One factor that could give cities



Justina Nixon-Saintil

The writer is Vice-President and Chief Impact Officer at IBM

CITIES WILL PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN HOW THE WORLD ADDRESSES CLIMATE CHANGE, AND IF THERE IS ONE FACTOR THAT COULD GIVE POLICYMAKERS MUCH-NEEDED SUPPORT, IT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

much-needed support and unlock opportunities for building greater resilience is artificial intelligence. If developed and deployed responsibly and ethically, AI could potentially accelerate urban climate solutions, enable science-based and sustainable development, and deliver innovation at an unprecedented pace, allowing us to put the most vulnerable communities first.

But the first step is to improve our understanding of AI’s many potential applications as a tool for resilient cities. For example, the challenge of handling vast amounts of data is a major obstacle to modeling future climate scenarios accurately and making informed planning decisions. Fortunately, through the power of AI, foundation models and geospatial analytics could help us visualise our cities in a new way.

Consider the metropolitan areas facing severe and changing weather patterns. With real-time and historical climate data and AI-powered predictive capabilities, governments could introduce new tools for disaster response and readiness. Everyone, from ordinary citizens to those tasked with protecting and maintaining critical infrastructure, could be better informed and prepared.

AI also has the potential to help make city operations more sustainable at every level, thus reducing cities’ outsize emissions and environmental impact. Intelligent software applications could integrate AI to analyse buildings’ energy usage, water consumption, and waste management, providing insights that allow communities and organisations to make more responsible decisions about sustainability. Moreover, with the addition of connected devices to drive in-depth data collection, safety measures such as urban infrastructure maintenance could

be more effective and efficient than ever before. Think of all the bridges and roadways threatened by unprecedented weather events. When combined with AI, the uses of data extend far beyond basic monitoring and reporting.

Nor will AI’s urban applications stop there. The technology has the potential to optimise public transportation and traffic planning to achieve more sustainable urban transit. It could help to identify the best locations for expanding much-needed green space, while also preserving urban biodiversity and natural resources.

Governments, public-service

providers, and nonprofits alike have growing opportunities to access and explore AI tools, such as through requests for proposals and pro-bono programmes, like those offered by IBM. However, recent research shows that while 69 per cent of cities are already exploring or testing the uses of generative AI, only 2 per cent are implementing it. As IBM’s Chief Impact Officer, I know that access to technology and the skills required to use it effectively can be major obstacles to implementation.

The need for greater access becomes all the more urgent when one considers the unequal distribution of climate-driven threats. Within our cities, problems like air pollution and a lack of access to clean energy disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable residents. These are the communities that have the most to gain from AI.

We all have a responsibility to make AI solutions support vulnerable populations. That means providing equal access to climate tools, supporting training in AI and related skills, and creating programmes designed to respond to the specific needs of historically marginalised urban populations.

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Rising sea levels and flooding threaten coastal megacities.

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OMAN FOOTBALL TEAM WINS SILVER

O M A N E A R N 3 4 M E D A L S I N G C C Y O U T H G A M E S

WALEED AL JAHWARI
DUBAI, APRIL 23

Oman under-17 football team claimed the silver medal in the first GCC Youth Games after they defeated Bahrain 4-1 on Monday night in Abu Dhabi. The hosts UAE won the gold medal after 2-0 win against Kuwait, who claimed the bronze.

The first edition of GCC Youth Games is being hosted by UAE, from April 16 to May 2, with participants of more than 3,500 GCC athletes competing in 24 games. Oman are participating with around 200 athletes competing in 15 sports, including sailing, football, golf, taekwondo, water sports, athletics, handball, volleyball, basketball, chess, fencing, table tennis, billiards, snooker and equestrian in addition to the para athletics team.

After the conclusion of five-day chess competition, Oman bagged four medals. Ahmed al Rahbi won a silver in the under-18 individual rapid chess. Oman claimed three medals in team rapid chess category — a silver in the under-14 girls team and a bronze each in under-18 male and female sections.



Omani sailors won seven medals —three gold, two silver and two bronze medals. Oman sailing team clinched the gold in optimist team category, Tamem al Balushi claimed silver medals in general optimist category and male optimist category. Tarteel al Hasani won bronze in female optimist category. Abdullatif al Qasimi won gold in ILCA4 class, while Elyas al Fedhaili struck gold in ILCA6 and his teammate Hatim al Erami claimed bronze in same class.

11 MEDALS IN TAEKWONDO
The Oman taekwondo team bagged 11 medals, five medals

were on the first day (Tuesday), including four gold and one silver. Dawood al Yousifi won gold in the 33-37 kg. Ziyad al Balushi won the second gold in 37-41 kg. Muhannad al Hajri claimed the third gold in 49-53 kg. Omani girl Dania al Abdali won the fourth gold in the 37-41 kg. Youssef al Zadjali won the silver in 45-49 kg. Oman succeeded in winning six medals on the second day (Wednesday). Shahnaz al Maawali won gold in the 44 kg. Al Ezz al Maawali claimed gold in 68 kg. Qaboos al Balushi won a silver in 68 kg. Fida al Barwani won gold in 52 kg. Hind al Balushi took silver. Abdulrahman al Jabri earned a gold.



Oman national athletics team concluded their great competition with 11 medals which included three gold medals

ATHLETES SHINE WITH 11 MEDALS
Oman national athletics team concluded their great competition with 11 medals, which was held at Dubai Police Officers from April 18 to 20. On the first day (Thursday) of competitions, the athletic team won three medals with Samar

al Yarubi clinching a gold in the 150-metre race, while Ghaya al Saadi also took gold in 400-metre race and Ahmed al Jabri claimed a bronze in the 500 metres race. The Oman athletics team won three bronze medals on the second day (Friday) with Kaltham al Jabri coming third in shot put, Al Ayham al Fadhailli finishing third in high jump and Azza al Hanai bagging the third medal in shot put. On the third day (Saturday), Oman athletes claimed five medals. Kaltham al Jabri won the gold in discus throw. Moayed al Badri won bronze in 400-metre race, while Azza al Hinai won bronze in 200 metres race. Oman

took bronze medals in both boys and girls medley relays.

SIX MEDALS FOR PARA ATHLETES
On the other hand, Oman's para athletes completed their participation with six medals — three gold, two silver and a bronze. Faisal al Balushi won gold medals in 200 metres sprint and long jump, and grabbed a silver medal in 100 metres. Maryam al Badi won gold in long jump, a silver in 100 metres race and a bronze in 200 metres race.

Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishari, Oman Olympic Committee Secretary-General, said, "We are delighted with Omani athletes' achievements in all the events as they succeeded in grabbing several medals. This is a good indicator for this category, which has proven its worth, as they represented the Sultanate of Oman well." "So far, the taekwondo, athletics, para athletes and sailing teams have succeeded, and the chess team adds a new achievement despite the limited number of participation in each section compared to other countries," he concluded.

MCSY, OFA all set for HM Cup final on May 10 in Khasab

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Football Association (OFA) unveiled the latest preparations for the final match of the His Majesty's Sultan Football Cup 2023-24 Championship on Tuesday in a press meet in Muscat. The final match of the coveted cup will take place on May 10 in Khasab between Al Nahda and Dhofar clubs. The match will kick off at 7:30 pm at Khasab Sports Complex.

Hisham bin Juma al Sinani, Director of Sports Sponsorship and Development at the Ministry and Chairman of the Main Committee for Final, Mohammed bin Suleiman al Yahmadi, Executive Director of OFA, Abdullah bin Ahmed al Shuhi, Assistant General Manager in Musandam Governor office and Mohammed bin Salem al Asmi, Operations Director at the National Travel Operator were the speakers during the press conference.

Hisham al Sinani affirmed that hosting the final match in Khasab at Musandam Governorate resulted after many site visits and coordination to assess the region's readiness to host this significant event. "This event will support in the growth of the governorate through attending of the crowd during the final and emphasised that one of the goals of hosting the final is to promote tourism in the governorate," he added.



"There are many plans and programmes for this final match in Khasab. We will announce very soon the details of these events which will be organised on the sidelines of the HM Cup," he added. Mohammed al Yahmadi stated that this season's final match of the HM Cup in Khasab will be an exceptional occasion.

"We had managed with our partners to overcome with the challenges in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Musandam Governor's Office. There are many surprises for this year's final match including raffle draw for two cars and phone devices. Besides that many other events and activities will be held across

Khasab city as part of the HM Cup match," he said. The Ministry in cooperation with its official partners has managed to arrange many packages for the fans to attend this crucial match. Mohammed al Asmi said that discounted rate of flight packages were arranged to support crowd attendance coming through Salalah Airport and Muscat International Airport to Musandam Governorate. "These packages include two packages from Muscat International Airport, economy class starting from RO 60 with a two-night stay, and the second package in business class starting from RO 160 with a two-night stay. For those departing via Salalah Airport, ticket prices start from RO 75 for economy class and include transportation to and from the airport," he said. Khasab Sports Complex can accommodate 10,000 spectators and it is the first time that Khasab city at Musandam Governorate is hosting the His Majesty the Sultan Football Cup Championship since its establishment. Hosting the coveted cup final match in Musandam Governorate is a continuation of the successful strategic partnerships between the Ministry, OFA and the governorates offices across the Sultanate of Oman especially after the successful experience of hosting the Super Cup final in Al Batinah North Governorate and HM Cup in Dhofar and Sur.



