

The Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers announced the results of a public poll that allowed members of society to choose topics for discussion at the second edition of a forum titled “Together We Make Progress”. The forum, the second of its kind, seeks to enhance communication and interaction between the government and society. The voting period, which started on November 9, saw a large turnout, with as many as 4,664 respondents expressing their opinion about topics deemed significant for the community. **DETAILS ON P2**



P13

OMAN AGROFOOD 2023 SPOTLIGHTS TECH INNOVATIONS



P10

RED WARRIORS TO PLAY FRIENDLIES AGAINST CHINA AND UAE



P20

WHAT IT TOOK TO BECOME OMAN'S FIRST FRANKINCENSE SOMMELIER



MUSCAT

ROTAVIRUS VACCINE FOR NEWBORNS



The Ministry of Health inaugurated a programme whereby rotavirus vaccine has been included in the national schedule for the immunisation. The event also included the launch of the fourth edition of the national guide for the immunisation programme and the Omani guide for immunisation. Rotavirus vaccine will be administered to newborns from this November onwards, who will be given two doses - the first at two months from birth and the second at the age of four months. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, who laid emphasis on the need to get the new vaccine due to its qualities that keep pace with international standards. **DETAILS ON P3**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$77.96 A BARREL

Oman oil price for February delivery on Monday reached \$77.96, comprising a drop by \$3.28 from the price of last Friday, which stood at \$81.24. The average price of Oman oil for December delivery has stabilised at \$89.79 per barrel, thus \$2.98 per barrel lower than November delivery. World oil prices dropped on doubts that Opec+ will be able to maintain planned output cuts. Underlining this, US oil production is at record levels above 13 million barrels a day and rig counts are still rising. The attacks on shipping in the Red Sea offered only fleeting support and Brent eased 60 cents to \$78.28 a barrel, while US crude fell 57 cents to \$73.52 at 0954 GMT.

Sayyid Fahd to attend GCC Summit

O N B E H A L F O F H I S M A J E S T Y

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, will leave for the State of Qatar on Tuesday, heading the Sultanate of Oman's delegation at the 44th GCC Summit, scheduled to be held in Doha on the same day.

In its capacity as chair of the current GCC session, Oman has been keen to communicate and cooperate with member states to enhance the GCC march and realise the GCC people's aspirations for progress and prosperity.

HH Sayyid Fahd will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising ministers and senior government officials.

The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 44th GCC Summit which will be held in the Qatari capital Doha on Tuesday.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said

will be headed by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers.

As part of its presidency of the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council, the Sultanate of Oman hosted the meetings of the GCC ministerial committees which

contribute to strengthening cooperation between the GCC countries in various political, economic, commercial, security and defence fields to enhance the process of the GCC joint action.

The Sultanate of Oman hosted the 43rd extraordinary session of GCC foreign ministers which dealt with the developments in the Gaza Strip. The meeting stressed support for the steadfastness of the Palestinian people on their land and cautioned against any attempts to displace them. It called on all the conflicting parties to protect civilians, refrain from targeting them and abide by international law and international humanitarian law without exception.

The GCC Summit stems its importance from the fact that it comes at a particularly sensitive stage in light of the crises and unrest that the world and the region are

witnessing including the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and the fall of tens of thousands of martyrs and wounded at a time when the GCC countries are intensifying their efforts to confront regional and international challenges, support peace, spread stability and end the war and aggression against Gaza.

The 158th session of the Preparatory Ministerial Council for the 44th session of the GCC Supreme Council in Doha was held on Monday. It dealt with many files of GCC joint cooperation in various fields including the agendas that will be submitted to the Supreme Council meeting along with the recommendations that will enhance the GCC march in a way that achieves greater progress and development for the GCC member states and strengthens the foundations of security and stability in the region. — ONA

FOSTERING THE CULTURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the Promising Omani Startups Programme (POSP), on Monday presided over the opening of a gathering titled “Promising Omani Startups Forum”, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The forum was aimed at highlighting the initiatives and achievements of the Promising Omani Startups Programme, fostering the culture of entrepreneurship, exploring the latest trends and studying international experiences and practices in the field, to better anticipate the future of the sector. **DETAILS ON P13**

Oman, Iran explore means to expand cooperation

TEHRAN: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday held a meeting in Tehran with Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The meeting discussed a number of topics of relevance to bilateral relations, means of expanding cooperation and exchanging benefits to serve the interest of the two countries' peoples.

The two sides also discussed regional and international developments of common concern, most notably the painful developments in Gaza Strip. They exchanged views about humanitarian and political efforts made to extend relief aid to the Strip, lift the siege and terminate the escalation and brutal Israeli aggression on civilians. In this context, they affirmed their unwavering stand in solidarity with the legitimate Palestinian cause. Speaking about the situation in the region, Sayyid Badr stressed the need to keep up constructive consultation between Oman and Iran as an effective means of enhancing mutual understanding and addressing regional challenges. **TURN TO P2**

GUARDING UNIQUE CORAL REEFS



Volunteer divers take part in a campaign to remove fishing nets from coral reefs at Daymaniyat Islands on Monday. On a sailing boat anchored off pristine Daymaniyat Islands, volunteer divers take turns plunging into the clear turquoise water, on a mission to remove coral-killing starfish and massive fishing nets damaging an unusually resilient coral reef system, seen as more likely than most to survive rising sea temperatures as the climate changes. **DETAILS ON P4**

50 killed in Israeli air strike

GAZA: The official Palestinian news agency said at least 50 people were killed on Monday in an Israeli air strike that hit two schools sheltering displaced people in the north of the Gaza Strip.

The reported attack took place as Israeli bombs also rained down on southern areas of the enclave and Israeli troops and tanks pressed a ground campaign in that sector.

The strike hit the Daraj neighbourhood in Gaza City, the WAFA agency said. It was not immediately possible to verify the report independently, and a spokesperson for the Israeli army said it was looking into the report.

It came as Gaza's health ministry said that at least 15,899 Palestinians, 70 per cent of them women or under 18s, have now been killed in Israeli air and artillery strikes on the enclave



Palestinians flee from Khan Yunis to Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

since October 7. Thousands more are missing and feared buried in rubble. Earlier on Monday, Israel ordered Palestinians to leave parts of Gaza's main southern city, Khan Yunis. But residents said

that areas which they had been told to go to were also coming under fire.

Israel's military posted a map on social media platform X on Monday morning with around a quarter of Khan Yunis marked off in yellow as territory that must be evacuated at once.

Three arrows pointed south and west, telling people to head towards the Mediterranean coast and towards Rafah, a major town near the Egyptian border.

Desperate Gazans in Khan Yunis packed their belongings and headed towards Rafah. Most were on foot, walking past ruined buildings in a solemn and silent procession.

But the head of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Thomas White, said people in Rafah were themselves being forced to flee. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**



Forum on Net-Zero emissions at the Oman pavilion in Dubai on Monday.

Oman affirms commitment to fighting climate change

KHALID AL ADAWI
DUBAI, DEC 4

During its participation at the the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), currently being held in Dubai, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed its support for the efforts taken by the international community to confront global warming and climate change, promote climate action, and shift from the use of fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aafi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, met with a number of directors and CEOs of energy firms, on the sidelines of the COP 28. He discussed with them a number of topics related to the firms’ global and local operations in the fields of energy and its techniques as well as the importance of reducing carbon emissions.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority (EA), also participated in meetings related to the Jordan Climate and Refugees Connected Initiative. He also held a meeting with Microsoft officials in continuation of the

discussion about the Authority’s trend of ‘data-driven environmental decision’ through digital transformation in systems and software related to monitoring, follow-up and governance.

The chairman of the EA explained the Authority’s orientation, scope of work, and the most important objectives. The company’s representatives outlined the work scenario at Microsoft as well as the most important experiences in this field. Similar meetings were held with the Korean side which was attended by the heads of the Omani teams.

During its participation in the COP28, the Sultanate of Oman, at its pavilion, reviewed its plan for achieving zero carbon neutrality by 2050, the establishment of the Oman Sustainability Centre, the launch of the national strategy of the Sultanate of Oman for an orderly transition to zero carbon emission, and the launch of the National Environmental Energy Policy which represents a milestone in the country’s action to combat climate change.

The Sultanate of Oman stressed that its national strategies are based on several main axes in various development sectors.

Oman, Iran to boost cooperation

FROM P1

Sayyid Badr pointed out that he and his Iranian counterpart followed up, with great concern, the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip and the relentless military operations staged by Israeli occupation forces targeting civilians, public facilities, hospitals and schools. The two sides commended the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and their invaluable sacrifices.

Sayyid Badr and his Iranian counterpart also laid emphasis on maintaining diplomatic and political efforts. They urged the international community to shoulder its responsibilities to stop the war, restore peace and security and resort to the rules of international law and international humanitarian law. In particular, they stressed the



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian in Tehran on Monday.

– ONA

need to lift the unjust siege on the Gaza Strip and provide relief aid, including medical and life-saving supplies, to the stricken population there.

The two sides stressed that security and stability cannot be achieved without an end to Israeli occupation

and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State in accordance with the resolutions of international law. These, they observed, constitute the core values of justice, and the dictates of human conscience and the tenets of religious and moral obligations.

The meeting was attended by Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ibrahim Ahmed al Mu’aini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and other officials.

— ONA

Conservation of frankincense heritage hailed

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, DEC 4

The Omani government’s efforts to preserve the country’s rich heritage around frankincense, as well as promote the cultural legacy behind it, has been lauded by a leading Middle East based scholar and archaeologist.

Professor William Zimmerle, Senior Lecturer at the Ancient World Program & Heritage Program at NYU Abu Dhabi, also credited the people of Dhofar for nurturing frankincense’s vibrant legacy.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the launch of the Frankincense Season in Dhofar, the expert remarked: I’ve just spent the evening here at the Museum of the Land of Frankincense and it has been spectacular. This is a real testimony to the legacy of Dhofari people, who have been here doing extraordinary work and keeping and preserving frankincense as its heritage, the heritage of its people, and the particular outstanding value of frankincense for the global community.”



“Something that has gone out from Dhofar to the rest of the world, and we’re grateful for this long heritage legacy that Dhofari people are keepers of this heritage past

WILLIAM ZIMMERLE
NYU Abu Dhabi

He elaborated on the significance of frankincense, noting that it’s “something that has gone out from Dhofar to

the rest of the world, and we’re grateful for this long heritage legacy that Dhofari people are keepers of this heritage past.” Prof Zimmerle also highlighted the importance of preserving the traditional craft of frankincense burners, known as Majmars. He mentioned a previous research project conducted in collaboration with the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center in Washington, DC, and the Majmarah, which resulted in a book on the craft production of incense burners.

He emphasised the need to continue preserving this craft in its authentic form while also exploring ways to adapt it for educational and creative purposes. “This, as we say in heritage studies, is we need to use it so we don’t lose it,” he explained. “And so as long as we keep using the phrase and outsiders using Luban using incense burners, we keep that heritage ongoing and we keep that heritage alive.”

Prof Zimmerle expressed his appreciation for Oman’s dedication to heritage preservation, particularly its

role in developing museums. He commended the Sultan Qaboos University Cultural Centre for its efforts and acknowledged the leadership of Ali Khaturia, the museum director.

He encouraged the government to continue prioritising heritage preservation, particularly in Dhofar, given its wealth of heritage sites and cultural value. “I hope in the future the government continues to focus on Dhofar because of the incredible number of heritage sites and value that’s here to continue to put that forefront to support projects, to support research, both financially but also in developing local students,” he asserted.

Prof Zimmerle concluded by reiterating his belief in Oman’s commitment to heritage and expressed his hope that the government will continue to prioritise heritage preservation. “I think Oman is definitely on the right track,” he affirmed. “And I just encourage the ministries and the government to continue to push forward to make heritage first and its priorities.”

هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation, (The Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Article(109) of the Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated Royal Decree(No.78/2004) (the Sector Law),hereby intend to modify Clause (4) (Licence Activities) of Part (1) of the Licence granted to Shams Ad-Dhahira Generating Company SAOC("the Licensee") as follows:

4. Licensed Activities:

This Licence authorises the Licensee to carry out the Generation of electricity at the Production Facilities up to a maximum installed capacity of 560 MW (at reference site conditions).

The intended Licence modification as per the licensee request be in order to increase the maximum capacity of production of electricity currently authorized by the Licence. By approving this modification, the licensee will be authorized for producing additional electricity generation capacity from its Production Facilities.

Any person who has any objection to the grant of the Proposed Licence modification shall submit details of their objection to the Authority within 28 days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Any objection submitted after the period stipulated in this Notice will not be considered.

Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

The Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center | Muscat Hills | Airport Heights | Block No 9993 | Building No. 95 | First Floor.

Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, Al Khuwair | P.O. Box 954, Postal Code 133
email: enquiries@apsr.om
Tel: +96824609700
Fax: +968 24609701

Voting results for ‘Together We Progress’ forum announced

MUSCAT: The Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers announced the results of the voting it launched on November 9 which allowed all society segments the opportunity to choose the topics proposed for discussion at the ‘Together We Progress’ forum within the framework of enhancing communication between the government and the society.

The voting witnessed a wide public response with 4,664 people voting.

The voting results showed that the Society and Citizenship category was the highest in terms of vote number accounting for 48 per cent followed by the Future Oman category at 27 per cent and Investment and Economy category at 25 per cent of the total vote number.

The Employment and Labour Market category was voted as the most demanded topic.

Based on the voting results, the ‘Together We Progress’ forum will deal with the following topics: education, higher education, research and innovation, health, social protection system, culture, sports and youth, media, employment and labour market.

— ONA

Job Vacancies Announcement:

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn", in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, is pleased to announce the availability of the following vacancy posts:

Unit	Job No.	Position	Grade	Number of Vacancies	Place of Work	Job Requirements
Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn" Head Office	1	Cyber Security Specialist (Male)	10	1	Muscat Governorate	- Master's Degree in IT Security, Cyber Security or Network Engineer - Bachelor's Degree in IT Security, Cyber Security or Network Engineer, with a minimum of (3) years of relevant work experience after obtaining the required qualification
Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn" Head Office	2	Internal Auditor (Male)	10	1	Muscat Governorate	- Master's Degree in Accounting or Finance. - Bachelor's Degree in Accounting or Finance, with a minimum of (3) years of audit-related work experience after obtaining the required qualification. - Proficiency in spoken and written English. - Report writing skills. - Data analysis skills. - Willingness to travel for auditing purposes within and outside Muscat Governorate based on the auditing plan. - Possession of professional certification(s) such as CISA, CIA, CMA and CPA.

