



P10

BRITAIN SEAL SEMIFINAL SPOT, PAKISTAN REVIVE HOPES



P13

OMAN'S FIRST POLYSILICON PROJECT MAKES HEADWAY AT SOHAR FREEZONE



P18

EXHIBITION ON OMANI FINE ART HELD



MUSCAT

ANNUAL HORSE RACES ON JAN 22

Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad bin Tarik al Said Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman will preside over the annual race of the Royal Cavalry, due to be held on January 22 in the Wilayat of Ibri, Governorate of Al Dhahirah. The event will be organised by the Royal Court Affairs, represented by the Royal Cavalry. The race will consist of five laps for purebred Arabian horses. The last lap assumes special significance due to the fact that the riders will compete to win His Majesty the Sultan's Cup. The Royal Cavalry will organise equestrian sports shows in between the laps. The shows will include musical performances and assorted folklore arts linked to horsemanship. — ONA

GREATER SAQR STATION OPENS



Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) celebrated the official inauguration of the Greater Saqr Gathering Station in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands. The project is expected to have a capacity of 30,000 barrels per day of oil equivalent. The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. The project showcases the company's contribution to Oman Vision 2040 and represents PDO's strategy in action, to deliver sustainable growth of its core oil and gas business whilst reducing costs and emissions. The gathering station, which was completed safely and in record time, is located in the south of PDO's concession area and aims to maximise recovery from six satellite fields through standardised pattern development with water flooding. **DETAILS ON P13**



HM CONFERS ORDER OF FELICITATION ON ROHM DIRECTOR GENERAL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred the Order of Felicitation on Umberto Fanni, Director General of the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM). The conferment comes in appreciation for the Director General's efforts in managing the Royal Opera House, as well as his contribution to enriching and promoting artistic music and its various related fields regionally and internationally through the programmes offered by ROHM. The Order was handed over to Umberto Fanni by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court. — ONA

HONOURABLE LADY VISITS AL BURAIMI GOVERNORATE



Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Wednesday visited the Governorate of Al Buraimi. The visit covered Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities, Sa'ra Oasis and the Al Hillah Castle. In the presence of Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, the Honourable Lady toured the sections of Al Wafa Centre and took note of rehabilitation and curative services it offers to people with disabilities. **DETAILS ON P4**

RO 2 billion 'Future Fund Oman'

TO INVEST DIRECTLY IN NEW OR EXISTING PROJECTS

MUSCAT: In line with the Royal directives to translate the objectives and mandates of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and further drive its efforts to develop the national economy and attract foreign investments, OIA on Wednesday officially launched 'Future Fund Oman' to start serving a wide range of investment categories. Future Fund Oman has a capital of RO 2 billion that will be utilised over a five-year period, with RO 400 million every year. The fund will allocate 90 per cent of its capital to directly invest in new or existing investment



Abdulsalam al Murshidi
Chairman of OIA

projects that prove to be commercially and economically viable. The remaining 10 per

cent is divided into 7 per cent allocated to SMEs and 3 per cent allocated to startups. The fund offers its funding and investment solutions to various investor categories. They include private sector organisations, business owners, SMEs, foreign investors, and startups. With the exception of oil and gas and real estate in direct local investments, the fund will focus on eight targeted sectors, including tourism, manufacturing, green energy, information and communication technologies, ports and logistics, mining, fisheries, and agriculture.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of OIA, underscored that Future Fund Oman is established in line with government policies and strategies aimed at enhancing targeted economic sectors. He explained that it comes as a key enabler of economic diversification and a credible partner to local and international investors who are considering investing and expanding their businesses into Oman and becoming part of the Omani business community.

