

2,977 students to graduate from SQU

The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) will celebrate the graduation of the 34th batch of its students on December 10 and 13. The graduation ceremonies will be held under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, at the university's open theatre. A total of 2,977 students will graduate including 1,261 in scientific colleges, and 1,716 in colleges of humanities.



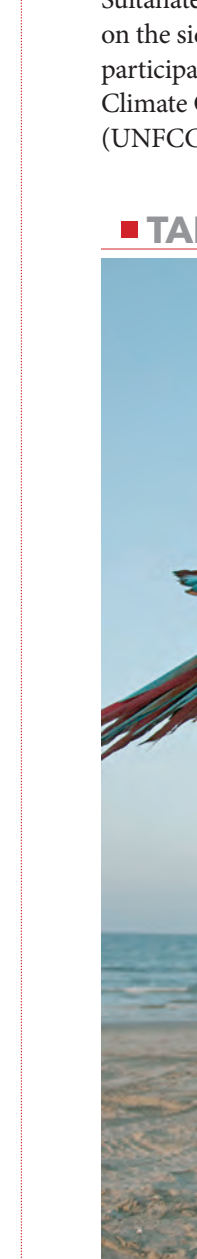
P12

JUVE GO TOP WITH LATE GATTI WINNER AT MONZA



P13

SME FORUM TO UNLOCK POTENTIAL OF OMANI STARTUP ECOSYSTEM



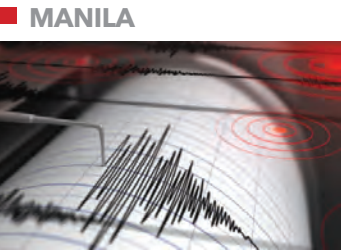
P20

BARA' IS A TIMELESS OMANI DANCE THAT ENSURES CULTURAL CONTINUITY



MUSCAT
CARNIVAL BRINGS HAPPINESS TO ALL

Everyone had reason to be happy at the ‘Village of Happiness’ carnival at the Civil Aviation Club amid the best weather on a weekend, with games, music, folk dance and birds. The carnival was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini al Said. “The ‘Village of Happiness’ offers a safe and fun environment for people with disabilities. This is how we wanted to mark the International Day for People with Disabilities. All the activities are free. I hope this event creates beautiful memories for them and their families,” said HH Sayyida Hujaija al Said. The initiative was supported by strategic partners, such as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Civil Aviation Club, and others from the private sector. **DETAILS ON P3**



EARTHQUAKE OF 7.5 STRIKES PHILIPPINES

An earthquake of at least magnitude 7.5 struck Mindanao in the southern Philippines late on Saturday, triggering evacuation orders for some areas of the country and for southwest Japanese coasts because of warnings of tsunami waves of 1 metre or more. The Philippine Seismology Agency Phivolcs said the waves could hit the Philippines by midnight and continue for hours, though there were no initial reports of significant wave damage by that time. The US Tsunami Warning System said there could be waves of up to 3 metres above the usual high tide level along some Philippine coasts, though it subsequently said there was no risk of a tsunami. “Based on all available data ... the tsunami threat from this earthquake has now passed,” it said.

COP28 pavilion embodies vision in the field of sustainability

KHALID AL ADAWI
DUBAI, DEC 2

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufl, Minister of Energy and Minerals, officially launched the Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion on the sidelines of the country’s participation in the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC-COP28) being held

between November 30-December 12 at Expo City Dubai.

The Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion comprises a number of green projects and initiatives all of which are aimed at finding effective solutions to preserve the planet. It also contains a section that highlights efforts for preserving mangrove trees as well as the environmental indicators

for the Sultanate of Oman.

The pavilion also highlights the country’s green hydrogen project, carbon capture technology and the urban strategy for the Sultan Haitham City. This is in addition to a section that displays minerals from the geology of Oman and their most important uses, a presentation on the early

warning system, scientific research projects and the latest modern research and scientific studies in the same field and the initiatives undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman to achieve zero carbon neutrality.

Al Aufl pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman is participating with an interactive pavilion that simulates the

country’s efforts and initiatives that contribute to achieving ambitious goals and strategies. The pavilion embodies the government’s vision in the field of sustainability, and its ambitious strategies spanning energy transformation, emission reduction, carbon capture, environmental protection and sustainable cities. **TURN TO P2**

TALKING BIRDS EXCITE ONLOOKERS!



In the diverse landscape of the Sultanate of Oman, where opportunities for exclusive activities abound, the captivating hobby of raising and taming birds has gained considerable popularity. Sultan Merza, a dedicated member of the ‘Talking Birds & Free Flying Team,’ showcases his passion at Athaiba Beach in Muscat, turning this serene location into a hub for bird enthusiasts. **DETAILS ON P2**

Cultural extravaganza marks opening of Frankincense Season

QASSIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, DEC 2

A cultural event marking the opening of the Frankincense Season in Dhofar was held under the auspices of Salem bin Muslim Qatan, Deputy Chairman of the State Council, in the presence of a number of officials and representatives of government and private entities. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is organising the event.

The opening ceremony was held at the Baleed Museum in Salalah, and featured a screening of a documentary film about the history of frankincense in



The Frankincense Season will continue until December 9

Dhofar. Also, there was a photo exhibition in which 34 schools from the governorate participated, showcasing the importance of frankincense in art and history.

The ceremony also included

a dedicated space for family businesses to display their locally produced, home-made products and a theatrical performance depicting stories from the history of frankincense, from its extraction methods to its past buying, selling and export practices.

In addition, over 270 frankincense trees were planted in the Wadi Douka Natural Reserve this morning.

The opening of the Frankincense Season this year aligns with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism’s efforts to preserve this significant cultural heritage and promote it locally and internationally. **TURN TO P2**

Israel bombards Gaza Strip as truce ends

OMAN, IRAN CALL FOR END TO HEINOUS ISRAELI ESCALATIONS

MUSCAT/GAZA: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Hussain Amir Abdollahian, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, discussed over phone the traumatic developments in the Gaza Strip and the efforts being made to end the heinous Israeli escalations and atrocities, on Saturday.

The two sides affirmed their constant attitude in solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate rights and to achieve comprehensive and just peace.

Earlier, Israeli war planes and artillery bombarded the south of the Gaza Strip on Saturday, hitting mosques, homes and a hospital, after the collapse of a truce in the nearly two-month-old war. Residents feared the barrages were a prelude to an Israeli ground operation in the south of the Palestinian territory which would bottle them up in a shrinking area and possibly try to push them into neighbouring Egypt.

The Gaza health ministry said at least 193 Palestinians had been killed and 650 wounded since the truce ended on Friday morning - adding to the more than 15,000 Palestinian dead since the start of the war.

Throughout Saturday morning, a steady stream of wounded people were carried into the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, with some people even receiving treatment laying on the floor.

The head of the International Red Cross said the renewed fighting was intense.

“It’s a new layer of destruction coming on top of massive, unparalleled destruction of critical infrastructure, of civilian houses and neighbourhoods,” Robert Mardini said.



Residents of the Hamad Town residential complex in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip flee their homes after an Israeli strike on Saturday. – AFP

With conditions inside the enclave reaching “breaking point”, in Mardini’s words, the first aid trucks since the end of the truce entered Gaza through the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing on Saturday, Egyptian security and Red Crescent sources said.

A senior adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid to Gaza’s civilians as the fighting resumes.

The warring sides blamed each other for the collapse of the seven-day truce, during which Hamas had released captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

The southern part of Gaza

including Khan Younis and Rafah was taking a pounding on Saturday. Residents said houses had been hit and three mosques destroyed in Khan Younis. Columns of smoke rose into the sky.

Displaced Gazans have been sheltering in Khan Younis and Rafah because of fighting in the north of the densely populated enclave, but residents said they feared Israeli troops were preparing to move on the south.

“This is the same tactic they used before entering Gaza and the north,” said Yamen, who gave only his first name.

Yamen fled to Deir Al Balah in central Gaza from the north after Israel destroyed several districts there. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**



Salem bin Muslim Qatan, Deputy Chairman of the State Council, at the Baleded Museum in Salalah on Saturday.
PHOTOS BY ALMUHALLAB MOHAMMED AL MAAMARI

Cultural extravaganza marks opening of Frankincense Season

FROM P1
Ahmed Baheet, a tourist guide, remarked, “The Frankincense Season presents a valuable opportunity to introduce this important cultural heritage and enhance its standing at the local and international levels.”
“Omani frankincense is renowned for its high quality and therapeutic and aromatic properties, making it one of the most significant commercial commodities exported from the

region since ancient times,” he said.
The ceremony was interspersed with various artistic segments presented by an Omani folk arts troupe.
The Frankincense Season in Dhofar Governorate will continue until December 9, encompassing a range of cultural and heritage events and activities highlighting the importance of frankincense in Omani history and culture.



COP28 highlights link between climate change and health

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The COP28 will host the first-ever day dedicated to health and the very first climate-health ministerial meeting, which will bring together ministers of health, environment, climate, finance and other sectors towards more ambitious action to address the rapidly growing burden of climate change on health.
It aims to catalyse collaborative efforts to safeguard both the planet and the well-being of its inhabitants, underscoring the urgent link between environmental stewardship and human health.
It is estimated that 3.6 billion people, almost half of the world population, are affected by climate change. It has become of paramount importance that countries and WHO take concrete steps to restrict further changes in climate, so as to ensure that temperatures don't rise beyond 1.5 degrees, use more clean energy and expand the healthcare infrastructure for better healthcare.

The Health Pavilion, the Energy for Health installation, the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATAACH) day and other events organised with various partners will put more focus on global healthcare.
Besides, the COP28 Health Pavilion, located in the Opportunity Petal, Thematic Arena 2 (TA2 225), Blue Zone, will host a wide range of events to champion the health perspective in climate action, reinforce international cooperation, encourage increased funding for health and bring attention to the most vulnerable populations.
“The World Health Organization's (WHO) decision to prioritise the impact of climate change on health at the upcoming COP28 summit in Dubai is both crucial and commendable. Recognising the interconnectedness of global health and environmental

Oman pavilion embodies sustainability vision

FROM P1
The pavilion and the Sultanate of Oman's participation constitute an opportune chance for the world to learn about the Sultanate of Oman's experience.
The inaugural ceremony included a video presentation that dealt with the Sultanate of Oman's futuristic vision entitled ‘Oman, a Sustainable Future’. Then, a ministerial dialogue session was held under the title ‘Energy and Climate: Two Parallel Paths for Oman’. Speakers were: Humaid bin Ali Almaani, Head of the Foreign Ministry's Global Affairs Department, Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Transport Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Agency. The session discussed four topics: accelerating the energy transition process and reducing emissions by 2030 and fulfilling old promises and setting a framework for a new deal on finance.

CLEAN ENERGY
The Sultanate of Oman submitted the first update of the second report on nationally determined contributions to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The first upgrade calls for enhancing national emissions reduction efforts, enhancing reliance on modern technologies and clean energy, green transportation, blue

sustainability, this approach is expected to pave the way for comprehensive healthcare strategies as climate plays a crucial role in our health,” said Dr Abood Sawafi, educationist and climate change activist from Buraimi University.
Dr Dilip Kumar Singvi, internal medicine specialist,



Salim bin Nasser al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals, at Oman's pavilion Dubai on Saturday.



carbon projects, and sustainable systems for agriculture and waste management.
Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auli participated in the Opening of the G77 and China Summit at COP28 summit alongside leaders of the countries and governments of the group. The meeting discussed ways to unite the international community to advance climate action for a sustainable future. The G77 and China Summit was formed in 1964 by 77 developing countries at a meeting of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, also

known as UNCTAD. The aim was to protect the common interests of the member states in the economic, social and environmental fields.
In a related context, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority (EA), met with the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). They discussed areas of bilateral cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the UNEP, in fields related to the environment, climate action and nature conservation.

Talking birds excite onlookers at Athaiba Beach

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

A riot of colours catches the attention of onlookers at Athaiba Beach in Muscat when Sultan Merza, a member of the ‘Talking Birds & Free Flying Team’, lands in the beach with his macaws and other birds.
Thanks to Muscat's pleasant weather, Sultan Merza and his companions bring a flock of vibrantly coloured ‘talking birds’ to the beach every afternoon, delighting beachgoers. Recognising the growing interest in this unique hobby, Merza initiated a platform on social media to connect with like-minded individuals, fostering an exchange of information and knowledge crucial for the hobby's



development in Oman.
Merza acknowledges the challenges faced by potential bird owners such as the lack of knowledge on taming and caring for these avian companions, along with the financial commitment required.
The ‘Talking Birds & Free Flying Team’ boasts over 30

macaws and various other species, imported mainly from South Africa. Since its establishment in 2017, the team has honed its members' skills, overcoming challenges related to bird taming, training and healthcare.
Beyond showcasing skills and dazzling audiences, the team aims to educate the community on



proper bird care and nutrition. Merza highlights the positive impact of their volunteer activities in supporting the Sultanate's biodiversity conservation efforts and eco-tourism policies.
The team's active presence on social media has attracted a diverse audience, both Omanis and residents, fostering a

community eager to explore and understand this distinctive hobby. Merza emphasises the government's efforts in preserving Oman's biodiversity, emphasising birds' importance for environmental balance.
Merza emphasises that the involvement with ‘talking birds’ extends beyond a display of

skills, presenting economic opportunities for enthusiasts. Raising and importing these birds involves many formalities including a ‘CITES Certificate’ from the Environment Authority in line with international commitment to conservation.
While currently engaged in local events, the team aspires to expand its activities beyond Oman. Merza and his companions, with years of experience, traverse different parts of the Sultanate of Oman to introducing their birds and the hobby, hoping to strengthen people's connection with nature.
As the ‘Talking Birds & Free Flying Team’ continues to soar, their dedication to fostering a deep bond between people and the natural world remains a testament to the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.



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Jokha al Harthy longlisted for Sheikh Zayed Award

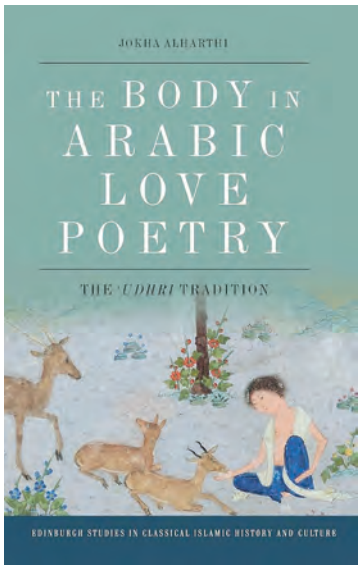
STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 2

Al Jasad fi al Ghazal al Uthri' (The Body in Arabic Love Poetry), authored by Oman's Jokha al Harthy and translated from English to Arabic by Zuwaina al Tuwya is among the longlist of the 18th Sheikh Zayed Book Award.

