

Oman, Serbia discuss cooperation

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Ivica Dačić, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation, including ongoing efforts to conclude an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation between Oman and Serbia. During a phone call, the two ministers discussed several regional and international matters. They also stressed the importance of advocating a language of dialogue and espousing constructive consultation to find tangible solutions for the realisation of stability and peace for all.

SUNRISE - 05:37 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:18 AM

DHUHR - 12:10 PM

ASR - 03:36 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:37 PM

ISHA - 07:52 PM



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

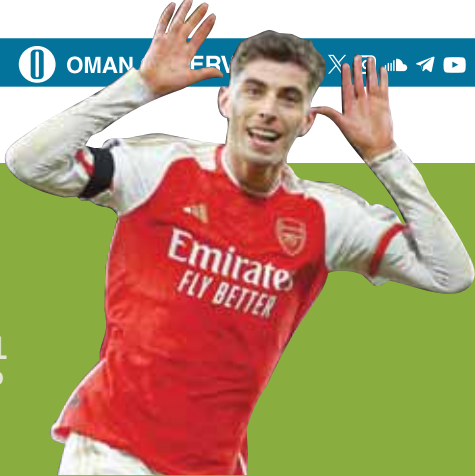
P15

GALFAR SECURES MAJOR RAIL CONTRACT, POISED FOR INFRA DIVERSIFICATION



P12

GOAL FEST PUTS ARSENAL CLEAR ON TOP OF LEAGUE



P20

TRAVELLING TO THE LOST CITIES OF OMAN



RIYADH

SAUDI KING LEAVES HOSPITAL AFTER ‘MEDICAL CHECKS’



Saudi King Salman left the hospital after medical tests, the state television said. King Salman earlier entered hospital for “routine examinations” on Wednesday, the Royal Court said. The tests were taking place at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah and were expected to last “a few hours”, the Royal Court said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA). State media on Tuesday showed footage of King Salman attending a weekly cabinet meeting. King Salman last entered the same hospital in Jeddah nearly two years ago, in May 2022, going in for a colonoscopy and staying for just over a week for other tests and “some time to rest”, SPA reported at the time. King Salman underwent surgery to remove his gall bladder in 2020. He was also admitted to hospital in March 2022 to undergo what state media described as “successful medical tests” and to change the battery of his pacemaker.

EARLIER REPORT ON P7

MUSCAT

MOVE TO CHECK FAULTY READINGS

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Authority for Public Services Regulation recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to manage electricity metres. Director-General of Standards and Metrology at the ministry, Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili, said: “Due to numerous complaints about inaccurate readings, we have decided to implement a calibration system for all incoming electrical devices in the country. This measure is expected to resolve these complaints.” According to Al Shukaili, the ministry is planning to recalibrate more than 400 smart electrical metres to ensure accuracy of readings.

DETAILS ON P3

Royal Academy fosters future-ready leadership community

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) celebrated the graduation of the third cohort of the National Programme for Developing Leaders and Future Foresight, an initiative pivotal in preparing national leaders for the rapidly changing global landscape. The programme was designed in partnership with the Ministry of Finance (Offset) and the Eller Centre at the University of Arizona.

The programme, which aligns with Oman Vision 2040, focuses on developing critical leadership skills among 32 middle management officials from various sectors of the state’s administrative apparatus. This cohort’s graduation marks another step forward in the academy’s commitment to fostering a future-ready leadership community within Oman, in collaboration with the

Ministry of Finance and the Eller Centre for Executive Education at the University of Arizona. The comprehensive programme is designed to cultivate a broad spectrum of leadership capabilities, including systematic institutional thinking, innovation driving, strategic decision-making, and agility in leadership. Dr Fathiya bint Abdullah al Rashdi, Acting Vice-President for Programme Affairs,

underscored the programme’s holistic approach, emphasising the development of a growth mindset, resilience, and effective communication among participants. The multi-faceted learning modules, enriched by the partnership with Eller Centre, aim to instil participants with the latest leadership strategies and insights, supported by mentors and supervisors from the private sector. Highlighting

the importance of this occasion, Dr Luigi A Pecoraro, Executive Director of Eller Executive Education at the Eller College of Management, University of Arizona, extended his heartfelt congratulations to the graduates. He praised the Royal Academy of Management for its partnership and shared commitment to providing an innovative and impactful educational journey.

DETAILS ON P2

HM message to President of Tunisia



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Kais Saied of the Republic of Tunisia. The message deals with bilateral relations between the two countries and their peoples. The message was handed over by Hilal bin Abdullah al Sinani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Tunisia, when Nabil Ammar, Tunisia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad, received him at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tunis on Wednesday. — ONA

OMAN AND BAHRAIN CALL FOR DE-ESCALATION

Israel says ‘moving ahead’ with Rafah operation

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Abdullatif Rashid al Zayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Kingdom of Bahrain, underscored the historical ties binding Oman and Bahrain. They also touched on agenda of the joint committee’s upcoming session, due to be held in Oman this year.

In the light of the forthcoming 33rd Arab Summit, scheduled to be held Bahrain, on May 16, Sayyid Badr expressed Oman’s confidence in the success of the summit and in producing constructive results that serve the general regional interest and reflect the directives of the Arab leaders and the aspirations of the peoples of the region for security and peace for all.

Oman is also confident that the summit would achieve more accomplishments that bring benefits and prosperity and boost joint and constructive Arab action, affirmed Sayyid Badr.

The two sides also reviewed the regional developments and stressed the importance of



A protester chants slogans in support of Palestinians in Gaza, outside Columbia University in New York City, US, on Wednesday. – Reuters

de-escalation. In this context, the two ministers affirmed that emphasis should be laid on ceasefire efforts in Gaza to reach a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian cause on the basis of the two-state solution in accordance with international

resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. Meanwhile, a senior Israeli defence official said on Wednesday that Israel’s military is poised to evacuate Palestinian civilians from Rafah and assault the hold-outs in the southern Gaza Strip city. — Agencies

Weather system till Saturday as restoration work continues

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

The Basic Services Sector of the Subcommittee for Emergency Situations Management in Al Buraimi Governorate confirmed the completion of the return of most of the services that were affected as a result of the weather condition in the recent period.

The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office said the current weather system will continue until Saturday, but it will be mainly concentrated over Al

Hajar Mountains especially the eastern range.

Thunderstorms of varying intensity, accompanied by hailstones, were reported in parts of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah South, and Al Sharqiyah North governorates, and are likely over Al Hajar Mountains. A good amount of rain was reported in parts of of Samayil and Al Mudhaibi.

Sandstorm alert as well as dust rising was issued for Qarn Alam, Fahud and Haima. Along the coasts of Sea of Oman, winds



Heavy rains in the Sultanate of Oman in general and Al Buraimi Governorate in particular have left spectacular scenes and some of which drew a lot of local people keen to spend most enjoyable time in the lap of nature. All dams of the Wilayat of Mahadha were full to the brim and retained 3,331 million cubic metres of water.

will be northerly to northeasterly, light to moderate becoming variably light at night, while over the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea it will be southwesterly, moderate and occasionally fresh and over rest of the governorates winds are expected to be northwesterly, light to moderate.

The sea state is expected to be moderate along the Arabian Sea and western Musandam coasts with maximum wave height 2.0 metres and slight to moderate along the rest of the coasts of the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman-USA Forum explores investment exchange

WASHINGTON: The first Oman-USA Economic Forum discussed in Washington D.C. enhancing trade and investment exchange between the two countries.

The forum was organised by the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the United States of America (USA) in conjunction with the US Chamber of Commerce on the sidelines of the Second Oman-USA Strategic Dialogue.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, delivered a speech in which he underscored the importance of the historical and strategic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the USA, and the efforts made to promote trade and investment exchange between the two countries to achieve goals of the Oman Vision 2040.

Ana Escrogima, USA Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, appreciated all efforts aimed at strengthening cooperation and economic relations between the two countries.

The forum included two discussion sessions on themes pertaining to “Trade and Investment” and “Renewable Energy” during which specialists from both sides spoke about the opportunities offered by the Sultanate of Oman in these two sectors and how to maximise the benefit from the free trade agreement signed between the two countries. The forum was attended by US government officials, representatives of US companies, and figures from the private sector.

— ONA



Shaikh Khalifa al Harthy delivered a speech in which he underscored the importance of the historical and strategic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the USA. — ONA



Salalah Autism Centre opens

SALALAH: Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities on Wednesday celebrated the opening of a building for the autism unit (Salalah Autism Centre). The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

The opening included a visual presentation by OQ Salalah, which funded the project as part of its efforts to strengthen its partnership with the Ministry of Social Development.

The project also promotes the company's community support initiatives aimed at empowering autistic children and integrating them into society.

Omaima bint Hassan al Nahdiyah, Head of Al Wafa Centre in Salalah, said that the facility features a broad range of rehabilitation equipment that will help extend special education to 80 autistic children, as well as physical and psychological rehabilitation.

Salalah Autism Centre will also help spread awareness among members of society about the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The autism centre's building, which occupies an area of 1,550 square metres, will provide a safe environment of therapy for autistic children, to be groomed by a highly qualified team of technicians and specialists who have extensive experience in the field of ASD.

Besides therapeutic assistance, the centre also provides support for families of autistic children, advising them about standard ways to deal with disorders and adapt to this type of disability.

— ONA



Salalah Autism Centre will also help spread awareness among members of society about the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). — ONA

TRANSPORT MINISTRY LAUNCHES DIGITAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Wednesday launched the first edition of the Digital Excellence Award in the government sector.

The award forms as part of the ministry's commitment to accelerate the pace of digital transition and enhance innovation in the government sector in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. It also seeks to upgrade the Sultanate of Oman's ranking in the Global Competitiveness Index for e-Government Development by raising awareness about the concept of innovation and the culture of digital transition.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that the Digital Excellence Award embodies the ministry's determination to utilise the latest technologies in government services, apply new standards of excellence in rendering government services and provide a model to be emulated by others.

The award is also aimed at rewarding outstanding entities operating in the field of digital transition, he added.

The Digital Proficiency Award falls in 4 digital transition categories classified as: Government institutions, initiatives, services and human resources.

The first category comprises “The Best Institution in Achieving Government Digital Transition” and “The Best Institution in Achieving Digital User Experience and Beneficiary Satisfaction”.

The second category has three sections: “The Best Integrated Digital Initiative for Digital Transition”, “The Best Initiative for Electronic Community Participation” and “The Best Initiative in Innovation and Utilisation of Advanced Technologies”.

The third category includes “The Best Digital Government Service Provided to Beneficiaries” and “The Best Digital Government Service Provided to the Corporate Sector”.

The fourth category is dedicated to “The Best Team for E-Government Transition” and “The Best Employee Leading Digital Change”.

— ONA



The award forms as part of the ministry's commitment to accelerate the pace of digital transition and enhance innovation in the government sector. — ONA

RAM graduates third cohort of ‘Leaders’ programme

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) celebrated the graduation of the third cohort of the National Programme for Developing Leaders and Future Foresight, an initiative pivotal in preparing national leaders for the rapidly changing global landscape. The programme was designed in partnership with the Ministry of Finance (Offset) and the Eller Center at the University of Arizona.

The programme, which aligns with Oman Vision 2040, focuses on developing critical leadership skills among thirty-two middle management officials from various sectors of the state's administrative apparatus.

This cohort's graduation marks another step forward in the Academy's commitment to fostering a future-ready leadership community within Oman, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and the Eller Center for Executive Education at the University of Arizona.

The comprehensive programme is designed to cultivate a broad spectrum of leadership capabilities, including systematic institutional thinking, innovation driving, strategic decision-making, and agility in leadership.

Dr Fathiya bint Abdullah al Rashdiyah, Acting Vice-President for Programme Affairs, underscored the programme's holistic approach, emphasising the development of a growth mindset, resilience, and effective communication among participants. The multi-faceted learning modules, enriched by the partnership with Eller Center, aim to instil participants with the latest leadership strategies and insights, supported by mentors and supervisors from the private sector.

Highlighting the importance of this occasion, Dr Luigi A. Pecoraro, Executive Director of Eller Executive Education at the Eller College of Management, University of Arizona, extended his heartfelt congratulations to the graduates. He praised the Royal Academy of Management for its partnership and shared commitment to providing an innovative and impactful educational journey. Dr Pecoraro noted that the graduates are now well-equipped to make a significant and enduring impact on Oman's future growth and

warmly welcomed them into the extended alumni network of both Eller Executive Education and the University of Arizona, wishing them continued success and a lasting impact.

The training journey of this cohort spanned six months, covering five modules designed to equip national leaders with essential skills for effective networking, cultural understanding within institutions, and influential communication strategies. The Royal Academy of Management continues to play a crucial role in Oman's developmental strategy, contributing to the creation of a dynamic leadership pool capable of navigating and leading in an ever-evolving global context.

— ONA



This cohort's graduation marks a step forward in the Academy's commitment to fostering a future-ready leadership community within Oman. — ONA



OMAN EMBASSY IN BELGIUM LAUNCHES ‘DIPLOMATIC WORLD’ MAGAZINE

BRUSSELS: The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Kingdom of Belgium launched the *Diplomatic World* magazine in Brussels. The inaugural ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs.

It was attended by top Belgian officials, heads of diplomatic

missions, businessmen and journalists.

In a speech on the occasion, Al Harthy stressed the importance of bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Belgium. He also commended the role of the media in consolidating ties between the two countries.

He pointed out that the



The inaugural ceremony saw the display of photographs about landmark heritage and tourism sights in Oman

magazine’s articles, which cover meetings with a number of Omani officials, will help upgrade the status of Oman at the international level.

For her part, Ru’aa bint Issa al Zedjاليyah, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Belgium, expressed hope that the ‘73rd’ issue of the magazine would help establish bridges of communication and

strengthen diplomatic relations between countries of the world.

The inaugural ceremony saw the display of photographs about landmark heritage and tourism sights in Oman, as well as a collection of books by Belgian writer-cum-journalist Maria Dekeersmaecker, who published a number of articles and books about Oman.

— ONA

MoU to combat faulty electricity meter readings

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Authority for Public Services Regulation recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to manage electricity meters.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Director-General of Standards and Metrology at the ministry, Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili, said; “Due to numerous complaints about inaccurate readings, we have decided to implement a calibration system for all incoming electrical devices in the country. This measure is expected to resolve these complaints.” According to Al Shukaili, the ministry is planning to recalibrate more than 400 smart electrical items to ensure the accuracy of readings.

Earlier this year, the APSR announced that it will implement a direct compensation system for electricity service subscribers. According to officials, operating



Due to numerous complaints about inaccurate readings, we have decided to implement a calibration system for all incoming electrical devices in the country

IMAD BIN KHAMIS AL SHUKAILI
DG of Standards and Metrology

companies will be required to pay the compensation directly by deducting the amount from the electricity bill.

According to al Shukaili, the Directorate will start recalibrating water meter readers in the second half of this year.

OMAN WINS AWARDS AT SITFY MONODRAMA FESTIVAL



WARSAW: Represented by Mazoon Theatre, the Sultanate of Oman, has won several awards at the Sitfy Monodrama Festival, held in the Republic of Poland. The contest saw the participation of competitors from 12 countries around the world. Director Yousef al Balushi won the Best Scenography Award, while actor Ahmed al Oweini won the Best Actor Award. — ONA

OMAN, FAO HOLD CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON CLIMATE RISKS

MUSCAT: The FAO Office in Muscat on Wednesday organised a consultative meeting with the authorities concerned in the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting was attended by representatives of the sectors of agriculture, water, environment and climate change.

The meeting relates to a framework agreement signed by the FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to start a new climate-friendly activity within the context of a project titled “Building a Resilient Environment and



Agricultural and Water Sustainable Resources in the Sultanate of Oman”. The project is funded by the Green Climate Fund.

The meeting outlined the project’s objectives, the scope of its studies and the programme of its

implementation. A panel discussion offered an opportunity to listen to the views of the participants.

The project activities include means of developing a communication and coordination network that connect representatives of government institutions and private sector establishments operating in the fields of farming, water supplies and climate change sectors. The network is entrusted to enhance integration among all to help adapt to climate change.

— ONA

Summit on women’s empowerment next month

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Scheduled for May 7, 2024, the Al Mar’a Summit & Awards aims to delve into crucial aspects of women’s empowerment and highlight their pivotal role in advancing societies under the subtitle ‘Women’s contribution in shaping the future: Empowering Women — Reality and Opportunities.’

The summit will feature a series of sessions addressing key topics pertinent to women’s empowerment. One such session will focus on enhancing women’s partnership in economic decision-making, emphasising the importance of gender-inclusive policies and initiatives in driving economic growth.

Additionally, discussions will revolve around the effectiveness of women’s support programmes in advancing social roles, highlighting successful models and strategies.

Another critical area of discourse will centre on the role of educational and training institutions



One such session will focus on enhancing women’s partnership in economic decision-making, emphasising the importance of gender-inclusive policies and initiatives in driving economic growth

in enhancing national competencies among women. Recognising education as a cornerstone of empowerment, the summit will explore ways to ensure equitable access to quality education and skill development opportunities for women.

Empowering women in entrepreneurship and fostering their competitiveness in the business landscape will also be a focal point. Through insights into successful entrepreneurial endeavours led by women, attendees will gain valuable perspectives on

harnessing female talent and innovation.