TURN TO P2

Unified data shows all GCC traffic fines

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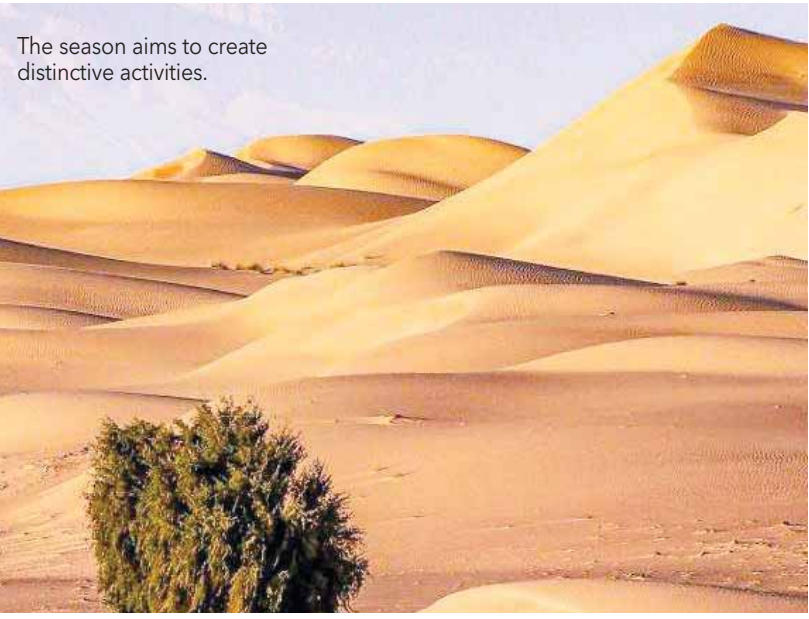
The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has confirmed that there is a unified system that gathers all the fines in the GCC, which can also be accessed from the ROP application. "If you feel that a fine is not correct or you did not commit the violation, you can either go to the ROP traffic department and lodge a complaint or can go to the GCC country where the fine has been registered against you. The first step might take time to get a response," according to an ROP spokesman. "So, the first thing is, whenever someone wants to move or travel in any of the GCC countries, he needs to read the regulations and the rules of that country including traffic rules." One can go to the ROP website and make the payment. The *Observer* has been getting messages on its social media platforms about motorists getting fines amounting to hundreds of rials while driving in the UAE. Meanwhile, he also clarified that the reports on using smart radars in Oman to change lanes or using mobile phones are true, but it is used on a trial basis. However, some GCC countries have already applied this technology.

'Tahayem Winter Season' to present a unique experience

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The first edition of 'Tahayem Winter Season' will take place from January 25 to February 3 in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Hassan in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. Various government and private entities are participating in the event to provide a unique tourism experience that harmonises with the natural and cultural characteristics of the governorate. The event is part of the efforts to enhance the role of the governorates, achieve

economic diversification, and align with Oman Vision 2040. Giving details of the event, Mohammed bin Ali bin Amer Akaak, Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, and the head of the organising committee for the Tahayem Winter Season, said that this season is part of strengthening the role of the governorates in the context of decentralisation trend. He added that it also aligns with the efforts to maximise the role of tourism and enhance its contribution to the national economy within the framework of the economic



diversification policy, according to Oman Vision 2040. This is a translation of the Royal directives emphasising the need to focus on tourist sites in the governorates and develop suitable plans for organising activities and tourist events that attract visitors to those locations. Akaak emphasised that this event aims to introduce the governorate's tourist assets, exploit its diversity, promote tourism, attract investments in the tourism and service sectors, and highlight the competitive advantages of the sandy areas in southeast Oman.



Interior minister meets Qatari counterpart; to attend Police College graduation

DOHA: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, met with Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad al Thani, Minister of Interior of the brotherly State of Qatar, at the Internal Security Force Camp (Lekhwiya), on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the strong fraternal relations between the two countries and ways of fostering them in various fields and exchanged viewpoints on several topics of common concern.

At the end, the minister of interior took a tour around the Internal Security Force Camp (Lekhwiya) during which he



The two sides reviewed the strong fraternal relations between the two countries and ways of fostering them in various fields. – ONA

was briefed about the facilities, services, technologies and security equipment. He also visited the shooting field, the multi-service facility, the medical services facility and attended shows staged by the bomb squad, cavalry displays, riot control forces, the special



unit and the search and rescue group.

The meeting was attended by

Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Qatar.

Sayyid Hamoud is in Qatar to take part in the graduation ceremony of the sixth batch of student candidates of the Police College in the State of Qatar, due to be held today (Thursday).

Sayyid Hamoud and his accompanying delegation were received at Hamad International Airport by Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Faisal al Thani, Qatari Minister of State for Interior Affairs and Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah Al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to Qatar.

