

P15

RO 12 MILLION
AL MASKAAN VILLAGE
TO LAUNCH AT KHAZAEEN
ECONOMIC CITY IN JUNE



P10

CAPIOT TAKES
AN EMOTIONAL
VICTORY IN STAGE
4 UPHILL SPRINT



P20

ENJOYING AN
IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE
IN NIZWA WITH
ELECTRIC CARTS



MUSCAT

DEALS INKED TO FUND
11 CSR PROJECTS

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) on Tuesday signed several agreements with various energy companies to support the implementation of 11 projects to the tune of RO 5 million. This collaborative endeavour involves seven leading companies in the sector, including Petroleum Development Oman, Occidental Oman, BP Oman, OQ, Daleel Petroleum Company, CC Energy Development Company, and ARA Petroleum. The agreements encompass projects including Ibri Public Park project, financing medical equipment for Khoula Hospital and others. **SEE P13**

23.4% RISE IN HOTEL
REVENUE IN 2023

The revenue of 3-5 star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of 2023 recorded a surge by 23.4 per cent to stand at RO 229 million compared to the same period in 2022 when it stood at RO185 million, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Statistics indicate that this rise is attributed to the increase in the total number of hotel guests by 27.1 per cent to stand at 2,071,169 guests by the end of 2023 compared to 2,629,205 by the end of 2022, with an occupancy rate of 8.8 per cent. Omani guests constituted 10 per cent to stand at 769,790. The number of GCC guests increased by 23.8 per cent. **DETAILS ON P13**

OPINION

P8


Karim Easterbrook
Importance of early colon
cancer screening

P16


Dr Yousuf bin
Hamed al Balushi
Strategic Free Trade
Agreement with the USA

HM's greetings conveyed to Lithuanian President



President Gitanas Nausėda of the Republic of Lithuania received Badr bin Mohammed al Mantheri, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Non-Resident Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Lithuania, on Tuesday. The ambassador conveyed to the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his wishes for good health and happiness to the Lithuanian President wishing the government and people of Lithuania continued progress and prosperity. **DETAILS ON P2**

SHURA BRIEFED OF OMAN VISION 2040

MUSCAT: Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, gave a visual presentation before the members of Majlis Ash'shura, on Tuesday. The visual presentation aimed at informing the members of the vision, its objectives, the government's effort to make it successful, and what has been achieved so far. It was attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, and Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura, as well as a number of council's members. During the presentation, Dr Al Jabri referred to the plans, objectives and mechanisms for implementing the Oman Vision 2040 in accordance to the national priorities. He explained the most prominent

indicators and the foundations for its implementation as well as the roles of follow-up units in all government institutions and their efforts to follow up on the implementation of the vision. Meanwhile, the Office of Majlis Ash'shura reviewed a response from the Council of Ministers to the desire expressed by Majlis Ash'shura regarding the efficiency of the tax system applied by the Tax Authority in collecting tax dues. The response stated that the government had previously approved a package of programmes related to the economy and development within the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan linked to the Oman Vision 2040. Attached to the response was the Tax Authority's views on the recommendations contained in the request.

SIX LIVES LOST IN RAINS AND FLOODS

WEATHER CONDITION WEAKENS

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Three children who were swept away in the flowing Wadi Bani Ghafr in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq were found dead on Monday, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA).

In a separate incident, the CDAA teams rescued three persons as their vehicle drifted into a wadi in the Wilayat of Izki while the fourth person, a woman, was found dead on Tuesday morning.

One person was found dead after a vehicle with two people drifted in Wadi Ghayya in the Wilayat of Yanqul, while the second person was rescued.

Rescue teams in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar recovered body of a person after his car was swept away on Monday and search is on to trace the other missing person.

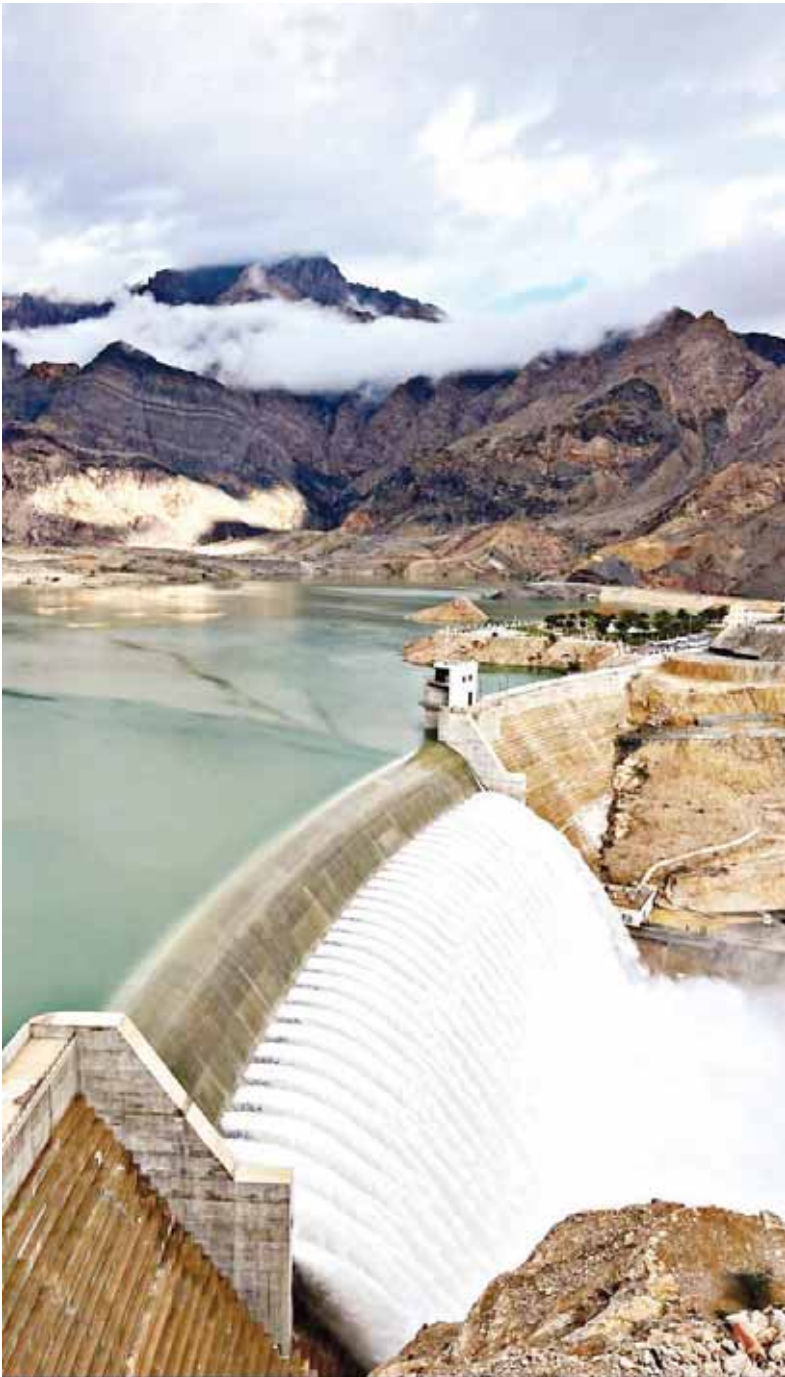
Earlier, the CDAA team rescued six people after their vehicle was stranded in a flowing wadi in the Wilayat of Yanqul, and all of them are in good health.

The CDAA said its teams have dealt with 224 reports since the beginning of the weather situation, and rescue operations are continuing to date.

The authority has called on everyone to exercise utmost caution, not to risk crossing wadis, to stay away from water bodies and electricity poles, and to monitor children to preserve their safety.

Meanwhile, there are chances of scattered rain in parts of the coast of the Sea of Oman and South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates.

According to Oman Met,



Wadi Dayqah Dam in Qurayat was picturesque as it was a spectacular sight with water in abundance. **SEE ALSO P3**

"Most of the impact will be concentrated for today and tomorrow in South Al Sharqiyah, which may witness rain of varying intensity."

The weather condition has weakened over the atmosphere of the Sultanate of Oman starting from Tuesday evening, with chances of rain of varying

intensity remaining scattered over the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah and North Al Sharqiyah and the coastal parts of the governorates of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah and Muscat, and rains in parts of Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates. The weather is expected to stabilise from Wednesday.


CHAMPS OF THE DAY!
Children pose for a photo on the podium after the fourth stage of the Tour of Oman, shortened to 104-km between Fanja and Yitti Hills due to weather conditions, on Tuesday in Muscat. — AFP

Oman achieves 11th place in entrepreneurship index

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushi

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved 11th place in the Entrepreneurship Index out of 49 countries participating in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report for the year 2023-2024, advancing 27 places from its ranking in the year 2022-2023. The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority announced that all sub-indicators of the report have improved significantly, especially

in vital areas such as financing emerging projects and developing government policies that support innovation and technology, in addition to strengthening the physical infrastructure, which is an essential pillar for the growth of emerging companies and small and medium enterprises, with praise and appreciation for the efforts.

Efforts are made to design and launch educational and training programmes, developed to meet the needs of the labour market and enhance entrepreneurship



The achievement is a reflection of the efforts made to enhance the business environment.

skills among Omani youth. The overall score for the Sultanate of Oman improved from 4.2 in the 2022-2023 report to 5.4 in the 2023-2024 report as a reflection of the efforts made to enhance the business environment and incentive packages. The data showed an improvement in the levels of confidence among investors due to several factors, most notably the legal and regulatory measures that were adopted to facilitate procedures for establishing and operating businesses.



Oman, UK discuss means of enhancing military cooperation



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani and Admiral Antony Radakin touched on current issues at regional and international arenas. — ONA

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Tuesday Admiral Antony Radakin, Chief of the Defence Staff in the United Kingdom (UK). The meeting discussed means

of enhancing cooperation between Oman and the UK. The two sides also touched on the current issues at the regional and international arenas. The meeting was attended by the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, the UK



Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi and Admiral Antony Radakin exchanged views on military topics of mutual interest. — ONA

Ambassador to Oman and members of the delegation accompanying the guest. Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, Admiral Antony Radakin, Chief of the Defence Staff in the United Kingdom (UK). The two sides exchanged views and discussed a set of military topics of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by senior SAF officers and the UK Ambassador to Oman. — ONA

HM's greetings conveyed to Lithuanian president

VILNIUS: President Gitanas Nausėda, of the Republic of Lithuania, received Badr bin Mohammed al Mantheri, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Non-Resident Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Lithuania, on Tuesday.



The ambassador conveyed to the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his wishes for good health and happiness to the Lithuanian President wishing the government and people of Lithuania continued progress and prosperity. The ambassador expressed the keenness of His Majesty's government to foster the distinguished bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and upgrade them to

the highest levels of cooperation in all fields particularly in the fields of trade, investment, technology, green energy and logistics to serve the common interests of the two countries. The Lithuanian President asked the ambassador to convey his sincere greetings to His Majesty the Sultan wishing him good health and well-being calling for bolstering trade, investment and logistical cooperation between the two friendly countries. — ONA

RNO Commander receives French military official

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on Tuesday received in his office Rear Admiral Emmanuel Slaars, Commander of the French Forces in the Indian Ocean, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several



matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Commodore Jasim bin Mohammed al Balushi, Director-General of Operations and Plans. It was also attended by the Military Attaché of the French Embassy in Muscat and several senior RNO officers. — ONA

SQU organises conference on unmanned vehicle systems



The conference saw the opening of a specialised exhibition. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Tuesday organised the Second International Conference on Unmanned Vehicle Systems (UVS-Oman 2024). The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence. The conference discussed automatic control technology, communications, related applications, traffic control, cargo, operations and maintenance, energy and networks. Dr Nabil bin Zahran al Rawahi, Dean of the College of Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University, said that the conference seeks to establish an interactive platform for exchanging ideas and technical experiences among people interested in unmanned vehicle systems (UVS), including

academics, researchers, engineers, industrialists and regulators. Hadj Bourdoucen, Chairman of the Conference Organising Committee, spoke about the rapid development of computer technology, automatic control technology and communications technology. He pointed out that the global market for UVS applications is experiencing high demand, notably in the areas of agriculture, construction, logistics services, traffic surveillance, first aids, entertainment, security and search and rescue operations and other domains. The conference saw the opening of a specialised exhibition. A number of lectures will be held on navigation and control of unmanned vehicles, UVS maintenance operations, energy, networks and other applications. — ONA

Oman, Belarus review bilateral relations

MUSCAT: The 7th round of political talks was held today between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus in Muscat. The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Belarusian side was headed by Evgeny Shestakov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. During the talks, the two sides underscored their keenness to continue enhancing cooperation in all



During the talks, the two sides underscored their keenness to continue enhancing cooperation. — ONA

fields. They also discussed several regional and international issues of common concern, including the repercussions of the Israeli war on Gaza. The meeting was attended by Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Head of the Europe Department and Sergei Terentiev, Ambassador of the Republic of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman. It was also attended by several officials from both sides. — ONA

Festival to boost Al Dhahirah tourism, showcase cultural richness

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 13

Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival 2024 will kick off on February 15, offering a range of activities, heritage and entertainment programmes and tourism experiences. Najeeb bin Ali al Rowas, Governor of Al Dhahirah and General Supervisor of the festival said the festival aims to hold events that contribute to tourism attraction and shedding light on the cultural and historical heritage of Al Dhahirah Governorate. "The aim of holding this event is to introduce the tourism components of Al Dhahirah Governorate, exploit its diversity

and uniqueness, highlight the competitive advantages of the governorate's states and create a distinctive entertainment and tourism outlet for visitors," he said. "This is in addition to contributing to supporting the governorate's resources and creating added value for the benefit of the local community by creating jobs for entrepreneurs, owners of small and medium enterprises, and productive families," he added. He explained that more than 100 young men and women from the governorate will participate in the management and organisation of the festival. Shaikh Dr Saeed bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Ibri and chairman



Al Dhahirah Governorate officials recently addressed the press conference to announce the activities of the festival

of the Executive Committee of the festival explained that this festival is the first-of-its-kind at the level of Al Dhahirah Governorate, as it will include a heritage village, areas for electric games for adults and children, shopping, kiosks designated for small and medium

enterprises, restaurants, and a theatre for various artistic and theatrical performances. There will also be poetry evenings, juggling games, and children's competitions, in addition to the Smurfs' village, acrobatics shows in addition to paragliding shows and horse racing, as well as laser shows, classic cars, circuses, carnivals, military music and folk arts from the wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate. Naseer bin Ali al Siyabi, Director-General of Al Dhahirah Municipality and Chairman of the Festival's Organisation and Services Committee explained that the selection of the festival site was made according to specific criteria, including ease of

access to the site and its distance from traffic congestion, as the site was prepared with more than 600 parking spaces. The site provides electricity, water and telephone services; administration and security offices; prayer rooms with restrooms for men and women and a first-aid room. The festival's logo was launched, which symbolises the shape inspired by the tombs of Bat, which are the most prominent heritage landmarks in Al Dhahirah Governorate while embodying the basic pillars of sustainable development for the governorate, in harmony with three main colours yellow, brown and turquoise.





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Why do we drive through wadis even after warnings?

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Even after repeated warnings on not to cross wadis continued on Tuesday, some vehicles ran into trouble and wadi crossing continues to be a challenge for authorities as they had to respond to calls.

People are still in shock of the news of three young children being washed away in the wadi while playing as their house is near a wadi and the other individuals who lost lives while being stranded in wadis.

Khalid al Yaqoubi, a concerned citizen said that if a punishment is applied that will serve as an example to others, such phenomenon will decrease and perhaps disappear. “There is a need to act tough because many precious lives are lost as a result of recklessness and lack of management on the part of the head of the family,” he said.

For Khalid al Adawi, a journalist based in Muscat, people who dare to cross the wadis do not realise the danger of doing so as well as the legal aspect of it. “Some people look at this action as a hobby and as a macho, masculine behaviour. And they are proud of it. Some trust their luxurious 4x4 vehicles and want to prove themselves by crossing the wadi,” he said.

“But sometimes the strength of the wadi is stronger than we can bear. To make things worse, at times children are also in the vehicle. So, the solution could be more awareness and until then the only solution is monitoring and fining,” he added.

Wadi Dayqah Dam creates picturesque sight

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The February thunderstorms have had a positive impact on Oman’s water resources as the dams in the northern governorates were able to capture the rainwater.

On Tuesday, the Wadi Dayqah Dam in Qurayat was picturesque as it was a spectacular sight with water in abundance and low flowing clouds and fog.