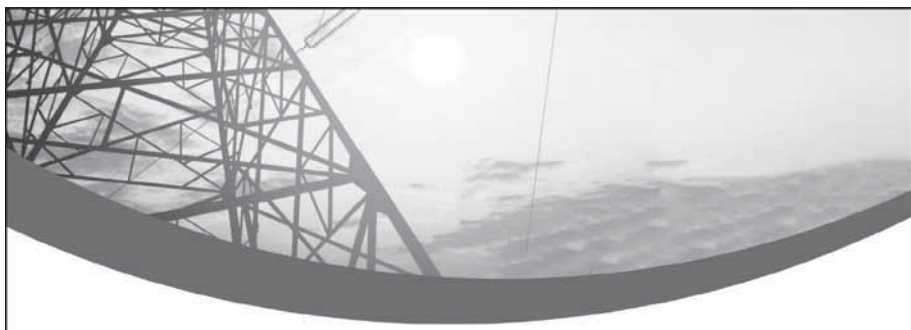
Despite progress, challenges persist for women across various sectors. The summit will provide a platform to address these challenges, fostering dialogue and collaboration to overcome barriers to women’s advancement.

Furthermore, the summit will review successful experiences in integrating women into leadership roles, acknowledging the transformative impact of female leadership on

organisational and societal dynamics.

Crucially, the discussions and initiatives at Al Mar’a Summit & Awards align with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises gender equality and women’s empowerment as key drivers of sustainable development.

By bringing together leaders, policymakers and advocates, the summit aims to catalyse positive change and propel women towards greater opportunities and achievements in Oman and beyond.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tenders:-

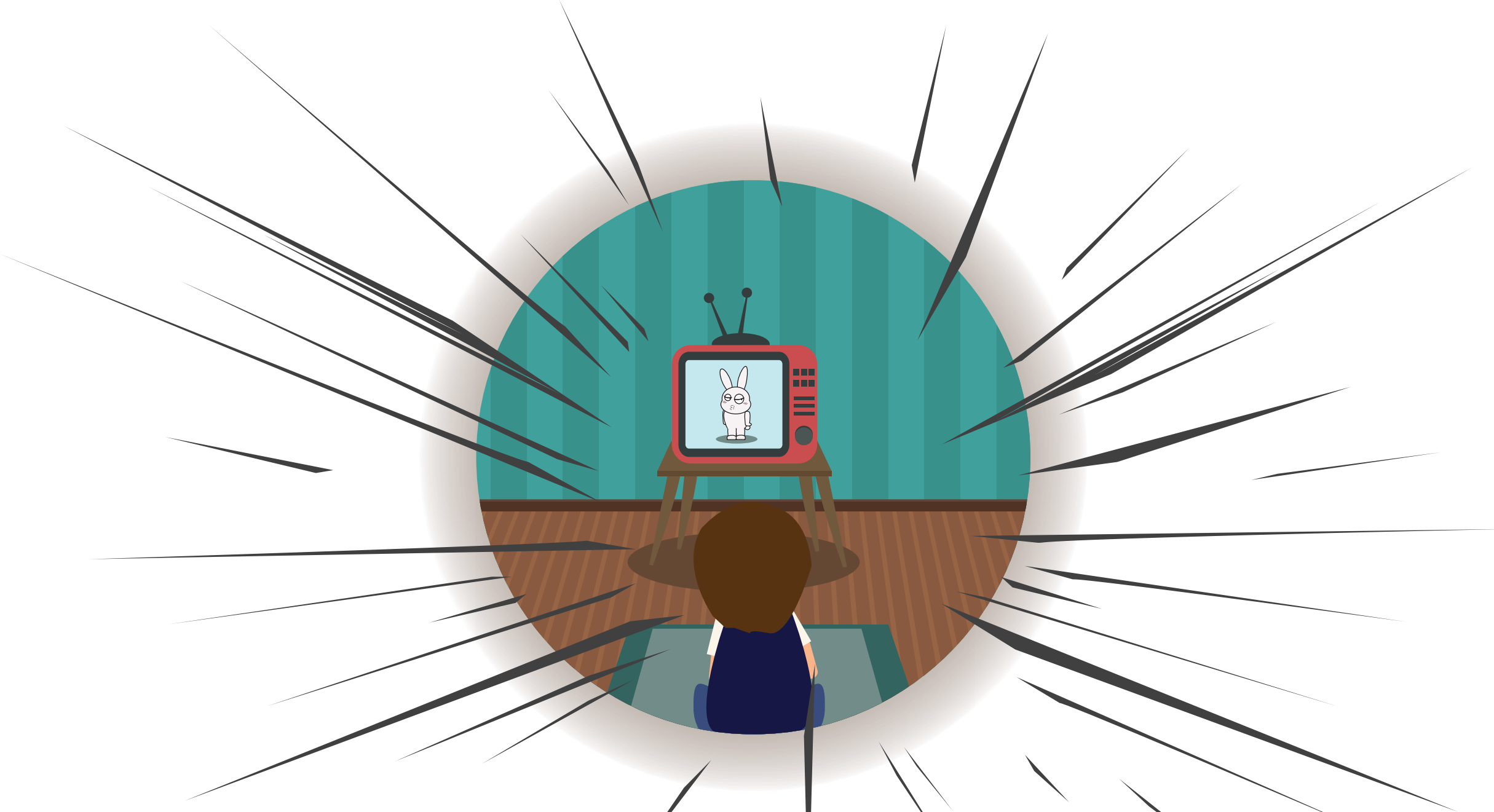
Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/2024/045	UNE LOT 03C/2024	05/05/2024	19/05/2024	52.500
DISC/2024/046	UNE LOT 03E/2024	05/05/2024	19/05/2024	52.500
DISC/2024/047	Construction of 33/11kV, 2x10MVA Primary Substation Designated as Mudhai	05/05/2024	19/05/2024	1,575.00
DISC/2024/048	Construction of 33/11kV, 2x20MVA Primary Substation Designated as SFZ -2	05/05/2024	19/05/2024	1,575.00
DISC/2024/049	Replacement Existing Floating Aerators with New in Raysut STP	05/05/2024	19/05/2024	52.500
DISC/2024/050	Construction of Discharge Point, Access Roads, Guard Rooms and CCTV at Regional (Mirbat, Taqah and Hurait)	05/05/2024	19/05/2024	105
DISC/2024/051	Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Submersible Pumps at APS	05/05/2024	19/05/2024	105

- To purchase the tender document website via the link or the Barcode below:
https://supplier.nama.om:4443/OA_HTML/OA.jsp?OAFunc=XXTEN_TENDER_FLOAT_DISC_F
- Every company wishing to participate in this tender must attach with its bid a bid bond in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman. Any bid that does not contain the bid bond will be disqualified.
- The original bid bond must be submitted in an envelope sealed with red wax and addressed to the chairperson of the minor tender committee and written on outside the Tender name and the Tender number and it should be placed in the tender box in Nama Dhofar Services in Salalah before 10:00 am of the last day for submitting Bids.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using “supplier portal”. No hard copies are accepted.
- The Tender fees are not refundable. However, Tenderers who are holding “Riyada” card issued from public authority for SME development will be exempted from providing the tender fee and the Bid bond.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person’s name and the company details.



Dhofar Integrated Services Company s.a.o.c.
CR Number 2185229 / P.O Box 2609
PC 211, Salalah - Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number 23232523 / Fax 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om





EXPLORING THE POWER OF CARTOONS

IMAN SALIM NASSER AL OWAISI

Animation is an artistic and expressive medium that has undergone many developments from its inception until now. In the past, it relied on handmade techniques, providing lovable characters and engaging stories, to be a haven for children and adults. Nowadays, with the advent of 3D digital technology, it has expanded to include a wider audience, crossing the boundaries of age and culture.

Animation with its powerful influence and attractiveness plays an important role in various aspects of a child's social, psychological, entertainment, and educational life. It enhances cultural understanding by watching stories and characters from different cultures and environments. Also, it is an important way to process and understand their feelings and experiences by impersonating characters and living in different scenarios.

In addition to using it to spread values such as friendship, courage, and integrity, which enhance the development of positive moral behaviour in a child, Therefore, it is considered an effective tool for presenting scientific and historical information in a simplified and enjoyable way, making learning more interesting by providing a visual and entertaining narrative.

On the other hand, some cartoons may reinforce negative stereotypes that contribute to spreading false ideas that encourage socially unacceptable behaviours. Some violent or frightening content directed at children causes negative effects such as anxiety, fear, autism, and aggressive behaviour. Dr Talal al Rawahi warned against a child sitting in front of the television without interacting, at the risk of exposing him to the autism spectrum.

Excessive reliance on animation to simplify information may lead to a superficial understanding of scientific or historical concepts and deprive students of developing

critical thinking skills. Scientific studies also have shown that excessive watching of cartoons leads to addiction and a lack of physical activity.

The importance of creating a child-friendly media environment is determined by its value to the child in particular and society in general, and this importance may increase with the development of artificial intelligence and the increasing margin of freedom in creating animated content.

Dr Al Rawahi, a family consultant, confirms that “we really need a child-friendly media environment because values must be wrapped in fun.” So it is necessary to create a media environment that enables him to understand correctly and stimulates his level of creativity and innovation through diversifying cultural programmes based on education and entertainment.

Dr Fatima al Ajmi, a writer and critic of children's literature, confirmed, “We look at animation as an educational aspect for a child.” For that, the social responsibility that media bears towards children is an educational responsibility determined in development content that reflects broader cultural and social diversity and addresses contemporary issues in a manner appropriate for children.

Teachers must use animation as a teaching tool while providing the necessary context and discussion to help children understand the messages and topics directed to them. There is no doubt that parents monitor the content that their children follow. It is a responsibility and a duty to keep their reality and minds from distraction.

One of the smart solutions nowadays is a possibility of linking the TV to the parents' account via the smartphone to monitor the content that their children follow which enhances the feeling of self-control and forms the conviction to understand the correct behaviours. And watching cartoons should be done with caution, and parents and educators should set limits on the time children spend in front of the screen.



WATCHING
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Recall
Cadillac BLS

Recall Date: 25th April 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Cadillac BLS	2006-2009	18

Description of defect: in these vehicles, the front-driver airbag inflator may experience an alteration over time that may result in inflator rupture during deployment. In the event of a vehicle crash and the driver air bag is commanded to deploy, the driver airbag inflator may rupture, causing metal fragments to pass through the airbag and into the vehicle interior, which may result in injury or death to vehicle occupants.

Recall consequence

Recall Action Procedure: Dealers will replace the driver air bag module assembly.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>

Toll free No 80050002 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM



Oman Trading Establishment LLC



Oman’s food resources to be the highlight at Food Safety Week

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A four-day intensive conference packed with workshops, brainstorming sessions and consumer awareness programmes, will be held as part of the Oman International Food Safety and Qualities Conference at the Mövenpick Hotel Azaiba on April 29.

The Food Safety Week, to be held under the auspices of Dr Saud

bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, offers a platform for scientific discussions, working papers and panel discussions.

A number of ministers and high ranking officials will be sharing their views on food safety and how to prepare for future where supply of resources may fluctuate.

There will be a public marathon at the Qurum Natural Park highlighting the importance of

a healthy lifestyle and remaining physically fit. Sessions include tips for leading a more active and healthy lifestyle and it will be a competitive sporting event that attracts one and all besides the athletes, adults and children to the mega marathon.

“This year’s Food Safety Week aims to address various themes, managing food risks for food security, ever-evolving challenges in the field of food safety and quality, the role of food

safety and quality in promoting sustainability in the economic sector and the role of Artificial Intelligence and modern technologies in food safety,” said official from the Director General of the Food Safety and Quality Centre at the ministry.

The activities of May 1 will be honoured by the presence of His Highness Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said, His Highness Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said who will be interacting with the public on

food safety.

An elaborate session for food risk assessment is scheduled to attract expert thoughts and share experiences of other nations and take stock of the potential risks of both locally sourced foods and imported food materials.

There will be sessions to implement specialised workshops in the areas of risk assessment for food sector specialists, risk assessment, good practices in fish farming, laboratory forum and a

technical competitive event that attracts a group of experienced and talented individuals to find innovative technical solutions to some of the challenges in the field of food safety and quality.

On May 2, teams from the ministry would educate shoppers about healthy purchasing methods and steps to follow, their rights and duties while purchasing at the commercial outlets and the session will be held at the Avenues Mall in Bausher.



Many health projects completed in Batinah N

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, APRIL 24

A series of health projects in Al Batinah North has been recently completed. Those projects reflect the commitment of improving healthcare services in the governorate.

The expansion of Sohar Hospital at a cost of RO 28 million has been inaugurated. It will provide new 270 beds, to make the total capacity for the hospital to about 636 beds.

Furthermore, the structural

framework for Al Suwaiq Hospital has been finalised spanning an area of 287,000 square meters. This project valued at RO 75 million equips the hospital with 256 beds to cater to the growing healthcare needs of the area.

Kidney dialysis units have been set up at Sohar Health center, covering an area of 2,138 square meters, at a cost of RO 1 million. This unit includes 21 beds and isolation rooms for renal patients.

Another kidney dialysis unit has been established in Saham Hospital, spanning 800 square

metres and costing RO 50,000. This unit, equipped with 19 beds and isolation facilities, shows the commitment to providing comprehensive healthcare services.

Another recreational facilities project was completed recently in Al Tayyibah in the Wilayat of Liwa, in collaboration with Vale Oman. It features pathways for walking and cycling tracks, extending over 1.2 kilometres, surrounded by gardens and comfortable seats, to promote exercise and physical activity for the community.

Thai trade show to unveil products

MUSCAT: The fifth Thai Trade Exhibition in Oman is set to showcase authentic Thai products and services to both traders and customers in Oman.

Scheduled from May 7 to 11 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat, this premier trade event will host nearly 100 exhibitors from Thailand, offering diverse products and services at attractive prices. Open to both traders and general visitors, the exhibition presents a special opportunity for attendees to discover and enjoy a truly unique shopping experience.

At the exhibition, visitors can explore a wide array of high-quality products spanning beauty and wellness, fashion and accessories, lifestyle and home goods, as well as food and beverages, along with various miscellaneous items. Beauty and wellness offerings encompass oud oil, cosmetics, spa essentials, and wellness products. Fashion and accessory selections feature clothing, footwear, bags, and accessories. Lifestyle and home products include home decorative



items. Likewise, the food and beverage segment includes dried fruits, ready-to-eat snacks, food ingredients, and beverages. Additionally, hospitals and healthcare service providers are part of this premier trade show this year.

Organised by Vega Intertrade & Exhibition LLC and co-organised by the Federation of Thai Industries, the Thai Trade Exhibition Oman 2024 receives support from the Oman International Exhibition Centre, Thonburi Hospital, Med Park

Hospital, BPK 9 International Hospital, Intra Oud & Agarwood, St Agarwood Trat, Oud EBA, Jintana Bra, Neo Corporate Public Company Ltd, and Hatai Gems & Jewelry.

The exhibition offers a platform for buyers from the Sultanate of Oman and the wider Middle East region to connect with Thai exporters, wholesalers, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), all under one roof. Business-to-business meetings will also be facilitated to bolster the trading community of both countries.

OPAZ delegation visits Japan to review economic ties

MUSCAT: Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, the Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, met with Ken Saito, the Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry in the Japanese capital of Tokyo on Wednesday, April 24.

The meeting discussed the economic cooperation between the two countries and the ongoing projects in the economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities in the Sultanate of Oman, including the low-carbon iron production project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The visit included meetings with officials from various companies involved in iron production, its

derivatives, renewable energy production equipment, ship and vehicle structure manufacturing companies, hydrogen reception, storage, and export stations, as well as discussions with financial institutions to support targeted projects.

The delegation also visited the Yokohama port to observe the reception and shipping of energy and petroleum product transport ships, as well as vehicle reception, storage, and shipping. During the visit to the port, Dr Al Sunaidy met with the Mayor of Yokohama and other officials.

Discussions during the meeting involved opportunities for cooperation between Yokohama

port and Duqm port in relevant areas. Dr Al Sunaidy and the accompanying delegation will also meet with the Governor of Yamanashi Prefecture during a visit to the hydrogen production center and the National Center for Energy Conversion and Storage Technologies.

On April 2023, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones signed a memorandum of understanding with the Japanese alliance of Kobe Steel and Mitsui & Co., Ltd to establish a direct reduced iron plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm with an annual production capacity of 5 million tons of direct reduced iron.

— ONA



The Omani delegation was headed by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.



