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OMAN'S HYPORT DUQM PROJECT MEETS KEY QUALIFICATION FOR EU EXPORTS



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CELTICS SCHOOL MAVS FOR 10TH STRAIGHT NBA WIN



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NIZWA MUSEUM OFFERS JOURNEY TO ANCIENT OMAN



MUSCAT

32 RESIDENTIAL UNITS DISTRIBUTED

Thirty-two residential townhouses located in Al Mahaj, Wilayat of Al Amerat, were distributed to eligible citizens, on Thursday. The distribution ceremony was held at IntercityHotel Muscat under the auspices of Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing. The social housing system comprises several diverse, integrated programmes that aim at regulating and arranging land uses and preserving them, providing appropriate housing for eligible and affected groups. **DETAILS ON P2**

GOVERNORATES AT DOHA EXPO

The governors' offices are taking part in the Omani pavilion at the International Horticulture Expo 2023 Doha as part of the Governorates Week held under the theme "Towards a Green Investment". The participation, taking place from March 3 to 9, aims to introduce the natural and geographical components, infrastructure and basic services in the governorates particularly with regard to the field of gardens, natural parks and walkways. It also aims to learn about the efforts made by the local administrations in each governorate to build a local economic system in line with the Oman Vision 2040. **DETAILS ON P5**

OPINION

P8



Dr Hamed al Sinawi

When parents are emotionally unavailable

P9



Ray Petersen

Talk about pointless stuff...

Oman to promote its tourism potential at Berlin fair

BERLIN: In official partnership with the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the events of the Berlin International Tourism Fair (ITB) 2024 will kick off on Monday in the German capital, Berlin. The fair is considered the world's largest tourism exhibition and a platform for knowledge exchange and expanding business networks in the tourism industry,

and it will last for several days. This official partnership reaffirms Oman's plans to develop the tourism sector and enhance its position as a global tourist destination. It is an ideal opportunity to showcase Oman's tourism resources, products, services and experiences, thereby contributing to tourism promotion and increasing the influx of more tourists, as well as promoting the

diverse investment opportunities recommended by the Omani Tourism Strategy to contribute to achieving the investment targets of the tourism sector in the context of the goals of Oman Vision 2040. It is expected that about 160 countries and 5,000 exhibitors will participate in the fair, attracting around 120,000 visitors from various countries around the

world, as well as 7,000 representatives of global media and 1,500 travel bloggers from 35 countries to cover the fair. Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, stated that this official partnership represents a milestone in enhancing Oman's position on the global tourism map, reflecting its commitment to ex-

panding the base of international visitors. At the same time, Oman is working to diversify its tourism products, enhance economic activity through investment in the sector, and highlight Oman's unique strategic location, natural beauty, stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage; making it an ideal destination for tourists seeking unique and amazing experiences. **DETAILS ON P13**

340,000 VISIT FAIR AS 10-DAY 'FESTIVAL OF BOOKS' CLOSES

KHALID AL BALUSHI
@khalid_albalushi94

The curtains came down on the activities of the 28th Muscat International Book Fair at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Saturday amid a diverse cultural presence from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and Chairman of the Main Committee of the Muscat International Book Fair. Speaking on the occasion, Ahmed bin Saud al Rawahi, Director of the Muscat International Book Fair, said 32 countries presented their treasures of knowledge and latest productions from publishing houses locally and internationally, amounting to a total of 8,047 publishing houses. Attracting thousands of book enthusiasts over the course of 10 days, the world of knowledge had something for children too, with illustrated stories, short



Dignitaries at the closing ceremony on Saturday.

stories, not to mention the joy they experienced at the Children's Museum and the adjacent theatre. All of this is likely to instil a love for reading in today's children, making them the readers of tomorrow. **BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS** The number of visitors to this year's book fair increased since its start on February 22. A large number of families participated

in various seminars and brainstorming sessions held as part of this major regional event. Around 340,000 visited the book fair till Friday. He said that the book fair was a spacious cultural space, with its solid cultural programme, which included approximately 130 diverse events, as well as activities directed to children and young people. The fair also hosted in its session this year an elite group

The exhibition gave a wide space for Omani writers and others who were an essential part in the success of its various programmes and activities

AHMED BIN SAUD AL RAWAHI
Director, Muscat International Book Fair

of symbols of thought, culture and literature from Oman and abroad, who presented a summary of their experiences. Their ideas, in addition to the large group of media professionals who represented various visual, print and audio media, contributed to conveying a vivid and honourable image of the exhibition in particular and of the Sultanate of Oman in general. **TURN TO P2**

LOW PRESSURE EXPECTED FROM MONDAY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The latest analysis from the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre at the Civil Aviation Authority indicated the possibility that the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a trough of a low pressure system starting from Monday until the end of the week. Clouds are expected to flow and form over most governorates of Oman, with chances of isolated rainfall on Monday. Rainfall is expected to be variable in intensity and thunderstorms ranging between 10-50 mm are expected on Tuesday, accompanied by active downdraft winds and hail in Musandam Governorate, extending to cover the rest of the governorates. There is a possibility of the sea wave height increasing from moderate to rough (2-3 metres) on the western coasts of Musandam Governorate and the coasts of the Arabian Sea, with the blowing of southeast winds (15-25 knots) in most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.



This image grab from an AFPTV video shows Palestinians running towards parachutes attached to food parcels, air-dropped from US aircraft on a beach in the Gaza Strip on Saturday. - AFP

Oman welcomes Palestinian factions meeting in Moscow

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the meeting of the Palestinian political factions held in the Russian capital, Moscow, last Thursday and Friday with the participation of all national forces and factions. In a statement issued on Saturday, the Foreign Ministry welcomed the statement issued after the meeting, stressing the importance of building on the momentum of its positive results to form a Palestinian national consensus government. This, the statement said, would guarantee comprehensive representation of all Palestinian components and factions in a manner that meets the aspirations of the brotherly Palestinian people at this crucial and critical historical stage.

Meanwhile, the US military on Saturday carried out its first airdrop of aid into Gaza, after the deaths of Palestinians queuing for food underlined the growing humanitarian catastrophe in the crowded coastal enclave after months of Israeli military operations. Other countries including Jordan and France have already conducted airdrops of aid into Gaza, where the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says a quarter of the population - 576,000 people - are one step from famine. The US airdrop used C-130 transport aircraft which dropped more than 38,000 meals along Gaza's Mediterranean coastline, the US military said in a statement. Jordanian forces also took part in the operation. **SEE ALSO P6**



Wide range of books, events attract readers

KHALID AL BALUSHI
@khalid_albalushi94

As curtains came down on the 28th Muscat International Book Fair on Saturday, some visitors shared their experience of the 10-day festival of letters which brought authors and readers together to a journey of knowledge, imagination and creativity. These visitors which include students, authors and publishers expressed their passion for books and the importance of reading.

Adel al Ruziqi from the Finiq book store was surprised at the brisk sale of physical books. “We eagerly await this cultural event every year because the book fair brings together people from all over the world. The crowded pavilions reflect Omanis’ love for books, and this is promising. There is a general decline in book purchases due to the availability of audiobooks and ebooks, but the book fair breaks the norm. Many visitors came to buy physical books.” He said, “I was surprised to see that the younger generation is demanding history books this year. Surprised to see that despite the rain, many Omanis turned up.”

At the fair, Amira al Balushi released her book titled “Olive Talk,” targeting children aged 5 and above. She described the story as portraying the scene of the first dawn after Palestine’s liberation from Israel. Al Balushi explained the joyful scenes of families and friends exchanging

congratulations while children filled the streets with laughter and joy.

Another attraction of the fair on Friday was a play by the Sultan Qaboos School for Basic Education titled “My Homeland” at the Children’s Theatre in the book fair. The play’s theme was love of the homeland and the importance of defending it. Rabbits symbolised citizens living happily in their homeland, facing an enemy attempting to seize their homeland. However, the rabbits win over the enemy with wisdom and cooperation.

Al Saayidiyah School presented a puppet show for children on citizenship and technology that helps to instil a sense of responsibility and wisdom in using technology.

Rehab Arslan from the Pakistani School expressed her amazement at the variety of books displayed and her desire to buy them all. “I love books a lot and enjoy reading, but the amount I have with me is very small and not enough for all that I want.”

Anabia, from the same school, shared her enjoyment of the book fair with friends. She did not plan to buy any specific book this time as she had purchased many books last year and had not finished reading them. Demas Saeed said, “I’ve previously attended with my family, and this is the second time I’ve come with friends from school. I enjoyed participating with friends in colouring the beautiful drawings distributed to us last time.”



MIBF to be held from Apr 25 to May 2 in 2025

FROM P1

The director of the Muscat International Book Fair said: “The exhibition gave a wide space for Omani writers and others who were an essential part in the success of its various programmes and activities, in addition to the presence of various publications, which represented the bright civilised face of creativity, thought and knowledge in our dear homeland.”

Al Rawahi said Al Sharqiyah North Governorate will be the guest of honour of the 29th book, which will be held from April 25 to May 2, 2024.

Raya bint Amer al Jabriyah, member of the Community



Ahmed bin Saud al Rawahi, Director of MIBF

Initiatives Committee, announced the National Reading Programme project through an annual competition among young people implemented by the Ministry of Education and supervised by the Community Initiatives Committee at the

book fair.

She said that the programme aims to enhance students’ linguistic and expressive abilities, stimulate critical thinking, and enhance the love of reading. It targets all governorates of Oman, and more than 15,000 students.

This year 847 publishing houses from 34 countries took part in the book fair

The Ministry of Information participated in this session with a pavilion that included four pillars representing the Oman News Agency, the General Directorate of Electronic Media (Ain Platform and Media Portal), Nizwa magazine, and the General Directorate of Publications and Artistic Works.

32 residential units distributed in Al Amerat under CSR plan

AL AMERAT: Thirty-two residential townhouses located in Al Mahaj, Wilayat of Al Amerat, were distributed to eligible citizens, last week.

The distribution ceremony was held under the auspices of Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing.

The social housing system comprises several diverse, integrated programmes that aim at regulating and arranging land use and preserving them, providing appropriate housing for eligible and affected groups.

The social housing support programmes aim to improve the standard of living of targeted families and help them achieve social stability by providing appropriate housing.

The residential units come within the framework of continued partnership between the ministry and the private sector which aims at financing the residential housing programme. The project was financed by the Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation (SBCF) with a cost of RO



Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing, at the event

1,456,786 as part of its social responsibility programme and its contribution to the provision of appropriate housing for low-income Oman families.

The housing units keep pace with the

requirements of modern life complete with necessary services and important facilities. The total land area of the project is 8,484 sq metres and the area of the residential unit exceeds 212 sq metres. The ministry plans



The project was financed by the Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation (SBCF) with a cost of RO 1,456,786 as part of its social responsibility programme

to handle 1,200 cases of housing assistance in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman this year, 50 of which are expected to benefit from the housing units programme.

— ONA

11th Muscat International Film Festival begins today

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousuf

The 11th edition of the Muscat International Film Festival will be held from March 3 to 7 under the auspices of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The four-day festival will begin on Sunday with the Iranian film ‘The Guard’ by Abotaleb Sadegh Daghighi followed by Yaser Ahmed and Behruz Bagheri’s ‘Exchange’, and ‘Rose Water’ by Mahmood al Shaikh.

A large number of entries were received when the deadline ended on January 31, from film-makers from the US, Tunisia, Iran, Morocco, and the GCC, according to the organisers, Oman Film Society (OFS).

“We began receiving entries for the Muscat International Film Festival 2024 two months ago, and there has been a great response from local talents as well as international film-makers,” said Humaid al Amri, OFS.

The Muscat International Film Festival, organised under the slogan ‘Renewed Oman’, has grown to be a major film festival in the region with the participation of jury members and guests from across the world.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Amri said that the last edition of the Muscat International Film Festival, held in March 2020 under the theme ‘Make your film in Oman’, introduced international film-makers to the most important tourist destinations in Oman, besides having seminars and workshops on the formalities and procedures involved in obtaining a licence to film in the country.

“We have included several competitions in a number of genres, for both the Omani and international film-makers under the title ‘The Relationship of the Omani Man with the Land.’ What makes the festivals different is that both citizens and expatriates can participate in the festival and we have created separate sections for the same,” said Al Amri.

Sur Maritime Heritage Festival sees huge turnout of visitors



BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

The first week of Sur Maritime Heritage Festival witnessed huge turnout in Sunaysilah Fort and Khor Al Batah. The marine village introduced the ancient maritime history of Sur through a simulation of a voyage accompanied by songs and equipment used by sailors.

A play at Sunaysilah Fort Theatre attracted a large audience including children. The theatre witnessed exciting competitions and performances

by children’s favourite cartoon characters. Visitors also flocked to the heritage village, which is displaying traditional artefacts, palm frond products, textiles and crafts for which the Wilayat of Sur is famous for. They also made a beeline to the pavilions of the productive families and SMEs selling traditional food, sweets and beverages.

On Friday, the festival featured poetry recitations and musical events led by Saudi vocalist Abdullah al Mukhles, and poets Ghaith al Ghailani, Rashid al Musharafi and Faisal al Farsi. Al

Razha folk dance was presented by the Al Bashaer Band.

As part of the activities accompanying the Sur Maritime Heritage Festival, the Omani Fishermen’s Association is organising an artisanal and amateur fishing competition in Sur, which will continue for two days. To facilitate wider participation of the public, Wadi Shab will host exciting events and activities. The festival will include many recreational activities for children and adults, which aim to shed light on tourism, heritage and handicrafts.





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OHRC chief receives British delegation

MUSCAT: Prof Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Human Rights Commission, received a delegation from the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which is on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the delegation was introduced to the work of the Oman Human Rights Commission, its system, its role in following up on international reports, monitoring them, verifying the information contained therein, coordinating with the relevant authorities to respond to them, and the role of the Commission

in promoting and protecting human rights. The British parliamentary delegation pointed out that the system of the Oman Human Rights Commission is consistent with the system of work of the Equality and Human Rights Commission concerned with the protection and promotion of human rights in the United Kingdom, which is accredited to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) at status (A), and expressed its readiness to enhance cooperation with the Commission on topics related to human rights.

Omani brand pioneers label-less bottle

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

An Omani company has come up with label-less bottles as these plastic wrappers are made of oriented polypropylene and glue that are not easily recyclable and harmful to the environment.

International Foods and Beverages' brand Barzman has been the pioneer in introducing label-less bottle concept, underscoring its steadfast commitment to Oman's 2050 environmental sustainability goals.