The Sultanate of Oman has a total of 185 dams, including 114 dams that store water for agriculture. Three flood protection dams are situated in Muscat, Sur, and Salalah, while 67 dams recharge downstream areas. There are three types of dams in Oman — flood protection dams, recharge dams and storage dams.

The Director of the Department of Dams at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Yousuf al Manthari told the Observer, “A number of dams are filled with water that will be used in the future, hence the the rains have been beneficial.” Qurayat had received heavy



amount of rain during the low-pressure this week. The amount of rain Wadi Dayqah Dam has collected is impressive. “It is estimated that Wadi Dayqah Dam can store 100 million cubic metres of water. Before the rainfall, the dam held about 52 million cubic meters of water, but this morning, it has been overflowing,” he said on Tuesday evening.

Al Manthari said, “At present, Wadi Dayqah Dam has a storage capacity of approximately 100 million cubic meters of water and is primarily used for agricultural purposes. Some of amount is used directly to Aflaj system.”

So what is the psychology behind driving through a wadi even after repeated warnings? The Observer spoke to a leading Senior Psychiatrist Dr Hamed al

Sinawi, who explained that people having an urge to drive through wadis have some similarities to those who are into adventurous sports, some of which can be

dangerous to perform.

According to him, there are several psychological theories to explain such behaviour and one of them is based on adrenaline rush because people who perform dangerous acts have their brain release a hormone known as adrenaline, which creates a state of excitement in the form of increased heart rate in addition to the feeling of power while escaping the eminent danger that is caused by the flooding.

“Another psychological explanation could be related to the impact of being watched by others especially when we see that most of the time the driving is videotaped by people surrounding them. They might even be cheered by others, which makes the driver enjoy some form of encouragement and feels heroic,” Dr Hamed said.

However he noted that there are people who lack the judgement and underestimate the power of wadis especially when it is flooded beyond expectations.

“Some people might expect that they would be able to swim in a wadi just like they do in the sea or swimming pool, which is not correct because the law of physics does not apply here as the amount of water and force involved exceeds the person’s capacity and ability to swim,” he pointed out.

Dr Hamed added that what is disturbing and something to consider about is that despite repeated warnings about the dangers of crossing wadis, people continue to put themselves and others around them in dangerous situation.

‘BE SAFE ALWAYS’

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

Despite the warnings on the heavy rain and the Royal Oman Police patrols, some people risk themselves and their families by crossing the wadis thus violating the directives.

The Royal Oman Police, led by the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, arrests 36 people for crossing the wadis, endangering their lives and the lives of others, and legal procedures are being completed.

The risk of crossing valleys is a phenomenon that worries the society, despite the great efforts made by the competent authorities, represented by the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance, the Royal Oman Police, and the Civil Aviation Authority, in providing advice and guidance on the danger of taking risks of crossing the wadis.

However, the irresponsible

scenes are repeated with every weather condition that the Sultanate of Oman is exposed to, with some young people and individuals irresponsibly taking risks in crossing the wadis.

The Royal Oman Police has been warning vehicle drivers not to risk crossing the wadis and to leave sufficient distance between vehicles while driving in rainy weather in order to preserve their safety and avoid traffic accidents.

There is imprisonment for three months and a fine of RO 500 for anyone who intentionally crosses the valleys, as the legal penalty for anyone proven to have intentionally crossed the wadi.

The Royal Oman Police, hoping for the safety of all, stresses the importance of adhering to the guidelines and advice that are broadcast and published through the official media following weather bulletins.



Despite the great efforts by competent authorities, some drivers ignore warning on dangers of crossing the wadis

‘AI TO RULE THE JOB MARKET IN NO TIME’

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is up for a major revolution navigating its ethical dimensions, and understanding its profound implications on the future landscape of employment, the future buzzword of the global job market would be AI to the extent that almost 95 per cent of the available jobs would be AI-oriented, according to experts attending aHuman Resources conference at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre on Tuesday.

Themed ‘Sprinting towards the Future of Work’, the 7th edition of the OSHRM Conference with the banner HR_X, was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat.

Throughout the conference, attendees will engage in robust

discussions on diverse topics, including emerging business trends, transformative human resource technologies, strategic workforce planning, and the evolving landscape of work

Participants will glean insights from global executive leaders representing renowned institutions, while also exploring the pivotal role of governments in shaping the future of work environments.

Speaking to the Observer, Malek Osseiran, Head of Mid Markets-MENA- LTS, said that AI would be the future mantra in the job market stating with job analysis, vacancy reporting, recruitment, training, development, retention and so on and so forth. “In light of the rapid progression of AI, ways of spearheading action based on the emerging AI revolution should be explored along with AI ethics and its impact on the future of jobs,



Themed ‘Sprinting towards the Future of Work’, the 7th edition of the OSHRM Conference with the banner HR_X, was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat.

as well as the technology’s role in digital transition and sustainable development,” he said.

This year’s discussions pivot around crucial themes such as spearheading the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution, navigating its ethical dimensions, and understanding its profound implications on the future landscape of employment. Additionally, the discourse will delve into the nuances of digital

transformation and the profound cultural shifts accompanying the era of AI, all aimed at fostering sustainable development.

Anchoring the agenda is an exploration of contemporary work paradigms, with a keen focus on innovative strategies for nurturing human capital and fostering an adaptive organisational culture conducive to economic empowerment across all sectors and the programmes of the

conference will delve into the nuances of digital transformation and the profound cultural shifts accompanying the era of AI, all aimed at fostering sustainable development. The workshops serve as platforms for showcasing cutting-edge advancements in human resource management, highlighting best practices, and unveiling innovative solutions geared towards human capital development. These sessions

aspire to empower practitioners, decision-makers, and stakeholders alike, recognising the imperative of fostering economic awareness across diverse professional strata.

Furthermore, workshops are designed in such a way to cover diverse topics like leadership development, talent management, and the integration of AI in international trade.

Over the course of three days, the discussion panels would review the latest developments in the human resources sector in line with the Oman Vision 2040 and the attendees will study successful experiences and innovative solutions, with the prime aim of developing human resources, enhancing the human capital and applying the findings in shaping the new work culture to mould a bunch of skilled and trained labour force to be the backbone of an economy.



FIRE INCIDENTS

SMALL BUSINESSES PAY THE PRICE

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The fire that gutted several stores in Seeb Souq in the wee hours recently caused enormous financial losses to businesses, even though there were no fatalities due to the incident.

According to some business owners, goods worth thousands of Omani rials were destroyed.

One of the store owners told the *Observer* that they had started storing goods to be sold during Ramadhan, starting in March, and the Eid Al Fitr in the following month. Around 17 of the 20 stores affected by the fire were fully damaged, which prompted officials from the Muscat Municipality to visit the place and take stock of the situation.

These small-time businessmen are just not sure how they can make up for the losses in a short period. "Apart from the losses, we do not have funds to restock our goods before the peak shopping season. After Eid Al Fitr, summer sets in, which is also the beginning of the long lean business season at souqs," he said.

Human casualties were avoided due to the swift action by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) fighters and the fact that it happened in the wee hours," an eyewitness said.

A resident of the area said that dilapidated buildings, lack of periodical auditing of security and safety requirements, illegal electrical connections and other issues lead to such disasters.

He said concerned authorities and store owners must ensure timely maintenance of installations.

CDAA had reported a similar incident in a commercial store in Dhofar earlier in January.

Also, a popular store was fully gutted after a fire broke out in a building in the Wilayat of Muttrah in 2022. The store never reopened after the incident.

CDAA has been calling on institutions and companies to adhere to safety requirements in commercial shops to avoid risks.

According to CDAA, industrial and commercial facilities not adhering to civil protection requirements cause fires to break out, resulting in property damages and material losses.

The reasons include failure to comply with regular maintenance of the facility's alarm and firefighting systems, use of unstable and fire-resistant materials, storing dangerous materials or materials in violation of those permitted by the concerned authorities and not ensuring the validity of the electrical connections inside the building.

The capital Muscat topped the list of fire

incidents in the country in 2022 with 1,307 cases, which is 31.2 per cent of the total incidents reported in the country.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), 4,186 cases were reported in the country in 2022, of which 949 were in North Al Batinah, 367 in South Al Batinah, 435 in Al Dakhiliyah and 349 in Dhofar governorate among others.

Incidents reported from household facilities were 32.1 per cent, transportation (22.2 per cent), residues (20 per cent), agriculture (9.8 per cent), and companies and enterprises (7.2 per cent.)

INCIDENTS REPORTED IN THE COUNTRY

MUSCAT

1,307

AL BATINAH
NORTH

949

AL BATINAH
SOUTH

367

AL DAKHILIYAH

435

DHOFAR

349

32.1%

HOUSEHOLDS

22.2%

TRANSPORTATION

20%

RESIDUES

9.8%

AGRICULTURE

7.2%

COMPANIES &
ENTERPRISES

* ALL FIGURES ARE FROM 2022



S AFRICA APPROACHES ICJ OVER ISRAEL’S RAFAH OFFENSIVE



JOHANNESBURG: South Africa’s government said on Tuesday that it had asked the World Court to consider whether Israel’s decision to extend its military operations in Rafah required the court to use its power to prevent further breach of Palestinians’ rights.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) last month ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent its troops from committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, in a case brought by South Africa.

Israel is planning to expand its ground assault into the city of Rafah, where over 1 million Palestinians have sought refuge from the offensive that has laid waste to much of the Gaza Strip.

Amid growing international concern over the plight of civilians, Israeli tanks shelled the eastern sector of Rafah city overnight, residents said, although the anticipated ground offensive did not appear to have started.

The Israeli military said its forces killed dozens of Palestinian fighters in clashes in the southern and central Gaza Strip over the last

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) last month ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent its troops from committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza

24 hours, including 30 in Khan Younis, a city close to Rafah on the coastal enclave’s border with Egypt.

Gaza health officials said an Israeli strike on a house in Nusseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed 16 Palestinians overnight.

In Khan Younis, Israeli tanks advanced further from the west and the east as bombing continued, residents said.

Israeli forces ordered displaced people in some shelters to head to Rafah. But the boom of tank shelling east of Rafah caused waves of panic inside the makeshift tent camps housing the displaced.

In Cairo, senior officials from the US, Egypt, Israel and Qatar were scheduled to meet to work on a three-phase framework that would see the release of captives and achieve an extended pause, sources familiar with the matter said. No further details were immediately available.

With the Gaza war now in its fifth month, attention is focused on the situation in Rafah. Around half of Gaza’s 2.3 million people are now living there in desperate conditions, including many who fled other areas under fire.

Israel says it intends to wipe out Palestinian groups operating in Rafah and evacuate civilians. Aid officials and foreign governments say there is nowhere for them to go, and Egypt has made clear it will not allow a refugee exodus over its border. Much of the densely populated enclave is in ruins, with 28,473 Palestinians killed and 68,146 wounded since October 7, according to Gaza health officials who announced 133 new Palestinian deaths in the past 24 hours.

— Reuters

International pressure mounts for ceasefire

GAZA: Israel faced growing international pressure on Tuesday to agree to a ceasefire with Palestinians

CIA Director William Burns met with Mossad chief David Barnea in Cairo on Tuesday for a new round of talks on a Qatari-brokered ceasefire proposal, which would temporarily halt fighting in exchange for freeing captives.

The two intelligence chiefs were joined in Cairo by the Qatari prime minister and Egyptian officials, Egypt’s Al Qahera News reported — two countries in the middle of mediation efforts as ceasefire proposals bounce back and forth between the two sides

The meeting came after the United States and the United Nations warned Israel against carrying out a ground offensive into Rafah without a plan to protect civilians.

After White House talks with Jordan’s King Abdullah II on Monday, US President Joe Biden said civilians in Rafah “need to be protected”.

“Many people there have been displaced — displaced multiple times, fleeing the

violence to the north, and now they’re packed into Rafah — exposed and vulnerable,” he said. Other countries urged caution on a ground assault, including China, Germany and Norway.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on Tuesday there were “too many victims” in Gaza, saying Israel’s assault on the Palestinian territory following the unprecedented attacks was “disproportionate”.

The United States has angered some Middle East allies by repeatedly refusing to back a full ceasefire, with Washington saying it supports Israel’s drive to eradicate Palestinian groups and calling for shorter pauses with captive-prisoner swaps instead.

Over half of Gaza’s 2.4 million people have sought refuge in Rafah, pressed up against the Egypt border in makeshift camps where they face outbreaks of hepatitis and diarrhoea, and a scarcity of food and water. Some families, already displaced several times, were starting to dismantle tents and gather their belongings to flee once again.

— AFP



Demonstrators take part in a rally in support of Palestinians, in central Rome. — AFP

UNRWA funding freezes risk ‘aiding’ deaths in the enclave

RIYADH: Freezing funds to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees risks “aiding” the deaths of civilians in Gaza, the head of Saudi Arabia’s humanitarian agency said on Tuesday.

Several countries — including the United States, Britain, Germany and Japan — have suspended funding to the UNRWA agency in response to Israeli allegations that some of its staff members participated in the October 7 attack.

Last week, as war entered a fifth month, Israel’s military also said troops had uncovered a Hamas tunnel under UNRWA’s evacuated Gaza City headquarters.

The UN has sacked the 12 UNRWA staff members accused by Israel of involvement in the October 7 attack and said the tunnel claim should be investigated once the conflict is over.

“We should not penalise the innocent people, millions of people who are living in Gaza, because of an accusation on a handful of people,” Dr Abdullah al Rabeeah, head of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, said in an interview on Tuesday.

“If you have close to two million people living in a small place... and then the funding for the food and for the health basics is stopped, basically you are calling for them to live in, actually, disaster and also aiding in their death.”

Rabeeah, who is also an adviser to the Saudi Royal Court, spoke as Gaza braced



A child sits atop items secured onto a vehicle by rope as people flee from Rafah in the southern Gaza. — AFP

for an expected Israeli incursion into the crowded southern city of Rafah where more than a million Palestinians are trapped.

He warned that such an operation would produce “chaos” and potentially trigger the “complete stoppage” of aid trucks.

“We will see thousands of people losing their lives. Now people talk about the threat of epidemics, the threat of famine, and you name it. So we don’t want to see any civilian get lost because of things that can be avoided,” he said.

At least 28,473 people, mostly women and children, have died in Israel’s relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

Rabeeah said any deal should allow humanitarian aid to flow into Gaza “without any obstacles”.

Saudi Arabia has sent 384 aid trucks and 20 ambulances into Gaza, he said, though he noted that an even greater amount of aid was stuck in Egypt, unable to cross into Gaza.

— AFP



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Tender Announcement

Tender No.	29/2024/ MHT/HQ-8	Tender Name	DESIGN AND SUPERVISION FOR CONSTRUCTION EXTENSION OF OFFICE BUILDING AT THE MINISTRY HQ IN MUSCAT
Fees of Tender Documents			25 O.R
Tender Document Sales End Date			27/2/2024
Last Date for Bid Submission			20/3/2024
Grade			Excellent
E-Tendering Portal			https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.

The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.

The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids

The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries

For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om or 24402200

For further information

Email : sotc@mht.gov.om
Phones : 22088348 - 22088085



UN voices deep concern over Senegal tensions

GENEVA: The UN voiced concern on Tuesday at tensions in Senegal after President Macky Sall delayed this month's presidential poll and urged swift probes into at least three deaths during protests.

"We are deeply concerned about the tense situation in Senegal," Liz Throssell, spokeswoman for the United Nations rights office, told reporters in Geneva.

"Following reports of unnecessary and disproportionate use of force against protesters and restrictions on civic space, we call on the authorities to ensure that they uphold Senegal's long-held tradition of democracy and respect for human rights," Throssell said.

She said at least three young men were killed and 266 people, including journalists, reportedly arrested across the country.

"Investigations into the killings must be prompt, thorough, and independently conducted, and those found responsible must be held to account," Throssell said.

"The authorities should also ensure due process for individuals

arrested during the protests."

Throssell said the government must "unequivocally order the security forces to respect and ensure human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly".

She also voiced concern that mobile internet access in Senegal was on Tuesday suspended for the second time this month, after authorities banned a planned march against the election delay.

"It is really important to guarantee the right to access to information," Throssell said, insisting that any restrictions must be "strictly limited to what's necessary and (be) as limited as possible in time".

Senegalese authorities on Tuesday suspended mobile internet and banned a march against the delay of this month's presidential poll.