The award is given by Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre (ALC) for translation, literary and art criticism and contribution to the development of nations categories. The lists were announced as the judging committees began the evaluation of all longlisted entries.

This year the Sheikh Zayed Book Award received the highest number of submissions in its history, with 4,240 nominations submitted from 74 countries, including 19 Arab nations and 55 other countries around the world.

The young author category received the largest number of nominations followed by literature and children's



literature respectively. The rankings continue with the literary and art criticism category, followed by contribution to the development of nations and translation.

The longlist for the translation category includes 11 titles from seven Arab countries: Oman, Kuwait, Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Libya. These longlisted works were translated into Arabic from four languages, namely English, French, German, and Italian.

200,000 tourists likely this season

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) expects the number of cruise ship passengers to be around 240,000 at the end of this year.

This will be a record high from 85,092 in 2020, 16,588 in 2021, and over 150,000 in 2022.

The number of ships visiting the three main ports (Port Sultan Qaboos, Khasab Port, and Salalah Port) has gone up from 28 in 2001 to 81 in 2022 and 183 in this season (2023/24).

As part of the efforts made by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) to encourage cruise tourism in the Sultanate of Oman, the Muscat International Airport received over 800 to 900 tourists contracted with Marella International over two days.

Passengers arrived from Gatwick, Manchester, and Birmingham on a TUI flight and embarked on a regional cruise tour onboard the Marella Discovery ship.

At the same time, 200 to 300 passengers from the ship



returned to the United Kindom by a TUI flight. This is the first cruise ship-flight experience conducted in the Sultanate by Marella Discovery Ship in the post-pandemic period, as previous operations were conducted during the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 seasons. MoHT has contracted with one of the international consulting companies as it prepares a special strategy for the cruise tourism sector.

Marella Discovery will conduct a similar ship-flight experience in April 2024. MoHT has been working in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police, Asyad Ports, Oman Airports, Transom, Travco Oman, and Khimji Shipping to ensure the smooth transfer of passengers between Muscat Airport and the Sultan Qaboos Port.

The ports of the Sultanate of Oman received 16,588 cruise ship passengers in 2021,

compared to 85,092 passengers in 2023. This year, the number of cruise ship passengers arriving in the Sultanate of Oman has been 176,132 until September, which is expected to go up to 240,000 by the year-end. All ports in the country are expected to witness 183 cruise visits during the winter 2023/24 season. Salalah Port on Friday received the cruise ship Sibon Encore on Saturday, carrying 865 passengers.

Carnival for people with disability

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Everyone had reason to be happy at the 'Village of Happiness' carnival at the Civil Aviation Club amid the best weather on a weekend, with games, music, folk dance and birds. The carnival was held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini bin Shihab al Said.

"The 'Village of Happiness' offers a safe and fun environment for people with disabilities. This is how we wanted to mark the International Day for People with Disabilities. All the activities are free. I hope this event creates beautiful memories for them and their families," said HH Sayyida Hujaija al Said.

The initiative was supported by strategic partners, such as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Civil Aviation Club, and others from the private sector.

More than 1,500 kids connected with various associations and institutions serving children with disabilities were invited to the event. The institutions



taking part included the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities, Oman Association for the Hearing Impaired, Oman National Autism Centre, Al Amal Centre of Ministry of Social Development, Al Fikriya School of Ministry of Education, Association for Children with Disability, Oman down Syndrome

Association, Omar bin Al Khattab Institute, Special Olympics Oman, Oman Association for Persons with Disabilities, Hams Al Atheer Rehab Center, Indian School Muscat - Care and Special Education, Advanced Complete Therapy.

The opening ceremony also had the facility of sign language interpreters for announcements and

performances.

The objective of the Village of Happiness was to have a vibrant and joyous celebration for the people with disabilities in Oman. The carnival provided a fun-filled and inclusive environment. From thrilling rides to entertaining performances, the carnival offered a wide range of attractions that catered to the diverse interests of attendees.

The opening ceremony started with a Dhofari folk dance performed by children with disability.

As part of the event, Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, signed an agreement with Sultan al Amri, CEO of Hyatt Information Technology SAL and founder of the Sign Book Application.

The application developed by Sultan bin Naser al Amri was launched. Sign Book aims to assist persons with hearing disabilities to access and enjoy services provided by various government and private sectors. The application allows an inclusive community by providing services on an equal basis.

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POSITIVE THINKING BECOMES A POWERFUL TOOL IN NAVIGATING THE STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH EXAMS, FOSTERING RESILIENCE AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

Students and their parents share a common aspiration for academic success, often associating high grades. The exam period, however, tends to cast a shadow of stress and, for some, depression. Notably, responses to stress and anxiety vary among individuals, with some constantly feeling tension while others experience a sense of isolation. Fortunately, there are strategies to navigate stress and maintain a positive outlook.

Maryam al Mashaikhiyah, a mathematics teacher, underscores that parental pressure is a significant contributor to student depression. Unintentionally, parents may impose immense stress by dictating their children's educational paths, often disregarding the child's interests and strengths. This includes academic pressures arising from expectations that surpass the student's capabilities. Societal expectations, too, play a role, assigning an exaggerated value to exams without considering the diverse aptitudes among students.

According to Abdullah bin Said al Hakamani, a parent, education extends beyond exams, certificates and final grades. Emphasising that true excellence lies in mastering one's chosen field, he advocates for recognising the intrinsic value of education irrespective of the academic subject. From a psychological standpoint, Maryam al Ghailaniyah, an educational and psychological counsellor, notes that exam-induced depression shares similarities with regular depression.

Symptoms like difficulty concentrating, restlessness and disturbed sleep manifest during the exam. She recommends prioritising sufficient sleep, adopting relaxation techniques and minimising stress associated with exams.

Journaling is also suggested as a tool to organise thoughts and gain a fresh perspective. Regular self-assessment can aid in identifying signs or symptoms of depression.

Maintaining a positive mindset is crucial during exam periods. It is easy to succumb to the negative aspects of exams, but viewing this phase as temporary is imperative. Reminding oneself that challenges will pass and that a well-deserved holiday awaits can contribute to a more optimistic outlook. Positive thinking becomes a powerful tool in navigating the stress associated with exams, fostering resilience and emotional well-being.

THINK POSITIVE TO BEAT EXAM BLUES



Nations rally behind renewables for net-zero at COP28 meeting



United Arab Emirates Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and COP28 President Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber speaks during the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP28, in Dubai. – Reuters

DUBAI: More than 110 nations pledged to triple the world's renewable energy within seven years at UN climate talks on Saturday as the United States pushed to slash methane emissions and boost nuclear capacity.

With smoggy skies in Dubai highlighting the challenges facing the world, leaders at the COP28 conference threw their support behind voluntary pledges aimed at ramping up alternatives to fossil fuels.

A massive deployment of solar, wind, hydroelectric and other renewables is crucial to efforts to displace demand for planet-heating coal, oil and gas and achieve Net-Zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The nearly 200 nations negotiating a COP28 climate deal face tougher talks over the next two weeks on the fate of fossil fuels.

More than half signed up to a commitment to tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency by 2030, the COP28's Emirati presidency said.

But major oil producers including Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and top consumer China were not on the list.

"I do need more, and I'm kindly requesting all parties to come on board as soon as possible please," COP28 president Sultan Al Jaber told delegates.

"This can and will help transition the world away from unabated coal," said Jaber, who also heads the UAE's national oil company and a renewable energy firm.

Clean power advocates welcomed the commitment but said it must be accompanied by the phase-out of dirtier forms of energy.

The future will be powered by solar and wind, but it won't happen fast enough unless governments regulate fossil fuels out of the way

KAISA KOSONEN
The head of Greenpeace's COP28

"The future will be powered by solar and wind, but it won't happen fast enough unless governments regulate fossil fuels out of the way," said Kaisa Kosonen, the head of Greenpeace's COP28 delegation.

Jaber also announced a pledge by oil and gas companies representing 40 per cent of global production, including his UAE

firm ADNOC and Saudi giant Aramco, to decarbonise their operations by 2050.

But the pledges do not include emissions when the fuels are used by their customers, and were criticised for repackaging previous, nonbinding commitments.

While COP28 rallied behind renewables, the United States led a call by more than 20 nations for the world to triple nuclear energy capacity by 2050.

In a declaration, countries ranging from Britain to Ghana, Japan and several European nations said nuclear power played a "key role" in the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by mid-century.

The use of nuclear power as a cleaner alternative to fossil fuels is highly controversial, with many environmental groups warning about safety risks and the disposal of nuclear waste. — AFP

Ukraine: Blackout at nuclear plant risked accident

KYIV: Ukraine said on Saturday that two power lines connecting its electricity grid to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant were cut overnight, putting the plant at risk of an "accident".

The plant has been at the centre of fighting since it was captured by Russian forces last year, and both sides have accused each other of compromising its safety.

"Due to the complete blackout, the nuclear power plant switched to powering its own needs from 20 diesel generators," Ukraine's nuclear energy operator said in a statement.

It said the plant was on "the verge of a nuclear and radiation accident" before Ukrainian specialists were able to promptly restore off-site power.

The plant's Russian-installed operator confirmed it resorted to diesel generators overnight, but said that it had operated within safe limits and that no safety violations were reported.



A view shows the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant outside Enerhodar in the Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine. – Reuters

The incident marks the eighth time the plant has been cut off from external power since the conflict began last year, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warned.

"The most recent external power outage is yet another reminder about the precarious nuclear safety and security situation at the plant, which can be affected by events far away from the site itself," IAEA chief Rafael Grossi said. — AFP

W Africa bloc firmly condemns violence in Guinea-Bissau

BISSAU: The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) strongly condemned an outbreak of fighting on Friday in Guinea-Bissau, where the situation had returned to calm on Saturday.

Clashes between members of the national guard and special forces of the presidential guard broke out on Thursday night in the capital Bissau, leaving two dead.

ECOWAS "strongly condemns the violence and all attempts to disrupt the constitutional order and rule of law in Guinea-Bissau," the Abuja-based organisation said in a statement.

"ECOWAS further calls for the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators of the incident in accordance with the law."

Calm returned to the small nation with a history of instability by mid-morning on Friday following the announcement that the army had captured Colonel Victor Tchongo, commander of



An empty street in Bissau – AFP

the national guard.

Members of the national guard on Thursday evening stormed a police station to extract Finance Minister Souleiman Seidi and Secretary of the Treasury Antonio Monteiro, according to army and intelligence officers.

The two government members were being questioned about the withdrawal of \$10 million from state accounts. They had been detained under orders of state prosecutors, who are named by the president. — AFP

N Korea: Interference in satellites means war declaration

SEOUL: North Korea said on Saturday it would consider any interference with its satellite operations a declaration of war and would mobilise its war deterrence if any attack against its strategic assets were imminent.

Pyongyang would respond to any US interference in space by eliminating the viability of US spy satellites, state media KCNA reported, citing a statement from North Korea's defence ministry spokesperson.

"In case the US tries to violate the legitimate territory of a sovereign state by weaponising the latest technologies illegally and unjustly, the DPRK will consider taking responsive action measures for self-defence to undermine or destroy the viability of the US spy satellites," the statement said.

DPRK are the initials of the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

North Korea says it successfully launched its first military spy

The DPRK will consider taking responsive action measures for self-defence to undermine or destroy the viability of the US spy satellites

satellite on Nov. 21, transmitting photos of military installations in the US mainland, Japan and the US territory of Guam.

A US Space Command spokesman, asked if Washington had the capability to interrupt the North Korean satellite's reconnaissance operations, said the US could deny an adversary's space capabilities using a variety of means, according to US broadcaster RFA.

In a statement issued later on Saturday, North Korea's foreign ministry said it will take countermeasures against individuals and organisations of the US and "its vassal forces" that impose and enforce sanctions



A rocket carrying a spy satellite Mallygyong-1 is launched, in North Gyeongsang province. – Reuters file photo

against North Korea, adding that US sanctions violate international law.

The United States on Thursday

targeted North Korea with fresh sanctions after the launch, designating foreign-based agents it accused of facilitating sanctions

evasion to gather revenue and technology for its weapons of mass destruction programme.

South Korea on Friday

blacklisted 11 North Koreans for involvement in the country's satellite and ballistic missile development, banning them from financial transactions.

North Korean state media issued a commentary by a North Korean international relations analyst, who argued "the United States, the world's biggest satellite possessor," should face the United Nations Security Council if sending satellites is considered a crime.

"In case an unexpected clash happens in the Northeast Asian region around the Korean peninsula, the US, which has continuously put pressure on the security space of the DPRK by escalating military threat and blackmail, will be held wholly accountable for the catastrophic situation," the commentary said.

It also blamed the United States for joint military exercises with Japan and South Korea, as well as for displaying its nuclear-powered aircraft carriers. — Reuters



A Palestinian woman reacts as people check the rubble of a building destroyed in an Israeli air strike on the Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

Humanitarian crisis reaches ‘breaking point’ in southern enclave

GAZA: Israeli war planes and artillery bombarded Khan Younis in the south of the Gaza Strip on Saturday, hitting mosques and homes and close to a hospital, after the collapse of a truce in the nearly two-month-intensive strikes.

The Palestinian health ministry said at least 200 Palestinians had been killed and 650 wounded since the truce ended on Friday morning — adding to the more than 15,000 Palestinian dead since the start of the war.

The head of International Red Cross said the renewed fighting was intense.

“It’s a new layer of disruption coming on top of massive, unparalleled destruction of critical infrastructure, of civilian houses and neighbourhoods,” Robert Mardini said.

With conditions inside the enclave reaching “breaking point”, in Mardini’s words, the first aid trucks since the end of the truce entered Gaza through the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing on Saturday, Egyptian security and Red Crescent sources said.

The warring sides blamed each other for the collapse of the seven-day truce, during which Hamas had released captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

The southern part of Gaza was taking a pounding on Saturday. Residents said houses and open areas had been hit and three mosques destroyed in Khan Younis. Columns of smoke rose into the sky.

In Deir Al-Balah city in

“It’s a new layer of disruption coming on top of massive, unparalleled destruction of critical infrastructure, of civilian houses and neighbourhoods

ROBERT MARDINI
The head of International Red Cross

central Gaza, nine Palestinians, including children, were killed in an air strike, health officials said.

Displaced Gazans have been sheltering in Khan Younis and Rafah because of fighting in the north of the densely populated enclave, but residents said they feared Israeli troops were preparing to move on the south.

“This is the same tactic they used before entering Gaza and the north,” said Yamen.

— Reuters

GAZA: Israel carried out deadly bombardments in Gaza for a second day on Saturday after a week-long truce collapsed despite international calls for an extension.