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to scan the below QR Code

Cyber Security Specialist Internal Auditor

starting from Tuesday, December 5, 2023, until the end of the official working hours on Tuesday, December 12, 2023



Follow us on **facebook**
omanobserver

oman

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

TUESDAY | DECEMBER 5 | 2023

3



FOREIGN MINISTER RECEIVES COPY OF CREDENTIALS OF US ENVOY

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister received a copy of credentials of Ana Escrogima, Ambassador-designate of the United States of America to the Sultanate of Oman, in Muscat on Monday. Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out her duties. He also wished the bilateral relations further developments and growth.

— ONA

Minister bestows awards on students

MUSCAT: The General Directorate of Education in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate organised an event to honour students who won the OMIFCO Award for Scientific Excellence on Monday. The awards were presented by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

The Sultan Qaboos School for Boys achieved first place, the Ahmed Bin Majid School for Boys came second and the Abbas Bin Abdul Muttalib School for Basic Education third place. Among girls, Bilad Bani Bu Ali School for Basic Education won first place followed by Bilad Bani Bu Hassan School for Basic Education and Bilad Bani Bu Hassan School for Basic Education in second place and Al Bandar Al Jadeed for Basic Education in third place.

The OMIFCO Award for Scientific Excellence aims to create a spirit of competition between schools to instil scientific spirit among students and encourage teachers to improve academic achievement.



National Research Awards presented



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, with National Research Award winners in Muscat on Monday.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 4

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) hosted the 10th edition of the Annual Research Forum in Muscat on Monday under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. The National Research Awards were presented during the forum.

The forum commenced with a keynote address by Dr Saif bin Abdullah bin Sulaiman al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation. Dr Al Haddabi highlighted the need for fostering an environment conducive to research, development, innovation, and creativity, with the ultimate goal of transforming the Sultanate of Oman into a knowledge-based economy in line with the visionary directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

Dr Al Haddabi underscored the



pivotal role played by the National Research Award over the past decade in supporting Omani scientists, researchers, and innovators. The award has not only motivated them to conduct impactful research but has also provided scientific solutions to both national and global challenges.

The 10th National Research Award in the PhD Category were bagged by Dr Alya bint Talib al Farsiyah, Dr Khalaf bin Marhoun al Abri, Dr Abdulhakeem Yaqoob Al Hashim, Dr Tahereh Jafary and Dr Mohammed Seddik Meddah.

In the Young Researcher's category, Fatma bint Nasser al Shohoumiyah,

Marwa bint Nasser al Rajhiyah, Dr Rajaa bint Saleh al Farsiyah, Makhlas bin Said al Marshoudi, and Mohammed bin Abdullah al Buraiki won the awards.

The forum also showcased success stories from three Research and Innovation Sector programmes. Two discussion sessions explored the impact of research in the industrial and academic sectors. The forum witnessed the signing of research contracts for the Strategic Research Projects Programme with six government institutions, totalling over RO 800,000, while the Block Funding Programme inked deals with 26 academic and government institutions, worth over RO 2,000,000.

Rotavirus shot for infants launched

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Health added the vaccine for rotavirus, which leads to 60,000 diarrhoea cases among children and results in 6,000 hospitalisations in Oman, in the National Immunisation Programme.

Infants born from November onwards will be given two doses in the second and fourth months. The vaccination is expected to cover 90,000 kids, which will reduce the hospitalisation rate by 90 per cent. This will also save a significant chunk of money as the government is spending RO 1 million for those hospitalised for diarrhoea due to rotavirus.

Rotaviruses are the most common cause of diarrhoeal disease among infants and young children. Nearly every child in the world is infected with a rotavirus at least once by the age of five.

The announcement to add the vaccine was held at an event organised by the Ministry of Health under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and other officials in Muscat on Monday. He also unveiled the fourth edition of the National Immunisation Programme.

The update of the National Action Strategy for Vaccines is the practical map that defines the vision for immunisations in the Sultanate of Oman during the coming years till 2030, which includes a package of goals and activities that the Sultanate of Oman will implement in this field. Oman has made great strides in raising vaccination coverage rates for all target groups to get rid of infectious diseases." There are about 111 million cases of diarrhoea due to rotavirus annually, including more than two million hospitalisations and more than 600,000 deaths.

In Oman, the rotavirus accounts for 36 per cent of hospitalised children.

The minister pointed out that the National Immunisation Programme has made giant strides in eliminating



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, at the ceremony in Muscat on Monday.

The vaccination is expected to cover 90,000 kids. This will also save a significant chunk of money as the government is spending RO 1 million for those hospitalised for diarrhoea

infectious diseases by vaccination, the most important of which is a certificate from the World Health Organization declaring the country free of measles and rubella.

The National Child Immunisations Programme includes 14 approved types of vaccines, which led to a significant reduction in morbidity and mortality rates of children under five years of age.

Rotavirus vaccine will be administered to newborns from November 2023 onwards, who will be given two doses: the first at two months from birth and the second at the age of four months.

Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, said that the launch of the rotavirus vaccine and the fourth edition of the National Immunisation Programme reflect the Ministry of Health's keenness to eradicate infectious diseases and maintain the stability of public health.

The Love and Birthing Care you need
for a Happy Delivery begins at
Apollo Hospitals, Oman

- All major & minor - open & laparoscopic surgeries <
- High risk Pregnancy <
- Delivery - Normal & Caesarean Section <
- Painless Labor | Epidural analgesia <
- Diagnostic & Therapeutic Hysteroscopy <
- Endometriosis <
- Cancer screening <
- Urinary Incontinence Management & and Surgeries <
- Hormones | PCOS <
- Menstrual Irregularities <
- Peri & Post Menopausal Treatment <
- Antenatal & Postnatal Exercise <
- Breastfeeding <
- Infertility Management <
- IUI Procedure <



For Further Details Call:
24430303 | 7234 4455

Apollo Hospitals
SULTANATE OF OMAN

apollohospitalmuscat.com AL HAIL



VOLUNTEER DIVERS GUARD OMAN’S ‘UNIQUE’ CORAL REEFS



A volunteer takes part in a campaign to remove fishing nets from coral reefs at Daymaniyat Islands. – AFP



A picture shows coral reefs at Oman’s Daymaniyat Islands. On a sailing boat anchored off Oman’s pristine Daymaniyat Islands, volunteer divers take turns plunging into the clear turquoise water to remove coral-killing starfish and massive fishing nets. – AFP



Volunteer divers remove fishing nets from coral reefs at Oman’s Daymaniyat Islands. – AFP



Volunteers take part in a campaign to remove fishing nets from coral reefs at Daymaniyat Islands. – AFP

DAYMANIYAT ISLANDS: On a sailing boat anchored off Oman’s pristine Daymaniyat Islands, volunteer divers pull on wetsuits, check their scuba tanks and then take turns plunging into the clear turquoise water.

They are diving for a reason: to remove the massive fishing nets damaging an unusually resilient coral reef system that is seen as more likely than most to survive rising sea temperatures.

The clean-up is one example of how divers and Omani authorities are joining forces to protect the reefs — which are critical for marine wildlife — from man-made damage.

“Coral reefs are a refuge for marine habitat and wildlife,” said Hammoud al Nayri of Oman’s Environmental Authority, as he watched the divers.

“To protect marine ecosystems, we must first preserve coral reefs,” said the 45-year-old who oversees the Daymaniyat Islands, Oman’s only marine reserve.

Most shallow-water corals, battered and bleached white by repeated marine heatwaves, are “unlikely to last the century”, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said last year.

Global warming, as well as dynamite fishing and pollution, wiped out a startling 14 per cent of the world’s reefs between 2009 and 2018, according to the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.

But Oman’s relatively cooler waters provide a rare refuge for its reefs, which are among the least studied in the world.

“Oman’s reefs are actually considered to be relatively less vulnerable than some regions,” said John Burt, associate professor of biology at New York University Abu Dhabi.

“This is largely due to the influence of the monsoon,” the marine expert explained.

“During peak summer temperatures, when we would expect to see bleaching related to marine heatwaves in most regions, the Indian Ocean monsoon picks up in southern Oman, cooling water temperatures dramatically.”

Oman’s reefs may be resilient to warming sea temperatures, but they are not immune.

Oman saw its last major bleaching event in the summer of 2021, when sea temperatures were particularly warm, said Burt.

Cyclones, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change, are also a major threat.

Between 2005 and 2010, more than half of corals in Oman were lost because of Super-Cyclone Gonu in 2007, Cyclone Phet in 2010, as well as a large-scale algal bloom in 2008-2009, Burt said.

“We have had over a decade of recovery in the intervening years which has allowed coral to come back to these reefs,” Burt said.

To protect the reefs from fishing nets and coral-killing starfish, Hasan Farsi dives in Daymaniyat every week to inspect for damage.

The son of a fisherman, he records the GPS coordinates of damaged coral areas and sends them to the EA to register them as clean-up targets.

He then joins the dozens of volunteers who dive down to remove the sunken nets and crown-of-thorns starfish, which prey on the reefs.

Coral reefs are “a huge environmental treasure”, Farsi said from a sailing boat, with extracted nets piled up behind him.

“The coral reefs, because of wrong practices by fishermen, are deteriorating year by year,” said the 52-year-old diving instructor.

“Without clean-up campaigns, they would be destroyed completely.”

Farsi is not alone in his effort.

Jenan al Asfoor, a diver and trainer, is a central figure in Oman’s coral reef conservation.

The 40-year-old heads Reef Check Oman, which is part of the global Reef Check Foundation.

It was established in 2017 with the aim of building a full database of the country’s coral reefs, monitoring their health, identifying their main threats, and working with authorities on protection policies.

Over the years, the organisation has conducted several surveys across the country.

“During these surveys, we noticed that we didn’t record much bleaching happening... most of the reefs we have surveyed look healthy and in good condition,” Asfoor said. “Our goal in Reef Check Oman is to continue protecting it for generations to come.” — AFP



A volunteer diver shows fishing nets removed from coral reefs at Daymaniyat Islands. – AFP



Dialogue sessions unveil blueprint for prosperity

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Muscat Dialogue Sessions represents a tangible manifestation of the Royal directives and commitment to empowering Omani youth in line with the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The inaugural session, themed ‘Towards a sustainable and prosperous future’ commenced on Monday under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat. Diverse segments of society, including youth, college and university students, and individuals invested in developmental discourse, graced the occasion.

Conceived as a proactive measure, these sessions aim to foster a robust community partnership, aggregating the nation’s young minds’ perspectives, ideas, proposals, outlooks, and aspirations towards a prosperous future.

Governor Saud al Busaidy highlighted the importance of the dialogues and said, “This year’s Muscat dialogue sessions

The Muscat Dialogue Sessions empowers Omani youth for a sustainable future towards realisation of ‘Oman Vision 2040’

are designed to meet with youth aspirations and listen to their opinions. We hope that there will be applicable ideas and proposals during the third day of these meetings, and we will strive for these ideas and projects to find their way to implementation.”

He highlighted the initiative to develop the Qurum commercial area and called for support to enhance the facades of buildings in alignment with the region’s desired developmental trajectory.

The programme spans two days and encompasses four pivotal themes.

Initiating with the ‘Humanisation of Cities and the Entertainment Industry,’ discussions aim to generate ideas and visions that contribute to transforming cities into more



Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, at the opening of the Muscat Dialogue Session.



The Muscat Dialogue Session was held on the theme ‘Towards a sustainable and prosperous future’.

livable and attractive spaces. Environmental volunteering is accorded focus, emphasising its role in fostering sustainability amidst the myriad challenges faced by the living environment.

The sessions also delve into crucial aspects, such as exploring promising investment opportunities in Muscat Governorate and their contribution to the national economy.

The theme of ‘Technology and Innovation’ is a cornerstone, emphasising the pivotal role of innovative technical methods in service delivery to align with contemporary developments. Experts from diverse sectors participated in theme presentations, fostering an environment of idea exchange and proposal discussions.

Their oversight extends to community groups engaged in priority projects. The comprehensive session programme is slated to conclude on Wednesday, heralding a significant step towards the realisation of Oman Vision 2040.

Camp for Youth Innovation concludes

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 4

The first edition of the Arab Camp for Talented and Innovative Youth culminated in a showcase of groundbreaking projects by young innovators. Held from December 3 to 5 under the theme “Innovation Towards a Better and More Sustainable Future,” the camp was organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science (ALECSO).

The concluding session saw participants recommending the creation of a digital platform on the Unesco website to globally spotlight their projects. The platform aims to connect these talented individuals with entrepreneurs, institutions, and decision-makers, fostering the establishment, development, and support of innovative initiatives.

Basil bin Ahmed bin Amer al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, sponsored the closing ceremony. The event aimed to promote innovation and sustainability, gathering 47 young innovators aged 18 to 24 from 21 Arab countries.

The closing programme announced the results of the innovative projects in each field that serve local communities and achieve sustainable development goals in the areas of environment, agriculture, food, health, education, knowledge transfer, as well as green and purple economy.

In the health field, Aisha bint Salem



The first edition of the Arab Camp for Talented and Innovative Youth is being held from December 3-5.
Picture by Hussein al Muqbali

Five winning projects awarded at the conclusion of the Arab Camp for Talented and Innovative Youth

al Omariyah’s project ‘Internet of Things System for Monitoring Epileptic Patients’ was the winner. In the education and knowledge transfer field, the innovation ‘Advanced E-Learning Gateway’ by the innovator Younes Othmani from Algeria won. In the

field of food security and assistance to people with disabilities, Lyan Lyan Mahmoud Khatib from the Syrian Arab Republic won with the project ‘Design and Implementation of an Electric Larynx to Aid Speech.’

On the third day of the camp, participants took part in a cultural and entertainment visit to the city of Nizwa to explore its historical castle, popular market, and local traditional crafts such as dagger-making, pottery, silver, and brass practiced by the people of Nizwa. Participants also learned about Oman’s rich history and vibrant present through the galleries of the Oman Across Ages Museum.

Oman aims for top spot in hydrogen exports

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman is on track to become the world’s sixth-largest exporter of hydrogen and the largest exporter in the region and with its competitive renewable capacities, the country could achieve a production cost of renewable hydrogen as low as U\$1.6/kg by the end of the decade, by which Oman would emerge as one of the most competitive producers globally, according to the Global Hydrogen Review 2023.

This report of the International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts a rapid increase in low-emission hydrogen projects. Further, Oman’s ongoing green hydrogen projects have rendered substantial progress by completing the first round of auctioning of green hydrogen blocks in Duqm and launching another round of competitive bidding process in Dhofar.

Once the projects are completed, Oman’s aggregate output of green hydrogen output will be expected to reach the targeted 1 million

tons per annum by 2030. These ongoing mammoth efforts in tapping sustainable energy in the country will be in focus at the second Korea-Oman Strategic Forum to be held on December 12, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, OCEC.