Sultanate of Oman

The Supreme Judicial Council

Tender Announcement

The Supreme Judicial Council announces its desire to submit the following tender:

Re-Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
11/2024	Rent a warehouse for the Supreme Judicial Council in Muscat Governorate	02/06/2024	09/06/2024	Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	RO 25/-

The specifications shall be as follows:

- The building's location must be within the Muscat Governorate.
- It should have sufficient space for employee parking and space for trucks and cars to enter and exit the warehouse.
- The warehouses must have a degree of isolation from external climate factors - heat, dust, and humidity - in addition to protection from water leakage.
- Air conditioning equipment must be available for the building and infrastructure, such as the computer network and its CAT6A connections and the telephone exchange.
- The building owner must be fully prepared and agree to make the required changes and additions (whether structural or technical) to the building in accordance with the requirements of the Supreme Judicial Council.
- The total building area should not be less than 700 square meters for the building as a suitable area for use in (storage - 3 offices for employees - 3 bathrooms - a preparatory kitchen - a separate room).
- A guard room for the warehouse and concrete for the flagpole shall be constructed in accordance with the approval of the Supreme Judicial Council.
- Installation of fire prevention equipment requirements in accordance with the specifications approved by the General Authority for Civil Defense and Ambulance, provided that they are maintained and are valid and licensed throughout the contract's validity period.
- The original maps and drawings of the building (PDF + AutoCAD copy) and all guarantees related to building materials, devices and equipment in the building are attached, in addition to the civil defense certificate.
- Bids are submitted on the specified date.
- The two parties are committed to applying the provisions and rules contained in the Royal Decree regarding the provisions regulating the relationship between owners and tenants of housing, commercial and industrial shops and registering their lease contracts No. 6/89 and its amendments upon signing the final agreement.
- Supply and install the necessary surveillance cameras for the building, connect the cameras to the guard's room for monitoring and control, supply and install special screens that connect directly to the cameras and preserve the recording based on the recommendation of the security authorities, and create all the necessary connections for that.

Where you can buy the more detailed tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders must submit a letter of commitment to the bid, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tenders Committee of the Supreme Judicial Council, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tenders Council and the latest updates to the electronic bidding system. Based on Circular No. (1/2024) issued by the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:**
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:**
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



ISRAEL READY FOR RAFAH ASSAULT

THE WAR, NOW IN ITS SEVENTH MONTH, HAS KILLED OVER 34,000 PALESTINIANS

GAZA: Israel's military has conducted all necessary preparations to take Rafah, which it deems the last Hamas bastion in the Gaza Strip, and can launch an operation the moment it gets government approval, a senior defence official said on Wednesday.

Some Palestinian civilians were fleeing their homes in northern Gaza on Wednesday just weeks after returning because of an Israeli bombardment which they said was as intense as those at the start of the war.

Much of the shelling was focused for a second day on Beit Lahiya on the northern edge of Gaza, where the Israeli military gave evacuation orders to four neighbourhoods on Tuesday, warning they were in a "dangerous combat zone".

After weeks of relative calm, Israel intensified its attacks overnight on Monday, focusing on areas — particularly in the north — from where it had previously withdrawn troops, saying the Palestinian militant group Hamas was no longer in control.

Plans for an attack on Rafah, where more than 1 million people have been displaced, have caused widespread international concern. Aid agencies have warned of a potential humanitarian catastrophe and US President Joe Biden has urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to invade Rafah.

Moving civilians out of harm's way will be an important part of Israel's strategy, a government spokesperson said.

Israel has said it will eradicate Hamas following the group's



A girl walks through rubble in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

rampage in southern Israel on October 7 in which 1,200 people were killed and 253 were taken hostage, according to Israeli tallies.

The war, now in its seventh month, has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, and many more are feared buried in rubble. The offensive has laid to waste much of the enclave, displacing most of

its 2.3 million people and creating a humanitarian crisis.

In the past 24 hours, Israeli strikes have killed at least 79 Palestinians and wounded 86, the Gaza Health Ministry said.

Two people were killed in a strike on a house in Rafah, four were killed when a missile hit a group standing outside a supermarket in Al Nuseirat

refugee camp and one was killed in a strike on a house in Deir Al Balah, central Gaza, Palestinian health officials said. Residents in northern Gaza and suburbs of Gaza City reported heavy shelling.

"We don't know why this is all happening. Is it because we returned home and we finally got some aid through after months

of starvation and the Israelis didn't like that?" said Mohammad Jamal, 29, a resident of Gaza City, near Zeitoun, one of Gaza's oldest suburbs. "It is as if the war started again. As if it is just happening, they burnt up the place," he said.

Asked about Wednesday's developments, the Israeli military had no immediate comment.

— Reuters

EU urges probe into reported mass graves at Gaza hospitals

Brussels: The European Union on Wednesday backed a United Nations demand for an independent probe into the reported discovery of mass graves at two Gaza hospitals destroyed in Israeli sieges.

"This is something that forces us to call for an independent investigation of all the suspicions and all the circumstances, because indeed it creates the impression that there might have been violations of international human rights committed," EU spokesman Peter Stano said.

"That's why it's important to have independent investigation and to ensure accountability."

The UN rights office said on Tuesday international investigators should be involved in a probe into the discovery of the bodies.

The UN rights office said it was "horrified" by the destruction of Gaza's two biggest hospitals, Al Shifa in Gaza City and the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis.

Gaza's Civil Defence agency said on Tuesday that health workers uncovered nearly 340 bodies of people allegedly killed and buried by Israeli forces at the Nasser complex.

Israel's army called claims that its troops had buried bodies during its operation at Nasser "baseless and unfounded".

The army has said around 200 militants were killed, and weapons stockpiles recovered, during its operation at Al Shifa.

Around 30 bodies were reported found buried in two graves in the Al Shifa courtyard.

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

Israel has accused Hamas of using medical facilities as command centres and to hold hostages abducted during its attack inside Israel on October 7 which set off the war. Hamas has denied the claims. — AFP

Rafah evacuations not 'possible' under current conditions: Red Cross

DUBAI: Humanitarian workers have no knowledge of plans to evacuate Palestinians from Gaza's southernmost city ahead of an expected Israeli assault, but such a transfer would not be "possible" under current conditions, a Red Cross official said on Tuesday.

"The rumour is that the probability of a major operation in Rafah is increasing," Fabrizio Carboni, Middle East regional director for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said on the sidelines of an aid conference in the United Arab Emirates.

"When we see the level of destruction in the middle area (of Gaza) and in the north, it's not clear to us where people will be moved to... where they can have decent shelter and essential services," he added.

"So today, with the information we have and from where we stand, we don't see this (massive evacuation) as possible." More than 1.5 million of Gaza's population

of 2.4 million had sheltered in Rafah, the last major population centre in Gaza that Israeli ground troops have yet to enter, though thousands have been seen heading back north.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has for two months talked of sending troops into Rafah to go after Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that runs Gaza.

On Sunday, he said the Israeli military would increase pressure to "deliver additional and painful blows" to the group behind the October 7 attack on Israel which triggered the ongoing war.

But Israel's allies including Washington have warned against a Rafah operation, fearing a worsening of Gaza's already catastrophic humanitarian conditions. "We don't see for the time being any plans for civilian evacuations," Carboni said during the interview on Tuesday at the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference (DIHAD). — AFP



A Palestinian displays his catch at the beach in Rafah on Tuesday. – AFP

Columbia vows more talks with pro-Palestinian student protests

NEW YORK: After a tense overnight standoff, Columbia University officials and students appeared to agree to further talks on Wednesday on clearing a pro-Palestinian protester encampment that has paralysed the New York campus.

The prestigious institution is at the core of demonstrations spreading to campuses around the United States over the Israel-Hamas war and ensuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

University administrators told student newspaper the *Columbia Spectator* that negotiations to dismantle the encampment would continue for another 48 hours following progress in talks.

The Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) group had threatened to refuse to participate "until there is a written commitment that the administration will not be unleashing the (New York Police Department) NYPD or the National Guard on its students."

It was not immediately clear if university officials had agreed to such terms, though New York Governor Kathy Hochul has said she had no plans to call in the National Guard.

University president Minouche Shafik set a deadline of midnight Tuesday to resolve the campus unrest, and some students began to



A pro-Palestinian encampment at Columbia University in New York on Wednesday. – AFP

remove their tents ahead of the cut-off period. But after the deadline passed without an agreement, many students began re-establishing their presence on the university's South Lawn, the epicentre of the demonstrations, the *Spectator* said.

Students occupying the pro-Palestinian encampment, which was erected last week, have hosted speakers, music performances, Islamic prayers and seder meals for the Jewish holiday of Passover,

which began on Monday.

Tensions reached their peak on Thursday, when more than 100 people were arrested after Shafik called in the police.

Given the uneasy mood and disruption to university campus life, some classes are being held online for the rest of the semester, which ends on April 29.

Pro-Israel supporters, and others worried about campus safety, have pointed to anti-Semitic incidents

and argued that campuses are encouraging intimidation and hate speech.

Protesters — including a number of Jewish students — say they've disavowed instances of anti-Semitism and are there to support Palestinians. Students have also launched protests at several other schools, including New York University, Yale, MIT, UC Berkeley, the University of Michigan and elsewhere. — AFP



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In brief

■ COLOMBO



RAISI: IRAN READY TO FORGE STRONGER TIES WITH SRI LANKA

Iran is ready to strengthen ties with Sri Lanka and other Asian countries, its president, Ebrahim Raisi, said on Wednesday, during a short visit to the island nation, the first by an Iranian president in 16 years.

The two countries are set to sign five pacts, or Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on the visit, only the second since one in April 2008 by Iran's then president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Opening a \$514-million hydro power project, Raisi pledged to support development projects in the Indian Ocean island by providing technical and engineering services.

■ MADRID



SPAIN PM UNDER PRESSURE AS WIFE FACES GRAFT PROBE

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez was under pressure to give answers on Wednesday after a court said it had opened an investigation into his wife Begona Gomez on suspicion of graft. It was a fresh blow for Sanchez, whose left-wing government has faced scrutiny over another politically-charged graft scandal involving the procurement of face masks during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The court statement came several hours after online news site El Confidencial said investigators were probing Gomez's ties to several private companies that received government funding or won public contracts.

■ GENEVA



UN LAUNCHES FUND TO SHIELD CLIMATE REFUGEES

The United Nations said on Wednesday it was launching a new Climate Resilience Fund aimed at boosting protections for "refugees and displaced communities" threatened by climate change.

In 2022, more than 70 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries, it pointed out.

"The impacts of climate change are only becoming more devastating, increasingly exacerbating conflict, destroying livelihoods and, ultimately, triggering displacement," UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi (pictured) said in the statement.

US Congress passes Ukraine and Israel foreign aid bill

WASHINGTON: A sweeping foreign aid package easily passed the US Congress late on Tuesday after months of delay, clearing the way for fresh Ukraine funding amid advances from Russia's attack force and Kyiv's shortages of military supplies.

The Senate approved by 79 to 18 four bills passed by the House of Representatives on Saturday, after House Republican leaders abruptly switched course last week and allowed a vote on the \$95 billion in mostly military aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan and US partners in the Indo-Pacific. The four bills were combined into one package in the Senate.

The largest provides \$61 billion in critically needed funding for Ukraine; a second provides \$26 billion for Israel and humanitarian aid for civilians in conflict zones around the world, and a third mandates \$8.12 billion to "counter communist China" in the Indo-Pacific.

A fourth, which the House added to the package last week, includes a potential ban on the Chinese-controlled social media app TikTok, measures for the transfer of seized Russian assets to Ukraine and new sanctions on Iran.

Biden has promised to sign the measure into law as soon as it reaches his desk, and his administration is already



A man removes shards of glass from broken windows of a store damaged by a Russian missile strike in Kharkiv on Wednesday. — Reuters

preparing a \$1 billion military aid package for Ukraine, the first to be sourced from the bill, two US officials said.

The Senate's Democratic and Republican leaders predicted that Congress had turned the corner in putting Russian President Vladimir Putin and other foreign adversaries on notice that Washington will continue supporting Ukraine and other foreign partners.

"This is an inflection point in history. Western democracy perhaps faced its greatest threat since the end of the Cold War," Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in the Senate.

The aid package could be the last approved for Ukraine until after elections in November when the White House, House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate are up for grabs.

Much of the opposition to the security assistance in both the House and Senate has come from Republicans with close ties to former US President Donald Trump, a Ukraine aid sceptic who has stressed "America First" policies as he seeks a second term. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, a strong advocate for assisting Ukraine, expressed regret about the delay, largely due to hardline Republicans' objections to

adding more to the \$113 billion Washington had authorised for Kyiv since Russia began its full-scale attack in February 2022.

"I think we've turned the corner on the isolationist movement," McConnell told a news conference. Some of the Ukraine money — \$10 billion in economic support — comes in the form of a loan, which Trump had suggested. But the bill lets the president forgive the loan starting in 2026.

The influx of weapons should improve Kyiv's chances of averting a major breakthrough in the east by Russian attackers, although it would have been more helpful if the aid had come closer to when Biden requested it last year, analysts said.

It was the second time this year that the Democratic-led Senate passed security aid for Ukraine, Israel and the Indo-Pacific. The last bill, more than two months ago, garnered 70 per cent support in the 100-member chamber from Republicans and Democrats.

But leaders of the Republican-controlled House would not allow a vote on the foreign aid until last week.

The legislation's progress has been closely watched by industry, with US defence firms up for major contracts to supply equipment for Ukraine and other US partners. — AFP



Saudi king enters hospital for routine tests

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's ageing King Salman entered hospital for "routine examinations" on Wednesday, the Royal Court said, in a rare public statement about his health.

The tests were taking place at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah and were expected to last "a few hours", the Royal Court said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

King Salman, 88, has been on the throne since 2015, though his son, Mohammed bin Salman, 38, was named crown prince in 2017 and acts as day-to-day ruler. State media on Tuesday showed footage of King Salman attending a weekly cabinet meeting. King Salman last entered the same hospital in Jeddah nearly two years ago, in May 2022, going in for a colonoscopy and staying for just over a week for other tests and "some time to rest", SPA reported at the time.

Saudi Arabia has for years sought to quell speculation over King Salman's health. In 2017, the Gulf kingdom dismissed reports and mounting speculation that the king was planning to abdicate in favour of Prince Mohammed.

King Salman underwent surgery to remove his gall bladder in 2020.

He was also admitted to hospital in March 2022 to undergo what state media described as "successful medical tests" and to change the battery of his pacemaker.

King Salman served as Riyadh governor for decades and also as defence minister. His reign as king has been marked by reforms largely managed by his son, who is trying to position Saudi Arabia for an eventual post-oil future. — AFP

Runaway cavalry horses injure 4 people in London



One saddled white horse covered in blood running through the street alongside another, black one.

LONDON: A number of military horses, including one covered in blood, ran amok on the streets of central London and injured at least four people on Wednesday.

The bizarre scenes unfolded in the heart of London, near Buckingham Palace and the seat of the British government, with the runaway animals galloping past bewildered Londoners going about their morning commute.

"A number of military working horses became loose during a routine exercise this morning.

All of the horses have now been recovered and returned to camp," a British army spokesperson said in a statement.

"A number of personnel and horses have been injured and are receiving the appropriate medical attention."

Medical authorities said four people had been taken to hospital after being injured.

Television images showed one saddled white horse seemingly covered in blood running through the street alongside another, black one.

— Reuters

France records growing number of supercentenarians

PARIS: The number of people in France living beyond 110 years is growing fast, the national demographic studies institute said on Wednesday, with women dominating the supercentenarian contest.

The phenomenon was unheard of in France of until the late 1980s, but in 2022 the authorities recorded 39 cases of people dying aged 110 or older, the INED institute said in a report.

Centenarians, meanwhile, have seen a "spectacular" rise in numbers, INED said, growing from around 1,000 in 1970 to 8,000 in 2000 and 31,000 at the start of this year.

On current trends, 200,000 people in France will be 100 or older by 2070, it said.

"We're seeing a spectacular rise of very old people," France Mesle, one of the report's authors, said, although she added that their number was still "negligible" in demographic terms. France's overall population is around 68 million, with over 20 per cent aged 65 or over.

The statistics are consistent with an earlier finding showing that the probability



Sister Andre Lucile Randon on the eve of her 117th birthday in Toulon. She died just before her 119th birthday. — AFP file photo

of reaching 100 or more is higher in France than in 15 other European countries.

French women have the highest life expectancy in the European Union at 85.2 years in 2022. France also counted the EU's highest number of centenarians last year, according to the national statistics institute Insee.

Two of the four individuals worldwide

In 2022 the authorities recorded 39 cases of people dying aged 110 or older. Centenarians, meanwhile, have seen a "spectacular" rise in numbers, growing from around 1,000 in 1970 to 8,000 in 2000 and 31,000 at the start of this year

recognised as having lived more than 118 years are French women: Jeanne Calment, the oldest recorded person who died at 122 years and 5 months, and Lucile Randon, who died just before her 119th birthday.

Around 2,000 people in France were 105 years old or older in 2023.

Of the 39 people who died at 110 or older in 2022, 38 were women.

They were typically involved in manual occupations such as farming, and their diet was healthy, said Laurent Toussaint, an expert on supercentenarians.

While the number of supercentenarians is evenly spread across metropolitan France, eight times as many can be found on average in the French overseas territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique.

The report said there was no clear explanation for this phenomenon. It said, however, that the island populations, mostly descendants of slavery survivors, may have inherited more robust genes adding to their longevity than population segments that were never exposed to slavery.

Marie-Rose Tessier, believed to be the oldest person in France, is 113 years and 11 months old.

The oldest person in the world is Maria Branyas Morera, 117, who lives in Spain, according to the US Gerontology Research Group. — AFP

Self-motivation turbo-charges performance



Ishwar S Deshmukh

The writer works at Indian School Salalah, Oman

Self-motivation is the internal drive that leads us to take action towards a goal. It keeps us moving forward, even when we don't want to. Motivation 'is the ability to initiate and persist at a task.'