Clouds of grey smoke from the strikes hung over Gaza, where more than 200 people had been killed since the pause in hostilities expired early on Friday.

As hostilities resumed, international leaders and humanitarian groups condemned the return to fighting.

“I deeply regret that military operations have started again in Gaza,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on X.

“Today, in a matter of hours, scores were reportedly killed and injured,” UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said.

“Families were told to evacuate, again. Hopes were dashed.”

Fears of a wider regional conflict grew after the Syrian defence ministry said Israeli strikes had hit Damascus on Saturday and the Lebanese groups said one of their

MEDIATION EFFORTS BY QATAR AND EGYPT ARE ONGOING, SAID A SOURCE BRIEFED ON THE TALKS WHO ASKED NOT TO BE NAMED

members had been killed in an Israeli strike on Lebanon on Friday.

The United States said it is working with regional partners to reach another ceasefire.

“We’re going to continue to work with Israel and Egypt and Qatar on efforts to reimplement the pause,” US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters in California on Friday.

Mediation efforts by Qatar and Egypt are ongoing, said a source briefed on the talks who asked not to be named.

In a diplomatic breakthrough, both sides agreed to a seven-day truce, during which Hamas freed 80 Israeli captives in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners, and more aid entered Gaza.

The week of hostage-prisoner exchanges yielded tearful reunions of families with their released relatives and jubilation in the streets of the occupied West Bank as Palestinian prisoners walked free from Israeli jails.

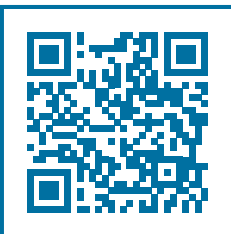
Twenty-five other captives, mostly Thais,

ISRAELI STRIKES ROCK RESUME GENOCIDE

MORE THAN 200 HAD BEEN KILLED SINCE PAUSE IN HOSTILITIES



This picture shows smoke rising from buildings in Gaza after being hit by Israeli strikes. – AFP



ISRAELI TAKES GAZA KILLING TO A NEW LEVEL

200 PEOPLE
KILLED SINCE THE
CEASEFIRE EXPIRED

were also freed in separate arrangements.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Dubai on Friday that the United States remained “intensely focused on getting everyone home, getting captives back” and “pursuing the process that had worked for seven days” during the truce.

But the Israeli military said that “ground, air and naval forces struck in the north and south of the Gaza Strip, including in Khan Younis and Rafah.”

Israeli forces carried out operations early on Saturday in various areas of the occupied West Bank, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Outside the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza City, a man in a blue sweater bellowed in grief and turned his face and hands to the sky after viewing a dead boy in a body bag.

In Israel, sirens warning of potential missiles sounded in several communities near Gaza. Authorities said they were restarting security measures in the area, including closing schools.

A rocket strike destroyed a van in one Israeli community near Gaza.

The Israeli military published a map of “evacuation zones” in the Gaza Strip that it said would enable residents to “evacuate from specific places for their safety if required”.

Residents in various areas of Gaza were sent SMS warnings on Friday. — AFP



Palestinian medics search for survivors in the rubble of a building following Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

ISTANBUL: Türkiye's President Tayyip Erdogan said that the chance for peace in Gaza after the humanitarian pause was lost for now due to what he described as Israel's uncompromising approach, broadcaster NTV reported on Saturday.

“We have always emphasised that we are in favour of a permanent ceasefire rather than a humanitarian break...There was an opportunity for peace here, and unfortunately, we have lost this opportunity for now due to Israel's uncompromising approach,” Erdogan was quoted as saying by NTV and other Turkish media.

The truce that started on November 24 had been

ERDOGAN: CHANCE FOR PEACE IN GAZA CONFLICT LOST FOR NOW



extended twice. But after seven days during which women, children and foreign captives were freed as well as a number of Palestinian prisoners, mediators failed to find a formula to release more.

Since then, Israeli air strikes and artillery bombardments have hit southern Gaza, extending the nearly two-month-old war in which thousands of people have been killed.

Speaking to reporters on his way back from the United Arab Emirates, Erdogan said that he is not losing hope for a lasting peace in the conflict adding that Hamas cannot be excluded from its potential solution, according to NTV.

— Reuters

NO CHRISTMAS TREE IN BETHLEHEM THIS YEAR

BETHLEHEM: There will be no Christmas tree in Bethlehem this year as the traditional site of Jesus' birth holds pared-down celebrations “without the fanfare and without too many lights” in the shadow of the Gaza war.

Bethlehem, which neighbours Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank, has been battered by Israeli clashes of years past. But many townspeople have been especially gripped by the current conflict in the Gaza Strip, 50 km away.

The war has seen much of the impoverished enclave devastated in an Israeli offensive with no end in sight.

“We have never seen Bethlehem like this, not even during the time of COVID. The town is empty, sad,” Father Ibrahim Faltas, a senior Franciscan friar, said in front of the Church of the Nativity. “Today was meant to be a joyous day.”

Palestinians were in pain at the “many children, women, the elderly, the people who were martyred in this crazy war”, he said.

— Reuters



A monk stands inside the Church of the Nativity on the day of the launch of the beginning of the Christmas season, in Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — Reuters

BEIRUT: Israeli forces and Lebanese groups exchanged fire across the Israel-Lebanon border on Saturday in a second day of hostilities after the collapse of a truce in Gaza between Palestinians and Israelis.

The Lebanese group said one of its fighters was killed but did not specify when. Three people in south Lebanon were killed by Israeli shelling on Friday in south Lebanon, according to Lebanon's state news agency, two of the dead were fighters.

Lebanese also said it fired rockets at an Israeli position. Israel's military said two mortar bombs launched from Lebanon fell in open areas in

SHELLS HIT SOUTHERN LEBANON ON SECOND DAY AFTER TRUCE



A Lebanese man walks on the rubble of his house that was damaged during Israeli shelling in recent weeks, in Mhaibib village, near the border with Israel. — Reuters file photo

Shomera, across the border from the south Lebanon village of Marwahin. The military said it responded by attacking the launch site and elsewhere in south Lebanon.

Shelling from Israel hit close to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) headquarters near the coastal town of Naqoura and around the border village of Rmaych, a UNIFIL spokesperson said.

The Israeli military said it carried out shelling near Naqoura after spotting “unusual activity” in the area. UNIFIL also detected fire around 11 am from the area of Tayr Harfa, about a mile from the Israeli frontier, towards Israel, the spokesperson said.

The border was largely calm during the week-long truce in the Gaza war. It has been the worst fighting since the 2006. — Reuters

Can doctors and patients be FB friends?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

A patient walked into my clinic for the first time, as I started introducing myself, she asks” how was your conference in Qatar? Did you like the mall you visited on Friday night? I paused for a while, this is not how patients usually respond when I introduce myself. I answered while grabbing my note and pen “ it was fine”.
So what brings you to the clinic today? She smiled and before telling me her problems she explained that she has been following me on Instagram for some time and that’s how she knew about the conference in Qatar.
I suppose the above encounter is not that unusual since both patients and healthcare professionals use social media on a regular basis. We use social media to share our work achievements, our personal experiences and the services we provide in our professional capacity. Some patients follow us to know if we are the right people to help them sort their problems. But the question is can my patients be my social media

friends? And if so, would that interfere with our professional relationship?
In my opinion there is no harm in being connected with my patients through social media provided that we both agree to mutually respect our boundaries. So my patients, like other followers can view my post, share and comment if they wish but we should not bring therapy into this, which means the patient should not discuss his or her problems outside the clinic since social media is not designed for that nor does it guarantee confidentiality for the information shared. I always explain that any form of communication should go through the clinic coordinator and not via social media.
Some patients do not understand this and feel restricted to appointment time especially when they feel the question they have needs immediate attention. They fail to see my point of view that outside therapy time I have my personal time to socialise and live my life.
If their situation is life threatening then

SOCIAL MEDIA CAN BEEN A GREAT TOOL TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS AND EXCHANGE THOUGHTS, OPINIONS AND LIFE EXPERIENCES AS LONG AS IT’S USED WISELY ALL THE TIME

they should consult the duty psychiatrist via the emergency department. Some would argue that their previous therapist allowed them to communicate with him through social media and I probably sounded “too assertive “when I responded” well, he is entitled to do what he feels comfortable with and me too”.
After all, imagine how my life would be if I spent it responding to every single query from people who come to the clinic? This would clearly lead to my burnout and makes patients more dependent on me. I totally understand that some colleagues don’t mind it because they feel it’s their duty to be there for their patients 24/7, or they probably like the sense of power they get out of it as they feel needed all the time yet that feeling comes with a big price. Keeping professional boundaries is essentially for a healthy doctor-patient relationship.
Finally, social media can be a great tool to communicate with others and exchange thoughts, opinions and life experiences as long as it’s used wisely all the time.

One must engage in sports regularly

Sports should remain in schools for many reasons as it comprises exercises, fun, friendships, teamwork and academics. This is an important argument because it can change lives and has both positive and negative effects on young athletes.
Exercising regularly is a key strategy in preventing heart disease. This will especially help later in life and will save lives. Sports enables them to have the energy required to have a successful day at school.



ISHWAR DESHMUKH

The next reason why sports in schools are important is friendships that result from teamwork. Socially, sports help young people get along with others. This is essential because students need to get along or they will never enjoy life or have friends. Second, in sports you learn to work together. You’re all working towards a common goal, and things like a tough coach or rough play can actually help bond you all together. This can produce friendships because students will meet other students who want the same thing.
Last, teamwork is a necessary skill that is best created in sports. Teamwork will help with many life skills such as communication. Another point worth bringing up is that a student who is extremely skilled at a sport has a chance of getting a scholarship to college. This is not something to rely on, but it is a possibility.
Without sports, students will not get enough exercise, their friendships will be limited, their teamwork skills will be finite and academics will decline. Sports are something that kids enjoy and are motivated. Sports are important in so many ways. Many parents may not afford sports outside schools for their children. Schools must take ownership for the healthy environment and the personal values of students.
Sports are generally liked by all, especially kids. If we look at history, we see the importance of sports from ancient times. The demand for sports is decreasing in modern times due to the popularity of video games and social media.
The sports activities are made compulsory in schools and colleges for the students good, their physical and mental health. If one wants s/he can make a career in this field. The interested ones in sports can be more active and lead a healthy life as they develop leadership qualities, with discipline routine. It certainly teaches the values of dedication and patience.

The author works at Indian School Salalah

Kissinger’s dirty work abroad hurt America at home, too

JAMELLE BOUIE

There has almost been too much to read since Henry Kissinger, the former national security adviser and secretary of state who served under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, died on Wednesday. But I think the best obituaries and retrospectives on Kissinger have emphasised his paramount role in the spread of human misery across the globe, in the name of realpolitik and what he determined were America’s “national interests.”
Let’s start with Kissinger’s full participation, as Nixon’s national security adviser, in the decision to authorise the secret carpet bombing of Cambodia, during which the United States dropped more than 500,000 tonnes of explosives on the country, killing as many as 150,000 civilians. These bombings, which destabilised the country, played a role in the rise of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, who went on to kill approximately 2 million people during his four-year stint in power.
Kissinger was also an architect of the US effort to undermine the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile. In the wake of the 1973 coup d’état that installed Gen. Augusto Pinochet at the head of a military dictatorship, Kissinger also pushed the United States to back the new regime, which killed, tortured or imprisoned tens of thousands of Chileans.
A few years later, in 1976, Kissinger would tell Pinochet, “My evaluation is that you are a victim of all left-wing groups around the world and that your greatest sin was that you overthrew a government which was going Communist.”
Kissinger’s dirty work went far beyond Southeast Asia and South America. Along with Nixon, he backed the brutal effort of the military government of the former West Pakistan to suppress Bengali nationalists in the former East Pakistan, in what is now Bangladesh. A recent study estimated the death toll in that conflict at 269,000 people,



Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger signs autographs at Georgetown University in Washington on March 9, 1977. – NYT file photo

with millions of refugees pushed into neighboring India. Kissinger also gave the green light to the Indonesian dictator Suharto’s 1975 invasion of East Timor, sparking a conflict that would, between 1976 and 1980, go on to kill at least 100,000 people out of a population of approximately 650,000.
This is just a sampling of Kissinger’s activities, which would continue in the decades after he left government, when he worked as a private consultant and guru, of sorts, for a wide variety of political and business leaders.
Kissinger’s death comes at a time of mounting anxiety over the future of American democracy. There is real fear that Donald Trump, if granted a second term in the White House, will dismantle our system of constitutional self-government in favor of some kind of autocracy. It is worthwhile, then, to think not just about Kissinger’s influence on American foreign policy but also about his influence on American democracy. This you can sum up in the contempt he expressed for Chilean democracy when he remarked that there was no reason for the United States to “stand by and let Chile go Communist merely due to the stupidity of its own people.”
Kissinger, like his patron Nixon, showed nothing but contempt for accountability, public opinion or the rule of law. Writing for The Atlantic, historian Gary J. Bass notes that Kissinger ignored outright a congressional prohibition against sending arms to Pakistan.
He brushed aside warnings from White House aides and lawyers at the

State Department and the Pentagon that it would be illegal to transfer weapons to Pakistan. In 1971, with Attorney General John Mitchell present, Nixon asked Kissinger, “Is it really so much against our law?” Kissinger admitted that it was. Not bothering to concoct a legal theory about executive power, Nixon and Kissinger simply went ahead and did it anyway. “Hell,” Nixon said, “we’ve done worse.”
Kissinger’s unrepentant dishonesty and duplicity — his apparent belief that the public simply had no right to know about the conduct of its government abroad — would reverberate throughout American politics in the decades after he left the White House. It is hard to look at the actions of the Reagan White House in Iran-Contra, for example, and not see a Kissinger-esque attempt to circumvent the public and its representatives in order to exercise power unencumbered by democratic accountability.
The same goes for the illegal torture programme pursued under President George W. Bush. The Kissinger ethos, as it were, is a belief that the president can act unilaterally, anywhere in the world, without democratic deliberation or public accountability. It’s a view that treats democracy as either window-dressing or, more often, an irritation and inconvenience to be avoided whenever possible.
Henry Kissinger thought nothing of the democratic aspirations of most people on this planet, Americans more or less included.

— The New York Times

Poetry and literature: Not a waste of time!

I'm often asked, from my educational perspective, whether the poetry and literature taught in schools and higher education has any genuine relevance to the lives of the students. In other words, "What good does it do them when they leave school?"

This, and its ilk, are fair questions. I guess the romantics among us may, when romantically inspired, borrow from Romeo and Juliet to make an impression, even though Shakespeare himself saw the lover's story as more of a tragedy than a romance, writing, "For never was a story of more woe than that of Juliet and her Romeo. Yet, it is the romance that lingers with us, aware of the tragedy, but knowing the romance. We seek to impress, or dream of hearing the immortal, "Soft, what light through yonder window breaks. It is the East, and (use any name here) is the Sun." Who could not be swayed? And followed up with... "That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet," and "parting is such sweet sorrow..." is the perfect note upon which to leave a promise for another day.