Oman team for the Asian Cities Chess Championship.

Oman draw with Yemen in Asian Cities chess

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

The Omani national chess team achieved a draw in the second round with the Yemeni team with a score of 2-2, as part of their participation in the Asian Cities Chess Championship in Russia, which is being held from April 21 to 30. In the team championship,

which consists of nine rounds, the Omani team had lost to the Russian team in the first round with a score of 4-0. They will play the third round against the Sri Lankan team. The Omani team is represented in the championship by four players: Abdullah al Maashani, Amer al Maashani, Salem al Amri and Hamood al Busaidy.



OMAN'S PACER BILAL KHAN MAKES HISTORY

The 37-year-old is the fastest Associate bowler to reach 100 T20I wickets

MUSCAT: He is fondly known as 'Billy Gun'. And why not. He is the most potent weapon in Oman's pace arsenal. Armed with precision and power, he rarely veers off target when he's on his game.

With his toe-crushers, inswinging yorkers, and menacing bouncers, he is now ranked among the elite in the T20I cricket world.

Meet Oman's pace spearhead, Bilal Khan, who recently achieved a proud milestone for himself and Oman Cricket. The 37-year-old belies his age, with his speed and skills, and became the first and only bowler from the 96 ICC Associate nations to reach the historic 100 wickets mark in the T20 internationals.

Bilal joins an illustrious list of bowlers from across the world as he also became the third joint fastest bowler in the world to achieve the milestone in T20Is. Bilal's historic record was achieved on April 15 during the recently concluded ACC Men's Premier Cup at the Oman Cricket Academy ground.

Bilal's 100 wickets came in his 72nd match to share the record as the third fastest in the world alongside Ireland's Mark Adair, who did it in 2023. The exclusive club of quickest bowlers to reach 100 T20I wickets is led by Afghanistan's spinner Rashid Khan, who reached in just 53 matches while Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga is second, completing his century of wickets in 63 games.

While the top-two in the 100-wicket club are spinners, both Bilal and Adair, are pacers.

The Oman speedster is a crafty left-arter who may not have express pace but his reverse-swinging yorkers during the death overs can rip through any team's batting lineup.

Among the top-ten fastest bowlers to achieve this record are Lasith Malinga (Sri Lanka, 76), Ish Sodhi (New Zealand, 78), Mustafizur Rahman (Bangladesh, 81), Shakib Al Hasan (Bangladesh, 84), Tim Southee (New Zealand, 84), Shadab Khan (Pakistan, 87), Mitchell Santner (New Zealand, 90) and Adil Rashid (England, 100).

Following the conclusion of the ACC Premier Cup, where Oman lost the final to the UAE, Bilal has garnered a total of 106 wickets in 75 matches.

Having made his Oman T20I debut in 2015, the Peshawar-born Bilal also holds the record of picking maximum wickets at one ground with 42 of his victims accounted at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat.

In his remarks after becoming the fastest and only Associate bowler to reach 100 wickets in T20Is, Bilal said: "First of all, I would like to thank God that I could reach this milestone. I really worked hard and in the past few games of the ACC Men's Premier Cup was determined and focussed to reach the mark.



"I'm satisfied and very happy as I am the first and only Associate bowler to reach this mark. It is a big thing for me."

The soft-spoken bowler said the key for his success has been "spending hours and hours in the gym and training hard."

He said: "There is no other way than hard work to succeed and I have been honest with my trainer and physiotherapist. They have helped me a lot in keeping me fit."

Asked about his most memorable spell in his T20I career, Bilal doesn't even bat an eyelid to talk about the match that powered Oman to the ICC T20 World Cup.

He said: "It was in 2019 in Dubai during the 2019 T20 World Cup Qualifier and we were playing against Hong Kong in an elimination match. It was a do-or-die situation, and I picked four wickets as we qualified for the T20 World Cup. I still remember the date, October 30, and the memories are so vivid."

"We batted first and made 134/7 and then restricted Hong Kong to 122/9. My figures were 4-0-23-4 and I had picked two wickets in an over. I had also dismissed the opening batter off the second ball of the match and then got the last to fall wicket in the penultimate over of the match."

Bilal expressed his gratitude and thanks to Oman head coach Duleep Mendis, his bowling coaches over the years, Aavishkar Salvi of India and Champaka Ramanayake of Sri Lanka. He said: "Duleep Mendis Sir trusts me a lot and that gives me lot of confidence. I have learnt a lot from Salvi Sir, who worked with me for 3-4 years and now Champaka Sir. I would like to thank Mazhar Saleem Khan, who is like a father and brother. I also owe my success to the strong support of all Oman Cricket board members, the chairman, and Madhubhai (Madhu Jesrani, OC secretary)."

Besides the T20Is, Bilal has also landed few opportunities to play franchise cricket and has impressed there too. He recently finished as the top wicket-taker for Chattogram Challengers, with 15 wickets, in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). He has also had stints at ILT20 and the Afghanistan Premier League in the past.

Bilal had the distinction of finishing as the highest wicket-taker in the ICC World Cricket League (WCL) Division 2 (2019-2023) with 76 wickets in 35 matches.



Jaiswal ton powers toppers Rajasthan to big win

JAIPUR, India: Yashasvi Jaiswal struck form with an unbeaten 104 as Rajasthan Royals consolidated their position at the top of the IPL table with a nine-wicket thrashing of Mumbai Indians on Monday.

Medium-pace bowler Sandeep Sharma took 5-18 to help restrict Mumbai to 179-9 after Yuzvendra Chahal claimed an IPL first of 200 wickets at Rajasthan's home ground in Jaipur.

Jaiswal, a left-handed opener whose previous best this season was 39, steered the team home in 18.4 overs in an innings interrupted by rain.

"I really enjoyed from the start and I made sure I was watching the ball properly and playing proper cricketing shots," said Jaiswal.

"I'm trying to do what I am doing well, some days it comes good and some days it doesn't, I'm not thinking much."

Rajasthan, who won the inaugural IPL in 2008 under late Australian hero Shane Warne, registered their seventh win in eight matches

Jaiswal struck his second IPL hundred — both versus Mumbai — as he smashed nine fours and seven sixes in his 60-ball knock and put on 109 runs with skipper

MATCHES	TABLE	SQUADS	STATS	VENUES		
Team	P	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
1  RR	8	7	1	0	14	+0.698 
2  KKR	7	5	2	0	10	+1.206 
3  SRH	7	5	2	0	10	+0.914 
4  CSK	7	4	3	0	8	+0.529 
5  LSG	7	4	3	0	8	+0.123 
6  GT	8	4	4	0	8	-1.055 
7  MI	8	3	5	0	6	-0.227 
8  DC	8	3	5	0	6	-0.477 
9  PBKS	8	2	6	0	4	-0.292 
10  RCB	8	1	7	0	2	-1.046 

Sanju Samson, who made 38. Sharma set up victory his first ever five-wicket haul in T20 cricket as he took the spotlight away from Chahal's remarkable feat and was named man of the match.

Chahal sent back Mohammad

Nabi caught and bowled for 23 with his leg-spin as he celebrated the achievement with hugs from teammates.

But Chahal was taken for 48 runs in four overs and Sharma stood out after he took three wickets in the 20th over

including Tilak Varma, who top-scored with 65, and Tim David, who made three.

Chahal was substituted with Jos Buttler coming in as impact player and he began with two boundaries in the opening over by skipper Hardik Pandya, who played his landmark 100th IPL match.

Pandya has endured a tough time this season after he replaced veteran Rohit Sharma as skipper only to be booed by the fans across venues.

"After the game, it's not the right time to go to the players, everyone is professional, they know their roles," said Pandya.

"What we can do is learn from this game and the mistakes which we have made, rectify it and make sure that we don't repeat it."

The left-handed Jaiswal joined in the charge as he hit South African speedster Gerald Coetzee for a six and two fours to get the chase underway.

Rajasthan raced to 61-0 in six overs when rain stopped play and action resumed after 45 minutes.

Piyush Chawla bowled Buttler for 35 after the break but Jaiswal stood firm and in the company of Samson made the chase a cakewalk.—AFP

Sur break Seeb's winning streak

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Sur Club ended Seeb Club's winning streak with a 3-1 victory in their match in the 18th round of the Omantel League on Monday.

The match started with an attacking style of play, especially from Seeb, who launched a strong attack at the beginning of the half, but Sur goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi brilliantly saved a powerful shot from Hamad al Habsi.