"This visionary approach not only showcases our continuous improvement policy but also marks a paradigm shift in eco-friendly packaging innovations across the GCC," Saif Mohammed Khatrosh al Numani, Chairman of International Foods and Beverages LLC told the *Observer*.

"The label-less bottle concept signifies a leap towards streamlining the recycling process. With this Barzman is boldly eliminating foreign materials like OPP labels and glue. By doing so, the company prioritises environmental sustainability, fostering ease in PET bottle recycling, and laying the groundwork for a more efficient circular economy," Ahmed al Hajri, General Manager of International Foods and Beverages LLC, said.

Such pioneering moves to reduce plastic waste will aim to revolutionise the PET bottle recycling landscape, presenting a bottle-to-bottle recycling opportunity that promotes environmental sustainability at every stage. Plastic bottles are harmful to our environment and on an average these bottles consume about 2.7 million tonnes of plastic each year globally.

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, MARCH 2

The Ihsaan Association and the municipality department in the Wilayat of Manah, organised the Elder Crafts Forum in Manah, coinciding with the celebration of Omani Craftsman Day, which falls on Sunday (March 3).

The forum was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Salim al Sulaimani, Majlis Ash'shura member of the Wilayat of Manah.

About 30 men and women from various Wilayats of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate displayed palm frond products, popular Omani food, traditional clothes, gunpowder, and other crafts.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate pays particular attention to traditional crafts because of their originality, distinction, and close connection with history because they are rooted in the depths of its popular heritage.

The Ihsaan Association is fully aware of the importance of traditional crafts and strives to highlight its potential. It involves the elderly and urges them to participate in many events and projects.

Majlis Ash'shura member Al Sulaimani said: "This exhibition facilitates interaction between generations. These initiatives by the Ihsaan Association to include the elderly and integrate them with society are commendable."

Shaikhah bint Sulaiman bin Said al Mahrouqiyah, a member of the Ihsaan Association, said: "We find great response from the elderly, as they feel joy, happiness, and enthusiasm when these activities are carried out for them. We find a very strong turn out from other governorates. Sometimes we may need, for example, 15 elderly people, but we find more participants willing to



Juma bin Khalfan al Abdali, a gun-powder maker from the Wilayat of Manah

attend than the required number. The association's objectives are diverse and comprehensive. It helps the elderly in obtaining health and social services. It also helps in training Ihsaan members in elderly healthcare. The Volunteer Affairs Committee trains these individuals to manage elderly people." Al Mahrouqiyah added, "Our message to the community is to participate in these activities. We hope that the public will support this segment of society. We also hope to find support from institutions to

contribute for the humanitarian services for the elderly."

Juma bin Khalfan al Abdali, a gun-powder maker from the Wilayat of Manah, said: "I am now seventy years old. I learned this craft from my grandparents, and now I have taught it to my children. I was afraid of losing this industry. Gunpowder-making requires work that lasts approximately three hours. To make it, we use various tools, including matches and a type of wood called "shakhr". These ingredients are cooked using



charcoal and then pounded by hand until they become like ash. In the past, we used these to hunt deer and birds. Now we sell them in markets. My participation in the forum is an opportunity to highlight my industry and introduce it to generations that may not know about the existence of this industry in Oman."

Extra lanes on Rusayl-Bidbid road now open

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), has opened the additional lanes on the Rusayl-Bidbid road towards Nizwa.

Launched in 2020, the 27km Bidbid-Rusayl road expansion project includes four lanes on each side, new flyovers, pedestrian underpasses and bridges, and rainwater drainage facilities.

The widening of the road will ease traffic as the highway (with additional lanes) will have the capacity to handle over 8,000 vehicles per hour

from over 3,000 vehicles per hour.

The road has been designed according to all traffic safety requirements with vehicles able to operate at a speed of 120km/hour.

Two new intersections have been added including one in Ghala to keep pace with population growth in these areas, especially on the Ansab-Jifnain road.

To facilitate the pedestrian crossing, the project includes the expansion of the underpasses and four new overbridges to serve the communities on both sides of the road.



The highway (with additional lanes) will have the capacity to handle over 8,000 vehicles per hour.

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- 7- R/C shops, with an area of 1944 square meters, it includes a market consisting of 19 shops in wilayat bidyah.
- 8- R/C Land with an area of 1044 square meters and an existing Running hotel in the Wilayat of Mahut/Hajj.
- 9- R/C building, with an area of 1,572 square meters, it includes hotel apartments and shops (running condition) in wilayat bidyah.
- 10- R/C Land in Masairah located at centre with area 600m².
- 11- 4 Industrial plots in Duqm, total area 30,000 square meters.
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Ministry of Heritage and Tourism





Winners of the 5th National Brainobrain Festival held at Middle East College.

Memory skills on display at Brainobrain Fest

MUSCAT: Over 1,000 children took part in the 5th National Brainobrain Festival held at the Middle East College, Student Hub, on February 17. The event was dedicated to enhancing memory and concentration skills among young learners and drew participants aged 5 to 14, marking it as one of the largest math-based gatherings in the city.

Organised by Brainobrain, an organisation committed to making memory and concentration skills intriguing and enjoyable for children, the festival saw an impressive turnout, with participants eagerly vying for top honours.

This annual event, which has become a cornerstone in promoting memory and concentration skills, saw 472 champions,

353 gold toppers, and 265 silver toppers, showcasing the growing enthusiasm among youngsters.

Highlighting the importance of mental agility in childhood development, Brainobrain emphasised the significance of engaging children in stimulating concentration and memory related activities. Through initiatives like the National Brainobrain Festival, the organisation aims to nurture memory and concentration skills, essential for academic success.

The winners were felicitated by Mazin al Sulaimani, and Anand Subramaniam during the prize distribution ceremony. Faculty members were also acknowledged for their invaluable contributions to the success of the event.

Pakistan embassy fetes educators

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

The Embassy of Pakistan in Muscat, Oman, held an event to honour the teachers, academicians, researchers and university professors of Pakistani origin and other nationalities who have contributed significantly to education in Oman.

The event was the second of the three events that the Embassy plans to organise to celebrate the Pakistan National Day 2024. The ceremony recognised the commitment and contributions of the educators in shaping the minds and futures of countless students across the nation.

Sayyidah Wafa Bint Hilal al Busaidiyah, renowned clinical psychologist, was the chief guest at the event. The event was attended by diplomats, representatives from academia and members of Pakistani community who joined together to celebrate the achievements of these luminaries.

The distinguished educators who were recognised hail from Pakistan, Oman, Iran and India and have served diligently for several years, nurtured intellect and fostered academic excellence in Oman.

Through their tireless efforts, they have left an indelible mark on the educational landscape of Oman enriching the lives of numerous individuals and communities.

The educators who were recognised belonged to Sultan Qaboos University, University of Nizwa, University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Gulf College, Mazoon College and Pakistan School System. Some engineers and other professionals who made their mark in their



The event is part of the Pakistan National Day celebrations

these high-achievers who not only elevated the standards of learning but also played a pivotal role in shaping a whole generation of learners in Oman.

Imran Ali, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman expressed gratitude to the educators for their commitment and contributions to education. He emphasised the pivotal role of educators in fostering intellectual growth, promoting cultural exchange and strengthening bilateral ties between Pakistan and Oman. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Embassy and the Government of Pakistan to promote excellence in all fields of life.

respective fields were also recognised and were awarded certificates of excellence.

In her speech, chief guest Sayyidah Wafa appreciated the efforts of the Embassy of Pakistan in holding this event. Appreciation of extraordinary work is an impetus to work better, she said. She cherished the remarkable contributions of

Oman's governorates take part in Doha Expo



DOHA: The governors' offices are taking part in the Omani pavilion at the International Horticulture Expo 2023 Doha as part of the Governorates Week held under the theme 'Towards a Green Investment'.

The participation, taking place from March 3 to 9, aims to introduce the natural and geographical components, infrastructure and basic services in the governorates particularly with regard to

the field of gardens, natural parks and walkways.

It also aims to learn about the efforts made by the local administrations in each governorate to build a local economic system in line with the Oman Vision 2040 as well as bringing investment opportunities to the governorates and benefiting from exclusive advantages.

— ONA

TENDER NOTICE

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
133/2024/MAFWR/HQ-12	Rent (14) four-wheel drive vehicles for a project to reduce the phenomenon of unlicensed wells	Tuesday 27/2/2024	Sunday 17/3/2024	Sunday 7/4/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
141/2024/MAFWR/HQ-13	Drilling and Aquifer Testing of (10) Exploration wells on the Agricultural Investment Land in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah	Wednesday 28/2/2024	Monday 18/3/2024	Sunday 7/4/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with second and third	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for international company that not have head quarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender) and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

Hit-and-run accident claims life of citizen, expat arrested

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) in Muscat has arrested an Asian expatriate who ran over a citizen in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, which led to his death. Legal procedures are being completed in the case.

World Civil Defence Day marked on March 1

MUSCAT: Oman, represented by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority marked the World Civil Defence Day on March 1. Marking this day comes in implementation of the resolutions of the International Organization for Civil Defence and in appreciation of the efforts made by civil defence agencies in various countries of the world.

— ONA

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY Advertisement No. (8/2024)			
International Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.			
Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/23/153 Re-Call	Maintenance Works at different locations at Muscat Governorate	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/035	Supply & Installation of IP video cameras at Qurum Public Park	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/051	Consultancy Services for Design of Internal Roads at Muscat Governorate	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/054	Provision of Labours for Muscat Municipality	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/056	Civil Works at Al Nasim Public Park	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/057	Electrical Works at Al Nasim Public Park	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/059	Supply & Installation of Arches at Al Nasim Public Park	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/060	Reconstruction of Boundary Walls at Al Nasim Public Park	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/064	Hire of Equipments & Vehicles for Muscat Municipality	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/065	Construction of Football Pitch at Quriyat Municipality	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
PRE/24/066	Archive File Documents for Muscat Municipality	19/03/2024	10/04/2024
1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically. 2. Clarification and Support: • For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om). • For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).			



UN says ‘large’ number shot in Gaza aid chaos

GAZA: A UN team has reported seeing “a large number” of gunshot wounds among Gazans after Israeli troops opened fire near an aid convoy, an incident which highlighted near-famine conditions after nearly five months of war.

US President Joe Biden said his military would start air-dropping relief supplies into the Palestinian territory where Israel is battling.

On Saturday the health ministry in the territory said thousands of people in north Gaza “are at risk of dying from dehydration and malnutrition”, and the World Health Organization said it had delivered treatment for 50 acutely malnourished children in the north.

The ministry on Friday reported a total of 10 children had died of “malnutrition and dehydration”.

Israeli troops opened fire as Palestinian civilians scrambled for food supplies during a chaotic incident in Gaza City that the ministry said killed 115 people and wounded more than 750.

The aid convoy deaths helped push the number of Palestinian war dead in Gaza to 30,320, mostly women and children, according to Gaza’s health ministry.

On Friday a UN team visited some of the wounded from the aid incident, in Gaza City’s Al-Shifa Hospital, and saw a “large number of gunshot wounds”, UN chief Antonio Guterres’s spokesman said.

The hospital received 70 of the dead, and around 200 wounded were still there during the team’s visit, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

In an interview published on Saturday in *Le Monde* newspaper, his French counterpart Stephane Sejourne said “responsibilities for the blockage of aid are clearly



Palestinians stand amid the rubble of a Mosque and makeshift shelters that were destroyed in Israeli strikes in Deir El-Balah. – AFP

Israeli”.

Sejourne said the “catastrophic” humanitarian conditions “created indefensible and unjustifiable situations for which the Israelis are accountable for.”

Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, said that “a famine is almost inevitable” in Gaza unless things

Israeli troops opened fire as Palestinian civilians scrambled for food supplies during a chaotic incident in Gaza City that the ministry said killed 115

change.

Laerke cited the near-total closure of commercial food imports, the “trickle of trucks”

coming in with food aid, and the “massive access constraints” to moving around inside Gaza.

The United Nations has

particularly cited restrictions on access to northern Gaza, where residents have been reduced to eating animal fodder and even leaves.

Witnesses on Saturday said that gun battles had taken place in Zeitun. The International Rescue Committee said the very fact airdrops were “being considered

is testament to the serious access challenges in Gaza”.

But the group said parachuting aid is not the solution and distracts “time and effort from proven solutions to help at scale”.

The IRC called for a “sustained ceasefire” and for land crossings into Gaza to be reopened to aid shipments. — AFP

AU chief accuses Israel of mass killing



People rally in support of the people from the Gaza Strip, in the Palestinian territories, in Madrid on March 1. – AFP

NAIROBI: African Union chief Moussa Faki Mahamat on Saturday accused Israel of “the mass killing of Palestinians” and urged an international probe after dozens died following a rush on an aid convoy in war-torn Gaza.

“Mahamat strongly condemns an attack by Israeli forces, that killed and wounded more than 100 Palestinians seeking life-saving humanitarian aid,” the bloc said in a statement posted on X on Saturday.

“The Chairperson calls for an international investigation into the incident to bring the perpetrators to account,” the statement said, urging “an immediate and unconditional ceasefire”.

Israeli troops opened fire as Palestinian civilians scrambled for food supplies during a chaotic

melee on Thursday that the territory’s health ministry said killed more than 100 people in Gaza City.

The deaths came after a World Food Programme official had warned: “If nothing changes, a famine is imminent in northern Gaza.” The Israeli military said a “stampede” occurred when thousands of Gazans surrounded the convoy of 38 aid trucks, leading to dozens of deaths and injuries, including some who were run over.

World leaders have called for an investigation, President Joe Biden said that the United States would start to deliver relief supplies from the air into Gaza, a day after the deaths of more than 100 Palestinians at an aid convoy.

— AFP

Ceasefire talks to resume in Cairo

CAIRO: Gaza truce talks are due to resume in Cairo on Sunday, two Egyptian security sources said on Saturday, though an Israeli news outlet reported Israel would not send a delegation until it got a full list of Israeli captives who are still alive.

US President Joe Biden has said he hopes a ceasefire will be in place by the time of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadhan, which starts on March 10.

There was no immediate comment from Israel or the Palestinian groups, which have been negotiating via mediators including Egypt and Qatar.

International pressure for a ceasefire has grown, with more than 30,000 Palestinians killed in Israel’s Gaza offensive, according to Gaza health authorities, and the UN warning that a quarter of the population are one step away from famine.

The Egyptian sources said Israeli and Hamas delegations were expected to arrive in Cairo on Sunday.

They said that an incident on Thursday in which more than 100 Palestinians seeking aid were killed by Israeli fire according to Gaza authorities, had not slowed down the talks, but instead pushed negotiators



Palestinians look on at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Rafah. – Reuters

to hasten to preserve progress.

The Egyptian sources said the parties had agreed on the duration of a Gaza truce, as well as captive and prisoner releases, adding that the completion of the deal still requires an agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from northern Gaza and a return of its residents.

But Israel’s Ynet news, citing an unnamed senior official, reported that Israel would not be sending a delegation to the

Cairo talks until it received a full list of captives held in Gaza who were alive.

According to the report, the central issue being worked on was how many captives would be released from Gaza, and in turn how many Palestinians would be freed by Israel in exchange for each of them.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al Maliki echoed the hope that a ceasefire would be agreed in time for Ramadhan.

“We hope that we will be able

The Egyptian sources said the parties had agreed on the duration of a Gaza truce, adding that the completion of the deal still requires an agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli forces

to achieve a ceasefire before Ramadhan, we hope to be able to achieve one today, yesterday, but we have failed,” Maliki, who represents the Palestinian Authority, said during a visit to Turkiye.

Israel killed at least 92 people and wounded 156 others over the past 24 hours in its ongoing assault on the Gaza Strip, the Gaza Health Ministry said on Saturday.

In Beit Hanoun north of the blockaded strip, Israeli strikes killed three people who were searching for food in farmland, residents and medics said. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

— Reuters



In brief

■ TOKYO



LOWER HOUSE PASSES BUDGET IN WIN FOR PM KISHIDA

Japan's lower house of parliament passed the government's budget for the coming fiscal year in a rare Saturday session, a win for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. The vote ensures that the 112 trillion yen (\$746 billion) budget, including relief funds for the New Year's Day earthquake on the Noto peninsula, will be enacted by the April 1 start of the fiscal year, regardless of what happens in the less-powerful upper house. Kishida became Japan's first sitting prime minister to appear before a parliamentary ethics committee, as he sought to draw a line under a scandal that hurt his popularity. — Reuters

■ MADRID



SPANISH POLICE CRACK COUNTERFEIT OPERATION

Spanish police said on Saturday they had made 14 arrests in connection with one million euros worth of counterfeit 100 euro bank notes which passed undetected by ATMs and other devices. "The banknotes produced by the organisation were made by hand, were very high quality, as they used special inks, watermarks and different elements designed to circumvent the detection mechanisms," said police. Police said they had arrested distributors at Barcelona airport and bus station, carrying 70,000 euros in counterfeit notes. The operation involved Spain, Italy and Greece and began last November. — Reuters

■ BUDAPEST



PARLIAMENT SPEAKER SIGNS OFF ON SWEDEN'S NATO

Hungarian parliament speaker Sandor Lezsak has signed off on the ratification of Sweden's Nato accession and forwarded the legislation to the president's office for promulgation, voting records on parliament's website showed on Saturday. Lawmakers approved Sweden's Nato accession on February 26, clearing the last hurdle before the historic step by the Nordic country whose neutrality lasted through two world wars and the Cold War. The Hungarian vote ended months of delays to complete Sweden's security policy shift and followed a visit by Swedish PM Ulf Kristersson. — Reuters

Zelensky calls for more defence systems to 'save lives'



Rescuers work at the site of a heavily damaged multi-storey apartment building, following a Russian drone attack, in Odesa. — AFP

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday urged the West to deliver more air defence systems after at least six people were killed in the latest Russian strikes. Overnight aerial attacks claimed four lives in the southern port city of Odesa, including a three-year-old child, while shelling killed one person in the Kharkiv region near the Russian border and another in the southern frontline Kherson region, Ukrainian officials said. "We need more air defences from our partners. We need to strengthen the Ukrainian air shield to add more protection for our people from Russian attack. More air defence systems and more missiles for air defence systems saves lives," Zelensky said. Ukraine is currently on the back

We need more air defences from our partners. We need to strengthen the Ukrainian air shield to add more protection for our people from Russian attack

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY
Ukrainian President

foot in the two-year war as a crucial \$60-billion aid package is held up in the United States congress. In Odesa, "a nine-storey building was destroyed as a result of an attack by Russians," Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said on Saturday in a post on Telegram. The attack killed at least four people, including a child, with eight

injured and others still unaccounted for, Ukraine's emergency services said. Footage shared from the scene showed several floors of a residential building collapsed and its facade ripped off. In Kharkiv, a 76-year-old man was killed in a shelling attack shortly after midnight, regional governor Oleg Synegebov said. Ukraine's air force said Russia

had launched 17 drones overnight and fired three missiles. It said it downed 14 of the drones, but falling debris caused damage to residential buildings in Odesa and Kharkiv. Kyiv also appeared to have had launched its own overnight drone attack that damaged a residential building in Saint Petersburg, Russia's second city. Videos on Russian social media showed what appeared to be a drone spiralling downwards into the building, triggering an explosion, blowing out windows and causing small fires. The city's National Guard division said its preliminary assumption that the damage was caused by a "falling drone." Kyiv has admitted it is heavily outgunned and outnumbered, facing ammunition shortages amid aid delays. — AFP

Scholz promises inquiry into Bundeswehr intercept

ROME: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz promised swift clarification on Saturday following the Russian publication of a recording of German air force officers discussing support for Ukraine. Speaking on the fringes of a visit to the Vatican, he described it as a "very serious matter." The conversation between German defence officials was published on Friday by the head of the Russian state broadcaster RT, Margarita Simonyan. In it, senior air force officers discuss the theoretical possibilities of a deployment of German Taurus cruise missiles in Ukraine. Scholz has repeatedly ruled out the supply of Taurus missiles to Ukraine, despite repeated requests by Kiev, arguing that he fears Germany could be drawn more deeply into the war launched by the Kremlin in February 2022. The clip also contains a diplomatically sensitive



reference to the British having "a few people on the ground" in Ukraine, in connection with the deployment of their Storm Shadow cruise missiles to the country. The reference follows anger in Britain over what London saw as previous indiscretion on Scholz's part. Scholz had said, in the context of the Taurus debate, that "what the British and French are doing in terms of target control and accompanying target control

cannot be done in Germany," without elaborating further. Some saw this as an indication that French and British forces are supporting the control of cruise missiles supplied to Ukraine. London immediately denied this was the case. Pressed on Saturday about possible diplomatic fallout from the intercepted Bundeswehr exchange, Scholz said: "That is why this is now being clarified very carefully, very intensively and very quickly. That is also necessary." Air Force inspector Ingo Gerhartz was among those present at the meeting, which is said to have been in preparation for a briefing to Defence Minister Boris Pistorius. The exchange heard in the recording addresses whether Taurus cruise missiles would theoretically be technically capable of destroying the bridge built by Russia to the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, annexed by Moscow in violation of international law. — dpa

Chad's Deby confirms plan to run for president

N'DJAMENA: Chad's interim President Mahamat Idriss Deby said on Saturday he plans to run in this year's long-awaited presidential race. Deby's confirmation came at the end of a week in which opposition politician Yaya Dillo was shot and killed in the capital N'Djamena. Dillo's death on Wednesday in disputed circumstances has further exposed divisions in the ruling elite at a politically sensitive time as the Central African country prepares for the promised return to democratic rule via the ballot box. Addressing a crowd of supporters and state officials, Deby announced his candidacy in a speech that made no reference to the recent violence. "It is... with a mixture of honour, humility, responsibility and gratitude that I accept this nomination," he said. Deby initially promised an 18-month transition to elections after he seized power in 2021 when his long-ruling father was killed in clashes with rebels. But his government later adopted resolutions that delayed elections until 2024 and allowed him to run for president. The government confirmed that Deby's uncle, General Saleh Deby Itno, had been arrested in the wake of Wednesday's events. Itno had recently defected to Dillo's party, the Socialist Party Without Borders. "He has now been charged by the public prosecutor and his life is in no danger," government spokesperson Abderaman Koulamallah said, without specifying what charges Itno faces. — Reuters



Chad's interim President Mahamat Idriss Deby greets supporters, in N'Djamena. — AFP

Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs hereby announces the following tender:

Tender Number	Name/Description	Grade	Closing Date for Collecting Tender Documents	Closing Date for Submitting Tender	Tender Document Cost
2/2024	Providing consultancy services related to design and supervision of furniture supply for the two VIP halls	Excellent Grade and First Class	11/3/2024	25/3/2024	RO. 25/-

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board participate and get the specifications and condition of the tender from the ESNAD Electronic Tendering Services website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) in exchange for paying the amount specified above electronically, which amount shall be non-refundable.

Offers must be submitted in ESNAD Electronic Tendering Services website **before (10:00) Ten pm** on the closing date for submitting Tenders; Tenders submitted after that will not be considered regardless of the reasons for lateness, which is valid for ninety (90) days from the closing date for submitting tenders.

NOTE:

For clarifications, you may contact via ESNAD Electronic Tendering Services website mentioned above.

***The Ministry is not obliged to accept the lowest or any Tender.**

When parents are emotionally unavailable



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

A twenty-eight-year-old man came to my clinic with anxiety, being more irritable and unable to relax. He told me that his wife gave birth to a healthy boy and despite his excitement about being a father he started feeling worried that he may not be able to be emotionally available for him.

When I asked what made him feel this way he explained that his father abandoned him and his mother when he was five years old after his business went bankrupt and travelled to East Africa to avoid going to jail leaving the young boy to be cared for by his mother.

The father settled in Africa, got married, and had children but after 13 years decided to return to Oman when his prison order expired.

The son had mixed feelings about meeting the father he never knew after such a long time and had difficulty accepting what he called ‘father’s interference in his life.’

He had anger issues toward his estranged father but was unable to express them.

Recently I came across a book by the American clinical psychologist, Lindsay C Gibson “Adult Children of Emotionally

Immature Parents”. The book describes the psychological and emotional effects of having emotionally immature parents on adult children.

Such parents are usually physically present at the same house as the child but are often self-centred, unable to express empathy toward their children or meet their emotional needs, or intolerant of genuine intimacy.

Some parents are perfectionists and tend to interfere with every detail of their children’s lives, while other parents are passive having no interest in their children leaving all aspects of parenting to a more dominant partner who might feel overwhelmed with responsibilities.

These types of parenting lead to the children experiencing loneliness, low self-esteem, being unable to manage their emotions, or forming unhealthy relationships as if searching for a parent who would understand them and address their needs.

This is why sometimes people choose to marry a person who is much older than them, form unhealthy attachments with an abusive partner, or even have multiple relationships, or even end up emotionally cold to their children.

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In her book, Dr Gibson provides real-life examples to illustrate the patterns of dysfunctional relationships that may emerge in such families. The book attempts to help the readers understand the effects of their parent’s behaviour on their upbringing and empower them to achieve personal growth and emotional healing.

The author provides practical strategies for setting boundaries, developing self-awareness, and building healthier relationships.

In some situations, the author suggests minimising contact with the parent or ensuring that you don’t go expecting too much or love, since you’ll probably just never have an emotionally mature relationship with that parent.

While the book provides useful insight and practical advice, we need to remember that each individual has his or her unique personal experience. Those seeking to overcome the emotional scars of their past may need one-to-one therapy to be able to forgive their parents who could not provide more than food and shelter or who may have been emotionally deprived themselves and focus on building a more fulfilling mature life.

Kerry tells US to find new ways on climate finance

SHAUN TANDON

Veteran envoy John Kerry called for the United States to find major new climate finance methods, warning of “huge disappointment” if historic promises to transition from fossil fuels go unheeded.

Kerry, who is stepping down as the US climate envoy, described an agreement in December in Dubai at the last UN summit as historic for its call on the planet to move away from fossil fuels in large part responsible for the planet’s rising temperatures. But he warned that the COP28 agreement must not be “reduced to mere words on a piece of paper.”

“If we don’t do what we’ve said we’re going to do in these next months, that’s exactly what could happen, encouraging cynicism and dropout-ism and huge disappointment around the world,” Kerry said at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Kerry, an 80-year-old former secretary of state, senator and presidential contender, has said he will focus outside of government on mobilising private funding to complement government efforts on climate.

Kerry said that the United States should consider a system of financial guarantees for investors, which would cover risks if projects fail.

“It’s time for creativity. We’ve come up with new financial instruments when we needed them before, and my judgment is we need them now,” he said. He pointed to his work as envoy with Indonesia and Vietnam on so-called Just Energy Transition Partnerships, or JETPs — financing deals between a small group of wealthy countries and an emerging economy to reduce reliance on fossil fuels or take other climate action.

Calling such deals “very bespoke,” Kerry said, “We don’t have time to do that.”

“We need to help deploy larger sums with greater confidence that the deal is bankable and we de-risked it sufficiently,” he said.

A recent study by the Climate Policy Initiative pointed to assessments that credit guarantees could mobilise between six and 25 times as much financing as traditional loans, with developing countries in particular looking to reduce uncertainties. Kerry also repeated his call for the world to phase out subsidies for fossil fuels — often politically sensitive in countries reliant on oil and gas.

He voiced admiration for the European Union’s new “CBAM” carbon tariff, although he acknowledged it was not politically feasible in the United States. — AFP



Noof Al Saidiyah

Self-immolation as a political protest

I was somehow anticipating an event like this to occur: someone setting themselves on fire, following the deep-rooted and extreme tradition of self-sacrifice for political protest.

It is conceivable that, with things deteriorating every day and facing a lack of options against the fierce and united world powers, someone may reach a point where they can no longer bear witness to the ongoing genocide against what remains of the two-and-a-half million Gazans.

This form of protest is not new in the face of injustice, even if the direct impact may not be on the protesters.

On June 11, 1963, during the Buddhist crisis in Vietnam, the monk Thich Quang Duc silently and courageously set himself ablaze in protest against the persecution of Buddhists by the government. The iconic image and video recording of this historical moment eventually led to reforms in favour of the Buddhists.

This might be one of the earliest (if not the very first) recorded instances in contemporary history of self-sacrifice for political protest.

Both Buddhism and Christianity have traditions that value sacrifices. A well-known example is the Hindu widows joining the funeral pyres of their husbands as a sign of loyalty.

While self-sacrifice in combat, such as in suicide missions, aims (or is intended to aim) for a military victory, political protest through self-immolation does not inherently lead to a victory but rather seeks to provoke a response; whether for immediate change or a more gradual impact.

However, it is also a risky gamble, as it may not result in any change at all, and in some cases, the identities of those who have self-immolated remain unknown, with their motives only speculated through the location of the act.

This demonstrates that self-sacrifice as a form of protest differs from demonstrations aimed at exerting pressure on authorities, serving primarily as a declaration of a resolute stance not easily reversed.

The documentary film ‘Tell Me Lies’ (1968) captures reactions to the Vietnam War, following the publishing



Children look for salvageable items amid the rubble of a Mosque destroyed in Israeli strikes in Deir El Balah in central Gaza. – AFP

of a photograph in a magazine showing a child disfigured by napalm shells.

The film also recounts the story of American anti-war activist Norman R Morrison, who set himself on fire in front of the Pentagon in protest against the American war in Vietnam in

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November 1965.

American Air Force pilot Aaron Bushnell, who set himself on fire in front of the Israeli Embassy in the US capital, was not the first to protest this way since the start of the war on Gaza. An unidentified individual did the same in front of the Israeli consulate in Atlanta last December.

Bushnell communicated his protest over the phone, stating his reasons to prevent becoming a victim of the ongoing genocide, with his final words being “Free Palestine.” The police’s intervention to extinguish the fire and point a gun at the victim seemed more like a lack of empathy in following police protocols than anything else.

During my research, I came across other cases of people protesting in a similar manner. For example, a man in Congo self-immolated last November

to draw attention to the genocide in his country.

The news cannot move on without us recalling the legacy of Bouazizi and around 50 others who also self-immolated during the Arab Spring.

The revolution sparked by Bouazizi makes it clear that such extreme forms of protest and ultimate sacrifices call for impactful actions in return, such as igniting a revolution. The term “ignite” here exceeds its symbolic meaning, as it becomes literal, with the body of the oppressed serving as the spark that can no longer endure injustice.

There are threatening actions where someone may threaten to capture or kill others to achieve a goal, whether justified or not.

However, the act of self-sacrifice respects others’ lives and primarily directs violence towards oneself, posing no direct threat to others. The sacrificer relies on how others will react to the act, knowing that many may reach a breaking point and contemplate self-immolation as a form of protest.

They hope to set an example and kickstart a series of self-directed violence until their voices are heard and the situation is addressed.

There is a puzzling question we cannot answer despite our analytical tools: why does one form of such extreme protest incite or motivate reform, while a similar act goes unnoticed without triggering a reaction that matches or surpasses the impact of the initial protest.

Translated by Badr bin Khamis Al Dhafri. (The original article was published in Arabic in Oman newspaper on February 29)

Talk about pointless stuff...

Just think about the ‘useless things you’ve learned, like cursive, or joined-up writing for instance. I went to the experts, and asked some contemporary educators what were their most pointless learning experiences.

English teacher Jack, asked “when was the last time you had to check the PH level of a liquid, or know whether its an acid or alkaline that turns litmus paper pink?” Julie and Leanne, in student support, echoed so many of my colleagues in asking “what the point is of algebra?” Come on, $7x-y(-3)=????$. Really. How many of you out there have ever used that kind of algebra outside of school?

Science teacher Emma, learned in her classes, weirdly, that on snooker tables, the cushions are exactly $\frac{3}{5}$ of the height of the balls to maximise the bounce off the cushion... Now I’m not just being daft, but it’s my guess that even the great Ronnie O’Sullivan doesn’t know, or need, that priceless nugget. While PE guru Amy’s most pointless was “in yr5 we did an entire term on the Tudors, but the related PE lesson was wearing Tudor dresses and learning to ‘Tudor dance.’

Engineering teacher Jason, learned how to gut a sprat, a small fish, at school, which he thinks “would only be useful if he ever washed up on a desert island.” Meanwhile Office Manager Mandy spoke of learning to use a lathe in Yr9, playing the recorder flute, identifying rock formations, oxbow lakes, and river formations, in geography, and somewhat surprisingly, has not differentiated an equation since Yr13, though she can, quite some years later. Mitochondria and chloroplasts seemed important too, once.

Ben, a Maths teaching carnivore, was taught how to make a fruit salad. He also, for a French assessment, had to describe his bedroom, something he had never done before. His “Ma commode en bois est a cote de mon lit. Sur ceci se trouve une lampe”



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

WE REALLY DO NEED CHANGES TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, BECAUSE IT’S NOT, AND NEVER HAS BEEN KNOWLEDGE THAT IS THE WAY FORWARD

therefore remains, in his eyes, something of a ‘lemon,’ even if it is a magnificently posh description of his childhood bed next to a wooden set of drawers with a lamp on top. And speaking of food, we all learned to make cupcakes and sponges in cooking class didn’t we?

Everyone says Shakespeare is divisive, with his thee’s and thou’s, his to be’s and his not to be’s, his “Wherefore art thou’s,” his “If music be the food of love...” and “Friends, Romans, countrymen...” etcetera, he is either seen as the doyen of all playwrights, or as a complete waste of space. The issue is that while one achieves a literary appreciation through such study, that’s not something you use every day, is it?

A pet hate, even of English teachers, is Emily Dickinson’s poetry. It’s stark, it’s black, and when contextually applied to a young woman who virtually isolated herself to death because she was either unlucky in love, or just got a massive ‘sulk’ on. Either way it doesn’t help our young teens to have a miserable woman who wrote miserable poetry, as someone to focus on.

And don’t get me started on Latin, or the periodic table. Has nobody realised we all have mobiles, laptops, tablets, Google etc, etc? The reality is that less than half of what our kids are taught is any good to them, but learning how to find stuff... is. And on that theme, Scientist Steve smiled as he recollected his teacher once saying, “It’s not as if you’ll be walking around with a calculator or computer in your pocket. Is it?

As such budgeting, credit ratings and debt, investment and interest rates, savings, debit and credit cards, pensions, real estate... in other words money management, and certainly also respect for oneself, and others are vitally important.

We really do need changes to the education system, because it’s not, and never has been knowledge that is the way forward, but enhancing understanding oneself, and others, and developing skills.

A VIEW FROM THE TOP!



This aerial view of Mount Fuji, Japan's highest peak at 3,776 metres, is seen from the window of a flight from Tokyo to Hong Kong, above Shizuoka Prefecture on Saturday. – AFP

How AI could reshape medicine

On a recent international trip, I found myself running late to the airport. Not being fluent in the local language, I used a translation app that enabled me to convey the urgency of my situation to the taxi driver. The app’s camera feature also allowed me to understand the road signs, providing real-time updates.

This is just one example of how digital innovations, particularly artificial intelligence, are reshaping our world. With recent studies showing that AI models can now identify early signs of health complications such as sepsis, these technologies are poised to revolutionise medicine, too.

These rapid technological advances also underscore the urgent need for AI regulation. The European Union’s Artificial Intelligence Act, which is expected to be approved in the second half of 2024, is a prime example. This pioneering law classifies AI systems according to their risk levels and explicitly bans specific high-risk applications, such as social scoring and emotion recognition, that pose a threat to personal safety, civil liberties, and democratic governance. It also highlights the importance of transparency and explainability, so that users can access information about AI-generated decisions.

The EU’s ambitious legislation offers a good starting point for a global discussion on how not to use AI. But



Junaid Nabi

The writer is a senior fellow at the Aspen Institute, is a member of the Working Group on Regulatory Considerations for Digital Health and Innovation at the WHO

USED IN A RESPONSIBLE AND ETHICAL MANNER, AI COULD USHER IN AN ERA OF DATA-DRIVEN HEALTHCARE THAT IMPROVES OUTCOMES FOR ALL

given these technologies’ vast potential to transform healthcare, it is equally crucial to explore howthey can be used to augment the human-centric aspects of medicine.

For starters, AI has the potential to make medicine more compassionate. For example, a recent study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* compared responses from ChatGPT to health-related questions with those provided by human doctors. Interestingly, a panel of licensed healthcare professionals preferred ChatGPT’s answers 79 per cent of the time, viewing them as more empathetic towards patients. Previous studies have shown that greater empathy and compassion can improve patient outcomes and expedite recovery.

In recent years, healthcare providers have become increasingly overwhelmed by managerial and administrative duties, constraining their ability to establish clinical rapport with patients. This “documentation burden” often leads to burnout and undermines the quality of care. By providing automated answers to routine questions, scheduling appointments, and managing paperwork, AI-powered platforms could streamline administrative processes and free up physicians to spend more time with patients.

But AI’s applications extend well beyond rationalising administrative tasks. A growing body of clinical evidence suggests that deep-learning algorithms — trained on vast datasets of medical images and patient records — can analyse X-rays, MRIs, and other medical scans with remarkable accuracy, frequently surpassing the diagnostic capabilities of human physicians. These innovations could revolutionise precision diagnostics, facilitating the early detection of diseases like pneumonia and cancer and supporting global health efforts, particularly in remote areas with limited access to specialised care.

Policymakers worldwide

are increasingly recognising the importance of preventive healthcare, largely owing to its economic benefits. AI is central to this shift, interpreting data from wearable devices and sensors to identify early signs of pathology, particularly cardiac conditions, and thus preventing minor health issues from becoming catastrophic crises. Moreover, smartwatches and fitness bands use AI-powered tracking systems capable of detecting potential sleep apnea and prompting users to seek medical advice before they develop severe health problems.

To be sure, integrating AI into healthcare poses significant challenges and raises numerous

ethical questions. In addition to ensuring fairness, combating algorithmic bias, and maintaining data privacy and security, it is crucial to recognise that AI cannot replace the personal touch that is essential to clinical practice. Medical professionals ought to lead this transition, using new technologies to augment their skills. While chatbots are unlikely to replace doctors and nurses anytime soon, AI tools are already supporting healthcare providers by improving diagnostic accuracy and facilitating more personalised, data-driven care. Given that persistent health challenges, especially chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension, often stem from inadequate investment in public health and a lack of social cohesion, addressing them requires more than just technological solutions. In such cases, comprehensive reform of national health policies is needed.

By adopting the emerging digital technologies in a responsible and ethical manner, we can transform the ways we diagnose, treat, and prevent diseases, ushering in an era of data-driven medicine in which health professionals and AI systems work together to deliver better care for all. But while machines can help, the ability to forge a healthier future is ours alone.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



AI models can now identify early signs of health complications.

sport

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Omani racer Ahmad Al Harthy along with OQ members

OQ sponsors race driver Al Harthy for 2024

MUSCAT: OQ, the global integrated energy group, has announced its exclusive sponsorship of Omani racing driver Ahmad bin Said al Harthy, for the 2024 season of the FIA World Endurance Championship. OQ's sponsorship of Al Harthy comes in support of Omani sports and empowers Omani professionals to participate in international sporting events. The sponsorship also fosters national pride by showcasing Oman on the global sporting stage and raises the profile of motorsports internationally.

Al Harthy will compete under the name of OQ Oman Racing Team in the FIA World Endurance Championship for the second consecutive year. The championship consists of 8 races held in various cities around the world. Al Harthy will also participate in the European GT Challenge Cup this season, including 5 rounds in different parts of the world. Ashraf bin Hamed al Mamari, Acting Group CEO of OQ, said: "OQ's sponsorship of racing champion Ahmad al Harthy reflects His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik's strong support for Omani sports and their role in representing Oman on the international stage. It also aligns with OQ's commitment to empowering Omani athletes to compete globally." He added: "Since 2021, the OQ Group has proudly supported racing champion Ahmad al Harthy, recognising the role this sponsorship plays in showcasing Oman and empowering Omani talent on the global stage. This renewed sponsorship builds on Al Harthy's past successes, including his impressive second-place finish at last year's Le Mans

race. We remain confident in his ability to achieve further triumphs in the upcoming international championships." Omani racer Ahmad expressed his gratitude, saying: "I would like to extend my sincere thanks to OQ for continuing their exclusive sponsorship of my international racing in 2024. Following their support over the past three years, which significantly contributed to our podium finishes, this renewed partnership empowers Omani athletes in endurance racing and marks a strong step forward for the sport in Oman."

Royal Commendation Medal recipient Ahmad al Harthy commended OQ's unwavering support for Omani athletes. He highlighted OQ's significant role in empowering them to compete internationally, acknowledging the positive impact it has had on his own achievements, including representing Oman in international car races. OQ supports Omani champions across various sports in their international participation. This includes shot putter Mohammed al Mashaykhi, whose participation in the World Para Athletics

Championships was bolstered by OQ's sponsorship and diver Omar al Ghailani, who secured first place in the Freediving World Cup with OQ's backing. OQ prioritises sports as a key area of its social investment programme. The Group annually sponsors numerous sports initiatives, events and activities to bolster Omani sports development. Additionally, OQ fosters a healthy lifestyle among employees by providing access to sports and exercise facilities and equipment, promoting work-life balance.

Saudi, Kuwait triumph in GCC Basketball Championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

The Saudi boys team won the GCC Under-18 3x3 Basketball Championship, while the Kuwaiti won the girls category. The Omani girls team won third place after defeating the UAE team. The tournament was hosted by the Oman Basketball Association from March 1 to 2, in cooperation with the GCC Basketball Coordination Committee, Arab Basketball Federation, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Al Mouj Muscat and Oman Sail. In the girls' final match, the Kuwaiti team won the first place after defeating the Saudi team 21-5. The match started quickly with the Kuwaiti team scoring two points, before the Saudi team scored one point. The Kuwaiti team then scored four points to make the score 6-1. The Saudi players tried to close the gap by scoring three goals, but the Kuwaiti team came back strongly to score seven points to make



Saudi boys team won the GCC Under-18 3x3 Basketball Championship

the score 13-4. Despite the Saudi team's efforts, the Kuwaiti team continued to double the score to win the match 21-5. In the third and fourth place match for girls, the National Team A won the third place after defeating the UAE team 5-4. The National team started quickly and took the lead with a point by

player Zeina al Batash. Two teams continued to exchange attacks to end the match with the National team winning 5-4. In the boys' final match between Saudi and Qatari teams, Saudi team started strongly and took a two-point lead. However, the Qatari team came back strong to score four



Oman girls team celebrates after winning third place

points and take a 4-2 lead. The competition between the two teams intensified, until the match ended with a 18-15 victory for the Saudi team. The UAE team won the third place after defeating the Kuwaiti team. The UAE team started with a good performance and took a three-point lead, but the Kuwaiti

team equalised after scoring three points. The scoring continued from both teams until the end of the match, which ended with an 8-6 victory for the UAE team. At the end of the final matches, Shaikh Ali bin Mansour al Amri, member of Majlis Ash'ura representing the Wilayat of Al

Seeb, Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the OBA, and Saadoun al Kuwari, Chairman of the GCC Coordination Committee, crowned the winners of the tournament. Dr Ali bin Salam al Yaarubi, Vice-President of the OBA and Chairman of the Technical Committee of the tournament, said: "The tournament went well according to the plan, and we witnessed a high technical level from all the gulf teams participating in the youth and girls categories. This reflects the development of the 3x3 basketball game in the Gulf region." He added: "As for the organisation of the tournament, we succeeded in choosing the right place and providing all the necessary requirements, including courts, equipment and logistics. We thank Al Mouj Muscat for providing the venue, Oman Sail for providing the facilities, and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for the financial support."



Al Miragh clinches Al Shabab Club's Super Cup

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

Shabab Al Miragh team lifted the title of Al Shabab Club's Super football Cup in Barka. Shabab Al Miragh team defeated Al Shamal team in penalty shootout after a 1-1 draw in the

consolation time in the final clash at the Al Shabab Club in Barka.

The winner team took the lead in the match as Ayooob al Balushi scored the opening goal in the first half while Musaab al Yahyai equalised in the second half before Shabab Al Miragh team secured their title in the penalty

shootout.

Khalid bin Saif al Mawali, Vice chairman of Al Shabab club, was the chief guest for the final in presence of both teams fans. Chief guest gave away the medals to the winner and delivered the Cup to Shabab Al Miragh team Captain.

OOTC concludes today after thrilling competitions

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) will conclude competitions of Oman Open Tennis Championship (OOTC) in the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Sunday.

As many as 160 players of various ages and nationalities took part in the tournament which run during the last three weeks. The concluding day will witness finals and closing ceremony in presence of Moutasim bin Hamoud bin Sangour al Zadjali, Chairman of Oman Tennis Association, who will deliver the winners in the various categories.

During the couple weeks ago, the tournament featured an intense and thrilling competition among the participated players, particularly during the final rounds of the various categories. National team players showed top performance to register commendable results across different age groups events.

The OTA offers a total cash prize of RO 8,000 for the first-place winners in each category in different disciplines, including men's and women's categories. The event re-launched after an absence of few years and the tournament targets to create a competitive atmosphere among



Moutasim al Zadjali, Chairman of Oman Tennis Association

players and encourages residents of various nationalities in the Sultanate of Oman to contribute to the development of local competitions.

OTA is very keen to organise several domestic competitions, hosting international tournaments, including the recent hosting of the International Youth Categories Championship beside organising special club tournaments.

The past two days of the Oman Open Tennis Championship saw the conclusion of several categories. In the Boys U-18 category competitions, Oman national team player Abdulrahman al Rahbi claimed the title after defeating Sharon by 6/1, 4/6, and 10/7. In Girls category, national team player



Aisha al Busaidy secured the title by outclassing Majda Kamil with scores of 6/5 and 6/2.

In the Boys' Doubles event, Oman's Abdulrahman al Rahbi and Ahmed Ihab clinched the title against the duo Muataz al Mazray and Azan al Busaidi by 6/4 and 6/1. In the Women's Over 50 category,

the German player Elizabeth emerged victorious following her win over Triglet from South Africa at 3/6, 6/3, and 10/7. In the Women's Over 40 category, the Australian Jacqueline claimed the first position after winning against Sareb from Italy with scores of 6/0 and 6/0.

Oman to host PNG for bilateral series

MUSCAT: With just three months remaining until Oman competes in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024, co-hosted by West Indies and the USA, the national team is all geared up for an intense season featuring one-dayers (50-over-a-side) and T20Is.

The action kicks off on March 3, as Oman welcomes fellow Associate nation Papua New Guinea (PNG) for a bilateral series. The series, comprising two one-dayers (50-over-a-side) and three T20Is, will run until March 8 at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat.

Zeeshan Maqsood will lead Oman with Aqib Ilyas serving as his deputy against the PNG side. The tour commences with back-to-back one-dayers on March 3-4, followed by a series of T20Is from March 6-8.

Expressing confidence ahead of the tour, Oman head coach Duleep Mendis said, "We had a memorable 2023 where the national team distinguished itself at different world-class events. From our commendable performance at the ICC CWC Qualifiers in Zimbabwe to securing a spot in the ICC T20 World Cup for the third time and clinching the T20 Gulf Cup, our achievements speak volumes." Looking towards the upcoming challenges, Mendis added, "Following the successful year, we are now looking forward to bettering our performances



Oman cricket team

this year. The PNG tour will launch our preparations for two major tournaments - the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 in June and the ACC Premier Cup in April. These tournaments are crucial milestones for us, and our focus is on ensuring that we are well-prepared to compete at the highest level."

Mendis emphasised the significance of the tour in preparing the team for the challenges ahead, and said, "The format of one-dayers (50-over-a-side) and T20Is proposed by the ICC will allow the teams to prepare adequately for these upcoming events. It's essential for our players to adapt to different formats and conditions, and this tour provides us with the perfect opportunity to do so. The boys are very keen to start and do well, which will lay the foundation for a successful year ahead."

International Tent Pegging Federation holds meeting

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

The International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF), which is based in Muscat, held the meeting of Board of Directors on Saturday under the chairmanship of Mohammed bin Issa al Fayrouz, President of the ITPF.

The meeting discussed many topics, that will be presented at the Federation's General Assembly meeting on Sunday in Muscat, with participation of more than 31 representatives of the Federation's member states. Among the most prominent topics that will discuss is proposals to host International tournaments, which will be held in 2024 and 2025 in various countries. The most prominent of these tournaments are qualifying tournaments for World Cup, the U-16 Junior Championship, the U-21 Youth Championship, the Veteran Championship, the Beach Championship, the Women's Championship, the Military Championship, the Universities Championship, the Championship of traditional dress Championship, the Friendship Championship, and the Club



Mohammed bin Issa al Fayrouz, President of the ITPF

Championship. Furthermore, the meeting reviewed what has been accomplished in the continental federations and discussing the request for countries to join the federation, in addition to the various agendas.

The meeting was attended by Anas bin Mohammed bin Marhoon al Maamari, Vice



President for Executive Affairs, Haider bin Hussein al Jumaili, Vice President for Development and Training, Brandom Miro, Vice President for Technical Affairs, Haitham bin Mohammed bin Jawad al Lawati, Secretary-General of the Federation, Salim bin Mohammed bin Issa al Balushi, Assistant Secretary General.

Mohammad Issa al Fayrouz, President of the International Tent Pegging Federation, affirmed that, "The Sultanate of Oman's hosting the meetings of ITPF reflect the keenness and confirmation of its support towards the International Tent Pegging Federation, which is based in the Sultanate of Oman".

"The Federation's Board of

Directors held a meeting to discuss many of the topics that will be presented in the Federation's General Assembly meeting which will be held on Sunday. These meetings are within the framework of the International Federation for the development of Tent Pegging Sport and to accomplish further improvement

in this sport which has become one of the international sports that is witnessing a great spread and wide practice.

This sport is one of the public follow-up sport around the world and we are working together on everything that would develop the sport in various countries of the world," he said.

CELTICS SCHOOL MAVS FOR



STRAIGHT NBA WIN

THE BOSTON CELTICS, fuelled by 32 points from Jayson Tatum and 21 three-pointers, withstood a 37-point triple-double from Luka Doncic to beat the Dallas Mavericks 138-110 on Friday and push their NBA winning streak to 10 games.

Tatum took awhile to warm up, missing all four of his shots in the first quarter, but the All-Star forward scored 16 in the third quarter as the Celtics seized control.

Down by seven at half-time, the Mavs pulled within two points midway through the third.

But Jaylen Brown and Tatum connected on back-to-back three-pointers and the Celtics pulled relentlessly away.

Brown scored 25 points and Kristaps Porzingis, who carried the early offensive load, added 24 as seven Boston players scored in double figures.

They simply overwhelmed the Mavs, despite Doncic's 12th triple-double of the season. Doncic added 12 rebounds and 11 assists and Kyrie Irving scored 19 points despite connecting on just nine of 23 shot attempts.

"In simple terms, we have a really good team," Tatum said after the league-leading Celtics became the first team this season to win 10 straight.

"Every night is going to look a little bit different. As long as we continue to build good habits and win, it's all going to work itself out."

The Golden State Warriors shook off a travel nightmare to push their road winning streak to eight games with a 120-105 victory over the Raptors in Toronto.

Stephen Curry scored 25 points and Jonathan Kuminga added 24 for the Warriors, who found themselves delayed six hours at the airport after their victory over the New York Knicks on Thursday night.

Trailing by three at half-time, the Warriors pulled away after the break. Klay Thompson, back in the starting lineup, scored 14 points, all in the second half.

"Fantastic win," said Warriors coach Steve Kerr, who had taken his team to task after watching them sleepwalk through the opening minutes.

He said he hated playing the heavy but felt he had to try to wake them up.

"Last night was brutal — that's the worst travel circumstances I've ever been involved in in the NBA," Kerr said.

R J Barrett led Toronto's scoring with 23 points. All-Star Scottie Barnes had 10 points and six rebounds before departing late in the first half with a left hand injury.

DOMINANT GIANNIS

Elsewhere, Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 46 points and grabbed 16 rebounds to lead the Bucks to a 113-97 victory over the Bulls in Chicago.

Antetokounmpo had six assists and made two three-pointers in a dominant performance.

Sacramento's Malik Monk scored 39 points off the bench to lead the Kings to a 124-120 overtime victory over the Western Conference-leading Minnesota Timberwolves.

Despite the departure at half-time of Timberwolves top scorer Anthony Edwards due to what the team called personal reasons, Minnesota kept it close in a back-and-forth second half and were up 120-117 midway through overtime.

But Monk hit a pair of three-pointers to put the Kings ahead and Trey Lyles drained a final free-throw to seal the victory for Sacramento.

In Detroit, Cleveland guard Darius Garland drilled eight three-pointers, including six in an 18-point second quarter, to fuel the short-handed Cavaliers in a 110-100 victory over the Pistons.

With Donovan Mitchell and Caris LeVert sidelined with injuries, Garland scored a game-high 29 points. Evan Mobley added 22 points and 17 rebounds for the Cavs.

In Philadelphia, Tobias Harris scored 31 points and pulled down 12 rebounds and Tyrese Maxey added 33 points to propel the 76ers to a 121-114 victory over the Charlotte Hornets.

It was a much-needed win for the 76ers, who are trying to keep themselves in playoff position as they await the hoped-for return of reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid, who had surgery in February on his injured left knee. — AFP

Jayson Tatum (0) drives the ball in action.
— USA TODAY Sports

business



EV CLUB OMAN:
HOW A GROUP OF
ELECTRIC CAR
OWNERS HELPED
INTRODUCE EV
INFRASTRUCTURE
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Oman to host world’s largest tourism exhibition

BERLIN: In official partnership with the Sultanate of Oman represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the events of the Berlin International Tourism Fair (ITB) 2024 will kick on Monday in the German capital, Berlin.

The fair is considered the world’s largest tourism exhibition and a platform for knowledge exchange and expanding business networks in the tourism industry, and it will last for several days.

This official partnership reaffirms Oman’s plans to develop the tourism sector and enhance its position as a global tourist destination.

It is an ideal opportunity to showcase Oman’s tourism resources, products, services, and experiences, thereby contributing to tourism promotion and increasing the influx of more tourists from export markets, as well as promoting the diverse investment opportunities recommended by the Omani Tourism Strategy to contribute to achieving the investment targets of the tourism sector in the context of the goals of “Oman 2040 Vision”.



Under the slogan of this year’s ITB Berlin opening ceremony ‘Beauty Has An Address’ the stage is set for Oman.

It is expected that about 160 countries and 5,000 exhibitors will participate in the fair, attracting around 120,000 visitors from various countries around the world, as well as 7,000 representatives of global media and 1,500 travel bloggers from 35 countries to cover the fair.

Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

for Tourism, stated that this official partnership represents a milestone in enhancing Oman’s position on the global tourism map, reflecting its commitment to expanding the base of international visitors.

At the same time, Oman is working to diversify its tourism products, enhance economic activity through investment in the sector, and highlight Oman’s

unique strategic location, natural beauty, stunning landscapes, and rich cultural heritage; making it an ideal destination for tourists seeking unique and amazing experiences.

He added that Germany is an important tourist market for Oman and represents the largest European market for incoming tourists. In 2023, Oman welcomed over 231,363 tourists



This official partnership represents a milestone in enhancing Oman’s position on the global tourism map, reflecting its commitment to expanding the base of international visitors.

AZZAN AL BUSAIDY
Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism

from Germany.

Moreover, Oman will be the official host country for the ITB Berlin 2024, where the host country enjoys a leading position in everything that happens during the fair.

It was emphasised that Oman’s

selection as an official partner of the ITB Berlin 2024 reflects the organisers’ appreciation for Oman’s continuous efforts to enhance the tourism sector and the positive steps it is witnessing, reflecting its importance in promoting growth and economic diversification that the government aspires to achieve.

On his part, Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, explained that Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Omani tourism sector institutions, is keen to participate annually in the Berlin fair.

This is in recognition of the importance of this global tourism event in promoting its natural and cultural resources, distinctive tourist and cultural landmarks, and learning about the experiences of countries around the world in developing the tourism sector, as well as forging partnerships and direct working relationships between Omani tourism sector institutions and their counterparts from various countries worldwide. — ONA

Global travel companies impressed with Oman’s tourism sector



Tourists visit a pottery and handicrafts shop at a market in Nizwa, Oman.

MUSCAT: Several travel and tourism companies praised the development of the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to the castles, forts, traditional markets, and Omani customs that give a unique tourist character different from other countries and contribute to attracting tourists to the Sultanate of Oman in various seasons.

Travel and tourism companies also pointed out that Oman is on the verge of a tourism growth, emphasising that innovative communication methods enhance the development of relationships and exchange of experiences in the tourism sector.

They highlighted the importance of meetings hosted by Oman in strengthening cooperation opportunities and opening new horizons for the tourism sector with various countries worldwide.

Ayman al Qaddouh, an expert in the travel and tourism sector from Qatar, stated that Oman is witnessing noticeable development through the government’s focus on sustainable sectors and diversifying its economy, especially in the travel, tourism, and entertainment sectors in the Omani market.

Veronica Nabori from South

America said that Oman is a preferred tourist destination for many visitors from various South American cities, pointing out that it is characterised by tourist attractions such as beaches, mountains, sands, and other attractive features encouraging visitors.

Glen Johnston, Vice President for the Middle East and International Affairs at American Company “Aviareps,” said that Oman possesses various tourism attractions in its different governorates, each of which stands out with its unique tourist and historical advantages.

Rahul Sukramani, Sales Manager at the St. Regis Resort in Al Mouj, Muscat, emphasised the tourism position of Oman through the tourist attractions and environmental diversity it is distinguished by, such as the mountainous, desert, coastal environment, folk heritage, handicrafts, and traditional arts, which are important tourist attractions for visitors from various countries worldwide.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism stated that the number of tourists who visited Oman in 2023 reached 4 million visitors, an increase of 36.7 per cent over 2022.

— ONA

Oman’s HYPOR T Duqm project meets key qualification for EU exports

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

The HYPOR T Duqm green ammonia project planned at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm has secured a key certification that would make its renewable ammonia output eligible for export to markets in the European Union.

The partnership of Belgium-based DEME, a leading international contractor and developer, and OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, is developing the multibillion dollar project in two phases at Al Duqm.

On Thursday, CertifHy – a leading green energy certification agency for Europe – announced that it had completed a pre-certification pilot for the HYPOR T Duqm project.

It affirms the future compliance of Renewable Fuels of Non-Biological Origin (RFNBO) produced in Al Duqm with the European Renewable Energy Directive II (RED II) Delegated Acts.

With this pre-certification, produced green molecules from HYPOR T Duqm qualify for import into the EU as green molecules. “We are pleased to announce



HYPOR T Duqm will be developed by a partnership of DEME Group and OQ Alternative Energy.

that the HYPOR T Duqm project is on-track to deliver RFNBO-compliant ammonia to Europe, in accordance with RED II Amendments,” said CertifHy in a post.

“Supported by the Belgian Federal Public Service’s Energy Transition Fund (ETF), the success of this pre-certification pilot paves the way for a stronger Belgium-Oman partnership, the latter of which holds tremendous potential to supply competitive hydrogen (and its derivatives) to international markets,” it further added.

“The positive results from the pre-certification pilot according

to the CertifHy RFNBO Scheme support our ambition to make Oman’s abundant renewable energy resources availability to the European market, contributing to the EU’s Net-Zero ambitions,” Jean-Baptiste de Cuyper, Green Hydrogen Development Manager – DEME Group, stated.

Partnering with CertifHy in the pre-certification pilot were Hiniicio, a leading Belgian-headquartered international consultancy in the field of hydrogen and fuel cells. TÜV SÜD, a global leader in independent testing, inspection and certification services, also took part in the pilot.

CertifHy was created in response to a request from the European Commission to formulate a high-quality hydrogen certification scheme across Europe.

CertifHy certificates assure EU importers of the reliability of green hydrogen imports from the standpoint of their origin and environmental attributes.

Last May, HYPOR T Duqm selected Hiniicio to conduct the green hydrogen pre-certification under the CertifHy scheme.

As green ammonia output from the project is earmarked primarily for export to Europe, among other markets, a robust and transparent certification scheme is seen as pivotal to assuring customers that the supplied renewable fuels have been sustainably produced and enabling them to achieve their climate goals.

Currently in the early stages of detailed engineering, HYPOR T Duqm will feature around 1.3 gigawatts of renewable power capacity with the goal to produce about 330,000 tonnes of green ammonia per annum in the first phase. Renewable capacity will be doubled to around 2.7 GW with 650,000 tonnes per annum of green ammonia in the second phase.

OETC welcomes first batch of students for 2024 ‘Winter Training’ programme



The students will undergo a two-month consecutive training programme.

MUSCAT: The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) recently welcomed the first batch of students for the year 2024 within the “Winter Training” programme. The number of students in this batch was 27 from various Omani higher education institutions.

The students will undergo a two-month consecutive training programme in various relevant fields, aimed at developing their skills and enhancing their readiness and efficiency to compete in the job market by acquiring the required competitive skills such as technical, leadership, and behavioural skills.

Mubarak al Jahwari, the General Manager of Human Resources at the OETC, highlighted that the company is

always seeking to contribute to the development of Omani youth as part of its social responsibility.

It aims to enhance their competencies and capabilities to engage in the job market.

The company annually welcomes two batches of students to participate in intensive training programs related to their fields of study.

This effort has continued over the years as part of its initiatives to support and empower the youth, organise workshops and visits to transfer and exchange knowledge and experiences, and equip students with practical and applied skills and knowledge in the electricity sector.

“Such initiatives receive great support and attention from the company due to their clear impact on enhancing the

Malabar Gold & Diamonds set to launch 10 new showrooms

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an extensive retail presence of over 340 showrooms across 13 countries, has announced a massive expansion to their global operations.

The jewellery giant is set to launch 10 world-class showrooms which will propel the brand’s global store count to 350 by March 2024. The move will further solidify Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ highly coveted position as the most preferred jewellery retailer in India.

The new showrooms in India will be launched at Latur, Satara & Nagpur in Maharashtra, Kolar & Whitefield in Karnataka, Jaipur in Rajasthan, Chandni Chowk in Delhi, Vanasthalipuram in Andhra Pradesh, Patiala in Punjab & in Puducherry.

While 8 of the new showrooms will be opened in regions where Malabar Gold & Diamonds has already established a robust presence, the new showrooms in Rajasthan & Puducherry will be the brand’s first expansion into these states.

“The great strides achieved by Malabar Gold & Diamonds globally is a matter of great



The launch 10 world-class showrooms will propel the brand’s global store count to 350 by March 2024.

joy not only for us within the organisation, but for all jewellery lovers across the 13 countries that we operate in.

As we prepare to open 10 new showrooms, I want to express my sincere gratitude to our cherished customers, team members, and other stakeholders for their pivotal role in making this possible. With every new store launch, we are inching closer to our goal of being crowned as the world’s no. 1 jewellery retailer”, commented M P Ahammed, Chairman of Malabar Group.

With over 25 exclusive brands

and collections that include Gold, Diamonds, Precious Gems, and Platinum jewellery—such as MINE Diamond jewellery, Era uncut diamond jewellery, Divine Indian heritage jewellery, Ethnix handcrafted antique jewellery, Precia precious gem jewellery, and Viraa royal polki jewellery, among others—the new showrooms will feature an extraordinary selection of designs.

Special attention has been paid to the diverse tastes and preferences of Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ extensive customer base, ensuring a broad assortment

of jewellery suitable for bridal, occasional, and everyday wear will be available to customers.

“Reaching a global store count of 350 marks a significant milestone in the growth trajectory of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Our influential presence across 13 countries had led to us being recently ranked 19th in the Global Powers of Luxury Goods report published by Deloitte, which further goes on to underscore our prominence in the international luxury retail sector,” commented KP Abdul Salam, Vice-Chairman of Malabar Group.

MHD Automobile brings back the thrill of Jeep Jamboree to Oman

MUSCAT: MHD Automobile LLC, the leading automotive company in Oman, proudly announces the triumphant return of the Jeep Jamboree to Oman after a hiatus of for years. This exhilarating event, took place in the heart of the Al Kamil desert in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, attracting close to 100 Jeep Wrangler vehicles and over 200 enthusiastic participants.

The three-day expedition, set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Al Kamil desert, provided an unparalleled opportunity for Jeep enthusiasts to experience the true off-road potential of their vehicles. MHD Automobile LLC aimed to reconnect with its valued customers by encouraging them to partake in this immensely popular desert adventure, as the Jeep Jamboree has witnessed a significant surge in popularity in



Oman over the past few years.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles LLC expressed excitement about the event, stating, “The Jeep Jamboree is more than just an off-road adventure; it’s a unique opportunity for our customers to enhance their driving skills while exploring the majestic landscapes of Oman.

We believe in creating memorable experiences for our customers, and the Jeep Jamboree

is a perfect platform for them to unleash the full potential of their 4WD Jeep Wrangler models.”

The meticulously planned adventure catered to participants of all driving experience levels, ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

Participants navigated their Jeep Wranglers across challenging sand dunes, further deepening their connection with the vehicles and honing their off-road driving skills.

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles unveils all-new MINI Countryman in Oman

MUSCAT: Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, has unveiled the all-new MINI Countryman. The much-anticipated 2024 model, with its innovative design overhaul and cutting-edge technology, sets the benchmark for compact crossovers with an eye towards the future.

The heart of the new the all new MINI Countryman beats with a choice of powerful and efficient petrol engines, tailored to deliver an unmatched blend of excitement and efficiency.

The lineup includes the front-wheel-drive MINI Countryman C, the all-wheel-drive S ALL4, and the high-octane JCW ALL4 variant. These models boast engines ranging from a dynamic 1.5-litre turbo-petrol with 167 bhp to a robust 2.0-litre turbo-petrol, culminating in the JCW’s breathtaking 296 bhp and 400 NM of torque, sprinting from 0-100 kmph in just 4.5 seconds.

Labelled “Charismatic Simplicity,” the 2024 MINI Countryman pioneers a new design language that is bold, modern, digital, and unmistakably MINI. This



philosophy is a harmonious blend of futuristic interiors and retro exteriors, celebrating MINI’s storied heritage while propelling it into the future. Characterised by upright proportions, a distinctive octagonal radiator grille, and a sculptural bonnet – among other elements – it embodies MINI’s adventurous spirit and emphasises a fun driving and user experience.

“We are excited to share the latest chapter in MINI’s storied legacy with our customers in Oman. We’re sure that all our MINI fans – past, present and future – will find it as exciting to drive as

it is to behold, with its brave new design and powerful engine lineup,” said Rachid Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles.

“The all-new 2024 MINI Countryman truly and stylishly captures the adventurous, edgy spirit of the brand, not to mention it is the ideal vehicle to explore the diverse landscapes of the Sultanate of Oman. The crossover is perfect to navigate the winding roads that meander through the country, leading into scenic wadis, majestic mountains and the long coastline with numerous stunning beaches.”

LG gears up its 2024 residential air conditioners lineup in Oman

MUSCAT: LG Electronics, a leading technology manufacturer, is all set to showcase its 2024 product lineup of Residential Air Conditioners (RAC) solutions at the Dealer Convention in Oman.

The latest solutions, all on display, will highlight a more efficient, sustainable and smarter way of improving the environment around the user, be it at home or in offices.

As residents in Oman generally deal with hotter temperatures, this new lineup of LG RAC solutions is bound to improve overall quality of life. During the event, LG will introduce its new RAC lineup, featuring the best of LG’s air

conditioning solutions for homes and offices.

One main example is the LG DUALCOOL Inverter compressor, which ensures non-stop cooling, while also saving energy for a greener environment and providing greater performance.

Available in LG ARTCOOL, DUALCOOL Big, DUALCOOL Smart and DUALCOOL Pro, this inverter is the secret behind the amazing cooling.

This Inverter compressor maximises cooling performance by 60 per cent faster cooling while also saving 65 per cent energy with optimised compressor operation.

Additionally, residents can get



LG and OTE officials pose for a photo during the launching event in Muscat.

15 per cent more cooling with the Dual Inverter Compressor, as it can run faster than conventional non-inverter compressor.

It also ensures precise cooling, by maintaining the setting temperature even while running at minimal level.

LG’s RAC solutions also boast a simple yet modern design across all products, making it ideal for any home or place. It encourages comfortable sleeping with a preset mode and a Comfort Air option so that outflowing air doesn’t hit the users directly.

The solutions also have 4way swing for airflow distribution for optimised cooling overall. LG also redefines its commitment towards air quality, embedding into its solutions a Dual Protection Filter to defend against fine particles and bacteria.

Additionally, the Plasmaster Ionizer sterilises over 99% of adhering bacteria and deodorises

the environment.

The solutions also come with ThinQ WiFi capabilities, which allow users to control the air conditioners at the tap of a button on their smartphones.

These air conditioning solutions come with Easy to install and are also long lasting with their Gold Fin coating, smart diagnoses, and a 10 years compressor warranty.

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HIBBA AL KINDI

In 2020, 32-year-old Zahir al Dhawi made the decision to replace his fuel-engine car with an electric one in an effort to simplify his life. At a time when public charging stations in Oman were scarce and with no charging station at home, Al Dhawi had to resort to creative solutions to keep his vehicle operational. This included utilising public charging hubs at mall parking lots, which often took hours, meticulously planning his routes, and installing makeshift chargers at relatives' homes outside of Muscat.

Despite these challenges, Al Dhawi persisted. "Despite owning other cars at the time, I convinced myself that EVs were the only way forward," he shared. However, he was not alone. Coincidentally, 21-year-old Jawad al Lawati also decided to purchase an electric vehicle after the engine of his old car broke down in the same year.

"My old 2002 model BMW's engine broke down, and replacing the engine was worth more than the car itself. Moreover, I used to go to the car mechanic every month to repair it, which cost a lot of time and money, not to mention the fuel cost as well. It was frustrating and a huge waste for me, so it was time to make a change to something that could be more sustainable," Al Lawati explained.

"So I thought about hybrid cars since they're the very new thing. But then I asked myself 'why not fully electric?'" he continued. "At the time, I was aware of Teslas but did not have much information or awareness about them, and I thought their prices were very expensive to afford. But when I opened their website and got to know a little bit more about the car, I was very fascinated, especially that the price is not that expensive. So I decided to get one."

Shortly after, Mohammed and Jawad met online through an online group connecting Tesla car owners in Oman.

As more electric vehicles emerged, the group soon expanded to include all different kinds of Electric Vehicles, with Jawad and Mohammed at the forefront as co-founders. The club began raising EV mobility awareness in Oman and advocating for EV regulations and services in the country, hosting regular events and activities to bring together EV owners and to promote green mobility.

According to the co-founders, there are many reasons why a person would switch to electric cars. In Mohammed's case, the tech-savvy engineer decided to make the switch to EVs in line with his adoption of smart technology in his life. Jawad shared that he was seeking a more sustainable option after becoming frustrated by frequent repairs and fuel expenses.

In a survey conducted by the *Observer*, approximately half of respondents in Oman would consider purchasing an electric vehicle, citing perceived environmental benefits and reduction of CO2 emissions as the

primary motivation driving their interest (78.8%), followed by lower operating and maintenance costs (59.4%) and improved technology (34.4%).

However, over a third of respondents expressed uncertainty regarding purchasing an EV (34.5%), while the remainder indicated that they would not consider it. Respondents primarily cited lack of sufficient public charging stations and the high purchasing price of electric vehicles as the main reasons behind their decision (58.1%), followed by long charging times (35.5%) and a lack of home charging stations (29%).

CHALLENGES TO EV ADOPTION

According to Al Dhawi, one of the biggest challenges hindering EV adoption in Oman was the lack of infrastructure. "One of the main challenges faced by the EV club was the lack of infrastructure that promoted EV adoption," he explained. He noted that due to the lack of EV classification registration until recently, EVs in Oman are highly underreported.

While the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology disclosed the number of EVs to be around 300 as of last June, Al Dhawi shared that the number is closer to 1,000. This discrepancy, according to him, led to a delay in EV infrastructure in Oman.



When the club approached relevant authorities to request public charging stations, they were met with scepticism regarding market demand due to inaccurate data on electric vehicles in the country.

The founders, however, provided data that demonstrated the increasing number of EVs in the country. "We provided the real numbers of cars with proof of car ownership. There was a massive growing rate of EVs; we witnessed a hundred cars in three months," Al Dhawi stated.

There are now around 90 active electric charging stations in Oman, which are currently free to use.

In regards to the price point, Al Dhawi argues that EVs can be more affordable to purchase than regular cars.

"People are favouring EVs because the price of EVs — imported cars — is half the price of petrol cars," he shared. He noted that while local car dealerships offer cars at a premium, with the lowest-priced electric vehicle in Oman starting at RO 17,000, imported EVs are highly affordable. Due to the EV grey market in the region, cars that were once valued at RO 25,000 are now available for around RO 10,000.

"Those are perfectly new and safe cars," Al Dhawi emphasised.

The only downside to buying an imported vehicle, according to Al Dhawi, is the lack of warranties. However, he argues that due to the lack of a combustion engine in EVs, they are generally more reliable and experience fewer issues. Moreover, he shared that third-party financing options are available to consumers when purchasing imported cars, eliminating the need for individuals to buy imported cars in full.

Soaring used car prices make vehicle ownership elusive for many in Oman



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is head of Business section in Oman Daily Observer

The used car market, traditionally a more affordable option, has seen prices skyrocket in the past two years, making the dream of car ownership increasingly elusive for many in Oman.

This surge is a confluence of global and local factors. The global chip shortage, plaguing the automotive industry since 2020, has led to a drastic decline in new car production, creating a ripple effect on the used car market.

The limited supply has driven up prices significantly.

Additionally, rising costs of raw materials like steel and aluminium have further inflated the cost of manufacturing cars, pushing the final price tag even higher for both new and used

vehicles.

Beyond these global challenges, Oman-specific factors are exacerbating the issue. The Sultanate of Oman's growing population and rising incomes have fuelled a surge in car demand.

However, with the limited availability of new cars due to global production constraints, many potential buyers are turning to the used car market, further increasing demand and driving up prices.

Furthermore, several factors contribute to the higher price of new cars in Oman compared to the US or Europe.

Oman charges a 5% customs duty on imported cars and applies the standard 5% VAT to the purchase price. Secondly,

the smaller car market in Oman provides less incentive for competitive pricing and can lead to higher distribution costs.

Additionally, high demand for specific models like SUVs and luxury cars, coupled with dealerships aiming for profit margins, can further inflate prices.

While used car prices might not be significantly lower due to the overall market inflation, the relatively low fuel costs in Oman may still make car ownership an attractive option despite the higher initial purchase cost.

This, coupled with the cultural preference for new car ownership in the Gulf region, including Oman, creates a constant stream of used cars entering the market as consumers trade in their older

vehicles.

However, the current demand outstrips the supply, causing prices to soar.

The consequences of this price surge are far-reaching, impacting individuals and communities across Oman. A significant portion of household income is now dedicated to purchasing a used car, often at the expense of other essential needs.

This financial pressure can lead to delays in achieving essential life goals.

Additionally, the limitations of Oman's current public transportation systems force many to rely on personal vehicles despite rising costs. The lack of reliable, efficient, and widespread public transport options further intensifies the issue.

Addressing this complex challenge requires a multi-pronged approach.

The government can play a role by exploring options like financial assistance programmes for purchasing new or used cars, easing the financial burden.

Additionally, significant investments in public transportation infrastructure to improve efficiency, comfort, coverage, and accessibility can offer a viable alternative to personal car ownership and reduce reliance on the used car market.

Finally, raising public awareness about the risks associated with rising used car prices can empower consumers to make informed purchasing decisions.

Bitcoin leads the charge in crypto bull market



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

The author is a member of the International Press Association

In recent financial news, the leading crypto asset Bitcoin has showcased remarkable performance, marking its best month in over three years this February with a surge of 48% to hit \$63,000. This notable increase, the highest monthly gain since December 2020, is largely attributed to the US approval of spot Bitcoin exchange-traded funds (ETFs), which has opened the market to both retail and institutional investors.

Analysts are now predicting an even brighter future for Bitcoin, with price expectations ranging from \$150,000 to \$500,000 in the coming years.

This surge in interest is further evidenced by major financial institutions like Morgan Stanley and UBS considering adding spot Bitcoin ETFs to their offerings. The institutional involvement in Bitcoin trading is on the rise, with a noticeable shift in activity from weekends to weekdays, hinting at a more mature market presence.

Additionally, the open interest for Bitcoin futures on centralised exchanges has reached a new peak, surpassing the previous highs seen in November 2021. The total open interest now stands at over \$26 billion, reflecting a heightened trading activity and positive trader sentiment towards Bitcoin.

This increase aligns with Bitcoin's price rally to over \$64,000, with retail-focused exchanges like Binance leading the charge.

Looking ahead, the Bitcoin community is eagerly anticipating the next halving event, scheduled approximately 50 days from now, which will

reduce the mining reward from 6.25 BTC to 3.125 BTC per block. Such halving events, which occur roughly every four years, have historically led to significant price fluctuations and often precede bull markets.

With the price of Bitcoin nearing all-time highs and institutional interest growing, the market is closely watching how this event will influence the cryptocurrency's value.

In related developments, BlackRock's iShares Bitcoin Trust ETF (IBIT) has rapidly expanded its assets under management (AUM) to over \$10 billion, just seven weeks post-launch.

This growth rate is unprecedented, with the ETF experiencing its second-largest daily inflows recently. This ETF now holds over 162,000 BTC, surpassing the holdings of other significant funds and highlighting the increasing mainstream acceptance and investment in Bitcoin.

These developments underscore the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of the cryptocurrency market, with Bitcoin at the forefront of this financial revolution. The increasing institutional involvement, coupled with significant market events like the halving, continue to shape the trajectory of Bitcoin and its role in the broader financial ecosystem.

The cryptocurrency landscape is witnessing significant milestones beyond Bitcoin's impressive performance. Tron, for instance, has reached a new peak in daily protocol revenue, generating nearly \$2 million and marking a record high for the blockchain.

This achievement underscores Tron's growing popularity, especially for stablecoin transfers, and highlights its position as a blockchain with one of the highest numbers of active users.

Despite facing criticism and challenges, such as the recent withdrawal of support from Circle, Tron's resilience and the 30% increase in the value of its TRX token this year illustrate the diverse and evolving nature of the cryptocurrency space.

Carbon credits hold the key to combating deforestation



ROSELYN FOSUAH ADJEI

The author is Climate Change Director at Ghana's Forestry Commission and National REDD+ Focal Point for Ghana.

Over the past few years, intense media scrutiny has prompted a growing number of companies to pursue high-quality carbon credits. Seeking to avoid accusations of "greenwashing," many of these firms are no longer content with merely offsetting their emissions and have been actively seeking credits that deliver tangible benefits to local communities.

The Ghanaian government is prepared to help. We have devoted more than 15 years to developing a robust forest-conservation programme.

After extensive planning and preparation, we are ready to offer high-integrity credits to buyers in the Global North who are eager to demonstrate their commitment to fighting deforestation.

To be sure, several forest-protection schemes have come under fire in recent years. Critics argue that instead of reducing deforestation, these offsets are primarily aimed at serving the interests of corporations seeking carbon credits to meet their climate targets and validate their claims of carbon neutrality.

But jurisdictional programmes like Ghana's are different. Designed to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, these initiatives cover vast areas while addressing some of the problems facing individual projects.

For example, they mitigate the risk of illegal deforestation outside of designated conservation zones.

The concept is not new. Article



5 of the 2015 Paris climate agreement encourages developed countries to offer results-based payments to developing countries for achieving emissions reductions.

Over the past two decades, jurisdictional forest-protection efforts have been largely funded by public donors, while corporate support has flowed toward specific emissions-reduction projects through the voluntary carbon market. But this is now changing, and countries like Ghana are leading the way.

Ghana's High Forest Zone, located within the Guinean Forests of West Africa, is recognised as one of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots. In 2008, an alarming increase in deforestation rates prompted the Ghanaian government to join the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and develop its forest-conservation programme with the goal of harnessing carbon finance to halt and reverse deforestation.

With financial support from the FCPE, the World Bank, and the Green Climate Fund, we identified five critical commodity-linked areas for intervention.

Through community engagement, our teams devised benefit-sharing strategies tailored to the diverse needs of various stakeholders.

They also developed specialised measurement technologies, enabling more accurate monitoring of the

carbon stored in Ghana's forests.

After spending nearly two decades laying the necessary technical groundwork and establishing relationships with local communities, Ghana recently entered the voluntary carbon market. We are preparing to issue jurisdictional carbon credits through the Architecture for REDD+ Transactions (ART) process, thereby enabling domestic and international companies to support our conservation efforts.

Our objective is to transform carbon credits into a long-term revenue stream. To this end, Ghana recently became one of the first countries to sign an emissions-reduction agreement with the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance (LEAF) Coalition.

As part of the deal, Ghana is set to receive \$50 million for reducing carbon dioxide emissions by up to five million tons.

While buyers in the Global North may view carbon credits as instrumental in meeting their climate targets, in Ghana, they represent a more profound shift.

The revenue generated from these credits translates into tangible income for local communities, enabling households to benefit financially from forest preservation.

These credits are more than a financial resource; they are a testament to years of dedicated work and commitment to environmental stewardship.

But for this programme to be effective, buyers must recognise that integrity and impact require substantial investment.

High-quality credits should do more than bolster corporate climate strategies; they should also contribute to preserving the world's forests.

In essence, this means providing communities with financial incentives to conserve trees instead of cutting them down.

While the LEAF agreement, which values CO2 emissions at \$10 per ton, represents a positive first step, it is not enough, because the returns on illegal deforestation are higher.

Given that carbon pricing appears to have been designed by and for those on the demand side, Global North buyers should consult countries like Ghana to understand the true cost of producing high-integrity credits.

Based on our extensive experience fighting deforestation, prices should account for the necessary preparatory work and, crucially, exceed the rates paid to illegal loggers and miners.

Carbon credits are not like aid funds, which are distributed by donor countries according to their own assessments of what they can or should give.

Rather, they are payments for emissions reductions that issuers like Ghana have worked hard to achieve – and that are crucial to limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius.

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WTO talks end with no deals in agriculture, fisheries

ABU DHABI: A high-level WTO conference ended on Saturday with a temporary extension of an e-commerce moratorium but no deals on agriculture and fisheries, throwing into doubt the effectiveness of the multilateral trade body.

The outcomes of the World Trade Organization's 13th ministerial conference in Abu Dhabi highlighted the sharp divisions between the body's 164 members amid geopolitical tensions and economic headwinds that are threatening global commerce.

"The WTO needed a good crisis and perhaps this will lead to a realisation that we cannot continue like this," said a senior European Union official participating in the talks. Speaking at the closing press conference, the Emirati chair of the so-called MC13 gathering, Thani al Zeyoudi, acknowledged the shortcomings.

"Despite our best efforts, we failed to agree on some texts which are of great importance to many of our members," said Al



WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala led discussions at the organisation's Ministerial meeting in Abu Dhabi. — Reuters

Zeyoudi, who also serves as the UAE's foreign trade minister.

For her part, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said the talks came up "against an international backdrop marked by greater uncertainty than at any time I can remember". "We have achieved some

important things and we have not managed to complete others," she said, while insisting that the "glass was half full".

The WTO, the only international body dealing with the rules of trade between nations, requires full consensus from all members to chalk up deals.

It was hoping the MC13 would replicate the landmark success of its 2022 ministerial in Geneva, which yielded a deal on fisheries and saw members agree to restore a now-defunct dispute settlement system by the end of this year. But the latest ministerial fell short of that objective.

"The unexpected weakness of the overall (MC13) package should... serve as a wake-up call," the Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce, John Denton, said in a statement.

After a 2022 deal that banned subsidies contributing to illegal, undeclared and unregulated fishing, the WTO was hoping to conclude a second package focusing on subsidies that result in overcapacity and overfishing.

Negotiations in recent months at the WTO headquarters in Geneva had enabled a draft text to be brought forward for a second fisheries deal, which provided flexibility and advantages for developing countries.

But some — notably India — demanded further concessions, including transition periods that others consider to be too long.

At MC13, a revised draft fisheries agreement faced strong objections from New Delhi. "There was basically just one country that was blocking the deal," said EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis, without

specifying which member.

Richard Ouellet of Canada's University of Laval said "consensus, which was once the cement of this organisation, has now become the mud in which it is bogged down".

With farmer protests sweeping Europe and India, agriculture agreements also emerged as a particularly sensitive topic of debate. Member states were trying to negotiate a text listing the subjects that merit further discussion.

An agriculture package, however, was hampered by a firm demand by India for permanent rules governing public stockholding of food reserves to replace temporary measures adopted by the WTO.

India's insistence on a permanent solution for public stockholding was "impossible to bridge", Dombrovskis said. Despite failing on agriculture and fisheries, the WTO managed to temporarily salvage a moratorium on customs duties for digital transmissions that was extended for another two years. — Reuters

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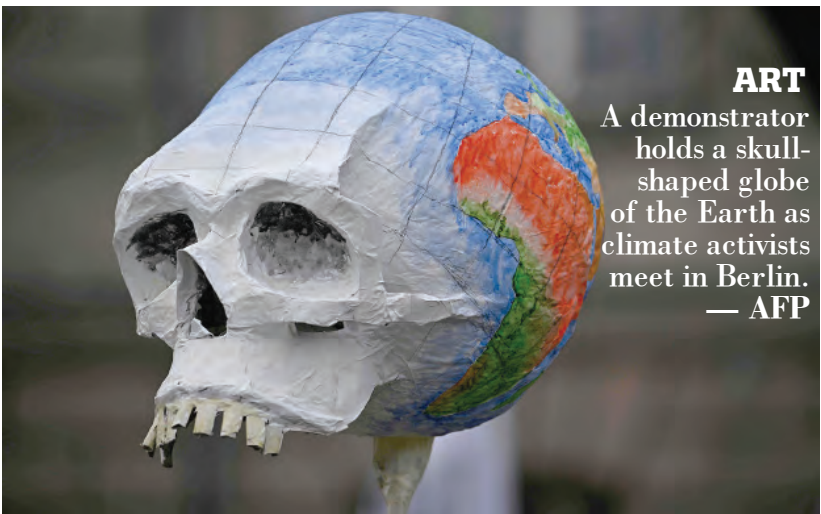
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ART
A demonstrator holds a skull-shaped globe of the Earth as climate activists meet in Berlin. — AFP



FASHION
Bollywood actress Kriti Sanon attends announcement event for her upcoming film 'Do Patti' in Mumbai. — AFP



FASHION
A model presents a creation by Isabel Marant for the Women collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week. — AFP



MUSIC
French flautist Mathilde Calderini performs on stage during the 31st annual (Classical music award) ceremony at the Opera Berlioz Le Corum in southern France. — AFP



NATURE
Almond blossom at the Colline des Amandiers garden in Mittelwihr, eastern France. — AFP

art & life

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Nizwa Museum offers journey to ancient Oman

It also aims to serve as an integrated historical reference for those who wish to explore the depth of Oman history and learn about the artefacts... P20

'Gamil's Fingers' takes centre stage at Al Husayni Alsagheer International Festival

BY TAYMOURA OMAR

AS part of the Al Husayni Alsagheer International Festival of Children's Theatre in Iraq, Al Din theatre for Culture and Art presents 'Gamil's Fingers'. This is a performance showcased by participation from Idrees al Nabhani and a group of kids namely Humoud al Rawahi, Salim al Siyabi, Omar al Siyabi, Rashid al Hina, Hood al Hina, and Issa al Duri. The performance has been written and directed by Assad al Siyabi. The melodious songs' are by Ziyad al Harbi, and written by



Muhammad al Aqoos. In addition, Yusuf al Balushi participated as a decor designer, Taiseer al Khalili as an audio engi-

neer and implementation, and Assad al Siyabi as a costume designer and scenographer. Mohammed al Nabhani, Al Din



president, mentions their participation.: "We try as much as possible to mention the role of young actors in Oman theatre because

they are the future. So, we are participating in Al Husayni Alsagheer International Festival to make them ready to showcase their

skills locally and outside Oman and provide them the knowledge they need to improve their abilities."



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Review: In 'Brooklyn Laundry,' There's No Ordering Off the Menu

FRAN AND OWEN have been chatting for only a few minutes, not all that companionably, when he asks her out. It's a risky thing to do, since she's a customer at the drop-off laundry he owns. To Owen, though, Fran resembles his ex-fiancée: "Smart, 1 inch from terrific, but gloomy," he says.

So bone-tired of being single that a casual insult from a guy she's just met isn't a deal breaker, Fran warily agrees to dinner.

"But I don't get why you want to, really," she adds. "I'm not your old gloomy girlfriend. I'm somebody else." Owen counters: "Well, whoever you think I am, I'm somebody else, too."

This is truer than he comprehends. Starring Cecily Strong as Fran and David Zayas as Owen, John Patrick Shanley's enticingly cast, rather lumpy new play, "Brooklyn Laundry," can get you thinking about warning labels — those heads-ups that we all ought to come with, so people know what they're in for when they encounter us.

Fran's warning label would be long and convoluted, Owen's even more so. Each of them would be surprised if they read their own. They realise that they're a little bit broken, in need of repair. They just don't understand quite how.

Side note to Fran: While Owen seems potentially quite sweet (gruff adorability is Zayas' bailiwick), he is way more hidebound and a whole lot more self-pitying than he lets on. Run, maybe?

But then we, the audience, would miss out on that dinner date, which is utterly charming, very funny and beautifully underplayed by Strong and Zayas



in this world-premiere production, directed by Shanley for Manhattan Theater Club on New York City Center Stage I.

If what you look for in Shanley's plays is the impassioned, oddball chemistry that made his Academy Award-winning 1987 movie "Moonstruck" a hit, this is the scene for you.

Hoping to alter her general perspective, Fran arrives at the restaurant on mushrooms. Under the trellised greenery and strings of lights, she is a softer, more wonder-struck version of herself, her hand gestures slowed as if the air they move through were textured. (Set design is by Santo Loquasto, costumes by Suzy Benzinger, lighting by Brian MacDevitt.)

Fran shares her stash with Owen, and they become vulnerable with each other — and sincere, and silly. Still, he does insist that she make peace with not being able to order chicken for dinner.

"You must choose from what exists on the menu, Fran, and not choose the invisible thing in your mind," Owen says.

Understandably, she protests: "But I like the invisible thing best."

Facing up to sorry reality is a central theme of "Brooklyn Laundry," a romantic comedy with a penchant for the resolutely dismal. It isn't advertised as a rom-com, mind you; the marketing suggests it's about three sisters and a laundry guy. What it's truly about is one



sister and the laundry guy she falls for, with terrible timing, just as her two sisters are really going through some stuff.

Trish (Florencia Lozano, in a thankless role) is dying luridly, lingeringly, in her oppressively dreary trailer home in rural Pennsylvania. Susie (Andrea Sygłowski, smartly tapping into anger to make the dialogue work) is at the mercy of her own sudden tragedy.

Yet all of that is in service of Fran and Owen's story, which turns throw-back-traditional toward the end, with

nonsensical lines like, "It's kind of crazy but I'm going to say it. You're a woman," and "You gotta excuse me, but I gotta say it. You're a man, Owen."

I wonder what "Brooklyn Laundry" might have become if Shanley hadn't staged it himself — if there had been a director to push him where text needs strengthening; to find a tone that breathes life into Fran's one scene with Trish; to steer away from visual grimness in design rather than, with the exception of the restaurant scene, straight into it.— **NYT**

FOOD

Ultraprocessed Foods Linked to Health Issues: Study

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW of 45 meta-analyses involving nearly 10 million individuals reveals alarming connections between ultraprocessed foods and a myriad of health issues, including heart disease, diabetes, mental disorders, and premature mortality.

Led by researchers from Deakin University in Australia, the study underscores a substantial increase in risk associated with consuming these foods.

Findings indicate a 50 per cent higher likelihood of cardiovascular disease-related death and common mental disorders with increased consumption,



Additionally, anxiety risk can surge by up to 53 per cent, while the chance of premature death from any cause spikes by 20 per cent. While obesity, sleep disorders, and type 2 diabetes also show elevated risks, evidence linking ultraprocessed foods to cancer remains limited, contrary to previous studies.

However, experts caution against dismissing the potential impact, given the established correlation between obesity,

which ultraprocessed foods exacerbate, and cancer risk.

The study's lead author, Dr. Melissa Lane, emphasises the critical need for dietary awareness and intervention.

Despite mixed evidence on certain health conditions like asthma and gastrointestinal health, the pervasive association between ultraprocessed foods and adverse health outcomes underscores the urgency of dietary reform. — **ONA**

CONSERVATION

Vietnam's 'Rice Bowl' Cracks in Monster Heat Wave

SOUTHERN VIETNAM, including business hub Ho Chi Minh City and its "rice bowl" Mekong Delta region, suffered an unusually long heat wave in February, weather officials.

Several areas of the delta are also suffering drought and farmers are struggling to transport their crops due to low water levels in the region's canals.

The intense period of heat began on 9 February 2024 with temperatures reaching up to 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit)—an "abnormal" high for February in southern Vietnam, which usually sees hot weather peak at around 39C (102F) in April or

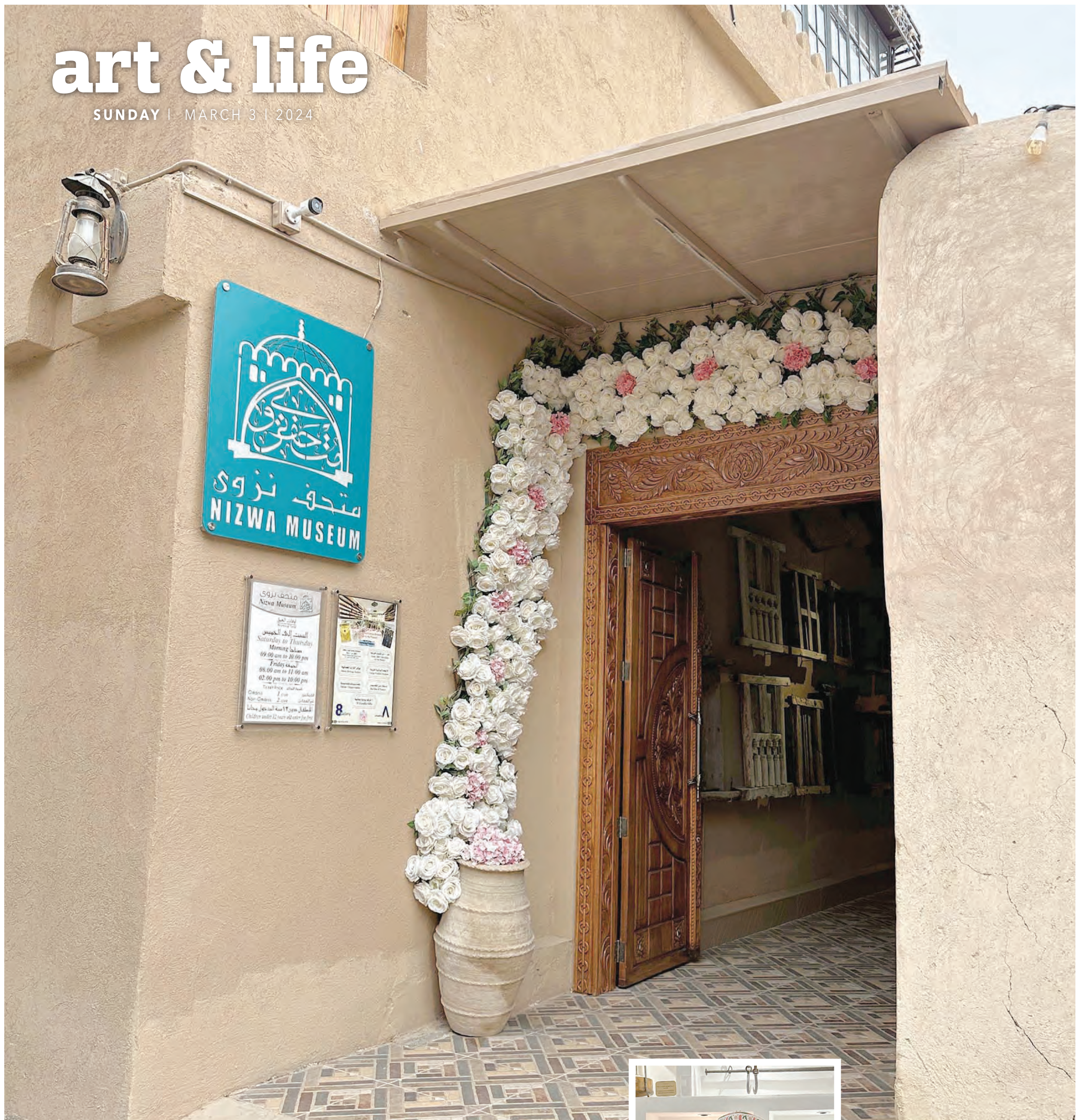


May. Globally, 2023 was the warmest year on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

It warned last month that this year could be even hotter because the naturally occurring El Niño climate pattern, which emerged in mid-2023, usually increases global temperatures for one year afterwards.

Scientists have warned extreme weather is also being intensified by global warming.

Vietnam's agricultural production heavily depends on rainwater, making farmers resort to pumping water from waterways due to its scarcity, this has resulted in significant height differences between riverside road surfaces and water levels, leading to subsidence and landslides, as reported by local authorities.— **ONA**



Nizwa Museum offers journey to ancient Oman

AMAL AL RIYAMI

Nizwa Museum at Al Aqar neighbourhood chronicles Oman's heritage and civilisation through nearly 2,000 exhibits on display. At the entrance to the museum, a visitor's attention is drawn to the ancient doors of Haret Al Aqar. One of the doors is 2 metres, 70 cm high, and 2 metres wide. It is more than 500 years old.

Inside the museum, one can find inscriptions and drawings that were engraved on doors and windows. These more than 100-year-old inscriptions vary from floral to geometric.

The museum tells about life in ancient Oman, traditional handicrafts, and the tools used in agriculture, hunting, handicrafts and industry. The first floor of the museum includes four galleries. In the Manuscripts Gallery, the oldest manuscript dates back to 426 years. The Weapons Gallery, which has the oldest weapon in it, dates back to 500 years. The Man Gallery, which contains the largest and rarest millstone in the Sultanate of Oman, and the

Civilisational

Communication Gallery contains collectibles dating back more than 500 years.

The second floor also contains four galleries. Copper Gallery, which has the most famous Nizwa copper coffee jug. The Handicrafts Gallery includes more than 300 traditional craft tools. Pottery Gallery, which contains one of the rarest and most diverse pieces of pottery. The Women's Gallery includes a rare spinning wheel.

The museum also has in its treasury a lot of heritage and archaeological pieces that will be displayed shortly in the coming months, allowing visitors the opportunity to enjoy the cultural diversity.

Mohammed bin Ahmed bin Said Ambusaidi, owner of the museum, said: "The museum aims to improve the heritage tourism in Oman in general and Nizwa in particular, which is a major tourist destination in Oman. It aims to highlight the historical and cultural role of Nizwa. It also aims to serve as an integrated historical reference for those who wish to explore the depth of Oman history and learn about the arte-

facts. The museum also conveys a message to the world about Omani heritage. It strives to become a permanent headquarters, and link the past and the present. It allows students to conduct research."

The most important feature of the museum, according to Ambusaidi, is identification cards placed in front of the collections to explain and understand what is on display. This will help the visitor to identify exhibits without guides. "I have more collectibles than what is displayed in the museum. I have more than 5,000 items, and I am still searching for other pieces. So far, approximately 5,000 visitors have visited the museum, most of whom are Omanis. I am very proud of people's feedback on the museum. I hope that there will be support from the government for the museum."

The museum is open from Saturday to Thursday from 9 am to 10 pm. On Friday, the museum is open from 8 am to 11 am and from 2 pm to 10 pm. Entry fee is RO1 for Omanis and RO2 for non-Omanis. Admission is free for children below 12 years.