We can also say that to describe a person's reason to do a particular thing/task can be linked to all facets of life. Self-motivation in sport would explain why someone does sport. A person may do sport due to the physical benefits, due to which it makes you a healthier person or the social benefits in that it helps you meet new friends.

Self-motivation is a very important factor in a person's life because it helps him or her see things in a positive way. In fact it is the strong tool to one can use to get further in life. What motivates oneself is very individual to a person, and everyone has their own personal reasons for participating in sports. Start with small and simple goals/objective, you are giving yourself the chance to attain bigger things ahead.

It is also important to keep track of the progress. Many sportspersons train for years to get to a high standard which is made possible by immense

personal motivation to keep them going.

Motivation plays a key role in guiding, initiating and helps to maintain the goal oriented behaviour. Self-motivated individuals will tend to put longer hours at work to become and prove a leader I personally state that one wants to perform at a higher level he or she must start the process of growing and developing as a sportsperson. One must be mentally and physically willing to face the challenges of fatigue, pain, boredom, and repeated training. Self-motivated person will always find a way to accomplish the task. These people do not need other people's word of encouragement in performing or accepting a challenging task.

The goals must not be big or long term they can be small and empowering. One needs the right mindset to be motivated. Motivation becomes the contributor in their performance and achievement. Self- motivation plays a vital role in building a foundation in making you perform and compete at higher level. Motivation will not only help a sportsperson in getting the starting position or a feel of achievement but it also helps him/her to reach their potentiality.

ONE SHOULD NOT AFRAID OF HELPING OR SUPPORTING OTHERS AND ALSO SEEKING THE SAME FOR SELE. THE CONSISTENCY OF THE MOTIVATION DEPENDS ON THE MUTUAL SUCCESS

One should always believe in self and ensure that nothing stops him/her in the road of success. Self-motivation also plays a salient role in enhancing the performance level of an athlete, but plays a role in the psychological and physiological component as well. In fact motivation is learned by or through experience. In simple words it is the key to succeed the goals and dreams. A self- motivated person tries and strives to come out of his/her comfort zone to achieve the desire goal. The internal force of the motivation drives the person to attain their goals against all odds which would stand in their way.

Self-motivation comes a long way and should always be driving force for an individual. Self-motivation plays a crucial role in ones achievement by employing firmness, proper and effective time management, fostering suppleness and promoting a growth mindset.

Lastly, one should not afraid of helping or supporting others and also seeking the same for self. The consistency of the motivation depends on the mutual success. I want to conclude with a quote,"Push yourself because no one else is going to do that for you".

Talks on global plastic treaty begin in Canada

MARION THIBAUT

Negotiators from 175 nations began talks on Tuesday on a proposed global treaty to reduce plastic pollution, which is found everywhere from mountain tops to ocean depths, and in human blood and breast milk.

“The world is counting on us to deliver a new treaty that will catalyse and guide the actions and international cooperation needed to deliver a future free of plastic pollution,” said Luis Valdivieso, chair of the negotiations at the UN-led talks in Ottawa, Canada.

“Let's not fail,” Valdivieso added as he opened the session that will run to April 29.

Nations agreed in 2022 to finalise a world-first treaty by the end of 2024, with concrete measures to battle plastic pollution around the world.

The meeting in Ottawa is considered crucial as it is the penultimate session before a final round of negotiations in South Korea later this year.

Plastics have created a reliance on disposable consumer culture, Canadian environment minister Steven Guilbeault said, adding: “We're here today because we recognise that we must throw away this throwaway generation.” “We must acknowledge that we can't choose between recycling, banning or innovation. We have to do all three,” Guilbeault said.

Guilbeault said the goal was to achieve “60 to 70 per cent of the elements endorsed” by delegates. Although there is a broad consensus on the need for a treaty, environmental activists pleading for a 75 per cent cut in plastic production by 2040 are at odds with oil-producing nations and the plastics industry. The stakes are high, with widespread plastic pollution having potentially grave impacts on oceans and climate.

Annual plastics production has more than doubled in 20 years to 460 million tonnes, and is on track to triple within four decades.

Only nine per cent is recycled, and according to the OECD, its contribution to global warming could more than double by 2060 — having accounted for 3.4 per cent of global emissions in 2019. During talks in Kenya in November, the length of a draft agreement leapt from 30 to 70 pages, with oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia recording their objections to limiting plastic production, instead emphasising recycling.

For the plastic and chemical industries, recycling is the most effective way to end plastic pollution with the least environmental and economic costs, said Chris Jahn, of the International Council of Chemical Associations, a global trade association.

— AFP

Recycled ‘zombie’ misinformation targets US voters ahead of Nov polls

DANIEL FUNKE AND ANUJ CHOPRA

Migrants, vaccines, pedophilia rings — old conspiracy theories are resurfacing ahead of the US election despite being repeatedly debunked, in what researchers call “zombie” falsehoods that appear to resonate with polarised voters.

Americans are deluged with misinformation about political hot-button issues that observers say have the potential to sway voters in the widely anticipated rematch between President Joe Biden and Donald Trump in November.

That includes misinformation that is recycled online despite being repeatedly knocked down by fact-checkers in what seems like a never-ending game of whack-a-mole.

The trend illustrates the ability of long-debunked falsehoods to mutate into viral political discourse on social media platforms, which now offer fewer guardrails as they scale back content moderation.

“This type of misinformation gets repeated so often that it eventually becomes the gospel truth to believers,” Mike Rothschild, an expert on conspiracy theories, said.

“The same tropes get recycled over and over and they work because they're always going to appeal to a certain type of person” in a polarised environment, he added. That includes a surge of false claims — inspired by record crossings along the US-Mexico border — that Democrats are recruiting migrants to sway the presidential election in favour of Biden.

Among the key misinformation spreaders is Elon Musk, the owner of X, formerly Twitter, who claimed ahead of primaries in swing states such as Arizona that the government was “importing voters” by welcoming unvetted illegal immigrants.

AFP's fact-checkers debunked the narrative, noting that migrants admitted on a temporary basis undergo background checks and have no direct path to citizenship or voting rights.

But the claim — which echoes years-old false narratives from Trump and other US conservatives that seek to demonise migrants — still received renewed traction, amassing hundreds of thousands of posts and comments across platforms.

‘LOT OF POPULARITY’

Republican politicians have made immigration a top issue in swing states such as New Hampshire, even as political observers say their claims are not always backed up by facts.

Some 43 per cent of residents said illegal immigration is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” issue in the state, according to a recent poll by the

THE TREND ILLUSTRATES THE ABILITY OF LONG-DEBUNKED FALSEHOODS TO MUTATE INTO VIRAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, WHICH NOW OFFER FEWER GUARDRAILS AS THEY SCALE BACK CONTENT MODERATION.

University of New Hampshire.

In recent weeks, AFP has also debunked numerous claims that vaccines are harmful or ineffective, a narrative that has surged since the Covid-19 pandemic despite being repeatedly swatted down.

The deluge comes as Robert F. Kennedy Jr, a longtime vaccine sceptic whose nonprofit raised millions of dollars during the pandemic, makes political inroads in some states as a challenger to Biden and Trump In part due to the spread of recycled falsehoods, the anti-vaccine community “is in a stronger and better place than it was pre-pandemic,” said Kolina Koltai, a senior researcher at the digital investigative group Bellingcat.

“RFK is gaining a lot of popularity and running as an independent,” she said. “He’s a very well-known anti-vaxxer. That’s not nothing.” Distrust in the government is one reason why

zombie claims continue to spread, analysts say — a trend exemplified by the staying power of the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory. The theory, which falsely linked a pizza restaurant in the US capital to an underground child sex trafficking ring involving high-ranking Democrats, has been thoroughly debunked since 2016. Yet it later grew into the sprawling QAnon conspiracy movement, which gained popularity ahead of the 2020 election. Social media users, including Musk, have repeatedly revived the unfounded allegations in recent months.

‘COGNITIVE BIAS’

Sensational claims that prey on people's innate fears are always going to be fodder for misinformation, experts say.

“Debunking such claims has relatively low impact since people and institutions who do the debunking are considered part of the corrupt system or ‘establishment’ in the eyes of the people who believe” them, Mert Bayar, from the Center for an Informed Public at the University of Washington, said.

Baseless claims that the 2020 election was ridden with fraud and stolen from Trump still resurface online — despite being thoroughly debunked by fact-checkers, government officials and audits.

Some of the recycled misinformation goes unchallenged as platforms such as X reduce content moderation in a climate of cost-cutting that has gutted trust and safety teams.

Analysts say misinformation purveyors have a financial motive to continue posting, as X's ad revenue-sharing programme incentivises extreme content designed to boost engagement.

Influencers also tend to reinforce their followers' beliefs.

“This can often be attributed to a cognitive bias known as confirmation bias,” Bayar said.

“Content creators might have financial incentives or personal reasons for recycling such claims, but many of the people who spread such claims also genuinely believe in them.” — AFP

Reflecting on rumours...

It is a challenging task to find the logic of rumour, however, one thing is certain, it spreads faster than official communication. I last wrote about the subject nine years ago, and rumours seem to be growing worse and more damaging.

Within the literature, it could be argued that rumour is a happy, common social activity that helps people feel less anxious. However, when one observes that educated people, presidents and owners of social platforms spread mis(dis)information), it is no longer a mechanism to relax anxiety. One can give it any other definition.

Even worse is when platform content farms infiltrate a country’s legal and electoral processes.

The term ‘rumour’ does not require that the information be untrue. Many times, it fills an information vacuum. In his work ‘A Sociological Study of Rumour’, sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani observed that when formal information is absent, people compensate by interpreting the situation and making sense of omitted data.

In ancient China, the rumour was used as a monitoring tool, and in our contemporary age, perhaps, it is still used in parts of the world.

According to researcher Adam Berinsky, rumour has been studied in social science for more than a century and it became insidious with the Internet when it became easier to spread false or misleading information. In the early 1900s, information credibility depended on the author’s moral integrity. His assertion was considered accurate if his character was known to be good.

That was also the period of the Coffee-House Culture, which had a great influence on circulating scandals and rumours. It was in coffee shops that all topics were up for debate, and political figures, people with influence, and journalists frequented to discuss the economy, society and culture at the time.

Scholars suggest that rumour as a social phenomenon needs to take



Sonia Ambrosio

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

THE TERM ‘RUMOUR’ DOES NOT REQUIRE THAT THE INFORMATION BE UNTRUE. MANY TIMES, IT FILLS AN INFORMATION VACUUM

into account principles relating to the behaviour of the community. Nicholas DiFonzo and Prashant Bordia noted in their book *Rumour Psychology* that some attitudes have deep roots and can be traced to the group’s cultural traditions. The source of a rumour can come from someone who is the eye and the ear in a neighbourhood, or from someone who has a relative or a friend in an influential position.

While some rumours are intentionally created to see what will happen, others are the result of somebody who genuinely believes what they are saying. Rumours attract attention, evoke emotion and invite involvement. They can also be cruel, or ruin one’s life for ever.

People tend to share rumours that they perceive as credible when anxieties are intense, and so they are less likely to check the logic of what they pass on, writes Ralph Rosnow in *Rumour and Gossip Research*. The rumour mill can emerge from veiled power conflicts, or it can be seen as a causal explanation for distressful events caused by a natural disaster or a human-caused event, such as a terror attack.

Cathy Faye notes in her book *Governing the Grapevine* that social scientists conducted research in the 1940s in an effort to dispel rumours that they thought would jeopardise national security and undermine public morale. Nevertheless, Ron Robin’s book *The Making of the Cold War Enemy* shows that rumour was a suitable tactic to raise morale among soldiers during World War II, as well as to secure support for the coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003. Rumours and gossip had entered the celebrity and entertainment journalism scene by the end of 1950.

The multiplicity and many forms in which rumour impacts us remain difficult to grasp. It is a topic that is not just complex; it is constantly changing. Anti-rumour campaigns, workshops, and studies can have limited effectiveness. The best I can see is to avoid rumours piggybacking on the vacuum of information.

INSPIRED BY FLORA!



Model Lucy Kent wears a dress inspired by the figure of Flora, the Goddess of Flowers and the Season of Spring, in the painting ‘La Primavera’ by late Italian artist Sandro Botticelli, as she poses in Harrogate, north England, on Wednesday. The dress, created by florist Helen James, will be displayed at the annual Harrogate Spring Flower Show, held at the Great Yorkshire Showground until next Sunday. – AFP

The West is hastening its own decline

Since Russia launched its full-scale war on Ukraine more than two years ago, the West has desperately sought ways to punish Russia without harming itself in the process. It has mostly failed.

So far, not even unprecedented sanctions have derailed Russia’s economy, let alone compelled the Kremlin to change its behaviour. Instead, Russia has pivoted to a war economy: it now produces nearly three times as many munitions as Nato, including more missiles than it was producing before the war began.

Much of the West, by contrast, is facing economic stagnation, owing not least to the switch away from cheap Russian energy to costlier supplies from elsewhere. The United Kingdom is officially in recession, and there has been no growth in the euro zone since the third quarter of 2022, when gas prices surged, leading the European Central Bank to start raising interest rates to stem runaway inflation. Higher fuel prices have helped turn former economic powerhouse Germany into the worst-performing developed economy.

European growth is not the only casualty of Western sanctions against Russia. The US dollar — which was already facing “stealth erosion” before the Ukraine war — appears to have lost some of its global influence, even in oil markets, as countries pursue alternatives to the greenback in response to the West’s decision to weaponise finance.



Brahma Chellaney

The writer is Professor Emeritus of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research and Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin

THE WEST’S STRATEGIC OVERREACH VIS-À-VIS RUSSIA IS NOT ONLY ALIENATING MUCH OF THE REST OF THE WORLD, BUT ALSO PROVIDING A WINDFALL FOR CHINA

Meanwhile, rising gold purchases by central banks in China, Turkiye, India, Kazakhstan and Eastern Europe, coupled with greater geopolitical uncertainty, have helped drive prices to a record high.

The European Commission’s move to seize the profits generated by frozen Russian central-bank assets would reinforce these trends. Given the centrality of central banks in the global financial system, their assets have historically been considered sacrosanct. But Russia’s assets — over two-thirds of which are held by the Brussels-based clearing house Euroclear — were frozen unilaterally by Western governments, without authorisation from the International Court of Justice or the United Nations Security Council, as required by international law.

Now, with “Ukraine fatigue” weakening Western support for continued military and financial aid, the European Commission wants to start tapping the €3.25 billion (\$3.45 billion) in annual accrued interest on the frozen assets. Under its current proposal, most of the revenues would be channelled through the European Peace Facility, which refunds EU states for sending arms to Ukraine, with the rest going to the EU’s central budget, to be used to strengthen Ukraine’s weapons-manufacturing capacity.

But such a move would be

unlikely to help turn the tide in the Ukraine war. What Ukraine really needs more than weapons and funds are new recruits to replenish the ranks of its exhausted and depleted forces. Here, its options are limited: not even draconian conscription practices have been able to offset the growing troop shortfall.

What seizing Russia’s earnings would do is set a dangerous precedent in international law and deal a blow to Europe’s credibility as a champion of a rules-based world order; the Commission’s proposed “legal pathway” amounts to lawfare, pure and simple.

It would also signal to other countries that their money is not safe in the West, thereby strengthening further their incentive to seek alternatives to Western institutions and currencies.



Flags of Ukraine fly in front of the EU Parliament building on the first anniversary of the Russian war, in Brussels, Belgium. – Reuters file photo

If this trend continues, the West’s financial-sanctions arsenal will be weakened considerably. Already, the West’s routine use of sanctions is reducing their impact.

Not only do Western sanctions fail to change the behaviour of the government being targeted, whether Russia, Myanmar, or Syria; they also almost invariably advance China’s commercial and strategic interests. In fact, no country is profiting more from Russia’s war in Ukraine — and the West’s response to it — than China.

Beyond expanding the international use of the renminbi, Western sanctions against Russia created an opportunity for China to secure greater cheap supplies of Russian oil, gas and grains.

Transported along secure overland routes, these supplies would likely continue being

delivered even in the event of a war with the West.

Moreover, China has more than doubled its nuclear-weapons arsenal since 2020, and it is expanding its conventional forces faster than any other country has since World War II.

Yet the West is so fixated on punishing Russia that China has managed to avoid much scrutiny, let alone pushback. US President Joe Biden, for example, is now attempting to “manage competition” with China by laying greater stress on diplomacy than on deterrence, with his latest budget woefully underfunding key enabling capabilities for the Indo-Pacific and even slashing the production target for Virginia-class submarines from two per year to just one.

For China, the longer the West stays distracted, the better.

The West, which accounts for just 12 per cent of the global population, should not underestimate the potential consequences of simultaneously enabling China’s aggressive rise and alienating the rest of the world.

Unless it abandons its strategic overreach vis-à-vis Russia and turns its attention to its real rival, the West is likely to lose its global supremacy, including its hold on the international financial architecture.