Seeb took the lead in the 12th minute through Mohsin al Ghassani, who curled a shot from outside the penalty area into the back of Sur net.

Seeb continued to control the match and had many chances to increase their lead, but goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi shone and saved his goal from certain goals.

In the 44th minute, Sur managed



to equalise after an assist from Mamoun al Mukhaini, which allowed professional Robert Jalsa to score the equaliser. The first half ended in a 1-1 draw.

The second half started strongly and aggressively, and the chances continued for Seeb, but goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi continued to shine and saved his goal from more than one goal. In the 76th minute, Sur took the lead through Yousef Nasser at 2-1. Sur added the third goal in

the 83rd minute through Al Harith al Mukhaini to break Seeb's winning streak by 3-1.

With this result, Sur raised their tally to 18 points in 10th place, widening the gap with 11th-placed Bahla to 4 points after the latter drew with Sohar, while Seeb's tally remained at 47 points, retaining the top spot in the league, 14 points ahead of second-placed Al Nahda.

RUSTAQ DOWN AL NASR

At Al Saada Sports Complex, Al Rustaq Club achieved an important 2-1 victory over Al Nasr.

In the first half, Al Rustaq opened the scoring in the 28th minute through Feston before Ahed al Mashaykhi added the second goal in the 39th minute.

Al Nasr managed to reduce the deficit in the 73rd minute through Abdullah, but that was not enough

to prevent them from losing.

The match witnessed field control by Al Nasr for most of its periods, but Al Rustaq intelligently exploited the opportunities that came their way and decided the result in their favour.

With this result, Al Rustaq raised their tally to 24 points to advance to fifth place, while Al Nasr remained with their previous tally (21 points) and fell to sixth place.

At the Sohar Sports Complex, Sohar Club drew with their guests Bahla 1-1.

Bahla took the lead in the 27th minute through their professional player Loki, while Sohar equalised in the 84th minute through their substitute Alexander Di Stefano.

With this result, Sohar raised their tally to 29 points in fourth place, while Bahla's tally became 14 points in the penultimate place.



Seeb and Sur players fight for the ball during the Round 18 of Omantel League.

INTER MILAN SEAL SCUDETTO IN DERBY

THRILLER WITH AC MILAN

Inter Milan's
Marcus Thuram
celebrates winning
Serie A title with
Lautaro Martinez
after the match.
– Reuters

MILAN: Inter Milan sealed the Serie A title on Monday after beating AC Milan 2-1 and creating an unassailable lead at the top of the league with their sixth straight derby victory.

Goals from Francesco Acerbi and Marcus Thuram gave Inter a 17-point advantage over closest challengers Milan and secured their 20th league crown with five matches of the season remaining.

Inter last won Serie A in 2021, followed by AC Milan in 2022 and Napoli last year.

For Simone Inzaghi, it was the first league title as a manager and on a cold, soaking wet evening at the San Siro he strode proudly in front of a clutch of Inter's "away" fans in the 75,000 crowd as they roared in delight and fired fireworks from the stands at the final whistle.

Milan made a fight of it in the final moments after Fikayo Tomori pulled one back with 10 minutes remaining but Inter held out to kick off a title party after a stormy ending to the match which featured three red cards.

"I feel like crying because we worked so hard, we deserve this joy," said tearful captain Lautaro Martinez.

"It's been wonderful but we have to keep going because we've already won a lot of trophies and we want to win many more."

Inter have become the second team to win 20 Italian league titles, and will have a second star stitched onto their jersey, after Juventus who are way out in the lead with 36 league crowns.

IN STYLE

Inzaghi's team did it style, laying waste to the rest of the division and becoming the first team to claim the title by winning the Milan derby and leaving his opposite number Pioli on the verge of the sack.

"He was struggling 14 months ago according to the media and look what he has achieved since. I am happy here, I work well and I think the team has margin for improvement," insisted 2022 Scudetto winner Pioli. With outgoing champions Napoli crashing and burning early in the campaign and Milan falling away in the autumn Inter raced off into the distance at the turn of the year.

Juve looked like putting up a fight but

they collapsed in February just as Inter strung together a run of 13 wins which also gave them hope of repeating a deep run in the Champions League.

Inter failed in that mission as they were knocked out of the Champions League by Atletico Madrid in mid-March, but by that time the domestic damage had already been done. The future looks bright too as Inzaghi, Martinez and Italy midfielder Nicolo Barella are all set to renew their contracts while smart work in the transfer market and increased revenue have helped mitigate significant financial harm wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Piotr Zielinski and Mehdi Taremi will arrive from Napoli and Porto as free agents in the close season while big stars like Thuram should stay. "Crazy feeling, crazy game. We wanted to do it for our fans and we did it. It's my first league title and I'm very proud of it," said Thuram.

The nominal away side on Monday, Inter were on their way to a title party in the 18th minute when Acerbi was left completely free to head home Benjamin Pavard's flick-on.

STORMY FINISH

Inter should have been two ahead seven minutes later through Lautaro Martinez who lost his footing when Federico Dimarco's perfect cut-back fell to the Argentina striker.

And his strike partner Thuram was equally at fault for Inter not increasing their lead seven minutes before the break as he shot a great chance just wide after being set up by Nicolo Barella.

But shortly after half-time, Thuram made up for that miss with a brilliant individual goal which took his tally for his debut Serie A season to 12. — AFP

GOALS FROM **ACERBI** AND **THURAM** GAVE INTER A 17-POINT ADVANTAGE OVER CLOSEST CHALLENGERS MILAN AND SECURED THEIR **20TH LEAGUE CROWN** WITH 5 MATCHES REMAINING



Inter Milan players celebrate winning their 20th Serie A title after the match. – Reuters

business

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Advisor sought for IPO of Oman’s grid operator

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Nama Group, the holding company of state-owned power and water utilities operating in the Sultanate of Oman, is assembling a team of experts to provide advisory services linked to the long-anticipated public listing of majority-owned Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the operator of the national grid.

On Tuesday, Nama Group – part of integrated wealth fund Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – invited suitably qualified legal companies to bid for its contract to provide Transaction Legal Advisory services for the planned Initial Public Offering (IPO) of OETC and its eventual listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The deadline for submission of proposals is May 2, 2024.

OETC is among a number of subsidiaries of OIA that are tipped for partial privatisation in line with the wealth fund’s strategy to divest some of its assets with the goal of raising funds, as well as encouraging the private sector to participate in the local economy.

The move to list OETC via an IPO comes four years after parent group Nama Holding successfully sold 49% of the transmission company’s stake to the State Grid Corporation of China (SGCC), a Chinese state-owned grid utility, which is also the largest utility company in the world.

The deal earned the Omani government close to \$1 billion. OIA, represented by Nama Group, has since retained 51% of OETC’s equity.

Seeking to raise the standards



OETC owns and operates Oman’s integrated national grid

of the national grid to world-class levels, OETC has earmarked sizable amounts, aggregating in excess of \$1 billion, towards the modernisation of its networks.

The lion’s share is being spent towards the interconnection of the standalone North and Southern grids into one integrated national grid. The initiative, known as ‘Rabt’, has now entered its second phase, with contractors focusing on building grid stations and overhead lines effectively extending the network from Duqm all the way to Salalah in the south.

Significantly, the total value of OETC assets soared 16.75% to RO 1.77 billion at the end of 2023, compared to RO 1.516 billion in 2022. Revenues from the Transmission Use of System (TUoS) and Connection Charges (CC) climbed 12.31% to RO 160.97 million in 2023, up from RO 143.33 million in 2022.

The operating profit increased 12.4% to RO 87.28 million in 2023 compared to RO 77.673 million a year ago. However, net profit after tax dipped 1.94% to RO 41.7 million in 2023, compared to RO 43.64 million in the previous year.

Oman’s GDP at constant prices reaches RO 38.276 bn in 2023



Non-oil activities rose by 2.4 per cent, registering RO 27.304 billion at the end of Q4 2023.

MUSCAT: The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices for the Sultanate of Oman recorded an increase of 1.3 per cent by the end of fourth quarter (Q4) of 2023 (from January to December 2023), reaching RO 38.276 billion compared to the end of Q4 2022, where it was RO 37.781 billion, according to preliminary data released by the

National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oil-related activities increased by 0.4 per cent, recording RO 12.441 billion at the end of Q4 2023, compared to RO 12.397 billion at the end of Q4 2022, with a contribution of 33 per cent.

Crude oil activities reached RO 10.644 billion, while natural

gas activities increased by 3.1 per cent to record RO 1.796 billion.

Non-oil activities also rose by 2.4 per cent, registering RO 27.304 billion at the end of Q4 2023, compared to RO 26.656 billion at the end of Q4 2022.

The total industrial activities amounted to RO 8.070 billion, compared to RO 8.101 billion at the end of Q4 2022, while

agricultural, forestry, and fishing activities amounted to RO 830,400. The service activities recorded RO 18.404 billion.