Demonstrations are subject to authorisation in Senegal, with authorities refusing to give the green light for many opposition rallies in recent years.



Senegalese demonstrators protest against the postponement of the election, in Dakar, Senegal. – Reuters file photo

Access to mobile data had already been restricted eight days earlier when parliament backed Sall's decision to postpone the election.

The measure has become a common response to curb

mobilisation and communication via social networks and is strongly condemned by rights activists.

Sall said he postponed the election because of disputes over the disqualification of potential candidates and over fears of a

return to unrest seen in 2021 and 2023.

Unauthorised protests often descend into violent clashes. Security forces repressed demonstrations which took place on Friday.

We call on the authorities to ensure that they uphold Senegal's long-held tradition of democracy and respect for human rights.

LIZ THROSSELL
UN spokeswoman

The Aar Sunu Election (Let's protect our election) collective, which includes some 40 civil, religious and professional groups, had called for a peaceful rally in the capital Dakar on Tuesday.

The United States and the European Union have called on the government to restore the original election timetable. — AFP

Farmers march to the Indian capital

NEW DELHI: Indian security forces fired tear gas on Tuesday to stop thousands of farmers demanding minimum crop prices from marching on the capital New Delhi after talks with the government failed.

Local broadcasters showed thick clouds of tear gas fired to disperse protesters near Ambala, about 200 kilometres north of the capital, with police also dropping canisters from the air by drones.

Police have set up a fearsome blockade of metal spikes, cement, and steel barricades on the highways from three surrounding states leading to New Delhi.

"Maximum numbers have been deployed," Ranjay Atrishya said, assistant commissioner of Delhi Police.

Public gatherings of more than five people have been banned in the city.

Two-thirds of India's 1.4 billion people draw their livelihood from agriculture, accounting for nearly a fifth of the country's GDP, according to government figures.

Farmers have called for a "Delhi Chalo", or "March to Delhi", echoing January 2021 when farmers breached barricades and marched into the city on Republic Day during their then year-long protest.

"The farmers are peaceful,



Farmers shout slogans during a protest demanding minimum crop prices in Amritsar, India. – AFP

but tear gas is being used against us through drones," Sarwan Singh Pandher, a top farmers' union official from Punjab, told reporters.

"The protest will continue till the government agrees to our demands."

Indian broadcasters showed columns of hundreds of tractors moving towards the capital from the surrounding states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, with some using their machines to drag barricades off

the roads.

Where roads could not be cleared, farmers in tractors have sought to head across the countryside.

Police close roads at Ghazipur on the outskirts of Delhi, using multiple lines of blockades. A first line of defence using razor wire was set up, then metal barriers, concrete blocks and finally police buses.

Police in Haryana state, adjoining Delhi, said they had made "strong arrangements",

Indian broadcasters showed columns of hundreds of tractors moving towards the capital from the surrounding states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh

adding in a statement that the situation is "under control".

The farmers are demanding a law to fix a minimum price for their crops, besides a clutch of other concessions including waiving off loans.

"The government should listen to the farmers instead of using tear gas shells and guns against them," said Randeep Surjewala, an opposition Congress MP from Haryana, where many of the protesting farmers come from.

Protests by farmers against agricultural reform bills in November 2020 lasted for more than a year, forming the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government since it came to power in 2014.

— AFP

Jailed Thai ex-PM Thaksin to be freed early

BANGKOK: Jailed former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra is to be freed, the government said on Tuesday, possibly as soon as the weekend -- just six months after returning from 15 years of self-imposed exile.

The controversial billionaire, twice elected premier and ousted in a 2006 military coup, was jailed upon his return to Thailand in August for eight years on graft and abuse-of-power charges, but within days had his sentence cut to one year by King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

Justice Minister Tawee Sodsong said on Tuesday that Thaksin, 74, would be among 930 prisoners granted early release.

"He is in the group where they are in a critical condition or aged over 70. He will be released after

six months automatically," Tawee Sodsong told reporters.

Thai media reported that the former Manchester City owner's release could come any day from Saturday.

His homecoming coincided with his Pheu Thai party returning to government in alliance with pro-military parties, leading many to conclude that an agreement had been struck to cut his jail time. The rumours grew stronger when he was transferred to a police hospital within hours of being sentenced because of his poor health, and it is not clear that he has spent any time in a prison cell.

Local media reported Thaksin had been suffering from chest tightness and high blood pressure. — AFP



Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra greets his supporters at Bangkok's Don Mueang airport. – AFP file photo

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Cyberattack hits Iran parliament websites

The websites of Iran's parliament and its affiliated news agency went down on Tuesday after they were targeted by hackers, state media reported.

"The websites of the parliament and Khane Mellat news agency have been hacked and become unavailable since this morning due to cyberattacks," the official IRNA news agency reported.

"The scale of the problem is under investigation by expert technical teams," IRNA added,



quoting a statement from the legislature.

Websites linked to Iran's government and affiliated media outlets have suffered several cyberattacks over the years. — AFP

TOKYO

Japan postpones next-gen rocket launch

Japan's space agency on Tuesday postponed the launch of its next-generation rocket planned for this week due to expected bad weather, after two previous attempts ended in failure.

The H3 rocket had been scheduled to lift off on Thursday from the southern island of Tanegashima.

Billed as a flexible and cost-effective new flagship, it was to carry two small satellites during the mission, intended to prove it can get into orbit.



Japan succeeded in landing its SLIM spacecraft nicknamed the "Moon Sniper" on the lunar surface last month, although the craft's solar panels were facing the wrong way. — AFP

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka rethinks online censorship plan

Sri Lanka said on Tuesday it would amend its strict new internet censorship law after opposition from global tech giants, who risked criminal prosecutions for content shared on social media.

A new bill would take "into consideration the proposals of experts in the field", he told reporters in Colombo.

The law as passed makes social media companies liable for any content posted on their platforms deemed offensive by Sri Lankan authorities.



A coalition of international tech companies warned Colombo the legislation was "unworkable" and that they would not cooperate with local authorities to implement it. — AFP



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In brief

■ STOCKHOLM



RESCUE WORK CONTROLS AMUSEMENT PARK FIRE

Swedish rescue services said on Tuesday that a major amusement park fire was under control a day later but efforts to douse it were hampered by the risk of a building collapse. One person was still missing after the blaze erupted on Monday at the Oceana water park still under construction at Sweden's largest amusement park Liseberg in the western town of Gothenburg.

"We have searched the spaces we can access, which we consider safe... we have not been able to find anyone," Per Nyqvist of the Gothenburg rescue services told a press conference. Police said an investigation into workplace offences had been opened. — AFP

■ ISTANBUL



AT LEAST 9 TRAPPED IN TURKISH GOLD MINE LANDSLIDE

A landslide on Tuesday trapped at least nine workers at a gold mine in eastern Turkiye, officials said, adding that search and rescue efforts were underway.

Images from the scene showed the landslide sweeping across a valley where the workers were believed to have been based at the time.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said there was no news from nine out of the mine's 667 employees, adding that 400 rescuers had been urgently dispatched to the scene.

"The governor and the company officials counted all the personnel and there was no news from nine workers," Yerlikaya said. — AFP

■ PARIS



FRANCE BEGINS TO DISMANTLE NOTRE-DAME SCAFFOLDING

The scaffolding around the spire of Paris's Notre-Dame cathedral has begun to come down, the authority charged with restoring the monument after a devastating 2019 fire said on Tuesday.

The spire should be entirely visible by the time the Olympic Summer Games open in the French capital on July 26.

In December, the cathedral regained its great cross, and got a new golden rooster to replace the old one that was destroyed in the 2019 fire. Initially, President Emmanuel Macron promised the UNESCO-listed building would be fully restored by the time the Games open. — AFP

US Senate passes \$95 billion Ukraine aid bill

WASHINGTON: The Democratic-led US Senate on Tuesday passed a \$95.34-billion aid package for Ukraine, though it faced an uncertain path ahead in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

The lawmakers approved the measure in a 70-29 vote that exceeded the chamber's 60-vote threshold for passage and sent the legislation on to the House. Twenty-two Republicans joined most Democrats to support the bill.

"It's certainly been years, perhaps decades, since the Senate has passed a bill that so greatly impacts not just our national security, not just the security of our allies, but the security of western democracy," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

Ukraine leadership sees the funding as crucial as it continues to repel Russian attacks and tries to keep its battered economy going as the war nears its third year. US President Joe Biden has been pushing for the package for months, but has faced opposition from Republican hardliners, particularly in the House.

The Senate vote occurred before sunrise, after eight hardline Republican opponents of Ukraine aid held an overnight marathon

Ukraine leadership sees the funding as crucial as it continues to repel Russian attacks and tries to keep its battered economy going as the war nears its third year

of speeches that dominated the chamber floor for more than six hours.

The package also includes funds for Israel, and humanitarian aid for Palestinians in Gaza.

Ukrainian officials have warned of weapons shortages at a time when Russia is pressing ahead with renewed attacks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky quickly hailed passage of the bill. "American assistance brings just peace in Ukraine closer and restores global stability, resulting in increased security and prosperity for all Americans and all the free world," Zelensky said on the social platform X.

Both houses of Congress must approve the legislation before Biden can sign it into law.

Senate Republicans last week



US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Democrat from New York, speaks during a news conference at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. — AFP

blocked a bill that would have coupled aid for Ukraine and other allies with the most sweeping changes to border policy in decades, after Donald Trump, the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, loudly criticised that deal.

Backers of the Ukraine aid

package have been warily watching Trump's reaction. So far the former president has criticised it on social media, saying it should take the form of a loan, and also worried US allies over the weekend by suggesting he could encourage aggression against Nato members who he believes don't pay their

dues to Nato.

"In the absence of having received any single border policy change from the Senate, the House will have to continue to work its own will on these important matters," Johnson said in a statement issued late on Monday. — Reuters

Armenia says 4 killed in border with Azerbaijan



Refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh region arrive in the border village of Kornidzor, Armenia. — Reuters file photo

YEREVAN: Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other on Tuesday of opening fire on their volatile border, with Yerevan saying Azerbaijani forces killed four of its soldiers.

Yerevan and Baku have fought two wars — in 2020 and in the 1990s — over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan recaptured in a lightning offensive last September.

The deaths on Tuesday came several days after the re-election in Azerbaijan of President Ilham Aliyev, in power for two decades in the country.

"Four were killed and one injured as a result of fire on Armenian positions from Azerbaijani troops," the Armenian defence ministry said in a statement.

The fighting occurred near the village of Nerkin Hand in the southern region of Siunik.

Azerbaijan's border guards said this was a "riposte" to a "provocation" on Monday by Armenian troops that Baku said had injured one Azerbaijani

Azerbaijan's border guards said this was a "riposte" to a "provocation" on Monday by Armenian troops that Baku said had injured one Azerbaijani soldier

soldier.

Baku's defence ministry said Armenian troops had opened fire twice late on Monday on Kokhanabi village in the Tovuz region.

Armenia denied the allegation, saying the claim "does not align with reality".

Russia — which used to be the main mediator of the conflict but has in recent years been bogged down by its Ukraine attack— urged calm and called

the violence "worrying".

"We call on both sides to show restraint to avoid any acts that the opposite side could see as provocative," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Armenia has distanced itself from its historic ally Russia since Azerbaijan's offensive, with Yerevan angry that Moscow's peacekeeping force in Karabakh did not act during Azerbaijan's takeover.

Baku has denied having territorial claims to Armenia after having regained Karabakh and ruled out a fresh conflict with Yerevan.

But Aliyev is suspected of trying to wrest control over Armenia's Siunik region to link Azerbaijan to the exclave of Nakhchivan, which is also bordered by Iran and Turkiye.

Aliyev's election win last week was all but guaranteed after his country's historic victory over Armenian separatists last year.

Internationally mediated peace talks have so far failed to produce a breakthrough between Armenia and Azerbaijan. — AFP

Russia puts Estonia PM on wanted list

MOSCOW: Russian police have put Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Lithuania's culture minister and members of the previous Latvian parliament on a wanted list, according to the Russian Interior Ministry's database.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Kallas was wanted for the "desecration of historical memory".

Russian state agency TASS said the Baltic officials were accused of "destroying monuments to Soviet soldiers", acts that are punishable by a 5-year prison term under the Russian criminal code.

"The Kremlin now hopes this move will help to silence me and others - but it won't," Kallas said in a post on social media platform X.

"I will continue my strong support to Ukraine. I will continue to stand for increasing Europe's defence," she said, adding Russia's move was not a surprise.

The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have demolished most of their Soviet-era monuments, including those commemorating Soviet

soldiers killed in World War Two.

In response, the head of the Russian Investigative Committee, Alexander Bastrykin, ordered a criminal investigation into the matter.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said: "This is only the beginning."

The Baltic politicians risk being placed under arrest only if they cross the Russian border, otherwise declaring them as "wanted" is unlikely have any practical consequence.

As well as Kallas, Estonian State Secretary Taimar Peterkop, Lithuanian Culture Minister Simonas Kairys and about 60 of the 100 members of the previous Latvian parliament, which ended its term in November 2022, were put on the list, according to the ministry database.

Kairys said the arrest order "means I acted actively and in a principled way".

All three are members of the European Union and Nato, and their relations with Moscow have worsened sharply since the start of the war. — Reuters



Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas

Importance of early colon cancer screening



Karim Easterbrook

Former Cambridge School Principal

Now that I am facing surgery to address the silent and slow progression of my own colon cancer, I've come to realise the urgency of raising awareness about this often overlooked disease. It may take a colon polyp ten years to become cancerous but thereafter it can accelerate rapidly, making early intervention crucial.

There are a number of common symptoms which your doctor might think warrant your having a colonoscopy. These include changes in bowel habits (diarrhoea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool), blood in the stool (rectal bleeding), abdominal cramps, pain or bloating that won't go away, unexplained weight loss that is sudden. Losing weight without trying, feeling constantly tired and lacking energy or, as in my case, iron deficiency anaemia due to chronic hidden bleeding from the tumour. Or none of the above. Colon cancer is often described as the silent killer because it often has no noticeable symptoms.

As in my case it is often picked up by chance when you are being investigated for something

which appears unrelated to cancer.

My own symptoms were fatigue and breathlessness. These were the only indicators of a potentially life-threatening condition lurking within.

Not many people like to talk about bowels, rectums and colons which is possibly why there seems to be so little awareness of the danger of colon cancer. This is tragic because whilst being one of the most curable cancers colon cancer remains the third most common cancers worldwide and is the second leading cause of death from cancer.

By sharing my story, I hope to inspire others to prioritise their health and undergo screenings without delay. Colon cancer should not be a death sentence; rather, it should serve as a rallying cry for proactive healthcare.

There is a widespread misconception that colon cancer only affects older individuals. However for whatever reason there has been a recent alarming trend in the rise of the number of younger people being diagnosed with Colon Cancer. Increasingly we are hearing of young celebrities and athletes

COLON CANCER SHOULD NOT BE A DEATH SENTENCE; RATHER, IT SHOULD SERVE AS A RALLYING CRY FOR PROACTIVE HEALTHCARE

dying from colon cancer. A recent example includes actor Chadwick Boseman who played King T'Challa in Black Panther. He was diagnosed with colon cancer at the age of 39 and died of colon cancer 4 years later in 2020 at only age 43. Colon cancer at 60 has become the new 45. Most colon cancer specialists around the world now recommend that colon cancer screenings should begin at age 45. In Germany they offer colon cancer screening for everyone from the age of 55 onwards.

The gold standard of screening, a colonoscopy, offers a comprehensive evaluation with lasting peace of mind if done once every 10 years. I found my own colonoscopy experience painless and brief, just like a rejuvenating afternoon nap. There was no discomfort and I won't hesitate to repeat the check-up in a year's time as a follow up to my current cancer treatment programme. I only wish I had had my own colonoscopy ten years ago.

I hope at least one of the readers of this article will avoid ever having to suffer from colon cancer having taken note of my own story. We have some of the best doctors in the world in the Sultanate of Oman and I am in safe hands.

Nato grapples with Trump 'new' threats

MAX DELANY

Schoolboys turned militia fighters stare towards Donald Trump sparked outcry by threatening not to defend Nato members who do not spend enough, but for diplomats at the alliance that weathered his time in office there was a sense of deja vu.

At a campaign rally in the US state of South Carolina the volatile former reality TV star said he told the leader of a "big" European power he wouldn't step in if Russia attacked an ally not meeting its financial obligations.

"No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want," Trump told his supporters.