According to the IEA projection, 27 Mt of hydrogen will be produced through electrolysis and low-emission electricity by 2030 and it has made a set of recommendations including implementation of support schemes for low-emission hydrogen production and use and stimulation of demand creation, among other strategies.

The Forum is scheduled to be held on the sidelines of the Green Hydrogen Summit and Exhibition (GHSE 2023), building on the findings on the previous Forum held in 2022. The one-day event also intends to attract participation and engagement of Korean and Omani stakeholders from public, industrial, research and academic sectors as well as from the international organisations including Korean firms that constitute a part of a value chain of the hydrogen sector.



Auction Announcement

مدائن
madayn

Public Establishment for Industrial Estates
Suhar Industrial City

Suhar Industrial City is pleased to announce to the investors the following Auction in 2023:

Auction No.:	Auction Name	Companies, Establishments and Individuals Qualified for Participation	Auction Form	Inspection Date	Tender Rendering Date
3/2023	Management and operation of (1) commercial shop at the front of the Industrial City	Small and Medium Enterprises	RO 10	Monday 18/12/2023	Thursday 28/12/2023

Those who are desirous to participate in the auction should render their offers in sealed envelopes with red wax, and addressed to Suhar Industrial City. The tenders shall be submitted to the Management of the Industrial City as a maximum at 12:00 pm on 28/12/2023. Any other tenders submitted thereafter shall NOT be considered. The Management of the Industrial City is not obliged to accept the highest bidding.

madayn.om



Israeli forces move into

RED CROSS CHIEF ARRIVES IN THE STRIP, SAYS SUFFERING 'INTOLERABLE'



Mirjana Spoljaric

GENEVA: The Red Cross president arrived in war-torn Gaza on Monday, calling for the protection of civilians in the Palestinian territory, where she warned that human suffering was “intolerable”.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said ICRC president Mirjana Spoljaric’s travel to the region would happen in several stages with “a visit to Israel expected over the coming weeks”.

“I have arrived in Gaza, where people’s suffering is intolerable,” Spoljaric said on X, formerly Twitter.

“It is unacceptable that civilians have no safe place to go in Gaza, and with a military siege in place there is also no adequate humanitarian response currently possible,” she added in an ICRC statement.

Spoljaric insisted that “all those deprived of liberty must be treated humanely”.

“The hostages must be released, and the ICRC must be allowed to safely visit them,” she said.

Her visit comes after full-scale fighting resumed on Friday following the collapse of a week-long truce brokered by Qatar, the United States and Egypt.

“The last week provided a small degree of humanitarian respite, a positive glimpse of humanity that raised hopes around the world that a path to reduced suffering could now be found,” Spoljaric said in the statement.

“As a neutral actor, the ICRC stands ready to support further humanitarian agreements that reduce suffering and heartbreak”.

She said the purpose of her visit was “to advance efforts that alleviate the desperate humanitarian situation”.

“I will convey my deep concern for the plight of civilians and underline the ICRC’s utmost commitment to doing everything we can to ease their suffering,” she added. — AFP

GAZA: Dozens of Israeli tanks rolled into southern Gaza on Monday, witnesses said, despite global concern over mounting civilian deaths and fears the war will spread elsewhere in the Middle East.

Weeks after Israel sent ground forces into northern Gaza, the army has been air-dropping leaflets in parts of the besieged territory’s south, telling Palestinians to flee to other areas.

Tanks, armoured personnel carriers and bulldozers were seen on Monday near the city of Khan Yunis, which is crowded with internally displaced Palestinians, witnesses said.

Amin Abu Hawli, 59, said the Israeli vehicles were two kilometres inside Gaza in the village of al-Qarara, while Moaz Mohammed, 34, said Israeli tanks were moving down the strip’s main north-south highway, the Salah al-Din road.

The Palestinian health ministry in the Gaza Strip on Monday said 15,899 people had died in the Palestinian territory since the start of the war with Israel, with 42,000 wounded.

Among the victims, 70 per cent were women and children, it added

The military was trying to cut the road between Deir al-Balah in central Gaza and Khan Yunis, “firing bullets and tank shells at cars and people trying to move through the area,” Mohammed said.

Israeli Defense Forces spokesman Daniel Hagari said that the army “continues to expand its ground operation in the Gaza Strip”.

“Wherever there is a stronghold, the IDF operates,” he added.

Full-scale fighting resumed on Friday after the collapse of a week-long truce brokered by Qatar,

15,899 people killed in the Palestinian territory since the start of the war with Israel, with 42,000 wounded, 70% were women and children

the United States and Egypt, during which the earring sides had exchanged scores of hostages and prisoners.

Air strikes have since intensified in Gaza’s south, said James Elder, a spokesman for the United Nations children’s agency Unicef.

“Despite what has been assured, attacks in the south of Gaza are every bit as vicious as what the north endured,” he posted on Monday on X, formerly Twitter.

“Somehow, it’s getting worse for children and mothers.”

In the southern Gazan city of Rafah, resident Abu Jahar al-Hajj said that his home had been rocked by an air strike that felt “like an earthquake”.

“The earth shook, and the sound was so loud. Pieces of concrete started falling on us,” he said.

Israel’s ally the United States has intensified calls for the protection of Gaza’s civilians, with Vice President Kamala Harris saying that “too many innocent Palestinians have been killed”.

A White House official said on Sunday the United States believes Israel is “making an effort” to minimise civilian casualties in Gaza. — AFP



▲ Palestinians check the damages after an Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



This picture shows smoke billowing after an Israeli strike in Gaza. – AFP



A woman cooks as Palestinians, who fled their houses amid Israeli strikes, shelter at a United Nations-run school. – Reuters

DESPERATE CIVILIANS FLEE THEIR HOMES IN

GAZA: Israel ordered people out of swathes of the main southern city in the Gaza Strip on Monday as it pressed its ground campaign deep into the south, sending desperate residents fleeing even as it dropped bombs on areas where it told them to go.

Israel’s military posted a map on X on Monday morning with around a quarter of the city of Khan Yunis marked off in yellow as territory that must be evacuated at once. Three arrows pointed south and west, telling people to head towards the Mediterranean coast and towards Rafah, near the Egyptian border.

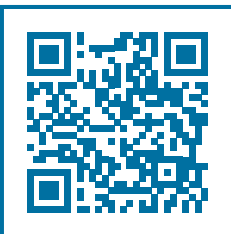
The Israeli military’s chief Arabic-language

spokesperson later said in a post on X that the central road out of Khan Yunis to the north “constitutes a battlefield” and was now shut. Access would be permitted on the western outskirts of the city, while in Rafah, a short “tactical suspension of military activities” would allow access until the early afternoon.

Israel is putting civilians in danger by operating from civilian areas, destroying areas by large bombs.

As many as 80 per cent of Gaza’s 2.3 million people have fled their homes in an Israeli bombing campaign that has reduced much of the crowded coastal strip to a desolate wasteland.





o southern Gaza



Palestinians inspect the damage in a residential area in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, following Israeli air strikes. — AFP



Children rest on blankets as displaced Palestinians fleeing central and southern Gaza set up tents in the new Tall el-Sultan camp west of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

DISCRIMINATE BOMBS

80 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people have fled their homes in an Israeli bombing that has reduced much of the crowded coastal strip to a desolate wasteland

Medical officials in the enclave say bombing has killed more than 15,899 people, with thousands more missing and feared buried in rubble. "The goals in the northern section have almost been met," the commander of Israel's armoured corps, Brigadier-General Hisham Ibrahim, told Israel's Army Radio. "We are beginning to expand the ground manoeuvre to other parts of the Strip, with one goal: to topple Hamas group." The United Nations said the areas in the south that Israel has ordered evacuated in the three days since the truce had housed more than 350,000 people before the war — not counting the hundreds of thousands now sheltering there from

other areas. In Khan Younis, many of those taking flight on Monday were already displaced from other areas. At a home that was struck overnight, flames licked the collapsed masonry and grey smoke billowed out from the rubble. "We were sleeping at 5 am when we felt things collapse, everything went upside down," she said. "They told people to move from the north to Khan Younis, since the south is safer. And now, they've bombed Khan Younis. Even Khan Younis is not safe now, and even if we move to Rafah, Rafah is not safe as well. Where do they want us to go?" — Reuters



Relatives mourn an Israeli soldier at his funeral in Tel Aviv. — Reuters

ISRAELI ARMY SAYS 3 SOLDIERS KILLED IN FIGHTING, TOLL REACHES 75

TEL AVIV: The Israeli army said on Monday three more soldiers had been killed in fighting in the Gaza Strip, raising the number of troop deaths there to 75 since the war began. All three died in northern Gaza on Sunday, the military said. The deaths brought the total number of Israeli defence personnel killed since October 7 — among them those who died in the attacks themselves, and including soldiers, reservists, kibbutz guards and others — to 401. Meanwhile, the Israeli prime minister's office on Monday said it had tallied the remains of 15 citizens that were being kept by Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip since the attacks of October 7. Confirming three additional deaths of hostages held in the Gaza Strip, it said the groups were now holding the remains of 15 people. The published list named the dead as 11 civilians and four soldiers, one of them a

senior officer, although it did not elaborate further. Under an agreement between Israel and Palestinian groups, 80 Israeli hostages were released in exchange for three times as many Palestinian prisoners during a seven-day truce that ended on Friday. Another 25, mostly Thais, were freed separately. Five other hostages were also freed before the start of the week-long pause. The Israeli army said on Saturday 137 hostages were still being held in Gaza. The Israeli army said it was taking "aggressive" action in Khan Yunis, in the south of the Gaza Strip, where it has been widely expected to begin ground operations. The advance of Israeli forces meant that in the north and east of the city, civilians could no longer travel along the Salah al-Din road that runs through the Palestinian territory, it said. The road "constitutes a battlefield, so it is extremely dangerous to go there", it warned. — AFP

WHO BOARD TO HOLD EMERGENCY MEETING ON MIDEAST CRISIS

GENEVA: The World Health Organization's executive board will hold an emergency session on December 10 to discuss the health crisis in Gaza and the West Bank, with the Palestinian envoy seeking more medical aid and access for foreign healthcare workers. The WHO confirmed on Monday it had received a request from 15 countries to hold the session, which will be convened by Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in consultation with the Qatari chair. The Palestinian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Ibrahim Khraishi, said the meeting would focus mostly on Gaza, engulfed by war between Palestinians and Israelis, but also cover attacks on the health sector in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. "We want to empower the WHO and call for the Israeli side not to target the medical sector. We want to allow for fresh medical supplies," he said, adding that his diplomatic mission was drafting a motion to be reviewed by the board. "One idea is to send more doctors in from around the world," he added, saying many countries had offered. Only a fraction of Gaza's

hospitals remain operational due to Israeli bombings and a lack of fuel, and those that are still functioning are increasingly overwhelmed by a new wave of wounded arriving. A WHO database shows there have been 427 attacks on healthcare facilities in Palestinian territories since the retaliatory aerial blitz and invasion of Gaza. The database does not touch on who is seen as responsible for the attacks. The WHO has also warned of spreading disease which it has said could kill more people than bombardments in Gaza, with diarrhoea cases among children rising to about 100 times normal levels. As many as 80 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people have fled their homes in an Israeli bombing campaign that has reduced much of the crowded coastal strip to a desolate wasteland. The WHO's governing board is made up of 34 members and typically meets every January to fix the agenda for its annual assembly. The United States, France, China and Japan are among countries currently holding seats.

— Reuters



Displaced Palestinians who fled from Khan Yunis, build shelters in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

AI to capture its 121 Indian languages

For a few weeks this year, villagers in the southwestern Indian state of Karnataka read out dozens of sentences in their native Kannada language into an app as part of a project to build the country's first AI-based chatbot for Tuberculosis.

There are more than 40 million native Kannada speakers in India, and it is one of the country's 22 official languages and one of over 121 languages spoken by 10,000 people or more in the world's most populous nation.

But few of these languages are covered by natural language processing (NLP), the branch of artificial intelligence that enables computers to understand text and spoken words.

Hundreds of millions of Indians are thus excluded from useful information and many economic opportunities.

"For AI tools to work for everyone, they need to also cater to people who don't speak English or French or Spanish," said Kalika Bali, principal researcher at Microsoft Research India.

"But if we had to collect as much data in Indian languages as went into a large language model like GPT, we'd be waiting another 10 years. So what we can do is create layers on top of generative AI models such as ChatGPT or Llama," Bali said.

The villagers in Karnataka are among thousands of speakers of different Indian languages generating speech data for tech firm Karya, which is building datasets for firms such as Microsoft and Google to use in AI models for education, healthcare and other services.

The Indian government, which aims to deliver more services digitally, is also building language datasets through Bhashini, an AI-led language translation system that is creating open source datasets in local languages for creating AI tools. The platform includes a crowdsourcing initiative for people to contribute sentences in various languages, validate audio or text transcribed by others, translate texts and label images.

Tens of thousands of Indians have contributed to Bhashini.



Rina Chandran is Tech Correspondent for the Thomson Reuters Foundation

INDIA HAS 22 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AND ONE OF OVER 121 LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY 10,000 PEOPLE OR MORE

"The government is pushing very strongly to create datasets to train large language models in Indian languages, and these are already in use in translation tools for education, tourism and in the courts," said Pushpak Bhattacharyya, head of the Computation for Indian Language Technology Lab in Mumbai.

"But there are many challenges: Indian languages mainly have an oral tradition, electronic records are not plentiful, and there is a lot of code mixing. Also, to collect data in less common languages is hard, and requires a special effort."

Of the more than 7,000 living languages in the world, fewer than 100 are captured in major NLPs, with English the most advanced. ChatGPT — whose launch last year triggered a wave of interest in generative AI — is trained primarily on English. Google's Bard is limited to English, and of the nine languages that Amazon's Alexa can respond to, only three are non-European; Arabic, Hindi and Japanese.

Governments and startups are trying to bridge this gap.

Grassroots organisation Masakhane aims to strengthen NLP research in African languages, while in the United Arab Emirates, a new large language model called Jais can power generative AI applications in Arabic.

For a country like India, crowdsourcing is an effective way to collect speech and language data, said Bali, who was named among the 100 most influential people in AI by *Time* magazine in September.

"Crowdsourcing also helps to capture linguistic, cultural and socio-economic nuances," said Bali.

"But there has to be awareness of gender, ethnic and socio-economic bias, and it has to be done ethically, by educating the workers, paying them, and making a specific effort to collect smaller languages," she said. "Otherwise it doesn't scale."

With the rapid growth of AI, there is demand for languages "we haven't even heard of", including from academics looking to preserve them, said Karya co-founder Safiya Husain.

PLAYING WITH SNOW!