Romance or humdrum? An informal discussion among colleagues revealed that we are so romantic at heart, with, to borrow some brief sentiment from Renee Zelwegger, one woman uttered, "Ooooh, you had me at soft." With a chuckle we agreed that these kind of lines will be immortal, but the question still stands, because while the best among us may be inspired by 'shaky Bill,' most of us would probably stand or fall on our own imaginations.

Academia would have us convinced that historical literature has immense value, with teaching organisations advocating that 'understanding and respecting alternative perspectives and viewpoints, in our divisive age,' is a necessary life skill, which could be debated ad infinitum, however, what can be more easily supported is their contention that literature 'enables students to see endless possibilities of linguistically shaped expression



Ray Petersen
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The writer is
a media
consultant

IS THE POETRY
AND LITERATURE
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STUDENTS!

and meaning.' There is though, in that phrase, no mention of the complexity of punctuation, particularly in poetry, where the rules of punctuation are so often 'misplaced' in a preference for radical expression, or shock factor.

William Blake, in 'A Poison Tree,' sends a message we should all understand about conflict, and to my mind that is something that all young scholars should all see, read, discuss, and understand, to prepare them for the ups and downs of workplace relationships. He wrote: 'I was angry with my friend. I told my wrath, my wrath did end. I was angry with my foe: I told it not, my wrath did grow.' Now there's a life lesson right there. If you have a problem, or an issue, a 'wrath' with anyone. Talk it through. Don't leave anything that worries you unsaid, and resolve, or 'end' it. In studying that poetry, you will understand the poet's intent, and it will remain with you, purely because it does have value.

I don't always know how much my students are getting from their literature, and more specifically from their poetry, but what I can say, with certainty, is that their ability to present themselves, their opinions, and their beliefs, develops exponentially with their ability to develop their own opinions on the literature, its purpose, and its integrity. I believe they draw confidence from learning that their opinion about an authors or poets intent, can be as important to them as Pythagoras, or the Periodic Table of Elements.

The truth, and the beauty of literature, is memorable, enduring, and empowering. It's universal, and as Rumi writes, "Not just her laugh and her face are lovely; Her anger, her moods, and her harsh words are too. Like it or not, she demands my life. Who cares for life? Her demands are lovely too."

In this gorgeous few words are beauty, anger, love, laughter, joy, pain, and a million other emotions that the students can unpack for themselves, and in this, I can truly see redemption for poetry and literature in education.

GRAZING IN BUSHY PARK!



Deer graze in Bushy Park, west of London on Saturday. Richmond Park and Bushy Park are home to over 1,000 free roaming red and fallow deer. - AFP

At COP28, cities will show us the way

Nation-states, presidents, and prime ministers — those are the players who garner the biggest headlines and the most media attention at each year's United Nations Climate Change Conference. Yet for the past decade, and with far less fanfare, cities, states, and regional governments (known as "subnationals") have been implementing the Paris climate agreement's guidance, even when their national governments have not. This has meant investing in clean-energy systems and other urban innovations to reduce emissions locally, and sharing what works through networks like C40 and the Global Covenant of Mayors to accelerate progress on a larger scale.

Fortunately, this year's UN conference in Dubai (COP28) brings a historic first that bodes well for progress on climate change more broadly. The inaugural Local Climate Action Summit will bring mayors and governors together to engage directly with national and international leaders, demonstrating how cities are driving solutions and generating ideas that are being adopted around the world.

The timing for this breakthrough couldn't be better. The UN recently released its first official report card on the progress the world has made since COP15 in Paris. It shows that bolder and more urgent action is needed



Michael R Bloomberg,
the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Climate Ambition and Solutions, is Founder of Bloomberg Philanthropies and Bloomberg LP and a former mayor of New York City



Yvonne Aki-Sawyer,
Co-Chair of C40 Cities, is Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone

to hold global warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels — the limit required to stave off the worst effects of climate change.

Cities like Freetown, which is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change (from extreme heat that rarely subsides to floods and landslides that come without warning), are determined to push world leaders to raise their ambitions — and to empower cities to do more to lead the way.

Freetown has shown how cities can set an example through innovative action. When urbanisation wiped out 70 per cent of its trees, the city created a programme to enlist residents in restoring green cover, which reduces the impact of severe heat. Freetown's young people are a big part of the campaign to plant one million trees by 2024, and their engagement does not stop there. Young people are well represented on Freetown's Community Disaster Management Committees and have put their collective energy into the city's Transform Freetown Agenda (of which the tree-planting is part).

Nor is Freetown alone. In the Philippines, Quezon City has created a network of sustainable urban gardens and farms that addresses food insecurity among residents and reduces the emissions associated with

traditional farming. In Lima, Peru, civic leaders have developed a climate-change plan that not only aims to protect the area's ecosystems, but also targets the small changes — park by park, orchard by orchard — that add up to large-scale improvements in the urban landscape. It has also launched a highly successful effort to monitor and improve air quality where the city's children play, learn, and live.

In these and many other ways, cities are showing global leaders how real progress is made. But cities should not be seen only as models; they also should be treated as essential partners in the global effort to combat climate



The timing for a breakthrough couldn't be better.

change. This has not typically been the case. Even where national leaders have professed their belief in multilevel governance, policy frameworks are often indifferent to local and regional climate efforts, which leads them to overlook proven solutions. At COP28 and in the years ahead, local leaders should have an equal voice in the discussion and access to the resources they need to take decisive action.

A true partnership between national and subnational governments could be the key that unlocks a consistent flow of climate financing. By working together, local and national

leaders can exert considerably greater influence on global institutions, including the UN, multilateral development banks, and governments with the means to accelerate climate-finance solutions.

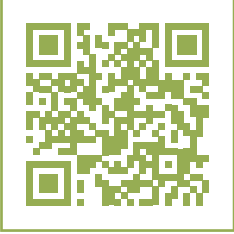
The world's mayors are increasingly coming together to deliver this message with a unified voice. Hence, in advance of the COP28 Local Climate Action Summit, C40 modernised its leadership model to include two, rather than just one, chair. The network is now co-chaired by the mayors of London and Freetown, an arrangement that better represents the insights and experiences of the world's people.

COP28 provides an opportunity to build on the leadership of London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who, in his previous role as C40 Chair, helped ensure that two-thirds of the organisation's budget is dedicated to advancing climate action in the Global South, where the effects of climate are the most severe.

Local leaders around the world are proving that when we join our strengths, pool our resources, and come together in a genuine spirit of partnership, local and national governments can achieve great progress and help safeguard the future.

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Al Nasr, Bahla advance to Sultan’s Cup semifinals

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

Al Nasr Club secured a spot in the semifinals of the Sultan’s Cup after defeating their opponent, Fanja Club, with a 2-0 win in the return leg of the quarterfinals held at Al Saada Sports Complex.

In a match that defied expectations, Al Nasr set the tone with an aggressive style, applying relentless pressure and maintaining possession. Fanja Club, on the other hand, opted for a strategic approach, building their play from the back. The game saw Al Nasr squander an early opportunity in the third minute by Walid al Musallami. Despite facing a resilient Fanja defence, Al Nasr created numerous scoring opportunities, culminating in a perfect cross from Anwar Mubarak in the 10th minute,

expertly converted into a goal by Walid al Musallami. The first half concluded with a red card shown to Al Nasr’s Walid al Musallami, leaving the team at a numerical disadvantage but still leading 1-0.

The second half witnessed Al Nasr extending their lead with a 60th-minute penalty successfully converted by professional player Ahboub Carter. Fanja Club struggled to regain focus in their offensive attempts, allowing Al Nasr to seize control once again. The match concluded with a decisive 2-0 victory for Al Nasr, securing their place in the semifinals.

With this result, Al Nasr booked a place in the semifinals, having already won the first leg (2-1).

Al Nasr awaits a tough challenge in the semifinals, facing the winner of the match between Al Nahda,



The match between Al Nasr and Fanja at Al Saada Sports Complex

the defending champion, and Al Seeb, the league leader.

BAHLA VS IBRI

In the second match, Bahla won against Ibri Club 1-0 in the quarterfinals of the Sultan’s Cup held at Ibri Club Stadium.

In the first half, Bahla tactically

dominated the midfield. On the other hand, Ibri Club struggled to build attacks, with a significant lack of focus in passing. Despite high-pressure play, Bahla couldn’t convert several chances into goals. The first half ended with a 0-0 score.

Bahla continued with the

same style in the second half, controlling the ball and creating dangerous opportunities. In the 76th minute, Bahla’s player Anis al Maarif scored the only goal of the match. After the goal, Bahla retreated, and Ibri Club tried to overcome Bahla’s defence to equalise but faced several

missed opportunities. The match ended with a 1-0 victory for Bahla, securing their spot in the semifinals after a 2-2 draw in the first leg.

Bahla’s next challenge awaits in the semifinals, where they will go head-to-head against the winner of the Oman vs Dhofar Club.

Oman Equestrian concludes the seventh race in Barka



Part of the purebred Arabian horses race over a distance of 2,000 metres

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

The horse ‘SSR’ snatched the first title at the seventh race of the Oman Equestrian and Racing, at Al Rahba horse racing track in Barka.

The race is organised by Oman Equestrian and Racing, represented by Horse Racing Club. The event includes eight rounds, five rounds allocated for purebred Arabian horses, one round for locally produced purebred Arabian horses and two rounds for purebred hybrid horses.

At the first round, ‘Muttrah race’ for purebred Arabian horses (local production) for a distance of 1,200 metres, the horse ‘SSR’ snatched the title, owned by Salim bin Said al Rashidi, led by Munis al Siyabi and trained by Khalid al Maliki. ‘Musk Al Khattam’ won the second place, owned by Mohammed al Saadi, jockeyed by Abdullah al Sawai and trained by Said al Balushi. Third place was won by ‘Ertikaz Oman’, owned by Yousef al Hosani, ridden by Adam al Balushi and trained by Mohammed al Ajmi.

At the second round, ‘Al Seeb race’ for purebred hybrid horses for a distance of 1,200 metres, ‘Scott Payne’ won the first place, owned by HH Sayyid Saud bin Harib al Said, led by Adam al Balushi and under the coach Ahmed al Balushi.

At the third round, ‘Bausher race’ for purebred Arabian horses over a distance of 1,200 metres, ‘SSR Shaala’ claimed the race, owned by Salem al Rashidi, led by Hamad al Maliki and trained by Khalid al Maliki.

In the fourth round, ‘Qurayat race’ for purebred Arabian horses for a distance of 2,000 metres, ‘Munsifah’ claimed the race, owned by Royal Cavalry, led by Mohammed al Farsi and trained by Fahd al Hajri.

Alone in the lead ‘Al Mogahaz’ snatched the title of the fifth round ‘Al Amerat race’, for purebred hybrid horses over a distance of 2,000 metres, owned by Abdulsalam al Mashaykhi, led by Amer al Rasbi and trained by Sultan al Alawi.

At the sixth round, ‘Muscat race’ for purebred Arabian horses over a distance of 2,000 metres, ‘Nisal Al Sham’ claimed the race, owned by Mahmoud al Raisi, led by Amer al Rasbi and trained by Mohammed al Balushi.

At seventh round, ‘Barka race’ for purebred Arabian horses over a distance of 1,800 metres, ‘Jamra SP’ finished first, owner by Al Mashaikhi Stables, led by Ahmed al Siyabi and trained by Nibras al Siyabi.

The last round, ‘Musannah race’, which is for purebred Arabian horses for a distance of 1,800 metres, ‘Valentino’ claimed the race, owned by Mohammed al Khalili, the jockey was Ahmed al Siyabi, and training by Hussein al Sunaidi.



Crowning the winners: Owners, Jockeys and Trainers





The match between Al Seeb and Al Salam

Al Seeb defeat Al Salam to remain on top spot

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

Al Seeb spikers continued their top show in the Oman First Division Volleyball League 2023-24, as they registered a 3-1 (23/25, 25/19, 25/16 and 25/22) win over Al Salalm in a tight clash on Friday for the sixth round of the league, At the main hall of Suhar Sports Complex.

The triumph meant, Muscat based team led the league order with 18 points, while the opponents remained positioned in the second place with 15 points.

The hosts Al Salam players began the match strongly as they managed to earn the first set at 23/25. In the following set, Al Seeb spikers coached by Jamal al Mamari bounced back with better focus and equalised by winning the second set at 25/19. Al Seeb players moved to the third set with more enthusiasm and grabbed the result of the third set with 25/16. In the deciding set, Al Seeb players confirmed their win at 25/22.

In other matches, Majees defeated Bahla 3-0 (25-9, 25-9, 25-16) at Nizwa Sports Complex while Al Bashaer captured a thrilling 3-0 win (25-19, 25-23, 25-22) from Suhar at the same

venue.

Oman club stun Saham 3-2 (25-15, 25-20, 25-19, 25-21, 11-15) at Suhar Sports Complex

Al Seeb led the league order standing by 18 points in the first spot while Al Salam are placed second with 15 points and Al Bashaer in third place with 13 points. Majees and Oman are positioned in the fourth and fifth with 11 and 8 points respectively. Suhar in sixth place with five points and Saham in seventh with two points. Bahla at the bottom of the order with no points.

On the other hand, the league leaders, Al Seeb, will take on Oman club in the final clash of Super Cup that will be scheduled to take place on Monday at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The match will kick off at 7:00 pm under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam bin Ali al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development in presence of Eng Ibrahim al Maqbali, chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA).

In addition, OVA are gearing up to host the West Asian Volleyball Championship for clubs in February 2024 at Suhar Sports Complex.



Celtics hold off 76ers despite Tatum ejection, Magic roll on

LOS ANGELES: Boston star Jayson Tatum was ejected in the third quarter but the Celtics clawed out a 125-119 NBA victory over short-handed Philadelphia on Friday as the Orlando Magic notched a ninth straight win.

Tatum scored 21 points before he was tossed for arguing a foul call after tangling with Robert Covington with one second left in the third.

Covington made the technical free throw, and two free throws awarded when Tatum's foul was upgraded to a flagrant because of contact to Covington's head.

That put the Sixers up 97-95 going into the final period.

Philadelphia's reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid missed a second straight game with illness.

Ailing Tyrese Maxey and injured Nicolas Batum were ruled out shortly before the game.

But the Sixers pushed Boston to the finish, pulling ahead 116-115 with 2:28 remaining before Al Horford's driving basket put Boston up for good with 2:09 to go.