The outburst was the most extreme from the Republican frontrunner casting doubt on his commitment to Nato's collective defence umbrella that has safeguarded Europe since World War II.

US President Joe Biden — who has pledged iron-cast backing for the alliance — slammed the comments from his likely opponent in November's presidential election as "appalling and dangerous".

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg issued an unusually strong-worded rebuttal to Trump, saying "any suggestion that allies will not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the US". The spectre of a returning Trump undermining the central role played by the US at a time Russia is waging war in Ukraine is a nightmare for many European officials.

One senior Nato diplomat, speaking like others on condition of anonymity, called the comment an "attack on the soul of the alliance" for casting doubt on its Article 5 vow to protect an ally if attacked. But it's far from the first time that the ex-real estate magnate has bullied fellow Nato members to splash out more on their own defence. During his term in office he reportedly mulled pulling Washington out of the alliance and rounded on members such as Germany for falling well below a target of spending two per cent of GDP on defence.

"We are all aware of the statements he can make," a second diplomat from a Nato member said. The latest from Trump comes with almost nine months left in a presidential campaign that looks set to be one of the nastiest in recent US history — and officials are braced for more nerve-racking comments.

Officials admit that Trump sowing doubt about US support for Nato is a boon for the Kremlin as warnings swirl that Russian President Vladimir Putin could look to target alliance members if Ukraine loses the war. — AFP

Power of love unites us...



Dr Khalfan bin Hamed al Harrasi

The author is Country Manager, University of Cambridge

Valentine's Day, which is celebrated today, is named after St. Valentine or Valentinus. Roses, gifts and chocolate are given to the ones we love. Valentine's Day is the 3rd most popular day for marriage proposal, after Christmas and New Year, with most marriage proposals happening between December and February every year!

Valentine's Day is a special day when we devote some of our time and efforts to express love and appreciation to the special and precious people in our life who can be the wife, friends, family, and workmates.

A sneak-peak into the history, however, shows that Valentine's Day was far less romantic than it sounds, and it wasn't as sweet as the millions of candy hearts produced every year for this occasion, especially at the times when it was celebrated by sacrificing animals to encourage fertility. Not until the 1300s when Valentine's Day became a sign of love as the French and English believed that February 14th was the when birds start mating! The date of February 14th is also attributed to the Death of St. Valentine, according to the Romans. A different account of the story, according to <https://www.history.com>, is that it was Pope Gelasius who declared (at the end of the 5th century) February 14 as a day for celebrating Valentine's Day; it was more of a religious ritual than a romantic celebration at that time.

It's amazing how many flowers are exchanged at Valentine's Day, with more than 250 million roses are annually produced by warm weather countries such as Ecuador, Kenya and Columbia in preparation to be dispatched to other countries to be ready for February 14th. According to the National Retail Federation, the US spent about \$23.9 million in 2022 on flowers and other Valentine's Day gift and about \$26 million in 2023.

Hallmark states Valentine's Day is the 2nd biggest celebration after Christmas for exchanging gifts. Interestingly, teachers receive most of the gifts and love cards, followed by children, mothers and wives. Pets (like dogs and cats) also receive their share of the Valentine's Day gift as

about 27.6 million people in the US purchases gifts for their cats and dogs in 2020.

As February 14th approaches, hearts are aflutter with anticipation and excitement for Valentine's Day, a celebration of love and affection cherished by people around the world. This annual observance, marked by romantic gestures, heartfelt expressions, and the exchange of gifts, transcends borders and cultures, bringing individuals together in a shared celebration of love.

Originating from ancient Roman rituals and later Christian traditions, Valentine's Day has evolved into a global phenomenon celebrated in various ways across different cultures. From the exchange of handwritten love notes and bouquets of flowers to romantic dinners and lavish gifts, the expressions of love on this day are as diverse as the individuals who celebrate it.

In Western countries, Valentine's Day is often associated with grand gestures of romance and affection. Couples exchange gifts such as chocolates, jewellery, and flowers, while restaurants and hotels offer special Valentine's Day packages to cater to the influx of love-struck patrons. It is a day when declarations of love are made, reaffirming the bonds between partners and creating lasting memories.

However, the celebration of Valentine's Day extends far beyond the Western world. In Japan, the tradition of exchanging chocolates on Valentine's Day is deeply ingrained in society, with women typically giving chocolates to men as a token of affection. This tradition has evolved into a cultural phenomenon, with various types of chocolates symbolizing different levels of affection or friendship.

In South Korea, Valentine's Day is not just a celebration of romantic love but also an opportunity to express gratitude and appreciation for friends and family. The day is marked by the exchange of gifts and handwritten notes, with special emphasis placed on the importance of interpersonal relationships.

Similarly, in countries like Brazil and India, Valentine's Day has gained popularity in recent years as a day to

celebrate love and romance. Couples exchange gifts and spend quality time together, while singles often use the occasion to socialise and meet new people.

Despite its global popularity, Valentine's Day is not without controversy. Critics argue that the commercialisation has overshadowed its true meaning, reducing love to materialistic expressions and putting undue pressure on individuals to participate in extravagant celebrations.

Moreover, in some parts of the world, Valentine's Day is viewed with scepticism or outright opposition due to cultural or religious reasons. In conservative societies, the public display of affection associated with Valentine's Day may be frowned upon, leading to restrictions or bans on its celebration.

In the Arab world, attitudes towards Valentine's Day vary widely depending on cultural and religious beliefs. While some people embrace it as an opportunity to express love and affection, others view it as a Western import incompatible with Islamic values.

Despite these differences, Valentine's Day continues to exert its influence in the Arab world, with many young people embracing it as a chance to celebrate love and romance. In urban centres like Dubai and Cairo, Valentine's Day is marked by the exchange of gifts, romantic dinners, and declarations of love, mirroring the celebrations seen in Western countries.

However, in more conservative regions, the celebration of Valentine's Day may be met with resistance or scepticism. Religious leaders often caution against the perceived immorality of Valentine's Day, warning against the pitfalls of Western influence on Islamic culture.

Nevertheless, the impact of Valentine's Day in the Arab world cannot be ignored. Despite cultural and religious differences, the universal desire for love and connection transcends borders, bringing people together in celebration of a shared human experience.

As we mark February 14th, let us remember that love knows no boundaries and that Valentine's Day is a celebration of the enduring power of love to unite us all.

My nostalgia about radio

As we go through life, we put a lot of emotional memories in the library of our minds. The older we get, the more nostalgic we become with those memories, and the emotional attachment to them is further amplified.

When someone says “it makes me nostalgic,” it means that they are reminded of a past activity or the like that is emotionally attached to their life. It takes them back to relive moments from their past. It is a longing for something that is gone but not forgotten!

I think everyone experiences nostalgia varyingly, as it is triggered by different things like an antique picture, music or sound, a person, or a place.

For instance, my childhood memories include a radio. I grew up middle-class background in the lap of nature in a small village in the south Indian state of Kerala. Those memories of birds chirping, warbling, and trilling are so fresh that they still feel like yesterday.

The village, far from the maddening and noisy towns and traffic snarls, was even bereft of electricity and a telephone, let alone the tarred roads. The only mode of communication with the rest of the world was radio.

Radio became our conduit to the infinite universe. The world seemed both near and far with this antique device! As I was growing up, I did indeed often listen to the radio, and indeed at the village library.

I became fascinated by radio and radio-related matters. I was 10 years old when we received a transistor radio in 1972 at our home. It operated on four batteries. A long net was tied outside the house and connected to the radio for better signal reception. I still remember how I woke up to the iconic tune of Akashvani (All India Radio) every morning.

Those days listening to the radio felt really different. It was more than just a source of entertainment; it was a source of information and knowledge. So it



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

became an integral part of my growing-up years. It played a significant role in the upbringing of children in that remote village.

I still remember the morning news, announced in a thick voice as ‘Yeh Aakaashwaani hai’ followed by rhythmic beats of percussion. My favourites on the radio were various musical programs on ‘Vividh Bharti’.

Away from the megacities, it is still perhaps more popular communication in many villages in countries like India! Even now, it is a valuable reference, providing anything from music to sports stats to awareness programs.

One of the most widely consumed mediums at the global level, the United Nations says the radio has the ability to “shape a society’s experience of diversity and stand as an arena for all voices to speak out, be represented, and be heard.”

World Radio Day is observed on February 13 every year to spread awareness about the importance of radio as a medium to inform, educate, and entertain. This day is celebrated with different broadcasts, online activities, community events, and awards to encourage decision-makers to provide access to information through radio.

According to Unesco, radio has crossed the 100-year milestone; hence, “it is a significant occasion to commemorate the medium’s extensive virtues and continuing potency as it faces challenges to its audience and revenue numbers from digital platforms, social media, digital and generational divides, censorship, consolidations, and economic hardships.”

Furthermore, “the continuing democratic value of radio is to serve as a grassroots catalyst for connectedness within underserved groups, including immigrant, religious, minority, and poverty-stricken populations.”

No matter what chores, the radio was like a common thing those days of childhood. It was indeed a family member! Listening to the radio felt really different during those days!

RADIO BECAME AN INTEGRAL PART OF MY GROWING-UP YEARS, AS IT PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN IN THAT REMOTE VILLAGE

RAISING THE MASCOT LOGO!



Workers mount the Berlinale mascot logo at the venue entrance of the ‘Zoo Palast’ cinema for the upcoming 74th Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany, on Tuesday. – Reuters

The toxic legacy of the Green Revolution

There are more than 390,000 identified plant species in the world, but just three – rice, maize, and wheat – account for roughly 60 per cent of the plant-based calories in our diets. The dominance of these three grains is largely the result of major technological breakthroughs, particularly the development of high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of rice and wheat during the Green Revolution of the 1960s.

These innovations have yielded enormous benefits, significantly increasing access to staple foods and rescuing hundreds of millions of people from hunger. But ramped-up agricultural output has also brought a host of other problems, particularly when it comes to the cultivation process. Notably, the enhanced productivity of HYV seeds depends heavily on the availability of reliable irrigation and the application of various chemical inputs, especially fertilizers and pesticides.

Consequently, the adoption of HYV seeds has led to the overuse of canal irrigation and subsequent waterlogging problems, forcing farmers to rely on groundwater irrigation, even in semi-arid regions. Similarly, the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers has dramatically increased following the shift to HYV-based agriculture.

The inherent vulnerability of these varieties to pests, together with the tendency to cultivate them in monocultures, has led to frequent



Jayati Ghosh

The writer is Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the Club of Rome’s Transformational Economics Commission

WHILE THE INTRODUCTION OF HIGH-YIELDING SEED VARIETIES HAS SAVED HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FROM HUNGER, IT HAS DIMINISHED THE NUTRITIONAL QUALITY AND INCREASED THE TOXICITY OF STAPLE GRAINS

infestations and the widespread, often indiscriminate use of chemical pesticides, resulting in residual toxicity in plants and grains. With pests developing resistance to these chemicals, it became necessary to seek out new technological solutions, including the development of genetically modified crops designed to be naturally resistant to (at least some) pests.

In addition, although these technologies are scale-neutral, access to the required inputs and markets typically is not. As a result, large farmers benefited disproportionately, adding to agrarian inequality.

As if these challenges were not daunting enough, experts are growing increasingly concerned about the deteriorating nutritional content of high-yield crops. For example, a recent study suggests that although the Green Revolution has helped India achieve food self-sufficiency, it has undermined the country’s nutritional security.

By analysing the quality and potential toxicity of roughly 1,500 rice and wheat varieties developed and introduced in India from the 1960s to 2018, the authors trace the long-term effects of HYV-focused breeding programmes. These programmes, they find, have modified the grains’ nutritional makeup, resulting in significantly reduced

dietary benefits and a higher concentration of toxins.

In short, although enhancing nutrition was the primary goal of cultivating these grains, the emphasis on increasing yields has significantly compromised their nutritional value. Notably, the levels of vital nutrients like zinc and iron in rice and wheat, India’s two most important food staples, have declined markedly. Specifically, rice experienced a 33 per cent drop in zinc and a 27 per cent decrease in iron, while the zinc and iron content in wheat fell by 30 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively. Even worse, arsenic levels in rice surged by 1,493 per cent.

These findings have far-reaching health implications

for those who consume these grains. In particular, the authors highlight “strong evidence” that “oral ingestion of metal toxicants” could lead to serious health problems like “lung cancers or chronic respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, hyperkeratosis, renal toxicity, and impaired bone calcification.” Increased consumption of staples like rice and wheat – the goal of the Green Revolution – could end up exacerbating India’s already significant disease burden.

This is also true for many other countries that have relied heavily on HYVs to boost yields and increase the production of staple crops. For example, the recently rebranded Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa continues to

advocate an outdated industrial model of agriculture that has failed to deliver the expected nutritional benefits.

As I have previously argued, nutrition should not be viewed only in terms of total calorie consumption based on mono-cropped cultivation. While the superior nutritional value of a diverse diet is now widely recognised, achieving it requires not just technological innovation but also a shift in focus toward cultivating a variety of crops best suited to the local environment and climate. In addition to improving nutritional outcomes, this approach promotes sustainability by reducing carbon dioxide emissions across the food’s entire life cycle.

India’s experience provides a cautionary tale for developing countries. In India and elsewhere, it is becoming increasingly clear that adopting agroecological practices based on smallholder farming is the most effective way to develop food systems that are both sustainable and nutritionally rich.

But this requires moving away from the predatory commercialisation of agriculture, which primarily serves the interests of large agribusinesses, toward a model that benefits the actual producers and consumers of food.

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There are roughly 1,500 rice and wheat varieties developed and introduced in India from the 1960s to 2018.

sport

T O U R O F O M A N S T A G E 4



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 13

Amaury Capiot of Arkea-B&B Hotels team recorded an emotional victory as he clinched the fourth stage of Tour of Oman on Tuesday. The Belgian sprinter clocked a time of 2 hours, 17 minutes and 35 seconds to win the stage, that started in Fanja instead of Al Rustaq Fort due to the current weather conditions in the Sultanate of Oman and the stage finished at Yitti Hills.

The Dutch rider IDE SCHELLING from Astana Kazakhstan team finished adrift of the stage winner while Italian rider Davide De Pretto of team Jayco Alula completed the race in third place.

Capiot came in third place of Muscat classic race on Friday but he managed to produce an excellent performance to be crowned as stage 4 winner of the 13th edition of the Tour of Oman.

“I am really happy with this victory following the hard stage. The team made a great effort to end as champion. This is indeed my first triumph after six races this season and this achievement means a lot for me as it is first podium for me in this year,” Capiot said.

“I took part in three European races beside tour of Oman. I am looking for more accomplishments in the forthcoming participations. Today’s stage was shorter than I expected. It was hard in the last 25 km and as a team we implemented a good strategy to stay together until last 2 to 3

km which was for me to stay in good position for better sprint,” he ended.

The battle for the general classification remains extremely disputed, with Finn Fisher-Black (UAE Team Emirates) making the most of time bonuses through the stage to claim back the red jersey 3 ahead of Luke Lamperti (Soudal Quick-Step) on the eve of the final stage, set to decide the overall winner on the slopes of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) which will take place on Wednesday.

“I may go back with the jersey as one more stage is remaining in the tour. We will go for the climbs today to Green Mountain with my team-mate Adam Yates and will look for a spectacular end,” rider Finn Fisher-Black said.

CAPIOT

TAKES AN EMOTIONAL VICTORY IN STAGE 4 UPHILL SPRINT

The peloton rolls from Fanja early morning on Tuesday for a distance of 104 km ending in Yitti Hills with a punchy route that inspires attackers. Blake Quick (Team Jayco Alla), Rasmus Bogh Wallin (Uno-X Mobility) and Matteo Malucelli (JCL Team Ukyo) were the first riders to set off. Many riders worked hard to join them unsuccessfully.

Soudal Quick-Step control the attackers

On the day after Paul Magnier and Luke Lamperti took the race over in Al Bustan, Soudal Quick-Step set the pace. The attackers’ lead is controlled at around 2 minutes. Burgos-BH up the ante on the first ascent of the day, the mighty climb of Al Jabal Road (Bausher-Al Amerat), with 3.3 km at 9.8 per

cent. The gap was down to 5 as Wallin goes first over the top. Lots of riders were dropped from the bunch including the green jersey owner Magnier and the golden jersey Oscar Pelegri (Burgos-BH). The Spanish rider Oscar managed to earn the golden jersey for the fourth successive time.