— ONA

14,000 Umrah pilgrims used Rub Al Khali road: Saudi Minister

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

As many as 53,000 Umrah pilgrims from Oman visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia last year, marking an increase of 207 per cent compared to 2022, according to Dr Tawfiq Fawzan al Rabiah, Minister of Haj and Umrah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the press conference held while wrapping up his two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman, Al Rabiah said no less than 14,000 Umrah pilgrims came through the Rub Al Khali port in the year 2023.

“We are happy to have hosted 53,000 pilgrims for Umrah last year, which is an increase of 207 per cent and out of them, 14,000 used the newly opened Rub Al Khali port to reach the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as we constantly work to facilitate procedures and legislation to enable the arrival of more pilgrims, including the decision to allow residents of GCC countries to obtain a tourist visa for the purpose of Umrah,” he said.

Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and



A session of talks was held in between Oman and Saudi Arabia

Religious Affairs (MoARA) and the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah (MoHU) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia held introductory meeting on the government platform ‘Nusuk’ (nusuk.sa) along with an interactive exhibition with the aim of raising the level of services provided to Umrah performers and visitors to Mecca and Madina for both Omani citizens and residents of the Sultanate of Oman.

“Moreover, we are seeking ways to discuss ways to improve the procedures at the Rub Al Khali port, in addition to initiatives to improve visa issuance procedures, including facilitating the procedures for issuing group visas for residents of the Sultanate of Oman,” he said, while assuring the Kingdom’s support in improving the experience of the pilgrims

and increasing the number of pilgrims, in line with the goals of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030.

The Kingdom’s Vision 2030 presents an integrated strategy to develop the Haj and Umrah system through the launch of the programme for serving the guests of God, a programme that works on several initiatives to facilitate the arrival of more pilgrims.

“I assure you of the Kingdom’s commitment and honour to serve the guests of God from all over the world, especially our brothers and sisters from the Sultanate of Oman. We are also seeking ways to enrich their overall experience,” he said.

“We are pleased with Flynas’ announcement of the launch of 4 scheduled flights from Salalah to



Dr Tawfiq Fawzan al Rabiah

Jeddah starting in the second half of this year. We expect that these efforts will contribute to enabling the arrival of more Umrah pilgrims, citizens and residents of the Sultanate of Oman, and improving their experience,” he said.

“We also would like to announce the opening of a visa centre during the first quarter of this year, from which we aim to provide better services to improve the experience of those coming to the Kingdom,” he added.

The minister of Haj and Umrah also met with a group of Omani tourism and Umrah companies on the sidelines of the exhibition, which is the unified national digital platform for serving Umrah pilgrims.

OMAN, SAUDI ARABIA EXPLORE MEANS OF BOOSTING JUDICIAL COOPERATION



The Omani delegation reviewed means of benefiting from joint experiences with Saudi Arabia, especially in digitising judicial services. – ONA

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reviewed areas of cooperation in the judicial field.

This came during a meeting between Issa bin Hamad al Azri, Secretary-General of the Supreme Judiciary Council and his Saudi counterpart.

The Omani delegation, during its meeting with Saudi officials,

reviewed means of benefiting from joint experiences, especially in digitising judicial services, training and grooming judicial cadres.

Moreover, the delegation were introduced to judicial facilities in Saudi Arabia, as well as the services and roles undertaken by those facilities.

— ONA



TENDER

PROVISION OF FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR POWER 2027-2029 & WATER 2027

Nama Power and Water Procurement (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the Law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

Tender Description	PWP seeks proposals from interested parties to provide financial and commercial consultancy services for the project and to advice on the best competitive tendering of the project and preparation of all documents which are required.
Tender Number	OPWP/2024/003
Tender Purchase Period	16 January 2024 up to 28 January 2024
Tender Fee	100 OMR / Free of charge for (SME) with a valid Riyadh card.
Submission date	27 th of February 2024 at 12:00 PM Gulf Standard Time (GST)
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website: (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx) the payment is done electronically through PWP website. In case of any queries please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om.
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender documents) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid.