The contribution of construction activities was 9 per cent, compared to 8 per cent for wholesale and retail trade, and 9 per cent for public administration and defence, with 41 per cent for other non-oil activities. — ONA

PDO commits to driving sustainable energy solutions

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 23

On the sidelines of the Oman Petroleum and Energy Show 2024 (OPES) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Steve Phimister, the Managing Director of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) delved into the company’s transformative journey over the past three years, focusing especially on its resolve to tackle the energy trilemma of affordability, sustainability, and security.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the company’s strategic evolution, Phimister highlighted PDO’s steadfast commitment to building a sustainable and low-carbon future while maximising value for Oman.

He said, “A big part of that, and a key part, is how we satisfy the cost competitiveness requirements along with carbon competitiveness requirements, so that we can grow and sustain our oil and gas industry, which is central to the economy of Oman.”

Through a comprehensive



PDO has embraced a clear strategy and operating model to deliver on its sustainability goals in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the global push towards Net-Zero emissions.

refresh of its purpose, PDO has embraced a clear strategy and operating model to deliver on its sustainability goals in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the global push towards Net-Zero emissions.

Phimister revealed that PDO has been actively increasing energy efficiency, reducing flaring,

curbing methane emissions, investing in renewable power, optimising water management, and exploring carbon capture, utilisation and storage technologies.

“And all of that comes together in an ecosystem that has to be integrated end-to-end,” he added.

These initiatives are part of a

cohesive ecosystem that integrates various elements across the energy value chain to address the complex challenges posed by the energy trilemma.

As a key player in Oman’s energy landscape, PDO recognises the importance of collaboration and partnership in driving sustainable change. Phimister emphasised the



A big part of that, and a key part, is how we satisfy the cost competitiveness requirements along with carbon competitiveness requirements, so that we can grow and sustain our oil and gas industry, which is central to the economy of Oman.

STEVE PHIMISTER
Managing Director, PDO

company’s collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and other industry stakeholders to collectively work towards solving the energy trilemma.

“And we play our part, because we’re one player, we’re one part of Oman, and one part of the solution. We’re working together with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and all the other companies in partnership, in operatorship, and the supply chain to work together to solve the energy trilemma,” Phimister added.

Expressing optimism and enthusiasm for the journey ahead, Phimister underscored the transformative potential of collaborative action and innovation in shaping a more sustainable and resilient energy future for Oman.

The collective spirit and shared commitment of all stakeholders at OPES 2024 exemplify a unified approach towards balancing energy affordability, sustainability, and security for the benefit of the nation.

NBO set to unveil new digital payment solution



MUSCAT: Continuing its commitment to redefine the banking experience for its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) is all set to unveil an innovative payment solution, having successfully completed all necessary testing and readiness assessments.

With a focus on seamless transactions and enhanced security, this cutting-edge offering is poised to set new standards in the world of finance enhancing convenience and security for its customers.

Tariq Atiq, General Manager – Chief Retail & Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said: “We are thrilled to unveil an innovative solution that promises to redefine how customers make transactions. Say goodbye to the hassles of traditional payment methods and welcome a faster, more secure and efficient way to shop with just a tap of your phone or smartwatch.

With seamless integration and advanced security features, we are confident that this solution will provide our customers with a quicker and more convenient way to make transactions. Stay tuned for more updates as we prepare to introduce this groundbreaking solution.”

As anticipation builds among people across Oman, NBO once again proves to be the best customer-centric bank by introducing a revolutionary payment gateway that will transform the way customers manage their finances. This new offering represents NBO’s unwavering commitment to innovation and customer satisfaction.

The upcoming payment solution is designed to simplify financial transactions, offering NBO and Muzn customers a quick, easy, and secure way to perform POS & Online transactions, and manage their cards, passwords, and more.

With just a tap of the phone or smart watch, users will be able to access and organise their payment information efficiently, making this novel tool an essential part of everyday financial management.

Stay tuned for the big reveal as NBO prepares to usher in a new era of banking innovation. Customers can easily explore this new service by opening an account and requesting a card through the NBO app or a self-service kiosk. Be among the first to experience the future of banking with NBO!

Geely’s exciting offers on all its models with unbeatable EMI prices

MUSCAT: Geely Oman is pleased to announce exclusive offers on its lineup of vehicles, making it an ideal time to purchase your next car. From the sleek Coolray to the luxurious Azkarra, Geely has something for everyone.

From February 27 to April 26, 2024, customers can drive home the Coolray, a stylish and compact SUV designed to captivate with its modern aesthetics and advanced features.

Equipped with a powerful yet fuel-efficient engine, cutting-edge technology, and a spacious interior, the Coolray offers an exhilarating driving experience for urban adventurers with an incredibly low EMI starting from RO just 86.

Looking for a more spacious option? The Emgrand, a versatile sedan combining elegance with practicality, is perfect for city commuting and long journeys alike. With its sleek design, spacious cabin, and impressive fuel efficiency, the Emgrand is available at an EMI starting from RO 68.

For those seeking a premium family SUV, the Okavango offers a harmonious blend of luxury, comfort, and performance. With ample seating capacity, advanced safety features, and versatile cargo space, the Okavango is designed to accommodate the needs of modern families with style and sophistication.

Opt for the Okavango, with an EMI starting from RO 104, and enjoy free insurance on all



variants.

If you aspire to set new standards in luxury and refinement, the Azkarra is a premium SUV that exudes sophistication and elegance.

Featuring state-of-the-art technology, premium materials, and exceptional craftsmanship, the Azkarra provides a first-class driving experience for discerning individuals who demand nothing but the best. You can bring it home with an EMI starting from RO 106.

But that’s not all. In addition to the attractive EMI prices, Geely is offering a range of added benefits to enhance the ownership experience. Customers purchasing the Azkarra Signature 2WD will receive free servicing for 3 years or 30,000 kms, whichever

comes earlier.

For those opting for the Azkarra Platinum 4WD, enjoy complimentary service for 5 years or 50,000 kms, whichever comes earlier.

All variants of the Azkarra come with free registration for 1 year, making it an irresistible offer.

Furthermore, all Geely models come with a manufacturer warranty of 5 years or 150,000 kms, whichever comes earlier. As an added bonus, customers will also receive free AAA roadside assistance for 3 years, providing peace of mind on the road.

And that’s not all — Geely is also introducing a Walk in & Win promotion, offering customers the chance to win exciting prizes.

From a set of Apple AirPods to fuel cards and Lulu vouchers,

there are plenty of rewards up for grabs.

“We are thrilled to offer our customers these exclusive offers on our popular models,” said a spokesperson for Geely Oman.

“With unbeatable EMI prices, complimentary servicing, and exciting prizes to be won, there has never been a better time to own a Geely vehicle. We look forward to welcoming customers to our showrooms and helping them find the perfect car for their needs.”

Don’t miss out on these fantastic offers from Geely. Visit your nearest showroom today and drive home in your dream car at an unbeatable price.

In Oman, Geely vehicles are brought to you by Towell Auto Centre LLC.

National Finance, Dar Al Atta’a launch initiative to empower women

MUSCAT: In alignment with its dedication to enhancing the well-being of communities throughout the Sultanate of Oman, National Finance, the country’s leading finance company, has joined forces with renowned charitable organisation Dar Al Atta’a.

This collaboration seeks to empower Omani women hailing from the governorates of Musandam, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, and Dhofar through a distinctive initiative centred on beekeeping and honey cultivation.

The initiative comprises two primary components. Firstly, it involves the education of 50 participants in the art of beekeeping. Secondly, a series of workshops will be conducted, engaging 35 participants in the crafting of handmade cosmetics derived from honey.

These products will then be distributed across various governorates. Through these concerted efforts, National Finance, in collaboration with Dar Al Atta’a, endeavours to bolster Omani women, particularly those from economically constrained backgrounds, enabling them to pursue lucrative self-employment opportunities in beekeeping.

Subsequently, they will be equipped to produce natural beauty commodities that are experiencing burgeoning demand



within the nation.

Commenting on the collaboration, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer, National Finance, said, “As a trusted Partner for Growth for all, National Finance is deeply committed to fostering societal progress by providing meaningful opportunities to those less privileged.

These efforts not only impart new skills but also facilitate the establishment of small-scale, locally-driven enterprises. Women are the backbone of Omani society, and this initiative

transcends mere acknowledgment of their contributions, actively empowering them towards independence and self-sufficiency, thereby enhancing the fabric of the communities to which they belong.”

Echoing the statement, Honourable Maryam bint Issa al Zadjaliyah, Chairperson and Founder of Dar Al Atta’a, stated, “We extend our gratitude to National Finance for its continuous support and effective role in the success of the initiative. The launch of the second phase of the cosmetics products created

from honey is an extension of what has been achieved through the initiative to diversify products derived from honey. We appreciate the joint efforts with National Finance and wish success to all beneficiaries.”