The gap stabilised until Soudal Quick-Step and UAE Team Emirates accelerated towards the final ascents of the day. The attackers were caught at the bottom of the penultimate climb of the day, in Al Jissah, summited with 10.8 km to go. Finn Fisher-Black (UAE Team Emirates) went first to take 3 bonus seconds and the overall lead. The pace remained hard until the finish, where a very reduced bunch sprints to the line. Ide Schelling (Astana Qazaqstan) almost took it but Amaury Capiot (Arkéa-B&B Hôtels) pipes him. Davide De Pretto (Jayco AlUla) rounds out the stage podium.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, handed over the awards to the top winners in Yitti Hills in presence of Saif bin Sebaa al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association, and officials.

The concluding stage of the tour is set to take place on Wednesday for a distance of 138.7 km that will be held from Imty (Izki) to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Amerat Royals crowned D10 champions



Pankaj Khimji handing Champions Trophy to Amerat Royals

MUSCAT: A rampant Amerat Royals emerged as deserving champions in the third edition of Oman D10 League, which concluded at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat.

The title win was the first for the Royals, who displayed consistency throughout the tournament to cap their stunning run.

In an action-packed final, Amerat Royals defeated Bousher Busters by 14 runs to bring curtains down on the 11-day event, organised by Oman Cricket (OC).

Both the finalists, Amerat Royals and Bousher Busters, had registered impressive wins in the group stage. Going into the summit clash, Royals won six of their seven league games while Busters won five. The format witnessed five teams progressing into the second round, the two teams were joined by Ruwi Rangers, Ghubra Giants and Qurum Thunders.

In the second round, Bousher Busters and Amerat Royals led the table securing three wins each to set up a title clash.

In the final, Royals' Jiten Ramanandi's all-round display stole the limelight. He slammed a breezy 46 to help his side reach

109. Fawad Ali bagged 3 wickets while Aaqib Ilyas

claimed two for the Busters.

Buster's chase looked on track with Aaqib Ilyas at the crease. However, his dismissal for 39 in the seventh over proved to be the turning point. He was caught in the 7th over scoring 39. Mohammed Adeeb Usmani's 26 went in vain as Ramanandi grabbed two wickets for just 12 runs to restrict the Busters to 95/4.

The title was the first trophy for Amerat Royals of the 2023-24 season, and they will hope to carry the momentum in the upcoming Super League D50.

The third edition of Oman D10 witnessed 40 matches and saw a total of 479 maximums and 548 boundaries being smashed while a total 381 wickets fell.

Ramanandi was adjudged Player of the Final while Ilyas was adjudged the Player of the Tournament for his all round performance (354 runs at a strike rate of 200 and 7 wickets).

At the post-match presentation ceremony, Pankaj Khimji, Oman Cricket Chairman, handed the champions trophy to Amerat Royals' skipper Pratik Athawale. Paul Sheridan, OC vice-chairman, handed the runners-up trophy to Bousher Busters' captain Sufyan Mehmood.

Alkesh Joshi, OC treasurer, Mohammed Faizan Idris, ITW Universe, and Duleep Mendis, OC Chief Development Officer presented the other individual awards.

Brief scores: Amerat Royals 109/7 (Jiten Ramanandi 46 (21); Fawad Ali 3/14; Aaqib Ilyas 2/24) beat Bousher Busters 95/4 (Aaqib Ilyas 39 (19), Mohammed Adeeb Usmani 26 (18) ; Jiten Ramanandi 2/12



Amerat Royals team, D10 Champions

Al Nahdha draws Al Riffa in AFC Cup West Zone semi-final



Gui Inters celebrates after scoring the goal

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 13

Al Riffa Bahrain club tied with their Omani guest, Al Nahdha 1-1 on Monday at Khalifa Sports City Stadium in Manama, in the first leg of the West Zone semi-final in the 2023-2024 AFC Cup.

The first half saw both teams playing cautiously, with Al Nahdha relying on counterattacks, while Al Riffa focused on offensive pressure, though they faced quick turnovers from Al Nahdha players. Both teams attempted attacks during the first half

but failed to create significant chances, leading to a goalless draw at halftime.

The second half began with high pressure from Al Riffa Club, and Kamil al Aswad almost scored the opening goal, but his header hit the crossbar. Al Nahdha responded with a header by Walter Boulya after a splendid pass from Salah al Yahyai. This was followed by exchanges of possession between the two teams, with the hosts Al Riffa exerting attacking pressure. In the 62 minute, Ali Harim scored the lead goal for Al Riffa with a remarkable header. After taking

the lead, Al Riffa continued their offensive style and came close to scoring a second goal with a powerful shot by Ahmed al Harazi, which was barely saved by Al Nahdha goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini. Al Nahdha then intensified their attacking style in an attempt to equalise, with their professional striker, Walter Boulya, missing a clear opportunity after being one-on-one with the goalkeeper. However, under the strong pressure exerted by the Omani Al Nahdha players, Gui Inters managed to score the equalising goal in the 77th minute with a powerful header

that hit the crossbar before returning to the same player, who neatly headed it into the net past Bahraini goalkeeper. Despite both teams' efforts to score a winning goal, the match ended in a 1-1 draw.

The second leg match between the two teams is scheduled for the upcoming Monday, February 19th, at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. This match will determine the winner and the team advancing to the West Zone final of the AFC Cup, facing the winner of the match between Iraqi club Al Kahraba and Lebanese club Al Ahed.

AL ZUBAIR TEAM FALL SHORT IN BID TO WIN ASIAN LE MANS SERIES

ABUDHABI: The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed trio of Oman's Al Faisal Al Zubair, Germany's Fabian Schiller and China's Anthony Liu were not able to challenge for the overall titles at the final pair of four-hour races of the 2023/2024 Asian Le Mans Series at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina circuit last weekend.

After qualifying their Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo in a superb pole position, they finished the first race in 10th and then lost an early lead in the second red-flag interrupted encounter and eventually reached the chequered flag in eighth after a drive-through penalty.

Al Zubair said: "It was a very unfortunate weekend finishing P10 and P8 in the races after starting on pole and second place and feeling

like we had a really good set-up with the car. Everyone was feeling good. I think with the championship on the line there were a few mistakes made by the team.

"Also, Anthony, my team-mate, made a mistake in the race which cost us a penalty. Taking that into account, coming back from the penalties and all, it was not so bad. With our goals, which he had to try and win the race, it was difficult to accept. We just prepare again and hopefully come more prepared for the next one."

Liu moved ahead of the rest of the GT field at the start of Sunday's second race and held a tiny advantage over Alex Malykhin in the Pure Rxcing Porsche before the race was red-flagged after a two-car



Pit action with Al Manar Racing at Yas Marina.

accident at turn 11. The Al Manar Mercedes was down in fourth behind Pure Rxcing, Optimum Motorsport and Sainteloc Racing.

After a substantial delay to remove debris from the trackside area, racing resumed with just

under two hours of the race remaining. Liu pitted in a packed pit lane and Schiller took over but the car was down in 15th with 1hr 40min remaining. But the crew incurred a drive-through penalty for a pit lane infringement. Schiller

slipped to 17th and then moved up to 13th with 80 minutes to go before climbing to 10th as the race approached the three-hour mark.

Al Zubair took over for the final stint, managed to get into the top 10 and moved up to eighth but that left the team short of the position needed to challenge for the overall GT Team and Drivers titles.

Leipt Motorsport won the second race from Triple Eight and the Pure Rxcing trio of Klaus Bachler, Joel Sturm and Alex Malykhin, who clinched the championship in their Porsche 911 GT3 R, despite an accident in race one.

Liu took the wheel from pole position for the first stint in the opening four-hour race and

reached the half-hour mark in second behind Christopher Haase in the Sainteloc Racing Audi. The Chinese driver slipped down to third behind the Pure Rxcing Audi as his stint progressed but moved back into second around the 90-minute mark.

The car had slipped down the running order as far as 16th before Al Zubair took over for the second stint. Luca Stolz had pushed the Triple Eight Mercedes into the lead from the Sainteloc Racing Audi and Optimum Motorsport's Tom Gamble in a McLaren.

Al Zubair and Schiller managed to climb back through the field and reached the chequered flag in 10th with the victory going to Stolz, Jordan Love and H.H.



‘Omseyah’, ‘Bahja’ grab Al Bashayer cups on 2nd day

WALEED ALJAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 13

The competitions of 7th edition of annual Al Bashayer Camel Festival continued on Tuesday at Al Bashayer Square in the Wilayat of Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The camel festival organised with the support of His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

The 6th day of competitions among participations from owners and racers from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and GCC countries.

The second day’s race was attended by 640 camels, challenged in 20 rounds allocated for the ‘Lagaya’ category, three years old,



for 5 km divided into 15 races in the morning time with cash prize for the top 10. Five main races will start in the afternoon, with two cups, a rifle and five cars for the winners and cash prizes up to 10th place.

In opening round of the morning period, ‘Al Wazi’ was the champion, owned by Ali bin Said al Daree. ‘Sultanate’ snatched the second round, owned by Mubarak

bin Amer al Habsi. ‘Mubhar’ claimed the third round, owned by Othman bin Hamoud al Daree.

As for the fourth round, ‘Al Dhab’ was finished first, owned by Saif bin Mubarak al Mazrouei. The fifth round won by ‘Firasah’, owned by Mubarak bin Amer al Habsi. The sixth round grabbed by ‘Munjaz’, owned by Said bin Amer al Mughairi.

In the seventh round, ‘Asyad’



came in first place, owned by Mohammed bin Hamad al Zari. In the eighth round was ‘Al Ain’ on time, owned by Al Ghafiq bin Al Sagheer al Maliki.

The ninth round snatched by ‘Al Wa’I’, owned by Ali bin Salem al Ghailani. The tenth round ‘Hamloula’ finished first, owned by Sultan bin Mubarak al Habsi. The eleventh round won by ‘Al-Dhabi’, owned by Sami bin Al Hamdi al

Daree. As for the second half ten ‘Ashqar’ was the hero, owned by Hamad bin Said al Qanoubi.

‘Al Shahiniya’ won the thirteenth round, owned by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Daree. ‘Reymah’ claimed the fourteenth round, owned by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Maliki. As for the fifteenth round, ‘Shaheen’ concluded the morning race, owned by Fahim bin Hamad al Jahafi.

In afternoon competitions, ‘Omseyah’ was the champion. Owned by Al Bashayer Camels and won the Al Bashayer Cup and a car. ‘Bahja’ grabbed the cup and the car, owned by Ali bin Fayel al Owaisi. ‘Malbi’ snatched the rifle and the third car, owned by Ali al Wahaibi. As for the fourth car, ‘Al Dhab’, owned by Faleh bin Yasser al Shamsi from UAE. ‘Heybah’ managed th fifth car, owned by Abdullah bin Hamad al Daree.

The chief guest Dr Faisal bin Ali al Zaidi, the Wali of Manah, honoured the evening competitions winners of the first places with cups, rifle and cars.

The third day competitions, Wednesday, will be for ‘Yathaa’ category, 4 years old, for 6 km race. Eleven races will be in the morning with cash prizes for the top 10. Four main races will be in the afternoon, the winners will have cars and cash prizes for the top ten

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Hotel revenues in
Oman reach
RO 229.25m in 2023



MUSCAT: The revenues of hotels with a classification of 3-5 stars in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 23.4 per cent by the end of 2023 to reach RO 229.256 million, compared to RO 185. 772 million by the end of 2022. Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information attributed this growth to an increase in the total number of hotel guests by 27.1 per cent, recording 2,071,169 guests by the end of 2023, compared to 1,629,205 guests by the end of 2022, while the occupancy rate recorded a growth of 8.8 per cent. Statistics showed that the number of Omani guests increased by 10 per cent, reaching 769,790 guests. The number of Gulf guests also increased by 23.8 per cent, recording 198,489 guests, and the number of European

THE RISE IN REVENUES IS ATTRIBUTED TO AN INCREASE IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF HOTEL GUESTS BY 27.1 PER CENT, RECORDING 2,071,169 GUESTS BY THE END OF 2023, COMPARED TO 1,629,205 GUESTS BY THE END OF 2022, WHILE THE OCCUPANCY RATE RECORDED A GROWTH OF 8.8 PER CENT. The number of guests from the Americas reached 57,752, while the number of visitors from the African continent reached 11,670, with a growth rate of 29.2 per cent. The number of Asian visitors also increased by 35.2 per cent, reaching 297,270, and from Oceania, 44,726, an increase of 133.8 per cent. — ONA

Energy firms commit RO 5 million
in funding for social projects

MUSCAT: In a concerted effort to promote impactful projects in the domain of social responsibility, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals has forged partnerships with seven key companies in the sector, collectively committing RO 2.5 million to support three significant national initiatives. This collaborative endeavour aims to enhance the well-being of Oman's communities and citizens through innovative projects. One of the pivotal projects is the Ibri Public Park Project, spanning an area of 168,000 sq metres in Al Dhahirah Governorate. It will feature green spaces, water bodies, recreational facilities, health paths, and an open-air theatre. Another initiative involves financing medical equipment for Khoula Hospital to bolster surgical services and accommodate a projected 10,000 surgeries annually. By providing essential medical equipment for the hospital's orthopaedic department and ophthalmology clinic, this project aims to reduce surgical waitlists, alleviate healthcare burdens, and enhance overall societal well-being. The third project, the Khuta "Steps" Platform Project for Vocational Guidance and Career Counselling, offers advanced career counselling services to students and job-seekers. This initiative acts as a bridge between educational institutions, job markets, and vocational opportunities, providing updated information on educational programmes, training



Mohsin al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (centre), signing agreements with various energy companies on Tuesday.



opportunities, and labour market insights. In remarks, Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, commended the Ibri Public Park project, emphasising its significance as a first-of-its-kind development in the Al Dhahirah Governorate. Strategically situated in the Wilayat of Ibri along the main Ibri-Dhank road, the park initiative aligns with the governorate's vision for future growth, he said. Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has inked agreements to fund a variety of social investment

programmes in collaboration with governmental and private entities. These initiatives include establishing a Fruit Research Center of Excellence, equipping schools with educational resources, funding cultural and innovation centres, enhancing road infrastructure, supporting healthcare initiatives, and more. Eng Abdulamir bin Abdulhussein al Ajmi, PDO's External Affairs and Value Creation Director, said the financing agreements exceeding RO 2.5 million will focus on community infrastructure development, healthcare sector support, education advancement, and scientific research promotion, were carefully chosen based on identified priorities in each domain.

OQ8 has bold growth ambitions: CEO

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 13

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries (OQ8), which was inaugurated last week at a high profile event attended by the leaders of the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait, has aspirations to expand capacity in the future, as well as diversify its market base. The 230,000-bpd-capacity project, a 50-50 joint venture between Oman's OQ Group and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), is described as the most modern of its kind in the region. Built at a cost of around \$9 billion at the Duqm SEZ, the project is also expected to catalyse the growth of a larger downstream industry centring around petrochemicals and other sustainable chemicals. Speaking to Bloomberg, OQ8 CEO David Bird said the company does indeed have plans to ramp



up capacity. "Absolutely, we have very bold ambition plans. This was always meant to be a phased investment," the CEO said, alluding in particular to the reference to 'petrochemicals' in the company's formal name. "Our official company name is Duqm Refinery and Petrochemicals Company with OQ8 as our brand. So yes, we have very bold growth ambitions. However, I would say we have to grow and that's what we're excited now. First, a very successful startup. Obviously the project's come through significant challenges of Covid and other supply chain interruptions, but demonstrating the appeal of the region and Oman where we can deliver a greenfield project so successfully started up so well in 2023 and now we're going for stable and efficient operation to earn our right to grow." In the interview, Bird also

underlined the expanding appeal of the refinery's output of fuels and petrochemical feedstock, with some products having found their way to distant markets. While 50 per cent of the output is marketed by the trading arms of the two principal shareholders – OQ Trading of Oman and KPC of Kuwait – OQ8 will play its part as well, he said. In particular, OQ8 plans to leverage Duqm's strategic location to target markets around the Indian Ocean, said the CEO. "I think the Indian Ocean this century will be the area where we see the most growth. So we're very excited by our proximity to India, the Indian subcontinent, and also East Africa. I think the African continent will experience significant growth that we're all keen to be a part of, given our location." Markets in Europe are also in OQ8's sights, said Bird, citing the refinery's ability to meet the continent's "most stringent fuel quality specifications". Nevertheless, some shipments have also reached markets further afield in a sign of the refinery's widening appeal, he noted. "I must say we've been pleasantly surprised where some of our products have ended up, and we've seen significant volumes go as far afield as Brazil, Gulf Coast of the US but also in East Africa." Boding well for OQ8 performance amid fierce competition in the global refining industry is its young age. "The average age of refineries in some parts of the world is more than 70 years. And by being one of the youngest refineries in the world, we are the most automated, the most efficient, the most data rich as well, which creates further opportunity for leveraging technology and AI to be the most competitive refinery in the world," he added.