Children play atop of a snow hill at Red Square in front of the Kremlin's Spasskaya tower after a heavy snowfall in Moscow on Monday. – AFP

Nature as infrastructure...

For millennia, natural infrastructure — such as river systems, wetlands, coastal plains, sand dunes, and forests — supported the development of human civilisation. In fact, our ability to harness such infrastructure, for everything from food and drinking water to storm-surge protection and flood mitigation, has been central to our success as a species. And it will prove vital to our future survival.

Technological advances propelled the evolution of infrastructure. Green turned to grey, with concrete, cable, and steel delivering energy, communications, and transportation — and, with them, unprecedented growth and development. But while rapid modernisation produced once-unimaginable prosperity, it has had grave unintended consequences, not least the environmental degradation and greenhouse-gas emissions that are jeopardising our very existence.

The question now is how to meet urgent environmental goals — reducing emissions and protecting and restoring nature and biodiversity — while enabling developing economies to fulfil their legitimate growth aspirations. The answer, as a recent report from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank suggests, may well begin with an explicit acknowledgement of nature as infrastructure.

Viewing nature as infrastructure is transformative, because it forces



Erik Berglöf is Chief Economist of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

VIEWING NATURE AS INFRASTRUCTURE IS TRANSFORMATIVE, BECAUSE IT FORCES US TO THINK IN A MORE SYSTEMIC WAY

us to think in a more systemic way. As we pursue growth and development, we must not only avoid damaging nature; we must also strengthen and enrich it through "nature-positive" investments — all while tapping its vast potential to deliver essential services.

Biologists already do this when they benchmark how to restore degraded land. But now economists must get on board and enhance their tools for capturing the value and complexity of natural capital. Biodiversity, for example, covers not just the number of species, but also their genetic diversity and diversity of functions. Yet another dimension of biodiversity is the complex evolutionary history of species — when they were separated on the "tree of life." It is only by deepening our understanding of biodiversity that we will comprehend nature's full potential — and our impact on it.

This knowledge is very site-specific, and acquiring it will require contributions from scientists and local populations. The good news is that there are already models for such collaboration. The massive Sanbei reforestation project, aimed at preventing two large deserts from merging in Northern China, was a flawed endeavour at the start, with only single tree types

planted. But, over the course of two decades, deeper knowledge of the local environment and the participation of local communities transformed it into a success.

Governance and incentives are also crucial to protect and nurture natural infrastructure. In Indonesia, mangroves have long protected communities, particularly poorer households, from deadly tidal floods, but they are being depleted in regions with weaker state capacity. In Egypt, by contrast, efforts to restore mangroves have been aided by revenues from eco-tourism and beekeeping, which produces honey and supports the delivery of vital pollination services.

The nature-as-infrastructure approach demands that we assess

what nature can deliver before considering grey solutions, and it can help countries close their infrastructure gaps in truly sustainable ways. But grey infrastructure will always be necessary for growth and development. This demands that we design it better, to minimise its impact on nature. For example, renewable-energy infrastructure has a large ecological footprint, and road infrastructure fragments and damages ecosystems. Solutions like co-locating infrastructure on brown sites and providing auxiliary infrastructure (such as wildlife highway crossings, green urban spaces, and nature-restoration offsets) can help mitigate these effects.

Of course, financing might pose a challenge. The Kunming-

Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, agreed a year ago, assumes that \$598-824 billion per year will be needed by 2030 to close the biodiversity funding gap. Such sums, needed to protect and then begin to restore nature, can be generated only by valuing nature properly and creating markets that will mobilise private and institutional capital.

To this end, "nature as infrastructure" must be developed as an asset class, using new tools and financial instruments. At the micro level, this will require better pricing of nature's services — for example, usage charges or permits and taxes for damaging activities — and adaptive local regulations. Micro-level policies can support the development of other financial instruments and, eventually, markets — for performance-linked bonds, policy-based lending, debt-for-nature swaps, and nature credits, to name a few — to channel more finance into nature. Lessons from carbon markets should be heeded, to avoid repeating past mistakes.

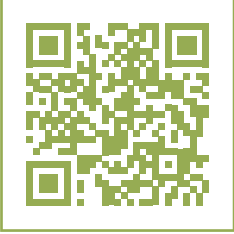
Special attention must be paid to low-income economies, many of which are highly vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation but have rich natural endowments that should be valued properly.



Technological advances propelled the evolution of infrastructure.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



Oman’s Ahmad al Harthy and teammates celebrate after winning the season-opening event of the 2023-24 Asian Le Mans Series in Sepang, Malaysia.

Ahmad claims maiden win in Malaysia

Ahmad al Harthy celebrates another career landmark with first LMP2 win

Omani teamed with Louis Deletraz and Nikita Mazepin at 99 Racing

First event of season at Sepang in Malaysia also delivers P2 in race two

Al Harthy and 99 Racing team-mates top driver and team standings

SEPANG: Ahmad al Harthy added another superb achievement to his string of successes in endurance racing at Sepang in Malaysia over the weekend, December 2/3, by taking his maiden race victory in an LMP2 prototype car during the season-opening event of the 2023-24 Asian Le Mans Series.

The Omani, who is currently assessing his options for next year following an excellent first campaign in the FIA World Endurance Championship this season in GTE Am, was invited to join the 99 Racing squad’s LMP2 outfit for the first two rounds of the new ALMS campaign.

After qualifying an impressive fourth fastest for the opening four-hour race on Saturday, just seven thousandths of a second shy of the front row, Al Harthy put together a very competitive start to the encounter – his first ever race at Sepang.

While not Al Harthy’s first taste of LMP2 prototype machinery, the Omani still lacked mileage in LMP2 compared to the majority of his rivals, further underscoring his performance. Maintaining a top four placing throughout the first hour, he moved up into third before slipping to fourth again through the

pit-stop strategies. Following great stints by Mazepin and Deletraz, the latter the reigning FIA WEC LMP2 Champion, the No 99 Oreca 07-Gibson moved through into the lead of the race in the hands of Deletraz with just under 40 minutes to go.

As rain started to fall, and then worsened into a full-blown storm, Deletraz and his chief rival pitted for treaded wet-weather Michelin tyres. With a huge amount of rain on track, the Safety Car was then deployed before red flags were shown with 10 minutes to go – Deletraz winning and taking away the fastest race lap with a time of 1m52.991 seconds (176.6 km/h).

For the second four-hour race on Sunday, Al Harthy again took the start – this time from fifth on the grid – and delivered an outstanding stint. While edged back to sixth initially, the Omani regained fifth soon after and then climbed into the top four before moving into the podium placings within the opening 15 minutes of action.

Then seizing second position during the second half-hour of action, Al Harthy ended hour one well within contention before pitting to hand the car over to



Ahmad al Harthy celebrates with the trophy.

Mazepin. Running in second when racing resumed after a Safety Car period, Mazepin swiftly took the lead of the race and pulled clear before then being reeled in later in the stint.

Down to second after the next stop, the race then took a turn for 99 Racing in the final hour when the planned pit-stop couldn’t be taken due to a Safety Car period which prevented access to the pits at that point. Deletraz duly ran the final stint after the stop and he was fifth with 45 minutes to go. Delivering searing pace once again, he was just eight seconds behind the runner-up spot with 15 minutes to go. Producing a true grandstand finish after catching his rival, Deletraz then sliced into second on the final lap of the race to secure the squad’s second Sepang podium.

Al Harthy, Deletraz and Mazepin concluded the opening ALMS event of the new season leading the overall driver standings with an advantage of 10 points. The same is true for 99 Racing in the team championship battle.

AHMAD AL HARTHY:
“It’s fantastic to have taken my first ever

LMP2 victory, I’m very proud to have achieved that and especially on my first visit to Sepang. It was a great first race, qualifying was very, very close and my stint was really difficult but I was very happy with my performance having not driven an LMP2 car for a long time – and also adapting to the circuit as well.

“In terms of race two, I started P5 and moved it up to P2 with some good overtakes and a good strategy. Both Nikita and Louis drove extremely well, they did an unbelievable job all weekend, but we got caught-out a bit with the Safety Car later on. Without that I think it could’ve been another win for us. We took the maximum we could though, second and a win is a great weekend.”

The Asian Le Mans Series now takes a break until February, when the championship travels to the Middle East for the three remaining rounds – one at Dubai Autodrome and two more races a week later at Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi.

2023-24 Asian Le Mans Series LMP2 Driver Standings(after Rd2):
1. Ahmad al Harthy/Louis Deletraz/Nikita Mazepin, 43 points

Red Warriors to play friendlies against China, UAE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 4

The Oman national football team will play two crucial friendly matches, first against China on December 29 and second against the UAE on January 6, 2024 during an abroad camp that will take place in the UAE later this month. The Red Warriors will get back to their domestic warm-up sessions ahead of taking part in the 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar next January.

The Oman players will commence their practice sessions for the domestic camp on December 11 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex under supervision of Croatian coach Branko

Ivankovic. The local training camp will run for four days while on the fifth day on December 15, the national team players will travel to UAE for an abroad camp that will feature two exciting scheduled warm-up matches against China and UAE.

Following the UAE camp, the national team delegation will travel to Doha city, Qatar to take part in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 which will take place during January 12 to February 10, 2024. Oman will compete in Group F besides Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan teams. The national team will commence their opening match against Saudi Arabia on January 16 while they will take

on Thailand on January 21. The concluding match will be against Kyrgyzstan on January 25.

Head coach Ivankovic is expected to announce the squad very soon which is likely to be similar to the recent one with minor changes. Recalling of Arshad al Alawi might be one of the changes besides some other faces.

Oman had suffered to a 1-0 loss against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek last month during the second match in Group D of the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027. Oman team had commenced their campaign with a thrilling 3-0 win over Chinese Taipei in the group opener.



HOPE GUIDES WEST INDIES PAST ENGLAND IN FIRST ODI

North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda: Shai Hope's 16th hundred and the rampaging support of all-rounder Romario Shepherd lifted the West Indies to a record-breaking four-wicket victory in a high-scoring opening duel of the three-match One-Day International series at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Sunday.

Set a daunting target of 326 by the visitors, the home captain anchored the effort through an unsteady period and then exploded with an array of mighty strokes, finishing the match with three sixes off Sam Curran in the penultimate over to seal the result with an unbeaten 109.

This effort surpassed the previous best of 276 by the West Indies against Sri Lanka in 2021 as the highest successful run-chase in an ODI by any team at the venue.

Hope's innings spanned 83 deliveries and was embellished by seven sixes and four fours, earning him the "Man of the Match" award.

Yet it was the role of Shepherd, who blazed 48 off 28 balls in a sixth-wicket partnership of 89 which got the West Indies back into the match when it appeared to have slipped away from them at 213 for five in the 39th over despite 66 at the top of the order from Alick Athanaze and an opening stand of 104 with Brandon King.

"Stats and record will come along by the way but my aim is to win matches and I'm happy to have played a part in that today," was Hope's immediate assessment of his effort, preferring to offer fulsome praise of Shepherd. "He was amazing. He is someone you can always rely on and he continues to show his worth at this level."

Earlier, Harry Brook held the England innings together



Brief scores
England 325 all out off 50 overs (H Brook 71, Z Crawley 48, P Salt 45; G Motie 2-49, O Thomas 2-57, R Shepherd 2-77) lost to West Indies 326-6 off 48.5 overs (S Hope 109 n.o., A Athanaze 66, R Shepherd 48; R Ahmed 2-40, G Atkinson 2-62, L Livingstone 1-50)
Result: West Indies won by four wickets

Shai Hope of West Indies hits a six to win the first ODI match against England at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda. — AFP

through the middle overs but it was blistering assaults at the top and tail of the 50 overs which lifted them to a competitive 325 all out.

Openers Phil Salt and Will Jacks blazed 77 at almost 10 runs per over after Jos Buttler opted to take first strike. Hope's bowlers then took advantage of a two-paced surface to pull the scoring rate down significantly before Sam Curran and Brydon Carse

regained the frenetic early tempo in an eighth-wicket stand of 66 as 86 runs were taken off the final nine overs the innings.

Brook's 71 came off 72 balls with seven fours and two sixes as the West Indies bowlers mixed up the pace of their deliveries to earn reward. Spinner Gudakesh Motie and pacers Shepherd and Oshane Thomas claimed two wickets each. "I thought it was a fantastic

effort by us with the bat," said Buttler in reflecting on the match. "It needed a special innings to chase it down and West Indies got that from Hope with support from Shepherd."

In the aftermath of a disastrous World Cup defence in India, England now find themselves in a must-win situation going into the second match at the same venue on Wednesday. — AFP

Nerveless Arshdeep sees India edge Australia

BENGALURU, India: Shreyas Iyer smashed 53 and fast bowler Arshdeep Singh kept calm in a tense final over as India edged Australia by six runs to seal the Twenty20 series 4-1 on Sunday.

India posted 160-8 in the fifth match after Iyer propelled the total with his 37-ball knock despite losing regular wickets after the tourists elected to field first in Bengaluru.

Fast bowler Mukesh Kumar (3-32), leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (2-29) and left-arm spinner Axar Patel (1-14) stood out as the hosts, who took an unbeatable 3-1 lead in the fourth T20, restricted Australia to 154-8.

But it was left-arm quick Arshdeep who defended nine in the last over when he began with two dot balls and then the wicket of skipper Matthew Wade for 22 to dim Australia's hopes.

The next three balls got the batting team just three runs as India celebrated victory.

"It was a good series from day one," skipper Suryakumar Yadav said. "We wanted to be fearless and enjoy ourselves when we were in the middle. So, very happy with that." It was a second-string Indian team which gave some consolation to the fans who witnessed hosts India lose the ODI World Cup final to Australia on November 19 in Ahmedabad.

Ben McDermott smashed 54



Arshdeep Singh gave away only three runs in the last over in which Australia required 10 runs to win.

off 36 deliveries but the batting wobbled after his departure and Mukesh struck twice on two deliveries to dent the chase.

He took down Matthew Short, for 16, Ben Dwarshuis, on a duck, to be on a hat-trick averted by Nathan Ellis.

The left-handed Wade smashed four boundaries and looked set to get the team home but a rising delivery from Arshdeep at the start of the final over made him angry as he signalled to the

umpires for a no-ball.

Wade protested and got out two balls later to take back his team's hopes, still dejected and waving his bat. "My job is to get us home in situations like tonight," said Wade.

"It would've been nice to get the result, but we learn and I thought Ben McDermott bounced back, (Jason) Behrendorff, (ben) Dwarshuis, (Tanveer) Sangha made an impact in tough conditions."

