

P15

KEY ROLE FOR GREEN
HYDROGEN IN PDO'S
DECARBONISATION
STRATEGY



P20

INVASIVE SPECIES
A GROWING AND
COSTLY THREAT, KEY
REPORT FINDS



P12

JELENA
OSTAPENKO
ENDS SWIATEK
REIGN



MUSCAT

TOURISM SECTOR
GENERATES RO 1.9BN



The tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman has contributed RO 1.9 billion by the end of 2022, posting an increase of 47.3 per cent over the corresponding period in 2021, when the sector registered RO 1.3 billion. Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the tourism sector posted a direct added value of RO 1.1 billion at the end of 2022, up from RO 804.9 million in 2021 (33% higher). The tourism sector contributed 2.4% to the gross domestic product.

DETAILS ON P6

FREELANCERS CAN
HAVE BANK ACCOUNT

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued instructions to banks to facilitate the opening of bank accounts for commercial purposes for those with freelancing and independent professions, and to provide the necessary credit facilities for this category. The CBO said freelancing and independent work are individual businesses that enable an individual to provide services or products without the need to establish a workplace or obtain a commercial licence.

DETAILS ON P5



NOW, DOWNLOAD
OMAN OBSERVER E-PAPER
FROM OUR APP



omanobserver.com

Royal Decree establishes Oman’s Embassy in Australia

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued four Royal Decrees. Royal Decree No (56/ 2023) ratifying the agreement between Government of the Sultanate of Oman and Government of the State of Palestine signed in Ramallah on July 7, 2023 on establishing a Committee for Consultations and Bilateral Cooperation.

Article (1) states that the above-mentioned agreement

shall be ratified in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No (57/ 2023) ratifying the agreement on air services between Government of the Sultanate of Oman and Government of the Republic of Senegal signed in Muscat on June 21, 2023.

Article (1) states that the above-mentioned agreement shall be ratified in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No (58/ 2023) endorsing the Sultanate of Oman’s joining the Convention on establishing the International Organisation for Marine Aids

to Navigation signed in Paris on January 27, 2021.

Article (1) endorses the Sultanate of Oman’s joining the Convention on establishing the International Organization for Marine Aids, in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the Ratification Document for the above-mentioned convention in line with its provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No (59/ 2023) establishing the Sultanate of Oman’s Embassy in Australia

Article (1) states that the Sultanate of Oman’s Embassy shall be established in Australia. Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

EDUCATION SYSTEM NEED
TO PRESERVE SOCIAL SET-UP

H H SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES GCC EDUCATION MINISTERS

MUSCAT: The educational work in GCC countries is progressing at a steady pace, inspired by the determination of the countries’ leaders to establish common visions to upgrade education in a manner that better serves the future of the GCC people. This underscores the leading role of education in achieving the common objectives, notably sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This was stated by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, as the Sultanate of Oman on Monday hosted the 7th meeting of the GCC Education Ministers’ Committee. The meeting discussed a wide range of topics, including the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the field of education, the effects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) on education and ways to instill principles of financial culture in school students.

Dr Madeeha said that, within the framework of a system to foster comprehensive quality,



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Monday received GCC Higher Education and Research Ministers and GCC Education Ministers.

PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

the GCC education sector’s accomplishments are noteworthy and that these efforts, which spearheaded the GCC march, began to yield fruit in reality.

Educational indicators issued by international organisations shows that the GCC countries continue to achieve good results in various international studies, an evidence of which was the rising number of GCC students

who obtained advanced standards in areas covered by the respective studies, she said.

The tremendous development in the field of information technology contributed to human advancement and led to the achievement of economic development and social and economic well-being, Dr Madeeha said, stressing that “this requires our educational

systems to protect moral and religious values and preserve the social structure in our GCC societies”.

Dr Madeeha said that the meeting coincides with Unesco’s issuance of the guiding principles for information and communications technology (ICT) in education policies and masterplans. “The issuance of the guidelines also coincides with the organisation’s celebration of Technical Education Week (in September 2023)”.

Speaking on the occasion, Jassim Mohammed al Budaiwi, GCC Secretary General, commended the efforts of the GCC Education Ministers’ Committee in lending strong support to the GCC, since its inception in 1975.

Al Budaiwi also valued the efforts of GCC education ministries during the Covid-19 pandemic. This stance reflected the ministers’ ability to deal with disasters within their scopes of action, he added. **SEE ALSO P3**

OQ GAS
NETWORKS
INTENDS TO
FLOAT ON MSX

MUSCAT: OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), (under transformation), on Monday announced its intention to proceed with an initial public offering (IPO) and listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), which is expected to take place in October. The IPO is subject to receiving the required regulatory approvals from the Capital Market Authority (CMA). OQGN’s planned listing will allow investors to gain exposure to the exclusive operator and owner of the NGTN.

The selling shareholders expect to sell up to 49 per cent of the total issued share capital of OQGN, with the company and the selling shareholders retaining the right to amend the size of the offering at any time before the end of the subscription period at their sole discretion, subject to applicable laws and the approval of the CMA. Immediately following the offering, a minimum of 51.0 per cent shareholding will continue to be held by OQ.

DETAILS ON P13

SPECIAL EDITION OF ‘COLLECTION IN MARINE SCIENCE’

MUSCAT: The National Museum has issued a special edition titled ‘Collection in Marine Science’. The issue documents the greatness of what the Omani navigator Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi wrote and reviving his marine prowess and navigational creativity.

The collection documents the origin of the manuscript titled “Kitab al-Fawa'id fi 'Ilm al-Bahr wa al-Qawa'id”, (Collection of Manuscripts of Benefits in the Science of the Sea and Rules, as well as the abbreviation container in the origins of marine science and Arajiz), which was loaned from Al Assad National Library in the Syrian Arab Republic to the National Museum since 2019. In the opening speech of



the publication, Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said: “The display of the original manuscript “Collection in the Science of the Seas” by the author Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi at the National Museum is an affirmation of the Omani identity of this unique

scientific and historical personality, which came in the context of the existing cooperation between the National Museum and the Ministry of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic within the context of cultural diplomacy pursued by the National Museum.”

He added: “The manuscript was loaned to the museum for a period of three years for the purpose of preserving before it was made available for museum display. Coordination was maintained with the National Records and Archives Authority in order to restore this document to its original condition, through the implementation of an integrated programme for preservation, and revision”. — ONA

■ UNWAVERING DEDICATION FOR PHOTOGRAPHY



Meet Ammar bin Ali al Riyami, an exceptional Omani photographer, who is leaving his mark in the world of photography. As a member of the photography group at Sultan Qaboos University, Ammar has achieved numerous accolades and awards, showcasing his unwavering dedication to capturing life’s intricate details.

DETAILS ON P18



THE UNSEEN FORCE WITHIN REACH



Scan here

 oqgn.om | [@weareoqgn](https://www.instagram.com/weareoqgn)



This announcement has not been reviewed or approved by the Oman Capital Market Authority or any regulatory authority elsewhere and the information contained in it does not constitute a public offering of securities or solicitation of any offer to buy securities for the purpose of Omani law, including Commercial Companies Law (Royal Decree 18/2019), Securities Law (Royal Decree 46/2022), CMA Executive Regulations (CMA Decision 01/2009) or Regulations for Public Joint Stock Companies (Decision No. 27/2021) which can only be done through a prospectus approved by and registered with the Oman Capital Market Authority. This announcement does not, therefore, constitute (and should not be considered) a prospectus for the public offering of securities in the Sultanate of Oman.



Sayyid Fahd receives GCC education ministers

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers on Monday received GCC Higher Education and Research Ministers and GCC Education Ministers.

The ministers were attending the 23rd meeting of the Committee of GCC Ministers of Higher Education and Research and the 7th meeting of the Committee of GCC Ministers of Education, currently hosted by the Sultanate of Oman.

After welcoming the guests, HH Sayyid Fahd expressed his appreciation for the efforts they have been undertaking to develop education, higher education and research. He stressed the importance of achieving further cooperation among member states to ensure the realisation of the desired goals in those sectors.

Then, HH Sayyid Fahd spoke about the attention accorded to education in Oman, notably the qualitative expansion taking place in this sector and the efforts made to upgrade it in line with a long-term future vision.

HH Sayyid Fahd explained that education constitutes the basic pillar of the progress and prosperity of nations. He added that investment in the field of education and research figures among the top priorities of the

drive to keep pace progress in the world.

The meeting reviewed the most important topics on the agenda of the two ministerial meetings. It studied Oman Education Ministry's proposals on topics of priority in cooperation and exchange of expertise among GCC states.

The meeting also stressed the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the educational process and the need to enhance cooperation in the fields of education, research, studies and teacher training, with emphasis on educational programmes aimed at protecting social values.

GCC ministers expressed their thanks to the Sultanate of Oman, chair of the current session of the GCC, for hosting these two meetings. They valued the good preparations for the meetings which, they said, contributed to achieving a positive outcome. They also hailed Oman's constructive role in the success of the GCC march.

The meeting was attended by Jassim Mohammed Al Budaiwi, GCC Secretary-General, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education and Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

— ONA



Renovated Taqah Castle a major khareef draw

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 4

Since its restoration and reopening, Taqah Castle, a historical gem located in Dhofar's Wilayat of Taqah, has been pulling in significant numbers of visitors eager to enjoy its distinctive architecture and heritage up-close.

More than 3,000 visitors have toured this landmark over the past 45 days since its grand unveiling. Taqah Castle, according to Amir bin Mohammed bin Salim, in-charge of the castle, is a two-storey architectural marvel. It encompasses a watchtower (Al Barza), a guards' chamber, a compact holding area, heritage exhibition hall, multiple chambers, storage for weaponry and provisions, the governor's suite, children's enclave, council chamber, and three security towers.

The castle's ground level accommodates the heritage gallery, storage for arms and provisions, and a series of chambers, while the upper floor



houses the governor's quarters, spaces for daytime and evening relaxation, a fully equipped kitchen, the governor's private chamber, and a children's area within the council chamber.

With a history tracing back to the 19th century, this castle originally served as the dwelling of the Wali of Taqah, the local governor, before transforming into a military barracks and later a prison.

In 1994, it underwent extensive restoration, transitioning into a

captivating museum open to the public.

Taqah Castle has emerged as a beloved tourist hotspot, offering a captivating window into Oman's rich heritage and cultural tapestry. Additionally, it has become a cherished venue for weddings and various events.

Having undergone restoration in 2018, the castle witnessed comprehensive repairs to its walls, towers, gates, and the installation of modern lighting and signage.

Wadi Al Sarrami road opens to traffic

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, opened the Wadi Al Sarrami road in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah to traffic, on Monday.

The road underwent repair and rehabilitation work after being damaged by cyclone Shaheen.

The rehabilitation work included the pavement of the existing dirt road.



The brands
you trust, have
a brand new
name



OQ Gas Networks S.A.O.G (under transformation) announces intention to float on the Muscat Stock Exchange

- OQ S.A.O.C, (“OQ”) directly and indirectly through Oman Energy Trading Company Limited (“OETCL”) and Oman Oil Services Limited (“OOSL” together with OQ and OETCL, the “**Selling Shareholders**”) intends to offer up to 49% of OQ Gas Networks S.A.O.G. (under transformation) share capital.
- The listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange will provide investors with access to the growth of the Company, which holds a natural monopoly over essential gas transportation in Oman as the exclusive operator and owner of the Company’s natural gas transportation network (“NGTN”) in Oman.
- The subscription period is expected to commence in September, after receiving the required approval from the Capital Market Authority of the Sultanate of Oman.



Muscat: OQ Gas Networks S.A.O.G. (under transformation) (“OQGN” or the “Company”) today announces its intention to proceed with an initial public offering (the “IPO” or the “Offering”) and listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (“MSX”), which is expected to take place in October 2023, subject to receiving the required regulatory approvals from the Capital Market Authority of the Sultanate of Oman (the “CMA”). The Company’s planned listing will allow investors to gain exposure to the exclusive operator and owner of the NGTN.

KEY DETAILS OF THE OFFERING

- The Selling Shareholders expect to sell up to 49% of the total issued share capital of OQGN, with the Company and the Selling Shareholders retaining the right to amend the size of the Offering at any time before the end of the subscription period at their sole discretion, subject to applicable laws and the approval of the CMA. Immediately following the Offering, a minimum of 51.0% shareholding will continue to be held by OQ.
- The Offering is being offered to eligible investors in Oman and qualified institutional and other investors in a number of countries (the “Category I Investors”) and retail investors in Oman (“Category II Investors”). Further information on the eligibility requirements for participation in the Offering will be available in the Offering Document upon its publication.
- The Subscription period for Category I and Category II investors is expected to commence in September, after receiving the required approval from the CMA.
- Shariyah Review Bureau (“SRB”) has issued a pronouncement confirming that, in its view, based on the circumstances as at the date of this pronouncement, the Offering is Sharia compliant in accordance with pertinent Sharia principles of the AAOIFI Sharia standards as of the date of this statement.
- Admission of the Shares to trading on the MSX is expected in October 2023 (“Admission”).

DIVIDEND POLICY

- The Company intends to adopt a semi-annual dividend distribution policy to pay dividends in cash after the Offer.
- The Company expects to pay the first dividend distribution of OMR 33 million for the first nine months of 2023 around January 2024 and expects to pay the second dividend distribution of OMR 11 million for the last three months of 2023 around April 2024.
- The Company currently expects to pay a dividend in respect of the fiscal year ending 31 December 2024, which will be the higher of 90% of the Company’s profit for the year ending 31 December 2024 or a 5% increase on the aggregate dividends paid for 2023.
- For 2025, the Company expects to pay a dividend, which will be the higher of 90% of the profit for the year ending 31 December 2025 or a 5% increase on the dividends paid for 2024.
- The Company’s ability to pay dividends is dependent on a number of factors, including the availability of distributable reserves, its capital expenditure plans and other cash requirements in future periods, as well as the necessary approvals.

Mansoor Al Abdali, Managing Director of OQGN, said: “OQGN, as the exclusive operator of the NGTN in Oman, provides critical infrastructure to deliver gas that supports the industries and economy of Oman. This listing, which we are proud to be conducting on the Muscat Stock Exchange, will allow us to move the company into the next chapter of growth. The core focus of OQGN will remain unchanged, focusing on the delivery of vital resources supporting the growth of our customers and the Sultanate of Oman. Our work is underlined by a commitment to reliability, efficiency, safety and sustainability. Together with our partners at OQ and OIA, we look forward to the listing and are excited by the opportunities it brings – to our customers, our investors, our employees, and the people of Oman”.

Talal Al Awfi, OQ Group CEO and OQGN Chairman, said: “The IPO of OQGN is part of a broader divestment programme envisioned by the government and being implemented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) - the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman. This

marquee offering is an opportunity for Omani and international investors to participate in Oman’s Vision 2040, the long-term national development plan that aims to make Oman a prosperous, competitive and sustainable nation and to rapidly diversify its economy. The listing of OQGN, which owns and operates critical gas transportation infrastructure in Oman, is in line with this ambition while enriching the dynamically developing Omani stock market. We look forward to the listing on the MSX and are excited for what’s to come”.

DETAILS OF THE OFFERING

The Selling Shareholders intend to offer up to 49% of OQGN’s total share capital. Immediately following the Offering, a minimum of 51.0% shareholding will continue to be held by OQ. The Company and the Selling Shareholders reserve the right to amend the size of the Offering at any time prior to the end of the subscription period in their sole discretion, subject to applicable laws and the approval of the CMA. All the shares being sold by the Selling Shareholders are existing ordinary shares and the Company will not receive any proceeds from the sale of the shares in the Offering, all of which will be paid to the Selling Shareholders. The Offering expenses will be paid by the Selling Shareholders. The Offering will be conducted in the manner approved by the CMA and will be offered in two tranches, being carried out concurrently as defined below:

- Category I Offer represents 70% of the total Offering (out of which 30% of the Offer Shares have been reserved for Anchor Investors) and will be made to eligible investors in Oman and qualified institutional and other investors in a number of countries.
- Category II Offer represents 30% of the total Offering for retail investors.
- If the aggregate demand in Category II is less than 30% of the Offer, then after full allocation to the Category II investors, the balance of the shares shall be made available to Category I investors, if there is oversubscription in Category I.