Oil prices drift
up with focus
on Middle East

LONDON: Oil prices edged up on Tuesday as uncertainty over fighting in the Middle East kept markets on edge, but gains were capped by concerns that continued high interest rates may weigh on energy demand. Brent futures were up 54 cents to \$82.67 a barrel at 1224 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up 50 cents at \$77.62 a barrel. Saudi state oil company Aramco has started trading PWT, which underpins the global Brent benchmark. Oil prices were near flat in Monday's trade, after gaining 6 per cent last week. "Oil prices have been numbed into submission by what has transpired, or not, in the Middle East," said John Evans of oil broker PVM in a note on Tuesday. Meanwhile, Oman oil price (April delivery 2024) yesterday reached \$81.86, comprising a rise by \$1.03 compared to the price on Monday which stood at \$80.83. The average price of Oman oil (February delivery 2024) has stabilised at \$77.21 per barrel, thus \$5.96 per barrel lower than January delivery 2024.

INEOS Grenadier: A rugged revolution for off-road excellence



MUSCAT: Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles (MHD) proudly introduces the INEOS Grenadier to Oman's dynamic and adventurous market. INEOS Grenadier will redefine the off-road experience for enthusiasts and explorers alike by combining rugged resilience with cutting-edge engineering. INEOS Grenadier is inspired by iconic off-road vehicles of the past while incorporating modern technology.

Its design pays homage to classic 4x4s, blending timeless aesthetics with state-of-the-art technology, setting a new standard in the world of adventure.

Key Features:
Adaptability: The INEOS Grenadier is engineered to conquer any terrain, from the challenging dunes of the Rimal Al Sharqiya to the rugged mountains of Jabal Shams. Its versatile design ensures optimal performance in diverse conditions, making it the perfect companion for Oman's varied landscapes.

Robust Construction:
Built with a robust ladder-frame chassis and advanced suspension, the INEOS Grenadier promises durability and reliability. The vehicle's high ground clearance and approach/departure angles enhance its off-road capabilities, making it a true off-road champion.

Powerful Performance:
The Grenadier boasts a powerful drivetrain, ensuring ample torque and horsepower for tackling steep inclines and challenging landscapes. Whether navigating rocky trails or sandy expanses, this vehicle delivers a performance that meets the demands of Oman's diverse terrain.

Built for Everyday:
The Grenadier might be rugged. Reliable, uncompromising 4X4. But it's also so much more. Its comfortable. Its versatile. Its balanced to drive both on road and off.

Practical Interior: Inside, the

Grenadier offers a thoughtfully designed and comfortable cabin. With ample cargo space and intelligent storage solutions, it caters to the needs of adventurers who require both functionality and comfort on their journeys.

Modern Technology: The Grenadier incorporates cutting-edge technology, including advanced safety features, a user-friendly infotainment system and connectivity options.

This ensures a seamless and enjoyable driving experience, both on and off the road. The introduction of the INEOS Grenadier witnessed the presence of Willeke and Alexander (<https://www.instagram.com/exploersoverland/>), a Dutch couple currently embarking on an extraordinary journey from the Netherlands to Australia in their INEOS Grenadier XO.

Making a stop in the scenic landscapes of Oman, they shared their experience, stating, "As we traverse the globe, our priority is comfort on every terrain, a quality the INEOS Grenadier delivers effortlessly."

With its authentic old-school design and a best-in-class engine, we are assured that we won't find ourselves stranded in any remote corners of the world during our travels."

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles LLC, remarked, "Today marks a significant milestone as we proudly introduce the INEOS Grenadier in Oman. With its unparalleled off-road capabilities, rugged design and commitment to reliability, the Grenadier is not just a vehicle; it's an embodiment of our dedication to providing the Omani market with a resilient and trustworthy companion for every adventure."

He further added, "We believe the INEOS Grenadier will set new standards, redefine exploration, and truly resonate with those who seek excellence in their off-road journeys."

Abraj showcases innovation and strategic growth at IPTC 2024

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services, Oman's leading provider of oil and gas services, participates significantly in the International Petroleum Technology Conference (IPTC 2024), hosted by Aramco in Al Dhahran, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This event marks a pivotal moment for Abraj as it showcases its leadership, innovation, and strategic partnerships in the oil and gas sector.

With a commanding 28% share in Oman's drilling market and over 15% in key well services as of 2023, Abraj Energy Services has solidified its position as a leader in the industry.

"Our participation at IPTC aims to exchange knowledge with the industry leaders in the energy sector. Hence, it aligns with our strategic expansion and growth plans for the regional and global markets."



Our exceptional market share, international alliances and partnerships, and operational excellence demonstrate our dedication to superiority and strategic vision. We're not just meeting industry standards; we're redefining them," stated Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services.

Abraj's strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabian Chevron, Kuwait Gulf Oil Company, and TotalEnergies for drilling services in early 2023 clearly indicate the company's aspirations to extend its regional presence and contribute towards energy security and economic growth at both local and global levels.

"Our human capital and industrial resources support our vision to be the energy market leader for our services. We are committed to adapting to environmental and innovative advancements to revolutionise the sector," concluded Eng Al Hamhami.

Abraj's commitment to excellence and efficiency is reflected in delivering more than 250 wells per year within the performance targets of our clients while maintaining unparalleled safety performance for over ten years.

"Our pre-qualification as an operator for Aramco and entry into the Saudi market is a significant strategic achievement for Abraj, strengthening our competitive advantage in the region," said Salah al Harthy, Business Development Director at Abraj.

Fitch assigns Omantel's Sukuk issuance final 'BB+' rating



MUSCAT: International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has assigned Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel, BB+/Stable) \$500 million senior unsecured trust certificates a final 'BB+' rating with a Recovery Rating of 'RR4'.

The sukuk were issued through the trustee, Otel Sukuk Limited (OSL). Oztel Holdings SPC Limited (Oztel) will act as guarantor to all of Omantel's obligations under the transaction documents.

The instruments were priced at 5.375% maturing in January 2031. The ratings are in line with Omantel's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) and senior unsecured rating.

OSL is an exempted company with limited liability incorporated in the Cayman Islands and has

been incorporated solely for the purpose of participating in the transactions contemplated by the transaction documents to which it is a party.

Its shares are held by Walkers Fiduciary Limited as share trustee. Omantel is the obligor, seller, buyer and service agent. Fitch understands from management that Omantel will use the proceeds for general corporate purposes, including the repayment of its bridge loan facility.

"The trust certificates' rating is aligned with the IDR of the ultimate parent and guarantor. This reflects Fitch's view that default of these senior unsecured obligations would reflect a default of Omantel in accordance with the agency's rating definitions," said Fitch in a press statement.

Tiggo 8 Pro's advanced technology redefines high-quality driving

MUSCAT: The real technology is to let you not feel the existence of technology, but to accept the experience upgrade brought by technological progress all the time. This is the greatest significance of technology.

Facing the consumer market where the pursuit of a sense of technology has become a common practice, the Tiggo 8 Pro, as the flagship SUV product of the Chery family, is a master of the latest technological achievements of Chery Automobile.

The Tiggo 8 series has become a sales force of the Chery brand since its launch in 2018 and has now successfully entered the international market.

Domestically, the Tiggo 8 is the brand's leading product in terms of sales. Overseas, the Tiggo 8 is trusted and loved by overseas consumers and has served as a state-level reception car for many times in Brazil and other countries, becoming a "gold-lettered signboard" of Chinese automobiles overseas.

The Tiggo 8's mighty power and intelligent technology make it not only the first choice for concierge cars, but also highly compatible with the technological pursuit and commercial needs of urban elites.

The combination of surging power and business elegance makes the Tiggo 8 Pro an ideal SUV for many business people around the world once it is released and has been widely praised by overseas consumers.

The 7-seat super-large space is equipped with 1.6TGDI and 7DGT super power, with an acceleration from 100 kilometres in 8.9 seconds and a maximum torque of 290N m. The steel belt adopts the BOSCH brand to improve the transmission efficiency. The transmission efficiency is as high as 92.5%, which can save fuel by 7%. The maximum power of the 1.6T in-cylinder direct injection engine is 145KW and the fuel consumption per 100 kilometres is only 6.8L.

In addition to strong power, the cockpit design of the Tiggo 8 Pro is also more user-friendly. The front seats support electric adjustment and memory functions, so that the driver and passengers can easily find the most comfortable posture.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in JD Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM (IQS). For more details please visit <https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS>. In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

For the latest Press Releases, Test Drive requests and more, please visit www.chery.om, www.youtube.com/@OmanChery, www.facebook.com/CheryAutoOman, and www.instagram.com/cheryoman. For any further details & to ascertain the availability of stocks, please visit the Chery Showroom at Wattayah.



Ooredoo wins two prestigious Stevie Awards for digital leadership

MUSCAT: Ooredoo has won two prestigious Stevie Awards for its outstanding support for the digital transformation of small businesses and for providing an upgraded digital customer experience (CX).

The accolades will be given to at the 2024 Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards in the United Arab Emirates.

The company won the 'Award for Innovation in Business-to-Business Products' category for its contributions to the digital transformation of small businesses across Oman.

The award is a recognition of Ooredoo's ongoing commitment



to supporting these entities in leveraging digital technologies and overcoming related challenges to drive their growth, competitiveness and operational excellence.

They also won the award for 'Excellence in Innovation in Technology Industries' for upgrading digital CX with the innovative and consolidated

Ooredoo App. The win is a testament to Ooredoo's ability and efforts to leverage emerging technologies to simplify and upgrade customers' digital worlds and adds to an ever-growing list of recognitions for their App.

The Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards are the only business awards programme

to recognise innovation in the workplace in 18 nations in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world's premier business awards, conferring recognition for achievement in programmes such as The International Business Awards for 22 years.

The winners will be celebrated during a gala event on 2 March at the Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.

Meanwhile, Ooredoo remains committed to meeting its customers' ever-changing and specific needs by offering tailored and smart solutions.



Madayn develops industrial sector with automation technologies



MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by its enabling arm, the Industrial Innovation Academy, works to develop industrial innovation and applied research, and build national capabilities in the industrial sector by paying attention to industries emanating from the various economic sectors in the lower sector, and identifying Industrial investment opportunities, adoption of automation technologies and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The Sohar Advanced Industries Production Company, whose operation is supervised by the Academy, is one of the initiatives to support the manufacturing sector, innovation, upgrading advanced industries, and economic diversification to achieve the Oman 2040 Vision.

Majid bin Sultan al Hinai (pictured), Executive Director of Sohar Advanced Industries Production Company, said that the factory currently includes three centres: a plastics technology centre, a mold manufacturing centre, and a centre for advanced industries, to develop technological skills and capabilities and design and manufacture models and tools for various industrial products. He pointed out that work is underway to incubate a company specialising in 3D printers, a marine drone company, and a modelling and design company.

Al Hinai explained that the number of employees in the project reaches 150, while the total number of equipment and devices in the project exceeds 100. The company owns more than 25 per cent of the total specialised cutting equipment in the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

RO 12 million Al Maskaan Village to launch at Khazaen Economic City in June

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, FEB13

Phase 1 of Al Maskaan Village – an integrated housing complex for corporate employees – is set to launch at Khazaen Economic City by around June this year, offering high standard, yet cost-competitive, accommodation for the staff of local and international companies looking to set up operations in this promising investment hub.

The facility, set on an area of 55,000 sq metres, is designed to accommodate over 3,300 junior and senior-level corporate staff of companies operating in Khazaen, helping bolster the City's overall value proposition to potential investors.

A further expansion is envisioned in the coming years, aimed at adding new capacity to accommodate a further 3,500 staff, according to Ryan Maxwell, Business Development Manager.

Speaking to the Observer, Maxwell described the Village as a mixed-use development designed to offer investors and their respective staff a broad array of amenities to support their



Overview of Al Maskaan Village at Khazaen Economic City.

operations.

"Al Maskaan Village is a one-stop solution, offering comfort and convenience to investing companies and their staff. We offer fully serviced and furnished hotel type rooms with three meals, WiFi, housekeeping and laundry services.

In addition, we can accommodate short stay guests for periods ranging from a few days to weeks and months.

Furthermore, the Village

incorporates office and retail spaces, event venues and lifestyle activities," he stated.

Construction work on the Village, comprising residential blocks, an industrial kitchen, and dedicated areas for retail and office spaces, is at an advanced stage of completion at a site adjoining the new Central Market for Vegetables and Fruit.

The project is being developed by Adrak Facilities and Services LLC, an affiliate of well-known

Omani construction firm Al Adrak Trading & Contracting Co. LLC. Total investment in Phase 1 of the project is around RO 12 million.

Importantly, Al Maskaan Village will complement Khazaen's expanding infrastructure, encompassing modern roads, connectivity with airports and seaports, and support services in the form of healthcare and hospitality.

The hub has pulled in over \$1

THE FACILITY, SET ON AN AREA OF 55,000 SQ METRES, IS DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE OVER 3,300 JUNIOR AND SENIOR-LEVEL CORPORATE STAFF OF COMPANIES OPERATING IN KHAZEN, HELPING BOLSTER THE CITY'S OVERALL VALUE PROPOSITION TO POTENTIAL INVESTORS.

billion in project investments as of end-2023 – a milestone that recently earned it the coveted 'Fastest Growing Investment Destination' accolade at the Dubai International Financial Awards.

In recent weeks, Khazaen has played host to a number of high-profile delegations led by senior Omani government officials.

Visitors have included Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat; Badr al Maamari, Secretary-General - Oman Tender Board; Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA); and members of the Municipal Council at Muscat Municipality.

They also stopped over at Al Maskaan as part of their tour of Khazaen.

OCCI delegation concludes visit to Bahrain

MUSCAT: The delegation of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) concluded yesterday its visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain with a meeting with members of the Bahraini Businessmen Association in Manama.

A number of important topics related to the development of economic cooperation between Oman and Bahrain were discussed as well as ways to increase the volume of trade exchange between the two countries.

Eng Reda bin Juma al Saleh, OCCI BoD member and head of the delegation, said: The meeting is one of the manifestations of the embodiment of Omani-Bahraini relations since ancient times, especially in economic and commercial field, driven by many commonalities that link the two countries.

Ahmed bin Abdullah, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Bahraini Businessmen Association, stressed that

the association pays great attention to developing and strengthening economic relations with Oman, being the third Gulf trading partner of Bahrain, and looked forward to increasing the volume of trade exchange and opening new horizons for investment and cooperation between Bahraini businessmen and their counterparts in Oman.

He called on Omani businessmen to seize the promising investment

opportunities available in Bahrain, as the government of Bahrain provides all the facilities and privileges to attract Gulf and foreign capital from all over the world.

At the forefront of these privileges is the freedom to transfer capital and profits, in addition to the freedom to establish companies and the absence of taxes on profits. All these advantages would push for greater economic openness for partners in the region. — **ONA**

New luxury property to bolster Muscat's appeal as a resort destination

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, FEB 13

International hotel chain Minor Hotels has unveiled plans to expand its luxury Anantara brand with a new resort in Bandar Al Khairan, Muscat. Scheduled to debut in 2026, the luxury property's addition underscores the burgeoning trend of resort developments in Muscat Governorate, positioning the capital city as a premier destination for leisure and business travellers alike.

Situated along the rugged Omani coast, the forthcoming Anantara resort will offer 121 keys, comprising 51 guest rooms, 46 chalets, and 24 villas.

Embracing contemporary luxury amidst a breathtaking natural backdrop, each accommodation unit promises a stylish retreat, with select villas boasting private pools for exclusive relaxation. Dillip Rajakarier, CEO of Minor Hotels, emphasised the intrinsic allure of Oman's coastline, asserting that the upcoming Anantara resort epitomises the brand's commitment to



Visual of the new Anantara resort planned at Bandar Al Khairan in Muscat.

excellence.

Partnering with Musstir, the real estate arm of the MB Holding Company, underscores a shared vision for elevating Oman's hospitality sector, he said.

Safana al Barwani, Managing Director of Musstir, echoed this sentiment, expressing excitement over the strengthened partnership with Minor Hotels. The collaboration seeks to showcase Oman's majestic beauty while inviting global travellers to experience its allure firsthand.