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OMAN HANDBALL TEAM
EDGE QATAR IN THRILLER



WALEED AL JAHWARI
DUBAI, APRIL 24

Oman handball team edged Qatar with a last-minute goal to win by 28-29 in the first GCC Youth Games being hosted by the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday. This was the second win for Oman after they beat hosts UAE earlier.

Oman had lost against Saudia Arabia and Kuwait in the other matches. Oman faces Bahrain on Thursday to determine the top three teams.

On Tuesday night, the Sultanate of Oman delegation took part in the official opening

ceremony of the Games in Dubai Opera.

The delegation included HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Vice-Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee, Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishri, Secretary-General of OOC, Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, board member, Lujaina bint Mohsen Haider Darwish, board member, Sanaa al Busaidy, Chairperson of Oman Committee for Women's Sports and Gender Equality, and Kadhim al Balushi, Director of the Mission.

In present of Shaikh Mansour bin Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Chairman of the

Dubai Sports Council, and Shaikh Rashid bin Humaid al Nuaimi, Vice-President of the UAE Olympic Committee, Dubai Opera hosted the opening ceremony of the first edition of GCC Youth Games, with the participation of 3,500 male and female athletes competing in 25 sports in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman and Fujairah.

The ceremony, which lasted 40 minutes, included three themes: sustainability, cohesion, and youth, through the latest technological, artificial intelligence tools and using of sustainable materials, in addition to highlighting the

deep-rooted fraternal relations between GCC people. The ceremony also witnessed a special aspect for youth through some action-packed and kinetic performances.

Table tennis competitions began on Wednesday, and will continue until April 27, at Shabab Al Ahli Club hall in Dubai. Oman are represented by Ali al Rawahi, Turki al Abri, and Nasser al Zaabi. Oman boys lost to Qatar 3-1 in their first match.

Oman girls also lost to Kuwait 3-0. Oman team was represented by Talia al Rawahiyah and Salma al Nasiriyah.

In the evening matches,

Bahrain beat Oman 3-0 in the girls section, while UAE blanked Oman 3-0 in the boys section.

In volleyball, Oman slumped to their fourth defeat against Saudi Arabia 25-14, 25-15, 25-19.

Oman are already out of any medal contention and face Bahrain in their last match at Al Nasr Club hall.

Meanwhile, Oman golf team arrived in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday, after completing preparatory training at the Al Mouj Golf Course.

The players list includes Adam bin Masoud al Barwani, Mahir Sampat, Pransh Jagwani,

Muhib bin Jamil al Kathiri, Masoud bin Abdullah al Barwani, team official and Ahmed bin Faisal al Jahdhami, technical member.

After the conclusion of 10 game's competitions over 8 days, hosts UAE lead the overall medal standings with 138 medals, while Saudi Arabia occupy second place with 51 medals with more gold medals than Kuwait in third place with 57 medals, a difference in gold medals, while Oman occupy fourth place with 35 medals, Qatar are fifth with 19 medals and Bahrain are sixth and last with 26 medals.

Al Shabab edge Al Wahda, Ibri secure win over Dhofar

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Al Shabab defeated Al Wahda 2-1 in a match played at the Sur Sports Complex, as part of the 18th round of the Oman League on Tuesday.

The first half started with an average level of play with short passes from both sides. Al Shabab had a chance in the fifth minute through Hatim al Humaimi, who shot a ball that went wide of the post. Al Shabab players then had several chances that were not executed perfectly. Al Wahda did not perform as expected and did not reach Al Shabab's goal. The performance continued without any danger amidst a retreat by Al Wahda players and slowness by Al Shabab players. The score remained 0-0 between the two teams.

The second half started well with an attacking spirit from both

sides. A ball was prepared for Hatim al Humaimi in the 48th minute, but it was saved by Al Wahda goalkeeper Ibrahim al Rajhi.

Al Wahda responded with a ball through Dhiab al Shehimi, who shot a ball that went over the crossbar in the 50th minute. In the 58th minute, Al Wahda striker Musha'al al Majizi missed a certain goal after entering the penalty area and shooting a wide ball. The 63rd minute witnessed Al Shabab's first goal from a counterattack after the ball reached professional player Marcelo Gomes, who took advantage of the advance of Al Wahda goalkeeper Ibrahim al Rajhi, to put the ball into the net. After the goal, the performance became active and a goal opportunity appeared for Al Shabab through Hatim al Humaimi, who found himself alone with the Al Wahda goalkeeper, but he put the ball



outside the goal, wasting a chance to score the second goal in the 71st minute. Al Wahda striker Musha'al al Majizi led an attack inside the 18-yard box and was tackled by Al Shabab defenders

in the 87th minute. The referee did not hesitate to whistle for a penalty kick, which was converted by Hamad al Mukhaini to score the equaliser. Attempts continued and from an Al Shabab attack, the ball reached Marcelo Gomes, who put the ball into Al Wahda's net, scoring the second goal for Al Shabab in the 90th minute. The match ended with Al Shabab winning 2-1.

With this victory, Al Shabab raised their tally to 23 points and moved up to seventh place, while Al Wahda's score remained at 10 points, bottoming out the overall standings of the league.

IBRI MOVE UP

Ibri defeated Dhofar 1-0 on Tuesday evening in a match played at the Ibri Sports Complex. Dhofar entered the field pressing Ibri in an attempt to score an early goal, but the steadfastness of Ibri defence, led by goalkeeper Mazen

al Kasbi, prevented that. In the 15th minute, Dhofar had a chance through Raed Ibrahim inside the penalty area, but he was unable to capitalise on it. Dhofar's attacking attempts continued, but to no avail, and the first half ended in a 0-0 draw.

The second half started with the same attacking pace from Dhofar, but Ibri defended well and emerged from Dhofar's attacks safely. In the 65th minute, Ibri managed to score the winning goal through Emmanuel Mahoub, who took advantage of a counterattack and shot the ball into Dhofar's net. Dhofar tried to come back into the match, but Ibri defended well and kept a clean sheet. The match ended with Ibri winning by 1-0.

With this victory, Ibri raised their points to 24, snatching fifth place from Al Rustaq on goal difference, while Dhofar dropped to ninth spot with 20 points.

Unbeaten Stoinis ton helps Lucknow chase 211 to beat CSK



Lucknow Super Giants' Marcus Stoinis celebrates after scoring the winning runs against Chennai Super Kings. – IPL

CHENNAI: Australia's Marcus Stoinis hit an unbeaten 124 as Lucknow Super Giants chased down a target of 211 with six wickets and three balls to spare against Chennai Super Kings on Tuesday.

It was Stoinis' first IPL century and his second in T20 cricket, trumping an unbeaten 108 by Chennai skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad at his home MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Lucknow looked in trouble at 88-3 after 11 overs but Stoinis put on 70 runs with Nicholas Pooran, who hit 34 off 15 balls, and an unbeaten 65-run stand with Deepak Hooda to achieve victory in 19.3 overs.

Stoinis reached his hundred

in 56 balls as he and Hooda, who made 17 not out off six balls, secured Lucknow's second straight win over Chennai, replacing the five-time winners in fourth spot.

Needing 17 to win in the final over, Stoinis smashed Mustafizur Rahman for a six and three fours, including one off a no ball.

"Tough pill to swallow, but good game of cricket," said Gaikwad. "LSG played really well in the back end. We had the game in control till 13-14 overs, but Stoinis played a great innings."

Stoinis walked in in the first over after Quinton de Kock's departure for a duck and paced

his innings to perfection as he hit 13 fours and six sixes in his 63-ball knock.

It was the highest score by a batsman while chasing in the IPL.

Hooda said Stoinis "played like a warrior, he is a kind of motivation to us".

Sri Lanka pace bowler Matheesha Pathirana took two wickets including the dangerous Pooran.

Chennai posted 210-4 courtesy of Gaikwad's second IPL ton and a 104-run stand between the captain and Shivam Dube, who smashed 66, after the hosts were invited to bat first.

Gaikwad took on the

opposition attack despite losing Ajinkya Rahane and Daryl Mitchell and raised his hundred from 56 balls with a six and four.

Gaikwad became only the third Chennai player after India's Murali Vijay and Australia's Shane Watson to hit two IPL tons and moved to second in this season's batting chart with 349 runs.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru star Virat Kohli tops the chart with 379 runs.

Dube got to his fifty with a four and a six before being run out in the final over, which saw veteran MS Dhoni walk out to a rousing reception and hit a four off the final ball. — AFP

National Museum unveils memorabilia of Ali al Habsi

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The National Museum, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, held an inauguration ceremony for several memorabilia of Omani international goalkeeper Ali bin Abdullah al Habsi on Wednesday.

These memorabilia, which are being exhibited for the first time, include the medal he won for winning the FA Cup with Wigan Athletic in the 2012-2013 season, as well as the shirt he wore in the final of the tournament.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by several prominent figures from the cultural and sports fields, including Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, and Basil bin Ahmed bin Amer al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, along with several sports figures and enthusiasts.

Jamal al Musawi expressed his pride in displaying Al Habsi's achievements in the National Museum, stressing the importance of documenting his inspiring career as a national icon in the world of football, and his hope that this initiative will be a source of inspiration for everyone, especially young people, to achieve success through hard work and dedication to their homeland.

For his part, Al Habsi expressed his pride and honour

at the inauguration ceremony for the establishment of a corner of his sports achievements in the National Museum. He praised the high directives of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, which linked the achievements of athletes to museums, stressing that this reflects an interest in sports and athletes and encourages everyone to make more achievements.

Al Habsi added that success in football depends on teamwork and the strength of the team, a principle that has accompanied him throughout his sports and personal career. He also drew attention to the support he received from those around him, especially the care and support of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who was an inspiration to the youth of the country.

In his footsteps, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik continues the ongoing renaissance of Oman.

The memorabilia that were displayed in the museum included a medal made of 9-karat gold, as well as a sports shirt engraved with the details of the historic match in which Wigan Athletic won the FA Cup.

It is noteworthy that Al Habsi, who retired from football in August 2020, achieved many successes during his career, and was one of the most prominent goalkeepers in the region and the world, and won several awards and honours during his professional and sports career.



Oman emerge as regional winners in ICC Development Awards

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The Sultanate of Oman emerged as Asian regional winners in two categories as the International Cricket Council (ICC) revealed the regional winners in the 2023 edition of the ICC Development Awards on Wednesday.

Oman topped the Asian Regional section in the 100 per cent Cricket Female Cricket Initiative of the Year and ICC Associate Member Men's Performance of the Year categories to cap a productive last year.

The ICC Development Awards were established in 2002 to celebrate the world-leading initiatives and innovative programmes delivered by ICC Members to grow the game around the globe. As many as 21 nations have been honoured as regional winners spanning six award categories: the ICC Development Initiative of the Year, the 100 per cent Cricket Women's Cricket Initiative of the Year, the ICC Digital Fan Engagement of the Year and the Cricket 4 Good Social Impact Initiative of the Year, plus two awards recognising the outstanding on-field performances in men's and women's international cricket in 2023.

Among the standout initiatives that have been recognised as regional winners are vibrant participation programmes in Italy,

Mexico and Nigeria, women's cricket initiatives in Sierra Leone, Costa Rica and Japan, plus social impact projects in Bahrain, Samoa and Scotland.

Also honoured are performances by Canada, Indonesia as well as the Netherlands, who provided plenty of highlights during the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 in India.

Regional winners will now be put forward for voting to determine the global awardees in each category, selected by a specialist panel of game development experts, former international cricketers and media personnel. Speaking on the announcement of regional winners, ICC General Manager – Development, William Glenwright said: "We are delighted to announce the regional winners in the ICC Development Awards for 2023. I want to thank all of our Members for the work that they commit to growing the game like it has never grown before and congratulate all of the successful member federations on their remarkable achievements in 2023."

"The ICC Development Awards is a long-running initiative that recognises and rewards the outstanding efforts to grow and strengthen the game in our 94 ICC Associate Member nations. 2023 was an extraordinary year for emerging nations and their relentless passion



for the sport is evident in the nominations we have received.

"Through a variety of participation programmes, digital innovations and inclusive social impact programmes we have once again seen how cricket continues to enrich communities around the world. With the addition of some historic on-field successes, there is plenty to celebrate and we look forward to crowning the six global winners later in the year."

The ICC Development Initiative

of the Year award recognises the outstanding development initiative delivered during the year and regional winners include Nigeria Cricket Federation, whose Under-17 Cricket Championship continues to provide competitive playing opportunities for boys and girls across the country. Mexico Cricket Association is nominated for their innovative programme that saw the sport delivered in prisons throughout Mexico City. Cricket PNG were honoured for

their Malolo Cricket initiative – a hard ball competition designed for 12 to 18-year-olds which exploded in popularity in 2023. Completing the nominations are Qatar Cricket Association's successful implementation of national projects including criio to grow their participation numbers and Federazione Cricket Italiana's 'Now Let's Play Together!' scheme, where cricket was introduced to school curricula to encourage greater participation across a variety of age groups in the country, with striking results.

The 100 per cent Cricket Female Cricket Initiative of the Year acknowledges the outstanding female cricket focused initiatives and among the programmes highlighted as regional winners are Cricket Belgium's initiative to develop their women's cricket infrastructure and expand the network of players and volunteers led by Smriti Kaneria, Costa Rica Cricket Federation's groundbreaking work alongside their National Institute for Women to host a Mothers and Daughters programme, the Women's Japan Premier League delivered by the Japan Cricket Association to drive greater competition among their national women's team, Sierra Leone Cricket Association's initiative on International Women's Day which brought 800 females together

alongside inspirational public figures for empowerment discussions and cricket activities plus finally Oman Cricket's 'Cricket4Her' programme – an effort to redefine the landscape of women's cricket in the country through tournaments and skill development.

In the men's performance category, the regional winners include Oman, who celebrated a successful year in ODI and T20 cricket, Indonesia, who claimed bronze at the SEA Games, Sierra Leone, who enjoyed landmark victories at U19 level over Nigeria and Uganda, Canada, who emerged victorious from the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Americas Qualifier and the Netherlands, who produced a series of blockbuster victories at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 and the Qualifier.

ICC REGIONAL LIST
100 per cent Cricket Female Cricket Initiative of the Year
Africa Regional Winner – Sierra Leone Cricket Association
Americas Regional Winner – Costa Rica Cricket Federation
Asia Regional Winner – Oman Cricket
EAP Regional Winner – Japan Cricket Association
Europe Regional Winner – Cricket Belgium
ICC Associate Member Men's Performance of the Year
Africa Regional Winner - Sierra Leone
Americas Regional Winner - Canada
Asia Regional Winner - Oman
EAP Regional Winner - Indonesia
Europe Regional Winner - Netherlands

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, APRIL 24

Having inflicted an embarrassing 5-0 defeat on Chelsea, the Gunners have put themselves three points clear at the top of the Premier League. While their nearest rivals for the title race, Liverpool and Manchester City have one and two games in hand respectively, Arsenal's barrage of goals gives them further significant advantage.

Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta, said: "A big performance, I thought collectively and individually we were really good against a really good team that was in great form and that was going to ask us a lot of questions. I think we responded really well. From the first half we were really flowing and playing with a lot of courage and making things happen."

He added: "Really happy today with the result, it's a great day for our supporters as well. So happy with the amount of chances and goals we scored and the clean sheet showed the consistency of the team. I congratulate them for their performance and for making our supporters proud and happy. It's a big London derby and we know what it means for them. It was a joy to watch them and enjoy today."

Chelsea were poor from the start. Even when they played reasonably well in short spells in the first half their finishing was poor. Nicolas Jackson, who had a series of misses in the FA Cup semifinal defeat three days earlier, missed the best chance in the 40th minute when from six yards he failed to head in a cross by Conor Gallagher.

Arsenal went into the lead as early as the 4th minute when Declan Rice advanced from midfield and passed to Leandro Trossard whose low, left-footed shot went inside the near post and that's how the score remained at the break.

But seven minutes into the second half, the Gunners artillery came into full use just after Djordje Petrovic had made a fine diving save from a firm shot by Rice. The Chelsea defence was soon exposed following a corner when a shot by Rice was blocked but the ball went perfectly for Ben White to put in a left-footed curling shot.

Five minutes later the third goal arrived. Kai Havertz took a superb pass from Martin Odegaard, held off Marc Cucurella and clipped a shot high into the net. But that wasn't enough for the German, he wanted a brace and that he achieved in the 65th minute. It was from another excellent pass to him in the box from where his low shot beat Petrovic off the foot of the post and by then the match was already way beyond Chelsea at 4-0.

Finally, with ten minutes remaining, White too completed a brace when his side-footed volley from a chipped pass by Odegaard went in over Petrovic.

Chelsea manager, Mauricio Pochettino, said: "Everyone saw we didn't compete from the beginning of the game. After we conceded, the team was so soft. I'm so disappointed with the start because we were supposed to compete better. We were not aggressive enough and that is why we're so disappointed. The team showed a lack of capacity to resist."

GOAL FEST PUTS ARSENAL CLEAR ON TOP OF LEAGUE



Arsenal's Ben White celebrates scoring their fifth goal with team-mates. – Reuters



Arsenal's Kai Havertz celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters

Al Faisal, Grenier set for GT Open race in Portugal

MUSCAT: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and new Canadian team-mate Mikael Grenier are taking part in this weekend's opening round of the 2024 International GT Open at the Autodromo Internacional Algarve, in Portimao, Portugal.