Earlier, India lost regular wickets but Iyer set up victory after he put

on fighting partnerships of 42 with Jitesh Sharma, who made 24, and 46 with Axar, who hit back with 31 from 21 balls, and was named man of the match. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES:
India 160-8 in 20 overs (S Iyer, 53, A Patel 31, J Sharma 24; B Dwarshuis 2-30, J Behrendorff 2-38) v Australia 154-8 in 20 overs (B McDermott 54, T Head 28; M Wade 22; M Kumar 3-32, R Bishnoi 2-29, A Singh 2-40)
Result: India won by six runs
Series: India won the five-match series 4-1

Majees CC stun Renaissance, Oman Stallions beat Yalla Shabab



Pratik Athawale of Oman Stallions

MUSCAT: Majees CC bamboozled Renaissance and Oman Stallions ease past Yalla Shabab at the weekend in the Premier Division League 2023-24 powered by Muscat Pharmacy LLC played at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1.

On Friday, Majees CC's Aamir Kaleem spun the web picking five wickets to bundle Renaissance to a mere total of 67. Arafat Islam contributed with the new ball scalping three wickets to his name while Ubaidullah claimed two wickets. In reply, Aamir

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Kaleem took the attack onto the opposition along with Lakpriya Ravindra to ensure Majees CC ease to a comfortable 7 wicket win.

On Saturday, Pratik Athawale's magnificent century helped Oman Stallions put a total of 230 along with contribution from Sankata Prasad scoring a handy 38. Karan Sonavale scalped a spell 6-fer to restrict Oman Stallions along with two wickets each for Bilal Khan and Abdul Khan.

In response, Mohammed Naseem dominated with a bashing 85, however, Yalla Shabab were bundled to 149 courtesy three wickets each for Shakeel Ahmad and Rafullah.

BRIEF SCORES: Renaissance 67 all out in 16 overs (Aamir Kaleem 5-9, Arafat Islam 3-23) lost to Majees CC 68-3 in 10.3 overs (Aamir Kaleem 29 (26b); Syed Muzammil 1-12) by 7 wickets. Oman Stallions 230 all out in 50 overs (Pratik Athawale 110 (132b); Karan Sonavale 6-36) beat Yalla Shabab 149 all out in 37.4 overs (Mohammed Naseem 85 (86b); Shakeel Ahmad 3-23) by 81 runs.

Auditors Cricket Cup to begin on Dec 14

MUSCAT: The Sports (Cricket) Committee of Auditors Oman is preparing the Annual Auditors Cup 2023 for an exciting round of cricket. The Auditor's cup is a ten-a-side softball cricket tournament held between participating audit firms and has been a tradition for last 15 plus years.

This ten-a-side tournament provides an opportunity to treat the firm's employees and their families to a great corporate event which provides entertainment on and off the field.

The founder of the committee Omar Sarfraz expressed gratitude to Jazz Boys Cricket Club for being an integral part of this event from past five years and hopes that the cricket tournament will bring the

firms together in spirit of passionate competition and mutual respect with another successful year of fun filled on field contest.

"We invite you to come and witness the teams having fun, and to join us in supporting the teams - which includes EY, Deloitte, PwC, KPMG, Crowe, Moore, GT, BDO and Al Nuha International. Over the weekend we had the draws at Moore office represented by all nine firms."

The event can be enjoyed with family and friends at the Oman Cricket Academy located in Al Amerat on December 14, 15 and 16, which will be played under floodlights starting at 5pm. Many spot prizes are up for grabs and catering by Beyond Kitchen for all the three evenings.



The team representatives and organisers during the Auditors Cup draw.

ESG Football Academy emerge JPL GCC Cup champions

MUSCAT: This weekend saw the fourth round of the JPL GCC Cup series take place here in Bausher, Muscat.

Ten teams from across the GCC came to the Sultanate of Oman this weekend to see who could be crowned the under-14 champions.

The ESG Football Academy team who were the youngest team in the tournament with the boys being under-13 and under-12 managed to pull off the unthinkable winning the crown.

They secured the win by beating Juventus Academy Oman in a nail-biting penalty shoot-out in the final.

ESG goalkeeper Hamad al Busaidy, who also won the individual award as the tournament's best goalkeeper, was the hero saving two penalties which secured the Cup for ESG.

ESG Football Academy coach Haitham said: "I am so happy for these boys. It's been a very tough weekend for them, but they have huge self-belief both individually and as a team and worked extremely hard for each other."

"We were always going to be up against it being the smallest and youngest team in the tournament, but the boys showed that football is not just about physicality but also having the right mentality as well as the technical ability which is even more important."

"Overall, it's been another tournament where we've seen so many talented players perform from across the Sultanate of Oman and it was fitting that it was two teams from Oman that played out the final. We are now looking forward to the fifth round taking place in Saudi Arabia in January 2024," he added.



ECG Academy celebrate with trophy.

Inter thump Napoli to make title statement

MILAN: Inter Milan sent a warning to the rest of Serie A with Sunday’s convincing 3-0 win at Napoli which re-established their two-point lead at the summit and left the champions’ title defence on its last legs.

Beautifully taken goals from Hakan Calhanoglu, Nicolo Barella and Marcus Thuram pushed Inter back above closest challengers Juventus, who briefly held top spot after beating Monza on Friday.

Sunday’s thumping was a show of force from Inter who illustrated why they are favourites to win a 20th league title, still unbeaten away from home in all competitions after claiming a huge win at a ground where they have a dreadful record.

“It was a show of strength, of team spirit,” said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi. “Winning like this in Naples is satisfying, but we’re only 14 games in and there is a very long way to go.”

Napoli are now 11 points off the pace and travel to Juve next weekend in a match which could end any realistic hope of the champions retaining the Scudetto before the calendar year is out.

To add insult to injury Napoli have dropped out of the top four, replaced by Roma who won 2-1 at Sassuolo earlier and sit in the last Champions League spot on goal difference.

NAPOLI RECRIMINATIONS

Returning Napoli coach Walter Mazzarri refused to speak after the match, sporting director Mauro Meluso expressing anger at referee Davide Massa for not stopping play for a foul before Inter’s opener and not giving a penalty for what he believed was a clear foul on Victor Osimhen while the home side trailed by a single goal. “I don’t want to create an excuse for our team, who obviously still need to work on a few things, but we didn’t deserve that humiliation today,” said Meluso.

Simone Inzaghi’s side have won 11 of their 14 league matches so far this season

and once Hakan Calhanoglu thrashed in the opener on the stroke of half-time they expertly dealt with a hyped-up Napoli.

Hosts Napoli were playing their first home fixture under Mazzarri, whose team are stuck on a paltry seven points from as many matches at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona.

Barella doubled Inter’s lead just after the hour mark with his first goal of the season shortly after Yann Sommer pulled off a brilliant save to deny Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, one of three superb stops from the Swiss.

Italy’s Barella burst unopposed from midfield and after collecting Lautaro Martinez’s low pass skipped past Leo Ostigard and Natan before confidently finishing past Alex Meret.

And with five minutes remaining Thuram — who earlier had a goal ruled out for a microscopic offside — made absolutely sure of the points, tapping home his fifth league goal of a brilliant first season at Inter from substitute Juan Cuadrado’s low cross.

ROMA COMEBACK

Paulo Dybala’s 76th-minute penalty and a wildly deflected strike from Rasmus Kristensen shortly afterwards earned Roma a win from their scrappy match with 10-man Sassuolo, who opened the scoring through Matheus Henrique.

The win at the Mapei Stadium came as coach Jose Mourinho is reportedly being investigated by the Italian Football Federation for saying that referee Matteo Marcenaro didn’t “have the emotional stability to referee at this level” ahead of the match.

The Portuguese blasted Marcenaro, 31, in a pre-match outburst on Saturday which the country’s refereeing association said “could lead to violence” against officials.

Fiorentina are a point behind Roma and Napoli in sixth thanks to a simple 3-0 win over the bottom team Salernitana, while Bologna are a further point and place back following their 1-1 draw at Lecce. — **AFP**



Inter Milan's Hakan Calhanoglu celebrates scoring their first goal against Napoli. – Reuters

Dominant Seeb prevail over Nizwa in OBL



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 4

Seeb defeated Nizwa with a score of 79-60 in the second round of matches in Oman Basketball League 2023-24 at the sub-arena of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The match witnessed Seeb’s dominance in the first three quarters, where Seeb managed the game perfectly and outperformed Nizwa. This led their coach to rest some of their players in the fourth quarter, allowing Nizwa to make a comeback. However, the lead from the previous quarters enabled Seeb to secure the victory.

Key players, including the American professional Bryce, Abdulrahman al Shuaibi, and Rashid al Zahibi, played pivotal roles in Seeb’s success. Their exceptional skills, marked by high accuracy in shooting, proved instrumental in securing the win.

The encounter began with a significant advantage for Seeb, who dominated the first quarter and capitalised on most of the opportunities. They started scoring through Rashid al Zahibi, followed by a similar shot from his teammate Ayman al Mahrami. Despite Nizwa’s attempts to reduce the gap with two points from their professional player Niver, Seeb continued to attack, putting significant pressure on Nizwa’s court and adding 24 points, while Nizwa managed only 9 points. The first quarter ended with Seeb leading Nizwa 28-11.

In the second quarter, Seeb continued their offensive and defensive dominance, despite Nizwa’s increased activity in both areas compared to the first quarter. Seeb managed to further strengthen their lead, scoring 21 points, while Nizwa scored 18 points. The first half ended with Seeb leading Nizwa 49-29.

In the third quarter, Seeb

maintained their superiority in capitalising on available opportunities and managed to extend their lead by adding 15 points, while Nizwa scored 13 points. The third quarter ended with Seeb leading 64-42.

In the fourth quarter, after securing the lead, Seeb coach withdrew some of their key players, allowing Nizwa to excel in both defence and offence and capitalise on most opportunities.

Despite Nizwa’s improvement, Seeb responded each time, scoring 14 points, while Nizwa scored 18 points. The match concluded with Seeb winning by 79-60.

The match was officiated by international Yemeni referee Taha al Hashidi as the first referee, international referee Ahmed al Khashibi as the second referee and Ali al Sulaimani as the third referee. The table officials were Juma al Hinai, Yaqoub al Nadabi and Hafiz Alwlad Ahmed.



Closer than you think

Over 100 branches, and more than 300
ATMs/CDMs/FFMs/MFKs to serve you

bankdhofar

www.bankdhofar.com

بنك ظفار
Bank Dhofar

Sayyid Bilarab opens Omani Startups Forum

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 4

Under the auspices of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the Promising Omani Startups Programme (POSP), the Promising Omani Startups Forum launched at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center on Monday, with the attendance of more than 1,500 participants. The programme highlighted its notable initiatives and presented the results of an analytical study on the startup ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman.

The forum, attended by a diverse audience of entrepreneurs, students, experts, academics, and enthusiasts, seeks to shed light on the initiatives and achievements of the Promising Omani Startups Forum. It aims to promote and empower the culture of entrepreneurship and startups, exploring the latest developments and trends while benefiting from

international experiences and practices to envision the future of the sector.

Diverse workshops are organised in the three main axes of the Promising Omani Startups Forum - Capacity-building for startups, financing and investment in startups, and the legislative environment supporting startups. Informative dialogue sessions will conclude each axis.

Stefan Kuster, the Chief Strategy Officer of Startup Genome, presented an overview of the future of the startup sector based on the analytical study's results, focusing on innovation and technology-driven startups in Oman. Dr Hussain al Salmi, Deputy President of the German University for Administrative and Financial Affairs, discussed the role of education in promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.

Insights from Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) will be shared by Saif al Maamari regarding Omantel's



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the Promising Omani Startups Programme (POSP), presided over the opening of a gathering titled "Promising Omani Startups Forum".

innovation labs in acceleration and incubation programmes. Camilo Doza, Founder and CEO of Doza Holdings, will discuss building high capabilities for startups with

the aim of expanding into global markets.

On the legislative environment axis, Mutasim al Sariri, General Manager of Value Added in Oman

Investment Authority, will present supportive policies for the growth of startups, and Ketna Hergi, CEO of Coot Note Venture, will discuss the role of business accelerators in

successful projects.

Adam Bergy, Development Manager at Startup Genome, will present on legislation and financial controls for startups. Hamoud al Hamdani, the Chairman of the Technical Committee for the Promising Omani Startups Forum, will conclude the axis with a presentation on the startup ecosystem in Oman.

On the financing and investment axis, Jacopo Lupo, CEO of EIBAN, will present on angel investment, and Khaled al Reis, Project and Marketing Manager at Bahrain's Future Fund, will discuss crowdfunding's role in promoting economic development.

The axis will conclude with a presentation on venture capital in startup sectors, shedding light on potential challenges in startup investments, presented by Maha al Balushi, General Manager of Strategy at the Empowerment Group.

Oman AgroFood 2023 spotlights tech innovations



The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, touring the exhibition on Monday.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 4

The 5th International Exhibition for Agriculture, Food, and Aquaculture (Oman AgroFood 2023) commenced here yesterday under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Speaking to the press, Director General of Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing at the ministry, Dr Masoud bin Sulaiman al Azri, highlighted the significance of this exhibition: "The exhibition truly highlights the importance of modern technologies in various agricultural and aquaculture sectors, shedding light on the latest advancements in food security, across agriculture,

livestock and fisheries, as well as water resources." According to Dr Al Azri, the exhibition will provide local companies the opportunity to further expand. "The goal of this exhibition is to bring in modern technology, transfer knowledge, and connect Omani companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, with global companies operating in the fields of food security." Food security a key pillar of the Oman Vision 2040 plan, as the government aims to establish complete food sufficiency by 2040. Last year, Oman ranked third regionally and 35th globally on the Global Food Security Index.

Just this year alone, the government signed 40 contracts to help boost food security in the country with an investment

value of over RO 9 million. 37 of these contracts were allocated to wheat cultivation developments in the Najd Agricultural Zone in the Dhofar Governorate, which has an annual product output of 52,000 tonnes.

Furthermore, the agricultural and fisheries sector, which contributed 1.8 per cent of the local GDP in 2022, plays a crucial role in diversifying the economy in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. Mordor Intelligence, estimates the agriculture market in Oman to be valued at around \$2.11 billion currently and expects it to grow to reach \$2.84 billion by 6.16 per cent in five years.

According to ministry officials, over 130 companies from 12 countries are participating in this year's exhibition which is taking place until December 6, 2023.