The new Anantara resort in Bandar Al Khairan will offer an array of premium facilities, including infinity swimming

pools, a kids' club lounge, and meeting spaces, catering to both leisure and business travellers.

With a focus on wellness, the property will feature an Anantara Spa and fitness centre, complemented by a private stargazing majlis for unparalleled celestial views.

Notably, this announcement adds to Minor Hotels' robust presence in the Middle East, complementing existing properties in Oman, the UAE, and Qatar. As part of a broader strategy, the company aims to reinforce its foothold in the region, capitalising on growing demand for luxury accommodations.

The new Anantara property complements a pair of similarly ambitious projects that are poised to reshape Muscat's landscape, offering sustainable living and luxury amenities. The Sustainable City – Yiti aims to become the region's first Net-Zero emissions community by 2040.

Spanning one million square meters, this project sets out to significantly reduce per capita emissions by 78 per cent compared to conventional housing, showcasing a commitment to environmental sustainability.

Additionally, Dar Global has initiated the construction of AIDA, a prominent urban development in Oman. Collaborating with Qurum Stone Development as the main contractor, AIDA integrates luxury golf, residential, and hospitality components.

This joint venture with Omran Group is slated for Phase 1 completion in 2027, offering a unique gated community and golfing destination situated by the sea, 130 meters above sea level. AIDA is designed to blend seamlessly with its natural surroundings, promising an unparalleled living experience.

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, FEB 13

A first-ever Aluminium Recycling forum opens today,

February 14, at JW Marritt Hotel, Muscat, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority.

The one-day event, hosted by Sohar Aluminium and endorsed by the Environment Authority, aims to "explore the latest trends, challenges and business opportunities" in aluminium recycling.

In a statement, the Chief Executive Officer of Sohar Aluminium Company LLC, Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, highlighted the significance of the forum.

"The Forum is aimed at bringing together aluminium industry players in Oman along with the regulatory authority for environment and discussing aluminium scrap recycling.

Further, it seeks to establish a baseline for waste from aluminium in Oman and find synergies between the industry players to maximise in-country aluminium recycling and promoting circular economy," he said.

The event will include presentations, discussions and keynote speeches from key industry players, including the International Aluminium Institute.

Key participants in the forum will include government institutions, waste management companies, private companies and aluminium recyclers.

The forum is part of the company's efforts in achieving Net-Zero neutrality. Last year, the company joined the SOHAR Net-Zero Alliance, a collaborative initiative by Sohar Port and Freezone (SOHAR) to accelerate the country's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. It is worth noting that the industrial sector is the highest carbon emitting sector in the country - accounting for 32 per cent of total emissions.



ALUMINIUM
RECYCLING
FORUM 2024

Opportunity Oman: Strategic Free Trade Agreement with the USA



DR YOUSUF BIN
HAMED AL BALUSHI

The author is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board advisor & business transformation mentor

OMANI INDUSTRIES WITH A COMPETITIVE EDGE CAN NOW REV THEIR EXPORT ENGINES. THE RENEWED FTA LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD, ALLOWING THEM TO TAP INTO THE VAST US MARKET WITH GREATER EASE. THIS TRANSLATES TO INCREASED REVENUE, JOB CREATION, AND A SIGNIFICANT BOOST TO THE NATION'S ECONOMIC WELL-BEING.

The winds of opportunity are blowing strong for Omani businesses, propelled by the invigorated Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States.

This strategic alliance, forged in 2009 and recently bolstered, unlocks a treasure trove of possibilities, paving the way for robust economic growth, flourishing trade, and a brighter future for the Sultanate of Oman.

The United States stands tall as a global superpower, drawing its influence from a complex interplay of multifaceted factors that collectively bolster its prominence and dominance in the global arena.

This commanding status is underpinned by a confluence of diverse elements that contribute significantly to its economic prowess and geopolitical influence.

Foremost among these factors is the sheer size and diversity of the American economy.

Renowned as one of the largest and most diverse economies globally, the United States boasts a multifaceted economic landscape spanning various industries, including technology, finance, healthcare, manufacturing, and more.

This diverse economic portfolio not only fortifies the nation against downturns in specific sectors but also contributes to its resilience in navigating economic challenges.

Additionally, the US leads the charge in fostering innovation and technological advancements. Centres such as Silicon Valley exemplify this, serving as thriving hubs for groundbreaking technologies and burgeoning companies.

The nation's significant investments in research and development further cement its position as a global innovation powerhouse, nurturing an environment conducive to innovation and technological advancements.

The United States' influence extends significantly through its currency, the dollar, which serves as a global reserve currency, underpinning numerous international transactions and systems. This, coupled with the nation's influential role in global institutions, greatly fortifies its economic prowess on the global



Cars account for a key share of US exports to Oman.

stage. Only 20 countries, including Oman, enjoy free trade with the US, and only 4 in the MENA region.

This puts Oman in a unique position to attract investment from India and other South Asian countries seeking to access the US market. Additionally, the direct shipping lane from Salalah Port further strengthens Oman's competitive edge.

The US, with its immense population and diverse consumer base, presents exactly that. The enhanced FTA dismantles trade barriers, slashing tariffs and simplifying regulations, making it easier than ever for Omani goods and services to reach American shores. From traditional dates and exquisite handicrafts to cutting-edge technology solutions, the possibilities are endless.

Omani industries with a competitive edge can now rev their export engines. The renewed FTA levels the playing field, allowing them to tap into the vast US market with greater ease. This translates to increased revenue, job creation, and a significant boost to the nation's economic well-being.

Imagine Omani agricultural products gracing American tables, or locally-developed software

solutions powering businesses across the Atlantic. The potential is truly boundless.

The FTA also acts as a shield against economic volatility by encouraging diversification. By reducing reliance on a single market, Oman becomes more resilient to external shocks.

This newfound flexibility allows businesses to explore new avenues, experiment with innovative products, and tap into diverse customer segments, ensuring long-term stability and growth.

The FTA fosters a dynamic exchange of knowledge and expertise. Collaboration with US counterparts opens doors to cutting-edge technologies, propelling Omani businesses to the forefront of innovation.

This paves the way for advancements in renewable energy, sustainable practices, and the development of groundbreaking solutions across various sectors.

Imagine Omani companies pioneering green technologies or collaborating on groundbreaking research projects with their American counterparts. The future is brimming with possibilities.

The FTA transcends mere economic benefits, fostering cultural exchange and mutual

understanding. Increased tourism from the US shines a spotlight on Oman's rich heritage and breathtaking landscapes.

This cultural exchange strengthens ties, promotes understanding, and opens doors for collaboration in various fields, from art and music to education and tourism.

To navigate this exciting new landscape, Omani businesses must equip themselves with the right tools. Conducting thorough market research, understanding US regulations and consumer preferences, and building strategic partnerships are crucial steps towards success.

Embracing innovation, investing in skill development, and adapting to the ever-evolving global market are equally important.

Omani companies have the potential to capitalise on "low-hanging fruit" by identifying high-tariff items in the US market and producing them for export. This can significantly boost competitiveness.

Since its 2009 launch, the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has been a success story. Bilateral trade hit a record \$4.22 billion in 2022, making the US

Oman's top non-oil export market and a top 10 trading partner overall.

Key US exports to Oman include cars, machinery, and medicine, while Oman sends industrial supplies, aluminium and fertilisers to the US.

While trade dipped slightly in 2023 to \$3.51 billion, the potential remains vibrant. Notably, Oman even qualifies for US tax credits on electric vehicles and their parts, creating a lucrative opportunity for this growing sector.

The US-Oman FTA is not just a piece of paper; it's a launchpad for Omani businesses to reach new heights. By seizing the opportunities, it presents, embracing the spirit of collaboration, and harnessing the power of innovation, Oman can chart a course towards a prosperous and sustainable future. The time to soar is now, and the sky's the limit.

Together, the US and Oman stand poised to embark on a new chapter of shared prosperity and economic growth. This strengthened FTA serves as a powerful testament to the enduring partnership between the two nations, paving the way for a brighter future for both.

US asset management firm plans to boost London team



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

Northern Trust Asset Management, the Chicago-headquartered custody bank's \$1 trillion funds business, plans to hire in London this year as it looks to build its investment team in Canary Wharf, a financial hub.

John McCareins, who became international head of Northern Trust's asset management business in June last year, said it would recruit "half a dozen or so", bolstering the number of investment professionals in London to more than 20.

McCareins said Northern Trust was prioritising growth of its fixed income business globally, given increased investor appetite for the asset class.

He said: "Interest rates have made fixed income much more relevant than it was 12 or 24 months ago". The asset manager has 66 people currently across its fixed income team worldwide, but has shifted focus to building its expertise in the asset class across Europe.

"We are in the market, actively recruiting for trading and portfolio management as we want to bring product manufacturing closer to clients," said McCareins.

"Building out a broader team of portfolio managers and traders (in the UK) gives us better access to local market insights that can help to inform our efforts with teams in the US. We continue to work and integrate with the US, but it is less of a fly-in, fly-out model and more

about having a localised approach."

Away from London, Northern Trust Asset Management hired Cuido Baltussen as head of quant international in November to be based in Amsterdam office. McCareins said two additional hires will join the unit led by Baltussen, who previously oversaw Robeco's quant fixed income team which was announced in January.

Increasing headcount comes as Northern Trust AM earmarks growth across its non-US business. "The mandate for us in our international business is to double revenues over the next five years," said McCareins.

Asset managers are gearing up for a potential flood of investor money into fixed income products, as investors look to take advantage

of attractive bond yields.

BlackRock president Rob Kapito told analysts in 2023 that "trillions" of dollars parked on the sidelines and in money market funds will "flood the fixed income market" when investors feel interest rates have peaked.

Asset managers have already gathered billions into their fixed income products, attracting 147 billion euros of new money across Europe between January and November 2023, according to Morningstar. This compared with 12.7 billion euros garnered by equity funds and outflows across most mainstream asset classes during the same period.

As well as expanding its London-based fixed income team, Northern Trust AM will be

looking to recruit more staff to work with some of its wealthiest clients in Europe. Northern Trust's global family and private investment office business has more than five hundred clients, with the average size of assets standing at \$1 billion dollars.

"That type of client requires not just a certain level of sophistication of investment and asset servicing capabilities, but an advice model that is different to what you would see working with traditional asset owners," said McCareins.

He added: "From a growth perspective, it's an area during 2024 where we will be going to market to hire investment practitioners that have experience working with families of significance."



UK wage growth slows as unemployment falls

LONDON: UK wage growth has slowed to its lowest level for more than a year while vacancies also fell back once again as the jobs market cools further, according to official figures on Tuesday.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said average regular pay, excluding bonuses, fell to 6.2% in the quarter to December, down from an upwardly revised 6.7% in the three months to November.

This was the slowest growth seen since the three months to October 2022.

But when taking Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation into account, real regular wages rose by 1.9% - a high since summer 2019, excluding the pandemic-skewed years.

This is thanks to inflation having fallen back sharply from the 41-year high of 11.1% seen in October 2022.

Vacancies also fell for the 19th straight month, down 26,000 to 932,000 in the three months to January, in a record run of falls, though the decline was the smallest for a

year-and-a-half.

In a sign that the jobs market as a whole remains largely resilient, the unemployment rate fell to 3.8% in the final three months of 2023, down from 3.9% in the three months to November and the lowest level since November to January 2023.

But the ONS cautioned that the unemployment rate should be "treated with additional caution" as it continues to overhaul its Labour Force Survey due to low response rates.

The data also showed inactivity remaining at 21.9% in the three months to December, having last month seen big upward revisions dating back to at least April to June 2023 as the UK struggles with high levels of those off work due to long-term sickness.

More timely data estimated that the number of workers on payrolls rose by 48,000 between December and January to 30.4 million, though this is subject to revision. — dpa

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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Golden Jewel Trading Contracting(SPC)**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1301346**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from **RO 10,000.000** to **10,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

CHANGE OF NAME

I **Anil** (holder of Indian Passport No **N7611753**) son of / daughter of **Jagdish Prasad** having permanent residence in **Ward No 22 Maliyo. KA. Mohalla Rajgarh Churu Rajasthan** (complete postal address in India) and presently residing in **Barka, Muscat, Oman** (complete postal address in Oman) intend to change my name from **Anil** (old name) to **Anil Saini** (new name) for all practical purpose. Any objection towards my name change may please be communicated to Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, P.Box No 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.



Indian Social Club Oman (SUR BRANCH)

NOTICE CALLING AGM

Members are hereby notified that seventh Annual General Meeting of the Indian Social Club, Sur branch is scheduled on Friday, 8th March 2024, at 7.00 p.m. Venue: Sur Club Auditorium.

AGENDA

1. Reading of the notice calling the meeting by the General Secretary.
2. Opening address by the President
3. Approval of the minutes of the previous Annual General Body meeting.
4. Report by General Secretary.
5. Presentation of the Accounts of 2023 by the Treasurer.
6. Discussion and Approval.
7. Appointment of auditor for 2024.
8. Any other points raised by the members with the permission of the Chair.

Only those who are already members of the Indian Social Club Oman, Sur branch, and have regularized the membership by payment of the prescribed fees for 2024 on or before 15.02.2024 are entitled to attend the AGM.

GENERAL SECRETARY, INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB, SUR BRANCH.

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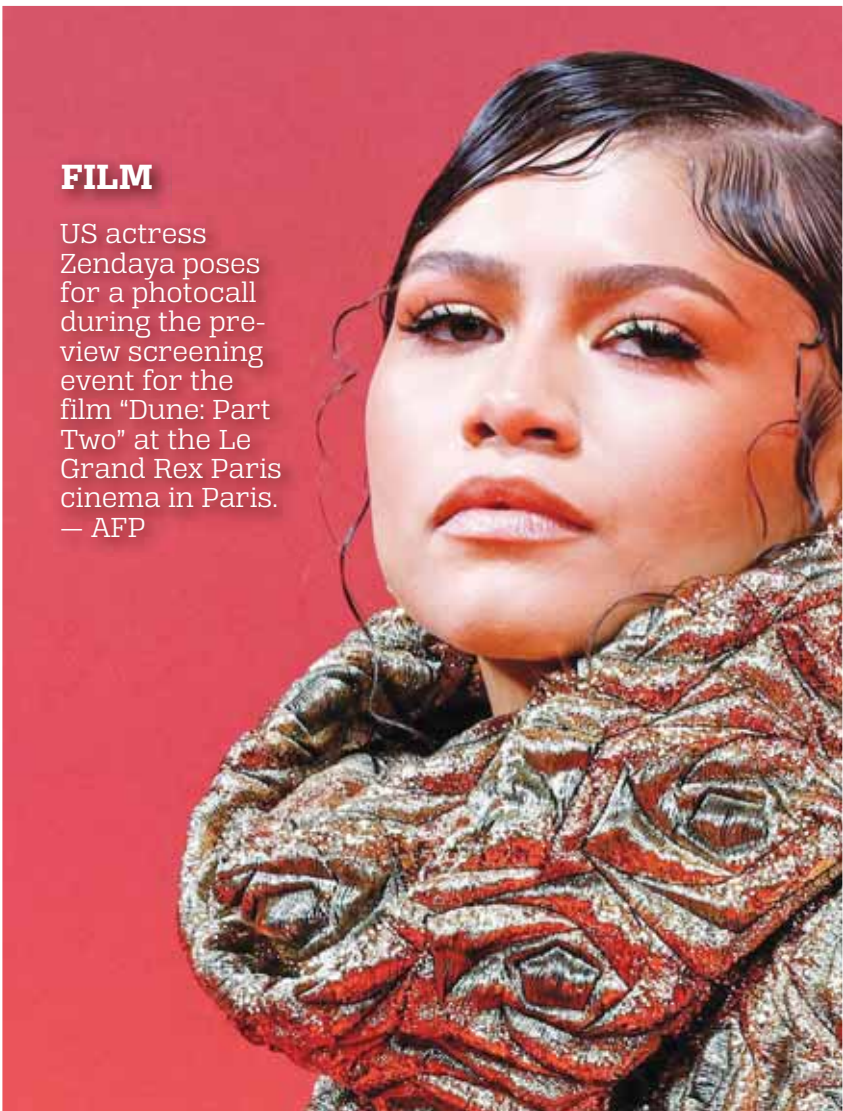
FASHION

Models walk the runway for the Tory Burch show during New York Fashion Week. — AFP



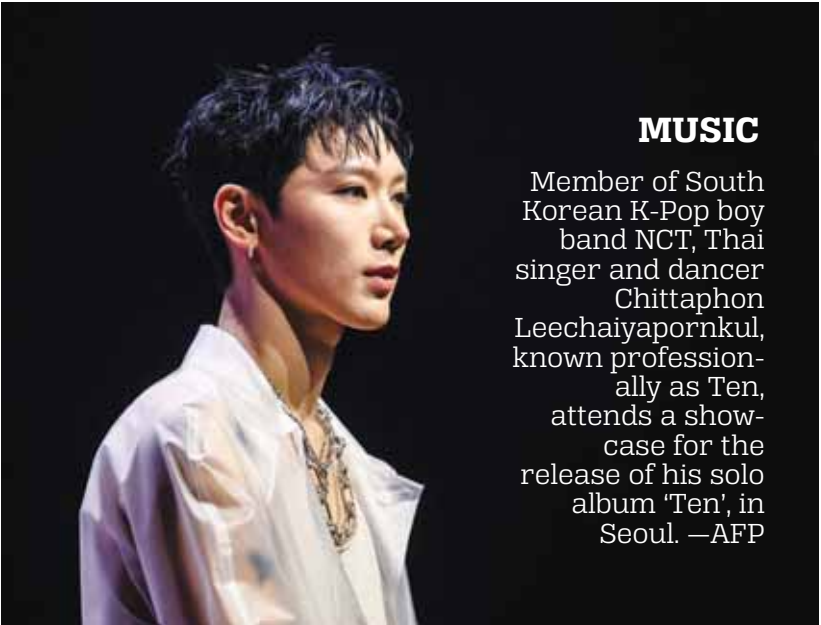
LIFESTYLE

An agriculture specialist officer from the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) inspects possible harmful pests found on flowers before they travel into the United States, at the Miami International Airport in Florida. — AFP



FILM

US actress Zendaya poses for a photocall during the pre-view screening event for the film "Dune: Part Two" at the Le Grand Rex Paris cinema in Paris. — AFP



MUSIC

Member of South Korean K-Pop boy band NCT, Thai singer and dancer Chittaphon Leechaiyapornkul, known professionally as Ten, attends a showcase for the release of his solo album 'Ten', in Seoul. —AFP



CULTURE

A woman walks past a dragon figure at the Longtan park fair on the second day of the Lunar New Year of the Dragon in Beijing. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 14, 2024 | SHAABAN 4, 1445 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



Enjoying an immersive experience in Nizwa with electric carts

The city of Nizwa offers a rich cultural experience, with traditional Omani markets, mosques and events showcasing music and cuisine. Its streets are now frequented by electronic carts used to tour the old city in minutes. Guided by Anas al Kasbi, here's a look of why these carts are a welcome option in the burgeoning scene of one of Oman's most popular old cities... **P20**

FILM

Spielberg praises stellar year of cinema as Oscars nominees converge

STEVEN SPIELBERG PRAISED a stellar year for cinema as Oscars rivals gathered in a packed Beverly Hills ballroom for the Academy's annual nominee luncheon on Monday.

The event brought together A-list stars, directors, producers and behind-the-scenes artists, offering them a chance to meet the competition and charm a few voters over champagne and canapes ahead of next month's awards.

"Oppenheimer" is widely thought to be leading the race for best picture at the Academy Awards on March 10, but Spielberg — a producer on rival movie "Maestro" — said it had also been a banner year beyond Christopher Nolan's atomic age drama.

"This has been a great and eclectic year for films — one of the best years in terms of high quality, in my opinion, of the past decade," he said.

"Maestro," Bradley Cooper's biopic of legendary conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein, "is Bradley's triumph," said Spielberg.

The two movies are part of a widely acclaimed and wildly diverse best picture shortlist, spanning from the \$1 billion-grossing "Barbie" to festival hits such as "American Fiction," "The Holdovers," "Past Lives" and "The Zone of Interest."

Any potential hostilities or tensions between rivals were absent at the gala on Monday.

Emma Stone and Lily Gladstone — the two frontrunners for best actress with "Poor Things" and "Killers of the Flower Moon," respectively, who have both been campaigning hard for months — shared a long private chat and emotional hug before heading off to mingle.

Robert Downey Jr, the best supporting actor favourite for "Oppenheimer," kept his fellow nominees entertained with a joke



while a giant "class photo" of the hundreds of nominees had to be retaken.

And while Margot Robbie and Greta Gerwig may have been "snubbed," according to some, in the Oscars' best actress and best director categories, both attended on behalf of the blockbuster movie anyway.

Gerwig received perhaps the loudest cheer of the day as her nomination for writing the film's screenplay was announced, while pink-clad Robbie — a producer of "Barbie" — was a popular figure in the centre of the group photo.

"It can be hectic," joked Billie Eilish, a best song nominee for "Barbie," speaking to AFP as she was immediately swarmed with requests for selfies upon entering an already star-packed gala.

Though not technically nominated, among the most in-demand actors was

Messi, the loyal and adorable canine star of French best picture contender "Anatomy of a Fall," whose director and writer Justine Triet also attended.

- 'GLOBAL' NOMINEES -

Praising "an amazing year for cinema," Academy president Janet Yang noted the highly "global" makeup of this year's nominees, who were selected by voting members from 93 different countries.

Particularly noticeable in the room was Bobi Wine, the Ugandan pop star-turned-politician, who sported a bright red beret along with his black tuxedo.

Wine's 2021 bid for Uganda's presidency was met with a violent crackdown, and is the subject of nominated documentary "Bobi Wine: The People's President."

In a recent interview, he said the upcoming Oscars could be "a game changer" for his country, as the West "will no longer have the luxury to pretend that they don't see what is happening in Uganda."

Wine's film is up for best documentary against "20 Days in Mariupol," whose director took a break from making two more films about Russia's war of his home country Ukraine to attend the luncheon.

"It's not enough to just make films and survive. It's important to speak about this," Mstyslav Chernov said.

"Almost no one" is still paying attention to Ukraine, he added. — AFP

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WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 14 | 2024

19

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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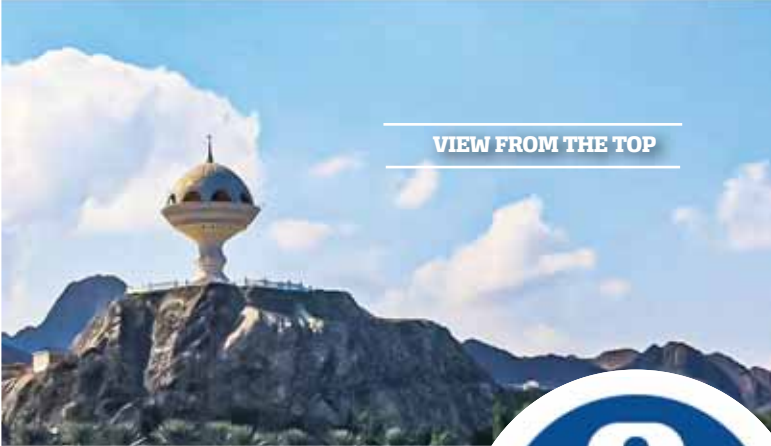


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Enchanted by Teatro Carlo Felice's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

BY GEORGINA BENISON
PHOTOS BY KHALID AL BUSAIDI

Teatro Carlo Felice Di Genova, in collaboration with the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), presented two spectacular performances of Benjamin Britten's 1960 Opera based on Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" last weekend. The company brought a children's choir of 24, an orchestra of 50 musicians, 24 soloists, 27 staff on tour – plus seven designers. It was a massive undertaking following the world premiere of this production in Genova last October 2023. The results were stunning, visually and aurally, for this 3-hour composition which defies operatic category or precedent.

Most immediately striking was the Set, created by Irish Designer Gary McCann who is renowned for combining contemporary and historical elements, while exploiting cutting edge technology. The curtain rose to reveal a rotating projection of a magical woodland scene on – and later through – gauze, giving a 3D framed screen effect with tremendous depth. As the drama unfolded the solid trees, suspended from above, were able to move freely giving the illusion of a "scary, forbidden and constantly moving forest, ruled by fairies". Puck too made most of his entrances by floating down on wires between trees, as if from the Otherworld. Fairies appeared surprisingly through concealed trap doors on stage in Act Two as Titania – sustained beautifully throughout by Californian soprano, Sydney Mancasola – awakes from her drug-induced slumber, singing an impossibly high, lyrical coloratura aria.

In Act One, as Oberon sings the lovely, "I know a Bank Where the Wild Thyme Blows" over a deep cello counter-melody, the mossy, uneven foreground appeared in front of the frame. It was realistic but quite a trip hazard for some of the cast, especially Theseus (beautifully delivered by American bass, Scott Wilde) and Hippolyta (sung by Bulgarian Mezzo, Kamelia Kader in an animated performance) in Act 3.

Along with McCann, the South African Lighting Designer, John Bishop was invited by acclaimed British Director, Lawrence Dale, to create evocative, mystical light and video effects. The results were mesmerising.

Britten composed the Opera to celebrate the re-opening of the Jubilee Hall in Aldeburgh, his birthplace, and the Libretto was transcribed concisely from the original Shakespeare text by Britten's long-term companion, counter-tenor Peter Pears. Britten's musical language – certainly not to everyone's taste – is more polytonal, neo-classical with a fluid key structure than the contemporary serialism going on in Europe.

Britten's love of that vocal register partly explains his decision to cast Oberon as a counter-tenor, first created and performed by Alfred Della in 1960. On Friday the role was performed superbly by South African Christopher Ainslie. His goblin, Puck – a rhythmic speaking role but central to the drama of the Fairies – was interpreted superbly by the agile Italian actor and Assistant Director, Matteo Anselmi.

It is an unconventional Opera in

low him, symbolised in her consistently high, virtuoso tessitura. The foursome is completed by Hermia, sung compellingly by a lamenting young American Mezzo, Annie Reilly, and the love-struck Lysanda, performed with tender pathos by Tenor, Peter Kirk.

Their dream-like Quartet in Act 3 as they awake, one by one to hunting horn calls, is atmospheric and moving: "And I have found Demetrius, like a jewel, Mine own, and not mine own" as they anticipate their forthcoming triple marriage.

These characters are juxtaposed with the earthy, rustic artisans or 'rude mechanics' with thespian aspirations, for whom Britten composed amusing parodies on English Folksong with West Country accents and ballads! He uses much more brass, such as quirky, punctuating brass chords and sliding trombones to emphasise their slapstick, humorous nature.

Their first appearance in Act One was just delightful, Peter Quince – sung by an effervescent Bass, David Ireland – assumes the role of Director for their play and tells Nick Bottom – performed with robust stamina and astounding vocal control throughout by British Bass, David Shipley – that he will play Pyramus, though Bottom wants to take all the parts! In the famous donkey-head scene, Shipley imitates the sound of braying brilliantly in his solo 'ee-aw' then lies down to sleep, embracing Titania. Francis Flute must sing the woman's role as he is clean-shaved, though he protests vehemently. In Act 2 Flute, played by Scottish Spieltenor, Seumas Beggs, made an hilarious stab at Thisby in a parody of an operatic soprano aria, accompanied by flute and harp.

At the beginning of Act 3 the esteemed Italian Maestro of the ensemble and season, Donato Renzetti, received an enthusiastic applause as he entered the pit. At the Finale, the whole cast received rousing curtain calls and the audience would not let them leave. Bravo to ROHM for yet another night's stellar success – a perfect Dream.

FASHION

Tory Burch wants to make 'everyday sublime' at New York Fashion Week



STRIDING DOWN THE runway to music from The Cure and Joy Division on Monday, models at New York Fashion Week paraded skirts inspired by lampshades – US designer Tory Burch's celebration of making "the everyday sublime".

The brightly coloured and sometimes shiny skirts seemed to stand alone at the waist and were designed to fold up "almost like origami," the designer said.

"I wanted sharp corners, but... the skirt actually comes off and it folds up into nothing, is almost like

dress protrude from a pleated jacket.

"I think it's about a woman who has confidence and is looking for optimism in the world," she said.

SEEKING BALANCE

True to the image of the Carolina Herrera brand founded in 1981, its new autumn-winter collection is characterised by precise, streamlined silhouettes, enhanced by ruffles on sleeves and skirts, as well as embroidery.

The fashion house's classics



origami," she said, celebrating the 20th anniversary of her brand.

Among the most singular works in her Fall/Winter 2024 collection, the skirts were worn with lightweight tops featuring long sleeves and hoods, during a runway show under the arcades of Manhattan's Great Library.

"I've tried to think about how to make the everyday sublime," she said. Burch's brand has long been lauded for its classic looks but it now seems to be evolving toward becoming more contemporary.

She uses very light materials but gives them character with raw-cut seams, adds multi-coloured fringes to a long sequined coat, or makes a delicate ruffled

are all there, including pencil or ruffled skirts and black-and-white checked suits.

Wes Gordon, the house's artistic director, has really made his mark on colours, however.

He has taken the brand away from basics such as black, white and brown to combine blocks of red or navy blue with blacks, pinks, yellows and even florals.

All of this was designed to dress a woman who is "not shy, who is powerful, who was confident and loves clothes," he said.

Gordon said he sought a balance between the "drama" of the colours and colour-blocking against the "precision and the discipline about the cut." – AFP



Enjoying an immersive experience in Nizwa with electric carts



BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
@khalid_albalushi 94

Nizwa is a sought-after tourist destination due to its historical significance, exemplified by the well-preserved Nizwa Fort, and its status as a former capital. The city offers a rich cultural experience, with traditional Omani markets, mosques and events showcasing music and cuisine. Surrounded by the stunning Hajar Mountains, Nizwa boasts natural beauty, inviting exploration through hiking and camping. The bustling Nizwa Souq is a highlight for visitors, offering a diverse array of goods. Combining history, culture, natural landscapes, and vibrant markets,

Nizwa provides travellers with an immersive and authentic Omani experience.

As my small family and I approached the grand wooden doors guarding the entrance to the Nizwa Souq, my gaze was immediately drawn to the spectacle before us. Classic tourist carts, adorned in opulent hues of black and red, embellished the scene, each one varying in size and exuding an air of luxury. While I had glimpsed these magnificent vehicles on social media in the past, nothing compared to witnessing them firsthand, especially in the company of my loved ones.

These iconic carts provided us with an unforgettable experience, not only imparting valuable information, but also saving us precious time. Manoeuvring through the alleys of Nizwa Souq and the Al Aqr village in just 30 minutes, they facilitated our exploration, particularly as I cradled my one-and-a-half-year-old daughter in my arms.

Led by the knowl-

edgeable tour guide, Anas al Kasbi, from Nizwa tourism carts, our journey became a captivating voyage through time, seamlessly bridging modernity with heritage and history. Anas enriched our excursion with profound cultural insights about the region, delving into the history of

carts have emerged as a beacon of tourism in the historic Al Aqr, nestled within Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. Beyond merely transporting passengers, they serve as immersive educational platforms, featuring multimedia content on tablets that showcase Omani customs, traditions



Nizwa, its revered imams, ancient mosques, and the transformation of traditional homes into charming inns and hotels for modern-day visitors.

Modern electric tourist carts are eco-friendly vehicles designed for sightseeing in busy tourist centres. Powered by electric motors, they emit zero emissions and operate quietly, reducing air and noise pollution.

These carts enhance accessibility for visitors with limited mobility and provide a comfortable touring experience with features like cushioned seating and climate control. Additionally, they offer cost-efficiency, lower maintenance and advanced safety features such as seat belts and roll-over protection.

By providing an alternative mode of transportation, electric carts help alleviate traffic congestion and make tourist attractions more accessible to a wider range of visitors. Overall, they contribute to sustainable tourism practices, offering an enjoyable and environmentally friendly way to explore popular destinations.

These classic electric tourist

and culinary delights. Moreover, these classic carts serve as a testament to the community's commitment to preserving its rich identity and heritage. They offer a glimpse into the tireless efforts of residents in crafting architectural marvels and cultivating the land to sustain their livelihoods.

Other than providing comfort for tourists, the carts are also convenient and friendly to people with disabilities.

The presence of these classic carts symbolises not only innovation, but also a reverence for the past. They afford tourists and history enthusiasts alike the opportunity to witness the evolution of design and engineering while immersing themselves in the vibrant tapestry of Nizwa's cultural landscape.

Beyond their historical and cultural significance, these classic carts exude an aura of beauty, luxury and sophistication, elevating the tourist experience to unparalleled heights. With every ride, passengers are enveloped in an atmosphere of elegance, allowing them to truly appreciate the timeless allure of Nizwa and its surrounding areas.