After Portugal, the eight-round 2024 International GP Open calendar continues in Germany and Belgium next month, Hungary in June, the Paul Ricard circuit in France in July, a pair of races in Austria and Spain in September and the finale at Monza in Italy on October 20. However, the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes AMG GT3 duo will only compete in Spa and Barcelona after this weekend.

Al Zubair said: "I am really looking forward to the start of the International GT Open



season. I will be participating in three rounds, all with Mick Grenier. Not only is he a very strong driver but he is someone I get along with very well. He will be with me in GT World Challenge Endurance and for these three rounds.

"We are with Getspeed and Al Manar Racing and we feel our package is extremely strong.



The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew will tackle this weekend's International GT Open round in Portugal.

We don't see a reason why we shouldn't be fighting for the win."

Al Zubair teamed up with Fabian Schiller to win the Portuguese race outright last year in their Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes AMG GT3. It marked the Omani's seventh GT Open race success after he finished third overall in

the championship in his first full season in 2021.

The Optimum Motorsport duo of Samuel de Haan and Charlie Fagg were their closest challengers in second place in a McLaren 720S GT3. Team Motopark's Diego Menchaca and Marcos Siebert finished third.

Al Zubair and Grenier will

crew the Mercedes in both the International GT Open and the Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup this season. Grenier finished second in the International GT Open back in 2019 after winning four races with the Emil Frey Racing Lamborghini.

Earlier this month, the pair teamed up with Austrian Dominik Baumann to finish second in the Gold Cup category at the first round of the Fanatec series at Paul Ricard.

International GT Open competitors are sharing the Portuguese circuit with Euroformula Open, GT Cup Europe, Clio Cup Series and Alpine Elf Europa Cup entrants this weekend.

The circuit was designed by Ricardo Pina Arquitectos and

finished in October 2008. It has been hosting ELMS, DTM and WEC for several years, while the International GT Open visited for the first time in 2010. Since 2020, it has also hosted MotoGP.

Private tests will be permitted on Thursday, before three free practice sessions take place on the 4.653km circuit on Friday (April 26). A televised 30-minute qualifying session follows from 09.30hrs on Saturday morning for one designated driver and the first 70-minute race gets underway with a rolling start from 14.15hrs.

The second qualifying session takes place at the earlier time of 09.00hrs on Sunday morning, prior to the one-hour second race of the weekend, which gets underway with a rolling start at 12.20hrs.





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Construction to kick off on Oman-UAE rail project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Coinciding with the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the United Arab Emirates, Etihad Rail, Oman Rail, and Mubadala Investment Company, signed a partnership agreement as shareholders marking the commencement of construction works of the joint railway project with immediate effect.

An agreement was also signed to award the civil works and construction tender for the joint network to an Omani-Emirati alliance led by Trojan Construction Group (NPC) and Galfar Engineering and Contracting, aligning with joint efforts to build national capabilities and drive in-country value, which includes the involvement of the private sector in the implementation of the joint project.

The alliance will also include Tristar Engineering & Construction (TE&C) and National Infrastructure Construction Company (NICC).

In addition, another tender for the systems and integration of the railway network, was awarded to a joint venture between Siemens and HAC, ensuring Hafeet Rail's fleet are equipped with



Officials from Oman and UAE at the signing of agreements linked to the implementation of the Oman - UAE rail project.

the latest rail technologies and advancements.

The trains will be equipped with the European Train Control System (ETCS) Level 2, the most advanced such system in the world, to ensure the highest levels of efficiency and safety in accordance with international standards and best practice.

As a result, the network's advanced infrastructure will

include full digital train control and tracking through GPS technology, enhancing the network's reliability.

The signing ceremony was attended by Shaikh Hamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Managing Director of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA),

Suhail bin Mohammed al Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure of the UAE, Mohamed Hassan al Suwaidi, Minister of Investment of the UAE and Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of ADQ, Mohamed bin Hadi al Hussaini, Minister of State for Financial Affairs in the UAE, Khaldoon Khalifa al Mubarak, Managing Director and Group Chief

Executive Officer of Mubadala, and Shaikh Nasser bin Sulaiman al Harthy, Deputy President of Operations at Oman Investment Authority and Chairman of Asyad Group.

Also in attendance were senior officials from ADQ, Etihad Rail, Mubadala Investment Company, the Oman Investment Authority, and Asyad Group, as well as representatives of the Emirati-Omani alliance that won the civil works and construction contract for the project.

Etihad Rail, Oman Rail, and Mubadala Investment Company also unveiled the new corporate identity of their joint venture, which will now be known as Hafeet Rail (formerly Oman and Etihad Rail Company).

The name pays homage to Jebel Hafeet, stretching between the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE.

Jebel Hafeet holds strategic significance and historical importance for both countries, serving as a link between the two neighbours through its rugged terrain, which includes mountains, deserts, and unique limestone formations.

Rising to a towering 1,249 meters above sea level, its numerous picturesque natural landmarks have long captivated citizens and tourists alike from

across the globe.

Commenting on the occasion, Shaikh Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Chairman of Etihad Rail, said the agreements were in line with the wise directives of the leadership of the two neighbouring countries, enhancing the long-standing historical relations between them, supporting economic and commercial integration, and strengthening their social and cultural ties.

He added that the project is another step forward in a long history of joint cooperation and will kickstart a new phase of planning for a better future for the two neighbouring countries and their people.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, noted that the joint railway network is a significant addition to the logistics sector, and will play a crucial role in stimulating various industrial sectors and economic activities, providing increased commercial and investment opportunities for the private sector, supporting the integration of Omani port activities and linking them to regional and international markets, in addition to its contribution to attracting national and foreign investments.

TURN TO PAGE 15

OETC-led alliance to explore cooperation in renewables and green metals with UAE



Officials from Oman and UAE at the signing of the framework memorandum.

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), in partnership with a number of Omani institutions operating in the fields of power, renewables and green metals, has signed a framework memorandum with a leading organised based in the United Arab Emirates.

The pact aims to bolster cooperation between the two brotherly countries in developing green industries, renewable and clean energy sectors, among other related areas.

The framework memorandum was signed on the sidelines of a visit by an Omani trade delegation to the UAE. Counterparts from the UAE side also attended the signing.

This memorandum will enable the commencement of feasibility studies to explore projects in the areas of renewable energy, green steel, and aluminium.

OETC and its Omani partners will work with their UAE counterparts to conduct feasibility studies and electricity connection requirements, and identify required investments.

The move comes as both sides seek to unlock opportunities in the fields of green metals, renewable energy, and environmental sustainability.

Both sides also aim to provide the right climate and groundwork for the private sector to invest in these areas. It is also a step that will contribute to Oman's efforts towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

OETC is keen to support continuous growth in sectors such as renewable and clean energy, green industries, and others, due to its significant positive impact and added value in achieving the national visions embodied in Oman Vision 2040.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Amidst the backdrop of the Oman Petroleum and Energy Show (OPES) 2024, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals, in a video message, highlighted the enduring significance of the oil and gas industry despite the ongoing global energy transition.

The event took place on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, gathering key stakeholders and industry professionals.

Eng Salim al Aufi underscored the undeniable importance of oil and gas as integral components of the global energy mix for the foreseeable future. Despite the growing emphasis on renewable energy sources like hydrogen, the Minister emphasised that forecasts from leading international agencies such as the IEA, OPEC, and IHS consistently project the continued relevance of oil and gas.

He stressed that the energy industry must maintain its



momentum and not veer off the path of progress.

Moreover, Al Aufi pointed out the indispensable role of oil and gas in supporting the petrochemical sector, which forms the backbone of numerous everyday products.

He emphasised that petrochemicals, derived from hydrocarbons, are essential for the production of various goods ranging from plastics to textiles.

Highlighting the pervasive presence of petrochemicals in

our daily lives, he illustrated how integral these materials are to modern society.

The Minister's speech delved into the economic significance of the oil and gas industry for Oman, revealing that it currently accounts for a substantial portion of the country's GDP, approximately 70 to 72 per cent. This underscores the pivotal role that the sector plays in driving economic growth and stability within Oman.

Furthermore, Al Aufi highlighted the sector's

contribution to national employment, particularly for the youth, with a strong focus on Omanisation efforts to empower local talent.

Al Aufi also shed light on the expanding international recognition of Omani service providers within the oil and gas industry, signalling a positive trend towards global competitiveness.

He emphasised the importance of nurturing local companies to broaden their horizons beyond national borders, thus enhancing the sector's overall capacity and reach. Lastly, in a reflection on corporate social responsibility (CSR), Al Aufi lauded the industry for its unwavering commitment to community-centric initiatives that transcend economic boundaries.

From grassroots endeavours to government-led collaborations, these CSR endeavours epitomise the oil and gas sector's holistic approach to societal development, touching lives and fostering well-being across diverse segments of Omani society.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds unveils ‘Golden Gift’ offers for customers

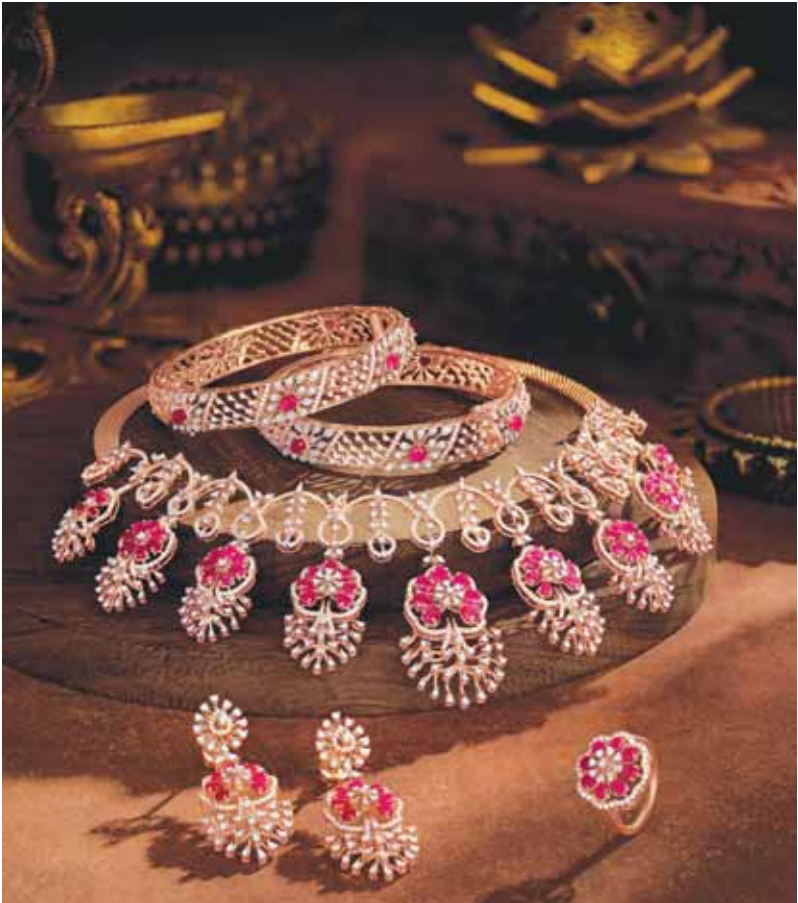
MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an extensive retail network of 350 outlets across 13 countries, has just unveiled their ‘Golden Gift’ offers providing customers the chance to get free gold coins. With this offer, customers can get assured gold coins with gold & diamond jewellery purchases.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds will also be showcasing an exquisite array of jewellery collections in gold, diamond and precious gems across their numerous sub brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraaaz, Ethnix & Divine etc., which are assured to be favourites amongst their customers.

The limited period offer can be availed across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets till May 11.

As part of the Golden Gift offers, for every diamond or precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO 500, customers will get free 1gm gold coin and for diamond and precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO 300 they will be eligible for ½ gm gold coin.

In light of the gold rate



fluctuations, customers can take advantage of the Gold Rate Protection offer provided by Malabar Gold & Diamonds, wherein customers can block the

prevailing gold rates by paying just a 10% as advance, valid till the 10th May.

If the gold rate goes up during this period, customers can

purchase at the blocked rate and if the rate happens to go down, customers can draw mileage from the lower rate.

FOR EVERY DIAMOND OR PRECIOUS GEM JEWELLERY PURCHASE WORTH RO 500, CUSTOMERS WILL GET FREE 1GM GOLD COIN AND FOR DIAMOND AND PRECIOUS GEM JEWELLERY PURCHASE WORTH RO 300 THEY WILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR ½ GM GOLD COIN.

The Gold Rate Protection offer can be availed by visiting any of Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlet, or online through their mobile app.

“The Golden Gift offers from Malabar Gold & Diamonds will definitely be a great compliment to the prosperity that our customers usher in when they buy jewellery.

With the assurance of free gold coins on jewellery purchase along with many more offers, we are certain that connoisseurs of jewellery across the nation will flock to our showrooms.

Offering great value on purchase along with a wide host of trendy designs that are a treat for jewellery lovers, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is once again

solidifying its position as the go-to place for jewellery shopping”, commented Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

The exclusive collection of jewellery that the brand has unveiled presents jewellery lovers with an enthralling array of designs in gold, diamond and precious gem jewellery.

The special design has been made available across a wide range of sub-brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraaaz, Ethnix and Divine, comprising of 22k gold, diamonds and precious gem jewellery.

Furthermore, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is offering customers 24K gold bars at zero making charges as well as special buy counters across their showrooms, offering incredible discounts on selected jewellery designs.

BankDhofar enhances customer service with extended branch hours for SMEs



MUSCAT: BankDhofar is pleased to announce extended working hours in 13 branches across the Sultanate of Oman exclusively for Small and Medium Enterprise customers.

This move is in line with Oman Vision 2040 focus on this sector.

This initiative reflects the banks dedication to deliver customer-centric solutions to its entrepreneurial clients, thereby supporting them in their growth and reflect on nation's economic prosperity.

This strategic move is complemented by the recent launch of a specialised business bank account tailored for SMEs, offering a comprehensive suite of banking solutions to meet their unique requirements.

With an expanded branch network and advanced digital offerings, entrepreneurs can meet the relationship managers at their convenience.

SME customers can visit the mentioned branches from 3:00pm to 8:00pm on a daily basis except for Friday and Saturday. The branches operating at extended hours are: Ruwi (Lulu Centre), Muttrah, Seeb, Al Maabelah Industrial City and Al Khoudh in Muscat Governorate, and Barka (the old BankDhofar branch).

Al Batinah South Governorate, and Fanja (Bidbid) in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. In addition to Ibri branch in Al Dhahirah Governorate, Sur in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, Al Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate and Salalah Industrial Zone in Dhofar Governorate.

NBO holds Tamayuz programme graduation for emerging leaders

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing commitment to leadership development and professional growth, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently celebrated the graduation of participants from its Tamayuz programme.

This initiative is designed to cultivate the bank's next generation of leaders through a comprehensive development framework that leverages both internal expertise and insights from renowned external professionals, reaffirming NBO's dedication to community engagement and professional development.

Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO, remarked, “The Tamayuz programme stands as a cornerstone within our broader strategy, within our people pillar.

While it is a pivotal initiative in our employee development portfolio, it is one of many

endeavours undertaken to fortify our institution's future.

By equipping our talented team with essential skills, knowledge, and leadership capabilities, we cultivate a culture of excellence and innovation at the National Bank of Oman.

We take immense pride in our graduates, who are well-prepared to drive significant growth and success moving forward.

Their adeptness at aligning strategic goals with practical implementation is instrumental for our bank's continued progress.”

The programme began with the Assessment Centre, which initiated a thorough selection process.

Candidates underwent extensive testing and interviews, from this competitive group, 49 outstanding individuals were selected to join the Tamayuz talent programme, aimed at



enhancing the bank's operational performance and success.

The programme offered a dynamic curriculum that featured personal effectiveness sessions, technical workshops, leadership courses, professional certifications, and e-learning modules.

Participants also took part

in live projects, applying their newfound knowledge to real-world challenges, thus gaining valuable insights and substantially boosting their capabilities.

Developed and executed by the bank's Academy of Excellence in collaboration with HR and senior management, the programme included contributions from both

internal and external thought leaders, distinguished professors from renowned universities, bestselling authors, and seasoned corporate trainers.

Covering topics such as ‘Agility in the Digital Era’, ‘Strategic Decision Making’, ‘Innovation & Divergent Thinking’, and ‘Leading with Gravitas.’

Onsor Technologies paves way for innovation at SQU

MUSCAT: In a scene blending the authenticity of knowledge with the modernity of technology, Onsor Technologies, in collaboration with the Independent Learning Centre at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), concluded the events of the “Future Dimensions Week 2” corner, held at the Independent Learning Center from April 16 to 23.

The event was held in the presence of Professor Dr Salim bin Hamoud al Harthy, Vice-President of the University for Academic Affairs and Community Service, Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Community Service Professor Dr Hussein bin Ali al Kharousi, Dr Hamoud bin Salim al Shuaibi, Director of the Independent Learning Centre, and several faculty members, drawing



the curtain on a revolutionary educational experience that opened new horizons for students and faculty members.

The event witnessed a huge turnout of students who gathered

to explore the innovative ‘AMAD Device’ technology, which allows them to experience three-dimensional education without the need for special glasses.