Patrick Beverley scored 26 points, grabbed eight rebounds and handed out seven assists for Philadelphia.

DeAnthony Melton scored 21 points before he fouled out with less than six minutes to go.

Jaylen Brown and Horford scored 20 points apiece for Boston, who made eight of 11 three-pointers in a sizzling 44-point first quarter, but



Jayson Tatum (0) tries to steal the ball from Patrick Beverley (22) during the second quarter at TD Garden. – USA TODAY Sports

surrendered 72 points in the first half to trail by three at the break.

Tatum had received a technical in the first quarter, and when he was whistled for a foul after colliding with Covington his objections were so strong that Celtics coaches moved to steer him away from the officials.

Tatum said he was "extremely surprised" to be ejected for just the second time in his career.

"I don't agree with that," he said. "One of the assistant

coaches that was there with me doesn't agree. But it doesn't really matter. It's like the refs' word against ours and at that moment when they throw you out they throw you out."

Horford said the Celtics had to lock back in after Tatum's departure.

"We just had to get stops, get gritty," he said.

DURANT MILESTONE IN DEFEAT

In Phoenix, Suns star Kevin Durant moved to 10th on the NBA all-time scoring list but it was the Denver Nuggets who emerged with a 119-111 victory.

Nikola Jokic scored 21 points and handed out 16 of the Nuggets' 38 assists and all five Denver starters scored at least 15 points.

Durant came into the contest needing 17 points to pass Moses Malone (27,409 points) on the all-time scoring list. — **AFP**

Rinku, spinners help India down Australia to clinch T20 series

RAIPUR: Rinku Singh's quickfire 46 and a spin attack led by Axar Patel helped India to a series-clinching 20-run win over Australia in the fourth Twenty20 international on Friday.

India posted 174-9 thanks to Rinku's 29-ball blitz, despite late strikes by the Australian fast bowlers after the tourists elected to field first in Raipur.

Axar then returned figures of 3-16 with his left-arm spin as the hosts kept down Australia to 154-7 to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series.

Leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi struck on his first delivery as he bowled Josh Philippe, for eight, and finished with figures of 1-17.

Axar struck in his first over to claim opener Travis Head's wicket, after his 16-ball 31 had given the tourists a



India's Rinku Singh and Mukesh Kumar. – **AFP**

quick start.

After derailing the opposition's chase, the Indian spinner kept up his strikes and sent Ben McDermott and Aaron Hardie back to the pavilion.

Tim David attempted to hit back but fast bowler Deepak Chahar took the batsman down, getting him caught in the deep on 19.

Chahar claimed another victim in

Matthew Short on 22 as the wheels came off the chase, before skipper Matthew Wade hit a valiant 36 not out. Earlier, the left-handed Rinku put on key partnerships including a 56-run fifth-wicket stand with Jitesh Sharma, who hit a 19-ball 35.

Ben Dwarshuis took two wickets in the 19th over and fellow left-arm quick Jason Behrendorff also struck twice in the next over to deny Rinku his fifty and check India's surge.

Hardie began with a maiden over and in his second over cut short Yashasvi Jaiswal's brisk knock of 37 off 28 balls, after the left-hander mistimed a pull to get caught at mid-on.

Leg-spinner Tanveer Sangha sent back Shreyas Iyer for eight and Dwarshuis made the hosts slip to 63-3 when he got skipper Suryakumar Yadav caught behind for one. – **AFP**

Taijul grabs 10 wickets in match as Bangladesh crush New Zealand

SYLHET: Taijul Islam grabbed his second 10-wicket haul in Tests as Bangladesh defeated New Zealand by 150 runs in the first Test in Sylhet on Saturday, taking a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

Resuming on the fifth and final day at 113-7 with another 219 runs needed for victory, New Zealand added 68 runs for their last three wickets, ending their second innings all out for 181 runs.

Taijul claimed the last two wickets to finish with 6-75, adding to his 4-109 in the first innings. Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan gave Bangladesh their first breakthrough on the day, after New Zealand's overnight batting pair of Daryl Mitchell and Ish



Taijul Islam, the man of the match fter winning the first Test match against New Zealand in Sylhet. – **AFP**

Sodhi survived nine overs.

Mitchell top-edged Nayeem to Taijul at long leg after making 58.

Tim Southee and Sodhi



Bangladesh cricketers celebrate after winning the first Test match against New Zealand in Sylhet. – **AFP**

entertained the sparse crowd with some counterpunches, putting on 46 runs for the ninth wicket in quick time, the highest

partnership for New Zealand in the innings.

But the runs came too late to have an impact on the outcome,

as Taijul claimed the wickets of both in the space of four overs.

Southee was caught by Zakir Hasan at midwicket after making 34 off 24 balls, including a four and two sixes.

Taijul brought the curtain down on an entertaining contest soon after, when Sodhi gloved a catch to Zakir at silly point.

It earned Bangladesh their second Test victory against New Zealand, with the first coming at Mount Maunganui in January 2022. "Credit goes to all the players, especially Taijul, Nayeem, Shoriful (Islam), and Mehidy (Hasan)," said Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, who became the fourth Bangladesh captain to win his first match in charge.

"Everyone enjoyed this match. We weren't thinking about the result," Najmul, who scored a century in the second innings, said in the post-match presentation.

Disappointed New Zealand captain Tim Southee praised the hosts and called for more from his team.

"They played well. Our bowling group needs to create pressure for longer, batters need to stitch more partnerships, be better for longer," he said.

The second Test of the series will be held in Dhaka between December 6 and 10.

The two-match series is the beginning of a new cycle in the World Test Championship for both teams.

JUVE GO TOP WITH LATE GATTI WINNER AT MONZA

MONZA: Juventus's Federico Gatti scored a stoppage-time winner in a frantic finale to secure a 2-1 victory at Monza on Friday that propelled them top of Serie A.

Juve sealed victory at the death as Adrien Rabiot's pass into the six-yard box found Gatti, who initially missed his kick but quickly recovered, driving the ball into the net.

Moments earlier, Monza had grabbed a stoppage-time equaliser through Valentin Carboni after Rabiot had netted an early opener for Juve.

Juve have 33 points after 14 matches, one ahead of Inter Milan, who visit Napoli on Sunday, while Monza are 10th with 18 points.

"How can I tell you about it? It's an incredible emotion to score such an important goal," Gatti said to DAZN.

"It's a shame for the goal we conceded because we could have done more, including myself. We were a little tired, but I made up for it immediately. These three points are so important."

Juve earned a penalty in the 11th minute after Giorgos Kyriakopoulos pulled down Andrea Cambiaso.

Dusan Vlahovic fired his spot kick towards the bottom right but his effort was saved by Monza's goalkeeper Michele

di Gregorio, who then quickly sprung up to push the follow-up away for a corner.

Juve broke the deadlock from that corner as Rabiot won an aerial duel, heading the ball into the roof of the net.

Just past the half-hour mark, Juve went close to extending their lead when Gatti fired over the crossbar.

As the rain poured down, the intensity subsided in the second half. Monza were convinced they had secured a draw in stoppage time when Carboni unleashed a long shot that skidded off the wet surface and into the corner of the net past Juve keeper Wojciech Szczesny.

After Gatti's goal, Carboni had another opportunity to level the scores, yet his long-range shot narrowly missed the target.

"It's an important victory because it came against a strong team that plays well," Juve manager Massimiliano Allegri said.

"We had chances to double the lead, but they kept possession in the second half. We didn't risk much, but we left too much freedom to Carboni, who is a good player.

"We reacted immediately. Praise to the players who strongly wanted to win." Juve will next host Napoli in Serie A on December 8. — **Reuters**



Federico Gatti celebrates with team-mates after scoring the second goal at the Bianteo stadium. — AFP



Federico Gatti celebrates with with team-mates Juventus' Brazilian (12) Alex Sandro and Danilo (6) after scoring the second goal. — AFP





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Oman revises GHG emission reduction target to 21% by 2030

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 2

The Sultanate of Oman has revised its target for reducing planet-warming greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 21 per cent by 2030, up from 7 per cent pledged in 2021.

The upward revision is a key highlight of the updated Second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) report — a non-binding climate action plan that Paris Agreement signatories must publish every five years — issued recently by Oman against the backdrop of the COP28 Summit underway in Dubai.

According to the Environment Authority (EA), the updated NDC “builds upon a foundation of economy-wide targets and a revised base year, encompassing all domestic sectors, including land use, land use changes, and forestry”.

Writing in the foreword, Dr Abdullah bin Ali bin Abdullah al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, stated: “The updated Second Nationally Determined Contribution provides a comprehensive outlook on Oman’s aspirations to reach Net-Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and move



Oman is located in a region highly vulnerable to climate change

towards a sustainable low-carbon economy. Notably, the country is taking proactive steps during this decade to reduce emissions by 21 per cent, compared to their expected emissions based on business-as-usual projections by 2030. This is a commendable and essential step toward addressing the global climate crisis.”

The updated NDC however cautions that the revised target is contingent upon a number of factors, notably international climate financing, technology transfers, activation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement (providing a framework for countries to cooperate towards the

implementation of their NDCs), and support for capacity-building programmes.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that the average annual temperature in Oman could increase by 2.6°C (4.7°F) by 2100 under a high emissions scenario.

Given its location in a region highly vulnerable to climate change, Oman also faces multiple risks in the form of rising temperatures, prolonged periods of high humidity, sea-level rise and an increased likelihood of extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, heatwaves, intense

rainfall and extended droughts, it has pointed out.

Moreover, the consequences are particularly significant, given that the majority of Oman’s population, infrastructure, and economic activities, are spread out in coastal zones that are vulnerable to any rise in sea levels, saltwater intrusion and extreme weather events.

Importantly, the updated NDC identifies the following six key objectives, underpinned by the most advanced decarbonisation technologies, to facilitate the country’s transition to Net-Zero: Energy and Resource Efficiency, Electrification and Renewables, Battery Electric Technology, Sustainable Hydrogen, Carbon capture and storage, and Negative emission solutions.

Also targeted for mitigation are emissions from domestic aviation and shipping, according to the Environment Authority. Strategies being weighed in this regard include the promotion of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAFs), establishment of green shipping corridors for ships powered by low-emission shipping fuels and technologies — initiatives that underscore Oman’s commitment to global emissions reduction goals, it added.

More than RO 21.6 bn of local liquidity reported at the end of Sept 2023

MUSCAT: As of the end of September 2023, the local liquidity in the Sultanate of Oman exceeded 21.6 billion Omani rials, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. This represents an increase of 4.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2022.

The preliminary data from the centre indicates a 0.7 per cent increase in the total money supply, reaching 1,617.5 billion Omani rials by the end of September 2023, compared to 1,606.9 billion Omani rials at the end of September 2022.

The narrow money supply (M1), which includes the total cash outside the banking system, current accounts, and demand deposits in the local currency, decreased by 2.9 per cent, amounting to 5,674.3 billion Omani rials compared to 5,841.9 billion Omani rials at the end of September 2022.

Total foreign assets at the Central Bank of Oman decreased by 0.7 per cent, reaching 6,203.1 billion Omani rials at the end of September 2023, compared to 6,249.4 billion Omani rials at the end of September 2022.

Private sector deposits in commercial banks and Islamic



Central Bank of Oman

windows at the end of September 2023 amounted to approximately 18,387.2 billion Omani rials, showing a 6.3 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2022 when private sector deposits were 17,302.4 billion Omani rials.

The total loans and financing provided by commercial banks and Islamic windows at the end of September 2023 increased by 5.7 per cent, reaching 30,435.7 billion Omani rials compared to 28,784.4 billion Omani rials. The average interest rate on total loans increased by 0.7 per cent, reaching 5.452 per cent at the end of September 2023.

The real effective exchange rate of the Omani rial decreased by 0.7 per cent at the end of September 2023, reaching 117.4 points. — ONA

SME forum to unlock potential of Omani startup ecosystem

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 2

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Development Authority is gearing up to host a pivotal forum for emerging Omani startups on December 4h at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC).

Targeting a diverse audience, including students, experts, academics, and investors, the event is designed to facilitate networking, collaboration, and knowledge exchange. With a specific focus on nurturing the country’s youth, the forum aims to explore the world of entrepreneurship, shedding light on the initiatives of the Promising Omani Startups Programme.

This programme, a key focus of the forum, will be highlighted to provide insights into its strategies and contributions to the startup ecosystem. The forum’s agenda includes thought-provoking workshops featuring discussions on topics crucial for startup growth and sustainability. These workshops aim to actively engage participants and provide practical



The emerging Omani startup forum will begin on December 4h

insights into the challenges and opportunities within the startup ecosystem.

An integral component of the event is an exhibition showcasing established startups, offering a unique opportunity for participants to interact with successful entrepreneurs. This platform allows emerging startups to learn from their counterparts who have successfully navigated the complexities of technology and innovation.

Highlighting the significance of technological advancements, the forum will feature inspiring success stories in the realms of technology and innovation, motivating and guiding aspiring entrepreneurs in navigating

the evolving startup landscape. The heart of the forum lies in the participation of 50 startups, each bringing its unique vision and innovative solutions to the forefront.

This diverse array of startups will be featured in an exclusive exhibition, providing them with a chance to showcase their products, services, and ideas to a wider audience, including potential investors.

By bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, fostering collaboration, and celebrating innovation, this event aims to propel the growth of startups in Oman and contribute to the country’s broader economic development.

MAWFR offers fisheries investment opportunities worth RO 9 million

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MoAFWR) , announced 25 investment opportunities for the establishment and management of fish markets and landing centres in various provinces in Oman with a total investment value of RO 9 million.

The initiative is in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and aims to attract private sector participation in investment projects, provide essential services, and achieve a return on investment.

In an interview with ONA, Khaled bin Salem al Amri, Head of the Fishery Investment Department at the General Directorate for Agricultural and Fish Marketing in MoAFWR, highlighted the benefits of investing in fish markets. These advantages encompass the effective utilisation of existing market infrastructure owned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources. The initiative also aims to encourage private sector investment in crucial services that support the fishing sector,



Render of a fish market building provided by MoAFWR



Head of the Fishery Investment Department, Khaled bin Salem al Amri

create employment opportunities for Omani youth, and foster partnerships with the private sector for the development and enhancement of supporting services provided by the ministry.

Additionally he noted that these opportunities will improve the quality of fish products. Explaining that fish collection centres will provide necessary services such as sorting, cleaning, and packaging of fresh fish, establishing a public auction system for fish, and facilitating the monitoring of seasons for harvesting certain aquatic resources.

AgroFood 2023 begins tomorrow at Oman convention centre

MUSCAT: Oman AgroFood, the 5th International Exhibition for Agriculture, Food, and Aquaculture, is set to kick off tomorrow with a prestigious inauguration led by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology.

The opening ceremony is scheduled for December 4th at 10 AM, taking place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

This comprehensive exhibition covers various sectors, including food, agriculture, and fisheries, making it a pivotal business platform. Over 100 companies from around the world, including China, Poland, Spain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Egypt, India, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Afghanistan, Mauritania, and Indonesia, will showcase a range of products, equipment,



Oman AgroFood Logo

machinery, and services, sharing their expertise with attendees.

Leading companies such as A'Saffa, Mazoon, Nakheel Oman Development Company, Nitaj, Oman Flour Mills Company, Fisheries Development Oman, Al Madina Logistics, Agro Trade Services, Bieshke International, Nada Al Rabeei, Salalah Mills

Co. are set to unveil their newest offerings, cutting-edge equipment, and services in the food, agriculture, and fisheries sectors.

Oman AgroFood serves as a vital annual gathering, bringing together government decision-makers, international thought-leaders, regional investors, and innovative technology and

solution providers.

By providing a comprehensive platform, the event offers access to emerging investment opportunities and new projects in crop and animal farming, while facilitating the optimisation of international trade relations. It serves as an ideal destination to showcase the latest innovations and solutions for sustainable farming and to foster successful partnerships with local and regional entities.

Don't miss the golden opportunity to attend the Oman AgroFood exhibition, running from the 4th to the 6th of December 2023. Doors will be open daily from 10 AM to 6 PM at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Oman AgroFood 2023 is jointly organised by International Fairs & Promotions (IFP) and Al Nimr Expo, two renowned names in the event management industry.

Chery achieves milestone selling over 200,000 vehicles



Chery Achieves Impressive Milestone Selling 200,000+ Vehicles

MUSCAT: Recently in October, Chery Group sold 200,313 vehicles, marking a 50.8 per cent year-on-year increase and exceeding 200,000 in a single month for the first time, setting a new record. Over the past four months, Chery Group has consistently exceeded the 150,000, 170,000, 190,000, and now the 200,000 monthly sales levels. From January to October, Chery Group accumulated sales of 1,453,550 vehicles, marking a year-on-year growth of 41.6%.

According to the CPCA (China Passenger Car Association), it's estimated that China's narrow-definition passenger car retail sales in October reached approximately 2.02 million units, marking 9.5 per cent year-on-year growth. Chery Group's overall sales, as well as the sales of its various passenger car brands, have exceeded 50 per cent growth, outpacing the industry's performance by more than fivefold, achieving "running acceleration". Among them, Chery Brand sold 140,360 vehicles in October, a year-on-year increase of 50.3%; sales from January to October were 1,049,734 vehicles, a year-on-year increase of 35.8%, marking the first time Chery Brand surpassed the million-unit mark. The Tiggo 8 and Tiggo 7, with monthly sales of 22,987 and 26,224 units, respectively, have become a star combination driving the group's sales growth.

During the October 2023 GIMS in Doha, Qatar, Chery Brand unveiled five products from the Tiggo and Arrizo families, covering PHEV and ICE. Among them, two PHEV models, the Tiggo 8 Pro Plug-in Hybrid and Tiggo 7 Pro Plug-in Hybrid, made their global debut, contributing to Chery Group's accelerated development in the new energy field.

Chery's robust competitiveness in its products is underpinned by its solid technological foundation. In October, Chery Group's

"Technology within reach" 2023 "Chery Tech Day" demonstrated its technological investments and achievements to its global users. Guided by the "Yao Guang 2025" strategic framework, Chery made substantial upgrades in 19 core technologies, including platform architecture, chips, high-efficiency hybrid engines, hydrogen technology, electric drives, batteries, intelligent interaction, autonomous driving, and intelligent cloud platforms. These advancements resulted in five world-class technological advantages in "Safety, Energy consumption, Space, Intelligent cabin, and Intelligent driving", building a technological value innovation chain that caters to the needs of users in the new era.

Practicing green and low-carbon development and undertaking global corporate citizen responsibilities have become the foundation of Chery's responsibility to accelerate its development. In October, Chery shared its "In somewhere, For somewhere" global concept of win-win and sharing during the 2023 "Chery Tech Day". Witnessed by more than 600 international media representatives and global users from 40 countries and regions worldwide, Chery launched the 2023 Global Automotive Ecological Expo and invited two thousand riders worldwide to carry out "Public Benefit Riding" and practice the concept of green environmental protection.

Chery donated \$6 million to UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) to support children's education projects worldwide, including in China, Mexico, South Africa, and Türkiye. Chery also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), jointly promoting the protection of the world's vulnerable environments and delivering warmth and hope with responsibility and love.

Bank Muscat wins the best bank for ESG in Oman award by Euromoney

MUSCAT: In recognition of its pioneering role in the field of providing unmatched banking services, Bank Muscat was awarded with The Best Bank in Oman for the application of environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices by Euromoney, the leading Authority for the world's banking and financial markets. The award recognises efforts made in providing innovative financing solutions designed to meet customer requirements,

while focusing on responsible and sustainable practices and commitment to social and environmental issues to achieve long-term economic growth.

Bank Muscat's corporate social responsibility and sustainability strategy focuses on creating a positive impact and providing long-term benefits to the local community in the Sultanate of Oman, spanning various sectors such as education, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), youth, sports, environment and health. Bank Muscat is a pioneer in the field of social responsibility initiatives in the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman, committed to its vision to provide the best for the economy, society and the environment.

The Award reflects the bank's



Bank Muscat HQ

commitment to provide tailor-made banking solutions to meet the requirements of corporate and institutional customers as well as investors. Through a comprehensive methodology in terms of environmental, social and corporate governance practices, the bank applies the principles of transparency and responsibility with various stakeholders to strengthen relationships with customers, regulators, employees, investors, suppliers, government agencies and society as a whole.

Since its inception, the bank has been committed to the best practices in the field of corporate governance, especially with regard to compliance with The Charter of the Organization and Management of Public Joint Stock Companies developed by

the Capital Market Authority and the regulations for Corporate Governance of Banking and Financial Institutions issued by the Central Bank of Oman. Over the years, corporate governance has evolved in the bank not only by ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements but also by meeting the needs of stakeholders, as the bank strives for excellence in enhancing the satisfaction of its customers and shareholders on an ongoing basis.

As the market leader in corporate finance and advisory solutions encompassing corporate finance, project finance, debt capital markets, debt refinancing and restructurings, IPOs, structured financings, quasi-equity financings, private placements, as

well as mergers and acquisitions in Oman, the bank prides itself in its intricate understanding of diverse business requirements of its clients. It offers unmatched financial expertise and guidance, innovative funding solutions and wide array of services for various customer needs. It is also the largest asset manager in Oman with approximately US\$ 2.5 billion of Assets under Management (AUM).

Across its four-decade journey, Bank Muscat has established a unique presence in multiple fields. It has also been closely associated with the sustainable development process, contributing to the implementation of various development projects within government's efforts to strengthen the national economy. It has adopted clear strategies and implemented sustainable programmes and initiatives of a positive impact on society. The Bank, in general, implements a range of sustainable programmes in the field of social responsibility and community service, including Green Sports, Tadamun, and Maliyat programmes, in addition to Al Wathba Academy for small and medium enterprises and a strong partnership with NGOs serving people with disability.

EDO and its subsidiaries join global energy leaders at COP28

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 2

Energy Development Oman (EDO) and its subsidiaries, Petroleum Development Oman and Hydrogen Oman — Hydrom — are participating at COP28, showcasing Oman's potential in renewable energies and green hydrogen. The world-renowned conference will run until December 12th and serve as a global platform for Oman to underscore its commitment to a sustainable future through a robust strategy that bolsters economic opportunity and industry-adjacent

Oman's commitment to a sustainable future is reflected in Oman Vision 2040 and our comprehensive strategies for a clean energy transition by 2050

development for the Sultanate of Oman.

"Oman's commitment to a sustainable future is reflected in Oman Vision 2040 and our comprehensive strategies for a clean energy transition by 2050," said Eng Mazin al Lamki, CEO of EDO. "COP28 provides an



Mazin al Lamki, CEO of EDO

important opportunity for us to highlight the Sultanate of Oman's unique geographical advantages, and abundant natural resources, that make Oman an ideal destination for sustainable energy projects," he continued.

Oman's participation in COP28 aligns with its ambitious sustainability agenda and long-term strategies for achieving a clean energy future by 2050. With a focus on renewable energies and industry adjacent development, Oman aims to become one of the world's leading producers of green hydrogen, targeting production of

one million tons annually by 2030. Mazin al Lamki CEO of EDO will be speaking at panel discussion addressing energy perspectives from around the world.

Oman's participation in COP28 promises to be a significant milestone in the Sultanate of Oman's journey towards a clean energy future. EDO and its subsidiaries are looking forward to sharing valuable insights, fostering collaboration, and building partnerships that will find sustainable solutions for a decarbonised future and create a resilient global energy ecosystem.



Construction resumes on upscale Al Sawda Island project in Dhofar



Elements of the boutique 5-star property planned on Al Sawda Island

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, NOV 2

The Al Sawda Island Tourism Project in Dhofar Governorate has resumed construction after a hiatus of several years.

In an exclusive interview to the *Observer*, Eng Mohammed Ragab, the company's Senior Deputy Vice President of Construction, confirmed that the project is on track and is scheduled to open in December 2026.

This ambitious project aims to foster sustainable social development on a secluded island, designed to provide unparalleled privacy and exclusivity for each visitor. It will feature luxurious hotel suites approaching seven-star standards, nestled amidst a breathtaking landscape that seamlessly blends natural beauty with refined luxury.

Nestled within the Dhofar Governorate, Al Sawda Island forms part of the Kuriya Muriya archipelago of five islands, namely (Al Halaniyat, Al Sawda, Qabila, Gharzooni, and Hasik). It falls under the administrative purview of the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al

Halaniyat Islands.

The coveted concession for the development and revitalisation of the island was granted to local developer Muriya, a partnership of Egypt-based Orascom and Omran Group of the Sultanate of Oman. The company envisions transforming the island into a marine tourism haven, featuring a boutique five-star hotel with 32 lavish chalets equipped with private swimming pools and exclusive beachfront access for resort guests. The project will also encompass a range of amenities and services designed to revitalise the island and its neighbouring counterparts, fostering a vibrant hub of tourism and recreation.

Characterised by its rugged terrain and scattered sandy beaches, Al Sawda Island offers breathtaking vistas of the Indian Ocean, creating an idyllic setting for a luxurious tourist retreat. To reach this enchanting destination, visitors can embark on a scenic boat journey or utilise the island's well-equipped port facilities.

The project comprises 57 villa suites, along with a selection of captivating restaurants and lounges,

a diving centre, and comprehensive hotel facilities. It is committed to providing world-class services and amenities while adhering to the principles of environmental sustainability.

Eng Mohammed Ragab elaborated on the challenges faced by the company in executing the project. He stated, "The project's remote location, situated 220 kilometres east of Salalah and 60 kilometres from the coast of Hasik, necessitates the establishment of logistical hubs to facilitate the transportation of raw materials between the site and the surrounding areas."

Furthermore, he acknowledged the difficulties associated with stabilising the workforce on-site and ensuring their living needs, particularly given the presence of approximately 400 workers currently involved in the project.

He emphasised that the island's unique status as a sanctuary for the environment and wildlife demands the adoption of environmentally friendly construction materials and practices to minimise human intervention and preserve the delicate ecosystem.

Additionally, he highlighted the seasonal limitations posed by the rough seas during the autumn period, which restrict construction activities to eight months of the year, potentially hindering the timely delivery of essential materials.

Despite these challenges, Eng Mohammed Ragab expressed optimism regarding the project's economic benefits for the region. He stated, "The project's grand scale is poised to stimulate economic activity and trade within the Governorate of Dhofar, fostering a vibrant and prosperous business environment."

He further elaborated on the project's role in empowering small and medium-sized enterprises, which serve as the bedrock of Oman's economic development. He affirmed the company's unwavering commitment to supporting Omani women, who play a pivotal role in managing local businesses alongside their fellow Omani women. He expressed pride in the longstanding partnership with Omani women in the construction and logistics sectors, acknowledging their invaluable contributions.

MAWFR offers fisheries investment opportunities worth RO 9 million

FROM PAGE 13

Al Amri highlighted five investment opportunities have been presented for establishing fish collection centres in various regions, including the Taywi area in the Wilayat of Sur, the Saqalah area in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, the Juwairah area in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, the Haddin area, and another centre in the Wilayat of Sadah.

Furthermore, an investment opportunity for the management and operation of the fish market at the Al Seeb Fishing Port has also been offered according to the official. The port, which is 80 per cent complete, covers an area of 7,000 square metres and will include 12 shops, a quality control laboratory, an ice production factory, and cooling storage rooms, among other facilities.

Additionally, he shared that investment opportunities also include the management and

operation of the fish aggregation centre in Al Shuwaymiyah in the Wilayat of Shuwaymiyah, and the islands of Al Halaniyat for wholesale fish display and sale on an area of 5,000 square metres. Additionally, opportunities are presented for the management and operation of fish markets in the Wilayats of Barka and Samayil in the Madra region.

Al Amri further noted that various investment opportunities have been offered for fish markets, including the establishment, management, and operation in several regions, such as the creation and management of fish and vegetable markets, fruit and meat markets, poultry markets, and other investment projects in the Wilayat of Al Amerat. Opportunities also include the establishment and management of fish markets in the Wilayats of Al Buraimi and the village of Bseyah in the Wilayat of Bahla, as well as the establishment of a wholesale market in the Wilayat of Sinaw. — **ONA**

OCCI's Suhar Investment Forum to explore multi billion investment opportunities in Al Batinah North

MUSCAT: A forum is taking place next year to highlight investment opportunities in Al Batinah North Governorate. The Suhar Investment Forum 2024, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry (OCCI) Al Batinah North Governorate will aim to showcase a variety of investment opportunities across different sectors.

In a released statement, Chairman of OCCI Al Batinah North, Said al Abri, highlighted the volume of investments in the city, "Suhar, known for its large to medium-sized industries, many of which are export-oriented, has seen significant growth with over \$35 billion in cumulative investments from both foreign and domestic investors. This thriving economic environment is a testament to Suhar's robust investment appeal."

According to Al Abri, the forum will highlight investment ventures within emerging industries.

"The Forum will spotlight new and lucrative investment opportunities in rapidly



Chairman of OCCI Al Batinah North, Said al Abri

expanding sectors. These include manufacturing, exports, logistics, tourism, energy, renewables, real estate, minerals, agriculture, food processing, IT, fintech, e-commerce, healthcare, education, and retail, among others." He shared.

According to organisers, the forum — which is taking place in February 26-27 of 2024 — will consist of a conference, a parallel exhibition, and specialised B2B meetings.