Operating under its Imtidad social responsibility initiative, National Finance has been pivotal in numerous initiatives aimed at promoting social welfare, encompassing youth and women’s empowerment, cultural enrichment, educational advancement, and environmental stewardship.



Eshraqa, SMEDA launch sixth pre-incubation programme

MUSCAT: The Khimji Ramdas (KR) Eshraqa ‘Tasees Programme’, in collaboration with Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), is pleased to announce the commencement of the sixth edition of its pre-incubation programme for startups.

Designed to equip entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and knowledge to translate their innovative ideas into successful businesses, Tasees’ Pre-incubation Programme guides participants through the essential phases of business development. It is important to note that SMEs undergoing the programme are eligible to apply for a loan through the Authority’s funding initiative (Al Azm) upon completion of the Jahiziah programme.

With the objective of providing entrepreneurs with the essential tools and knowledge to translate their concepts into real-time businesses, the Pre-incubation Programme consists of comprehensive modules spanning over three weeks.

These modules include in-

class instructional sessions covering idea validation, business model canvas, marketing plans, operations planning, and financial management, followed by individual coaching and final business plan presentations.

“We are elated to begin yet another pre-incubation for our talented startups in collaboration with SMEDA,” stated Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas.

“‘Tasees’ was launched to foster an entrepreneurial spirit among Omani nationals, build a thriving entrepreneurial environment, and fast-track the nation’s economic diversification efforts, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Since its inception, it has helped nurture the dreams of aspiring local entrepreneurs and has paved the way for several innovative businesses.” The nomination advertisements for the pre-incubation programme were released on April 4, 2024 by SMEDA, generating an overwhelming response across social media platforms and from across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.



SLB highlights role in supporting decarbonisation strategies of energy firms

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, APRIL 23

International oil services giant SLB (rebranded from Schlumberger) is leveraging its formidable expertise to support energy companies in the region achieve their decarbonisation goals.

Speaking at the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) 2024 conference on Monday, Karim Badawi, Director of New Energy for Middle East and North Africa at SLB, delved into the intricate landscape of decarbonisation, offering insights into both short-term deployment strategies and long-term technological innovations.

Badawi's perspectives shed light on the evolving energy paradigm and the imperative of collaborative efforts in driving sustainable solutions. Badawi highlighted the availability of diverse technologies poised for immediate adoption.

Among these, carbon storage



SLB's Karim Badawi with fellow panelists at the OPES forum.

emerges as a compelling solution. With advancements in carbon storage technology and a growing focus on decarbonisation, opportunities abound for commercial-scale deployment.

Badawi cited the example of a landmark carbon capture and storage project in collaboration with Saudi Aramco, underscoring the MENA region's potential to

leverage its geological assets for storage initiatives.

Geothermal energy, characterised by its reliability and scalability, offers a green base load of energy that can be harnessed at scale, according to the SLB executive.

In this regard, he referenced ongoing collaborations in Oman, driven by the Ministry of Energy

and Minerals, as a testament to the region's commitment to unlocking geothermal resources.

With seismic activity concentrated in areas like the "Ring of Fire," geothermal technology presents a mature and viable option for sustainable energy production, he noted.

Renewable energy, particularly wind and solar, has evolved into a mainstream solution, buoyed by technological advancements and cost efficiencies.

Badawi emphasised the abundance of renewable resources in the Mena region, positioning wind and solar as pivotal components of green energy strategies.

Notably, Oman's ambitious green hydrogen strategy underscores the role of renewables in mitigating carbon intensity across various industries, he said.

Looking ahead, Badawi underscored the evolving landscape of capture technology and hydrogen production.

Collaborative endeavours, such

as SLB's joint venture with carbon capture company, Aker, exemplify the industry's commitment to accelerating technological advancements.

Hydrogen, poised to play a central role in the energy transition, presents opportunities for low-cost production and widespread deployment.

Badawi highlighted the Mena region's advantage in leveraging existing natural gas infrastructure to facilitate the transition to low-carbon hydrogen, thereby addressing decarbonisation challenges across multiple sectors.

As the energy sector navigates the complexities of decarbonisation, collaboration emerges as a lynchpin for success.

Badawi's insights underscore the significance of technology, innovation and partnership in driving sustainable solutions.

With concerted efforts and strategic investments, the Mena region is poised to chart a course towards a greener and more resilient energy future.



Dialogues to discuss economic development and support for companies

MUSCAT: The Oman Business Forum and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion will organise next Tuesday the second trade dialogue of this year titled "Economic Development and Support for Advanced Companies", at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

The event aims to raise awareness and exchange views on economic development topics, with the participation of a selected group of speakers and representatives from both the public and private sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

The session will discuss the economic development strategy aimed at supporting the growth of local second-stage companies instead of attracting companies from abroad.

Maimuna bint Suleiman al Adawiyah, Director of the Oman Business Forum confirmed that the economic development strategy supports second-stage companies by providing them with essential market information, competitive intelligence, and digital marketing strategies to help them grow.

Al Adawiyah added that adopting the economic development strategy can greatly contribute to economic diversification efforts in the Sultanate of Oman, involving empowering local companies with the capacity for expansion, creating job opportunities, and enhancing our economic position globally.

Omantel, Abraj Energy ink MoU to support HRD collaboration

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Omantel, the leading integrated telecommunications services provider in Oman, and Abraj Energy, a prominent energy company, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Tuesday, April 23, 2024, to strengthen their collaboration in human resources development.

The MoU, titled 'Talent Management and Performance Management', was signed by Hilal al Siyabi, Chief People Officer for Abraj Energy, and Dr Yousuf bin Salim al Hinai, General Manager ICT and Digital Solutions for Omantel.

In remarks to the *Observer*, Hilal al Siyabi, Chief People Officer of Abraj Energy Services, revealed that the "agreement aims at enhancing our human capital management systems in alignment with our digital transformation strategy. The primary goal is to improve our human capital performance and productivity".

Dr Yousuf al Hinai, General Manager at Omantel, emphasised its pivotal role as the technology partner for the entire system at Abraj. "We are responsible for handling solution design, implementation and project management.



Officials of Omantel and Abraj Energy at the MoU signing.

"However, our collaboration is closely aligned with Abraj, recognising their expertise and ownership. It's a mutual partnership, progressing smoothly towards our shared goals. We anticipate celebrating the official launch soon."

The MoU signifies the commitment of both Omantel and Abraj Energy to work together on initiatives that enhance talent management and performance management practices within their organisations. This collaboration could encompass sharing best practices in talent development, creating joint training programmes and establishing benchmarks for evaluating employee performance.

Conference on energy and sustainability held in Ibra

MUSCAT: The International Conference on Energy and Sustainability (ICES) 2024 began on Monday, April 22, in the Wilayat of Ibra in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. The conference was organised by Al Sharqiyah University, represented by the College of Engineering, under the auspices of Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, the Governor of Al Sharqiyah North.

Dr Talal bin Khamees al Wahibi, Dean of the College of Engineering at Al Sharqiyah University, explained in his conference speech that the conference aims to provide a scientific platform for researchers to discuss and review the latest developments and challenges in the field of energy and sustainability.

It also aims to facilitate communication, cooperation, knowledge exchange and experience sharing in the areas of scientific research and development among academics, to contribute to discovering opportunities, developing and refining future scientific visions to achieve sustainable development, and enhance economic and environmental development.

The conference, which lasts for two days, focuses on five themes:



Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani speaks during the international conference.

energy transition and innovation, environmental sustainability, water sustainability, sustainable practices and solutions, policy, governance and social impact. These themes are discussed through 82 scientific papers presented by a number of specialists and academics from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman in three dialogue sessions.

On the first day of the conference, several speakers were hosted. Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom Oman and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, presented a paper on "The Role of Renewable Energy and Green Hydrogen in Driving and Leading Sustainability and Energy Transformation in the Sultanate of Oman."

Jindal Shadeed backs development of Oman's tallest flagpole project

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, APRIL 23

Muscat Municipality, in collaboration with the Muscat Governorate and Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, has unveiled an extraordinary business venture in the heart of Muscat — Al Khuwair Square.

This groundbreaking project not only features Oman's tallest flagpole, but also encompasses a wide range of recreational amenities, making it a sanctuary for leisure and outdoor sports enthusiasts.

The project, spanning an impressive area of 18,000 square metres, is a testament to the fruitful collaboration between the public and private sectors. Muscat Municipality, represented by the Muscat Governorate, and Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, a leading iron and steel producer in



Harsha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, delivers his message during the unveiling event.

the region, have joined forces to bring this visionary project to life.

The unveiling was attended by Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, along with Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and Harsha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel.

Al Khuwair Square's centrepiece is the Sultanate of Oman's tallest



An artist's impression of Oman's tallest flagpole, standing at a towering height of 126 metres.

flagpole, standing at a towering height of 126 metres. This remarkable man-made structure surpasses the height of a 40-storey building and is constructed from 135 tonnes of steel.

Adorning the pole is the majestic Omani flag, measuring 18 metres in length and 31.5 metres in width. The flagpole itself boasts

an outer diameter of 2,800mm at its base and 900mm at the top, equipped with a warning light system for aircraft.

The square is not just about the flagpole; it offers a plethora of recreational amenities. Lush green areas, Omani palm trees, walking and cycling paths, an outdoor arts and crafts exhibition,

a skate park, and designated areas for sports activities create an inviting atmosphere for residents and visitors alike.

Additionally, public amenities such as restrooms and a parking lot with 107 spaces ensure convenience and accessibility.

The Al Khuwair Square project serves as a pioneering model for synergising efforts in initiatives with multifaceted impacts. It aligns with Oman Vision 2040, showcasing exemplary cooperation and partnership between the public and private sectors.

This collaboration between Muscat Municipality and Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel exemplifies their shared commitment to serving the objectives of Oman's long-term vision. Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, a subsidiary of Jindal Group in Oman, has played a pivotal role

in financing this monumental project.

As one of the region's largest iron and steel producers, Jindal Shadeed has spearheaded green industrialisation initiatives in Oman and beyond.

Their partnership with the Muscat Governorate in realising Al Khuwair Square demonstrates their dedication to progress and success, inspiring future generations to strive for greatness.

Construction on Al Khuwair Square project is well underway, with completion expected by the end of October.

The official inauguration is scheduled to take place during the 54th National Day celebrations of the Glorious Renaissance, a momentous occasion that will further symbolise the aspirations of Omanis to propel their nation to greater heights of success and glory.

Business output at highest level since May 2022



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Recent business surveys are pointing to a bright next few months for the UK as the economy finally feels the benefit of falling inflation. Economic output climbed to its highest level since May 2022 last month, according to the BDO Business Trends report, which collects and regroups data from the UK's main business surveys.

The accountancy's output index climbed to 102.39, above the 100 no change mark for the first time since July 2022 and comfortably higher than the 98.67 recorded in February. The improvement was driven by increased consumer demand, reflecting lower inflation, and supportive fiscal policy. Partner at BDO, Kaley Crossthwaite, said the data illustrates the

UK's "robustness in the face of global economic adversities." The BDO's survey will come as a boost for Chancellor Jeremy Hunt ahead of the general election. Consequently, optimism among CFO's at the UK's largest firms increased for the third consecutive quarter as the UK economy's rosier economic prospects filtered through into corporate confidence.

With inflation falling fast and interest rates likely to be cut in a matter of months, CFO's are much more confident about their business prospects than is normally the case.

A net 17 per cent of CFO's are more positive about the financial prospects for their business than they were three months ago, according to a Deloitte survey. The accountancy firm has been conducting surveys over the last

sixteen years.

Uncertainty also fell to its lowest level since summer 2021, when lockdown restrictions were coming to an end.

Chief economist at Deloitte, Ian Stewart said: "Optimism among the UK's largest businesses is running at well above average levels, suggesting that the worst of the economic downturn is behind us, with current sentiment at levels that preceded periods of good growth in 2010, 2014 and 2021." He added: "For the first time in three years, CFOs expect margins to increase over the next 12 months." There were 64 CFOs that participated in the latest quarterly survey including finance bosses at eight FTSE 100 companies and 23 FTSE 250 firms. The survey showed that fears about inflation are receding.

Finance chiefs now expect inflation to be 2.9 per cent in a year's time, down from 3.5 per cent last quarter.

The findings reflect the UK's positive start to the year so far, with the economy returning to growth in January and business surveys indicating a robust expansion in February and March. However, the survey showed that geopolitics is the most likely factor to disrupt this rosier outlook. It's the third time in a row that fears about geopolitics have been at the top of CFO's minds.

Meanwhile, fresh trade figures have shown the UK has become the world's fourth largest exporter thanks to a boost in services. It comes after the UK ranked seventh in 2021, moving up the table three places in the figures for exporting goods and services

in 2022, the United Nations (UN) has confirmed.

According to the latest statistics from the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which leads on global trade for the UN, the UK has overtaken France, Netherlands and Japan to take fourth position, behind only China, the US and Germany.

Business and trade minister Kemi Badenoch welcomed the news and said: "These new figures show how the UK is punching above its weight on trade, and is on track to reach our ambition of exporting a trillion pounds of goods and services a year by 2030."

The trade news comes thanks to the UK's strength in services exports, which have grown in recent years to a record high of £470 billion last year.

What to do about the EU's relative decline



HUGO DIXON

The author is a British business journalist and the former editor-in-chief and chairman of the financial commentary website Breakingviews which he co-founded.

The European Union will be marginalised if it continues to shrink compared to other parts of the world. Two former Italian prime ministers, Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi, are proposing remedies. Anxious leaders welcomed Letta's report about how to improve the bloc's single market at their summit last week. They may lack the will to drink the necessary medicine, though.

There are two ways of looking at the EU's relative decline.

The first is in terms of living standards. Here, what matters is not that developing countries, led by China and India, have been dragging themselves out of poverty in recent decades and so closing the gap on Europe, says Erik Nielsen, UniCredit's chief economic advisor. Rather, it is that the EU has not been moving ahead as fast as the United States.

EU income per head has grown 55% since the single market was created in 1993 when measured on a purchasing power parity basis.

That's not far behind the 65% gain enjoyed by the average American. But the EU has only kept up because new members, such as Poland, have expanded very fast: that country's income per head has almost quadrupled.

By contrast, income per person in the bloc's bigger and older members — Germany, France and Italy — is up only 37%, 35% and 20%, respectively, over the same period.

The other way of looking at the region's relative decline is in terms of power. Back in 1992, the EU was a geoeconomic giant. With 29% of global output and a strong position in leading technologies, it could set many world standards.

By 2022, the bloc's share of world output had shrunk to only 17% while the US share was stable at 25% over the same period. What's more, the EU now has only four of the world's top 50 technology companies, Draghi noted in a speech last week.

The EU's relative economic weight is not just declining because other regions' living standards are growing faster. Its currency has weakened, and its population is stagnant. This



European Union flags fly outside the European Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. — Reuters

would not matter if the post-war global economic and political order was intact.

But Russia has invaded Ukraine, while both China and the United States are undermining the world trading system.

The EU is worried that it will be bullied by larger rivals.

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and the United States are undermining the world trading system. The EU is worried that it will be bullied by larger rivals.

Different threats need different responses. Boosting the EU's economy is not the main answer to an aggressive Russia. After all, the bloc's economy is already seven times bigger, and Russia's output seems set to stagnate in the coming years.

Rather Europe's leaders need to summon up the will to provide more help to Ukraine. They also need to spend more on their own defence, while bulking up and streamlining their armaments industries.

Another geopolitical threat is from China. The People's Republic could hold the EU to ransom because it controls supplies of critical goods such as rare earths.

The answer is to secure alternative sources. The EU has made a start with its Critical Raw Materials Act, which sets targets for production of specific goods. But if it is serious about avoiding blackmail, it will need to put money behind this initiative.

Yet another threat is that China and the United States will attract the industries of the future to their shores by both fair and foul means.

The EU needs to respond by strengthening its single market so it can offer companies economies of scale comparative to the US and Chinese markets. It will also need a targeted industrial policy to respond to the subsidies and tax breaks on offer to companies in other large economies.

Over 30 years after the launch of the single market, it may seem odd that the EU is still discussing how to improve it. But the original design left out several key industries — energy, electronic communications and capital markets.

The cumulative impact of action on all these sectors could be significant since they are central to the functioning of other industries. The EU's weak position in capital markets when compared with the United States is particularly glaring.

The lack of an equity culture is one of the reasons that the bloc is not creating more large entrepreneurial companies.

The snag is that completing the single market is a mind-numbing job that requires confronting national vested interests on multiple fronts.

Leaders may not have the will to do that. The EU has supposedly been committed to

creating a capital markets union for a decade but has achieved very little.

The initiative has suffered from the lack of a political champion, says Marco Buti, a former senior EU official now at the European University Institute.

An equally knotty problem is how to respond to the vast subsidies that China and the United States are throwing at high-tech and green industries. If the EU does nothing, it could find it is squeezed out of strategic industries such as artificial intelligence and high-end semiconductors.

On the other hand, engaging in a subsidy race will be expensive. It could also be wasteful if the EU pours money into industries where it has no long-term edge.

A targeted approach may be the best option. For example, it is foolish to compete with China in wind turbines and solar panels, where there is already overcapacity.

It would be best to buy this kit at the lowest price and fast-track the roll-out of cheap green energy. By contrast, subsidising the manufacture of advanced chips could make more sense.