In this context, Engineer

Maadh bin Ahmed al Hanai, CEO of Onsor Technologies, explained: “The ‘AMAD Device’ relies on advanced technology that enables the user to interact with three-dimensional content through

precise cameras that monitor their eye movements.

Thanks to this technology, the screen becomes a gateway to rich cognitive worlds, where images become clearer and more understandable, making it easier for students to grasp information in an engaging and effective way.”

Al Hanai added: “The capabilities of the ‘AMAD Device’ are not limited to facilitating the learning process but extend to enhancing interaction with educational content, adding a fun and enthusiastic dimension to the educational process.

Three-dimensional images contribute to enhancing deep understanding of concepts, especially those complex ones that are difficult to visualise in two-dimensional space.

The ‘AMAD Device’ technology represents a significant step towards enhancing the use of technology in education, and it represents a qualitative addition to the efforts of Sultan Qaboos University and Onsor Technologies in developing the educational process and providing a distinguished educational environment for all students.”

Engineer Essam al Ismaili, CCO at Onsor Technologies, expressed his immense satisfaction with the success of the “Future Dimensions Week 2” event, affirming the company's commitment to disseminating this innovative technology in all educational institutions, believing in its importance in improving the quality of education and enhancing students' skills.



OQ: Evolving energy landscape a strategic blend of various resources

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Speaking at the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) on Tuesday, Dr Anwar al Kharusi, OQ Vice-President of Business Development, shed light on the future of the global energy mix.

He dispelled the notion of a straightforward transition from one dominant source to another, instead advocating for a more nuanced perspective: a strategic blend of various resources.

Dr Al Kharusi acknowledged the continued relevance of fossil fuels, particularly oil and gas, which currently comprise roughly 75 per cent of the global energy mix, with oil itself contributing a significant 50-60 per cent share.

However, he underscored a critical shift in investment trends. Financial institutions are increasingly prioritising 'lighter'

oil and gas projects with lower environmental impact.

This strategic shift is driven by the demonstrably larger carbon footprint associated with heavy oil and Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) projects.

Conversely, gas presents a cleaner alternative that is also readily deployable across diverse industries, making it a more attractive proposition for investors, he noted.

This trend towards gas is not merely a global phenomenon, it is also reflected in the strategic direction of OQ, Oman's global integrated energy group. While oil will not be entirely sidelined, the focus is demonstrably shifting towards gas projects, reflecting a recalibration within the energy landscape, he pointed out.

Going beyond this current shift, Dr Al Kharusi emphasised the crucial role of integrating



Conversely, gas presents a cleaner alternative that is also readily deployable across diverse industries, making it a more attractive proposition for investors

**DR ANWAR
AL KHARUSI**

OQ Vice-President of Business Development

renewable energy sources into existing infrastructure.

He cited OQ's collaboration with TotalEnergies on the Marsa LNG project as a prime example of this forward-thinking approach. This project exemplifies the strategic blending of natural gas with solar power, resulting in a cleaner energy mix with a reduced carbon footprint, he remarked.

Looking ahead, Al Kharusi envisions a future where the energy mix is a carefully curated blend, not a simple replacement of one source with another.

Fossil fuels will continue to play a vital role, but with a growing emphasis on cleaner options like gas and a seamless integration of renewable energy sources.

This integrated approach holds the key to enhancing the competitiveness of renewable energy and paving the way for a more sustainable future, he added.

Value of Oman's cybersecurity market to hit \$58 million by 2025



The digital economy currently accounts for 2 per cent share of Oman's GDP.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

The value of the cybersecurity market in the Sultanate in Oman is expected to grow to \$58 million by 2025 at an average annual compound growth rate of 24 per cent, according to Eng Maqbool bin Salim al Wahaibi, CEO of Data Park, Oman's first and largest data centre.

Speaking at the Oman Cybersecurity Conference last week, Al Wahaibi revealed that the growth can be linked to the increase of Internet of Things (IOT) services and cybersecurity attacks. "From an economic perspective, the cybersecurity market in the Sultanate is expected to experience a significant increase of 24 per cent by 2025.

This is due to anticipated growth in Internet of Things services and an increase in the frequency of cyberattacks on the banking and healthcare sectors due to their complete transition to what is known as full electronic services," he stated.

Furthermore, he shared that cybercrime losses represent a significant portion of the digital economy's size. "[...] cybercrime and its losses to the global economy accounted for 40 per cent of the digital economy's size, and it is expected to account for 50 per cent by 2025," Al Wahaibi said, noting that cyberattacks resulted in losses exceeding one million dollars in 2020.

According to Al Wahaibi,

the cybersecurity market in the Mena region is valued around \$20.3 billion and is expected to grow to \$44.7 billion in 2027, while the global cybersecurity market is anticipated to reach \$657 billion by 2030.

Badar al Salehi, Director-General of the Oman National Computer Emergency Readiness Team (OCERT), shared that Oman recently issued the National Cybersecurity Industry Programme in an effort to enhance the industry's contribution to the local GDP.

"To enhance the cybersecurity industry and align it with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises cybersecurity as part of economic diversification and financial sustainability, efforts have been made in Oman to launch the National Cybersecurity Industry Programme in November 2022."

"This programme is one of the key national programmes within the National Digital Economy Programme, with a national vision aimed at establishing a specialised cybersecurity industry to enhance and diversify economic growth through the creation of a specialised cybersecurity industry in the region focusing on human capital, innovation and excellence."

According to Al Salehi, the programme aims to increase the contribution of the cybersecurity market to Oman's GDP, create job opportunities, promote independent and freelance services in the market and attract foreign investments.

Spot market, contract optimisation deals boost Oman LNG 2023 revenue



Oman LNG set a benchmark with a production above the nameplate capacity of 11.4 mtpa in 2023

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

Spot market and contract optimisation deals buoyed Oman LNG's earnings by more than \$1 billion last year in line with majority state-owned company's revamped marketing strategy that emphasises the importance of agility in capitalising on market opportunities.

The total revenue for the year, however, declined 21 per cent to \$4.9 billion, down from \$5.774 billion in 2022. Net Income After Tax (NIAT) totalled \$1.5 billion, down from \$1.970 billion in 2022.

Oman LNG Chief Executive Officer Hamed al Naamany stressed the "robust" financial results of the company, bolstered in particular by its flexible and agile marketing capabilities.

"Our track record includes 173 LNG cargos deliveries (combined from Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG), underscoring the scale and efficiency of our operations. In terms of financial performance, we maintained robust results with a total revenue of \$4.9 billion and a Net Income After Tax (NIAT) of \$1.5 billion," Al Naamany stated in the company's newly published 2023 Annual Report.

"Notably, we achieved a second consecutive record-breaking financial performance, highlighting the strength and reliability of our long-term agreements. Meanwhile, Qalhat

LNG (QLNG) allocated a total revenue of \$2,353 million in 2023, with an impressive dividend yield of 17 per cent from the invested portfolio.

Oman LNG remained active in the spot market and contracts optimisation leveraging increased agility and deals that yielded over \$1 billion in upside."

Of the 173 cargoes of LNG delivered during 2023, 6 per cent constituted spot sales, while the balance 94 per cent comprised shipments based on long-term contracts. A further 31 cargoes of natural gas liquids (NGLs), a byproduct of LNG production, were delivered to domestic off-takers during the year.

Talal al Aufi, Chairman – Oman LNG, said the company "set a benchmark with a production above the nameplate capacity of 11.4 million metric tonnes per annum of LNG in 2023". A notable highlight of the year, he said, was the mandate granted by shareholders to Oman LNG's management team to facilitate the extension of the company beyond 2024.

"As a part of this mandate, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals supported Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG's marketing campaign for 10 and 4 years respectively. In pursuance, Oman LNG was able to secure sales term commitments of up to 10.4 mtpa through term sheet agreements with a number of buyers and shareholders in Asia and European markets.

Construction to kick off on Oman-UAE rail project

FROM PAGE 13

This will drive the competitiveness of the two neighbouring countries at a global trade level, which will in turn enhance their economic prosperity.

Suhail bin Mohammed al Mazrouei, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure of the UAE, took the opportunity to emphasise the significance of the accomplishments already achieved by the company since its inception.

He highlighted its commendable levels of efficiency and dedication in taking early steps to establish a safe and sustainable joint railway network, in alignment with the strong bilateral relations and ties between the two nations.

The Minister of Investment of the UAE and Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of ADQ underscored the joint venture's accomplishments in the 18 months since its announcement, chiefly the completion of engineering and preparatory work for the network, which has paved the way for the commencement of construction.

Al Suwaidi emphasised the

network's role in facilitating local and regional trade, unlocking new opportunities in infrastructure, transportation and logistics sectors, and fostering economic diversification and comprehensive development. He also highlighted the tourism benefits that the project will provide, through the facilitation of easier travel between the two countries.

Eng Abdulrahman al Hatmi, Chief Executive Officer of Asyad Group, highlighted the role of the project in reaffirming Oman and the UAE's position as strategic logistical hubs for import and distribution of good to regional and global markets in light of the current economic boom in the GCC and particularly in Oman and the UAE.

He went on to commend the strategic vision and economic foresight of Oman and the Emirates which aims to foster an integrated transportation ecosystem that will reshape the logistics landscape in the region.

The project reaffirms the strategic and economic visions of both countries, bolstering their positions as logistical hubs for the import and distribution of goods to regional and global markets.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 24

In a significant boost to its portfolio and a strategic move towards diversification, Oman's Galfar Engineering & Contracting SAOG (Galfar) announced a joint venture contract with Oman-Etihad Rail LLC (Hafeet Rail) for the design and build of the Abu Dhabi-Suhar railway link project. The estimated project value stands at a hefty RO 521 million (approximately \$1.4 billion).

"This project win strengthens Galfar's order book and positions the company for a strategic foray into the promising realm of railway infrastructure projects," Galfar expressed their gratitude to Hafeet Rail for entrusting the project to their consortium.

The contract award was announced against the backdrop of the two-day State Visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the UAE that concluded on April 23, 2024. The Omani-UAE alliance led by Trojan Construction



Galfar is set to power the growth of an indigenous rail construction industry in Oman. Image for illustration only.

Group (NPC) of the UAE and Galfar of the Sultanate of Oman secured civil contracts for the joint development of the rail network.

The Abu Dhabi-Suhar railway link is a

cornerstone project in Oman's infrastructure development plans.

This high-speed rail line is expected to revolutionise transportation between the two economic powerhouses, significantly reducing travel time and bolstering trade activity across the region. Suhar is a major commercial and political centre which will benefit immensely from the improved connectivity. Analysts predict streamlined logistics, increased foreign investment and job creation as a result of this project.

Galfar brings a wealth of experience to the table. Established in 1971, the company has built a solid reputation for excellence in design and construction across diverse sectors like oil and gas, water and wastewater, and transportation.

Their proven ability to manage large-scale projects, coupled with their engineering and construction expertise, makes them a strong choice to lead the Abu Dhabi-Suhar railway project.

Oman’s investment policies deliver positive returns for national economy



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI.

There is great interest from foreign investors to establish productive, industrial and commercial projects in the Sultanate of Oman. However, the substantial facilities made available to the foreign investor are often not utilised if the primary objective of investor concerned is to obtain a residency visa to stay in the country for multiple years.

This facility to work in Oman has been exploited by some to compete with small Omani merchants and entrepreneurs.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, which is

responsible for granting commercial registrations, has realised this matter, and has taken several steps to stop those breaching local decisions and laws. However, the volume of commercial registrations confirms that the issue needs continuous monitoring. On the other hand, many large investors have succeeded in establishing projects that serve the national economy and create opportunities for the people of the country to work in several projects.

Thus, while the focus should remain on attracting foreign investment, measures should be reinforced to curb the potential for misuse of this channel by

some. Indeed, the issue was discussed during the annual media briefing of the ministry, attended by their excellencies, the Minister and Under-Secretaries.

Commercial registrations granted via the Invest Oman platform totalled 437,858 registrations by the end of December 2023, compared to 386,537 registrations in 2022.

The Ministry pledged to improve the business environment, exercise flexibility, and enhance services through its multiple platforms established for this purpose.

These efforts have led to the strengthening of Oman’s position as an important destination for investment.

Besides, these platforms have boosted awareness of the laws and legislations governing the business environment in Oman.

The Minister mentioned that a foreign investor who does not complete his procedures regarding opening a bank account or carrying out his mandated responsibilities, such as employing Omani staff or engaging in hidden, it will be obliged to cancel his registration.

Indeed, the fight against hidden trade has been continuing since the formation of the national team tasked with combating this phenomenon.

To deter this practice, the Ministry has granted investor residency visas to around 3,700

foreigners. But because of the failure of some to adhere to the laws, the ministry evaluated the work of all these investors and detected violations by some who were notified to rectify their situation.

The volume of investment in the country is increasing annually despite the unfortunate actions some investors. It soared to about RO 25.050 billion until the end of the third quarter of 2023, representing an increase of RO 4.821 billion, compared to the third quarter of 2023. This increase validates Oman’s investment policies, which continue to deliver positive returns overall to the national economy.

Microsoft makes a new push into smaller AI systems



CADE METZ
The author is a technology reporter for The New York Times.



KAREN WEISE
The author is a technology correspondent for The New York Times.

In the dizzying race to build generative artificial intelligence systems, the tech industry’s mantra has been bigger is better, no matter the price tag.

Now tech companies are starting to embrace smaller AI technologies that are not as powerful but cost a lot less. And for many customers, that may be a good trade-off.

On Tuesday, Microsoft introduced three smaller AI models that are part of a technology family the company has named Phi-3.

The company said even the smallest of the three performed almost as well as GPT-3.5, the much larger system that underpinned OpenAI’s ChatGPT chatbot when it stunned the world upon its release in late 2022.

The smallest Phi-3 model can fit on a smartphone, so it can be used even if it’s not connected to the internet.

And it can run on the kinds of chips that power regular computers, rather than more expensive processors made by Nvidia.

Because the smaller models require less processing, big tech providers can charge customers less to use them. They hope that means more customers can apply AI in places where the bigger, more advanced models have been too expensive to use.

Though Microsoft said using the new models would be “substantially cheaper” than using larger models like GPT-4, it did not offer specifics.

The smaller systems are less powerful, which means they can be less accurate or sound more awkward.

But Microsoft and other tech companies are betting that customers will be willing to forgo some performance if it means they can finally afford AI.

Customers imagine many ways to use AI, but with the biggest systems “they’re like, ‘Oh, but you know, they can get kind of expensive,’” said Eric Boyd, a Microsoft executive.

Smaller models, almost by definition, are cheaper to deploy, he said.

Boyd said some customers, like doctors or tax preparers,

THE SMALLER SYSTEMS ARE LESS POWERFUL, WHICH MEANS THEY CAN BE LESS ACCURATE OR SOUND MORE AWKWARD. BUT MICROSOFT AND OTHER TECH COMPANIES ARE BETTING THAT CUSTOMERS WILL BE WILLING TO FORGO SOME PERFORMANCE IF IT MEANS THEY CAN FINALLY AFFORD AI.



The smallest Phi-3 model can fit on a smartphone, so it can be used even if it’s not connected to the internet. – Reuters

could justify the costs of the larger, more precise AI systems because their time was so valuable.

But many tasks may not need the same level of accuracy. Online advertisers, for example, believe they can better target ads with AI, but they need lower costs to be able to use the systems regularly.

“I want my doctor to get things right,” Boyd said. “Other situations, where I am summarising online user reviews, if it’s a little bit off, it’s not the end of the world.”

Chatbots are driven by large language models, or LLMs, mathematical systems that spend weeks analysing digital books, Wikipedia articles, news articles, chat logs and other text culled from across the internet. By pinpointing patterns in all that text, they learn to generate text on their own.

But LLMs store so much

information, retrieving what is needed for each chat requires considerable computing power. And that is expensive.

While tech giants and startups like OpenAI and Anthropic have been focused on improving the largest AI systems, they are also competing to develop smaller models that offer lower prices. Meta and Google, for instance, have released smaller models over the past year.

Meta and Google have also “open sourced” these models, meaning anyone can use and modify them free of charge.

This is a common way for companies to get outside help improving their software and to encourage the larger industry to use their technologies. Microsoft is open sourcing its new Phi-3 models, too.

(The New York Times sued OpenAI and Microsoft in December for copyright infringement of news content

related to AI systems.) After OpenAI released ChatGPT, Sam Altman, the company’s CEO, said the cost of each chat was “single-digits cents” — an enormous expense considering what popular web services like Wikipedia are serving up for tiny fractions of a cent.

Now, researchers say their smaller models can at least approach the performance of leading chatbots like ChatGPT and Google Gemini.

Essentially, the systems can still analyse large amounts of data but store the patterns they identify in a smaller package that can be served with less processing power.

Building these models are a trade-off between power and size. Sébastien Bubeck, a researcher and vice president at Microsoft, said the company built its new smaller models by refining the data that was pumped into them, working to

ensure that the models learned from higher-quality text.

Part of this text was generated by the AI itself — what is known as “synthetic data.”

Then human curators worked to separate the sharpest text from the rest.