The forum is expected to attract several government and agency officials, in addition to business owners and investors from Oman, the MENA region, Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Investors target bank stocks on Muscat Stock Exchange

MUSCAT: Bank stocks attracted investors on the Muscat Stock Exchange last week amid expectations of further improvement in financial results for 2023, following third-quarter financial results showing an increase in the profits of listed banks.

The trading value of bank stocks last week amounted to 12.3 million Omani rials, constituting 47.9 per cent of the total trading value witnessed by the exchange last week, which amounted to 25.6 million Omani rials. Banks also accounted for 67.5 per cent of the total number of traded securities, with 94.9 million shares traded. Banks also captured 20.7 per cent of the total number of executed transactions, with 1,096 transactions out of a total of 5,283 transactions on the Muscat Stock Exchange last week.

Investors in the past week focused on the shares of Bank Sohar International, Bank Muscat, and Bank Nizwa. The trading value of Bank Sohar's shares exceeded 7 million Omani rials, while Bank

Muscat witnessed trading of around 4.3 million Omani rials, and Bank Nizwa saw trading with a value of 792,000 Omani rials.

The share of Bank Nizwa increased by 4.1 per cent last week and closed at 100 baisas. The share of Bank Sohar rose by 3 per cent and closed at 102 baisas, while the share of Bank Muscat recorded a decline from 277 baisas to 272 baisas. Bank Sohar International and Bank Nizwa stated in separate statements last week that they have suspended merger negotiations between the two banks without providing any details.

Investors in the past week also focused on the shares of Omantel and OQ Gas Networks. Omantel's shares witnessed trading with a value of 5.9 million Omani rials, representing 23.2 per cent of the total trading value. OQ Gas Networks shares witnessed trading with a value of 3.3 million Omani rials, representing 12.8 per cent of the total trading value. The share also executed 2,769 transactions and rose during the week to 155 baisas but closed at 153 baisas, up



Investors in MSX

3 baisas from its previous closing.

The Muscat Stock Exchange recorded several positive indicators last week, as the main index rose

by 37 points and closed at 4,658 points, continuing its series of gains that began three weeks ago. Sectoral indices also recorded an

increase, led by the financial sector index, which rose by about 70 points, the industry sector index rose by 44 points, the services

sector index rose by 12 points, and the Sharia index recorded an increase of 12 points.

The Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed an increase in the trading value, which rose to 25.6 million Omani rials, compared to 13.7 million Omani rials in the previous week. The number of executed transactions increased from 2,827 transactions to 5,283 transactions.

Last week, the prices of 31 financial instruments rose, led by Jazeera Iron Products, whose share rose by 13.5 per cent and closed at 260 baisas, followed by Dhofar Insurance, whose share rose by 10.5 per cent and closed at 230 baisas, and Oman United Insurance, whose share rose by 10 per cent and closed at 165 baisas.

On the other hand, the prices of 25 financial instruments declined last week, led by the Oman Real Estate Fund, Oman and UAE Holding Company, Oman Chlorine, Dhofar Beverages and Foodstuff, and Oman United Insurance. — **ONA**

A lesson from an Omani tech entrepreneur



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If you're contemplating starting a tech business but are concerned about insufficient tech knowledge, take comfort in knowing that the opposite extreme also exists. There are entrepreneurs who dive into the tech world, believing they know all there is, but in reality, their limited understanding can lead to significant flaws in their envisioned business models. This is a tale of Arif, a young Omani entrepreneur, whose journey from a California business school to the tech world offers invaluable insights for aspiring tech entrepreneurs in Oman.

Arif's Story: The Dream and the Reality After graduating from a tier-2 university in California, not far from the tech hub of

Silicon Valley, Arif was eager to ride the wave of technological innovation. His business programme, infused with foundational tech knowledge, seemed to perfectly prepare him for launching a tech startup. It offered a structured approach to fundraising and crafting impressive pitch decks. However, Arif soon discovered that the tech portion of his curriculum, while theoretically solid, lacked practical depth.

The Misunderstanding of Tech Roles Arif's programme assumed its students would become 'full-stack developers' — professionals capable of handling all aspects of a tech project, from data architecture to front-end user experience. This misconception led Arif to believe his startup

needed just a CTO alongside him as CEO. The reality, however, was starkly different. His business idea required a diverse team of specialists, including a data architect, a backend developer, and at least one front-end developer.

Financial Miscalculations and Realizations Initially, Arif sought \$500,000 in funding but managed to secure only \$350,000 from five investors. He soon realised that hiring a qualified CTO would consume nearly half of this amount. Fortuitously, a friend agreed to join as a CTO for shares, but his limited knowledge only highlighted the need for additional expert team members.

Escalating Costs and Strategic Shifts The team faced a harsh

reality: hiring expert developers to complete their app in six months would cost over \$250,000. Despite this, Arif and his team proceeded without salaries. They soon added a Chief Marketing Officer to attract early users for their beta release. However, marketing costs and the CMO's salary rapidly depleted their funds.

Pause and Reflection Six months in, with development and promotion becoming unsustainable, Arif and his team decided to put the project on hold. This hiatus created tension with their investors, a common challenge in the tech startup world.

A New Beginning with Learned Wisdom Arif is now embarking on a second

fundraising campaign, this time seeking \$1.25 million — a figure he's calculated with much greater precision. He hopes his story, shared through the Oman Observer, will remind young Omani entrepreneurs that the glittering startup scene of Silicon Valley isn't always as golden as it appears.

Arif's journey is a reminder of the myriad of challenges and realities of launching a tech startup. His experience underscores the importance of understanding the intricacies of tech roles, the true costs involved, and the value of practical experience over theoretical knowledge. As Arif embarks on his next venture, his story stands as a guiding beacon for Oman's aspiring tech entrepreneurs.

Surging US oil production brings down prices



Clifford Krauss

American oil fields are gushing again, helping to drive down fuel prices but also threatening to undercut efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Only three years after US oil production collapsed during the pandemic, energy companies are cranking out a record 13.2 million barrels a day, more than Russia or Saudi Arabia. The flow of oil has grown by roughly 800,000 barrels a day since early 2022, and analysts expect the industry to add 500,000 more barrels a day next year.

The main driver of the production surge is a delayed response to the Russian attack of Ukraine in February 2022, which sent the price of oil to well over \$100 a barrel for the first time in nearly a decade. The wells that were drilled last year are now in full swing.

With the surge in output, gasoline prices have fallen by close to \$2 a gallon since summer 2022 and are back to levels that prevailed in 2021. The increase in production has also provided the Biden administration with substantial leverage in its dealings with oil-exporting foes such as Russia, Venezuela and Iran while reducing its need to cajole more friendly countries such as Saudi Arabia to temper prices.

But the comeback in US oil production poses big risks, too. More supply and lower prices could increase demand for fossil fuels when world leaders, who are meeting in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, are straining to reach agreements that would accelerate the fight against climate change. Scientists generally agree that the world is far from achieving the goals necessary to avoid the catastrophic effects of global warming, which is caused mainly by the burning of fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas and coal.

"We're achieving energy security and reducing inflation by leveraging high-emitting, carbon-intensive oil production," said Amy Myers Jaffe, director of the Energy, Climate Justice and Sustainability Lab at New York University. "We're going to need to address that conflict."

The United States now exports roughly 4 million barrels a day,



This week the average price for a gallon of regular gasoline was \$3.25 a gallon. — *The New York Times*

more than any OPEC member except Saudi Arabia. On balance, the United States still imports more than it exports because domestic demand exceeds supply and many American refineries can more easily refine the heavier oil produced in Canada and Latin America than the lighter crude that oozes out of the shale fields of New Mexico, North Dakota and Texas.

Nearly every extra barrel of American crude produced is being exported, mostly to Europe and Asia, where supplies are tight. In addition, the natural gas that often bubbles up with oil has led to record exports of gas and helped to lower prices for that fuel and for electricity, much of which is produced at gas-fired power plants in the United States.

The surge in US production has helped to end the energy crisis that gripped Europe after Russia attacked Ukraine — at least for now. European countries have replaced much of the gas they were buying from Russia with gas from

the United States, Qatar and other exporters. They have also reduced their use of natural gas, a phenomenon that a mild winter last year helped.

"There is a foreign policy dividend in keeping a lid on oil prices," said David Goldwyn, a leading energy diplomat in the Obama administration.

Not long ago, the US oil industry was in deep trouble. It had suffered repeated busts since 2015, culminating in a collapse of prices during the pandemic. Investors fled. Exxon Mobil was kicked out of the Dow Jones industrial average, and some European oil companies announced plans to pivot from fossil fuels to renewables more quickly.

With concerns over climate change growing, Joe Biden, during his 2020 presidential campaign, promised to stop drilling on federal lands and federal waters offshore. He also pledged to accelerate the transition to renewable energy and electric cars to drastically

reduce the emissions responsible for climate change.

But as president, Biden has taken a much different tack. Although he has supported green energy and battery-powered cars, he has also hectored oil companies to increase production in an effort to drive down prices for consumers. He has approved a large drilling project in Alaska over the objections of environmentalists and a small number of offshore oil and gas permits.

Biden has been under pressure from some Democrats to trumpet gains in oil production as a way of reaching out to voters who are leery of high gas prices. He has yet to do so — but his administration has not complained about the production, either.

John Kirby, spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, said the administration was committed to keeping energy prices low.

"The president is going to keep focusing, as he has been,

on a healthy global market that's properly balanced and that can continue to bring the price of gasoline down here in the United States," Kirby said.

The pandemic took a heavy toll on US oil production, which fell to just over 11 million barrels a day at the end of 2020 from 13 million at the end a year earlier. Dozens of oil companies went out of business, and the number of rigs in use fell to 350 in 2020, from 800, as thousands of field workers lost their jobs.

Most of the new US oil production is coming from the Permian Basin, which straddles Texas and New Mexico. There are also some new projects and expansions in Alaska and offshore in the Gulf of Mexico.

"It's the mother of all comeback stories," said Robert McNally, who was a senior energy adviser under President George W. Bush. "The last couple of years have shown that you should never bet against the US oil sector."

— *The New York Times*

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WEATHER

Passengers stand in line at Munich's airport after heavy snowfall hit Bavaria and its capital Munich, Germany, on Saturday. — Reuters



FASHION

Models present creation by fashion designer Amilani Perera during the Colombo Fashion Week in Colombo. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

A woman shows her ink marked finger after casting her vote outside a polling station during Telangana's state assembly elections Hyderabad. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Vicky Kaushal attends the launch event of 'U Mumba' jersey for the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) Season 10 and promotion of his upcoming film 'SamBahadur' in Mumbai. — AFP



TOURISM

Aerial view showing the wreckage of a Douglas DC-6 aircraft turned into a hotel in San Gil, Santander department, Colombia. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | DECEMBER 3, 2023 | JUMADA AL ULA 19, 1445 AH

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Bara'a is a timeless Omani dance that ensures cultural continuity

Oman's rich cultural heritage resonates through intricate dances and music, blending pre-Islamic roots with Islamic and global influences. Bara'a dance stands out, celebrated across occasions, deeply entrenched in Oman's fabric and recognised as intangible heritage.... P20

ENTERTAINMENT

Team behind 'The Taste of Things' hopes to conquer Oscars with French food

CONTROVERSY HAS SIMMERED around France's entry for the Oscars, 'The Taste of Things' — a love letter to the country's culinary traditions — but film-maker Tran Anh Hung and star chef Pierre Gagnaire say the art of cooking is worth celebrating.

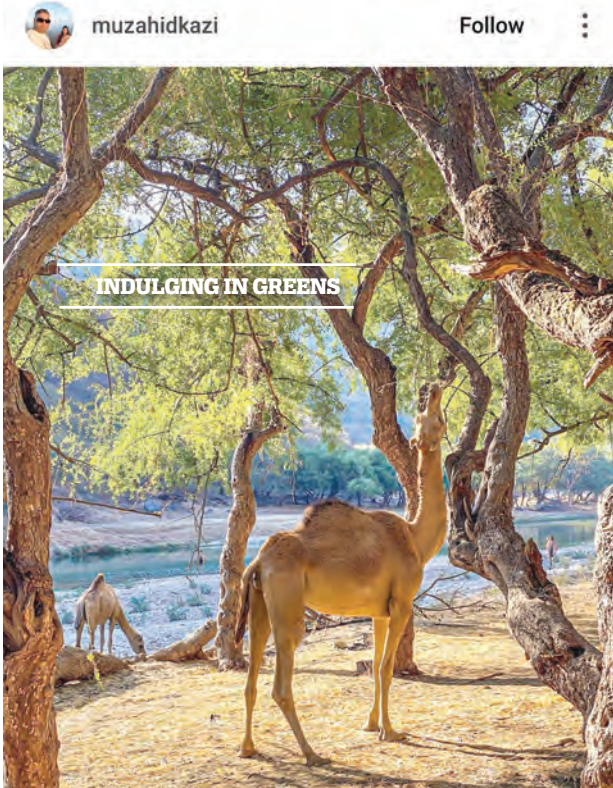
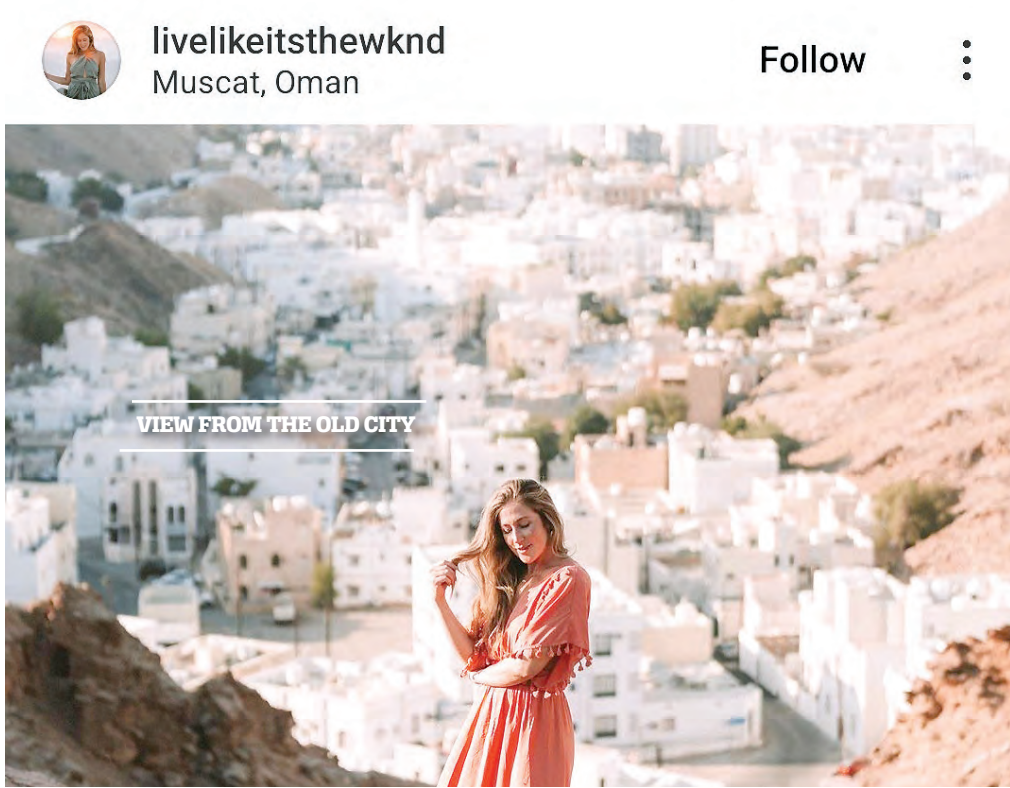
The movie, which hopes to win an Oscar nod in January, is a sumptuous 19th century romance about a cook (Academy Award winner Juliette Binoche), the gourmand she works for (Benoit Magimel) — and the exquisite dishes they create. 'I've been looking for a subject about cooking for 20 years, because I wanted to make a film about an art form. And I chose culinary art — not painting, not music,' Tran told AFP at a New York screening hosted by the French government. The director, who came to France as a child in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, first earned international attention with 'Cyclo' and 'The Scent of Green Papaya' — both set in the Asian country. With 'The Taste of Things,' the 60-year-old film-maker said he hopes to 'pay tribute to my country, which welcomed me when I was 12 years old,' explaining how he was 'amazed' by French culture upon his arrival. For the 73-year-old Gagnaire, who currently has restaurants in Paris,



London, Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai and Dubai, working on the film both as a consultant and in a small on-screen role was a way of 'defending our know-how' in the kitchen. 'In the kitchens, in the back, we build things and defend our culture. In the kitchens, we often talk — there are French words,' Gagnaire told AFP. 'And by doing what we do, we sell not just taste — we sell crockery, we sell wine, we sell everything that revolves around the arts of the table.' - ART CONSUMED BY 'BUSINESS' - Tran and Gagnaire were in New York to promote 'The Taste of Things' as it makes its way through the Oscars selection process, hopefully resulting in a nomination, to be announced on January 23. The film, which debuted in Cannes in May and opened this month to tepid reviews in France, was selected to vie for the best international feature film prize over Justine Triet's acclaimed courtroom drama 'Anatomy of a Fall,' spark-

ing criticism. That film, about a woman accused of murdering her husband, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes and managed to attract more than one million spectators in cinemas in France. Some felt that the choice of 'Taste' as France's Oscars entry was a way of punishing Triet for some outspoken statements she made against the government of President Emmanuel Macron when she won the Palme. 'These days, we're all about 'quick and done' whereas cooking takes time. It takes time. (...) This cinema pays homage to slowness.' Tran, who won best director honours in Cannes, says cinema as an art form is 'becoming increasingly rare' in favour of more commercially viable fare. 'I think that today's art world is too much eaten up by, how shall I put it, business,' he said. 'The Taste of Things' is adapted from a Swiss novel written in 1920. It will open in the United States in February 2024, just before the Oscars in March. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Maria Callas Was Opera's Defining Diva. She Still Is.

HER VOICE IS the shadow that remains after shock, after anger: the sound of a woman realising she has nothing left to live for.

It is the second act of Verdi's opera "La Traviata." Violetta and Alfredo, a prostitute and a wealthy young man, have fallen madly in love. But his father confronts her, demanding she drop the disreputable affair to salvage the marriage prospects of Alfredo's sister.

For Violetta, it is an unbearable sacrifice, but she'll do it. "Dite alla giovine," she sings, in a broken murmur: Tell your daughter that I will abandon the one good thing I have, for her sake.

Singing that passage on May 28, 1955, at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, soprano Maria Callas reached the phrase about how "bella e pura" Alfredo's sister is — how beautiful and pure — and inserted the tiniest breath before "pura."

It's a barely noticeable silence, but within it is a black hole of resignation. Callas' split-second pause achingly suggests Violetta knows that if she, too, were pure, her happiness would not be expendable.

Tiny details like this are how Callas — who would have turned 100 on Dec. 2 — gave opera's over-the-top melodramas a startling sense of reality, and her characters the psychological depth and nuance of actual people. Tiny details like this, captured on hundreds of recordings, are how this most mythical of singers has stubbornly resisted drifting entirely into



myth.

The defining diva of the 20th century, Callas is not so far from us in some ways; a normal life span would have brought her well into the 21st. Those many recordings — endlessly remastered, repackaged and rereleased — have kept her in our ears, the benchmark of what is possible in opera, musically and emotionally. Her dramatic art and dramatic life, often intertwined, have made her an enduring cultural touchstone: a coolly glamorous stare in Apple ads and the inspiration for plays (including a Tony Award winner), performances by Marina Abramovic (bad) and Monica Bellucci (worse), a coming film starring Angelina Jolie (we'll see), even a hologram tour (sigh).

Yet Callas can also seem like a figure of faraway history. Her lonely death was back in 1977, when she was just 53 — and by then, her days of true performing glory were almost 20 years behind her. The number of people who saw her live, particularly in staged opera, is dwindling, and her short career was just early enough that precious little of it was filmed.

So she has been for decades, for most of us, a creation of still images and audio. We have to use those tools to conjure what her performances were like, to complete them.

But when you hear her, this is surprisingly easy. You listen to that "Dite alla giovine" and immediately see, in her voice, the blankness of her face, the mouth barely moving and the rest a mask of surren-

was refined where others were vulgar. In her powerfully expressive voice and magnetic presence, opera really, truly mattered.

Watch her perform "Tu che le vanità" from Verdi's "Don Carlo" in concert in 1962, near the end of her career. You are aware even before she opens her mouth of opera's founding paradoxes. She is grand, and honest; epic, and intimate.

Opera in the modern era is at its core an exhumation of the past, a literal revival. Callas is the essential singer — she is opera — not because of her instrument or her acting, but because, with a combination of born



intuition and carefully acquired skill, she imagined and reconstructed a vanished world.

She took on a whole repertory — the bel canto of the early 19th century, notably operas of Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini and Gioachino Rossini — that had been ignored or distorted for generations. And she approached pieces that had never left the public, like "La Traviata," Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" and Bellini's "Norma," as if they were being done for the first time. The title character of "Lucia," then widely assumed to be a chirpy

cipher, was in Callas' throat a morbid, ecstatic gothic heroine — more intense, and more believable. In the wake of World War II, she showed that Europe's patrimony could emerge from the rubble.

Born in New York to Greek immigrants, Callas grew up listening to Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts and, at 13, returned with her mother to Greece. Just a year later, she was singing Carmen's "Habanera" and Norma's "Casta diva" as a conservatory student in Athens.

She had no real apprenticeship. There were no supporting parts, no young-artist programmes. By her early 20s, she was singing some of the most challenging roles in the repertory; by her early 30s, she was singing them all over the world.

Sixty years after Callas sang "Medea," the star of a new production



at the Met in 2021 said Callas' legacy hadn't stopped being the "elephant in the room." Opera is still asking the question that writer Ethan Mordden recalled being posed by a friend back in 1969: "Is there life after Callas?"

Should there be? She and her flash of a career remain a beacon of artistic integrity and profundity — of the cultivation of tradition and craft, of a desire to bring the past to bear on the present — in a culture that values those qualities less and less.

Costume designer Piero Tosi was there for her great "Traviata" at La Scala in 1955. "She scarcely seemed to be singing," he said of her "Dite alla giovine." "Yet everyone heard."

Impossibly distant, yet immensely present: At her centennial, Callas still occupies a position in opera something like the sun.

— NYT / With Photos from AFP

FILM

'Leave The World Behind': Strangers, danger and layers, says Julia Roberts



US ACTRESS JULIA Roberts says her new film "Leave The World Behind" is a multilayered disaster thriller that allowed her to play someone very different from herself. Executive produced by former US President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, the movie is written and directed by "Mr. Robot" creator Sam Esmail and based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Rumaan Alam. It sees Roberts' character Amanda, her husband and two children head on an impromptu holiday in a small Long Island town. Their getaway is interrupted when a man

and his daughter, played by Mahershala Ali and Myha'la Herrold, turn up on their doorstep claiming to be the owners of the upmarket residence and requesting to stay the night. As tension builds between the two families, strange events start occurring around them and they find themselves under the same roof trying to make sense of the chaos outside.

"There's always about 17 and a half things going on at one time in every scene for each person. It

was just all the layers of the people and the circumstances," Roberts said at the film's premiere in London on Wednesday.

The Hollywood star cherished the challenge of playing cynical advertising director Amanda.

"Just the idea of playing someone who's sort of intrinsically suspicious and a little prickly, which is not my nature, but to still make her human and approachable and likeable."

Fans of Alam's book should not expect a faithful adaptation, Esmail warned.

"Something that works in a literary medium may not work in a cinematic medium. I was very upfront with Rumaan that I really was going to take liberties with the interpretation. I ran through all the ideas, he was on board and then in a lot of ways I think we both got what we wanted because his book and the film are kind of two different standalone pieces that kind of operate independent of one another."

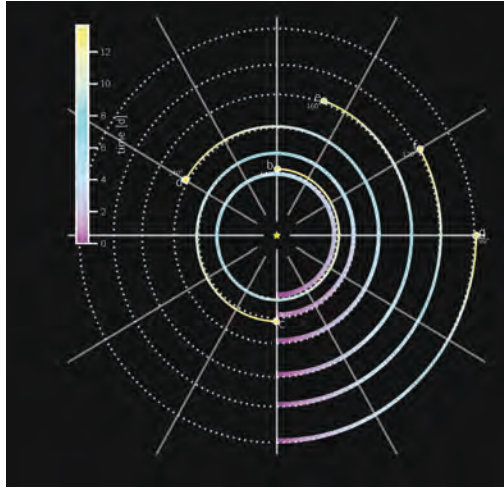
"Leave The World Behind", which also stars Ethan Hawke and Kevin Bacon, is out in select cinemas and starts streaming on Netflix on December 8. — Reuters

SPACE

Six planets found in synchronised orbit may help solve cosmic puzzle

THEY ARE THE MOST common type of planet observed in our Milky Way galaxy - two to three times the diameter of Earth but smaller than Neptune, and orbiting closer to their stars than our solar system's innermost planet Mercury does to the sun.

Called "sub-Neptunes," they are absent from our solar system and their fundamental nature has remained a puzzle. But the discovery announced on Wednesday of six of them in synchronised orbits around a star about 20 per cent smaller



in mass than the sun is giving astronomers hope that an answer could come soon.

The researchers determined that the six planets were in a rare condition called orbital resonance, with their synchronised orbits around the star apparently unchanged since they formed about 4 billion years ago. That indicates no chaotic event like a giant impact event has perturbed their orbits. "The resonance aspect is

really interesting - partly the mathematical beauty of it," said astronomer Hugh Osborn of the University of Bern in Switzerland, one of the authors of the research published in the journal Nature.

"The key thing about this system is its potential to unlock the secrets of these mysterious sub-Neptune planets, which we know so little about," Osborn added. "These are definitely

not Earth-like planets."

Hundreds of sub-Neptunes have been discovered.

"What these sub-Neptunes are made of is an active topic of research in the field since there are multiple combinations of rock, water and atmospheric composition that can reproduce the bulk properties - mass, radius and density - of the planets," said University of Chicago astronomer Rafael Luque, lead author of the study. —AFP

Bara'a is a timeless Omani dance that ensures cultural continuity

By Balqees al Oraiimi

Oman's dance and music journeys reflect an intricate tapestry of cultural evolution. From pre-Islamic eras resonating with Razha and Ardha dances accompanied by traditional instruments to the Islamic infusion of spirituality into artistic expressions during celebrations like Eid al Fitr, the country's heritage breathes through its rhythmic beats. Colonial encounters, notably with the Portuguese and even other Arab and African cultures, brought forth a fusion that enriched local dances, embracing the diversity of cultural exchange.

In the modern era, Oman's artistic landscape harmoniously blends tradition with contemporary influences. Government initiatives and cultural festivals like the Muscat Festival serve as bastions of preservation, ensuring the continuity of these cherished art forms.

Of the many different celebratory dances in Oman, Bara'a is one of the vibrant ones that stands as an emblematic cornerstone among Omani youth folk expressions, gracing every occasion that brings people together in joyous revelry, be it weddings, festive gatherings, or national celebrations.

This cherished art, deeply woven into the fabric of Omani heritage, can be seen from the coastal cities of Sur, Al Ashkharah, and the Dhofar Governorate, serving as the catalyst for its dissemination from Dhofar to the southeastern expanse of the Sultanate of Oman.

A fixture in national festivities, cultural galas, and tourism showcases, the Bara'a dance secured its rightful place on the list of intangible cultural heritage in 2010. Its very essence embodies the virtues of chivalry, courage, strength, generosity, and the renowned hospitality epitomised by the Bedouin culture.

As a rhythmic marvel, the art of

Bara'a boasts diverse rhythms such as the Rahmani, Kasco, Maidan, Chobani, Liwa, Sharh Dhofar, and other traditional beats, demanding exhaustive hours for a single cycle of its captivating melodies to be completed.

With its distinctive performance style, the dance requires a specific number of participants, typically ranging between two to six individuals, each attired in their traditional garb. A crucial element of this attire is the dishdasha, complemented by each performer wielding a dagger in their right hand while gripping the fixed dishdasha mid-length with their left. The choreography pulsates with rapid, powerful jumps and synchronised movements, as the dancers gracefully advance, retreat, and twirl, eventually kneeling in unison before the ensemble playing the melodies of the Bara'a.

The esteemed poets and singers who have elevated Bara'a in Oman include Mohammed Habrishi, Saleh and Said Awlad Faraj al Ghassani, Jamaan Diwan, and Saad Rajab al Mughni.

The significance of intangible cultural heritage transcends boundaries, offering a revealing glimpse into the cultures of nations and their influences on others, acting as a bridge that fosters communication between diverse cultural legacies.

Oman's commitment to preserving its cherished folk arts speaks volumes about its dedication to safeguarding these invaluable legacies while navigating the Sultanate of Oman's contemporary development and the intersection of Omani culture with global civilisations.

Recognising the paramount importance of this aspect of cultural heritage, the Authority ratified the International Convention for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage through Decree No. 56 of 2005, solidifying Oman's steadfast resolve to uphold its cultural inheritance for future generations.

Of the many different celebratory dances in Oman, Bara'a is one of the vibrant ones that stands as an emblematic cornerstone among Omani youth folk expressions, gracing every occasion that brings people together in joyous revelry, be it weddings, festive gatherings, or national celebrations.