— Reuters

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ART

A visitor takes a picture of the "Discobolus" by Myron during the exhibition "Olympism, a modern invention, an ancient heritage" at the Louvre Museum in Paris. — AFP



DINING

US Chef Josh Haner cooks a dish based on seaweed condiments, surrounded by algae containers, in Ballstad, near Flakstad, in Lofoten Islands. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Aamir Khan (R), Indian industrialist, and founder of Bollant Industries, Srikanth Bolla (C) with actor Rajkummar Rao (L) attend the song launch of upcoming Hindi-language biographical film 'Srikanth' (film on the life of Srikanth Bolla) in Mumbai. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A newlywed couple pose at sunset on the Alexandre III bridge in front of the Eiffel Tower, in Paris. — AFP

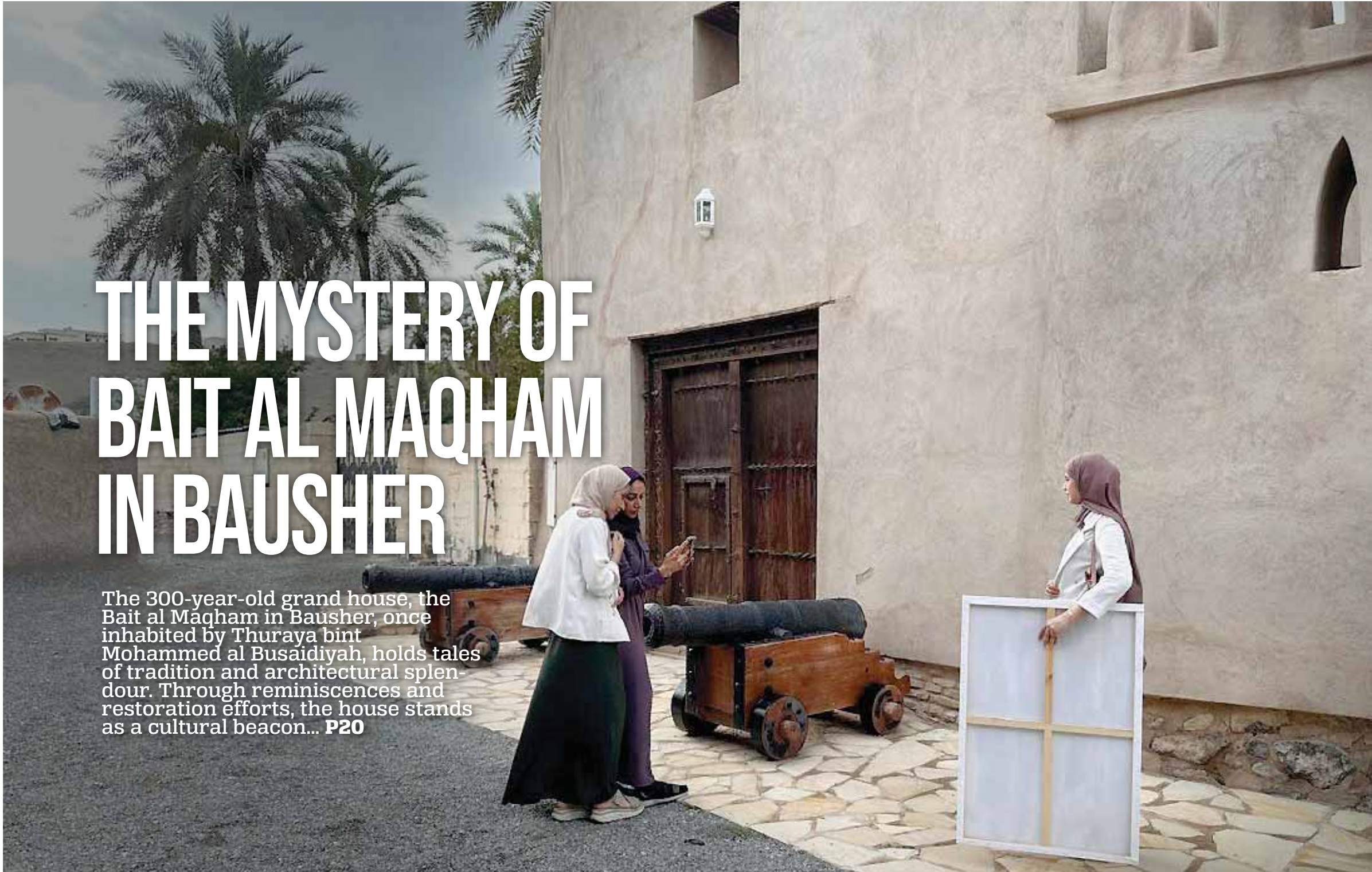


TECHNOLOGY

A visitor plays Rock-Paper-Scissors with a SVH servo-electric 5 finger gripping hand at the booth of Schunk company during the Hanover technology Fair (Hannover Messe) on Tuesday in Hanover. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | APRIL 24, 2024 | SHAWWAL 15, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



THE MYSTERY OF BAIT AL MAQHAM IN BAUSHER

The 300-year-old grand house, the Bait al Maqham in Bausher, once inhabited by Thuraya bint Mohammed al Busaidiyah, holds tales of tradition and architectural splendour. Through reminiscences and restoration efforts, the house stands as a cultural beacon... P20

ENTERTAINMENT

DDA LA FEST 2024 sets Muscat for dance spectacle on April 26

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

THE CITY AMPHITHEATRE in Qurum will host around 200 students ready to showcase their tal-

ents this weekend. Adding to the excitement, a parent group will debut their meticulously choreographed masterpiece for the first time. DDA — The Dance Destination announced DDA LA FEST 2024, set to captivate audiences on April 26, 2024, at Qurum City Amphitheatre in Muscat. The organisers said it will showcase a collection of performances where passion meets talent and will be a celebration of dance, rhythm and creativity, showcasing the extraordinary talent nurtured by DDA — The Dance Destination over the years. Adding to the excitement, DDA LA FEST 2024 will feature esteemed guests Tushar Shetty and Rohan Rohan Rokade, renowned figures in the world of dance. "Their presence will further elevate the event and inspire performers and attendees alike," said Deepti Suresh. "We are thrilled to present DDA LA FEST 2024, a platform where more



than 200 students showcase their hard work and dedication under the mentorship of renowned choreographers from DDA and the Indian film fraternity," said the spokesperson for Team DDA. "This event is a celebration of passion, creativity and the joy of dance where we showcase performances of our passionate DDAites from the age of 4 to 73 years. The main attraction of the event will be a mesmerising performance by the parents of the students at DDA. We invite everyone to join us for an unforgettable evening of entertainment and inspiration." With its stunning venue at the Qurum City Amphitheatre, DDA LA FEST 2024 promises an immersive experience that will leave a lasting impression on all who attend. Entry to DDA LA FEST 2024 will be on a Pass basis which will be free of cost, offering dance enthusiasts and supporters of the arts the opportunity to secure their seats for the event.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



ceramic curved tiles. They cover 70 square metres (750 square feet) of roof, produce a maximum of 13 kilowatt-hours and are linked to an ecologically-friendly sodium battery, according to project manager Alberto Bruni. Pompeii, which gets over 15 hours sunlight a day in peak summer, intends to extend their use to other villas in the archaeological site, he said. Augusto Grillo, the founder of Ahlux, said the tiles are about five per cent less efficient than a traditional solar panel. "This nominal loss is compensated however by the fact that our panels heat up less in summer," while traditional ones are covered by glass, and can lose efficiency on very hot days, he said. "The performance ends up being very similar," he said.

RED-TILED CITIES Various institutions have expressed interest in the tiles, from Rome's MAXXI modern art museum to the 17th century Pinoteca Ambrosiana museum in Milan, Grillo said. "The problem is finding the funds," he said, adding that many of Italy's famous historic buildings are public or owned by Catholic institutions.

The cost is a bit more than the price of a new roof and traditional panels put together -- though the solar tiles, which last between 20 to 25 years, serve double duty, because they function as a roof too, Grillo said.

Project manager Bruni said the cost of the panels "is coming down", meaning they may be able to play a part in the wider ecological transition.

Italy is under pressure to make red-roofed cities such as Florence or Bologna greener as part of efforts to combat climate change.

The European Union aims to reduce carbon emissions by 55 per cent compared with 1990 levels by 2030, and will have to upgrade existing buildings to do so.

That is a mammoth challenge for Italy, where some 60 per cent of buildings are in the worst two energy categories, compared to 17 per cent in France and six per cent in Germany, according to Italian Constructors' Association ANCE.

"There needs to be some national and perhaps European co-investment to make sure that the very, very ambitious timelines have a chance of being respected," Angelica Donati, president of the youth constructors' association ANCE Giovani, said.