Microsoft has built three different small models: Phi-3-mini, Phi-3-small and Phi-3-medium. Phi-3-mini, which will be available on Tuesday, is the smallest (and cheapest) but the least powerful. Phi-3 Medium, which is not yet available, is the most powerful but the largest and most expensive.

Making systems small enough to go directly on a phone or personal computer “will make them a lot faster and order of magnitudes less expensive,” said Gil Luria, an analyst at the investment bank D.A. Davidson.

— The New York Times

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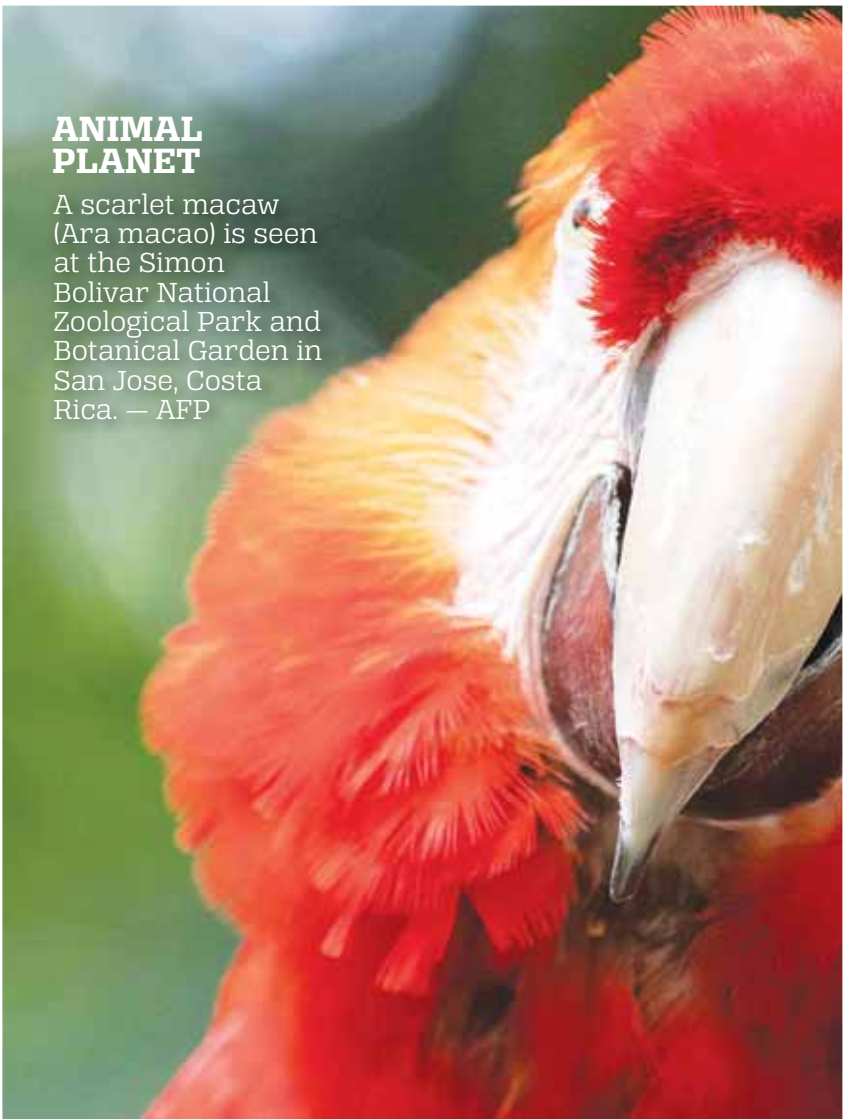
MUSIC

French rapper Gazo performs during the 39th Victoires de la Musique, the annual French music awards ceremony, at the Seine Musicale concert hall in Boulogne-Billancourt, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP



TRAVEL TALES

A Ukrainian serviceman walks past a recruiting poster in Kyiv, amid the Russian war of Ukraine. — AFP



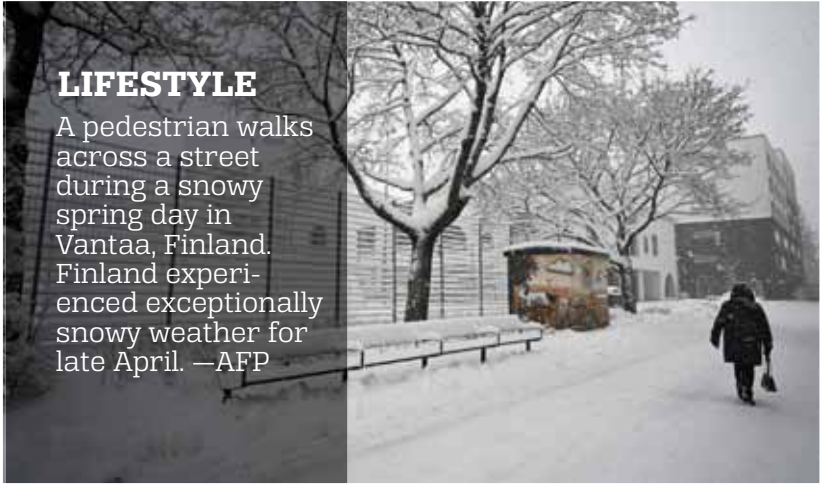
ANIMAL PLANET

A scarlet macaw (Ara macao) is seen at the Simon Bolivar National Zoological Park and Botanical Garden in San Jose, Costa Rica. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD:

A 50-metre anamorphic field painting of a girl holding the Earth, created by artists from 'Sand In Your Eye' to mark Earth Day, adorns a hillside above Hebden Bridge, north west England. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A pedestrian walks across a street during a snowy spring day in Vantaa, Finland. Finland experienced exceptionally snowy weather for late April. —AFP

art & life

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TRAVELLING TO THE LOST CITIES OF OMAN

Travelling to the Lost Cities of Oman is like stepping into a living history book, where each stone whispers tales of bygone eras. Through exploration, one can witness Oman's pivotal role in global commerce and appreciate its rich heritage, akin to the warmth of Omani hospitality... **P20**

MUSIC

Celine Dion gives health update in rare interview

CANADIAN POP MEGASTAR Celine Dion, who suffers from a rare neurological disorder, said in her first interview since announcing the career-sidelining diagnosis that she is well, but taking life "one day at a time."

Dion, 56, first disclosed in December

2022 that she had been diagnosed with Stiff Person Syndrome, which causes stiff muscles in the torso, arms and legs, with noise or emotional distress known to trigger spasms. As the cover star of Vogue France's May edition, she told the magazine she was "well" but that her condition requires "a lot of work."

"Five days a week I undergo athletic, physical and vocal therapy," she said. "I haven't beat the disease, as it's still within me and always will be. I hope that we'll find a miracle, a way to cure it with scientific research, but for now I have to learn to live with it," she said.

There is no cure for Stiff Person Syndrome, which is progressive, but treatment can help control symptoms. According to the US National Institutes of Health, it affects twice as many women as men.

In May last year, Dion was forced to cancel a string of shows scheduled for 2023 and 2024, saying she was not

strong enough to tour. Asked about her ability to return to the stage, Dion told Vogue France she "can't answer that" right now.

"I don't know... My body will tell me," she said.

Dion made a surprise appearance at the Grammy Awards in February, when she presented the Album of the Year award to Taylor Swift.

In January, Dion announced she would make a feature-length documentary, to stream on Amazon Prime Video, about her condition to help increase public awareness.

Dion has sold more than 250 million albums during her decades-long career.

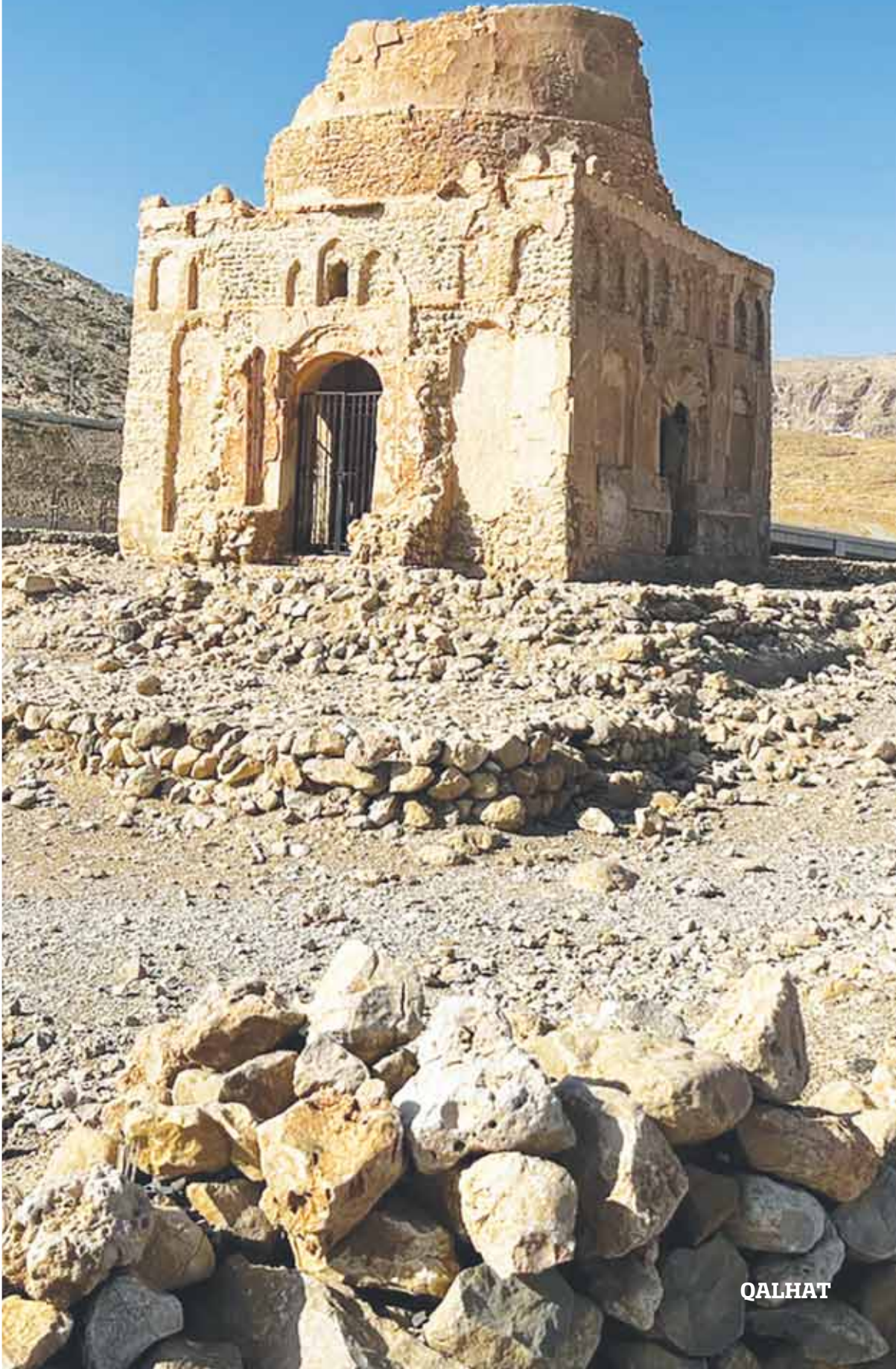
The Quebec-born star's "Courage World Tour" began in 2019, over three years after her longtime manager and husband, Rene Angelil, died aged 73.

Dion had completed 52 shows before the Covid-19 pandemic put the remainder on hold. — AFP



TRAVELLING TO THE LOST CITIES OF OMAN

Each settlement tells its own story, hiding in the subtle signs left behind, markers of a time long past. Coming from India, the cradle of history, I felt compelled to explore the historical canvas of Oman. What I found was enriching.



QALHAT



SALUT

BY AMIT NARANG

After an uneventful first three hours, the road from Duqm to Salalah reaches the green waters of the Arabian Sea and then hugs the coastline to Salalah. As it crosses the spectacular cliff-lined vistas of Al Shuwamiyah and Mirbat, the remains of a lost city come into view. A city perched on top of a hill, framed on its back by the picturesque (though seasonal) Darbat waterfall and overlooking the blue lagoon of Khor Rori.

THE FRANKINCENSE PORT

The city of Sumharam, dating back to the 3rd century BCE, harks back to a time when Oman was a key international entrepôt and a

once-thriving trading city of Qalhat, the twin capital of the kingdom of Ormus (Hormuz). It flourished as a major centre in the Indian Ocean trading network, with thriving connections to Arabia, Africa, India, China and South-East Asia. Qalhat is the only city in Oman that is mentioned by Marco Polo (which he calls Calatu). The famous Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta describes it in the 14th century as one having 'fine bazaars and one of the most beautiful mosques'. It is also a place reportedly visited by the Chinese voyager Zheng He. The city itself had a large resident Indian community due to the close trading links — in dates and horses — with the western coast of India.

All that remains today are some water cisterns and visible city foundations, along with the mausoleum of Bibi Maryam, who herself

deserved recognition.

TOMBS OF ETERNITY

In the backdrop of the majestic Jabal Al Misht, not far from the town of Ibri in the village of Al Ayn, stand 19 beehive stone tombs. UNESCO has included these along with the nearby Bat necropolis and the monumental tower at Al Khutm as a World Heritage Site and describes this protohistoric archaeological complex as representing "one of the most complete and well-preserved ensembles of settlements and necropolises from the 3rd millennium BCE world-wide". The tombs are from a period when Oman was a significant global centre for copper mining and trade.

Across aeons, kingdoms and empires rose and fell, and lofty pal-



SUMHURAM

centre for global trade in frankincense. The city is mentioned in the ancient Greek treatise Periplus of the Erythraean Sea as Moscha Limen, a great trading outpost for merchant ships travelling the immense distances between the Mediterranean, Egypt and the Indus Valley civilisation in India. Its wealth and grandeur can be witnessed even today in the remains of the huge fortified walls, a monumental gate, multistorey residences, warehouses and temples as well as several private and public buildings. Standing inside these magnificent ruins, one can picture basketloads of Omani frankincense being

was one of Qalhat's most notable rulers. The rest of the city was destroyed after its occupation by the Portuguese and abandoned later.

WHERE THE EAGLE DARED

King Solomon, from the biblical tales, is said to have visited it on one of his flying trips, finding a 'castle already standing of which no memory remained' and an eagle as its sole inhabitant. Centuries later as per legends, it was the site of the famous battle of Salut where Malik Ibn Fahm routed the Persians, a key milestone in the history of Oman.

aces and fearsome castles disappeared and were reduced to dust. But these simple structures, created by stacked stones with basic mud mortar, are still standing for 5000 years. Our humble Bronze Age stone architects also deserve credit for good real estate spotting; for they chose what arguably is one of the most scenic mountainous locales in all of Oman.

CROSSROADS OF HISTORY

History is a complex weave of human stories, endeavours and experiences juxtaposed on a grand canvas of geography and time.



UBAR

loaded onto ships destined for far-away shores. The unique beauty of the site, perched as it is between the ocean and the mountain, lends it a magical touch that adds to its historical significance as a key node of global trade in ancient times.

THE ATLANTIS OF THE SANDS

A later trip to the town of Thamrait, a two-hour drive from Salalah, brought me to the archaeological remains of the mythical city of Ubar, which is mentioned in the Holy Quran and nicknamed the lost Atlantis of the Sands by TE Lawrence (of Arabia). It was discovered by a team of Los Angeles-based archaeologists using literary investigation and satellite imagery. Despite its legendary story, it is hardly known or recognised, and it took a bit of convincing to make the driver take us to the nondescript village of Shisr where it exists as the ruins of a long lost settlement that vanished into the sands as the limestone cavern under it collapsed into a sinkhole. This lost city of Ubar, on the edge of the Rab al Khali, was also a key outpost of the frankincense trade and seems to have been built 5000 years ago. Today all that survives are some structures and a massive sunken wall.

THE HORMUZ QUEEN'S MAUSOLEUM

On my first drive from Sur to Muscat, I caught a glimpse of a lone mausoleum standing next to the sea, not far from the popular tourist spot of Wadi Shab. This Mausoleum of Bibi Maryam, as I discovered later, was part of the

Located just 20 minutes from the town of Bahla, the Salut Castle is easily one of the most important historical sites in Oman, albeit perhaps also one of the least known or visited. With continuous habitation across the Bronze and Iron ages, spanning a staggering 3500 years, from 3000 BCE to 300 CE, this major urban centre was a key node of global commerce in copper, found abundantly in the Al Hajar Mountains, and had extensive contacts with Mesopotamia and Indus Valley civilization in India.

Showcasing a rich collection of artefacts and historical objects — including pottery with snake motifs, shell make-up kits, India-made necklaces for women, and seals modelled on the artwork of Indus Valley culture — the newly developed Visitor Centre at the Salut Archaeological site is itself well worth every Baisa (it's free actually). The site has been included in the tentative listing for a future nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which will be a much-

Each settlement tells its own story, hiding in the subtle signs left behind, markers of a time long past. Coming from India, the cradle of history, I felt compelled to explore the historical canvas of Oman. What I found was enriching. The 5 historical sites in Oman explored here are a tribute to the rich unbroken history of Oman and its role as a key centre in the timeless march of global caravans of history.

A lot like the gracious Omani hospitality, there is much to discover and admire in the rich tapestry of Omani heritage.



The writer is Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman