

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), took part in the Global Investment Summit held in London. Oman's delegation to the summit was headed by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, OIA Chairman. Al Murshidi conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. **DETAILS ON P15**



HM, German President hold official talks



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday. SEE ALSO P2,3&4

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the session, His Majesty the Sultan reiterated his welcome to President Steinmeier, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay.

On his turn, the German President expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the warm welcome and hospitality.

The session reviewed bilateral relations and means of promoting them in various spheres to serve the joint interests. The two leaders exchanged views on the regional and international developments, as well as matters of common interests.

The official session of talks was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His

HM, GERMAN PRESIDENT HOLD A SESSION OF TALKS

TALKS SESSION REVIEWS BILATERAL RELATIONS

MEANS TO PROMOTE TIES IN VARIOUS SPHERES

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON REGIONAL, WORLD AFFAIRS

THE TWO LEADERS DISCUSS MATTERS OF COMMON INTEREST

Majesty the Sultan, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (Head of the Mission of Honour), and Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Ambassador of Oman to Germany.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the German side by Dr Tobias Lindner, Minister of State at the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dirk Lölke, Ambassador of Germany to Oman, Wolfgang Silbermann, Head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Office of the Federal President, and members of the official delegation accompanying the guest.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan and the German President held a closed-door session. — **ONA**

HM HOSTS OFFICIAL DINNER



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted an official dinner at Al Alam Palace guesthouse on Tuesday evening in honour of President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany, and his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The dinner was attended by some members of the Royal Family, ministers and officials. Later, His Majesty the Sultan bid farewell to the German President, wishing him a pleasant stay during his visit to Oman and a safe return home. — **ONA**

President of Swiss Confederation arrives on Thursday

MUSCAT: President Dr Alain Berset of the Swiss Confederation and his spouse will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Thursday.

A statement was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to

this effect. It reads as follows: “With the prime objective of consolidating the friendship relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Swiss Confederation in a manner that boosts their cooperation

in various spheres, President Dr Alain Berset of the Swiss Confederation and his spouse will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Thursday and Friday. “The visit reflects the Royal keenness accorded by His Majesty

Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Dr Alain Berset to bilateral relations between the two countries and means of promoting them to serve their peoples. “The visit will discuss a set of topics of concern to

both countries, in addition to exchanging views on current regional issues. May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan, grant him good health and guard him as a source of pride for Oman and its people.” — **ONA**





OFFICIAL RECEPTION FOR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who began an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The German President was accorded an official reception ceremony on Tuesday. Upon the arrival of the motorcade of the German President at Al Alam Palace external courtyard, a squadron of cavalry lined the two sides of the road to the gate of the palace, welcoming the guest.

Then, the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) band played a welcoming tune to the accompaniment of trumpets, as the motorcade entered the internal courtyard of Al Alam Palace. After that, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied the German President to the Dais of Honour where the national anthem of Germany was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the President of Germany, wishing them a pleasant stay.

In his turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, Chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP). After that, His Majesty the Sultan and the guest proceeded to the hall where they took coffee.

The President of Germany is accompanied by an official delegation comprising Dr Tobias Lindner, Minister of State at the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dirk Lölke, Ambassador of Germany to Oman, Wolfgang Silbermann, Head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Office of the Federal President, and a number of German officials. — ONA





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FOR GERMAN PRESIDENT



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HONOURABLE LADY HOSTS DINNER

HER HIGHNESS
the Honourable Lady
Assayida Ahd Abdullah
Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse
of the Sultan of Oman,
hosted a dinner at Al Alam
Palace in honour of Spouse
of the German President,
on the occasion of her visit
to the Sultanate of Oman.
The dinner was attended by
a number of dignitaries
from the Omani and
German sides. – **ONA**





GERMAN PRESIDENT, HIS SPOUSE VISIT OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM



MANAH: Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, and his spouse on Tuesday visited Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, as part of their official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The guest was received by Eng Al Yaqdhan bin Abdullah al Harthi, Director-General of the Museum, and a number of officials.

The president and his spouse went on tour of the museum's divisions and listened to a briefing about the facility's design informed by the rugged topography of Al Hajar Mountains. They toured the History Hall and the Renaissance Hall that present interactive, symbolic value to the visitors.

They also took note of antiques and manuscripts that demonstrate the depth and authenticity of Omani history. They were also briefed about modern interactive technologies

that characterise the museum and the services that the museum provides for visitors of different segments.

At the conclusion of their visit, Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his spouse signed the Senior Visitors Register, expressing their thanks for the hospitality accorded to them, and describing Oman as a "country of rich history and prosperous future".

The German President was accompanied during the visit by Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, Chairman of Board of Trustees of Oman Across Ages Museum, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (Head of the Mission of Honour), Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, among other officials. — ONA



Spouse of German President visits GUtech's History of Science Centre

MUSCAT: Elke Bündenbender, spouse of German President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, on Tuesday visited the History of Science Centre at the German University of Technology (GUtech), as part of the current official visit of the President to the Sultanate of Oman.

The guest was received upon her arrival at the centre by Professor Dr Michael Brown, Vice-President of GUtech, and other officials.

She listened to a briefing about the History of Science Centre, which acts as an educational and cultural source for generations and highlights cultural contribution and human communication among people. Towards these objectives, the centre focuses on developing applied sciences and demonstrating the history of the transmission of ideas and theories.

During the visit, the guest took note of student projects in various research specialisations.

She later visited the GUtech and toured its departments and colleges. There, she was briefed about the academic curriculum, the services provided by the university and its scholarly research programmes.

The guest was accompanied during the visit by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. — ONA



German President visits Nizwa Fort

NIZWA: Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, and his spouse visited Nizwa Fort in the Wilayat of Nizwa in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on Tuesday within the context of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

Upon their arrival at the fort, the president and his spouse were received by Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, and Saleh bin Dhiab Al Rubai'ee, Wali of Nizwa.

The guest and his accompanying delegation listened to a briefing about Nizwa Fort, the stages of its construction, its archaeological designs and heritage features that demonstrate the legacies of Omani history.

The president went on tour of the arcades of the fort and its exhibitions, which include a set of artefacts, and watched live demos, presented by the people of Nizwa, about centuries-old methods of making sweets and pottery.

The guest received some souvenirs presented by a number of



The president went on tour of the arcades of the fort and its exhibitions. — ONA

children from the Wilayat of Nizwa. The president signed the VIP Register, expressing his delight to get a close look at the history of the Sultanate of Oman.

The German President and his spouse were accompanied during the visit by Eng Said bin Hamoud al

Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (Head of the Mission of Honour), and Dr Rahma bin Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, among other officials. — ONA



Sayyid Badr, British Foreign Secretary discuss Gaza situation

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister made a phone call on Tuesday with David Cameron, UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

The two sides touched on the need to reduce escalation and the necessity of addressing the effects and repercussions of the humanitarian, security and political situation resulting from the war in Gaza Strip.

They also exchanged views on means of creating a solid ground to achieve a just and comprehensive peace with the participation of all parties and with the support of the international community.

— ONA



Sayyid Badr and David Cameron touched on the need to reduce escalation and the necessity of addressing the effects and repercussions of humanitarian situation



DEFENCE SECRETARY GENERAL RECEIVES ICAO'S COUNCIL PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a on Tuesday Salvatore Sciacchitano, President of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged cordial talks and discussed several matters of mutual interest. — ONA

Incubator to boost entrepreneurs

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, NOV 28

In a groundbreaking collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Sohar University has inaugurated its pioneering initiative – the Scientific Incubator. This forward-looking endeavour aims to redefine the landscape of innovation and research outcomes, revolutionising how businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs thrive in today's market.

Dr Hamdan al Fazari, Vice-Chancellor of Sohar University, has stated that the Scientific Incubator stands as a testament to the university's commitment to nurturing talents and driving socio-economic growth through innovation in line with his majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's recent speech on "the necessity to diversify sources of income through knowledge, technology, and innovation".

The Incubator catalyses transforming cutting-edge research into vibrant startups, fuelling a culture of innovation that resonates with the entrepreneurial spirit of today's youth. Beyond merely incubating ideas, the primary objective is to



actualise these innovations into tangible, competitive entities. By embracing and refining innovative projects and research outputs, the Incubator facilitates their evolution into tech-driven startups capable of competing and excelling in the economic landscape.

This initiative recognises the significance of empowering the younger generation. It offers a comprehensive suite of services and support designed to equip aspiring entrepreneurs. Access to state-of-the-art laboratories, hands-on workshops, and a plethora of research resources forms the cornerstone of this support system.

Moreover, the Incubator is more than a resource hub; it's a nurturing environment that fosters growth. Consultations, technical expertise, and commercial guidance are readily accessible, ensuring that each

budding entrepreneur receives tailored support to bring their vision to life.

Prof Ghassan al Kindi, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation, underscores the importance of fostering ideas and cultivating a robust ecosystem where these ideas can flourish.

The scientific Incubator complements the manufacturing incubator, which is already running at Sohar University in collaboration with the authority of SME development.

This concerted effort aligns seamlessly with Sohar University's commitment to youth empowerment, research growth, and economic development. By fortifying the relationship between academia, research, and entrepreneurial endeavours, the Scientific Incubator emerges as a beacon of hope and opportunity for the enterprising youth of today.



The cooperation programme includes providing consultation and guidance services to entrepreneurs

OCCI, SMEDA sign pact to boost entrepreneurs

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a cooperation programme with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) to promote and develop the small and medium enterprises sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

The programme comes within the framework of the Chamber's strategic directions to improve the business environment and expand the base of economic diversification in line with the objectives of Oman Vision

2040 in achieving sustainable economic development and creating economic leadership.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Halima bint Rashid bin Sulaiman al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, signed the programme.

It aims to support and enable micro, small and medium enterprises to grow, expand and implement programmes and activities that enhance training and empower entrepreneurs.

Khalfan al Khatri, Assistant

Director of the Marketing and Events Department, said: "This signing comes in an effort to continue empowering owners of small and medium enterprises, raising their competitive capabilities, and harnessing technology to ensure that small and medium enterprises keep pace with rapid changes, in addition to opening new opportunities for their expansion locally, regionally, and globally."

The cooperation programme includes providing consultation and guidance services to entrepreneurs, implementing specialised training programmes and organising exhibitions.

Integrated Energy Valley to ensure green energy supply for Duqm project

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Various clean energy sources have been lined up to power operations of the world's largest green hydrogen-ready steel plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). Involving an investment of \$3 billion, the first-of-its-kind project will be fully operational in 2027.

Renewable wind and solar power will provide around 16 hours of electricity daily for the Vulcan Green Steel (VGS) plant, while efforts are on to explore additional energy storage options to bridge the remaining 7 to 8 hours to ensure 24x7 energy supply.

The foundation laying ceremony of the project was held under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones,



Oman has always been exploring ways to expand its electricity generation capacities through renewable independent power projects

and Naveen Jindal, Chairman of Jindal Group.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the event, Venkatesh Jindal, Vice Chairman, VGS, said an MoU has been signed with the OQAE (the Alternative Energy vertical of OQ Group) to explore joint development of an Integrated Energy Valley (IEV), a first of its kind project in GCC.

"One of the most attractive parts of this project is the continuous exploration of Integrated Energy Valley (IEV), a first-of-its-kind project in the GCC. We leave no chance to use renewable energy sources extensively," Jindal said, adding that such an initiative combines solar, wind and energy storage to provide round-the-clock, cost-competitive green energy to meet the growing decarbonisation needs of large industries in Oman, such as VGS.

The IGV initiative aims to secure the plant's green energy requirements until renewable hydrogen becomes available at Duqm.

As part of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the National Energy Strategy to derive at least 30 per cent of electricity from renewables by 2030, the country has always been exploring ways to expand its

electricity generation capacities through renewable independent power projects (IPPs). As a result, Oman has embarked on many projects to meet this target.

Accordingly, a number of renewable energy projects have been commissioned or are currently underway. The PDO-driven Miraah concentrated solar power project paved the way for renewable energy projects in the country in 2015.

Oman operates a 50 MW wind farm in Harweel, a 100 MW solar plant by PDO, and a 500MW solar PV project at Ibri. Two more solar PV plants, each of 500 MW, are under development in Manah. Likewise, the 'Sahim' initiative supports installing small-scale solar systems on residential and commercial buildings - initiatives that stand testimony to the constant drive towards tapping renewable energy sources.



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ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

The Board of Directors of **Mazoon Dairy Company SAOC** is pleased to invite the Company's shareholders to attend the company's ordinary General Meeting, to be held at **3:00pm on Sunday, 17/12/2023**, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) If the quorum requirement for holding the meeting is not fulfilled, a second ordinary general meeting will be held on **Tuesday, 19/12/2023** at the same time and place to discuss the following agenda:

- To approve the loan to be granted to the company by some of its shareholders (as per the attachment).
 - Oman Food Investment Holding Co (SAOC) = OMR 10,000,000
 - Al-Hosn Investment Company = OMR 5,000,000**Total = OMR 15,000,000**
- To discuss and approve authorizing the company's board of directors, or any person to be authorized by the board to take the required procedures for the loan.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls of holding General Meetings using electronic platform, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Juristic persons only, have the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information, please contact
Ms. Khaula Mohammed Al Saduni on phone No. 96598414

Chairman

Auditor

Legal Advisor



EU SAYS ISRAEL NOT LETTING ENOUGH FUEL INTO GAZA

BRUSSELS: Israeli restrictions on fuel supplies to Gaza are hampering aid deliveries and humanitarian access required under an UN resolution, an EU commissioner, Janez Lenarcic, said on Tuesday.

Lenarcic — who is in charge of crisis management — was speaking as the EU countries and aid organisations scrambled to provide relief to Gaza’s population of 2.3 million under a truce agreed by Israel and Hamas. “We are calling for the increase of fuel supplies to the (Gaza) strip,” Lenarcic told journalists in Brussels. “The humanitarian access should be based on the needs and not on some restrictions,” he said.

Much of Gaza’s population has been displaced by Israel’s military action, and the narrow coastal territory’s health system has been brought to its knees, while water, food, medicine and power supplies have been all but exhausted.

Israel launched its relentless bombing and ground offensive which has killed 15,000 people, thousands of them children. — **AFP**



Trucks transporting humanitarian aid wait at the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. – **Reuters**

DISEASE COULD BE BIGGER KILLER THAN BOMBS: WHO



A Palestinian man surrounded by children cook at a UNWRA school used as shelter in Gaza City. – **AFP**

GENEVA: More people could die from disease than from bombings in the Gaza Strip if its health system is not repaired, a World Health Organization spokesman said on Tuesday, warning of a surge in infectious diseases and diarrhoea in children.

In figures deemed reliable by the United Nations, Gaza health authorities say more than 15,000 people have been confirmed killed in Israel’s bombardment of the narrow enclave, around 40 per cent of them children, with many more feared to be lost under rubble. “Eventually we will see more people dying from disease than we are even seeing from the bombardment if we are not able to put back (together) this health system,” said the WHO’s Margaret Harris at a UN briefing in Geneva. She repeated concerns about

a rise in outbreaks of infectious diseases, particularly diarrhoea in children, with cases for those aged five and older surging to more than 100 times normal levels by early November.

“Everybody everywhere has dire health needs now because they’re starving because they lack clean water and (they’re) crowded together,” she said.

James Elder, a spokesperson from the UN Children’s Agency in Gaza, told reporters by video link that hospitals in the strip were full of children with burns and shrapnel wounds and gastroenteritis from drinking dirty water.

“I met a lot of parents... They know exactly what their children need. They don’t have access to safe water and it’s crippling them,” he said. — **Reuters**

ENTERING AID AMID PAUSE ‘NOT EVEN FOR TRIAGE’, SAYS UN

GENEVA: The United Nations welcomed on Tuesday the increase in aid deliveries into Gaza afforded by a temporary truce but warned it was not enough to even start addressing the Palestinian territory’s massive needs.

UN children’s agency Unicef said the aid flow to the northern Gaza Strip — the largest since the war erupted on October 7 — was “the right start”.

“(It’s) definitely the right type of aid — fuel, medicines, food, warmth,” spokesman James Elder told a press briefing in Geneva via video-link from Gaza.

But, he warned, the needs in the besieged enclave of more than two million are so huge that “all this aid is triage... It’s not even enough for triage.”

When there are insufficient

resources to treat everyone who needs it, hospitals and aid organisations are forced to triage — that is, to prioritise the most urgent cases, or those people most likely to survive, and leave the others. “The aid needs to multiply... Everything here is emergency care right now,” Elder said.

Their comments came as Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas embarked on a two-day extension to an initial four-day truce that has allowed Israeli captives to be freed from Gaza in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails.

The truce “has caused a moment of respite, critically to get aid in and also for people to take the heartbreaking task of looking for loved ones”, Elder said. — **AFP**

More captives as truce

GAZA: A new group of Israeli captives were set to be freed on Tuesday in exchange for Palestinian prisoners as the warring sides embarked on a two-day extension of a truce that has paused the devastating Gaza war.

The temporary cessation of hostilities and releases of captives were hailed as a glimpse of hope after seven weeks of conflict sparked and prompted an Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip.

A source close to the Palestinian movement Hamas said that 10 captives held in Gaza would be freed in return for 30 prisoners released from Israeli prisons in the first exchanges under the truce extension.

“Lists of the 10 Israeli captives and 30 Palestinian prisoners for the fifth day of the truce were exchanged without objections,” the source said.

In addition to those releases, “some foreign workers held in Gaza” would also be freed, the source said.

The 7:00 am deadline for the first phase of the ceasefire to expire passed without major incidents after 11 more Israeli captives were freed from Gaza and 33 Palestinian prisoners were released by Israel overnight.

But a witness saw an Israeli tank which fired three times in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood of Gaza City as Palestinians attempted to make use of the lull to return to their homes.

The Israeli military described the shelling as “warning shots”, saying its tank fired as suspected people approached army positions. At least one person was hurt. Hamas and UN officials have reported that Israeli fire has killed at least one person since the truce began on November 24.

Israel views the truce as a temporary measure to secure hostage releases and says it plans to continue its military offensive. The government has agreed a \$8.2-billion war budget that will now go to parliament.

But Israel faces increasing pressure for a more lasting ceasefire and the ramp-up of humanitarian aid to Gaza, where an estimated 1.7 million people have been displaced, according to the United Nations.

The truce paused fighting which Israel’s retaliatory ground and air operation in the Gaza Strip has killed almost 15,000 people, mostly civilians, according to the territory’s government.

Images show buildings several storeys high flattened by the Israeli bombardments in the central Gaza Strip and residents walking through the rubble of ruined homes.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres hailed the ceasefire extension as “a glimpse of hope and humanity in the middle of the darkness of war”.

Israel has vowed to stick to its war aim of destroying Palestinian groups and rescuing all 240 captives. — **AFP**

Israel faces increasing pressure for a more lasting ceasefire and the ramp-up of humanitarian aid to Gaza, where an estimated 1.7 million people have been displaced



Crowds of locals and displaced Palestinians walk past destroyed buildings in the south

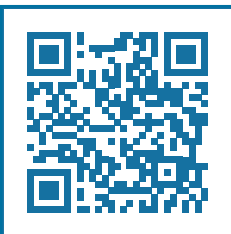


Qatari Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry Of Foreign Affairs, Lolwah Bint Rashid Al Khater attends a meeting as she visits Gaza during a temporary truce, November 26. – **Reuters file photo**

QATAR

DOHA: Mediator Qatar said on Tuesday it would use a two-day extension to a humanitarian pause in Gaza to work towards a “sustainable truce” between Israel and Hamas.

“Our main focus right now, and our hope, is to reach a sustainable truce that will lead to further negotiations and eventually to an end... to this war,” foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al Ansari told a Doha news conference.



es to be freed extended



ern Gaza Strip city of Khan Younis. – AFP ▲



▲ A protester walks near burning tyres in the occupied West Bank. – AFP

◀ Palestinians walk amid debris of buildings hit in Israeli strikes, near Al Zawiya market in Gaza City. – AFP



BLINKEN TO VISIT MIDEAST TO CONTINUE DIPLOMACY



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken addresses the media during a Nato foreign ministers meeting at the Alliance's headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. – Reuters

BRUSSELS: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Israel, the West Bank and the United Arab Emirates this week, the US State Department said, as Washington aims to press for more humanitarian aid for Gaza and help secure the release of captives.

Blinken will travel to Belgium, North Macedonia, Israel, the West Bank, and the UAE until Saturday, the department said in a statement.

“In Israel and the West Bank, Secretary Blinken will discuss Israel’s right to defend itself consistent with international humanitarian law, as well as continued efforts to secure the release of remaining captives, protect civilian life during Israel’s operations in Gaza, and accelerate humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza,” the department added.

Blinken will discuss what Washington wants to see in Gaza, a State Department official said earlier. Blinken will also discuss the need for an independent Palestinian state as well as attend the UN COP28 climate summit in Dubai, according to the State Department.

Some captives have been freed in recent days in exchange for Palestinians held by Israel in a deal mediated by Qatar and Egypt and agreed by Israel, Hamas and the United States.

It will be his third trip to the region since the recent war that started one of the bloodiest chapters in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Blinken has conducted high-stakes diplomacy with Israeli and Arab leaders to help ensure the conflict does not broaden, captives are freed and aid is delivered into the Gaza Strip, where a humanitarian disaster has been unfolding.

This week, he will speak about the future of Gaza and the need for a permanent political solution to the long-standing conflict, after he spelled out Washington’s red lines on a visit to Japan earlier this month for how the strip could be governed if Hamas is defeated.

Blinken ruled out Israeli occupation of Gaza, permanent displacement of its people and reduction in its territory, although a clear plan has yet to emerge in talks with Arab states, Israel and Palestinian leaders.

The top US diplomat “will also discuss the principles he outlined in Tokyo on November 8, (and) tangible steps to further the creation of a future Palestinian state,” the State Department said.

— Reuters

EYES SUSTAINABLE CEASEFIRE IN THE STRIP

“However, we are working with what we have. And what we have right now is the provision to the agreement that allows us to extend days as long as Hamas is able to guarantee the release of at least 10 captives.”

Qatar has been engaged in intense negotiations, with support from Egypt and the United States, to establish and extend a truce in Gaza, and has previously said that it was designed to be broadened

We are hopeful that in the next 48 hours we will be getting more information from Hamas regarding the rest of the captives
MAJED AL ANSARI
Qatar foreign ministry spokesman

and expanded. The Gulf state announced late on Monday that successful talks had resulted an a two-day extension to the truce. Over the initial four-day pause, which had been due to expire on Monday night, a total of 50 civilian captives — all women and children — were freed in return for 150 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. Ansari confirmed the truce would continue with the release

of 20 further captives. “We are hopeful that in the next 48 hours we will be getting more information from Hamas regarding the rest of the captives,” he added. The spokesman said “minimal breaches” in recent days had not “harmed the essence of the agreement”. Qatar has led parallel negotiations with other nations which led to the release of 17 Thais, one Filipino and one dual Russian-Israeli national.

Meanwhile, US and Israeli intelligence chiefs have arrived in Doha to discuss the “next phase” of a deal between Hamas and Israel in Gaza, a source briefed on the visit said on Tuesday. The leaders of the US Central Intelligence Agency and Israel’s Mossad were scheduled to meet Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, the source said, adding that Egyptian officials were also taking part.

“The director of the CIA and the director of the Israeli National Intelligence Agency are in Doha to meet with the Qatari prime minister,” the source said. The informed source said CIA director Bill Burns and Mossad head David Barnea would hold a “series of meetings” initiated by prime minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani in Doha “to discuss the potential terms of a deal beyond the two-day extension”. — AFP

Why should we go for traditional food?

Our food habits have changed over the years, with our diets becoming almost distorted when compared to those of our ancestors. The way food is prepared and eaten has seen a dramatic change in recent years.

While convenience is a huge selling point, our eating habits, preferences, and attitudes have changed. Factors like income, food prices, individual preferences and beliefs, and cultural traditions have all influenced changes in our food patterns. Modern-day fast food or convenience foods, along with dine-out, are increasingly becoming popular all over the world.

Many people even started thinking that convenience food would become prevalent and eventually replace traditional foods and their traditional methods of preparation. They argue that traditional food is a generational issue because food taste, technique, and availability evolve.

However, for me, traditional food brings out a sense of comfort and belonging. I say it because every bite of it carries a story. It talks in volume about the people who created them! It's not just about taste but about love, care, and tradition that have been passed down through generations. It brings people together and makes celebrations special!

I still remember the joy of gathering around the table, especially during festivals or special occasions. The aroma and taste of those dishes, the laughter, and the chatter are memories that stay with me forever. Traditional food is not just about eating; it's about celebrating togetherness.

Furthermore, traditional food is often closely tied to the local environment and the resources available in a specific region, representing a connection to the land, the seasons, and the natural resources that sustain a community.



Samuel Kutty
@samkutttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

I STILL REMEMBER THE JOY OF GATHERING AROUND THE DINING TABLE, ESPECIALLY DURING FESTIVALS OR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

The food that we used to eat was well-balanced and loaded with a good proportion of healthy fat, carbs, and fibre in good quantity, as compared to the food eaten now. We should not forget the fact that most modern-day diseases relate to our food habits.

Unfortunately, many of those traditional foods are disappearing from our food tables! Even the recipes passed down through generations and served as a way to preserve and celebrate cultural identity are missing today!

Till a few decades ago, the lifestyles of humans were primarily focused on growing vegetables, crops, and hunting animals and consuming them in accordance with their needs. They used to toil a lot, which kept their bodies running, and therefore they were healthy and rarely encountered any disease.

With modernisation, things have changed. Humans began to employ machines to do most of the work while he could just sit comfortably and command them to do it. This alluring lifestyle comes with its own perils, the biggest of which is health.

Today's fast life can't afford to spare much time for cooking. Today's young generation asks why they should bother spending hours cooking when they can head to the supermarket and buy everything ready-made.

But one thing they forget is the nutrient value of traditional foods. It cannot be compared with ready-to-eat food, even though many of these processed foods are similar in appearance and flavour to those of the traditional diet.

So, let's start learning to cook in an attempt to preserve our traditional recipes. Let's also cherish it, let's savour it, and most importantly, let's pass it on to the next generation.

After all, traditional food is a delicious link to our past, a joyful celebration of our present, and a precious legacy for our future!

EROSION CAUSED BY HIGH TIDES



View of the seafront and collapsed road following the erosion caused by high tides and wind at Pakefield Holiday Park in Lowestoft, Britain, on Tuesday. – Reuters

Protecting Gaza's children...

In just over 50 days, some 20,000 civilians in Gaza have been injured, while more than 8,000 have been killed, according to Palestinian officials. A majority of the dead – at least 5,500 – are children, which amounts to one Palestinian child killed every ten minutes, while an additional 1,800 children are missing, and presumed dead, under the rubble.

The high death toll among young people partly reflects the fact that nearly half of Gaza's population is under the age of 18. But it can also be attributed to the targeted attacks against civilian infrastructure, including Al-Shifa Hospital, Indonesian Hospital, and the United Nations-run Al-Fakhura school. As a result, at least 21 of Gaza's 35 hospitals – including the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, the only facility providing chemotherapy for cancer patients – are no longer operational. (The aid agency Save the Children has warned that children's mental health in Gaza is being pushed beyond the breaking point.)

The UN Security Council has identified and condemned the willful killing and maiming of children as one of "six grave violations" of its 1999 resolution on children and armed conflict. But, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarked in late October, there are many "clear violations of international humanitarian law that we are witnessing in Gaza." Deprived of water, food, fuel, and electricity, and facing a shortage of medical supplies, doctors and nurses have struggled to care for patients; in some cases,



Nurul Izzah Anwar

a former member of the Malaysian parliament, is a political activist



Yolanda Augustin

is an oncologist and health activist

surgeons have been forced to operate without anesthesia.

These grim conditions have had dire consequences for the premature babies on life support at Al-Shifa Hospital. Eight have died, while 28 more had to be evacuated to Egypt and are being treated for "serious infections."

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has warned that the lack of clean water and the acute shortage of fuel will almost surely lead to the collapse of Gaza's sanitation systems, resulting in infectious-disease outbreaks – to which children are particularly vulnerable. Moreover, hunger is now severe and widespread, as the price of basic items has skyrocketed and food deliveries have slowed to a trickle. The threat of starvation and malnutrition looms, and it is once again young people who are most at risk.

International organisations, governments, civil-society groups, activists, academics, and industry leaders must take urgent action to broker a lasting ceasefire (not just a temporary pause), to secure the release of all hostages, and to prevent a genocide against the Palestinian people. Israel must stop targeting hospitals and schools; ensure the unimpeded delivery of food, water, medicine, and fuel; and open humanitarian corridors for civilians, especially children, pregnant women, the sick, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. Finally, these groups must continue calling for an

end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

While people worldwide have urged their governments to take a principled stand against the ongoing atrocities in Palestine, consumer boycotts can also be a powerful tool for change. Inspired by the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement seeks to exert non-violent pressure on Israel until it complies with international law. More than 30 states in the United States have adopted anti-BDS measures – a paradoxical tribute to the movement's effectiveness.

It is also imperative to support young Palestinian refugees across the world. Malaysia, in particular, is well placed to take a leading

role in this effort.

The country's sovereign wealth fund, Khazanah Nasional Berhad, together with its grant-making foundation, Yayasan Hasanah, has offered scholarships for Palestinians studying at Malaysian universities – a programme that the government is working to expand. Numerous educational initiatives, including the Fugee School, Malaysian Relief Agency, Yayasan Chow Kit, and Baitul Mahabbah, have been established for refugee children, although increased funding would ensure their continued success. Malaysia should also follow Türkiye's example and allow more refugees to work legally.

As for children still living in Gaza, Malaysia can help by

working together with Indonesia and Türkiye to rebuild hospitals and schools. Malaysia has taken an initial step by establishing a RM 100 million (\$21 million) humanitarian aid fund for the Palestinian people.

As calls for a lasting ceasefire in Gaza intensify, we must put pressure on Israel to end the killing of children and other civilians while also supporting young Palestinians at home and abroad. In the words of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, we must help the children of Gaza – too many of whom have lost their childhood, if not their lives – carry their "banner of hope" for a normal existence.

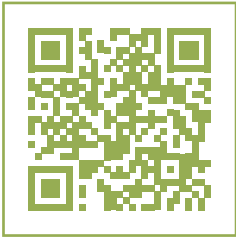
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One Palestinian child is killed every ten minutes.

sport

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Ibri stun Sohar, Oman club beat Al Wahda

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 28

The Omantel League's tenth round concluded on Sunday with an unexpected turn of events as Ibri secured a resounding 3-0 victory against Sohar on their home turf. The match showcased Ibri's dominance and strategic play, leaving Sohar in a challenging position.

The match began contrary to expectations, with the guest team Ibri dominating the first half by playing a build-up style from the back.

Sohar responded with poor pressure and organisation in their defence. Ibri had the first dangerous opportunity in the fourth minute, which the professional player Bruno Pires missed as Sohar goalkeeper skillfully saved it. Sohar retaliated with a fierce attack in the fifth minute, but Frank Williams failed to capitalise.

The back-and-forth continued until the 16th minute when Kleber Calil, the Brazilian player for Ibri, skillfully netted the first goal after a precise pass from Fahad al Hajri. Ibri continued to control the game and extended their lead to 2-0 in the 19th minute through a goal by Youssef al Ghafri, who skillfully dribbled past Sohar's defenders and



Ibri and Sohar players fight for the ball in the Omantel League tenth round match.

goalkeeper to score.

As Sohar struggled to recover from the 2-0 deficit, Dhofar maintained control, creating several opportunities for a third goal, but luck was not on their side. The first half concluded with Dhofar leading 2-0.

The second half continued with the same rhythm. In the

52nd minute, a free-kick was expertly executed by Youssef al Ghafri, setting up Bruno for the third goal. Despite subsequent attacks from both teams, the match concluded with Ibri securing a convincing 3-0 win.

With this result, Sohar missed the opportunity to secure second place, remaining at 18 points.

Ibri climbed to fifth place in the league table with 15 points, trailing behind Al Nasr on goal difference.

Ibri continued to showcase impressive performances, maintaining five consecutive clean sheets under the guidance of their coach Ali al Balushi, despite being promoted to the

OMANTEL LEAGUE POINTS TABLE													
Season 2023-24													
Club	MP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts	Last 5				
1 Al-Seeb	9	7	2	0	18	2	16	23	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
2 Al-Nahda	9	5	4	0	18	10	8	19	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
3 Oman Club	10	6	1	3	10	8	2	19	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
4 Sohar	10	5	3	2	17	9	8	18	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
5 Al-Nasr	10	4	3	3	12	8	4	15	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
6 Ibri	10	5	0	5	11	10	1	15	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
7 Dhofar	10	4	1	5	13	14	-1	13	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
8 Al-Shabab	10	2	4	4	9	11	-2	10	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
9 Sur	10	2	4	4	12	15	-3	10	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
10 Al-Rustaq	10	1	5	4	8	14	-6	8	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
11 Al Wahda	10	2	1	7	8	23	-15	7	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
12 Bahla	10	1	2	7	3	15	-12	5	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Premier League for the first time in their history.

OMAN CLUB BLANK AL WAHDA

In another match, Oman defeated Al Wahda 3-0 on Sunday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Oman Club entered the game with a high-pressure style, attempting to secure the three points and jump to third place after Sohar's loss. Al Wahda players struggled against Oman, and Basal al Rawahi scored the first goal for Oman in the 21st minute. The first half ended with Oman leading 1-0.

In the second half, Oman added two more goals through Mahmoud al Hasani from a penalty in the 66th minute, and Yazeed al Rawahi scored the third goal in the 90+2 minute, securing a 3-0 victory for Oman.

With this win, Oman increased their points to 19, surpassing Sohar (18 points) for third place, while Al Wahda remained at 7 points in the 11th position, just above the bottom.

The strongest match of the tenth round between Al Seeb and Al Nahda was postponed due to Al Nahda's commitment to the Lebanese Al Ahed match in the fifth round of the AFC Cup.

Al Manar Racing trio set for Asian Le Mans challenge

MUSCAT: The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed trio of Al Faisal al Zubair, Martin Konrad and Fabian Schiller begin their challenge for honours in the 2023/2024 Asian Le Mans series at the Sepang International Circuit in Malaysia this weekend.

The Omani, the Austrian and the German have entered a Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo in the competitive GT class in the series that makes a return to South East Asia with this weekend's double header. Competitors then move on to the Dubai Autodrome and the Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi in early February next

year for the remaining rounds.

Al Zubair teamed up with Konrad and German racer Luca Stolz at two rounds of the last Asian Le Mans series and finished third and seventh in the two four-hour races at the Dubai Autodrome.

They then claimed back-to-back GT class wins in rounds three and four in Abu Dhabi. Their Haupt Racing Team finished second in the GT Teams' Championship and they ended the campaign in a similar position in the Drivers' Championship behind the Walkenhorst Motorsport BMW M4 GT3 trio

of Chandler Hull, Nicky Catsburg and Thomas Merrill.

Al Zubair said: "I am really looking forward to the start of Asian Le Mans at the end of this week. It's a championship where we finished strong last year by winning both races in Abu Dhabi and we finished second in the championship. This year, we are aiming to go one better. We do understand that there is an extra round this year. The entry list also seems a lot stronger than last year.

"This is something we do bring into account and we know the competition will be tough. Myself, Konrad and Fabi haven't

been to Sepang before, so we will be learning the track as well. But we feel confident and hope to be on the pace relatively quickly. We will try and go for the win and try and get the Le Mans entry – that is our target. Last year we were with HRT and this year we are with the Getspeed crew."

This year's Al Manar Racing Mercedes had been built and prepared by Getspeed from its base at the Nurburgring in Germany. The 2023/2024 series will also mark the first as a joint venture between the founding Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO), Asian Endurance

Management (ALMEM) and SRO Motorsports Group.

Eleven teams have registered for the LMP2 category, five will compete for LMP3 honours and the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew are joined by 22 rival teams in the GT class. Stand-out names on the list include the Attempto Racing Audi R8 LMS, crewed by Dylan Pereira, Alex Aka and Andrey Mukovoz, a pair of Sainteloc Racing Audis, a second Getspeed Mercedes and the Optimum Motorsport McLaren 720S. Other registered GT teams include AF Corse, GT Racing, Herberth Motorsport, Project

One and Team Motopark.

The 5.543 km Sepang International Circuit is situated 85 km from Kuala Lumpur city centre and close to the city's international airport.

The first 90-minute free practice for the opening 4H of Sepang gets underway at 13.30hrs on December 1 and a second session is planned for 18.00hrs. Qualifying takes centre stage from 10.10hrs on December 2 morning and the first four-hour race of the new season fires into life at 15.00hrs.

Race two is scheduled for 15.00hrs on December 3.



The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo.

Embiid triple double leads 76er record rout of LeBron's Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid delivered his sixth NBA career triple double on Monday to lead Philadelphia to a 138-94 rout of the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Cameroonian's 30 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists helped inflict on LeBron James the most lopsided loss of his career.

Embiid made nine-of-15 from the floor, including 2-of-3 from three-point range, and sank 10 of his 12 free throws.

"You're trying to play winning basketball," Embiid said.

"When my teammates are wide open, I want to get them easy shots, just make the game easy for myself."

The 29-year-old, seven-foot tall (2.13m) NBA Most Valuable Player last season notched his first triple double of the campaign in three quarters on the same night the 76ers made 22 three-pointers, one shy of the club record.

Tyrese Maxey scored a game-high 31 points and added eight assists for the Sixers, who shot 47-of-93 from the floor and 22-of-46 from three-point range.

"We're playing together. We're having fun sharing the ball," Embiid said.

"The ball is moving. We know what we've got to do. It starts on defence. Once you get stops, you get



Joel Embiid (21) dribbles the ball against Anthony Davis (3) during the third quarter. — USA Today Sports

in transition and get easy baskets." Four-time NBA MVP LeBron James, who led the Lakers with 18 points, suffered the heaviest defeat of his 21-year NBA career.

Asked what needed to change for the Lakers, he replied: "A lot."

Depleted defending NBA champion Denver, sparked by

guard Reggie Jackson and 35-year-old centre DeAndre Jordan, rallied late to beat the host Los Angeles Clippers 113-104.

Two former Clippers powered Denver as Jackson had 35 points and 13 assists while Jordan added 21 points and 13 rebounds.

Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points

to lead the Clippers.

The Nuggets improved to 12-6, moving one game behind Western Conference leader Minnesota, while the Clippers fell to 7-9.

Host Utah edged New Orleans 114-112 as Keyonte George scored 19 points and Jordan Clarkson added 16 and 10 assists. — AFP

Muscat CT, VLCC and Bank Muscat post wins

MUSCAT: Muscat CT beat IAS Engineering convincingly and VLCC beat Zawawi Powertech in the Premier Division League 2023-24 powered by Muscat Pharmacy LLC played at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1.

Muscat CT's Samay Shrivastav took six wickets as they beat IAS Engg by 58 runs on Friday.

Ayaan Khan and Shoaib Khan notched salient half centuries helping them post 239-7 in 50 overs. Mansoor Mazher picked 2 wickets for IAS Engg.

In reply, IAS Engg scored 181 with Abdul Rauf scoring 42. Samay Shrivastav cleaned the IAS Engg batting line-up claiming six wickets while Afriedh KT picked up 3 wickets to ensure a 58-run victory for Muscat CT.

On Saturday, VLCC bundled out Zawawi Powertech for 140 courtesy 3-wicket hauls from Abdullah Adil and Parameswaran Shankar. Kalaiaarasan Natarajan

top-scored for Zawawi scoring 49. In reply, Melvin Mathew and Sahil Dias sealed the victory for VLCC chasing the target in 33 overs with 7 wickets in hand.

In another match, Bank Muscat thumped OCT Ruwi in the A Division League 2023-24 powered by Khimji Ramdas LLC at the OCA Turf 2 on Saturday.

Deepak Kumar's fiery spell claiming five wickets wrapped OCT Ruwi for a paltry 84. In reply, Asghar Khan and skipper Abbas al Balushi guided Bank Muscat to a convincing six wickets win over OCT Ruwi.

BRIEF SCORES
Muscat CT 239-7 in 50 overs (Ayaan Khan 54 (73b), Shoaib Khan 53 (76b); Mansoor Mazher 2-34) beat IAS Engg 181 all out in 44.5 overs (Abdul Rauf 42 (66b); Samay Shrivastav 6-28, Afriedh KT 3-20) by 58 runs.
Zawawi Powertech 140 all out in 28.5 overs (Kalaiaarasan Natarajan 49 (71b); Abdullah Adil 3-26, Parameswaran Shankar 3-28) lost to VLCC 141-3 in 33 overs (Melvin Mathew 47 (79b), Sahil Dias 40 (63b) by 7 wickets.
OCT Ruwi 84 all out in 24.2 overs (Shoaib al Balushi 20 (21b); Deepak Kumar 5-30) lost to Bank Muscat 85-4 in 23.2 overs (Asghar Khan 31(59b); Shoaib al Balushi 2-28) by 6 wickets.



Abdullah Adil, Sahil Dias, Melvin Mathew and Parameswaran Shankar of VLCC.

16 coaches take part in OOA specialised symposium

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by Oman Olympic Academy (OOA), organised the first specialised symposium, 'Designing Training Plans - Periodisation', for three days at Sultan Qaboos University and OOA, as part of the National Coach Certification Programme to develop and enhance the capabilities of sports coaches in Oman.

This programme constitutes an important step towards building a base of qualified sports trainers and gives the opportunity for coaches to participate in an educational programme that gives them a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge and experience, develop their skills and will have a positive impact in enhancing the performance of athletes in Oman and raising their technical levels.

The symposium concluded on Tuesday and was presented by Dr Shihab Al Din bin Ahmed al Riyami, Director of the National Coach Certification Programme, and a certified international lecturer for sports training, with the participation of 16 coaches from sports federations and clubs, the military sports sector, universities and educational colleges.

The symposium topics

varied between the theoretical and practical aspects, with the aim of providing participants with various sciences and studies as an essential part of the programme's strategy to ensure the provision of high-quality training. It included many diverse topics, including the goals, importance and design of sports training plans, time planning for training and its types, the main elements of its preparation and annual plans and their sections.

The symposium also included training on using the NCCP programme to design seasonal training plans, and presenting visual presentations from the participants on the last day of the programme to evaluate them and measure the level of understanding and knowledge of the learner during the symposium days, where the mechanism of work and evaluation of the symposium was applied according to international standards and programmes.

The NCCP is one of the important national projects and a summary of the sports sciences that keep pace with Omani society and the national training staff. It combines international training programmes and coaches, such as the Canadian, American and British Coaches Programmes.



Phillips claims four as NZ restrict Bangladesh

SYLHET, Bangladesh: Spinner Glenn Phillips returned figures of 4-53 as New Zealand restricted Bangladesh to 310-9 before bad light forced an early stumps on the opening day of the first Test in Sylhet on Tuesday.

Phillips, chosen ahead of Rachin Ravindra, picked the crucial wickets after opening batsman Mahmudul Hasan hit 86 off 166 balls to give Bangladesh a platform for a strong total.

The hosts, who opted to bat first after winning the toss, dominated New Zealand in patches but lost wickets in important phases, with Kiwi bowlers Ajaz Patel (2-76) and Kyle Jamieson (2-52) celebrating success.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and one of his predecessors, Mominul Haque, each made 37 runs for Bangladesh.

They put up 53 runs and 88 runs with Mahmudul for the second and third wicket pairs respectively, before their untimely dismissals.

Patel bowled opener Zakir Hasan for 12 to give New Zealand their first breakthrough, before Phillips made Najmul his maiden Test wicket in the morning session.

Kane Williamson ran back from mid-on to complete the catch.

Ish Sodhi and Phillips struck in successive overs just before the tea break to halt Bangladesh's progress further.

Daryl Mitchell took a low catch at slip as Sodhi dismissed Mahmudul, ending his dogged innings.

Mahmudul hit 11 boundaries in his fourth Test half-century.

His dismissal came within five balls of Phillips forcing



Glenn Phillips delivers a ball during the first Test against Bangladesh. — AFP

Mominul to give a catch to wicketkeeper Tom Blundell.

Experienced Mushfiqur Rahim fell to Patel for 12 as Williamson took his second catch of the day.

Jamieson, the only New Zealand pacer with some success, had Mehidy Hasan caught by Mitchell for 20.

Wicketkeeper-batsman

Nurul Hasan struck a few quick boundaries before Phillips swung momentum further New Zealand's way.

The off-spinner claimed the wicket of debutant Shahadat Hossain, who made 24 before hoisting a catch to Henry Nicholls at short midwicket.

Phillips ended Nurul's innings at 29 six overs later.

Tajjul Islam, eight not out, and Shoriful Islam, 13 not out, survived the day after Jamieson made Bangladesh nine down with the wicket of Nayeem Hasan, the pacer's second of the day.

The two-match series marks the beginning of a new cycle for the World Test Championship for both teams. — AFP

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Al Nahda book West Zone semis in AFC Cup



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 28

Oman's Al Nahda booked their spot in the West Zone semifinals following their a 2-1 win over Al Ahed FC of Lebanon in Group A of the 2023/24 AFC Cup at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday night. The fourth triumph meant, Oman's representative strengthened their lead in the top of the group and raised the tally to 12 points with nine points gap from Al Ahed who placed in second with three points.

The Al Buraimi-based team's goals were scored by Bilal Bin Saha (32) and Omar al Malki (34) while the 2019 champions consolation goal was scored by substitute Ali al Haj (65).

The hosts began the match with much more focus towards scoring the opening goal and register a lead in the game. Oman national team striker Omer al Malki was close to break the deadlock after a cross from Abdulaziz al Ghilani but Al Malki's header went beyond the target in the 10th minute.

Hamed al Azani's battalion were the best in the green

field as they dominated the centre of the field through their active movements by Salah al Yahyaei and Essam al Subhi. After half an hour in the match, Bilal bin Saha registered the opening goal in the 32nd minute following Abdullah Fawaz's delightful pass to Bilal who struck home to gave the hosts a well-deserved lead. Two minutes later, Omar al Malki's header doubled the lead for the Oman representative. The first half ended with Al Nahda leading at 2-0.

The deciding half began with coach of Al Ahed, Raafat Mohammad, making few substitutions to activate his side. Substitute Ali al Haj managed to reduce the gap after 15 minutes from the second half as he netted the first goal for Al Ahed. Later on, the goal gave more power the visitors as they pressed hard in the remaining minutes seeking for the draw at least.

The opponents were very close to register the equaliser after Darwich's attempt from a free-kick sailed just over the bar in the 71st minute. Al Nahda tightened their defence and managed to break all the

scoring attempts by Al Ahed as Al Nahda players managed to end the match with a 2-1 win.

The head coach of Al Nahda, Hamed al Azani, praised the top show delivered by the players. "The players produced an excellent show and managed to end the game with crucial three points. Congratulations to the players for moving to the West Zone semifinals. The first half was an exciting half for Al Nahda and we managed to score two goals with better technical dominance," he said.

Responding on the team's show in the second half, Al Zani responded that many players were exhausted and some substitutions were made.

"The players attended several matches with the club and the national team and despite that they showed a top game. All the local and continental events are essential for Al Nahda. We should focus in each event separately until achieving the desired target. I hope to see my team in further stages at the AFC Cup event and I am confident that the team could reach to these final rounds," he concluded.

FULL-TIME STATISTICS

Al Nahda v Al Ahed

11	SHOTS	7
6	SHOTS ON TARGET	2
57.1	POSSESSION	42.9
2	YELLOW CARDS	2
0	RED CARDS	0

Full-Time 2-1

Oman to take part in Gulf rapid chess in Kuwait

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 28

The Oman national chess team is gearing up to compete in the Gulf Rapid Chess Championship, set to take place in Kuwait on December 1 and 2.

Hosted by the Kuwait Mind Sports Association and supervised by the International and Asian Chess Federations, the tournament will feature intense competition in the 2200 category for men and the 2000 category for girls.

The Oman Chess Committee looks forward to presenting a commendable performance enabling the Omani players to achieve advanced positions in

the first Gulf championship. The tournament adopts a rapid classic system with nine rounds, each lasting 10 minutes, with a three-second increment. The tournament provides an opportunity for Omani players to improve their international rankings and engage in fair competition for championship positions.

Headed by Musallam al Wadahi, the national team comprises 13 players.

Anwar al Issaei will represent the girls' team, while the men's category will see strong participation from Salem al Amri, Hamoud al Busaidy, Fahim al Maqbali, Rashid al Balushi, Manaa al Kathiri, Munaif Bait

Saeed, Hamdan al Hanai, Saif al Harasi, Kamal al Hanai, Saeed al Maamari, Mazen al Hanzali and Ali al Maamari.

Around 120 players from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, in addition to Iraq and Yemen, are participating in the championship.

Beyond the competition, the event will host the General Assembly of the Gulf Chess Federation, bringing together presidents and representatives of Gulf chess federations.

This championship serves as a valuable opportunity for Omani players to enhance their international rankings, further showcasing the growing prominence of chess in the region.



Hamoud al Busaidy



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Pact to support production of industrial gases in Duqm

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 28

Air Liquide, a world leader in industrial cases, and Marafiq (part of OQ Group), have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop a partnership for centralised production and supply of industrial gases in Duqm via a dedicated infrastructure. Duqm is expected to host a number of industries requiring industrial gases and focused on sustainable growth.

Under this agreement, Air Liquide and Marafiq will study the most efficient and low carbon solutions to produce and supply industrial gases to a variety of industries planned for Duqm. End-users such as property developers and industrial customers in Duqm will benefit from this partnership, including economies of scale, synergies, world-class technologies and operating expertise related to industrial gases.



Air Liquide Monica Varagnat signs the MoU with Abdullah al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq

Monica Varagnat, Large Industries Business Line VP, Africa, Middle East & India, said: “Air Liquide is very pleased to join Marafiq as a strategic partner who is aligned with our growth ambitions in the Duqm industrial basin. In the context of this partnership, Air Liquide will leverage its world-class technologies and expertise in the supply of industrial gases to contribute to the industrial development in Duqm.”

Abdullah al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq, added: “The memorandum

of understanding will enable Marafiq to enhance its services to industrial projects in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm and contribute to providing integrated services to companies operating in the zone, including electricity, water, industrial water and industrial gases.”

He added: “Air Liquide is one of the companies specialised in the industrial gases sector, and we expect that the memorandum of understanding will contribute to achieving mutual benefits for the two companies, and at the same time contribute to serving

and attracting many industrial projects to the Special Economic Zone of Duqm.”

Air Liquide specialises in the production of gases, such as oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen, for industry and health, and has a presence in 73 countries. The Group is also developing solutions contributing to climate and the energy transition — particularly with hydrogen — and takes action to progress in areas of healthcare, digital and high technologies.

Marafiq manages the power and water sectors in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) under a long-term agreement and enjoys the capability to produce power and industrial water to serve OQ8 (Duqm Refinery), OTTCO (Crude Oil Storage Park in Ras Markaz). In addition, Marafiq is supplying electricity to the zone through the zone distribution company to serve industrial, commercial and tourism projects, and residential properties in the Zone.

Omantel to reap positive financial benefit from Zain KSA’s stake sale

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 28

Omantel has announced that it anticipates a positive financial impact in Q4 2023 from Zain KSA’s divestment of a 20-per cent stake in Golden Lattice Investment Company (GLIC) to the Public Investment Fund (PIF) for SAR 726 million. The announcement was made through Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Tuesday.

According to a disclosure issued by Zain Group on November 20, 2023, the carrying value of the divested shares amounted to SAR 605 million, resulting in a potential gain of up to SAR 121 million (RO 12.4 million). Zain Group’s share of this gain will be 37.045 per cent, while Omantel’s effective share will be 8.12 per cent in accordance with its ownership in Zain Group.

The disclosure further indicated that the transaction is expected to be finalised in the fourth quarter of 2023, and Omantel will provide further updates on the transaction’s financial impact upon its completion.

Mer Ahmed Issa, a Muscat-based stock market expert, commented



that the sale of 20 per cent of Zain KSA’s stake in GLIC to PIF is a positive step for the company. He further stated that PIF’s investment signals a strong vote of confidence in Zain KSA’s future prospects.

Issa explained that the sale is expected to enhance Zain KSA’s financial performance by increasing cash flow and improving profitability. The sale is also anticipated to support the company’s growth by providing capital for investments in new projects.

Regarding the deal’s impact on Omantel, Issa stated that it will result in a one-time gain for the company in the fourth quarter of 2023. He added that this gain will contribute to improving Omantel’s financial performance and bottom line.

7.5 pc decline in Omani non-oil exports during 9M 2023

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 28

Recently released official data from the Directorate-General of Customs (Royal Oman Police) and the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) reveals a 7.5 pc decline in Omani non-oil exports during the first nine months of 2023 compared to the corresponding period in the previous year.

The value of Omani non-oil exports during this timeframe totalled RO 5.3 billion, a decrease from RO 5.7 billion in the same period of 2022. Saudi Arabia emerged as the primary destination for Omani non-oil exports, registering import values of RO 774 million, followed by the United Arab Emirates at RO 671 million, and India at RO 554 million.

In terms of Omani imports,

there was a 2.7-per cent reduction in the first nine months of 2023 compared to the previous year, with a total value of RO 10.9 billion, down from RO 11.2 billion in the same period in 2022. The UAE took the lead as the largest source of Omani imports, contributing RO 2.96 billion, followed by Saudi Arabia with RO 1.47 billion, and China with RO 794 million.

Economic expert Mohammed

Ali commented on these figures, attributing the decline in Omani non-oil exports to various factors such as escalating global commodity prices, disruptions in the supply chain, and the Russo-Ukrainian war. Ali emphasised that this contraction in non-oil exports will impact Oman’s economic growth, given that such exports constitute approximately 60 per cent of the GDP.

‘Made in Oman’ campaign gets under way

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 28

In a collaborative effort spearheaded by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), along with key players such as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Joint Committee for External Exhibitions of Omani Products (OPEX), the ‘Made in Oman’ campaign gets underway with a comprehensive agenda extending until the end of December 2023.

Scheduled for Wednesday, November 29, 2023, the campaign is strategically designed to elevate consumer awareness regarding national products and actively feature them in a series of promotional events. Notable figures, including

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, will be present alongside other dignitaries.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, shared insights into the campaign’s objectives.

Dr Saleh emphasised the campaign’s core goal: introducing and promoting national products within the local market. The initiative also seeks to drive the adoption of the new National Product Identity logo while encouraging industrial establishments to obtain a licence for this identity. The overarching aim is to boost local consumer confidence in national products,



positioning them as the preferred choice.

Dr Saleh highlighted the pivotal role the campaign plays in forming a distinctive image of the diverse Omani industry, fostering integration among industrial establishments and small to medium-sized enterprises, and creating enduring connections

between producers and consumers.

The launch event promises a series of activities, including the unveiling of the “Omani Quality Mark,” the inauguration of an Omani product corner at Al Mawaleh in Muscat, and a ceremony honouring institutions participating in the ‘Made in Oman’ campaign.

Notably, the campaign aims to resonate with diverse demographic groups across various age brackets. Dr Saleh stressed the collaborative effort with partners to make the initiative inclusive and inspiring for all members of society. The intention is to deliver an interactive experience that encourages citizens and residents to actively support local products, leveraging the richness and

diversity of Omani industries. Furthermore, Dr. Saleh aims to expand partnerships to serve the overarching economic development goals and garner support from both government and private entities involved in industrial sector development.

Underlining the exceptional quality of Omani products, Dr Saleh asserted their capability to compete both locally and internationally. Supporting Omani products, he emphasised, directly contributes to the national economy by infusing money internally, bolstering foreign trade, and boosting sales and production for national factories. This multifaceted impact creates new employment opportunities, fuels the growth of the Omani industry, and significantly contributes to the

GDP.

In a parallel endorsement, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the OCCI, highlighted the ‘Made in Oman’ campaign as a strategic move to empower national industries, aligning with the vision of Oman 2040. He underscored the crucial role of promotions to complement the exceptional quality of Omani products, especially in the face of heightened competition resulting from Oman’s economic openness.

The ‘Made in Oman’ campaign, with its dual focus on quality and promotion, is poised to make a significant impact, not only on the perception of Omani products, but also on the broader economic landscape, marking a step towards economic diversification and sustainability.

Mazda launches their most powerful SUVs in Oman

MUSCAT: The automotive landscape of Oman witnessed history in the making as Mazda in association with Towell Auto Centre introduced two new groundbreaking models, All-New 6 Cylinder, 3.3L Turbo, MHEV Mazda CX-90 & CX-60. This significant unveiling not only heralded the debut of Mazda's luxury segment vehicles but also celebrated the enduring 50-year partnership between Mazda and Towell Auto Centre in Oman.

Towell Auto Centre has been a pillar of automotive excellence in Oman, embodying a tradition of quality and customer satisfaction that goes beyond mere transactions. The relationship between Towell Auto Centre and its customers is built on trust, understanding, and a genuine interest in catering to the automotive needs of the Omani market. The long-standing partnership with Mazda is more than a business alliance; it's a shared journey toward achieving automotive excellence and customer satisfaction. Each milestone is a testament to their shared dedication towards innovation and customer satisfaction.

Towell Auto Centre, with its deep-rooted understanding of the Omani market, has always ensured that Mazda's innovative designs find resonance among the discerning customers of Oman. The unveiling of the All-New 6 Cylinder, 3.3L Turbo, MHEV Mazda CX-90 & CX-60 isn't just a showcase of modern automotive design; it's a reaffirmation of Towell Auto Centre's pledge to continue delivering the best of the automotive world to the people of Oman. With a rich legacy of trust and excellence, Towell Auto Centre continues to be synonymous with quality and customer satisfaction in the automotive sector of Oman, forging ahead with a commitment to usher in state-of-



Mazda 60CX

the-art automotive solutions to the market.

Mazda CX-90, the brand's flagship SUV, signifies a fine blend of luxury and innovation. Its dynamic design, spacious interior, and powerful yet efficient engine set a new benchmark in the luxury SUV segment.

The Mazda CX-90 exterior showcases a meticulously sculpted body, flowing lines, and a distinctive grille. The LED headlights, equipped with a Daytime Running Lamp feature, and the signature front and rear light design aligns with Mazda's commitment to blending power and elegance, ensuring the CX-90 presents a sophisticated presence on the road.

The CX-90's interior is just as impressive as its exterior. The cabin is trimmed in high-quality materials, such as Nappa leather, real wood, and brushed aluminium. The front & second-row seats are ventilated. The CX-90 also comes standard with a panoramic sunroof, automatic climate control, and a premium

Bose Acoustic system.

The Mazda CX-90 is also packed with the latest technology. With advanced Driver Personalisation System, it enhances the driving experience by adapting various vehicle settings to individual preferences. It has the ability to recognise different drivers, the system adjusts seating positions, mirror angles, and even climate control settings according to the recognised driver's pre-set preferences. This innovative feature reflects Mazda's commitment to creating a personalised and intuitive driving experience, ensuring that every journey in the CX-90 feels uniquely tailored to the driver.

Similarly, it has other features like the standard infotainment system features a 12-inch touchscreen display, Apple CarPlay, and Android Auto. The Mazda CX-90 also comes with a 12-inch Dashboard digital Meter display, a digital instrument cluster, and a driver assistance package that includes adaptive cruise control, lane departure

warning, blind spot monitoring, and much more.

Mazda's CX-90 is powered by a sophisticated 3.3L Turbo inline 6-cylinder engine that delivers exhilarating and impressive fuel economy. The engine is paired with an 8EAT (e-SKYACTIV 8-Speed Automatic Transmission), which provides smooth and seamless shifts. The all-wheel-drive system ensures confident handling and traction in all road conditions. Together, these components create a driving experience that is both luxurious and breathtaking.

The latest Mazda CX-90 is equipped with an innovative Inline 6 Turbo engine, offered in two distinct power variants. The base model includes a 3.3L Turbo engine that delivers 284 PS, while the more powerful version boasts a high-output producing 345 PS.

The CX-60 receives an update for 2023, with the addition of a more powerful and efficient 3.3L Turbo engine. This new powertrain produces 284 PS and 450 NM torque under the hood.



BankDhofar remains committed to deliver exceptional customer service to make banking experience convenient and seamless across its retail channels

BankDhofar transforms banking experience with digital and physical expansion

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, a leading financial institution in Oman, is pleased to announce new and innovative ways to bring banking closer to its customers with a range of customer centric services.

BankDhofar has witnessed a rapid expansion of its branch network recently, and the branches are located in strategic locations in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, including major cities and remote rural areas.

This expansion has helped BankDhofar reach a wider range of customers and provide them with banking services they need.

With a vast network of over 100 branches across Oman, BankDhofar brings the banking experience 'closer to you'. The branches provide a warm and welcoming environment for customers offering all banking needs including account opening, management, priority banking and servicing loans and facility requirements.

BankDhofar understands the importance of mobility and simplicity. Citizens and residents alike can now open their BankDhofar's Savings account

instantly by downloading 'Intilaqa App' which is available at both App Store and Google Play. With few simple and easy steps their account will be active and can perform their banking transactions in a fast, easy and secure way.

The bank has enhanced its website and with its unique design, users can navigate easily and get information about products and services of the Bank. That is not all, potential corporate or bulk customers can submit their contact details and our dedicated staff will visit the company or any location the customer suits and assist in opening a bank account, facilitating loan applications, and much more.

This personalised service ensures that the banking needs are met at the utmost convenience of customers. The Bank has recently won the "New Website of the Year" Award at Oman Banking and Finance Awards 2023.

Currently, BankDhofar's national wide network consists of more than 100 branches including Maisarah and three corporate branches. The network also includes more than 300 ATMs, CDMs, FFM and MFMs.

Lakhoos Exchange introduces Omani staff training programme in India

KABEER YOUSUF
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Lakhoos Exchange, Oman's oldest money exchange house, has initiated a special training programme for its Omani workforce in collaboration with Federal Bank in India to enhance skills and growth opportunities of the local human resources.

The inaugural team of Omani staff members of Lakhoos Exchange underwent an intensive three day training programme covering various topics in association with Federal Bank, a leading bank in India that is also the company's correspondent agent as well as for cross border payment to India.

The training was held at the Federal Academy of career excellence, Federal Heights, Aluva, Kerala, India.

Reflecting on the programme's success, Rajendra M Ved, Director of Lakhoos Exchange said, "The Sultanate of Oman has given us the opportunity to become one of the fastest growing remittance companies. We have pledged our support to the Omani programme and we will relentlessly strive to fulfil the Oman's leadership's

vision of empowering Omani nationals by increasing growth opportunities and developing skilled workforce to drive the economy to greater heights."

The participants, employees in charge of branches and cashiers along with head office coordinator, went through training in introduction to banking, remittance operations, digitisation in India, NEFT/RTGS/ Rupee drawing arrangement, dealing and treasury, cash handling techniques and detection of counterfeit notes, information and technology and cyber threats, customer care and services, Knowing Your Customer and Anti Money Laundering compliance guidelines regulatory requirement, business communication and client interaction.

"With the tradition and legacy for more than a century in Oman, it was always a constant endeavour of Lakhoos Group to empower the Omani National workforce. This Omani staff training programme is definitely adding value to the staffs as well as to the organisation, noted Umesh Ravindran, General Manager.

The training was conducted



by high profile members of the Federal Bank consisting of Deputy Vice Presidents and senior managers of the respective specialisations. In addition, the participants also had interaction with the Managing Director and CEO, Shyam Srinivasan, who is known to have coined the statement, 'Digital at fore and human at core.'

Shalini Warriar, Executive Director of Federal Bank, provided an insight into financial operations and emphasised on the importance of meeting people in person even as digitisation expands.

While covering dealing and treasury topics the participants were introduced to financial markets and classifications, trends, identifying the downfall

and upward trends, sites to refer the reports, way to ask bid rates, knowing bullish and bear markets and insights on precautions and smart decisions.

Faisal Nabeel, one of the programme graduates, expressed gratitude for the experience praising the quality of both the training he received and for the opportunity to learn from

industry experts.

"It was a unique experience, which helped me to improve effective communication and teamwork along with the regulatory and technical aspects," he said.

The training programme concluded with sight seeing session of Cochin's tourism attractions on the fourth day.

Oman participates in Global Investment Summit



The Sultanate of Oman took part in the Global Investment Summit in London.

LONDON: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Investment Authority, took part in the Global Investment Summit, held in London.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the summit was headed by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

During the summit, the chairman of OIA conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to King Charles of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Head of the Commonwealth.

The summit discusses the topics of technology, renewable energy and artificial intelligence. — **ONA**



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (left), Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Kadri Simson, EU Commissioner for Energy, will take part in a 'Ministerial Fireside Discussion' on December 13

Muscat to host key forum on Oman-EU Energy Transition

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 28

Energy cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the European Union (EU) is set for a significant boost as Muscat prepares to host next month a key delegation representing the EU-GCC Green Transition Cooperation Project.

An important highlight of the visit is a forum set to take place on the sidelines of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) Conference & Exhibition on December 13, 2023. Discussions during the forum will focus on the theme, 'EU and Oman Cooperation: Shaping the Future of Renewable Hydrogen'. It will feature, among other elements, a 'Ministerial Fireside Discussion' involving Eng Salim al Aufi, Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals (MEM), and Kadri Simson, EU Commissioner for Energy.

A series of presentations and panel discussions also planned during the forum will delve into opportunities to strengthen strategic collaboration between the EU and the Omani government, focusing on green hydrogen's potential and furthering the global energy transition.

Taking part in these sessions are Dr Firas al Abduwani, Director General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen (MEM); Ambassador Christophe Farnaud, the EU Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Sultanate of Oman, and the State of Qatar; and Spyros Kouvelis, Team Leader, EU-GCC Green Transition Network Project, among others.

The visit builds on a succession of high-profile engagements between Oman and the European Union – a potentially

lucrative market that Muscat is keenly eyeing as a destination for a sizable chunk of its exports of green hydrogen, among other hydrogen derivatives such as green ammonia and methanol. Those volumes are expected to materialise starting from 2030, when an estimated 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen (or its derivatives) production capacity is anticipated to come online, mainly in and around the Duqm SEZ.

Two key topics that are due to feature in the deliberations relate to recent EU regulatory initiatives on imports of green hydrogen into the European Union. One concerns the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which aims to ensure that the EU's climate policies are not undermined by production relocating to countries with less ambitious green standards or by the replacement of EU products by more carbon-intensive imports. In its transitional phase, CBAM will only apply to imports of cement, iron and steel, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.

Another flagship initiative of the European Commission is REPowerEU, an initiative that supports the import of a diverse mix of clean energies including renewable hydrogen.

High-level delegations from a number of countries – aspiring green hydrogen producers and importers alike – are expected to attend the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) Conference and Exhibition due to take place in Muscat from December 12 – 14, 2023. Organised by Birba, Oman's energy-focused event planner, GHSO 2023 enjoys the support of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

WISE11 summit to shape the future of education with AI

LIJU CHERIAN
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DOHA: The World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), a global platform for innovation in education established by the Qatar Foundation, began on November 28, Tuesday at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC).

WISE11, the summit's 11th edition in 2023 will delve into the theme 'Creative fluency: Human flourishing in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)'.

The theme explores the intricate connection between humans and the evolving AI landscape and envisions a future where AI supports rather than competes with human potential.

The summit will encourage the WISE community to explore topics like computational literacy, personalised learning, AI-integrated teaching approaches, and equity issues in emerging educational technologies worldwide.

Firyal al Balushi, a medical professional from Oman, was part of the Learners Voice Programme (LVP) of World Innovation Summit in 2012-2013. She started an online website 'OmanMD, Your Online Omani Doctor' that provides information about common diseases in Oman with a special focus on genetic disorders.

For the 2023 WISE Awards Winners, six projects from five different countries have been selected for their innovative approach to pressing education issues and positive social impact. This year, 404 projects applied or were nominated for the WISE Awards.

Stavros N Yiannouka, CEO of WISE, says:



The World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) is hosting its 11th edition in Doha on November 29, 30 themed on 'Creative fluency: Human flourishing in the age of AI.'

"WISE11 is a dedicated space where the intersection of human creativity and Artificial Intelligence will be thoroughly examined. We are bringing together leading experts, educators, and innovators from around the world to work hand-in-hand, ensuring that our approach to AI in education centres on the betterment of human lives. The summit is pleased to bring together globally renowned figures and distinct entities to deeply examine the interconnection of AI and learning ecosystems."

The WISE11 summit will address pivotal topics, including scaling for equity and access, envisioning the classrooms of the future, aligning higher education with an AI-driven job market, building ethical AI systems, and preserving AI and digital sovereignty.

Participants will have the opportunity to hear about the possibilities and challenges of AI integration in education from distinguished voices in industry, academia, and government.

This includes Sayasat Nurbek, Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Luis Benveniste, Global Director of Education at The World Bank; and Conrad Wolfram, European co-founder/CEO of The Wolfram Group among others.

WISE11 will also engage with notable educators who will add a diversity of perspectives to understand the impact of AI on learning ecosystems. Around 1,200 delegates attending, with up to 2,200 participants are expected to attend the two-day meeting.

National Zero-Carbon Programme hosts Entrepreneurship Forum

MUSCAT: The National Zero-Carbon Programme, in collaboration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, organised today in Muscat the first Entrepreneurship Forum under the theme "On Our Way to Zero-Carbon - Opportunities and Growth." The forum aims to support initiatives, projects, and promising opportunities that work towards reducing carbon emissions.

The event was organised to enhance the strategic partnership between government entities and the private sector, stimulate entrepreneurs, and showcase



available opportunities for small and medium enterprises to work on projects supporting Zero-

Carbon initiatives and reducing carbon emissions. The forum included panel

discussions that focused on introducing the National Zero-Carbon Programme, discussing

initiatives and promising projects for entrepreneurs, and highlighting technologies and

innovations supporting Zero-Carbon goals. The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority delivered a visual presentation on programmes supporting entrepreneurs and their specialised institutions, covering areas such as financing, contract funding, readiness, added local value, marketing, and promotion.

The forum also featured dialogues with participants to explore opportunities, understand challenges facing entrepreneurs in the sector, and present successful experiences in small and medium enterprises working on reducing carbon emissions. — **ONA**



It’s been difficult days in the world of crypto

An explosive few days for crypto has seen Changpeng ‘CZ’ Zhao — Chief Executive Officer of leading crypto exchange Binance — sensationally resign last week after pleading guilty to money laundering as part of the deal that will end the criminal probe into the company. There was a massive \$4.3bn fine imposed by the US court on Binance. Announcing his departure, the CEO said: “I made mistakes, and I must take responsibility.”

It was just about this time last year that turmoil at its rival giant FTX ravaged the industry. But will news of wrongdoings at Binance have the same impact?

In a statement, entrepreneur Zhao noted that “in our resolutions with the US



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agencies they do not allege that Binance misappropriated any user funds and do not allege that Binance engaged in any market manipulation.”

Is there worse news to come, or is Zhao’s resignation the end of the matter? Either way, the stage is set for a potential crypto turmoil again.

For the time being at least, the news certainly appears to have been received with some indifference by investors and traders. Shockwaves from the details of the fine didn’t take long to hit crypto markets. Bitcoin losing two per cent and Ethereum falling four per cent in an hour.

But other than a few select coins, the bleed appears to have been relatively muted. The price of Bitcoin held onto its recent gains and Ethereum traded strongly. Solana,

Cosmos and Polygon were among the worst hit, losing more than 10 per cent of their value while Cardano’s Ada remained steady at \$0.37.

Binance wasn’t the only exchange in trouble last week, either. Cryptocurrency exchange Kraken – one of the oldest in crypto – was charged by the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for operating as an “unregistered securities exchange,” as was alleged by SEC. With the news somewhat overshadowed by Binance’s travails, the question arises, could this also have big repercussions.

“Kraken’s choice of unlawful profits over investor protection is one we see far too often in this space,” said Gurbir S Grewal, the SEC’s director of its division of enforcement. He

added: “And today we are both holding Kraken accountable for its misconduct and sending a message to others to come into compliance.”

Bankrupted crypto leading platform Celsius Network says it is to scale back various functions to focus purely on Bitcoin mining. Celsius chiefs said feedback from the US Securities and Exchange Commission had encouraged its post-bankruptcy plan to change course. The company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in July last year. The Chapter 11 plan was lifted earlier this month, allowing Celsius to continue.

Also making some of the bigger news in the cryptocurrency market this month is little-known rewards token Assemble. The platform, where users and merchants can

aggregate and spend rewards points with its ASM token, saw a 65 per cent leap in value over the last few days, and a rise of 20 per cent in 24 hours.

That brought ASM (Assemble protocol) up to a 150 per cent rise over a month. Last week, trading activity was at 63 per cent buy as 24-hour volume was up by almost 90 per cent for the three-year-old protocol as it reached a value of \$0.05per token.

The basic idea behind the ASSEMBLE Protocol – which is a blockchain-based global point integration platform – is to provide its users an unrestricted opportunity to use their points, similarly as they use cash, anywhere in the world without any time or place constraints. (The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

How the Biden administration took the pen away from Meta, Google and Amazon



FARAH STOCKMAN

One reason that the idea of free trade has fallen out of fashion in recent years is the perception that trade agreements reflect the wishes of big American corporations, at everybody else’s expense.

US officials fought for trade agreements that protect intellectual property — and drug companies got the chance to extend the life of patents, raising the price of medicine around the world. US officials fought for investor protections — and mining companies got the right to sue for billions in “lost profit” if a country moved to protect its drinking water or the Amazon ecosystem. And for years, US officials have fought for digital trade rules that allow data to move freely across national borders — prompting fears that the world’s most powerful tech companies would use those rules to stay ahead of competitors and shield themselves from regulations aimed at protecting consumers and privacy.

That’s why the Biden administration, which came into office promising to fight for trade agreements that better reflect the interests of ordinary people, has dropped its advocacy for tech-friendly digital trade rules that US officials have championed for more than a decade.

Last month, President Joe Biden’s trade representative, Katherine Tai, notified the World Trade Organization that the US government no longer supported a proposal it once spearheaded that would have exported the American laissez-faire approach to tech. Had that proposal been adopted, it would have spared tech companies the headache of having to deal with many different domestic laws about how data must be handled, including rules mandating that it be stored or analysed locally. It also would have largely shielded tech companies from regulations aimed at protecting citizens’ privacy and curbing monopolistic behavior.

The move to drop support for that digital trade agenda has been pilloried as a disaster for US companies and a boon to China, which has a host of complicated restrictions on transferring data outside of China. “We have warned for years that either the United States would write the rules for digital trade or China would,” Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, lamented in a press statement. “Now, the Biden administration has decided to give China the pen.”

The truth is that Tai is taking the pen away from Meta, Google and Amazon, which helped shape the previous policy, according to a research paper published this year by Wendy Li, a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who used to answer



the phone and interact with lobbyists at the US trade representative’s office. The paper includes redacted e-mails between Trump-era trade negotiators and lobbyists for Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Amazon, exchanging suggestions for the proposed text for the policy on digital trade in the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. “While they were previously ‘allergic to Washington,’ as one trade negotiator described, over the course of a decade, technology companies hired lobbyists and joined trade associations with the goal of proactively influencing international trade policy,” Li wrote in the Socio-Economic Review.

That paper explains how US trade officials came to champion a digital trade policy agenda that was nearly identical to what Google, Apple and Meta wanted: No restrictions on the flow of data across borders. No forced disclosure of source codes or algorithms in the normal course of business.

No laws that would curb monopolies or encourage more competition — a position that is often cloaked in clauses prohibiting discrimination against US companies. (Since so many of the monopolistic big tech players are American, rules targeting such behaviour disproportionately fall on US companies, and can be portrayed as unfair barriers to trade.) This approach essentially takes the power to regulate data out of the hands of governments and gives it to technology companies, according to research by Henry Gao, a Singapore-based expert on international trade.

While some of this agenda is reasonable and good for the world — too much regulation stifles innovation — adopting this agenda wholesale would risk cementing the advantages that big US tech companies already enjoy and permanently distorting the market in their favour.

Many smaller tech companies complain

that big players engage in monopolistic behaviour that should be regulated. For instance, Google has been accused of privileging its own products in search results, while Apple has been accused of charging some developers exorbitant fees to be listed in its App Store. A group of smaller tech companies called the Coalition for App Fairness thanked Tai for dropping support for the so-called tech-friendly agenda at the World Trade Organization.

Still, Tai’s reversal stunned US allies and foreign business leaders and upended negotiations over digital trade rules in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, one of Biden’s signature initiatives in Asia.

“The term we would use is ‘gobsmacked,’” John W H Denton, secretary-general of the International Chamber of Commerce, told me. “We don’t understand what’s going on.”

The about-face was certainly abrupt: Japan, Singapore and Australia — which supported the previous US position — were left on their own. It’s unfortunate that US allies and even some American officials were taken by surprise. But changing stances was the right call.

The previous US position at the World Trade Organization was a minority position. Only 34 per cent of countries in the world have open data transfer policies like the United States, according to a 2021 World Bank working paper, while 57 per cent have adopted policies like the European Union’s, which allow data to flow freely but leave room for laws that protect privacy and personal data. Nine per cent of countries have restrictive data transfer policies, including Russia and China.

The United States now has an opportunity to hammer out a sensible global consensus that gives tech companies what they need — clarity, more universal rules, and relative freedom to move data across borders — without shielding them from the kinds of regulations that might be required to protect society and competition in the future.

As concern grows about the safety of AI and the power of Big Tech to freeze out competition, there are good reasons to think twice about pushing an agenda that might favour a handful of companies that have already amassed a mind-boggling amount of data and political influence.

If the Biden administration can shepherd a digital agreement that strikes the right balance, there’s a chance that it will also restore faith in free trade by showing that trade agreements don’t have to be written by the powerful at the expense of the weak.

This article originally appeared in *The New York Times*.

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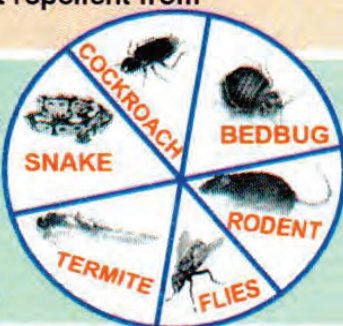
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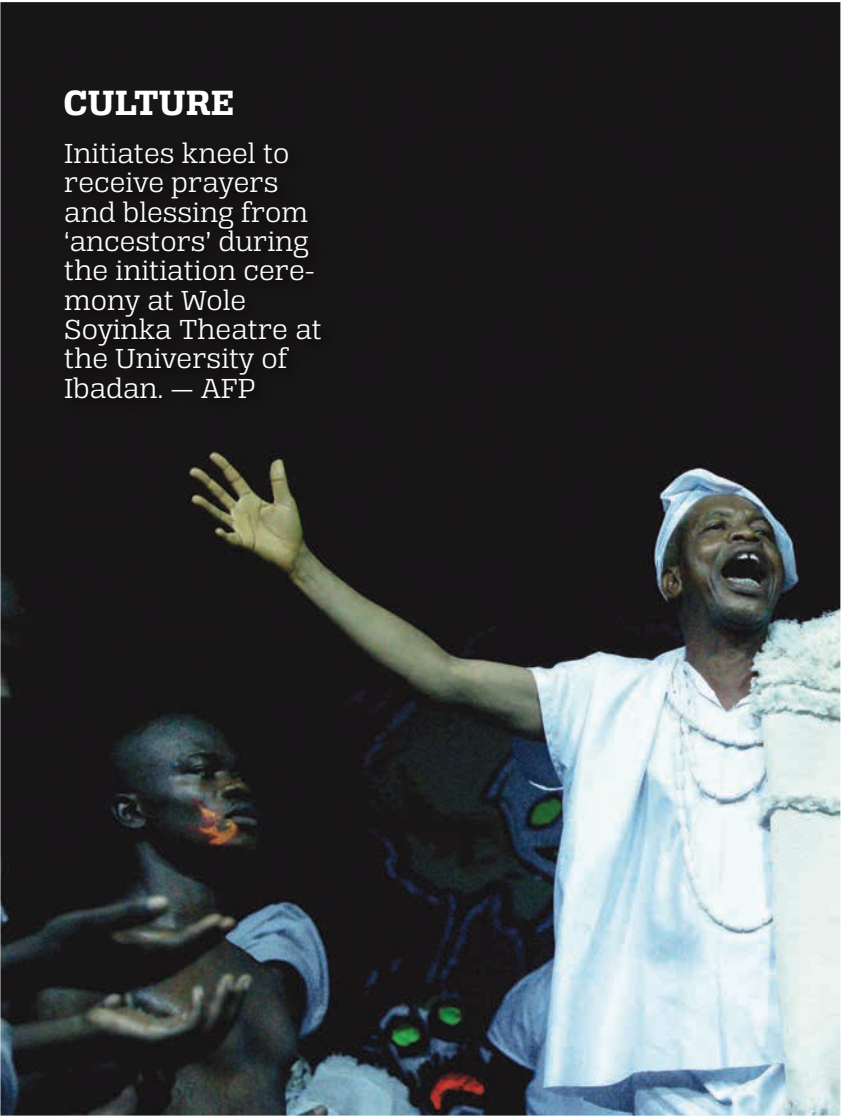
TRAVEL TALES

Platforms were used to release “Krathong” or floating basket into the Chao Phraya river at the Wat Arun temple during the annual Loy Krathong festival celebrations in Bangkok. — AFP



FASHION

A model walks by a square in Fort-de-France, on the French Caribbean overseas island of Martinique, on the sidelines of the Transat Jacques Vabre pair sailing race. — AFP



CULTURE

Initiates kneel to receive prayers and blessing from ‘ancestors’ during the initiation ceremony at Wole Soyinka Theatre at the University of Ibadan. — AFP



FOOD SCENE

Karla Hoyos, volunteer chef for World Central Kitchen (WCK) and owner of Tacotomia, cooks during an interview with AFP in Miami, Florida. — AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

A cow grazes on the banks of Yamuna River near the Signature Bridge amid heavy smog conditions in New Delhi. — AFP

art & life

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The finer details that make an abaya elegant

Women across the region meticulously choose abaya textures and stone designs to elevate their appearance and make them ready for success. As the demands grow, craftsmen adapt embracing trends to enrich these traditional robes...
P20

CONSERVATION

Sustainability is a shared journey, not an end point

BY MONICA BARTEN

IN RECENT YEARS the Gulf Cooperation Council (“GCC”) has witnessed a tipping point for sustainability, with all countries embedding into their future visions, commitments to achieving economic and environmental gains by adopting measures to limit waste, recycle and reuse materials, and develop renewable energy. Climate awareness is high, and the next big stride forward is to turn this awareness into habitual action. This is only possible with the shared efforts of all stakeholders in society.

The GCC region’s governments are leading the way, with their respective long-term vision plans citing sustainability as a crucial pillar. Oman Vision 2040, for example, states ‘sustainable cities’ and ‘environmental and

natural resources’ among its national priorities. Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Oman was among the first nations to adopt the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015. In November 2023, the United Nation’s Climate Change Conference (COP28) will be hosted in the UAE, bringing a spotlight on the region’s progress in translating climate dialogue into firm action.

Consumers are also playing their part. Research commissioned by Philip Morris Management Services (Middle East) Limited (“PMMS”), who is an affiliate of Philip Morris International (“PMI”), in 2022 across KSA, UAE, and Kuwait revealed that 68 per cent of respondents would be willing to pay more for a product if the company selling it demonstrated sustainable practices. Meanwhile, the majority (76 per cent) agree that the sustainability efforts of a company would positively impact their decision to buy their products.

The above mentioned results underline something important. Sustainability is no longer a luxury or an aspiration but a competitive necessity if companies are to remain relevant to the modern consumer. What’s more, as the chief provider of products and services, private enterprises have major influence over how sustainable a society can be. But what a company makes is equally important as how it makes it. Just as companies must consider the positive and negative impact their products have on consumers and wider society, they must also consider

the impact the production of these products has on our environment.

Clearly, there are many nuances to consider; and that’s why sustainability can never be an end goal. Instead, it is a strategy and series of actions that are always in motion.

I do not believe one concrete benchmark of ‘sustainability’ can ever realistically be set for a business, because what is achievable moves constantly — steered by the demands of society and advances in technology and methods that set a new standard to reach. This can only be a positive challenge for any business to face because progress is the only way to survive. Consider for a moment the evolution of the automotive industry.

Manufacturers have an obligation and a desire to move away from combustion engines and towards hybrid and electric vehicles (EV), and many have already set deadlines to reach their sustainability goals. But this alone isn’t the end point. Adoption of greener vehicles must grow, infrastructure must be put in place and over time, across generations, today’s minority becomes the majority.

The same is true for PMI. We’ve been on a journey of transformation towards a smoke-free future because, despite cigarettes being the core of our business, we want them to be replaced by science-based smoke-free products in the upcoming years, to the benefit of adult smokers who would otherwise continue to smoke, those who care about them, and public health.

Sustainability and business performance

are fully interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Our actions—grounded in data, science, and facts—speak louder than words. PMI is committed to serving as an agent of change and advocate of positive values. We understand that our business must become a provider of effective smoke-free alternatives to continued smoking for adult smokers who don’t quit.

Does this make us a sustainable company? More than yesterday, but not entirely. And that’s the point. There’s always more to do as a company, an industry, and a society. The most important part is that progress never stops. This progress requires action from all, and it’s pleasing to see that in Oman and indeed the wider region, for sustainability, society is on the same path — we’ve just got to keep walking it.

The author is the Communications Director of the Philip Morris Management Services (Middle East) Ltd.



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Muscat gears up for 2nd Woman & Child film festival

BY BALQEES AL ORAIMI

THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED Second Woman & Child International Film Festival is set to captivate audiences in Muscat, commencing this Monday. Organised by the esteemed Oman Film Society, the festival, spanning from December 4 to 6, is poised to showcase a diverse array of cinematic treasures focusing on women and children.

Revealing an extensive lineup of events and initiatives, the festival's organising committee aims to galvanise Omani women and children's involvement while projecting a progressive image of Omani society's commitment to their issues. Emphasising inclusivity, the festival aims to attract and support Omani women in the film industry, foster children's cinematic experiences, unearth emerging talents, and position Muscat as a vibrant hub for cinema, tourism, visual arts and creativity.

Over three days, the festival will

host competitive categories, featuring the International Narrative Film Competition, the Omani Narrative Film Competition, the International Documentary Film Competition, and the Omani Documentary Film Competition.

With an overwhelming response, 85 films from 14 countries worldwide have been submitted for consideration. From this pool, 39 exceptional films, comprising 31 feature films and 8 documentaries, have been selected for the festival's competitions. These films will vie for prestigious awards including Best International Narrative Film, Best Omani Narrative Film, Best Screenplay, and Special Jury recognitions in both narrative and documentary categories.

Renowned personalities in the film industry will comprise the distinguished juries. The feature film panel includes esteemed directors such as Nujoom al Ghanem from the UAE, Aisha al Rifai from Saudi Arabia, and Omani artist Nour Al

Huda al Ghamariyah. The documentary film jury comprises director Marwa al Sharqawi from Egypt, along with Dr Azza al Qassabiyah and Professor Laura al Siyabiyah from Oman.

Beyond film screenings, the festival promises engaging dialogue sessions, highlighted by a workshop titled "Make Your Own Documentary Film," led by director Marwa al Sharqawi. Furthermore, guests will partake in tailored tourist tours across Muscat Governorate.

The festival's grand inauguration at the Oman Film Society headquarters will feature the screening of "Clouds" by director Muzna al Musafer, alongside a special segment celebrating Palestine. This prestigious event will be graced by esteemed female artists and directors renowned for their exceptional cinematic and artistic contributions.

Khitam al Sayyid, the Festival Director, expressed immense joy in presenting the festival's second edition, underscoring its burgeoning

influence on both local and international platforms. She emphasised the festival's commitment to honouring women and reinforcing their pivotal role in society, irrespective of cultural boundaries.

Al Sayyid reaffirmed the festival's dedication to fostering a remarkable platform for children's cinema, providing a captivating visual narrative that celebrates the world of childhood with its boundless imagination and storytelling.

The Second Woman & Child International Film Festival is poised to be a beacon of cinematic excellence, celebrating diversity, empowerment, and the vibrant spirit of storytelling centred around women and children.

In an age where storytelling through cinema holds immense power in shaping societal perceptions, the call for representation and inclusivity remains urgent, especially for groups historically marginalised — women and children. The burgeoning need for a

film festival dedicated exclusively to their narratives stems from the realities on the ground that demand visibility and acknowledgment.

Women and children often bear the brunt of systemic inequalities, facing multifaceted challenges that warrant attention and understanding through the lens of cinema. The film industry, traditionally dominated by male-centric narratives, has tended to sideline or stereotype their experiences, failing to capture the depth and diversity of their stories.

By spotlighting films crafted around women and children, a film festival can serve as a catalyst for dialogue, empathy, and societal change. It amplifies the stories of resilience, courage, and triumph, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of their lived realities. Moreover, such a festival creates an environment conducive to discussions, fostering awareness and action towards addressing pertinent social issues.



TRENDS

Merriam-Webster crowns 'authentic' as word of the year

IN AN AGE WHERE forces from AI to Donald Trump have left Americans doubting the truth, US dictionary Merriam-Webster says that 2023's most looked-up word was "authentic."

The venerable publisher, whose dictionary is especially popular online, said the trend was driven by people reading and talking about artificial intelligence, celebrity culture, identity and social media.

"Authentic" beat out other contenders such as "deepfake," "rizz" (young-people speak for charisma) and "coronation" for honours as the word that most often sent people to the dictionary.

"Authentic" has several shades of meaning including "not false or



imitation," and "true to one's own personality, spirit, or character," Merriam-Webster said.

"Although clearly a desirable quality, authentic is hard to define and subject to debate — two reasons it sends many people to the dictionary," the publisher said in a news release.

It noted that celebrities such as Taylor Swift talked this year about their interest in seeking an authentic voice or self.

"What makes Swift a cultural phenomenon is not only her musical prowess and versatility but the trademark authenticity

she puts on each note and verse," Forbes magazine said in an article published in October.

Elon Musk is big on authenticity, too, or so the tech tycoon says.

At a world government summit in Dubai in February, the outspoken owner of X, the former Twitter, said executives and government leaders should "speak authentically" on social media.

"I think it's good for people to speak in their voice, as opposed to how they think they should speak," he said. "It ends up sounding somewhat stiff and not real.—AFP

FASHION

Gucci design studio strikes over move to Milan

SOME 40 ARTISANS FROM Gucci's design studio downed tools on Monday in the creatives' first ever strike, held over plans to move much of the team from Rome to Milan.

The Italian luxury brand, owned by French group Kering, said in October it was transferring 153 of its 219 design employees from the capital to Milan, a move the strikers claim is "a mass redundancy in disguise".

"Gucci cuts but doesn't sew", read one banner held aloft by demonstrators outside one of the Rome offices, while another read: "At Gucci, redundancy is fashionable".

"The style office is the heart of Gucci, where the designers and



couturiers work, and this is where all the collections are born. This is the first strike in its history," Chiara Giannotti, a union representative for the brand, told said ahead of the four-hour strike.

Last week, over 50 Gucci artisans joined a national strike organised by Italy's largest trade unions, Giannotti said.

"Kering wants to take advantage of this restructuring to reduce staff numbers and push out employees who have been offered unsatisfactory conditions or who cannot leave Rome because they have their families and children there," she said.

Gucci said the move "does not

envisage any reduction in personnel and will be implemented in full compliance with current regulations".

It has also provided "a series of economic and support measures" to affected staff, the company said.

While 153 employees are due to be transferred to Milan by March, the fate of the 66 other artisans due to remain in Rome "is uncertain", according to the unions.

"We are demanding the same conditions for all as part of the transfer to Milan, or else the relocation of employees to other Kering companies in Rome or Florence", said Giannotti.

Gucci changed its artistic director in January, bringing in Sabato De Sarno to replace Alessandro Michele, who transformed the label over seven years with his eccentric, gender-fluid designs and offbeat shows. — AFP

The finer details that make an abaya elegant

By Kabeer Yousuf
@kabeeryousef

"They say 'dress for the occasion' and don't just 'dress,' and women, concerned about their appearance as they strive for greater heights, reign in bigger roles, and shoulder mightier responsibilities, never spare any stone unturned in ensuring they look their best in their chosen attire.

What makes their abaya, the long, usually dark robe worn by women, different and stand out, are the texture and the material they choose, and, needless to say, the intricate, stone-studded designs they carry on their robes.

By and large, abayas are worn not only for casual use but also for formal occasions, and a special section of formal

that is required for the pattern.

He feels that it is important to think about the type of fabric one wants in a dress, as it will affect the look and feel of the dress. Generally, one would need 3.5 yards of double fabric, which is 5 feet wide. Usually, tracing paper is used to make a sewing pattern template, and one needs to draw it on tracing paper before it is materialised.

In countries like Oman, polyester is a popular fabric and is high in demand because it is easy to manage, and the current trend revolves around this material. It is appropriate for both casual and special occasion abayas, while some also choose a polyester and georgette blend, which is more comfortable and easy to maintain. However, shops situated in the



abayas is available for all the working ladies in varying styles and designs, which are also in great demand as the number of working women is constantly on the rise. Known as crochet work, embroidery, and other stone designs, which are a part and parcel of their dresses, clearly make a statement and reflect their aesthetic sense in fabrics resonating their personality while assuming their presence in any gathering.

Tapping into their proclivities towards their choice of abaya, a large number of men specialise in adding beauty to these long cloaks and are located in every wilayat, awaiting their customers. These people specialised in crocheting and embroidery works are busy throughout the day, and during festive seasons, their task warrants employing even more manpower to cater to the occasionally burgeoning demand for the same as they work round the clock.

Mohammed Ansari, an artisan from New Delhi, feels that the style of embroidery is changing fast, and one needs to 'equip' oneself with the latest, changing trends and the fashion in existence. "I have been doing design work and embroidery for more than a dozen shops who depend upon our service for the same. Over the last decade, there has been a visible change in the patterns, likes, and styles of such works, the reason for which, I think, is the exposure to social media where they get to know different styles and innovative designs," adds Ansari, who has been doing this for more than 30 years.

But the majority prefers the traditionally followed regional style, that is, the GCC concepts of abaya artworks where they can incorporate an element of Arab culture and tradition. However, one cannot predetermine the time used in the making of a particular work as it depends upon the intricacies involved in the work and the labyrinthine attention to detail



OC Center in Ruwi also have a large collection of Abayas made of silk, which come in a variety of colours and patterns from across the world.

One of the materials currently in use, but not many know about, is called 'Nida,' which is a polyester fabric used to make outfits such as jilbab and abaya. It is typically made from a blend of nylon and polyester fibres, and the fabric is available in a wide range of designs and hues, making it a versatile option for women who want to stay comfortable and cool.

As the vogue scenario in the Arab world keeps evolving and as the designs borrow and lend patterns with each other among the neighbouring countries, designers and crochet workers like Mohammed Ansari find their bread and butter in making these long robes even more beautiful. There is a new generation coming up with newer, out-of-the-box ideas to be incorporated into the crochet works."