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last date for obtaining the documents	Bid Submission Date	Requirements from participants	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	103/2023	Provide In Vehicle Monitoring System (IVMS) Management Solution & Services for Three Years.	19/12/2023	16/01/2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration & TRA Certificate.	26/250
2	104/2023	Supply of Ancillary Spare Parts for OETC Grid Stations at Dhofar Governorate.	19/12/2023	16/01/2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250
3	105/2023	Oil leakage Attending and Painting for Transformers at OETC Dhofar Governorate Grid Stations	19/12/2023	16/01/2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	105/-

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender:	By E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer), SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions:	- Specifying the name of the Company or whatever refers to in the Bid Guarantee Envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 91777378 , 93515198 , 99105413
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx

الشركة العامة لنقل الكهرباء
OMAN ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION COMPANY S.A.O.C.
أحد شركات مجموعة لئام
Member of Name Group

Oman Electricity Transmission Company S.A.O.C.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2428 3000 | Fax: +968 2230 9046
www.omangrid.com

رؤية عمان 2040
الاستراتيجية
Moving Forward with Confidence

Omran Group completes kitesurfing expedition

MUSCAT: OMRAN Group, in partnership with Oman Sail and Sea & Beach Projects, is delighted to announce the successful completion of a groundbreaking Kitesurfing expedition along Oman’s stunning coastline. This venture is a testament to OMRAN Group’s commitment to diversifying Oman’s tourism sector and enhancing the adventure experiences on offer, in preparation for the establishment of ‘downwinder’ activities and competitions in Oman.

Spanning 334km over five days, from Bar Al Hickman in the Wilayat of Mahout to Al Suwaih in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, the expedition aimed to explore potential sports and adventure experiences along Oman’s shores. The ideal wind conditions of Oman’s coast provide a prime setting for activities such as Kitesurfing and Wingfoiling.

Mohammed al Ghufaili, OMRAN Group’s COO, commented, “This expedition aligns with our objective to diversify the tourism sector by showcasing Oman’s natural beauty and adventure potential. We are dedicated to crafting sustainable and eco-conscious experiences that resonate with adventure enthusiasts worldwide.”



An image of a kitesurfer captured by Bassem Zein.

Marcelo Antunes Ferreira, who undertook the expedition, shared his awe-inspiring experiences, ranging from captivating wildlife and breathtaking landscapes to engaging with local fishermen and witnessing traditional Omani fishing methods, adding, “The success of this expedition, supported by a dedicated team and rigorous safety measures, highlights the potential for expanding water sports and adventure tourism in the Oman.” Al Ghufaili further stated, “Sea and beach tourism brings people

closer to nature and promotes environmental awareness. Oman’s rich marine environment, paired with our commitment to sustainability, positions us as a top choice for travellers. Additionally, this trend often results in significant tourism revenue boosts during peak seasons, benefiting local businesses, employment opportunities, and overall economic growth.” In the evolving landscape of adventure tourism, OMRAN Group is well-positioned to transform Oman into a premier global destination

for adventure seekers and nature enthusiasts. The success of this expedition paves the way for future similar activities and potential competitions.

Furthermore, the Group’s focus on eco-tourism and responsible tourism practices aligns with the conservation and sustainability objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the National Tourism Strategy. This ensures the remarkable destinations where these activities are hosted remain pristine for future generations to enjoy.

Meethaq Islamic Banking Services available in Sur, Sohar and Nizwa

MUSCAT: Aligning with its strategy to broaden its services to encompass all segments of society, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat is launching special booths across key commercial centres in various regions of the Sultanate of Oman, aiming to bring Meethaq’s suite of services and products closer to customers, ensuring seamless, convenient and fast transactions.

As a start, Meethaq will set up a booth at Sur City Center in Sharqiyah South, for three days, from December 7th to 9th. Meethaq Team will be available in the counter in two shifts, morning and evening, to provide customers with the best banking experiences. The second station will be Sohar City Center in Batinah North from December 14th to 16th and it will end at Nizwa Grand Mall in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate from December 21st to 23rd.

These booths will offer visitors access to a range of Shariah-compliant products and services including opening children and saving accounts, subscribing in Meethaq saving plan, applying for salary transfer, and various financing products. Meethaq employees will ensure swift and hassle-free transactions, committed to delivering unparalleled banking services.

On the occasion, Sami Arfah



An image of the Meethaq Islamic Banking - Head Office Branch.

Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager - Meethaq Personal Banking, said: “Despite of our wide network encompassing 27 branches distributed across all governorates, offering various banking services and facilities, we have launched this initiative with the aim of providing opportunities for customers to explore our diverse range of products and services, including the opening of bank accounts, in a convenient environment in these renowned commercial centres. I urge everyone to take this opportunity and benefit from these exceptional services. I would like to extend my gratitude all our customers for their trust in the banking services, products and facilities provided by Meethaq.” Meethaq Islamic Banking endeavours to provide a full suite of Shari’a compliant Islamic banking products and services including deposit products, consumer financing, credit cards, corporate banking, Internet banking, mobile banking and 24/7 Contact Center for both customers and corporate sector.



Opening of the Qurayat Branch by NBO.

NBO inaugurates branch in Qurayat

MUSCAT: In its commitment to elevate the overall customer experience, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) is delighted to announce the official opening of its new branch in the wilayat of Qurayat. The opening ceremony, held under the auspices of Abdullah bin Zahrán al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO, witnessed the presence of esteemed clients and NBO senior management. This expansion reflects NBO’s dedication to exceptional service and community engagement strategically meeting evolving customer needs.

Speaking on the occasion, Tariq Atiq, General Manager and Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at National Bank of Oman said: “The upgrade and modernisation of our branch networks exemplifies our dedication to providing seamless and convenient services for our customers across Oman. This newly inaugurated branch is just one among several that

we plan to upgrade in the upcoming period, reflecting our customer centric approach. In alignment with our commitment to prioritise customer service, we continuously explore new ways to enhance their banking experience through advanced solutions. This new branch solidifies that commitment, offering a digital banking experience tailored to meet the diverse needs of our customers. It underscores our commitment to digital presence and financial inclusion in Oman, aligning with national efforts for digital transformation.” Prioritising convenience and accessibility, the new branch introduces a digital corner operating 24/7. The digital corner offers a variety of services such as a multi-purpose service kiosk that meets the different needs of customers, such as opening accounts, issuing debit cards, renewing and replacing cards, cash and check deposit transactions, cash withdrawals, bill payments, and other services

in addition to an ATM and a CDM.

Additionally, the branch will also feature a dedicated Sadara Centre, an exclusive service crafted for our Priority Banking customers. This dedicated area will offer personalised assistance and a host of premium banking services, ensuring an pioneering banking experience for our valued customers. With its contemporary design and strategic location in the heart of the city, the new branch ensures easy accessibility and ample parking space enhancing the overall experience for both customers and visitors.

It is noteworthy that NBO offers a diverse range of digital banking solutions and services for both its corporate and retail customers, including NBO App and Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) platform. The Bank is steadfastly committed to continually improving its digital platforms, staying attuned to the evolving needs of its customers.

ahlibank discusses importance of diversification in wealth management conference

MUSCAT: Demonstrating a commitment to thought-leadership and continuous knowledge sharing with its esteemed clientele, ahlibank recently hosted a conference for its ‘Exclusiv’ wealth management customers at its head office. The high-profile event provided valuable insights to ahlibank’s Exclusiv clients, assisting them in managing and growing their wealth strategically. The conference hosted international experts from global financial institutions that specialise in investments and wealth management.

Focused on ‘The Power of Diversification,’ the conference received a positive response from attendees and shed light on ahlibank’s latest initiatives, including the launch of its “Digital Wealth Platform” integrated into a comprehensive and innovative product and service portfolio.

Najla al Lawati, AGM and Head of Private Banking & Wealth Management at ahlibank, commented on the event, stating,

“At ahlibank, we design wealth management products tailored to our customers’ needs and preferences. Through our Exclusiv portfolio, we aim to consistently deliver high-quality services and present investment opportunities to our high-profile clients. Building strong relationships with our customers is essential for their ongoing financial well-being.” As the market evolves, ahlibank remains dedicated to excellence in its various initiatives and events, ensuring meaningful engagement with customers to understand their evolving needs.

Highlighting the significance of diversification in reducing risk and enhancing returns, Najla al Lawati emphasised, “Diversification is crucial when implementing strategies to mitigate risk. At ahlibank, we consider it our duty to guide our customers through the financial landscape with enlightened approaches, emphasising the diversification of investments and delivering a comprehensive wealth

management experience.” As an integral component of ahlibank’s extensive Private Banking & Wealth Management services, the Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) takes centre stage. Essentially, the SIP provides an effective platform for investors to invest in funds that have demonstrated market potentials. ahlibank’s SIP, structured under expert guidance and advisory, is designed to augment customers’ wealth through thoughtfully chosen investment opportunities along with other services as part of its extensive portfolio.

Exclusiv Banking at ahlibank, focuses on maximising returns and minimising risks, managing wealth and providing customised financial and investment solutions. ahlibank’s privileged banking offers personalised services to help customers’ investments flourish and grow, with the Bank and its team of professionals ready to guide them on their journey to long-term financial success and prosperity.





Oman's hydrogen economy to create 380,000 jobs

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, DEC 4

The Sultanate of Oman's long-term strategy to develop a hydrogen-centric economy has the potential to create anywhere between 291,000 and 381,000 employment opportunities by 2050, according to a new report published this week.

Titled, 'Hydrogen Fuelled Economies: Opportunities for economic value creation from green hydrogen in Oman,' the report by business management consulting firm Guidehouse Germany delves into the job generation potential of this nascent sector, as well as its contribution to the country's future GDP growth.

It was compiled for the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) and Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) of the Sultanate of Oman.

A central finding of the report is the future green-hydrogen economy's sizable job creation potential. "Based on the 2050 production targets, the hydrogen economy is expected to create 291,000 to 381,800 employment opportunities, 46-50 per cent of which are connected to the deployment of renewable electricity, depending on the share of equipment and machinery that is imported to Oman (rather than produced locally)," it said.

Hydrogen production is targeted to reach around 8 million tonnes per annum by 2050, which part of this volume expected to be utilised locally as a zero-carbon energy resource for hard-to-abate industries, including steel, aluminium and cement. Oman expects a number of international manufacturers to set up their operations at Duqm SEZ, where much of this hydrogen capacity is anticipated to materialise over the coming



Around half of the future green economy's job creation potential is linked to the renewable electricity sector

decades.

Significantly, around a quarter of the total employment is direct employment while the rest is created indirectly, according to Guidehouse. The employment potential from renewable energy scale-up is the largest driver representing around half the

overall potential employment the report noted.

Beneficial impacts to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are also expected to be significant, according to the report. Future sales of green hydrogen and related products are also estimated to contribute

in the order of 31-51 per cent of current GDP levels, with new revenue sources effectively offsetting expected declines in oil and gas revenues. The report stresses the need for Oman to tap the experience and technological capabilities of leading economies, notably Germany, in harnessing

the full potential of its new green hydrogen economy. Also imperative, it notes, is a supportive regulatory and policy environment that is essential for attracting foreign investment into the hydrogen sector.

"This includes clear long term energy transition plans, encompassing renewable energy targets and measures to create local hydrogen demand, long-term visibility of hydrogen auction schedules and transparent and fair criteria," the report points out.

Due consideration must also be given to a number of objectives in order to drive a rapid ramp-up of the hydrogen market, says Guidehouse. These factors include: "support for first-mover and pilot projects, hydrogen infrastructure planning and/or provision, and alignment with key offtake markets regarding their requirements as well as on instruments for creating offtake certainty".

Promising Omani Startups Forum opens

FROM PAGE 13

Halima bint Rashid bin Sulaiman al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, emphasised that the programme's success is linked to the efforts of the unified team, following the approach of integration and harmony between government and private institutions inside and outside Oman. This collaboration aims to empower future generations of entrepreneurs to continue

their growth locally and globally.

During the 2023 forum, the programme highlighted key initiatives, including a podcast on startups, the launch of three children's stories, an educational game on startups in collaboration with the Islamic Bank Al Azar, the release of six guidance manuals, an entrepreneurship card for startups, an online educational course for startups on the Entrepreneurship Academy platform, training camps for school and university students,

the Start-Up Weekend event for universities, allocating 10 per cent of the Future Fund's capital to small and medium enterprises and startups, launching an investment page for Omani startups on the Dealroom platform, and reviewing and honouring winning ideas in the Entrepreneurial Ideas competition.

On the sidelines of the forum, a startup exhibition will showcase 50 technology and innovation-based startups from various sectors, presenting their services

and innovations to the public and visitors. The exhibition features the winning projects from the Entrepreneurial Ideas competition, a collaboration between the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, the Oman Investment Authority, and companies like Imkan Group, Nama Group, and OQ Group. The competition aimed to find solutions and initiatives for fifteen challenges facing these startups, resulting in twenty innovative ideas in these three areas.

IBM shows new quantum computing chip, targeting large systems

NEW YORK: International Business Machines on Monday showed a new quantum computing chip and machine that it hopes will serve as the building blocks of much larger systems a decade from now.

Researchers around the world are trying to perfect quantum computing, which relies on quantum mechanics to reach computing speeds far faster than classical silicon-based computers. The challenge has been to create quantum computers that are reliable enough in the real world to consistently beat conventional computers.

Microsoft, Alphabet's Google and China's Baidu, along with startups and nation states, are all racing to develop quantum machines.

As quantum researchers have made the machines big enough to outpace classical computers, they have struggled with data errors. On Monday, IBM showed what it says is a new way of connecting chips together inside machines and then connecting machines together which, when combined with a new error-correction code, could produce compelling quantum machines by 2033. — **Reuters**

Gold strikes record on rate cut bets but equities struggle

HONG KONG: Gold reached a new record on Monday, driven by growing optimism that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates in the new year. Traders shrugged off Jerome Powell's attempts to temper expectations. However, equity markets faced challenges in building on a positive lead from Wall Street, with attention shifting to key US jobs figures expected later in the week.

Bets on a monetary policy easing gained momentum after Powell stated on Friday that the economy was "well into restrictive territory" following over a year of rate hikes, pushing borrowing costs to a two-decade high. Recent data indicating a softening labour market, economic slowdown, and decreasing inflation toward the bank's two per cent target contributed to stock rallies and a weakened dollar.

Gold prices surged to \$2,135 at one point on Monday as traders sought refuge in bullion amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. The metal gained strength from speculation that the Fed could slash rates amid a slowdown in inflation. This, in turn, weighed on the dollar, making gold more affordable for international buyers. Bloomberg reported a 60 per cent chance of a rate cut in March, with a fully priced-in expectation for May.

"Markets are piling in on the



A worker polishes gold bullion bars at the ABC Refinery in Sydney

rate cut bets," said Capital.com's Kyle Rodda. "Gold can run higher and will do so at the earliest sign of a recession."

Powell sought to manage expectations after his remarks last week, cautioning that it was "premature" to speculate on when policymakers would start cutting. He emphasised the bank's readiness to tighten monetary policy further if deemed necessary. Despite earlier indications of additional tightening, recent remarks from Powell and Chris Waller have been widely interpreted as signaling the end of rate hikes and the possibility of future cuts.

Bitcoin surpassed \$40,000 for the first time since May last year, boosted by expectations of US approval for spot Bitcoin exchange-

traded funds, including those from firms like BlackRock. Bloomberg reported potential approval by the Securities and Exchange Commission by next month.

Stock markets showed mixed performance, with Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Taipei in the red, while Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Manila, Mumbai, Bangkok, and Jakarta experienced gains. Wellington remained flat. London, Paris, and Frankfurt opened lower.

In Hong Kong, troubled developer China Evergrande briefly surged over 13 per cent after a court ruled on Monday that it has until late January to present a restructuring plan to avoid liquidation, extending the previous December deadline. — **AFP**



Wind turbines can be seen atop a hill at the Infigen Energy wind farm located on the hills surrounding Lake George.

Copenhagen targets \$3 bn for greenfield renewables

DUBAI: Danish investment firm Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners is looking to raise \$3 billion for a new fund focused on building renewable energy projects from scratch in emerging and middle-income countries, the heads of the fund told Reuters.

The 14-year Growth Markets Fund II it has just launched will target wind and solar power and niche investments such as battery storage and projects that turn electricity into carbon-neutral synthetic fuels, so-called 'power-to-X'.

According to data firm Preqin, only one emerging markets greenfield renewables fund has raised more than Copenhagen wants to amass, although the 2014 \$3.26 billion Guangzhou City Development Industry Fund is focused on China.

Getting more money to developing economies to help them transition to a low-carbon future is a central aim of the COP28 climate talks in Dubai, but most climate-focused funds have targeted safer, more reliable returns in developed countries.

While a deal to phase out fossil fuels has been hard to agree, more than 60 countries have backed a

global agreement to triple renewable energy this decade.

Most of the world's future emissions will likely come from emerging and middle-income countries. They will need \$2.8 trillion in investment by 2030 to meet cleaner energy goals, including at least tripling renewable capacity, Copenhagen partner and co-head of the fund Niels Holst said.

"The key driver in these countries is that they need power. The growth in demand for electricity is enormous," he told Reuters, adding that renewable energy was often the cheapest energy source.

Yet financing is far short of what's needed, with investors deterred by the risks involved.

Only \$550 million has been raised this year for funds focused on renewable energy projects in developing countries, against more than \$1 billion last year and nearly \$8 billion in 2020, Preqin data showed.

Rising inflation and interest rates have hit cleaner energy project returns in developed markets, including Britain and the US. — **Reuters**

Empowering awareness: The evolution of Islamic banking in Oman



DR NAGIB A OMAR
nagib@cbfs.edu.om]

The writer is a Certified Islamic Finance Executive (CIFE), Certified Investment & Financial Analyst (CIFA) and an Assistant Professor, Accounting & Finance at College of Banking & Financial Studies, Oman

In the ever-changing landscape of Oman's financial sector, the rise of Islamic banking stands out as a defining force, reshaping the way individuals and businesses engage with financial services. This article explores the present state of Islamic banking in Oman, its market dynamics, and the crucial role that awareness plays in nurturing its expansion.

The notable rise of Islamic banking: Oman's Islamic banking sector has experienced substantial growth, emerging as a significant contributor to the nation's economic landscape. Beyond being a mere financial trend, this surge reflects a broader transition towards Sharia-compliant financial solutions, resonating with the values of an increasingly well-informed population.

Changes in market dynamics: The financial landscape is undergoing a notable transformation, with Islamic banks steadily gaining ground against traditional counterparts.

Prominent institutions like Bank Nizwa and Al Izz Islamic Bank have shown substantial growth, signifying a preference for Sharia-compliant financial instruments among consumers.

Global and GCC comparisons: A benchmark for Oman. Expanding our perspective, it is crucial to compare the awareness of Islamic banking globally and within the GCC. Countries like Malaysia, with their innovative campaigns, serve as benchmarks for Oman's awareness efforts. Within the GCC, the UAE's initiatives, such as the 'Islamic Economy Week,' offer valuable insights into effective awareness creation.

Awareness as the cornerstone of financial prosperity: Awareness emerges as the foundation of a thriving financial sector, influencing financial inclusion, economic growth, financial literacy, and ethical consumer behaviour. Informed individuals and businesses are better positioned to benefit from ethical and Sharia-

THE FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE IS UNDERGOING A NOTABLE TRANSFORMATION, WITH ISLAMIC BANKS STEADILY GAINING GROUND AGAINST TRADITIONAL COUNTERPARTS. EXPANDING OUR PERSPECTIVE, IT IS CRUCIAL TO COMPARE THE AWARENESS OF ISLAMIC BANKING GLOBALLY AND WITHIN THE GCC

compliant finance, aligning with Oman's Vision 2040 for sustainable economic development.

Best practices in awareness creation: Drawing lessons from best practices, such as innovative campaigns, collaboration, and education, Islamic banking in Oman strives to make its principles accessible and engaging. Through interactive online platforms and strategic influencer partnerships, the sector aims to create an environment where individuals can navigate the intricacies of Islamic banking with confidence.

Technology's role in expanding reach: In the digital age, technology plays a pivotal role in extending awareness to a broader audience. Digital platforms, social media engagement, podcasts, virtual reality experiences, and webinars are crucial tools in amplifying the impact of Islamic banking awareness.

Challenges and solutions: A practical approach. As with any journey, challenges are inevitable. Recognising financial constraints,

tailoring communication strategies among all stakeholders, measuring and adapting to competition, addressing misconceptions regarding Islamic banking practices, and investing in education (by offering Islamic finance programmes in higher education institutions) and continuous internal as well as external training by Islamic financial institutions are essential elements in fortifying the path to heightened awareness.

The way forward: Advocating for strategic evolution. In conclusion, the journey toward heightened awareness in Islamic banking requires strategic partnerships, continuous engagement efforts, and a commitment to staying informed about the benefits and principles of Islamic finance and banking. This evolution is not just a financial imperative but a societal responsibility, contributing to a future where ethical finance and informed decision-making are paramount in Oman's economic vision.

EU's electric dreams short-circuited by EV charging gridlock

JULIA PAYNE

Electric vehicle drivers hoping to top up their batteries at one of Repsol's 1,600 Spanish charging stations might well be disappointed, with nearly half lying dormant because they have no power connection. Such gaps are evident across the European Union, where last week the European Commission announced plans to upgrade the bloc's power grids. These are due to be implemented in 18 months and include addressing EV charging station power shortages.

But despite the declarations of its leaders, red tape preventing progress towards greener transport in the EU is on the rise, industry groups, and energy companies said, with permitting one of the major roadblocks. The ease of building an EV charging hub varies considerably country by country. One industry source said that in Germany, a hub was held up for months over rules protecting a single tree, while another located on a busy highway had to wait 10 months for a noise evaluation before it gained approval.

"Although the work of installing a fast and ultra-fast charging point requires only two to three weeks of work, due to different administrative requirements in Spain, the complete process ... can last from one to two years," Repsol said.

Industry group ChargeUp Europe said that while the Commission recognised permitting was a problem, it had not proposed any concrete tools or actions. Specific guidelines for member states to accelerate permitting are only expected at some point over the next two years, the plan's timeline shows. This is slowing down the rollout of charging hubs across the

THE EASE OF BUILDING AN EV CHARGING HUB VARIES CONSIDERABLY COUNTRY BY COUNTRY. ONE INDUSTRY SOURCE SAID THAT IN GERMANY, A HUB WAS HELD UP FOR MONTHS OVER RULES PROTECTING A SINGLE TREE, WHILE ANOTHER LOCATED ON A BUSY HIGHWAY HAD TO WAIT 10 MONTHS FOR A NOISE EVALUATION BEFORE IT GAINED APPROVAL



An Audi electric vehicle is being charged in a charging station in Drogenbos

27-member bloc, putting EU targets to phase out petrol and diesel vehicles, as well as its broader climate goals, in peril.

"The time needed for connecting the EV recharging points to the grid can indeed be seen as a barrier to accelerate the uptake of EVs and needs to be tackled," a Commission spokesperson said in an emailed response. The process for setting up a fast EV station has risen to an average of two years from six months in the last few years, four EV charging companies and the industry's representative said, as firms wade through myriad rules from federal to municipal levels.

"It's Kafka meets the energy transition. We have so many things working against Europe but we could fix this," Lucie Mattera, secretary-general of ChargeUp Europe, said. Mattera said the number of EVs will grow faster than the total number of public charging stations which ChargeUp Europe estimates will rise by nine times by 2030, with EVs by ten. The electrification of transport is one of the key pillars underpinning the EU's goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. To do so, it will ban sales of CO2-emitting vehicles from 2035 and wants to develop a network of EV charging stations. That ambition has created bottlenecks for power companies and regulators unprepared for the surge in demand in the EU, where so far only 5.4 per cent of passenger cars run on alternative fuels, including electric, out of a total 286 million.

"It's up to the member states now to really step up," Miguel Stilwell de Andrade, CEO of Portuguese energy firm EDP, said, adding: "There's just an avalanche of projects". GRIDLOCK This year, the EU adopted a law to install fast chargers by 2030 every 60 kilometres along designated road networks for passenger cars and every 100 km for heavy-duty vehicles. But charging developers say obtaining basic data about potential hubs is a major challenge, making investments hard.

This involves finding out whether an average roadside

rest stop has a single lamppost or enough cabling that connects to the broader grid. Hubs often require an extra electricity sub-station, which converts high voltage power into smaller units. The process then involves requests to power distribution companies (DSOs) to install more capacity.

"Sometimes we have to send physical mail," said Peter Badik, co-founder of EV charging firm Greenway Network, which has set up 1,300 EV chargers in Slovakia, Croatia, and Poland. "Even when they say yes, you don't know when they will do the upgrade," Badik said, adding there was so far no way to track how quickly a power company was building up capacity.

— Reuters

Classifieds

MELBA DEBT RECOVERY
Specialized in Debt Recovery since 2005
Offering: (No Recovery No Fee Policy)
For service please contact: **(+968) 99357404**

Driving School

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

Contact No: 99074072

A graphic showing a hand on a steering wheel with a small car model in the center, positioned at the bottom right of the advertisement.

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

25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE **FAST DELIVERY** **EXCELLENT SERVICES**

WORLD WIDE CARGO SERVICE Tel.: 99432926, 78211708, 92319472, 93350121

Head Office (H.O.) Room No.: 218, 1st Floor, Aircargo Complex, Branch Al-Hail, Email: eaglefreightexpress@gmail.com

ATR & SEA CARGO
FREE PICKUP
24/7 SERVICE



PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches),
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



JOB VACANCY

Furniture company requires for immediate placement:-

- 1- Accountant with at least 3 years experience
- 2- Outdoor Sales, 5 years experience in furniture and wall to wall carpets, Oman driving license
- 3- Driver with heavy driving license

Please send CV to **Email: wmsq711@gmail.com**

And mention in subject **Job number 1 or 2 or 3**

SIT. WANTED	
SALES & marketing Professional with 27 years of Oman experience, having driving licence & all types of products/ services sales experience. 78501743.	EXPERIENCED, talented, qualified professional @ (Groups of Co's) in accounts, finance — targeting senior-level assignment in management. 99219937.

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN, male, young,
3 years experience in
Online Product Marketing,
E- Commerce, US
Customer Support and
Product Management.
Looking for: Roles in
Product Marketing, Social
and Digital Marketing,
Customer support or
Business Communication.
Tel: 95786144.
E-mail: roshanantxav@
gmail.com

WANTED driver job
23 years experience in
Oman. 78736292.

An advertisement for social media advertising services. The background is a blurred image of a person's face. The text is in white and blue. It says "To advertise on our social media platforms and website" in white. Below that, in a blue box, it says "Please Contact our Team". Underneath that, in white, it says "95210257". At the bottom, there are three smartphone screens displaying social media profiles, and a small icon of a person with a speech bubble.

SIT. VACANT

FOOD distribution company need salesman. Experience: GCC countries (4 and above) years. Omani driving licence. Nationality: Indian only. Language: English, Hindi and Arabic. Send your CV in : Info@aaacomman.com

OMANI man required for sales and admin job in a chemical trading company. Driving license necessary. E-mail: sales.oman@ecabiotech-me.com. Contact: 79741371

SITUATION VACANT

Reputed club in the city
requires

Padel Coach

Qualification:

- Certified Padel coach with recognized coaching certification or relevant experience.

Experience:

- Young, Dynamic & Experienced Padel Coach.
- Minimum 3 years' experience of Padel Coaching.
- In-depth knowledge of padel rules, techniques and strategies.
- Excellent communication skills.
- Proven track record of coaching experience & success.

Responsibilities:

- Conduct individual & group padel coaching sessions.
- Develop personalized training programs to enhance players' skills and performance.
- Organize and supervise practice sessions for members.
- Set up weekly mini social tournaments.
- Supervise 3 Padel courts.
- Update and maintain social media communication, to grow the Padel community.

Please email your credentials (CV) to:

ocenet@omantel.net.om

within 7 days.

■ FOR RENT	■ SIT. WANTED
FLATS and offices for rent in Muscat. 96379095, 98403020.	INDIAN male 14 years experience light/heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman. Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com
■ FLAT FOR RENT	
IN Ruwi, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, hall, kitchen, with car parking. RO 150 monthly only. Tel: 94402003	ACCOUNTANT & sales Executive, Indian male, 31 years, BA English, specialised in Accounting. 2 years experience in India & 6 years experience in Oman. Seeking position in Accounts/ Sales fields (has Oman license). Mob: 78805951. Gmail: akhilgopinath2017@gmail.com
■ SIT. WANTED	
INDIAN male 33, B.com, (CMA-pursuing), 12 years experience in Oman & UAE as senior accountant looking for suitable position, currently in Oman on visit visa with valid Oman D/L. Contact: 96358811	M.COM graduate with Oman driving licence, residing in Muscat with 1 year and 4 months work experience as Media Finance Executive in India, seeking for Accounts Assistant or other related eligible jobs. Contact: 71755901, E-mail: krishnanmahesh02@gmail.com



OMAN  DAILY

Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari

99639264
wadiameeh@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

MUSIC

Jared Watson of band Dirty Heads performs during the Audacity Beach Festival in Fort Lauderdale Beach, Florida.— AFP



TRADITION

Revellers dressed stand in a forest in the village of Lidecko during a traditional Saint Nicholas parade near the town of Vsetin, Czech Republic, on Monday. — Reuters



FASHION

A model presents a creation by fashion designer Karma during the Colombo Fashion Week in Colombo. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US singer-songwriter John Legend attends the 3rd Annual Academy Museum Gala at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A race crew member carries crash netting after the cancellation of the Men's Super-G events, during the FIS Ski World Cup Birds of Prey races at Red Tail Stadium in Beaver Creek, Colorado. — AFP



art & life

TUESDAY | DECEMBER 5, 2023 | JUMADA AL ULA 21, 1445 AH

 OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om

features@omanobserver.om

What it takes to become Oman's first frankincense sommelier

As the first frankincense sommelier, Khalid al Amri has been tasked in educating and curating experiences that reveal luban's rich legacy, from its historical significance as a trade commodity to its integral part in ceremonies, hospitality, and health practices. Check out how he got started...**P20**



ENTERTAINMENT

Dionne Warwick, Billy Crystal, Queen Latifah rein at Kennedy Center Honors

WASHINGTON CELEBRATED singer Dionne Warwick, comedian Billy Crystal, Bee Gees member Barry Gibb, rapper and actress Queen Latifah, and opera star Renée Fleming on Sunday at the Kennedy Center Honors, the top US honour for achievements in the arts.

President Joe Biden lauded the work of the five performers during a reception at the White House before the show.

"The performing arts are more than just sound and scene. They reflect who we are as Americans and as human beings," he said.

The show kicked off with a tribute to Warwick, 82, a pop music star since the 1960s who has sold more than 100 million records and is known for hits such as "I'll Never Love This Way Again" and "That's What Friends Are For," a 1985 song she recorded with Gladys Knight, Elton John and Stevie Wonder to raise awareness about AIDS.

"There simply is no song that Dionne Warwick cannot sing," said record producer Clive Davis, adding that she had "inspired musicians all over the world." Singer Cynthia Erivo performed a stirring version of Warwick's song "Alfie."

Crystal, 75, known for starring roles in films such as "When Harry Met Sally," "City Slickers," and "Analyse This," was next up. Actors Meg Ryan and Robert



De Niro appeared onstage to pay tribute to their friend.

"You're only 75. That means you're just about six years away from being the perfect age to be elected president," De Niro quipped. Biden, 81, is running for re-election. The crowd roared.

Crystal is a Tony- and Emmy-winning actor and writer who hosted the

Academy Awards nine times. Whoopi Goldberg, who also paid tribute to Crystal, said he should win an honorary Oscar for his service as the long-time host of the awards show.

Next up was Queen Latifah, 53, a musician and actress known for films including "Chicago" and "Bringing Down the House," who won a Grammy Award

for Best Solo Rap Performance in 1994.

Actress Kerry Washington said she was one of the "best rappers of all time."

Fleming, 64, is an acclaimed soprano who has performed at opera houses around the world and collected five Grammy Awards.

"It's wild," to be an honoree, Fleming said. "It's all joy."

Gibb, 77, a singer and songwriter who performed with his brothers Robin and Maurice in the Bee Gees, has sold more than 220 million records. He has won nine Grammy Awards and, as part of the group, is known for songs such as "Stayin' Alive" and "How Deep Is Your Love."

He told reporters ahead of the show that he felt the presence of his brothers, both of whom have died.

"It's very emotional," he said. "What we all did together — when we were good, when we were on — that was something to be proud of."

The show, which was recorded, will be broadcast by US television network CBS on December 27. — Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

explore_salalah
Hafa Beach, Salalah
Giulio Cercato • Arabic Sunset

Follow

ffreezaa and vibes_of_oman

Follow

khalidalmawali
نزوى

Follow

ROAD TRIP

INSIDE THE FORTRESS

KEEPER OF TRADITIONS

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

0

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**.

Opera school hones South Africa's musical talent

JULIE BOURDIN

YONWABA MBO had a future in farming laid ahead of him when the opera "bug" hit.

A few years ago, the tall, broad-shouldered South African decided to ditch agricultural studies to have a go at lyrical opera. At 31, he is now rehearsing to play Figaro in the "Marriage of Figaro", preparing to take the first steps as an opera soloist.

Mbo is a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT) music faculty, home to what is arguably Africa's most prestigious opera school. Pretty Yende, the soprano who sang at the coronation of Britain's King Charles III this year, honed her skills there, as have other rising stars of world opera.

Like Yende, who grew up in a small village in eastern South Africa, many of the school's students got into singing somewhat late in life, often by chance.

"Before I studied opera... when I heard it, I would always ask myself: why are these people always screaming?" Mbo, a powerful baritone, says with a laugh.

"Then when the bug bit me, I got to hear the technical side of it and to understand how much work you need to put in, in order to sound like that. I started appreciating the art."

Unable to read a musical score, he started from scratch.

For six years now he has studied all things opera, motivated by the idea that someone like him can tell a story in music, singing in a foreign language.

On a November morning at the leafy university campus, he is practising his rendition of Figaro, Mozart's rebellious servant, alongside Siphosihle Letsoso.

Letsoso, 23, who hails from the former mining town of Kimberley in the Karoo desert and also dreams of a career as a soloist, plays Figaro's lover Susanna.

"There is no opera scene in Kimberley!" she laughs. "That's what is really encouraging me to just do well. So that I could go back one day and develop the theatre, live it up."

Aspiring singers arrive at the academy with "raw talent" in need of refinement, says the British conductor Jeremy Silver, the school's director.

In a bright classroom, Silver sits at a piano as he accompanies Mbo and Letsoso in their rehearsal.

"With this crescendo, you're becoming more insistent, you're telling him things straight," he tells Letsoso, who diligently takes notes.

The Cape Town academy is the only opera school in the country



First year post graduate opera student Siphosihle Letsoso practices during a rehearsal at the University of Cape Town School of Music. — AFP

with a comprehensive curriculum, including music, singing, acting and opera languages including Italian, French and German.

"There is a huge amount of talent in South Africa," says Silver, adding that the country is now firmly on the global opera map. School, church and community choirs are ubiquitous in South Africa, helping expose people to "free, open singing" from a very young age, he says.

"What we then have to do is to focus that interest, focus their instincts, and to teach them all the other skills."

This year, the school held auditions in six cities across South Africa.

It offers music lessons in disadvantaged areas of Cape Town, organised by singing teacher Paulina Malefane, who keeps an eye out for promising voices.

In the township of Khayelitsha east of Cape Town, one of the largest and poorest in the country, around thirty schoolchildren are learning to sing the C scale.

"One day when you are grown up, you will come and take my job!" Malefane says, encouraging a girl

who is drawing a treble clef on a white board.

A renowned actress and singer, Malefane also overcame a lack of theoretical knowledge she started off -- something she hopes her pupils will not have to go through.

"If and when they decide to take music or opera... at least they have something they can start with. They have some background of music," she says, as a student points with a hesitant finger to the C note keys on a piano, drawing thunderous applause from her classmates.

— AFP

ART

Sketchbook by Caspar David Friedrich sold at auction for \$1.8m

A SKETCHBOOK BY German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) was sold at Berlin auction house Grisebach on Thursday for a total of over ?1.8 million (\$1.96 million).

The value of the "Karlsruhe Sketchbook" had previously been estimated at up to \$1.5 million.

The auction price was ?1.45 million, but the gross price with buyer's premium for the auction house is reportedly ?1.819 million. There was initially no information on the new owners.

The little book belonged to a family in Karlsruhe for more than 200 years. According to the



auction house, it is the last known bound copy of a sketchbook by the artist that is still in private hands.

Only six of a total of probably 20 of these little books have survived. Four of them — some of them incompletely bound — are kept by the National Museum in Oslo, another by the Museum of Prints and Drawings, or Kupferstichkabinett, in Dresden.

Friedrich, who was born in the north-eastern German city of Greifswald, repeatedly slipped the sketchbook into the pockets of his travelling coat between mid-April and early June 1804. The drawings were made in Dresden. They include fine pencil drawings of trees, branches and tree trunks.

The artist had incorporated several motifs into major works, for example the sketch of an oak tree in his early work "Hünengrab im Schnee" (Cairn in Snow).

Shortly before the auction, it became known that the sketchbook was to be protected as a cultural asset. The Berlin cultural administration initiated proceedings to have the "Karlsruhe Sketchbook" entered in the register of nationally valuable cultural assets of the state of Berlin. Export is therefore prohibited for the duration of the proceedings.

Lyonel Feiniger's 1923 painting "Clouds over the Sea I" was also sold at the auction for \$1.9 million. The painting had previously been estimated at up to \$1.2 million. — dpa

FASHION

Designer Matthew Williams leaves Givenchy

FASHION DESIGNER Matthew Williams is leaving Givenchy after three years as creative director, the French luxury brand announced on Friday, in the latest shake-up at the top of the luxury business.

Givenchy did not name an immediate successor, saying the coming collections would be handled by its in-house team.

Nor was any reason given for the parting of ways, which is effective from January 1.

Givenchy CEO Renaud de



Lesquen said Williams's "collections, resolutely creative and contemporary, have sparked a new dynamic and found their audience".

Williams described his time as creative director as "the dream of a lifetime" in the statement.

Having worked with the likes of Kanye West and Lady Gaga, the heavily-tattooed US designer brought an element of street cred to the fabled French brand.

But its parent group, LVMH, has been tight-lipped about Givenchy's sales performance under Williams.

It noted the success of his "U-Lock" jacket and "Voyou" bag this year, but analysts say it failed to match the growth of other brands in the group such as Louis Vuitton and Celine.

In the fast-paced and cut-throat fashion world, several high-end labels have changed their creative directors this year, including Gucci, Chloe and Alexander McQueen. — AFP

What it takes to become Oman's first frankincense sommelier



BY YERU EBUE

Khalid al Amri grew up with frankincense — a regular fixture in his home when he was growing up. He is familiar with its distinctive smell and has always loved how the resins form tiny bubbles whenever they hit the hot embrace of the burning coal.

When the white smoke rises out of that fiery ember and the smell is dispersed into the room, Khalid feels like he is transported back to a time long past, from the darkened hallways of great men to the cramped but homey tents of people traversing the desert, moving from one place to another to trade and make a living, into wooden vessels crossing grumpy seas, and into the halls of kings, queens, and sultans who ruled the land so differently than how it is today.

As the first-ever frankincense sommelier, Khalid has been tasked with curating millennia-worth of knowledge. Banking on his heritage, he has done his research and met up and worked with frankincense farmers who showed him how the valuable resins, locally called Luban, are made and harvested.

"You have to make a frankincense tree cry to get its treasure," he said while describing the methodical way of cutting the tree where the golden sap flows.

Khalid knows that while frankincense is produced by some key countries in the region, Oman is well-known worldwide for having some of the best quality frankincense thanks to the perfect condition of Dhofar and farms that are located in rough valleys shielded by towering mountains but yet enjoying the salt-rich wind that flows towards the farm.

Frankincense is renowned for its Biblical references and religious symbolism and embodies a pervasive presence across Omani society. It transcends mere fragrance, touching every

facet of life — from health and wellness practices to integral roles in hospitality and rituals surrounding childbirth.

At the Shangri-La Al Husn in Muscat, Khalid al Amri assumes the role of a Culture and Heritage Ambassador, where his tasks include sharing information



about Omani arts, architecture, and notably, the legacy of frankincense.

To become a frankincense sommelier, his meticulous training, spanning two years was shaped under the guidance of esteemed scholar Dr Patricia Groves who helped him delve deeper into Oman's rich tapestry of history, art, and the nuanced world of frankincense.

Reflecting on his journey, Khalid humorously recalls his presumption of knowing all about Omani culture before his comprehensive training. His initiation wasn't a mere memorisation of facts but a transformative experience, demanding a

mastery of English expression and an embodiment of narratives that echo Omani history's richness.

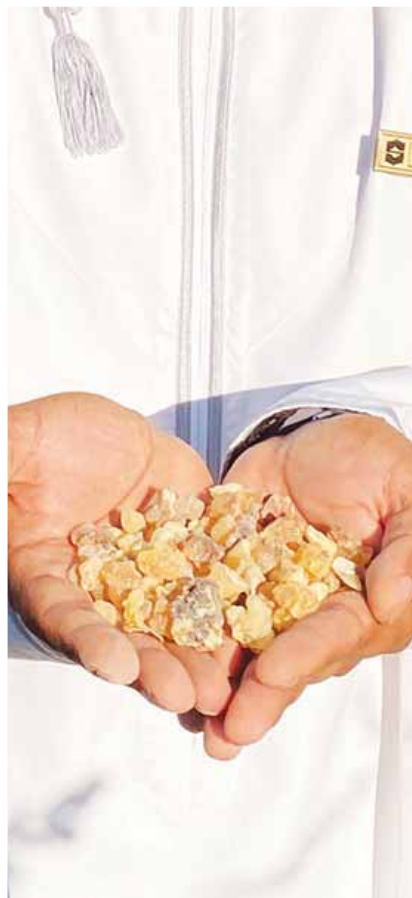
The extensive curriculum, meticulously crafted by experts



like Stephanie Rachid and Fahad al Hasni, is aimed at nurturing Khalid's unique voice in imparting cultural wisdom rather than robotic recitation. His training spanned topics encompassing

Omani architecture, historical nuances, and the profound significance of the region's terroir, essential in understanding the distinctiveness of premium frankincense.

Khalid mesmerises with tales of the resin's historical stature — once esteemed as a prestig-



ious trade commodity in the pre-petroleum Arab world. He intricately narrates the harvesting process, describing how the resin, derived from Boswellia trees through meticulous incisions, holds medicinal properties akin to the revered status of "sweat of the Gods" in ancient Egypt.

Beyond its historical value, Khalid emphasises frankincense's integral role in Omani hospitality. The evocative aroma permeates the atmosphere, welcoming guests not only at the property where he works but also in Omani households, sym-

bolising a heritage intertwined with generosity and warmth.

Khalid's passion for frankincense extends beyond cultural ambassadorship; it's a lifelong pursuit. He artfully utilises the resin in various forms to curate a unique experience for guests, from private gardens with 21 frankincense trees to incorporating it into spa treatments and even advising on its use in culinary delights and cocktails.

As Khalid shares stories of Luban, recounting childhood memories and its healing properties, he emphasises its signifi-

To become a frankincense sommelier, his meticulous training, spanning two years was shaped under the guidance of esteemed scholar Dr. Patricia Groves who helped him delve deeper into Oman's rich tapestry of history, art, and the nuanced world of frankincense.

cance in ceremonial practices and celebratory occasions like weddings and prayers. His reverence for the resin mirrors Oman's historical legacy, a land once revered for its vibrant trade routes and finest quality frankincense, particularly from the revered Wadi Hajar.

In Khalid's narration, Luban is more than a resin; it's a gateway to a treasure trove of stories that unravel the interconnectedness of cultures and the healing prowess of nature. It's an invitation to embrace the enchanting fragrance that carries within it the rich tapestry of Omani heritage, a testament to the wonders of the natural world awaiting discovery.