Details of the Offering will be included in the Offering Document which is expected to be published by the Company prior to subscription opening. The completion of the Offering and Admission of the shares to trading on the MSX is expected in October 2023, subject to market conditions and obtaining relevant regulatory approvals in Oman, including approval of Admission. The shares held by the Selling Shareholders following completion of the Offering shall be subject to a lockup which starts on the date of Admission and ends 180 calendar days thereafter, subject to customary exceptions and waiver by the Joint Global Coordinators. The Company will also be subject to a lock-up starting on the date of Admission and ending 180 calendar days thereafter. Shariyah Review Bureau (“SRB”) is a Shariah Advisory firm licensed by the Central Bank of Bahrain. It has issued a pronouncement confirming that, in its view, based on the circumstances as at the date of this pronouncement, the Offering is Sharia compliant in accordance with pertinent Sharia principles of the AAOIFI Sharia standards as of the date of this statement. The pronouncement is not intended to be and does not constitute a legal, financial, or investment advice and SRB shall not bear any liability in this context. Investors are advised to conduct their own due diligence and consult with their own Sharia advisors before making any investment decisions based on the pronouncement. Bank Muscat S.A.O.G., BofA Securities and EFG-Hermes UAE Limited (acting in conjunction with EFG Hermes UAE LLC) have been appointed as Joint Global Coordinators, and Bank Muscat has been appointed as Issue Manager.

OVERVIEW OF OQGN

OQGN holds a natural monopoly over the essential gas transportation infrastructure in Oman and is the exclusive owner and operator of the NGTN, serving critical roles in Oman as the asset owner, operator and maintenance and transportation provider of gas through the NGTN. The NGTN is a comprehensive gas transportation network encompassing a system of pipelines, metering facilities, compressor stations, gas supply stations and block-valve stations. The NGTN serves as an essential link connecting gas producers

with gas consumers operating in various essential sectors requiring gas as a critical production feedstock or for power generation, such as liquefied natural gas (“LNG”), power generation and water desalination, oil and gas and industrial and commercial (e.g., petrochemical, fertiliser, aluminium and steel plants). The Company transports gas, through the NGTN on behalf of the Shipper, which buys gas from gas producers and sells it to gas consumers. At present, there is only one Shipper, IGC, although additional Shippers may be introduced in the future. In 2022, the Company transported 39.4 BCM of gas, from six gas producers to a diverse consumer base of approximately 130 gas consumers through approximately 4,031 kms of gas pipelines, supported by three compressor stations and 25 gas supply stations, providing uninterrupted gas supply in 2022.

INVESTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

OQGN operates in the attractive investment destination of Oman

- Oman is a resilient and stable economy, growing at a steady rate with a strong Gross Domestic Product (“GDP”) outlook (Real GDP Growth CAGR 23E-25E of 3.7%), evidenced through various ratings and supported by a young and growing population (population growth 23-25E of 3.2% with 50% of the population under 30 years old in 2023E).
- Oman’s strategic vision, “Oman Vision 2040”, which is a national comprehensive 20-year plan, which aims for rationalisation of government expenditures, ensuring Oman is on track to achieve sustainable fiscal surplus with an economic diversification strategy and the introduction of new sources of revenue.
- Other initiatives to transform Oman into an increasingly attractive investment destination include consolidating national assets and promoting privatization and implementing favourable regulatory changes to support Foreign Direct Investment (“FDI”) flows.

Natural monopoly over critical gas transportation infrastructure under a 50-year concession (up to 2070)

- OQGN holds a natural monopoly over essential gas transportation infrastructure in Oman as the exclusive operator and owner of the NGTN.
- OQGN operates under a 50-year concession expiring in 2070 granted by the Government of Oman under the Amended Concession Agreement.
- OQGN has a strong operational track record with consistent gas availability, minimal interruptions and international certifications.

Indispensable role as the link between core Omani gas producers and gas consumers, with stable long-term demand and supply

- OQGN’s NGTN plays the critical role of connecting gas producers with consumers through pipelines, gas supply stations, and gas compressor stations, earning transportation and connection fees.
- OQGN serves a diverse consumer base of approximately 130 gas consumers through approximately 4,031 km of gas pipelines, transporting 39.4 BCM of gas from six gas producers in 2022. Oman has substantial gas reserves estimated to be 692 BCM in 2022 and a reserves-to-production ratio estimated at approximately 20 years.
- The Company’s future growth is supported by Oman’s growing demand for gas, which is forecasted to range between 37.7 BCM and 54.5 BCM by 2043, coinciding with a rise in economic activity and industrialisation across Oman’s critical industries, including LNG, power, desalination, oil and gas and industrial and commercial sectors.

Established RAB framework underpinning predictable cash flows

- The Regulatory Asset Base (“RAB”) Framework provides a regulated revenue system pursuant to which the Company charges Transportation Charges to the Shipper, as well as Connection Fees to Connected Parties that require the Company to build a Connection to the NGTN.
- The RAB Framework aims to provide a predictable tariff-setting regime that should allow a relatively stable and cost-reflective revenue



stream, with Allowed RAB Revenues not affected by changes in the price and volume of gas transported during a Price Control Period, which is currently set for a period of three years. Thus, it supports the Company in achieving stable profitability margins with resilient performance and stability against the volatility in commodity prices and gas volumes transported.

- The Regulator determines the maximum revenue that the Company may earn from gas transportation (i.e., the Allowed RAB Revenues) based on several building blocks set out in the Amended Concession Agreement.
- The Transportation Charges charged to the Shipper are then derived from the Allowed RAB Revenues as approved by the Regulator and the network capacity booked by the Shipper. A large majority of the Company’s income in 2022 was received from the Shipper.

Stable financial performance with a growing asset base and efficient capital structure

- In 2022, the Company earned income of OMR 160.4 million and Regulated Adjusted EBITDA1 of OMR 96.4 million (Regulated Adjusted EBITDA Margin2 of 70.9%).
- For the six months ended 30 June 2023, the Company earned income of OMR 85.0 million and Regulated Adjusted EBITDA of OMR 59.3 million (Regulated Adjusted EBITDA Margin of 78.0%). In comparison, the Company earned income of OMR 73.0 million and Regulated Adjusted EBITDA of OMR 49.0 million (Regulated Adjusted EBITDA margin of 73.1%) for the six months ended 30 June 2022.
- The Company has also maintained an efficient capital structure, resulting in its Adjusted Net Debt-to-Regulated Adjusted EBITDA3 of 3.3x in 2022 (4.1x in 2021) and Adjusted Net Debt-to-Regulated Asset Base4 of 0.3x in 2022 (0.4x in 2021).
- In June 2023, the Company entered into refinancing facilities in order to improve the Company’s long-term capital structure.

Strong growth prospects through approved near-term network expansion and long-term transformative growth initiatives

- OQGN has strong growth prospects through Regulator-approved near-term network expansion and long-term

- transformative growth initiatives.
- The Company’s growth strategy comprises three key pillars, namely (i) continued investment in natural gas transportation network growth, debottlenecking and upgrades, (ii) acquisition of gas transportation assets and (iii) expansion into transportation of other energy sources.
- The Company’s growth strategy also contemplates utilizing its strengths and market position to play an essential role in the energy transition in Oman by facilitating hydrogen and captured carbon transportation and storage.
- OQGN is a forward-looking organisation with ESG embedded in the Company’s strategy. The company’s strategic priorities are aligned with Oman’s ambitious sustainability agenda and it is committed to contributing to the achievement of Oman’s Net Zero goals.

Experienced management team with a strong track record of successful project deliveries

- The Company is led by an experienced management team with a strong track record of successful delivery of projects within the gas sector.
- The management team combines private and public experience in the oil and gas sector, both within the industry and in corporate finance.
- The Company is led by the Managing Director, Mansoor Al Abdali, the Vice President of Finance, Khalid Al Qassabi, the Vice President of Business Development and Commercial, Saif Al Hosni and other senior management team members who have been involved in the Company’s evolution as a critical gas infrastructure asset in Oman.
- The Company also benefits from a highly experienced and qualified Board of Directors, with decades of experience across the energy and logistics sectors. The Board members include Chairman, Talal Al Awfi (Group Chief Executive Officer, OQ Group), Deputy Chairman, Ayad Al Balushi (Chief Financial Officer, Oman Investment Authority), Fathi Al Balushi (Chief Executive Officer at Oman Brunei Investment Co), Raiya Al Salmi (Head of Organisational Excellence, OQ) and Hanaa Al-Hinai (Chief Executive Officer at Al Ahlia Insurance).

Summary of OQGN’s Financial Performance and Operating Highlights

Key Financial Highlights (In OMRm)	2020	2021	2022	H1-22	H1-23
IFRS Measures					
Total Income	166.1	157.5	160.4	73.0	85.0
y-o-y growth		(5.2%)	1.9%		16.5%
EBITDA ¹	83.2	66.7	71.3	34.7	46.3
EBITDA Margin ²	50.1%	42.4%	44.5%	47.5%	54.5%
Net Profit	59.3	43.1	45.6	23.4	33.1
Net Profit Margin	35.7%	27.4%	28.4%	32.0%	38.9%
RAB Measures					
Regulated Asset Base ³	923.1	953.2	972.1	n.a.	975.6
Regulated Adjusted Income ⁴	134.0	132.0	136.0	67.1	76.0
y-o-y growth		(1.5%)	3.0%		13.3%
Regulated Adjusted EBITDA ⁵	103.2	92.6	96.4	49.0	59.3
Regulated Adjusted EBITDA Margin ⁶	77.1%	70.1%	70.9%	73.1%	78.0%
Adjusted Net Debt-to-Regulated Adjusted EBITDA ⁷	3.8x	4.1x	3.3x	n.a.	2.8x
Operating KPIs					
Total Gas Delivery ⁸ (bn SCM)		35,101	37,292		39,380
Pipeline Length (km)		3,969	3,999		4,031
Gas Availability ⁹ (%)		99.9977%	99.9999%		100.0000%



SAYYID BADR RECEIVES EU REPRESENTATIVE FOR GULF

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday received Luigi Di Maio, European Union's (EU) Special Representative for the Gulf Region. The meeting discussed developments in the GCC region and ways of enhancing cooperation between the two sides. – ONA

Young Ambassadors Programme launched to empower Omani youth

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, in close collaboration with the Foreign Ministry, the Sultan Qaboos Center for Culture and Science, and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, inaugurated the first edition of the Young Ambassadors Programme. This initiative aligns with an ambitious vision and unwavering commitment to developing human resources in line with the Sultanate of Oman's Vision 2040.

An event marking the inauguration was held under the auspices of Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs. The programme's inaugural ceremony took place at the Novotel Hotel, Muscat.

The Young Ambassadors Programme is designed to harness the potential of Omani youth as the nation's greatest asset. Through a series of national initiatives and programmes spanning various sectors, it aims to empower Omani youth, nurture their creativity, and strengthen their connection to their national identity.

Speaking about the initiative, Shaikh Khalifa al Harithy highlighted its significance in supporting Omani youth and unlocking their capabilities in alignment with the goals of Oman's Vision 2040.

He emphasised that the programme aims to prepare Omani youth to address international issues, participate in conferences



and events, and serve as exemplary representatives of the Sultanate of Oman.

Fares al Awfi, Director of the Youth Programmes Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, expressed the Ministry's commitment to investing in young people and enhancing their capacities. He stressed the importance of collaboration with various sectors to create opportunities for Omani youth, stimulate their innovative ideas, and broaden their global awareness, enabling them to actively engage in international forums.

The programme has attracted significant interest, with 410 individuals initially registering. After rigorous selection, 120 young men and women advanced to the second stage, and eventually, 70 qualified to participate in the United Nations simulation programme in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth extended its gratitude to the Foreign Ministry, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, and the Sultan Qaboos

Center for Culture and Science for their instrumental roles in making the programme a success.

Faisal bin Nasser al Hosani, Head of the Youth Participation Department at the General Directorate of Youth, underscored the programme's objective of equipping young ambassadors with media, leadership, and communication skills. He also highlighted the creation of a database of empowered young individuals capable of representing Oman effectively at international conferences and meetings.

Rabie al Haddad, Director of the Diplomacy Programme at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, commended the programme's role in developing the capabilities of young people and offering them promising opportunities, especially in today's dynamic world. He emphasised the programme's significance in bringing Oman closer to the United Nations and aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations by 2030.

Freelancers to have separate bank a/c

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued instructions to banks to facilitate the opening of bank accounts for commercial purposes for those with freelancing and independent professions, and to provide the necessary credit

facilities for this category.

The CBO said freelancing and independent work are individual businesses that enable an individual to provide services or products without the need to establish a workplace or obtain a commercial license.

The CBO directed all banks to facilitate the opening of bank accounts for this category.

The decision gives self-employed and independent professionals the same benefits granted to small and medium enterprises.

Omani delegation to take part in G20 Summit

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A high-level delegation from the Sultanate of Oman will participate in the G20 Summit in India on September 9 and 10.

The 30-member team will comprise ministers, senior officials, media and diplomatic representatives.

Oman has attended the G20 round of meetings as a special invitee by host country India. Besides Oman, seven other guest countries — the UAE, Egypt, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Singapore and Switzerland — are attending the G20 Summit.

Speaking to the Observer, Faisal al Nabhani, Director of International Cooperation and Trade Relations at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), said, "Oman's key interests at the G20 participation are economic cooperation, combat corruption, focus on labour and employment, education and energy etc."

Further, Oman's participation allowed it to engage with G20 countries in setting the global agenda for international cooperation on various topics of international importance.

Recently, Oman attended the Trade & Investment Working Group meeting from August 21 to 23, headed by Faisal al Nabhani.

"We prepared the work before the Trade & Investment Ministerial Meeting. Oman's participation in the meeting



Oman's key interests at the G20 participation are economic cooperation, combat corruption, focus on labour and employment, education and energy.

FAISAL AL NABHANI
Director, MoCIIP

was led by Qais al Yousuf, after which the delegation attended the B20 in Delhi.

The B20 explored through a series of panel discussions how private companies can contribute to tackling some of the major challenges of our day, including the green energy transition, financial inclusion for sustainable growth and empowering MSMEs."

VISION 2040 AND G20

"The Oman Vision 2040 is the road-map for Oman for the next 20 years. Oman's participation in G20 meetings allowed us to pick up on global trends and the strategic outlook of the world's major economies. This should help in ensuring that Oman's implementation strategy for Oman Vision 2040 is in lockstep with major economies."

"There are numerous initiatives that get proposed in global international fora, to get a first-row seat at the table and engage with G20 members in discussions that

are at the source of many of these initiatives allows Oman to express its views and inform these discussions. It also allows Oman to showcase its development plans, particularly in the green energy space," said Al Nabhani.

"We thank India for the invitation and hope this experience will give us added impetus in moving forward for the many government entities that participated in the G20 meetings.

"Around seven ministers from Oman participated in G20 meetings throughout this year. Omani officials from various entities attended approximately 80 G20 meetings in India. We hope that this level of exposure will give us enough material to recalibrate our development activities in line with the global trends we witnessed at G20 and help us move forward in the various fields covered under G20, including education, energy, trade and investment," Faisal said.

SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Monday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
3248/2023/ MOH/NIZH-6	REPAINTING WORKS FOR KERB STONE NH	13/September/2023	09/October/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2023/ 3158	Maintenance work at Sinaw Hospital	Before 9 am on Wednesday 6/September/2023	Before 9 am on Tuesday 3/October/2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25 Per set
2023/ 3160	Maintenance work at Ibra Health Center	Before 9 am on Wednesday 6/September/2023	Before 9 am on Tuesday 3/October/2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25 Per set

All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

[\(https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om\)](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

Any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 Email id: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

Approved by/director of financial affairs



Spring heralds another tourism season to Dhofar

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

In Dhofar Governorate, September heralds the advent of Al Sarb or spring season. From September 21, this enchanting season will grace the landscape, bringing with it a tapestry of natural wonders that will last until December 21.

The atmosphere during Al Sarb is characterised by the brightness of the sun, moderate weather, and low humidity. Khareef fog gets cleared, and flowers bloom, which attracts tourists to enjoy the picturesque nature in addition to the calm waves of the sea.

Al Sarb is considered one of the important seasons for farmers, fishermen, and livestock breeders due to the seasonal agricultural harvest in mountainous and plain areas that depend on the

autumn monsoon rains. The most important of which are maize, beans, and cucumbers. It also sees increased production of honey and the availability of large quantities of fish of high nutritional value like lobster, kingfish, sardines, safi and shari.

During this season, the finest types of local 'ghee' are produced, which cannot be obtained easily due to the high demand. The cows produce good quality milk due to natural grazing since the fall season, foraging on various types of natural herbs in the natural pastures that flourish in the fall season and extend to the spring season. People drink cold or hot (Al Mu'adhib), depending on their choice.

While harvesting Al Sarb crops and harvesting agricultural products, farmers recite poems and songs called Al Maqoud,



which instill enthusiasm and entertainment in their souls and encourage them to make more efforts.

The breeders begin grazing their camels in places that are closed in the fall, and the shepherds sing the chants and songs of "Nana" and

"Dabararat" with their beautiful melodies. Temperatures will be around 20 degrees Celsius in the mountains

and 26-28 degrees in the low lying areas during the day. The season also rolls out green carpet for the camels and herders who descend to the plains for the annual journey or Al Khatlah. The roads, beaches and slopes of Salalah and adjoining areas will be full of camels from Wadi Nahiz, Wadi Darbat, Wadi Ghaydat, and other areas.

The camels are accompanied on their journey by herdsmen on four wheel vehicles or pick-ups. The journey lasts for about a month, during which these herds move from one place to another in search of fodder.

Mubarak bin Abdullah al Maashani, a citizen, says, "Al Sarb attracts visitors who love the moderate climate, high breeze and surfing." Al Maashani appealed to the government and stakeholders to pay more attention to the season like khareef.

Command and Staff College celebrates opening of 37th Course



MUSCAT: The Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies on Monday celebrated the opening of the 37th course the Joint Command and Staff College for officers. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Air Commodore Ahmed bin Mohammed al Mashaikhi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College.

At the outset of the ceremony, held at the college's headquarters at Bait Al Falaj, Air Commodore

Al Mashaikhi delivered a speech in which he urged the officers to take advantage of the advanced course so that they could be an example of dedication to military professionalism and discipline. He also welcomed student officers from other GCC states, wishing them a happy stay in Oman.

The ceremony included a visual presentation about the college's march and accomplishments.

— ONA

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Technology, innovation and medical tourism will be highlighted at the Oman Health Exhibition and Conference (OHEC) from September 18-20 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

In its 12th year, the three-day event, held under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, will feature the exhibition in two sections — medical products, services and equipment and medical tourism.

The first segment is for medical professionals — doctors, medical practitioners and nurses, whereas the second part will focus on those seeking medical support, services and treatment through overseas territories, explained Ashley Roberts, Managing Director, Connect, the event organiser.

He said, "The conference is an important part of the overall event in collaboration with our esteemed partners at the Ministry of Health. It is a free-to-attend conference with free accreditation from the Continued Professional Development (CPD) accreditation. It will be held daily from 9 am to 3 pm."

On day two, the focus is mainly on the initiative from the World Health Organization looking



at Patient Safety. The Ministry of Health will present the steps taken by the Sultanate of Oman by presenting case studies as well.

Dr Qamra al Sariri, Director General, Oman Quality Assurance Centre, Ministry of Health, said at the press conference held at Crowne Plaza Hotel that Oman is going through a growing and maturing population as well as a growing younger population. So, there is a need to diversify the medical services that are offered, and accordingly, the government has been launching a number of public hospitals as well as new hospitals in the private sector.

Dr Qamra said, "Such a large-scale event that brings national and international members of the health sector is necessary as Oman's healthcare sector needs to share our experiences with the international healthcare sector."

At the three-day event, the latest technology and innovations are expected to emphasise AI solutions that could help the Heath sector perform better.

In addition to brands from Oman and the GCC countries, the event will also see the participation of hospitals and clinics from India, Iran, Malaysia, Thailand, Poland, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and Lebanon, with a lot to showcase in the way of medical tourism offerings.

OHEC is also supported by the Directorate General of Quality Assurance Centre (DGQAC), the Directorate of Private Health Establishment and the Directorate General of Pharmaceutical Affairs and Drug Control (PADC).

At the event, Oman's MHD ACERE will display HospiCare, focusing on providing high-quality products for different departments

such as Emergency, Intensive Care Unit, Operation Theater and surgical products. Bluedot will have its state-of-the-art Air Ambulance and Medical Assistance services on display. Visitors will also witness the unveiling of Al Farsi Medical Supplies' B2B e-commerce platform, HospitalShop.com, which offers over 10,000 products spanning medical, dental, and laboratory segments, and their locally manufactured medical equipment brand 'Trusta'. This robust engagement underscores the industry's acknowledgement of OHEC as a pivotal nexus for networking, showcasing innovations, and driving industry growth.

Another key highlight is the presence of the VIP delegation from Malaysia, headed by Farizal B Jaafar, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC), at the inauguration on Sep 18. MHTC, alongside Malaysia's leading private hospitals, namely Alpha IVF & Women's Specialists, KPJ Healthcare Berhad, and Sunway Medical Centre, will showcase Malaysia's world-class healthcare offerings, as well as explore collaborative opportunities to extend the reach of its quality and affordable healthcare to the Middle East.

Tourism sector generates RO 1.9 bn by end of 2022

MUSCAT: The total tourism production in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of 2022 stood at RO 1.9 billion, posting an increase of 47.3 per cent over the corresponding period in 2021, when the sector registered RO 1.3 billion.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the tourism sector posted a direct added value of RO 1.1 billion at the end of 2022, up from RO 804.9 million in 2021 (33 per cent higher). The tourism sector contributed 2.4 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product.

The Tourism Statistical Bulletin showed that local tourism in the Sultanate of Oman contributed 68 per cent to tourism production, the equivalent of RO 1.3 billion during 2022.

The number of inbound visitors

in 2022 stood at about 2.9 million, an increase of 348 per cent over 2021 figure of 652,000. In terms of volume, the segment of visitors from GCC states took first place (1.6 million visitors), followed by visitors from Asian countries (651,000 visitors) and European countries (360,000 visitors), while the number of visitors from other Arab nationalities stood at 240,000.

Leisure and recreation topped the list of main causes of inbound tourism and constituted 43.5 per cent of the total number of visits, followed by visits to family and friends (35.7 per cent) and employment/business trips (10.5 per cent).

The number of visitors who stayed for more than one night during their trip stood at 2.1 million visitors, compared to 861,000 visitors who stayed in

Oman for one day.

Total general spending by inbound visitors stood at RO 592.4 million.

Outbound tourism saw a rise of 166.2 per cent to 5.2 million visitors during 2022, compared to 1.9 million visitors during 2021. Omani visitors constituted 67.3 per cent (3.5 million) of total outgoing visitors.

As many as 3.3 million tourists stayed more than one night at their destinations, constituting 64 per cent of total outgoing visitors, compared to 1.9 million outgoing visitors who returned during the same day (constituting 36 per cent of the total).

The growth rate in overall spending by departing visitors during 2022 surged by 243.8 per cent to RO 966.6 as against RO 281.1 million in 2021 in 2022.

— ONA





omanobserver.com/podcast

world

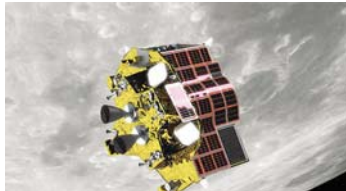
OMANDAILYOBSERVER

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 5 | 2023

7

In brief

■ TOKYO



JAPAN MOON MISSION LAUNCH ON THURSDAY

Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries said on Monday it planned to launch its H-IIA rocket carrying a moon lander on Thursday morning, after unfavourable wind conditions led to a postponement last month.

The rocket is scheduled to take off from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's (JAXA) Tanegashima Space Centre in southern Japan at 8:42 am JST (Wednesday 2342 GMT), with a launch window open until September 15, the company said. The new schedule was announced a week after the previous launch attempt, which would have carried Japan's first spacecraft to land on the moon, was suspended because of high winds.

■ BERLIN



SCHOLZ WEARS EYE PATCH AFTER JOGGING FALL

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is wearing a black eye patch to cover up injuries to his face after getting into a jogging accident over the weekend. "Looking forward to the memes," the chancellor posted on X, along with a photo of him with an eye patch covering his right eye and several scrapes on his face.

"Thanks for the good wishes, looks worse than it is!" he added.

Government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said the chancellor was doing well given the circumstances. "He was in quite a good mood this morning, but still looks a bit battered." He said the photo had been released "so that everyone can get used to what he will look like in the next week or two."

■ ABUJA



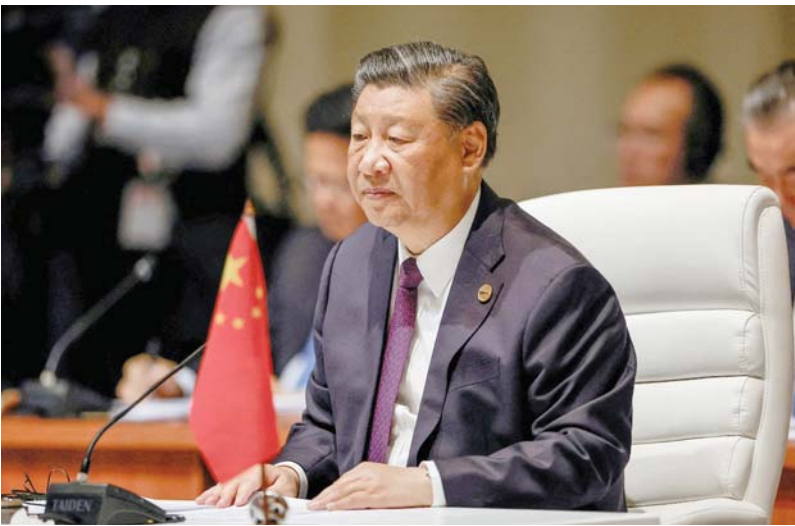
TRIBUNAL TO RULE ON PRESIDENTIAL VOTE CHALLENGE

A Nigerian election tribunal will on Wednesday deliver its ruling to petitions challenging the result of a presidential vote that brought Bola Tinubu to power, the court registrar said on Monday.

The victory in February for Tinubu, of the All Progressives Congress, is disputed by his two main opponents. Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party and Peter Obi who came second and third in the race, respectively, challenged Tinubu's victory in court on the basis of fraud claims.

The tribunal, which started hearing in June, will give its ruling on September 6, the registrar said, adding that the judgment will be televised.

Xi to skip G20 summit in India



Chinese President Xi Jinping

BEIJING: Premier Li Qiang will lead China's delegation at a G20 summit in New Delhi this weekend, China's foreign ministry said on Monday, indicating President Xi Jinping would not attend and scuppering chances of a meeting with US President Joe Biden there.

The September 9-10 summit had been seen as a venue for a possible meeting between Xi and Biden, who has confirmed his attendance in New Delhi, following months of efforts by the two powers to stabilise ties frayed by trade and geopolitical tensions.

"The G20 is the main forum for international economic cooperation and China has always placed great importance on and proactively taken part in such events," Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a press conference, when asked by a reporter why China's "leader" would not attend.

Mao declined to directly confirm that Li's attendance meant that Xi would not go, although she did not correct reporters who made that assertion. Reuters reported exclusively last month that Xi was likely to skip the meeting and send Li.

Li leading the delegation at the G20 meeting makes it all but certain that Xi will not be going since China would not have both its president and premier abroad at the same time, let alone at the same event.

Biden said on Sunday that he was disappointed Xi was not going to the summit but added that he was going to "get to see him". Biden did not elaborate.

Xi last met Biden on the sidelines of a G20 summit in Indonesia in November.

This will be the first time that a Chinese president has missed a leaders' summit since the first edition was held in 2008, though in 2020 and 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Xi attended virtually.

Also absent from the New Delhi summit will be Russian President Vladimir Putin, following an International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant for him over alleged war crimes in Ukraine. Russia will be represented by its foreign minister.

The other G20 leaders attending include German Chancellor

Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Wen-Ti Sung, political scientist at the Australian National University, pointed out that Xi had joined a meeting in South Africa last month of leaders of the BRICS group of major emerging economies.

"Xi's skipping the West-heavy club of G20 right after attending the BRICS summit may be a visual illustration of Xi's narrative of 'East is rising, and the West is falling', as well as showing solidarity with Russia's President Putin who is also not attending," Sung said.

The other venue where Xi and Biden could meet would be November's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco.

Senior US officials have travelled to China in recent months to

strengthen communications amid concern that their friction could spiral out of control.

US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, the most recent official to have visited China, said the US does not want to decouple from China.

Alfred Wu, associate professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, said Xi might be reluctant to travel abroad, given his focus on domestic issues.

"Xi Jinping is setting his own agenda where his top concern is national security and he has to stay in China and make foreign leaders visit him instead," Wu said.

"But if Xi skips APEC, that would be very substantial after all the preparations made for it by the US side, and it would reflect even more badly on China's future and its international standing, since it still needs foreign investment." Xi's absence from the G20 gathering could also be seen as a snub of host India, say some analysts, suggesting it could be a signal that China is unwilling to confer influence on its southern neighbour that boasts one of the fastest growing major economies while China's slows.

Ties between India and China have been also troubled for more than three years after soldiers from both sides clashed on their disputed Himalayan frontier in June 2020, resulting in 24 deaths.

— Reuters



Oleksiy Reznikov

Ukraine's defence minister resigns in wartime shakeup

KYIV: Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov submitted his resignation on Monday in the biggest shakeup of the defence establishment in 18 months of war with Russia.

Reznikov has been at the forefront of Kyiv's lobbying for Western weapons to fight Russia's invasion, but his departure after months of corruption allegations against his ministry is not expected to have a big impact on military operations.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday he was sacking Reznikov and proposed Rustem Umerov, a Crimean Tatar and ex-lawmaker who runs the State Property Fund, to replace him.

Reznikov, who took office in 2021, has helped Kyiv secure billions of dollars worth of Western military aid since Russia's invasion in February 2022. Ukraine has received weapons including German battle tanks, US HIMARS rocket launchers and British Storm Shadow cruise missiles to push back Russian forces, and is poised to receive US F-16 fighter jets soon. — Reuters

■ ATTENTION PLEASE



A man takes part in a protest during the 2023 Munich Auto Show IAA Mobility, in Munich, Germany, on Monday. — Reuters

Hundreds more UK school buildings could be crumbling

LONDON: Hundreds more school buildings in England might be crumbling and unsafe, Britain's education minister said on Monday, after authorities ordered 104 schools to shut buildings with old and weak concrete.

The revelations of crumbling school buildings just days before the start of a new term has sparked anger among parents and teachers, and represent a new political headache for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ahead of an election expected next year.

The issue has added to the impression of decaying public infrastructure in Britain, which has faced months of disruptive strikes by workers including in hospitals and schools.

Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said the government was still waiting on responses from around 10% of the 15,000 schools in England which were sent



The Department for Education began reviewing the risks posed by RAAC in 2018 when the roof at a primary school in Gravesend, Kent, collapsed

surveys to identify those at risk.

The buildings in question contain Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), a lightweight form of concrete commonly used in walls, floors and ceilings during the 1960s-80s but now considered weak and unsafe.

Keegan said schools which are

suspected to have RAAC would be inspected in the next two weeks.

"Most of them won't have RAAC," she told BBC Radio. "It could be hundreds more."

A majority of the currently affected schools would still be able to operate largely normally, the government has said.

— Reuters

Israel, Bahrain agree to boost trade ties

MANAMA: Israel's foreign minister agreed on Monday with his Bahraini counterpart to boost trade relations, during his first visit to one of the two Gulf Arab states to establish ties with Israel.

"The foreign minister and I agreed that we should work together to increase the number of direct flights, the tourism, the trade volume, the investment," Eli Cohen said during a ceremony to inaugurate Israel's new embassy.

The embassy in the capital Manama will replace the first embassy Israel opened in 2021, a year after it established diplomatic relations with Bahrain as part of the US-brokered Abraham Accords.

Under the accords, Israel also established ties with the United Arab Emirates and Morocco.

Monday's ceremony was attended by Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al Zayani, who said the event signified a "shared commitment to strengthening and cultivating bilateral relations".

"As we build into deeper diplomatic endeavours and engage in bilateral cooperation across various sectors, the

establishment of this new embassy assumes a pivotal role in our collaboration," he told reporters.

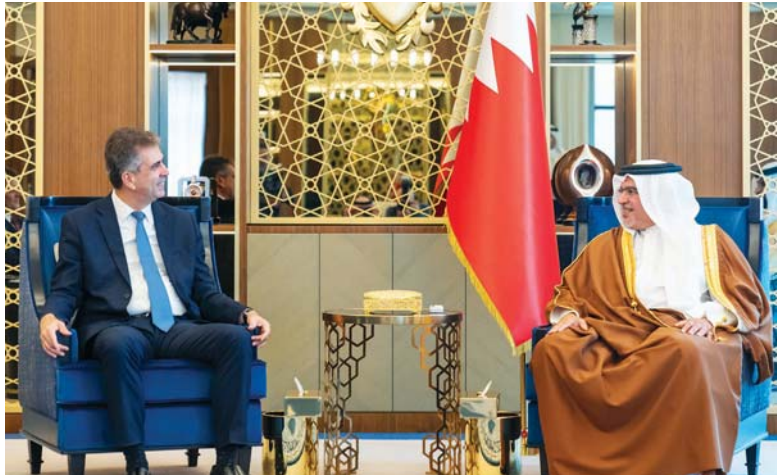
Cohen arrived in Bahrain on Sunday, accompanied by a business delegation of more than 30 companies working in high-tech, logistics and real estate.

Earlier on Monday, he met Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa and discussed "the importance of advancing a free trade agreement and projects to connect youths in Israel and Bahrain", Cohen posted on X, formerly Twitter.

"We look forward to expanding the circle of peace and normalisation to other states in the area," he said.

Despite now having steady ties with Israel, Bahrain and the UAE have joined other Gulf Arab states in issuing a series of condemnations against it this year.

The storming of the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and raids by Israeli forces on Nablus and the Jenin Palestinian refugee camp in the occupied West Bank were among Israeli moves that sparked a Gulf outcry. — AFP



Bahrain Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa with Eli Cohen, Israel's foreign minister

The writer is a life coach and NLP practitioner

Acceptance of the situation, circumstance, the person or the event will help this anger to dissipate. Instantly there is an energy shift within the body, as the head sends it signals via uplifting thoughts, which in turn produces worthy feelings,

Accepting diverse perspectives promotes harmony and peace, while ideas from new thinking fuels innovation and creativity. The acceptance of others is intertwined with the acceptance of self, which is the cornerstone of our emotional

Accepting others is not only a generous and compassionate act, it also has transformative effects on our lives. It liberates us from the constraints of prejudice, judgement, bias and intolerance, allowing us to experience greater personal fulfilment and deeper connections in a more harmonious and interconnected world. By embracing acceptance, we free ourselves from all the limitations usually constricting us and we open ourselves up to the richness of diversity. Here's to continuously and continually unlocking our wonderful human potential.

THOMAS GROPALLO AND
EMMANUEL GIROUD

“He’s someone who knows the Gabonese military apparatus very well, a good soldier, trained at good military schools” including Morocco’s Meknes royal military academy, a member of Bongo’s Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) said on condition of anonymity. — **AFP**

Malesic is the author of
"The End of Burnout."
He teaches writing at
Southern Methodist
University

YES, A COLLEGE EDUCATION WILL
HELP SOMEONE EARN MORE IN A
CAREER. THAT'S A GOOD THING.
BUT LIFE IS MUCH MORE THAN
WORK.

At the time, I knew almost nothing of this man's life beyond the university. But I saw in his broad curiosity, his care for us and his comfort with unhurried discussion a way of life I had never before imagined. It was the life of the mind, something like Aristotle's ideal. I

Yes, a college education will help someone earn more in a career. That's a good thing. But life is much more than work. I am certain that if students show an interest in questions beyond how to become better workers, if they exhibit a desire to learn for its own sake, they will meet people who are just as eager for it as they are.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

OMAN عمان DAILY Observer ESTABLISHED ON 15 NOVEMBER 1981	E D I T O R I A L					ADVERTISING	PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:	
	EDITOR-IN-CHIEF	DESK	LOCAL	BUSINESS	SPORTS	FEATURE	Tel: 24649444, 24649430, 24649437, 24649401	Ministry of Information P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
	Tel: 22651222	Tel: 22651209	Tel: 22651221	Tel: 22651208	Tel: 22651205	Tel: 22651220	Fax: 24649434	
SECRETARY	ONLINE	DESIGN	TRANSLATION	PROOFREADING	DISTRIBUTION AGENT			
Tel: 22651200	Tel: 22651202	Tel: 22651210	Tel: 22651204	Tel: 22651206	Tel: 24649351/24649360			
					Fax: 24649379			
Website: omanobserver.om		EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili			e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om			
Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these pages are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.								

Life was so simple then...

Life was so simple during childhood. Study during the working months and when summer arrives land in Oman to be with your parents.

Every child who have gone through this stage can relate to these experiences. There were no malls and Muttrah Souq was the star attraction.

Walking through Muttrah Souq meant taking in all the aroma of the spices, voices that were chatting in the background and colourful toys that made the young mind hop from one to the other. It could be a doll, a kitchen set or games. Once you have it secured in your hand after convincing dad it is the best thing you have ever laid your eyes on, impatience would take over. One could not wait to reach home to open the boxes.

Walking over the payments of Muttrah Souq in 2023 I was that little kid all over again looking at all the colorful toys with parents and brother on the side. A mirror would have to convince me about the decades that have passed by me.

It is amazing to relive or be transferred to that era with just sights and sounds, not to forget aroma.

Obviously conversations have changed and the writer's own outlook have transformed into unimaginable level on topics such as savings and investments.

The time capsules are so important, as in my case Muttrah Souq. The lanes that opened up to new interests during different ages to the version of Muttrah Souq with free Wi-Fi. Seasons change, and festivals come and go, but Muttrah Souq remains the same - during high tide and low tide. If it was trading dhows in the past, there are cruise ships which arrive at the Sultan Qaboos Port today.

People ask, "Why are there products from other countries at Muttrah Souq?"

But that has been the pulse of the souq. People brought things from everywhere and that is how it become a



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

DON'T BRUSH ASIDE YOUR THOUGHTS THAT YOU WANT TO SHARE FOR THEY MIGHT BE THE WORDS THEY ARE LONGING TO HEAR

trading hub.

Becoming a journalist had the pleasure of interviewing the pioneers of Oman's business community who revealed their growing up years into business. They just grew into it. Most of the renowned business houses originated from here - Muttrah Souq.

The arrival of each dhow must have been exciting... the people who arrived and the products they brought.

But by 80s all the toys that one would dream of were at Muttrah Souq or other parts of Ruwi when it came to electronic toys. The VCR days were magical because today you have your stars sharing the same space with everyone on online platforms. Back then the stars were from big screen to TV screens.

The beauty of a letter being brought home can never be recreated and the notification beep of a message on your mobile phone is no match. But if you weren't born in that era it is difficult to comprehend the concept. Instead one may wonder why on earth would someone would want to read a handwritten letter.

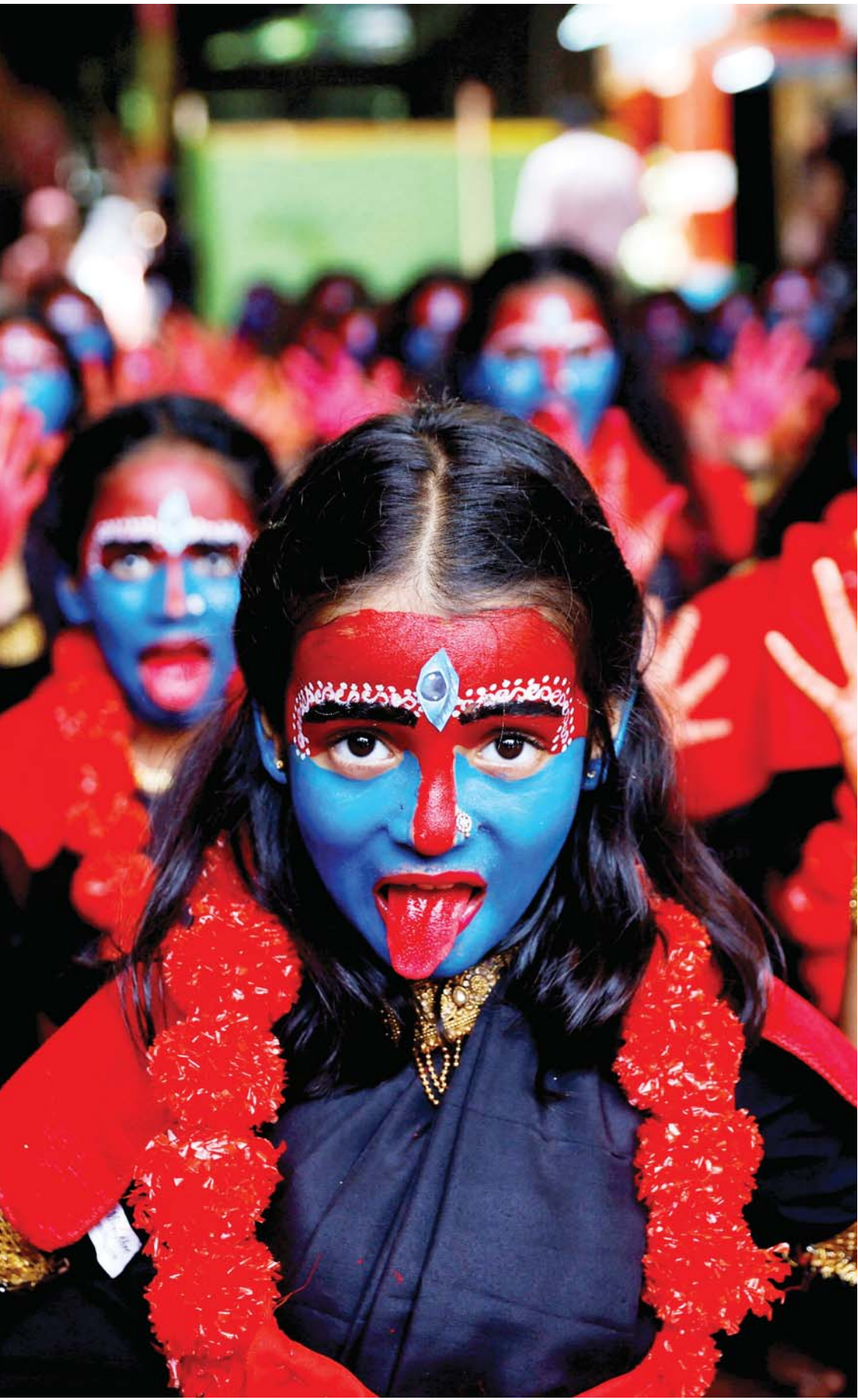
This reminds us when we even try to imagine the journey the letter went through to reach this far.

Only the sentimental ones would know the value of handwriting and how much it is connected to the personality of the writer. Including the colour of the ink mattered. If an error was made no one used a whitener, but just scratched it out. As a young student from a boarding school, the letters I wrote as you would imagine had many designs of corrections and often ended up never mailing them to parents and grandparents.

The letters that were never sent and the words that were never shared weren't just a click away then, but must have meant so much to the ones who had been waiting.

In other words don't brush aside your thoughts that you want to share for they might be the words they are longing to hear.

DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION!



Students with faces painted as Hindu goddess Kali, take part in a cultural event ahead of the Janmashtami festival, at a college in Mumbai, India, on Monday. – Reuters

Is America reverting to isolationism?

The first debate between the Republican Party's candidates for next year's US presidential election revealed major schisms over foreign policy. While former US Vice-President Mike Pence and former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley defended America's support for Ukraine in Russian war, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy expressed scepticism. Former President Donald Trump – the unquestioned front-runner – skipped the event, but he, too, has objected to US involvement in that conflict.

Polls show that rank-and-file Republicans are as divided as the candidates. That raises concerns that if an isolationist Republican wins in 2024, it could mark a turning point for the US-dominated international order established at the end of World War II.

Historically, American public opinion has oscillated between extroversion and retrenchment. Having witnessed the tragic consequences of the isolationism of the 1930s, President Franklin D Roosevelt launched the process that culminated in the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944 and the United Nations in 1945. President Harry Truman's post-war decisions then led to permanent alliances and a continual US military presence abroad. The United States invested heavily in European reconstruction through the Marshall Plan in 1948, created Nato in 1949, and led the UN coalition that fought in Korea in 1950.



Joseph S Nye, Jr

The writer is a professor at Harvard University and a former US assistant secretary of defence

FOLLOWING THE FIRST REPUBLICAN DEBATE OF THE US PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY SEASON, THERE IS GOOD REASON TO WORRY ABOUT WHAT A REPUBLICAN VICTORY IN 2024 WOULD MEAN FOR THE US-LED GLOBAL ORDER

These actions were part of a realist strategy to contain Soviet power. But containment was interpreted in various ways, and Americans later had bitter, often partisan debates over interventions in developing countries like Vietnam and Iraq. Still, while the ethics of intervention were called into question, the value of sustaining a liberal institutional order was much less controversial. As the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once observed, the "fortunate vagueness" of liberal internationalism had saved it from succumbing to ideological rigidity.

The liberal international order thus enjoyed broad support in US foreign-policy circles for decades after WWII. But in the 2016 presidential election, Trump's argument that the post-1945 alliances and institutions had benefited others at America's expense resonated strongly with many voters. To be sure, his populist appeal rested on more than an attack on US foreign policy. He also tapped into widespread anger over the economic dislocations caused by globalisation and the post-2008 Great Recession, and exploited polarising cultural changes related to race, the role of women, and gender identity. But by blaming economic problems on "bad trade deals with countries like Mexico and China and on immigrants competing for jobs,"

Trump successfully linked nativist resentment to US foreign policy.

Of course, Trump is not the first to apply this formula. The current populist response had antecedents in the 1920s and 1930s. More than 15 million immigrants had come to the US during the first two decades of the century, sowing fears among many white Americans that they were being overwhelmed. In the early 1920s, a resurgent Ku Klux Klan helped pushed through the National Origins Act to "prevent the Nordic race from being swamped," and to preserve the older, more homogeneous America. Similarly, Trump's election in 2016 reflected, rather than caused, the deep racial, ideological, and cultural rifts that had been developing since the 1960s.

While many analysts worry that American retrenchment could result in the kind of international disorder that plagued the 1930s, Trump supporters argue that his

administration's less generous and tougher stance produced greater stability abroad and support at home. Whatever the case, Trump's election represented a clear shift away from the liberal tradition.

Some believe that Trump's rise was caused by the failure of liberal elites to reflect the underlying preferences of the American people. But that is facile. Of course, there are many strands of American public opinion, and elite groups are generally more interested in foreign policy than the public at large. Nonetheless, we do have a good sense of where the public has stood over time.

Since 1974, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs has surveyed Americans on whether it is better to play an active global role or to stay out of world affairs. Over that period, roughly one-third of the public, hearkening back to the nineteenth-century tradition, has been consistently isolationist. That number reached 41 per cent in 2014; but, contrary

to popular myth, 2016 was not a high point of post-1945 isolationism. At the time of the election, 64 per cent of Americans said they favoured active involvement in world affairs, and that number rose to 70 per cent in 2018 – the highest recorded level since 2002.

Although full-scale 1930s-style isolationism is highly unlikely, many analysts still worry that a failure to support Ukraine could signal a return to American retrenchment, auguring a serious weakening of the international order. Russian President Vladimir Putin's war was a clear violation of the UN Charter. If Russia prevails in occupying Ukrainian territory, it will have undercut the liberal principle prohibiting the use of force to alter a country's borders. The solidarity among Nato countries in applying sanctions and supplying military equipment to Ukraine thus is not only moral, but also practical and realistic.

The outcome in Ukraine will have serious implications for the future of Europe and the wider world. Although Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping entered a "no-limits" partnership just before the war, China has been cautious, so far, in offering material support to Russia. Chinese leaders are doubtless concerned about Putin's risk-taking, and worried that the alliance is proving too costly to Chinese soft power.



Polls show that rank-and-file Republicans are as divided as the candidates.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



SALAH ‘COMMITTED’ TO EPL TITLE CHALLENGE

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp said Mohamed Salah wants to remain at Anfield after scoring in a dominant 3-0 win over Aston Villa on Sunday. Dominik Szoboszlai, with his first goal for the club, and Matty Cash's own goal put the Reds in command before Salah added a third after half-time. Liverpool reportedly turned down an offer worth up to £150 million (\$189 million) from Saudi side Al Ittihad for Salah this week.

"I never had any doubt about his commitment to this club," said Klopp after Salah scored his 188th goal for the club.

"You can't imagine how much fuss the world has made but how calm we are with it. He is our player and wants to play here."

Victory takes the Reds to within two points of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League.

But it was the manner of victory and a return of 10 points from a tricky opening four games of the new season that will have Liverpool fans dreaming of a title challenge once more.

Either side of Liverpool's first title in 30 years in 2020, Klopp's men missed out on the title to City twice by a solitary point in 2019 and 2022.

However, last season they slumped to fifth in the Premier League to miss out on Champions League football for the first time in seven years.

A return to the top four looked like it could be the limit of Liverpool's ambitions for the new campaign after a difficult summer in the transfer market led them to miss out on a number of targets.

Klopp has had to completely rebuild his midfield, but new signings Szoboszlai and Alexis Mac Allister have slotted in with ease.

"Absolutely it was a top game, best for a while," added Klopp. "I don't know when it was last that convincing."

Salah was a constant threat and there is little doubting Liverpool's firepower up front with Darwin Nunez now finding his feet after a difficult first season.

Nunez was rewarded for his match-winning contribution off the bench with two goals away to Newcastle last weekend with his first start of the season.

TRENT SETS TONE

The Uruguayan's pace and power consistently exposed the Villa defence but it was from a set-piece that the home side broke the deadlock after just three minutes. Trent Alexander-Arnold's corner came out to the edge of the box where Szoboszlai arrowed a powerful shot into the far corner

on his weaker left foot. Alexander-Arnold controlled the game from his new role at the base of the Liverpool midfield when in possession.

Captain for the day in the absence of the suspended Virgil van Dijk, it was his pass that started the move for the second goal.

Salah squared for Nunez, who should have scored himself, but when his shot came back off the post, the ball ricocheted in off the unfortunate Cash.

Villa had lost just seven Premier League games in 28 under Unai Emery.

But just as in the 5-1 thrashing they suffered at Newcastle on the opening weekend of the season, their high defensive line was easily picked off.

"The first half was key. They were clinical," said Emery. "Maybe we were a little weak in some actions and that was key in the first half."

Salah remains indispensable if Liverpool are to hold any hope of reeling in City for a 20th English top-flight title and got the goal his performance deserved on 55 minutes.

Villa failed to deal with another corner and Salah converted Nunez's flick-on at the back post. — AFP

Premier League		2023	2024
Standings			
	Points	played	
1 Man City	12	4	●●●●
2 Tottenham	10	4	●●●●
3 Liverpool	10	4	●●●●
4 West Ham	10	4	●●●●
5 Arsenal	10	4	●●●●
6 Brighton	9	4	●●●●
7 Crystal Palace	7	4	●●●●
8 Brentford	6	4	●●●●
9 Nottingham F.	6	4	●●●●
10 Aston Villa	6	4	●●●●
11 Man Utd	6	4	●●●●
12 Chelsea	4	4	●●●●
13 Fulham	4	4	●●●●
14 Newcastle	3	4	●●●●
15 Wolves	3	4	●●●●
16 Bournemouth	2	4	●●●●
17 Sheffield Utd	1	4	●●●●
18 Everton	1	4	●●●●
19 Luton Town	0	3	●●●●
20 Burnley	0	3	●●●●
Last match			
● Won ● Drawn ● Lost			
● Champions League (C1)			
● Europa League			
● Relegation			



Sohar take on Seeb in HM Cup Round of 16 clash



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

Former champions Seeb will take on Sohar in a top clash in the Round of 16 of the His Majesty's Cup football championship 2023-24, according to the draw unveiled at the Oman Football Association (OFA) here on Monday. Top eight Omantel League teams Al Nahda, Seeb, Sohar, Al Nasr, Bahla, Al Rustaq, Dhofar and Oman Club were given direct entry to the Round of 16. The other eight teams will join them from a knockout preliminary round. The matches will start on September 28.

Defending champions Al Nahda will meet the winners of Muscat and Sur from the knockout round.

Al Nasr will face the winners of Al Wahda-Al Talea match, Bahla will meet the winners of Ahli Sidab-Salah match and Al Rustaq will face off against the winners of Ibri-Salah match.

In the other Round of 16 matches, formers champions Dhofar take on the winners of the Saham-Nizwa tie while Oman Club meet the winners of the Qurayat-Al Mudhaibi match.

Kerala Smashers to hold badminton tournament in Ghala on Sept 8



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

An all-Oman badminton tournament will be organised at the Ghala badminton court on September 8, from 9am to 9pm, according to the organisers. The registration will end on Tuesday. (September 5)

Organised by Kerala Smashers, a group of badminton lovers, the tournament will witness skilled players from across the country descending down on the capital city to vie for the best badminton player in the region.

The annual tournament which is currently in its fourth season, will be conducted in knockout round in all four divisions — premier, men's A, mixed doubles and an exclusive session for those above 45 years of age will be an added attraction this year.

While top players from Muscat will face each other in the premier section, the section for 45 and above will welcome veteran players from different governorates through the day-long matches.

"Anyone possessing a valid Omani resident card is eligible to participate in the tourney and we have received nearly 70 teams of now," said Riyas, president of the Kerala Smashers, at the press briefing held at the Layali Restaurant in Ghala.

"Winners can look forward to prizes, trophy, and other valuable gifts and we are expecting the participation of more than 100 teams," he said.

"We have plans of conducting an Inter-Regional Tourney for the top players from all the GCC countries at our own badminton court which will soon be functional," Riyas added.

Launch of the official jersey too was held at the press meet in the presence of Samson, MD of Al Ruba Electrical Services.

Zakkariya, Kerala Smashers vice-president, Ajnas, secretary, Rajesh and Shanid, joint secretaries, Jaleel, treasurer and tournament coordinators, Dulkifli, Ebin, Moni, Thaju, Noufal, Aju and Nitin were present at the press briefing.

ALLEN, PHILLIPS LEAD WAY AS NZ HAMMER ENGLAND

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: New Zealand outplayed England as they won the third Twenty20 international at Edgbaston on Sunday by a commanding 74 runs to maintain their hopes of a shared series.

Finn Allen made 83 and Glenn Phillips 69 in New Zealand's 202-5.

Recalled paceman Kyle Jamieson (3-23) and spinner Ish Sodhi (3-33) then did the bulk of the damage, with New Zealand captain Tim Southee (2-30) also in the wickets, as England collapsed to 128 all out inside 19 overs.

There were only four double-figure scores in the T20 world champions' innings, England captain Jos Buttler top-scoring with 40 and Moeen Ali making 26.

"We asked for a better performance in all three areas (batting, bowling and fielding) and that was the kind of performance you expect to see when we play," Southee told the BBC.

"Finn showed his class today and Glenn has been outstanding for us for a long time, especially on tricky surfaces. He made it look like a completely different surface to everyone else.

"So we got a decent score and then with the ball we were more clinical and also had the advantage of having 20 overs watching England bowl."

Buttler added: "Credit to New Zealand, they outplayed us. It was a good toss (for New Zealand) to win, we let them get too many. We couldn't break that Allen-Phillips partnership and they just took the game away. "Chasing that kind of score we needed a fast start and a good powerplay and we didn't get any partnerships going."

Allen, who played for Southern Brave in English domestic cricket's the Hundred, struck leg-spinner Adil Rashid for three consecutive sixes and the opener received good support from Phillips during a stand of 88 for the third wicket.

Gus Atkinson, fresh from impressing with four wickets on his T20 debut during a 95-run win at Old Trafford on Friday, was the pick of England's attack with 2-31.



New Zealand's Finn Allen plays a shot against England during the third IT20 at Edgbaston Cricket Ground, Birmingham, Britain. — Reuters

But spinner Liam Livingstone was smashed for 55 in four overs.

Earlier, the highlights of opener Allen's 53-ball innings came during a 15th over where he launched the experienced Rashid for three consecutive sixes — a drive over deep extra cover, a legside slog and a lofted shot down the ground.

He was in sight of a second T20 century when bowled by Luke Wood's inswinging yorker.

Atkinson took two wickets in the 19th over, bowling Phillips with a slower ball before removing Daryl Mitchell.

Jamieson then dismissed for Will Jacks for 11, with Southee removing Dawid Malan for a laboured two off 11 balls.

The in-form Harry Brook, controversially omitted from defending champions England's preliminary squad for the 50-

over World Cup, got off the mark with a four but fell for eight when he holed out off Sodhi, who had already dismissed Jonny Bairstow. England were now 55-4 and Buttler's 21-ball knock ended when he was caught and bowled by spinner Mitchell Santner.

Jamieson struck twice in the 16th over, with his dismissal of Moeen leaving England all but beaten at 113-9. — AFP

Bangladesh thump Afghanistan to keep hopes alive



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz (R) celebrates with Najmul Hossain Shanto after scoring a century during the Asia Cup 2023 match in Lahore. — AFP

target in ODIs, Afghanistan got off to a disastrous start with Islam trapping the dangerous Rahmanullah Gurbaz leg-before in the second over for one.

Ibrahim Zadran, who top-scored with 75, added 78 for the second wicket with Rahmat

Shah (33) and another 52 for the third with Hashmatullah Shahidi (51) but failed to keep up the momentum.

Mahmud ended Zadran's 74-ball knock with a brilliant diving catch by wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim to hit Afghanistan hard.

He hit ten boundaries and a six.

Shahidi and Najibullah Zadran (17) added 62 for the fourth wicket to keep Afghanistan in the hunt but they fell in quick succession. With 123 needed off the last ten overs, Rashid Khan hit a 15-ball 24 but that was too little, too late.

'PROVED HIMSELF'

Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan praised Miraz.

"We played very well all-round," said Shakib. "Mehidy got his chance up the order and proved himself, we always knew he had the ability. We executed our plans really well." Afghanistan skipper Shahidi was disappointed with his team's bowling.

"We conceded too many runs," said Shahidi. "It was still chaseable but we fell short and now our last game is do-or-die." — AFP

OSTAPENKO ENDS SWIATEK REIGN



Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko celebrates her win against Poland's Iga Swiatek during the US Open women's singles round of 16 match. – AFP

BEN SHELTON of the USA after a fourth-set winner to Tommy Paul of the USA on day seven of the 2023 US Open. – USA Today Sports

COCO GAUFF of the USA after beating Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark on day seven of the 2023 US Open tournament. – USA Today Sports



DJOKOVIC MARCHES ON, US PLAYERS BOOST LOCAL HOPES



DJOKOVIC MARCHES ON, US PLAYERS BOOST LOCAL HOPES

NEW YORK: Iga Swiatek's US Open title defence and reign as world number one came to an end on Sunday with a shock loss to Jelena Ostapenko, while Novak Djokovic continued his march towards a 24th Grand Slam crown.

Swiatek's 3-6, 6-3, 6-1 fourth-round defeat brought the day to a stunning conclusion but it was not a surprise to some, with Ostapenko extending her domination over the Pole having won all four career meetings.

"I had nothing to lose today," said the 20th seeded Latvian. "I knew she's a great player and she's very, very consistent, especially last few years."

"I also knew she would have all the pressure. "I was just trying to make it hard for her and to play my game and to fight until the very last point."

Swiatek's defeat means a new US Open women's champion will be crowned next Saturday, and when the world rankings are

updated on September 11 it will be Aryna Sabalenka's name at the top of the list.

There will be a new men's world number one as well, with Djokovic retaking top spot, but the Serb's primary goal remains a fourth US Open title that would see him match Margaret Court's record haul of 24 Grand Slams.

The 36-year-old took another confident step towards that objective on Sunday, easing past Croatia's Borna Gojo 6-2, 7-5, 6-4 to reach the Flushing Meadows quarterfinals for the 13th time.

EXCITING TIME

Until the late-night Swiatek drama, the day had belonged to local hopes with five US players competing in eight matches on the two steamy show courts.

It has been two decades since Andy Roddick became the last American man to win the US Open, and 2017 since Sloane Stephens hoisted the women's

US OPEN RESULTS	
MEN (FOURTH ROUND)	
Frances Tiafoe (USA x10) bt Rinky Hijikata (AUS) 6-4, 6-1, 6-4;	Ben Shelton (USA) bt Tommy Paul (USA x14) 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4;
Taylor Fritz (USA x9) bt Dominic Stricker (SUI) 7-6 (7/2), 6-4, 6-4;	Novak Djokovic (SRB x2) bt Borna Gojo (CRO) 6-2, 7-5, 6-4
WOMEN (FOURTH ROUND)	
Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x20) bt Iga Swiatek (POL x1) 3-6, 6-3, 6-1;	Coco Gauff (USA x6) bt Caroline Wozniacki (DEN) 6-3, 3-6, 6-1;
Sorana Cirstea (ROU x30) bt Belinda Bencic (SUI x15) 6-3, 6-3;	Karolina Muchova (CZE x10) bt Wang Xinyu (CHN) 6-3, 5-7, 6-1

trophy, but as the season's final Grand Slam enters its second week there is a belief both finals next weekend could feature a home grown contender.

For the first time since 2005 there will be three American men in the last eight, with Taylor Fritz, Frances Tiafoe and Ben Shelton all posting last 16 wins.

And there is certain to be at least one US man through to the semifinals after Tiafoe swatted aside Australian wildcard Rinky Hijikata 6-4, 6-1, 6-4 and Shelton beat compatriot Tommy Paul 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 to set up a last eight all-American clash.

"Ben has wanted to play me at the Open for a long time," said Tiafoe, who electrified the tournament with his run to the semifinals last year. "So he's going to be super excited. He's going to come out with a lot of energy."

"It's going to be a great atmosphere."

"Two people of colour playing in the quarterfinals, huge match on Arthur Ashe."

"It's a pretty monumental moment."

Fritz, who has not yet dropped a set, advanced with a tidy 7-6(2), 6-4, 6-4 win over Swiss qualifier Dominic Stricker.

His reward? A last eight meeting with Djokovic.

Gauff was the first US woman into the last eight, ending Caroline Wozniacki's return to Flushing Meadows 6-3, 3-6, 6-1, and was probably preparing for a showdown with Swiatek until Ostapenko rewrote the script.

Top ranked US woman Jessica Pegula, 2017 finalist Madison Keys and Peyton Stearns will all have their opportunity to join Gauff on Monday when they play their fourth-round matches.

"With Ben and Frances winning guarantees a person in the semi," said Gauff. "With Jess (Pegula) and Maddie (Keys) playing, it guarantees a person in the quarters. "It's just really exciting tennis for America." — Reuters

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
4,757.624



CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$89.41
Brent Crude \$88.54
Light Crude \$85.54



Follow us on
omanobserver.om/business



Need cash?

Transfer money easily from your credit card to your account

2477 57 77 | www.maisarah-oman.com

[f /MaisarahOman](#) [@MaisarahIslamic](#) [@Maisarah.Islamic](#)

#MAISARAHWORLD



بنك مساره
MAISARAH
البنك الإسلامي للخدمات
Islamic Banking Services

New project to transform Salalah's Iteen into natural wonderland



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 4

Nestled in the heart of Salalah, the sprawling Iteen Nature Park is one of Dhofar's most popular settings for social and cultural events, and informal family get-togethers as well.

Now, in an effort to enhance its appeal, Dhofar Municipality is partnering with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) in the development of a full-fledged natural park replete with attractions and amenities to appeal to visitors of all ages.

Total investment in the initiative is about RO 5 million, which includes a contribution of RO 2 million from PDO.

An overview of the Iteen Nature Park project was provided at the Dhofar Forum held in Salalah last week.

The project is one of six civic and tourism enhancement initiatives being implemented by Dhofar Municipality

targeting key sites across the governorate.

According to officials, the Iteen Nature Park project will transform a 273,000 sq metre area of Iteen Plain into a new, spectacular landmark in the government.

A tender for the implementation of the project is expected to be floated shortly. Once redeveloped, Iteen Nature Park will captivate visitors with its diverse range of natural wonders, including cascading waterfalls, lush forests, and meticulously manicured gardens.

Complementing these natural marvels are an array of world-class recreational amenities such as picturesque hiking trails, idyllic picnic spots, and a state-of-the-art playground.

Furthermore, the project will make a significant economic impact as well, in the form of job creation, growth in tourism revenues, and other knock-on benefits, officials added.

Oman's OQ Gas Networks to offer 49% shares for public subscription

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

OQ Gas Networks SAOG (OQGN), the exclusive owner and operator of Oman's gas transportation network, announced on Monday, September 4, 2023, its intention to proceed with an initial public offering (IPO) and listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The public subscription — planned during October 2023 after approvals from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) — will enable investors to gain exposure to OQGN as the monopoly owner of the Natural Gas Transportation Network (NGTN).

According to details shared at a press briefing hosting by OQ Group and its subsidiary OQGN, the Selling Shareholders intend to offer up to 49 per cent of OQGN's total share capital. Immediately following the Offering, a minimum of 51.0 per cent shareholding will continue to be held by OQ. The IPO will be offered in two tranches:

- Category I Offer represents 70 per cent of the total Offering (out of which 30 per cent of the Offer Shares have been reserved for Anchor Investors) and will be made to eligible investors in Oman and qualified institutional and other investors in a number of countries.
- Category II Offer represents 30 per cent of the total



Offering for retail investors.

Mansoor al Abdali, Managing Director of OQGN, commented: "OQGN, as the exclusive operator of the NGTN in Oman, provides critical infrastructure to deliver gas that supports the industries and economy of Oman.

This listing, which we are proud to be conducting on the Muscat Stock Exchange, will allow us to move the company into the next chapter of growth. The core focus of OQGN will remain unchanged, focusing on the delivery of vital resources supporting the growth of our customers and the Sultanate of Oman.

Our work is underlined by a commitment to reliability, efficiency, safety and sustainability. Together with our partners at OQ and OIA, we look forward to the listing and are excited by the opportunities it brings — to our customers, our investors, our employees, and the people of Oman."

Talal al Awfi, OQ Group CEO and OQGN Chairman, added: "The IPO of OQGN is part of a broader divestment programme envisioned by the government and being implemented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.

This marquee offering is an opportunity for Omani and international investors to participate in Oman's Vision 2040, the long-term national development plan that aims to make Oman a prosperous, competitive and sustainable nation and to rapidly diversify its economy.

The listing of OQGN, which owns and operates critical gas transportation infrastructure in Oman, is in line with this ambition while enriching the dynamically developing Omani stock market. We look forward to the listing on the MSX and are excited for what's to come."

The subscription period for Category I and Category II investors is expected to commence in September. Admission of shares for trading on the MSX is expected in October 2023.

Asyad launches shipping line connecting Khazaen to India

MUSCAT: Asyad Group launched a direct shipping service linking the land port in Khazaen Economic City with the Neva Sheva Port in India, via Sohar Port through Asyad Logistics Solutions, and on board the Asyad Lines fleet.

Asyad aims to support private companies operating in the export and import sector and shipping agents, in addition to small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs, by linking them to the Indian market. Providing direct partial shipping service at Khazaen land port reflects positively on the level of competitiveness of shipping agents in Oman, who will benefit from the storage and container handling facilities at the land port.

The partial shipping solutions service for local importers will ensure a stable import and export line with the port of Neva Sheva, thanks to the direct weekly travel operated by Asyad lines between the two countries, which contributes to reducing transportation costs, shortening the shipping period, sustaining direct export and import operations from the country of origin.

— ONA

SMEDA funds 363 projects in Dhofar worth RO 14.6m

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

The Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) funded 363 projects in Dhofar Governorate worth RO 14.6 million since its inception, according to recent data.

In an effort to support business owners and simultaneously boost the tourism sector, the Authority, in collaboration with the Municipality, has provided several opportunities for small and medium businesses during the tourist seasons.

This includes providing business owners with well-equipped spaces to sell their products at prime tourist locations.

This year, SMEDA and Dhofar Municipality offered 130 outlets for SMEs and artisans. This included 85 outlets for SMEs, 55 of which are mobile food and beverage carts at Sahal Atin, and 30 exhibitor booths at a consumer exhibition in Atin Square.

This is in addition to 45 outlets for artisans, 30 of which are booths at a traditional Omani artisanal exhibition in the village of Samharam, and 15 artisan



booths at Taqah Fort.

Last year, the value of contracts awarded to small and medium-sized businesses in the governorate amounted to RO 3.5 million, with a total of 480 businesses benefiting from operating event sites. In addition, more than 500

temporary job opportunities were created as a result.

Furthermore, 290 artisans and artisanal institutions received support in the governorate, worth a total value of RO 203,023. The Authority has a total of six centres in the governorate, and a total of 15,132 micro, small and medium enterprises, and 10 companies under the Samharam Incubator — a programme specifically designed to accelerate the growth of creative enterprises in the governorate.

Just this year, the Authority announced that it approved financing requests worth RO

11.295 million in H1 of 2023 in collaboration with Oman Development Bank.

The Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority was established by Royal Decree No. 107/2020 with the goal of assisting and integrating SMEs and artisan industries into the economic growth of Oman, by offering a variety of technical, training, and consulting programmes to SMEs.

Additionally, SMEDA provides various funding programmes totalling in RO 9.6 million in value.

Chery Automobile officially partners with Saud Bahwan Group

MUSCAT: Recently, Chery Automobile signed a distribution agreement with Oman's renowned Corporate – Saud Bahwan Group.

Attending the signing ceremony were Zhang Guibing (President, Chery International), Qin Chao (Vice President), Shen Xiantian (General Manager, Chery MENA), Mohammed Saud Bahwan (Chairman, Saud Bahwan Group) and Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan (Managing Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group).

At the event Zhang Guibing placed high hopes on Chery's return to Oman's vibrant automotive market and said that, with the iteration of the technology and the expansion of its global business, Chery will provide Oman's market with more competitive products and it is believed that this cooperation will achieve remarkable results.

Mohammed bin Saud Bahwan, Chairman, Saud Bahwan Group, asserted confidence in Chery's



brand concept and product strength. He said that in the future, the group will fully support Chery in quickly opening up Oman's auto market utilising the Group's various strengths.

As one of the largest business houses in Oman, Saud Bahwan Group has an impressive portfolio of globally renowned automotive brands.

The Group also has a very strong sales and after-sales service network throughout Oman, and has built a strong reputation for offering some of the finest customer experiences.

After 26 years of development, Chery adheres to the brand concept of technology, green,

family and companionship.

With the corporate vision of building an auto brand with international competitiveness and influence, Chery has ranked first in China's auto exports for 20 consecutive years and its brand strength has continued to rise.

From January to June 2023, the total export volume of Chery Automobiles is 394,000. Up to now, Chery's cumulative global users have exceeded 12 million, and overseas users have exceeded 2 million. Chery's auto products have won the title of "Most Popular Chinese Automobile Brand" in many countries around the world.

By establishing a partnership

with Saud Bahwan Group, Chery Automobile will not only further expand its overseas sales network, but will also promote localised operations with the help of the Group's experience.

In the future, Saud Bahwan Group will establish Chery showrooms and after-sales service agencies in major cities in Oman to promote enriching customer experiences.

Chery is expected to grow its presence to become one of the top brands in Oman in the coming years and strengthening local consumers' awareness of Chinese brands further fulfilling the mission of Chinese brands going global.

Opening a children's account made easy through ahlibank's mobile banking app

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to increasing its diverse portfolio of banking products and provide innovative solutions, ahlibank is the first bank in the Sultanate of Oman to introduce opening children's savings accounts through its mobile banking app.

This comes as part of the bank's efforts to facilitate its operations digitally and to making the banking experience easier and more accessible to its customers. This new feature has been designed to meet the customers' needs, as it seamlessly integrates modern technology with the bank's extensive expertise to provide a unique and rewarding experience.

It has been crafted to allow users to effortlessly open their children's account instantly through mobile devices. These easy and secure steps will enable parents to manage their children's financial future from the comfort and safety of their homes with utmost ease and security.

Commenting on the new feature in the mobile banking app, Taher al Balushi, General Manager - Strategy & Transformation and Project Management at ahlibank, said, "At ahlibank, we strive to keep up with our customers' requirements by devising innovative methods and digital solutions to serve and meet their diverse banking needs.

Today, digitisation has become



an integral part of the banking sector's demands, and this is where our role comes into play in responding to the sector's evolving landscape. We aim to provide banking services that align with the principles of sustainability, firmly believing that we are moving forward on the right path to realise our vision to transform the banking experience."

In this regard, Hassan al Zaabi, Head - Digital & Alternative Channels, said: "Offering convenience and innovation for our customers has always been at the forefront at ahlibank. We are thrilled to unveil this feature on the mobile banking app, another first in the Sultanate of Oman.

With a deep commitment to enhancing our customer's experience, we empower them to carry out their banking at their convenience. With innovative solutions in the banking sector, we aim to simplify the financial journeys of our customers and their children."

KR Group, Bank Muscat collaborate on global financial market trends

MUSCAT: The Khimji Ramdas Group's (KR Group) Corporate Finance department recently hosted an enlightening workshop, focusing on the intricate dynamics of the 'Global Financial Market', in collaboration with Bank Muscat.

The session held at KR Infra's multipurpose hall, proved to be a remarkable opportunity for the Group's finance professionals to gain invaluable insights into the prevailing economic landscape in Oman and the catalysing factors driving global economic transformations.

With a keen emphasis on broadening perspectives beyond the realms of daily operations, the workshop aimed to equip attendees with a comprehensive understanding of international financial dynamics.

Finance representatives from various business units across the KR Group, converged at the venue, making the session a comprehensive platform for cross-functional learning and knowledge exchange.

The session featured an in-depth exploration of the current economic conditions in Oman,



shedding light on the key elements influencing global economic shifts. Bank Muscat's experts delved into predictions and anticipated scenarios regarding the global economy, arming attendees with the knowledge to anticipate and navigate potential challenges and opportunities.

Expressing his perspective on the collaborative initiative Mayur Sanghani, Group Head – Corporate Finance, KR Group mentioned: "At KR Group, we are committed to fostering continuous learning and professional growth. This session exemplifies our dedication to equipping our finance teams with the tools and insights necessary to excel in an ever-evolving financial landscape."

Al Ahlia Insurance and NLGIC rebrand as Liva

MUSCAT: Al Ahlia Insurance Company SAOC and National Life & General Insurance Company SAOG (NLGIC) have come together to form a new brand – Liva – with the aim of revolutionising the insurance landscape.

These two dynamic and award-winning companies started their integration journey in July 2022 with an ambition to build the region's leading multi-line insurer that delivers value to its customers, while generating sustainable and profitable earnings for its shareholders. Liva aims to deliver on this mission.

"Liva marks a powerful evolution that draws upon the rich heritage of NLGIC and Al Ahlia Insurance, all aimed at revolutionising insurance to meet today's dynamic realities.

The name 'Liva', encompassing 'protection' and 'life', perfectly mirrors our commitment to safeguarding our customers' lives, enabling them to embrace every moment. Through a



LIVA WILL PROVIDE A HOLISTIC PORTFOLIO OF INNOVATIVE, SMART AND RELIABLE SOLUTIONS THAT BLEND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WITH GLOBAL EXPERTISE TO SAFEGUARD ALL ASPECTS OF PEOPLE'S LIVES.

combination of our strengths, we've crafted a robust brand identity that propels us forward, powering our journey towards ambitious growth," said Hanaa al Hinai, CEO of Al Ahlia Insurance (to rebrand as Liva).

Liva builds on the strong brand equity of Al Ahlia Insurance and NLGIC, taking it to the next level by diversifying its offering and expanding its reach even further.

Liva will provide a holistic portfolio of innovative, smart and reliable solutions that blend local knowledge with global expertise to safeguard all aspects of people's lives.

The new brand reinforces the company's purpose of instilling confidence in people to live the lives they want, well prepared for the unexpected,

by creating an ecosystem beyond insurance that has its customers' needs at its core.

NLGIC brings specialism in health and life insurance products as first and largest insurance company in Oman with a large network of sales and service touchpoints across the country, while Al Ahlia Insurance is a leading general insurer in Oman with a portfolio of award-winning products and services.

The integration of the two companies' portfolios into the new entity Liva makes the new brand a strong multi-line insurer.

Over the next few weeks, a rebranding initiative is set to unfold across the products, branches, and offices, embracing the captivating new visual identity of Liva, characterised by its vibrant orange and white palette.

Importantly, this transformation doesn't impact any customer existing policies or partner agreements—all aspects remain unchanged.

Geely launches Asian Games test drive and win campaign

MUSCAT: Geely, the renowned automotive brand, is pleased to announce its exciting "Test Drive and Win" campaign, offering car enthusiasts a unique opportunity to experience the thrill of a Geely car.

Geely's "Test Drive and Win" campaign, valid from 15/08/2023 to 07/09/2023, invites all individuals to test drive a Geely vehicle in the Sultanate of Oman to participate in the raffle and stand a chance to win an unforgettable trip to witness the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou city.

As part of the prize package, two lucky winners will receive two air tickets (economy class)



and enjoy a two-night stay at a luxurious hotel in Hangzhou city.

Geely Auto will ensure an unforgettable experience during the trip, with a one-day guided tour of Hangzhou city, including a visit to the iconic Geely HQ, where innovation and automotive excellence converge.

The winners will also be provided with transportation by Geely throughout their stay for a hassle-free and enjoyable visit.

The raffle for the "Test Drive and Win" campaign will be conducted on 10/09/2023, and Geely Auto eagerly awaits the announcement of the two lucky winners who will embark on a once-in-a-lifetime

journey to experience the 19th Asian Games.

Geely Auto is proud to sponsor this remarkable campaign which aims to reward Geely's valued customers and showcase the brand's commitment to providing exceptional experiences.

The campaign aligns with Geely's vision of being at the forefront of innovation, offering top-of-the-line vehicles that epitomise style, performance, and cutting-edge technology.

Geely's current lineup of cars features the All New Azkarra, All New Emgrand, All New Okavango, and All New 2024 Coolray. Each variant boasts

sophisticated design elements, superior comfort, advanced safety features, and powerful performance, making every Geely driving experience truly special.

In Oman, Geely vehicles are brought to you by Towell Auto Centre LLC. So, the people in the Sultanate of Oman can be assured of the best-in-class automobile experience. To know more about the offer in Geely Oman or to buy a car in Oman, visit www.geelyoman.com or the nearest Geely Oman showroom.

For any queries or to book a test drive, contact at ph: +968 94440666 or send an email to suraj@towellauto.com.



3-day seminar to focus on security of vital installations

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 4

The Institution for Security and Safety Services is hosting a three-day seminar on the security of vital facilities on September 4 - 6 at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Dhofar Governorate.

The seminar is organised under the auspices of Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It will bring together experts and stakeholders from the security and safety sector, along with project managers from the government and private sectors.

The seminar will feature 17 speakers and is expected to attract 250 participants. It will provide a forum for discussing critical security and safety issues, with a focus on global perspectives and insights.

In his opening remarks, Brigadier General (Eng) Said bin Sulaiman al Asimi, CEO of the Institution for Security and Safety Services, said that he is confident that the seminar will

be a valuable learning experience for all attendees. He noted that the event has drawn a significant crowd, with participants from a variety of public and private sector facilities.

Brigadier General Al Asimi emphasised the importance of prioritising the safety and security of both workers and facilities. He said that these measures are essential to ensuring a safe and healthy work environment, which in turn enhances productivity and the overall well-being of society.

During the seminar, participants will explore a wide range of topics related to occupational security and safety. This will include the introduction of cutting-edge technological innovations and novel practices in the field, as well as the sharing of valuable insights and lessons learned from both local and global experiences.

The forum will also feature a number of interactive sessions, providing attendees with opportunities to actively participate, ask questions, and exchange experiences.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the nation's biggest oil and gas producer, envisions a significant role for green hydrogen in its ambitious strategy to become a Net-Zero energy company by 2050.

The majority state-owned company said it is actively pursuing green hydrogen opportunities potentially for use as an alternative to natural gas, as well as a zero-carbon fuel substitute in heavy transportation.

"This aim is fully aligned with the national direction towards achieving net-zero emission status by 2050," the company said.

"We are currently focused on injecting H₂e into the gas grid to "time-shift" energy production from solar power plants for gas-blending applications in gas turbines; and secondly, on replacing conventional heavy-duty vehicles with hydrogen fuel cell vehicles," it stated in its newly published 2022 Sustainability Report.

[Energy time-shifting involves the generation of electricity when it is available cheaply in abundance to be stored and used later when it is less abundant and expensive.]

For now, PDO is focused on piloting green hydrogen technologies to demonstrate



the viability of solar hydrogen production systems through water electrolysis processes to meet the company's decarbonisation goals primarily for the hard-to-abate sectors.

This includes steam generation for enhanced oil recovery (EOR) based on the use of renewable energy to produce superheated steam – an initiative currently deployed as part of the pioneering Miraah solar project in Amal.

According to PDO, the plummeting cost of renewable energy has also enabled its potential deployment in hydrogen boilers, as well as electrical and molten salt heaters. Other opportunities for hydrogen use are being keenly explored as well, it stated.

Steve Phimister, Managing Director, commented: "We remain committed to building a sustainable and low-carbon future, not only to ensure our Company's long-term success but also to continue generating oil and gas revenue in a cost-effective, energy-efficient manner to maximise value for the Sultanate of Oman.

We remain intent on the use of low carbon fuels (such as hydrogen) in PDO's operations, for example to replace the use of hydrocarbons in steam generation, for gas-blending applications in gas turbines and replacing conventional heavy-duty vehicles with hydrogen fuel cell vehicles," he further stated.

Phimister also described as

"landmark" an agreement signed by PDO with Oman Shell in May 2022 to jointly study Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) opportunities in Oman.

As part of the MoU, Oman Shell and have PDO have agreed to broadly assess all aspects related to reinjecting and storing CO₂ in Oman.

As part of its Decarbonisation Roadmap, PDO aims to derive 30 per cent of its power from solar and wind resources by 2025, rising to 50 per cent by 2030.

To drive this transition, the company plans to procure a pair of wind power projects each of 100 MW capacity, as well as a new solar PV project, also of about 100 MW but with battery energy storage.

OQGN: Driving Oman's economic growth through gas transportation infrastructure

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 4

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) is at the forefront of Oman's economic development, playing a pivotal role in the country's gas transportation infrastructure. With a natural monopoly over essential gas transportation and a strong operational track record, OQGN is well-positioned to support Oman's economic growth and meet the increasing demand for gas.

Oman's resilient and stable economy sets the stage for OQGN's success. The country has been experiencing steady growth, with a projected Real GDP Growth Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) from 2023 to 2025 of 3.7 per cent.

Supported by various ratings and indicators, Oman's strong Gross Domestic Product (GDP) outlook is further bolstered by its young and growing population, with approximately 50 per cent of the population under 30 years old in 2023.

Underpinning Oman's economic vision is 'Oman Vision 2040,' a comprehensive 20-year plan aimed at diversifying the economy and achieving sustainable fiscal surplus.

As part of this vision, OQGN operates under a 50-year concession, granted by the Government of Oman through the Amended Concession Agreement, which provides OQGN with a natural



monopoly over the critical gas transportation infrastructure until 2070.

OQGN's monopoly position is crucial as it serves as the link between core Omani gas producers and approximately 130 gas consumers. Through its National Gas Transportation Network (NGTN), OQGN connects producers and consumers through pipelines, gas supply stations, and gas compressor stations.

In 2022 alone, OQGN transported 39.4 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas from six gas

producers, utilising its extensive network of approximately 4,031 kilometres of pipelines.

The stability and reliability of OQGN's operations are evident in its strong operational track record. With consistent gas availability and minimal interruptions, OQGN has earned international certifications, further reinforcing its operational excellence and adherence to industry standards.

The demand for gas in Oman is expected to rise significantly in the coming years, driven by economic activity and

industrialisation across various sectors.

Forecasts indicate that gas demand will range between 37.7 BCM and 54.5 BCM by 2043, highlighting the need for a robust and efficient gas transportation infrastructure. OQGN's strategic position as the exclusive operator and owner of the NGTN positions the company for future growth.

It not only ensures a stable long-term supply of gas but also generates revenue through transportation and connection fees.

As Oman's critical industries, including LNG, power generation, desalination, oil and gas, and industrial and commercial sectors, expand, OQGN's role becomes increasingly indispensable.

To support its growth trajectory, Oman has implemented initiatives to attract investment and promote economic diversification.

These include consolidating national assets, promoting privatisation, and implementing favourable regulatory changes to support Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows. These measures create a favourable investment climate for OQGN and other companies in Oman's energy sector.

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) holds a natural monopoly over essential gas transportation infrastructure, playing a crucial role in Oman's economic growth.

With a strong operational track record, OQGN connects gas producers with consumers, meeting the rising demand for gas across various sectors.

Supported by Oman's stable economy, Vision 2040, and favourable investment climate, OQGN is well-positioned to capitalise on the growing demand for gas in Oman.

The company's exclusive concession, which runs until 2070, ensures its dominance in the gas transportation sector, providing stability and predictability for investors.

Oman chairs meetings of GCC ministry of trade and industry under-secretaries



MUSCAT: Dr Saleh bin Said Masan (pictured), Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, will preside on Wednesday, September 6 2023, the 57th Trade Agents' Meeting of the Trade Cooperation Committee and the 43rd Industry Agents' Meeting of the Industrial Cooperation Committee in Dhofar Governorate.

The under-secretaries will discuss a number of topics in the preparatory meeting of the Commercial Cooperation Committee, the most important of which is addressing the challenges of intra-Gulf trade and facilitating trade exchange.

The industry agents will also discuss a number of topics, including finding a unified definition for the national Gulf product and its standards, and the executive regulations for the law system, unified industrial organisation, as well as addressing the challenges facing the industrial sector.

The power of branding in startup success



KAMLA SAID
AL RAHBIYAH
kamlaa2040@gmail.com

The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

As-Salaam-Alaikum.
Have you ever wondered why some startups succeed while others fail, despite having a great product or service? The secret often lies in their branding.
Branding is not just a logo or a tagline; it is the entire experience your customers have with your company, product, or service.
Your brand strategy is how, what, where, when, and to whom you plan on communicating and delivering your brand messages. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasised the importance of trust and a good reputation when he said, “It

is enough for a man to prove himself a liar when he goes on narrating whatever he hears.”
Hence, a strong brand is built on trust and a good reputation, which can only be earned by being truthful and reliable
1. Creating a Strong Visual Identity: Your logo, colours, and design should be memorable and reflect your brand’s values and message.
A well-designed logo can create a lasting impression in the customer’s mind. Remember, your visual identity is often the first interaction a customer has with your brand.
2. Building an Emotional Connection: People often make purchasing decisions based on emotions rather than

logic.
Therefore, it is essential to establish an emotional connection with your audience. This can be achieved through storytelling, understanding your audience’s pain points, and addressing them in your messaging.
3. Consistency is Key: Consistency in your branding across all platforms and touchpoints is crucial for building trust and loyalty.
From your website to your social media channels to your customer service, every interaction should reflect your brand’s values and personality.
4. Delivering Value: Your brand should not only promise value but deliver it

consistently.
Whether it is the quality of your product, your customer service, or your contribution to the community, make sure you are always delivering value.
5. Creating a Community: A loyal community of customers can be your biggest brand ambassadors. Encourage interaction and engagement among your audience by creating a sense of belonging.
Social media is a great platform for this. Your branding is the essence of your startup. It reflects your mission, values, and promises to your customers. Therefore, it is crucial to give it the necessary attention and effort.

As we move on to our next article, ‘Understanding consumer behaviour for effective sales’, we will explore how a deeper understanding of your customers can contribute to your startup’s success.
As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger.”
Similarly, a strong brand is not the one that dominates with flashy advertisements and aggressive marketing, but the one that controls its narrative and builds meaningful relationships with its customers. Ma’as salama!

China’s biggest homebuilder reels as economy slows

When Country Garden, the biggest developer in China’s increasingly troubled real estate sector, published its annual report in April, the cover design exuded hope: a phoenix spreading its wings.
The company said the image showed that China’s economy was “back on track” and that this year would see “growth soaring to new heights.”
That was wishful thinking. Shortly after the report’s release, China’s nascent economic recovery lost steam and an already sluggish real estate market started to collapse.
At Country Garden, presales of unfinished apartments, a crucial indicator of future revenue, plunged more than 50 per cent in June and July, twice the rate of decline in the preceding five months.
For the past three years, as dozens of major property developers defaulted after years of excessive borrowing, Country Garden was an outlier. But last month, it missed two interest payments — signaling that it, too, was at risk of financial collapse, with \$187 billion in debt.
Country Garden must come up with \$22.5 million this week, the end of a grace period for the missed payments.
On Friday, the company won a last-minute approval from creditors to postpone repayment of \$537 million in yuan-denominated bonds, originally due on Monday, until 2026, according to documents shared by Country Garden.
Last week, after reporting a \$7.1 billion loss for the first six months of 2023, Country Garden said there were “material uncertainties which may cast significant doubt” on its ability to avoid bankruptcy.
The company is scrambling to raise cash and keep its creditors at bay, selling off stakes in properties and issuing shares at a discount.
It has been a dramatic fall for Country Garden. The company’s improbable rise, from a regional homebuilder to a nationwide behemoth, tracked China’s meteoric ascent.
Now, its collapse reflects the speed and severity of the country’s real estate meltdown, which threatens to derail the broader economy.
“As giant as Country Garden



DAISUKE WAKABAYASHI

The author is an Asia business correspondent for The New York Times, based in Seoul. He covers a wide range of subjects from the Chinese economy to corporate news across the region.



CLAIRE FU

The author covers news in mainland for The New York Times in Seoul. She joined The Times in 2018.



A visitor is seen at the sales office at Country Garden’s Ten Mile Bay project in Nantong, China. – The New York Times

is, it’s a canary in the coal mine,” said Kenneth Rogoff, a Harvard University economics professor, who has written extensively about China.
To bolster the teetering real estate market, China’s financial regulators on Thursday rolled out a series of measures, including lower minimum down payments for first-time buyers and a reduction in interest rates on existing mortgages.
These and previous measures may not be enough to save Country Garden, which is struggling to pay its debts.
Many Country Garden bonds trade for pennies on the dollar, suggesting that lenders have low hopes of getting repaid.
And the company’s share price is below 1 Hong Kong dollar, a precipitous fall for what was once one of China’s largest private companies, whose stock traded above 17 Hong Kong dollars five years ago.
Country Garden was founded by Yang Guoqiang, a former farmer and construction worker who was raised in such dire poverty that, according to a profile on a government website, he didn’t wear shoes for the first 17 years of his life and he almost dropped out of school because he couldn’t afford the \$1 tuition.
The company started developing properties in 1997, around the time that China began to change the rules for private ownership of real estate.
When it went public in 2007, the company told investors that one of its strengths was a large reserve of low-cost land to develop. It also said it could build faster and cheaper than competitors.
Two years before the public offering, Yang transferred his 70 per cent stake to his second daughter, Yang Huiyan, who was then a manager in the company’s procurement department.
When Country Garden’s stock listed, the 25-year-old Yang became the richest woman in Asia, with a fortune eventually estimated as high as \$29 billion. Yang, who was co-chair with her father until March, when she assumed the position exclusively, remains Country Garden’s majority shareholder.
Until recently, Country Garden had been hailed as a survivor

of the industry turmoil. While Beijing did little to backstop other major homebuilders, including Evergrande, the now bankrupt property developer that once rivalled Country Garden for market supremacy, the government has displayed a greater willingness to support the firm.
When China’s financial regulators issued a 16-point guide in November to aid the property industry, Country Garden was placed on a “white list” of quality developers to prioritise for financial aid and credit lines from state-owned banks, according to Chinese media reports.
For years, Country Garden has maintained close ties with the ruling Communist Party. Yang, its founder, served on the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, a national political advisory body.
Country Garden proactively supported policy initiatives such as the distribution of sewing machines and farm equipment in poor areas under the banner of “poverty alleviation.”
Even as Country Garden’s finances have deteriorated, it

has prioritised the wishes of policymakers by completing the construction of presold homes. It finished nearly 700,000 presold units last year and another 278,000 units in the first half of this year.
Even so, in its latest earnings report Country Garden said it was focusing on improving its cash flow and cutting costs.
It employs about 58,000 people, fewer than half the full-time staff it had in 2018.
The company declined to provide additional comment beyond its public announcements.
In the earnings report, the company said it was “deeply remorseful” about its current predicament, but added that it “will never succumb to passive defeatism.”
When Yang Guoqiang addressed employees at a company meeting early this year, he urged perseverance.
“Do not fall down before dawn,” he said, according to the company’s WeChat account. “We must live till spring comes, and spring will surely come.”
— The New York Times

WJ Towell Group Company



Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

TUESDAY

SEPTEMBER 5, 2023 | SAFAR 19, 1445 AH

OMAN DAILY
Observer Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almaashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595



النماني للشحن
AL NAMANI CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR AIR AND SEA CARGO WORLD WIDE

DOOR TO DOOR CARGO



INDIA BANGLADESH NEPAL PHILIPPINES UAE INDONESIA EUROPE UK CANADA USA

WHATSAPP
96353654

TOLL FREE NUMBER
80066766

Follow us :  www.alnamanicargo.com

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

SKT سماء الخضراء للتجارة
SAMA AL KHADRA TRADING

SERVICES:

PIPING SYSTEMS

VALVES

DRAINS

INTERCEPTORS

Tel: 24501568, 24502479 • Fax: 24503566
Email: sales@samaalkhadra.com
Website: www.samaalkhadratradingco.com



To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,

WhatsApp
->your name-> to
96473232

AUDIT, ACCOUNTING, VAT, TAXATION

Contact: 97239696 95355638

Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit
Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Sur

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?

Advertise with us.

Contact us on: **99639264**

FOR SALE

DISCONTINUOUS
PU Sandwich Panel
Machine, running
condition, for sale.

Contact number:
99205104. Mail iD:
mktho@omantel.net.om

SIT. WANTED

SENIOR
Accountant, B.Com,
MBA (Finance), 17
years experience in
Oman, seeks senior
level opportunity.
Contact:
+96878581435

ROYAL CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR CARGO

ALL OVER INDIA
INDONESIA ▶ NEPAL
AIR EXPORT (Port to Port)
SEA EXPORT (Container Booking)
PICK UP FREE ANYWHERE IN MUSCAT 93213206

SERVICES BY AIR & SEA

FOR MORE INFORMATION JUST DIAL
CUSTOMER CARE 93213207

FLAT FOR RENT

FLATS and
offices for rent
in Muscat.
96379095,
98403020

IN DARSAIT, 3
bedrooms, hall, 4
bathrooms, kitchen with
store, small sea view.
Near the Indian Schools.
RO 220 monthly only.
Tel: 99315986

EAGLE FREIGHT EXPRESS
DOOR TO DOOR COURIER SERVICES
INDIA | NEPAL | BANGLADESH

WORLD WIDE CARGO SERVICE Tel.: 99432926, 78211708, 92319472, 93350126
Head Office (H.O.) Room No.: 218, 1st Floor, Aircargo Complex, Branch Al-Hail, Email: eaglefreightexpress@gmail.com

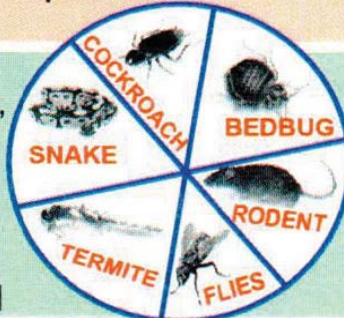
25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
FAST DELIVERY
EXCELLENT SERVICES
AIR & SEA CARGO
FREE PICKUP
24/7 SERVICE

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocroaches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman



SIT. WANTED

ACCOUNTANT
(male), MBA Finance
and a Certified SAP
FICO Consultant with
7 years work experience
from Oman in Finance
Department. Looking
for a suitable position.
Contact: 99685330.
Email: hussain_ca87@
yahoo.com

INDIAN male
34 years, MBA-
Marketing. 12yrs
Oman Exp, looking
for a job. Experience
in sales, operations
and project. Presently
working as operation
manager. Driving
licence. Contact:
98469481

INDIAN male, in
family visa, BTEch
NEBOSH, IOSH
(MEP) Mechanical
Engineer with 12
years of experience
in execution, testing
& commissioning,
and maintenance. 9
years GCC (7 years
in Qatar, 2 years
in UAE and rest in
India). A valid Oman
driving licence.
shyamkottaram007@
gmail.com or call me
at 79105173.

ACCOUNTS/
Finance, Qualified
Female, M.com,
MBA 2 year
working Experience
in auditing firm
KPMG) looking for
a suitable position.
Contact: 94562018
shalusebastianjmj@
gmail.com

SUDANESE lawyer
and legal adviser,
with more than 30
years of experience
in Sudanese courts
of all levels and
types. Available
in Muscat, Tel:
79121176, Yasir.
Elmahhi@hotmail.
com

OMAN OBSERVER

Now get news on the go



To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,
WhatsApp
->your name-> to
96473232



OMAN **عمان** DAILY

Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadialmeeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com



@omanobserver
www.omanobserver.om



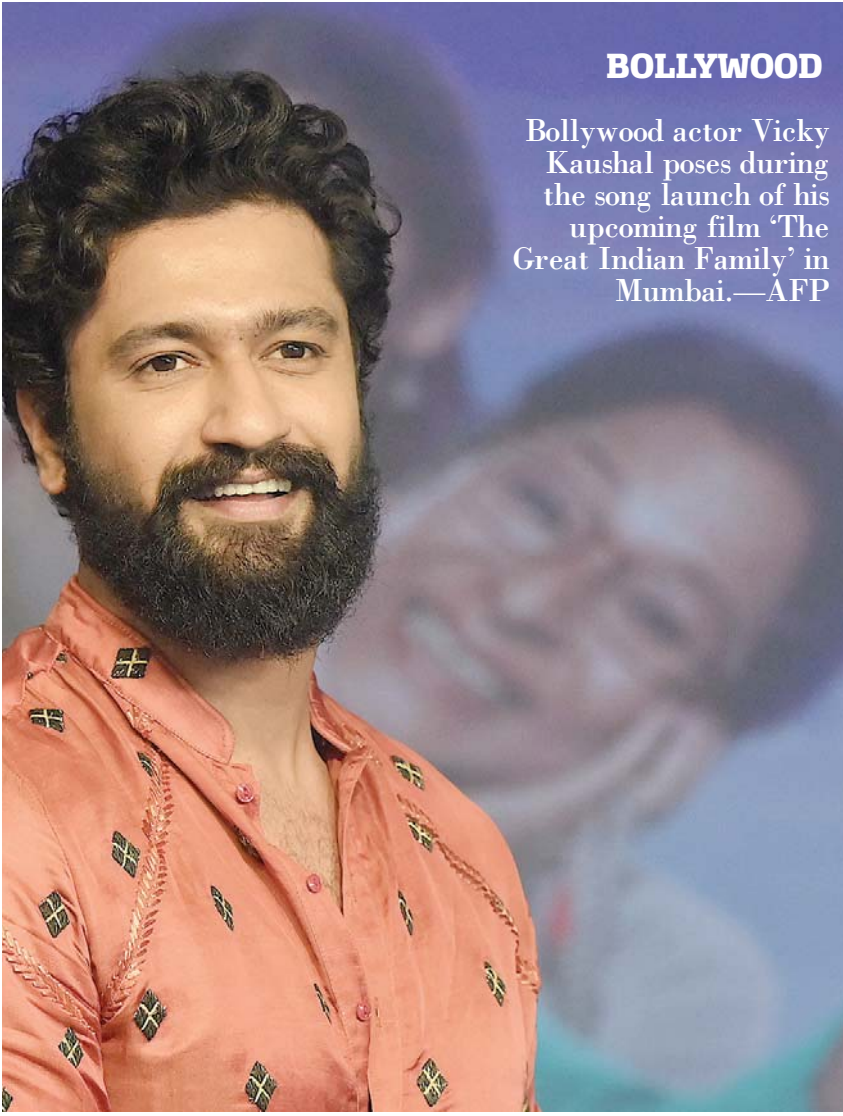
ENTERTAINMENT

A reveller lies on a street flooded with tomato pulp during the “Tomatina” annual food-battle in the Spanish eastern town of Bunol. — AFP



TRAVEL

Residents use kayaks to travel on a flooded road in Tampa, Florida.—AFP



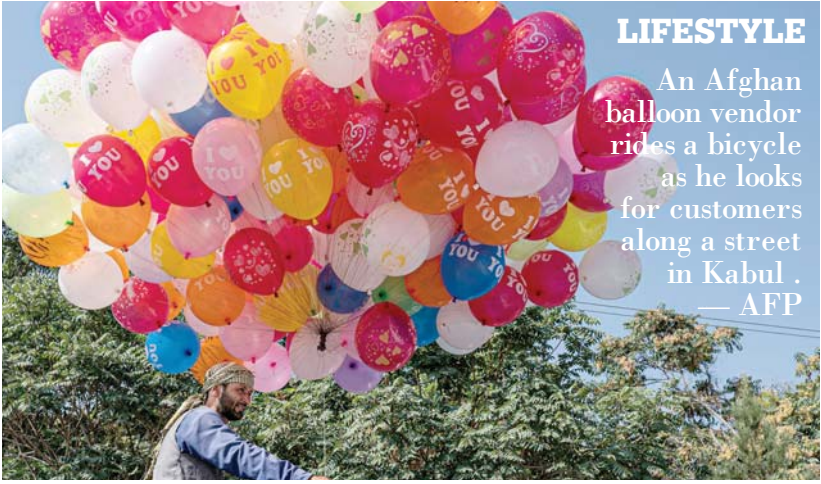
BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actor Vicky Kaushal poses during the song launch of his upcoming film ‘The Great Indian Family’ in Mumbai.—AFP



FILM

South Korean film director Celine Song arrives to attend the 49th edition of the American film festival in Deauville, western France.— AFP



LIFESTYLE

An Afghan balloon vendor rides a bicycle as he looks for customers along a street in Kabul . — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 5, 2023 | SAFAR 19, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



Unwavering dedication for photography

By Zuwaina al Sulaimani

Meet Ammar bin Ali al Riyami, an exceptional Omani photographer who is leaving his mark in the photography world of the Sultanate of Oman. As a member of the photography group at Sultan Qaboos University, Ammar has achieved numerous accolades and awards, showcasing his unwavering dedication to capturing life's intricate details.

Ammar's journey in photography began approximately three years ago, and since then, he has embraced a world of challenges, learning opportunities, and boundless enthusiasm. In Oman, the photography scene is vibrant and competitive, fostering an environment where photographers continuously challenge themselves, leading to personal growth and expertise in the field.

Speaking about his unique perspective on photography, Ammar emphasises the importance of conveying messages through images. He believes that photography should be a medium for addressing societal issues and delivering enriching and impactful messages. While he acknowledges some gaps in the educational aspect of photography in Oman, he is optimistic about the Omani youth's development in this regard, especially through work-



shops that encourage the delivery of valuable messages through photography.

Reflecting on his early encounters with a camera, Ammar describes it as the beginning of his journey as an Omani photographer, a journey fuelled by a desire to uncover his talents and abilities. To him, a camera is not just a device for taking pictures but a remarkable tool for preserving memories artistically. The profound connection between a photographer and their camera transforms mere button presses into the capture of life's precious moments.

Ammar's portfolio comprises many unforgettable shots, each a treasure that motivates him to continue his photographic journey. One of his memorable shots features his younger brother, Anas, who shares his passion for photography. This particular image, taken on a farm, has garnered attention in local and international competitions. Other cherished shots include scenes from Ras Al Hadd, where spontaneous moments embody the reality and nuances of life in Oman, as well as images from Al Jabal al Akhdar and Nizwa market, highlighting the rich details that define Omani culture.

When asked about his dream photography destinations, Ammar's eyes light up with excitement. He has already photographed in the Gulf countries but aspires to explore Europe, northern Turkey, Africa,

Kashmir in India, and Pakistan. For him, the global environment offers a wealth of captivating details that can transform an ordinary photographer into an extraordinary one. He is drawn to capturing different cultures, finding inspiration beyond the familiar surroundings of Oman.

Ammar's view of photography as an art form is deeply rooted in the balance between technical skill, creativity, and storytelling. He believes that a successful photographer must not only convey goals, details, and messages through their images but also adhere to photography etiquette. In his view, it is essential to separate the technical aspects of photography from marketing considerations and focus on factors such as planning, timing, and visual composition. Every distinguished photographer, according to Ammar, should leave his unique mark on every image, combining artistry with passion.

Ammar offers three key principles for aspiring photographers: A commitment to the art of photography, continuous practice and experiential learning, and a clear goal and message in every photograph. With these principles in mind, Ammar aims to inspire fellow photographers and continue capturing life's beautiful and meaningful moments. His ultimate aspiration? To make his mark on the world of photography and reach the esteemed platform of National Geographic.



find us on



Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



whisk_and_zoom and michaelclicks

Muscat, Oman

A.R. Rahman, Shakthisree Gopalan · Yenga Pona Raas...



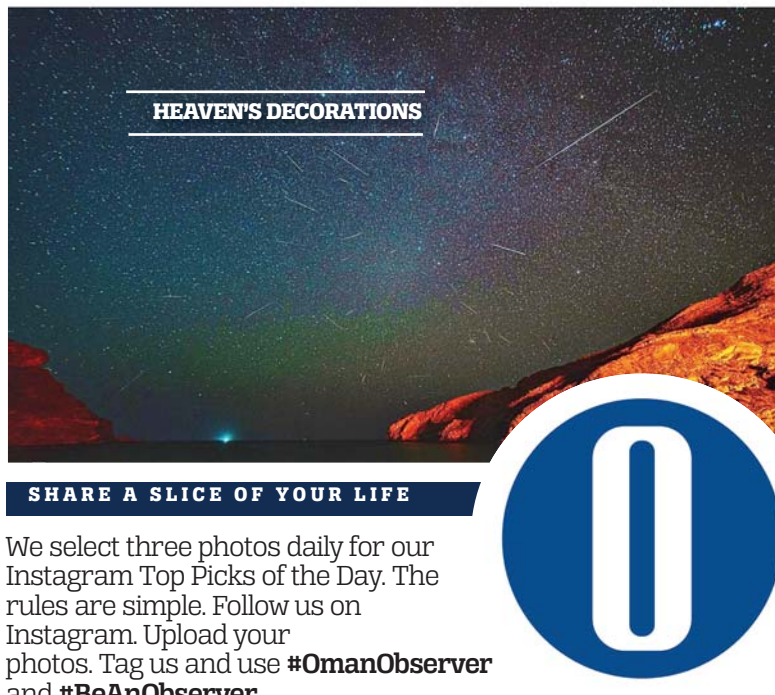
thephotodev
Girnar Jain Tirth

Follow



aravind.hp
Muscat, Oman

Follow



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



Desert rain leaves thousands stranded in muddy mess at Burning Man

TENS OF THOUSANDS of festival-goers were stranded on Sunday in deep mud in the Nevada desert after rain turned the annual Burning Man gathering into a quagmire, with police investigating one death.

Video footage showed costume-wearing "burners" struggling across the wet gray-brown site, some using trash bags as makeshift boots, while dozens of vehicles became stuck in the sludge.

Many events at the counterculture festival, which drew some 70,000 people, were cancelled when rain tore down structures for dance parties, art installations and other entertainment.

Police said they were probing one death, without giving further details. Fear set in among some attendees desperate to flee the muddy site.

"I got scared with what happens when so many people run out of toilet paper and water and food, so I felt I had to get out," Pascale Brand, a 40-year-old who arrived from the Netherlands, said.

Brand said she had been "crying a lot," before deciding on Sunday that "I am leaving no matter what."

She got a seat in a neighbour's vehicle and they made it down a muddy road without any problems.

"There were people yelling at you, 'You can't leave... Go back! The gates



are closed," she said, but the vehicle made it past an unmanned gate, and to a paved road.

"I felt like I was breaking out of something," Brand said.

Others made the strenuous journey on foot.

"It was an incredibly harrowing six-mile (10 kilometre) hike at midnight through heavy and slippery mud, but I got safely out," lawyer Neal Katyal said on social media.

Organisers asked festival crowds to hunker down at the Black Rock City venue after the heavy rains started on Friday night. Scattered showers continued throughout the weekend, and it rained for two hours on Sunday.

"You can't really walk or drive," a young circus performer named Christine Lee said on TikTok, adding that the mud was five inches



deep in some areas.

WATER AND HOPE

A video posted on social media showed comedian Chris Rock hitching a ride in the back of a pickup truck after managing to leave.

Festival organisers urged so-called "burners" to "conserve food, water and fuel, and shelter in a warm, safe space," saying the "playa" — the huge open-air esplanade where the event unfolds — was impassable.

"Look out for your neighbours, introduce yourself," they added.

One attendee, known on the playa only as Dr T, said he is planning to "just go with the flow, meet people and make the best out of this difficult situation."

The California surgeon said he was worried about missing patient appointments on Tuesday, but that there was "nothing I can do about it right now."

"We have water, and we have hope and we take people (into) our

camp when they need" it, he added.

Organisers insisted early in the day that the event's finale attraction — the burning of a structure known as "the Man" — was set to go ahead on Sunday night. But the event was later postponed.

"Due to rain & muddy conditions on Sunday & an inability to move heavy equipment & fire safety onsite, the Man Burn will not happen tonight," festival account @bmantraffic tweeted.

"It is now scheduled for Monday 9/4, at 9 pm" (0400 GMT Tuesday), it said.

The gathering was originally scheduled to conclude on Monday.

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Organisers warned that only some four-wheel drive vehicles with all-terrain tires were able to move.

"Anything less than that will get stuck. It will hamper exodus if we have cars stuck on roads," they said on a "2023 Wet Playa Survival Guide" special webpage.

If necessary, they said it would be possible to walk to the nearest road, where buses would be provided to take people to Reno.

Passengers on those buses counted at least 25 vehicles, mostly recreational motor homes, stuck in mud on the roadways out.

Mobile cellphone trailers were being deployed and the site's wireless Internet was opened for public access.

According to a White House official, President Joe Biden had been briefed on the situation in the desert.

"Event attendees should listen to state and local officials, and event organisers," the official said.

Last year, the festival contended with an intense heat wave and strong winds.

Launched in 1986 in San Francisco, Burning Man aims to be an undefinable event, somewhere between a celebration of counterculture and a spiritual retreat.

The festival — for which tickets cost hundreds of dollars — culminates each year with the ceremonial burning of a 40-foot (12-metre) effigy.

It has been held since the 1990s in the Black Rock Desert, a protected area in northwest Nevada, which the organisers are committed to preserving.

—AFP

GAMING

Youthful and gaming-obsessed seeks homegrown hit

YOUNG SAUDIS WANDER through a museum of video game history stretching from the original Pac-Man to PlayStation 5, a project intended to inspire them to create their own blockbuster titles.

The display of consoles and arcade machines from the past half-century is part of Gamers8, an eight-week festival of eSports tournaments in the capital Riyadh, with a prize pool totalling \$45 million.

Saudi Arabia has made no secret of its passion for gaming and eSports, which is believed to come from the very top.

Last year, Saudi announced a \$38 billion investment strategy for the oil-

rich Gulf kingdom's Savvy Games Group, owned by the Public Investment Fund.

As it gathers momentum, the national gaming and eSports strategy is placing growing emphasis on local game production, vowing in its official document to turn the kingdom into "an Eden for game developers" that can produce new titles "promoting Saudi and Arabic culture".

That's where the museum and adjacent "game labs" come in: Throughout Gamers8, around 3,000 people, the majority of them Saudis, have flocked to the site for crash courses in skills like coding and animation.

"In the past, Arabs were only buying



A Saudi trainee attends a training course at the Saudi Esport Academy in Riyadh last week. — AFP

games, not developing games," said developer Mohammed al-Fakih as he honed his skills in a lab one night this week. "Now there is an opportunity to develop games, design your own ideas and make them a reality, according to local customs and traditions."

EARLY DAYS

Youthful Saudi Arabia appears ripe

for the video game market, with nearly two-thirds of the non-immigrant population aged under 30.

But so far, no one has solved the riddle of how to design a breakout gaming hit that also showcases Saudi culture, acknowledged Faisal bin Homran, chief eSports officer at the Saudi Esports Federation.

There are 25,000 Saudi and foreign

developers currently grappling with the challenge, he said.

"With the expertise coming from outside and the knowledge being transferred, we will notice some games that can really go internationally," he said.

One source of inspiration, he noted, comes from Saudi characters already featured in global franchises, like Shaheen in the Tekken fighting games or Rashid in Street Fighter. Rashid is said to be from an unspecified Middle Eastern country.

Officials like Homran, though, are dreaming bigger: the national strategy targets 30 globally competitive games produced in domestic studios by 2030. Already, some unpolished Saudi-made games have resonated with Saudi fans, among them Khaled al Ghaith, a Rocket League enthusiast who spent his summer vacation at the Gamers8 labs learning to code.

The 14-year-old said he had particularly fond memories of a game titled "Khashem", or "Nose" in Saudi Arabic, about a character who lost his memory and had to complete a series of challenges drawing on his sense of smell to get it back.

"Every game that is made by a Saudi, I always play it and really enjoy it," Al Ghaith said.

"I say, 'Wow, this is the work of a

Saudi' and I get so proud."

A NEW PATH

Riyadh's gaming push has continued unabated.

This year Savvy completed a \$4.9 billion purchase of Scopely, the California-based mobile games company, and the Public Investment Fund now owns more than eight per cent of Nintendo. The potential rise of Saudi Arabia as a game development powerhouse could bring concerns, said Tobias Scholz, an eSports expert at Norway's University of Agder.

"We will see an unconscious shift in development and fewer games that have a critical view," Scholz said.

"We will not see a negative tone, because the developer will think, 'Those are my bosses.'"

These worries are far from the mind of Abdulaziz Maher, 23, who took classes during Gamers8 on sound design and how to move characters through a three-dimensional landscape.

The experience has spurred him to consider work in development, something he didn't previously realise was possible.

"All the ideas in my mind were in chaos, but now they are in order," he said. "Like there is a path you can walk on." — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Invasive species a growing and costly threat, key report to find



INVASIVE SPECIES THAT destroy forests, ravage crops and cause extinctions are a major and growing threat worldwide, a landmark UN-backed assessment is poised to report.

From water hyacinth choking Lake Victoria in East Africa, to rats and brown snakes wiping out bird species in the Pacific, to mosquitoes exposing new regions to Zika, yellow fever, dengue and other diseases, tens of thousands of alien species have taken root — often literally — far from their place of origin.

The science advisory panel for the UN Convention on Biodiversity, known by its acronym IPBES, will release on Monday the most comprehensive assessment of so-called “alien species” ever assembled.

Humans are to blame when non-native species wind up on the other side of the world, whether by accident or on purpose.

Scientists point to the pervasive spread of these species as hard evidence that rapid expansion of human activity has so radically altered natural systems as to tip Earth into a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene, or the “era of humans”.

Some invasive species are accidental arrivals, hitching rides in the ballast water of cargo ships, the containers in their holds, or in a tourist's suitcase.

Others were introduced deliberately.

The hyacinth which at one point covered 90 per cent of Lake Victoria

— crippling transport and fishing, smothering aquatic life, blocking hydroelectric dam intake, and breeding mosquitoes — is thought to have been introduced by Belgian colonial officials in Rwanda as an ornamental garden flower before making its way down the Kagera River in the 1980s.

The Everglades wetlands preserve in Florida is teeming with the destructive offspring of erstwhile pets and house plants, from five-metre (16-foot) Burmese pythons and walking catfish to Old World climbing fern and Brazilian pepper.

Invasive species are a significant cause of extinctions, along with habitat loss, global warming, pollution and direct exploitation for food or body parts.

Small islands with endemic species not found anywhere else on Earth are especially vulnerable.

Rats, snakes and mosquitoes transported by Western explorers or, later, tourists have wiped out dozens of bird species in the last two centuries.

The deadly fire that reduced the Hawaiian town of Lahaina to ashes last month was fuelled in part by bone-dry guinea, molasses and buffel grasses — imported as livestock feed — that have spread across abandoned sugar plantations.

A global treaty to protect biodiversity hammered out in the Canadian city of Montreal last December sets a target of reducing the rate at which invasive alien species spread by 50 per cent compared to current levels. — **AFP**