"We have the most beautiful cities in the world, which means we need much more thoughtful interventions, and quickly. There's a lot to be done". — **AFP**



'ANCIENT ROMAN' SOLAR ROOF TILES POWER POMPEII VILLA

POMPEII IS SHINING A light on mysterious rites of ancient Rome thanks to terracotta-style solar roof tiles installed on one of its most famous villas. The traditional-looking tiles have solar photovoltaic cells inside, allowing the UNESCO World Heritage Site to preserve its aesthetics while generating clean energy to illuminate its frescoes. And though the project is in its early stages, experts say the tiles could one day help historic city centres across Italy turn green. The tiles look "exactly the same as

the ancient (Roman) ones", found in archaeological sites and cities across the Mediterranean, Pompeii director Gabriel Zuchtriegel said. But while "Pompeii is a unique site due to its vast size and complexity ... I hope this will not be a unique project," said Zuchtriegel, who wants the site near Naples to be a "real-life lab for sustainability". The scheme weds emerging technologies with an extraordinary mural unearthed in 1909 under deep layers of volcanic ash at the Villa of the Mysteries,

which was buried along with the rest of the city when Vesuvius erupted nearly 2,000 years ago. The mural depicts female devotees of Dionysus — the god of wine and revelry — engaged in mysterious rites. They have intrigued scholars for decades, with some historians suggesting they are evidence that the lady of the villa was a priestess whose slaves took part in cult rituals. **TERRACOTTA VARNISHES** The fresco, which covers three walls

and is one of the best preserved in Pompeii, is illuminated by special LED lights designed to bring the deep red, purple and gold images to life, while not damaging the painted surfaces. The lights are powered by electricity generated by the solar panels, which were installed in October. Ahlux, the Italian company behind the lights, patented the system in 2022 and produces both curved and flat panels varnished in terracotta tones. The solar panels on the villa's roof are flat and lie between traditional

FILM

Ryan Gosling's 'The Fall Guy' is a love letter to stunt performers

AFTER SERVING "KENERGY" with "Barbie", actor Ryan Gosling turns the spotlight on the movie-makers whose job is to shine on screen while remaining invisible in "The Fall Guy". The film is inspired by the popular 1980s TV series of the same name and stars Gosling as Colt Seavers, a top

Hollywood stuntman down on his luck after an on-set accident. An ambitious film producer (Hannah Waddingham) manages to pull Colt out of his self-imposed post-injury isolation in order to rescue the directorial debut of the love of his life, Jody (Emily Blunt), following the disappearance of the film's leading man, Tom Ryder (Aaron Taylor-Johnson). Life starts imitating his art as Colt tries to track down the vanished superstar and lands in the middle of a criminal plot. The stuntman has to put on his best performance both on and off the screen to save Jody's movie — and himself. "I've benefited from the work of stunt people my whole career. They come in and they take the hits for you and then get none of the credit. That ends here. Hopefully the whole conversation is different after this film," Gosling said as he attended the movie's premiere in London on Monday. "It's completely a love letter to stunt performers and the magic of what they create in movies. It's a love letter to crews and making films," added Blunt.



"The Fall Guy", which was shot in Sydney, Australia, is directed by David Leitch, a former stunt double to stars including Brad Pitt and Matt Damon, and director of "Bullet Train", "Deadpool 2" and "Atomic Blonde".

Many of its daring action scenes were shot with real in-camera stunts and during filming Gosling's stunt double Logan Holladay set a Guinness World Record for the most cannon rolls in a car. The classic stunt sees an apparatus fitted

beneath a car that propels it into a series of rolls at a designated speed. Holladay's 8.5 rolls broke Adam Kirley's 2006 record of 7 in "Casino Royale". "It was a mandate to do some old-school classic stunts and blow them out as big as possible," said Leitch. "The record was written in the script. We wrote it in the script to throw down the gauntlet and challenge the stunt team to come with it, and I think they did," said Leitch, 48. Stunt coordinator Chris O'Hara was given a "stunt designer" credit on the project in what the creators said was an industry first and an acknowledgement of the multifaceted nature of his job. "Hopefully it sheds light to the Academy, that maybe someday we might be able to be up for an Academy Award, just like all of our other department heads in the business," said O'Hara. "This industry's backbone is the action movie. It's the movie that travels the most internationally. It's time that they're celebrated for what they contribute," added actor Winston Duke. "The Fall Guy's" global cinematic rollout begins on April 24. — **Reuters**



THE MYSTERY OF BAIT AL MAQHAM IN BOUSHER

The historic house, which has stood the test of time, maintains its Omani identity in construction and charm, attracting visitors of all ages, with the presence of artefacts that could further enhance its allure.



BY KHALID AL BALUSHI

Residing gracefully beside a serene aflaj canal, within the historic quarters of Bausher, stands proudly the 300-year-old 'Bait al Aoud' — translated as the grand house. Adjacent to it is an exquisite mosque and around it, verdant farms are planted with palm and lemon trees, their branches cascading over the weathered walls encircling the majestic edifice.

Steeped in rich history, its former inhabitant, Thuraya bint Mohammed al Busaidiyah, whose lineage traces back to Sayyid Ahmed bin Said, the founder of the Busaidi state, was a beloved character who imparted knowledge and religious teachings to the women and children of the village.

Bait al Aoud is a beautiful spectacle for those who love history and architecture. Passing by this imposing house, one can't help but wonder about the amazing stories that have happened there. Over time, the house has gone through a lot of challenges, from experiencing the wrath of Cyclone Gonu

and said that Bait al Maqham is Bait al Aoud. The shaikh said that since the house is adjacent to Al Maqham Mosque, then the honorary name just follows."

Bait al Aoud spans three floors, featuring four rooms on both the first and second floors, while the upper floor boasts a solitary chamber reputedly belonging to Sayyidah Thuraya, overlooking the canal and valley to the east, the quaint Al Maqham Mosque to

used to pass through the house, and the swimming pools were also inside."

Al Hasani shared, "The house has undergone restoration twice, first in 1992 and then in 2010, after it was damaged during the climatic conditions of Cyclone Gonu. The restoration was carried out by the efforts of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to ensure the continuity of the house as a historical and cultural landmark in Muscat



to the modern renovations and building of a proper falaj that goes around the property.

One mystery that seems to confuse a lot of people is how this house eventually became Bait al Maqham. While there's no debate over the Grand House being called Bait al Aoud, old inhabitants felt that something is lost in history, as Bait al Maqham actually points to a different house that is now lost in history.

Sulaiman al Shamsi, born and raised in the sixties and living in one of the houses of this ancient neighbourhood, reminisced, "Our family was originally from Fanja but my grandfather, Shaikh Issa bin Salim al Shamsi, who was appointed as a judge in Bausher, moved to this side of Bausher and this is where eventually our family settled down."

"Bait al Aoud, everyone knew who it belonged to. What is lost to history is that Bait al Maqham, the name, used to belong to the house of Said bin Nasser al Kindi, whose family used to gather and pray in the small Al Maqham Mosque," Sulaiman said.

"Unfortunately, the old and original Bait al Maqham owned by Nasser al Kindi disappeared with time and the heirs didn't rebuild the house," Sulaiman added.

Sulaiman also shared that, as time passed, eventually, a new sheikh judge was appointed.

"When Shaikh Judge Salim al Siyabi, who was born in Ghala, a nearby area, came, he was asked

the south, and a verdant farm adorned with palm trees to the west. Adjacent to the room, an open area extends towards the staircase.

Majid al Hasani, the house guide, said, "One of the rooms in the house contains a secret hiding place whose length and destination are unknown. Stories say that its length reaches kilometres, but this information is not accurate, as someone tried to enter but the path was blocked."

Most rooms were furnished with colourful rugs and cushions, reflecting Omanis' love for colours and life. The rooms were adorned with 'Rawazin', openings within the walls for placing Chinese vases, symbolising Oman's trade relationship with China. These shelves were also used as bookshelves for placing books and Qurans, and sometimes for perfumes and incense. The rooms were full of windows, which Al Hasani believed were abundant due to the lack of electricity at that time and essential for light and ventilation.

Sulaiman al Shamsi recalled, "In my childhood, there were camels and cows inside the uneven courtyard of the house, which were used for transportation and carrying goods. I witnessed a well in the middle of the house, and the house was not as you see it now."

He added, "There used to be a medium-sized platform to the left of the house, which no longer exists, replaced by the recently constructed theatre. The canal

Governorate."

Al Hasani mentioned, "The ministry received the house without any furniture, and we lack details regarding any prior furnishings or their whereabouts."

The historic house, which has stood the test of time, maintains its Omani identity in construction and charm, attracting visitors of all ages, with the presence of artefacts that could further enhance its allure.

Al Hasani said, "The place receives approximately 80 to 90 visitors, which is very few compared to what it deserves." He attributed this to the narrow street leading to the place, as some hesitate to park their cars at the beginning of the alley and walk the distance to reach it.

He also said that a lot of artists and photographers come to visit as the house is a good backdrop for photography.

Al Hasani said, "We organised two events in the house to revitalise and promote it. Last year, a draw was held by the Bausher Club here, in the presence of the wali, and this year we organised the 'Tahloula' event, which included various activities such as chants and prayers involving children, as well as entertainment competitions designed for them."

"The farm originally belonged to the house, but it is currently being offered for investment, and its management has been handed over to an investor," Al Hasani said.