RO 2 bn ‘Future Fund Oman’ to bolster venture capital

FROM PAGE 1

THIRD PORTFOLIO

He added that this step helps in further empowering and integrating with the private sector, supporting SMEs, and bolstering venture capital in the Sultanate of Oman. He further noted that Future Fund Oman is OIA's third portfolio, along with the two existing portfolios — the National Development Fund and the Future Generations Fund. With its extensive investment expertise, OIA will manage the fund and demonstrate the capabilities of local talents who have already proven to be successful wealth managers and investors with a track record of accomplishing good investment returns.

On the other hand, Mulham al Jarf, Deputy Chairman for Investment at OIA, underlined that the fund will be governed by OIA's governance practices as per best international practices to ensure efficiency and flexibility in achieving the desired financial and economic objectives of establishing the fund. The fund will complement the existing government financing and investment ecosystem that currently involves a number of institutions such as the Development Bank, SMEs Development Fund, Rakiza Fund, Oman Technology Fund, etc. He pointed out that Future Fund Oman offers flexibility in choosing the type of investment



participation, whether through direct financing at market rates or equity investments with the private sector in a balanced manner that is not limited to one sector alone.

QUALITY STANDARDS

In compliance with the principles of governance and transparency, the fund will adhere to OIA's quality standards that have already put OIA in the second place globally in the Governance and Sustainability Development Index between 2022 and 2023. The fund will have two committees in its governance structure; they include an Investment Committee, which comprises five members representing OIA, the Ministry of Finance, and independent entities. This committee will be responsible for approving new and follow on investments as

well as divestments. The second committee will be the Advisory Committee, which is tasked with the supervision and follow-up on SME and startup investments. To achieve the fund's national objectives, the Ministry of Finance will act as a strategic partner to OIA in managing the direct local projects, while the SMEs Development Authority will serve as a member in the Advisory Committee to provide insights and advice to the Investment Committee. Additionally, the Oman National Investment Development Co. (Tanmia), ITHCA Group, Omantel, and Cyfr Capital will manage investments allocated for SMEs and startups. Leveraging new technologies to improve convenience, transparency, and process automation, interested investors can apply directly via the electronic platform

(www.Futurefund.om) which is designed to enable easy access to all relevant information about the financing requirements. The investor will be required to create an account on the platform and answer a set of questions to qualify the investment opportunities and help them identify the appropriate financing model.

If the financing requirements are fully addressed, the applicant will be required to fill out the designated Investment Opportunity Form to complete the application process, which will afterward be forwarded to the concerned team for consideration. Review and analysis of an application may take up to three months after submission. Applicants will be updated about the status of their applications on a regular basis.

— ONA



Psychological programme for first aid launched



This initiative, with the slogan 'A Conscious Society', aims to develop the health sector, creating a spirit of promotion and motivation among health personnel

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

For the first time, Oman launched the national training programme for psychological first aid under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health, at Al Masarra Hospital on Wednesday.

This initiative, with the slogan 'A Conscious Society', aims to develop the health sector, creating a spirit of promotion and motivation among health personnel, involving them in decision-making and devising solutions to the challenges facing the health sector.

The programme also aims to empower individuals with the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to provide psychological

support in emergency situations and provide a response to them, through high-quality, evidence-based rehabilitation and education, where the trainer will obtain an international certificate accredited by the United Kingdom.

The programme also aims to create a community aware of mental health, whose effects will be reflected positively to improve the quality of life of the individual and society.

Speaking to the Observer, Ahmed al Sulaimani, representative of the hospital, said that the aim is to create a spirit of promotion and motivation among health personnel, in order to involve them in decision-making, and to devise solutions to the challenges facing the health sector in pursuance of Oman Vision 2040.

Zainab al Wahaibi, pharmacist from Al Masarra Hospital, presented the idea of a first aid programme for mental health, within the framework of the invitation from the Ministry of Health regarding the participation of individuals in the first health innovation forum.

The training programme is distinguished by its effectiveness and quality in improving primary preventive mental health in an innovative way using Artificial Intelligence (AI) techniques.

The programme received support from the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (beah), thanks to the unyielding efforts towards achieving integration between the various sectors to achieve common goals, in partnership with the private sector.

Oman participates in emergency session on developments in Somalia

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday took part in the Arab League Council's emergency session to lend backing to the Federal Republic of Somalia in addressing challenges posed to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The meeting was held via videoconferencing at the ministerial level.

Shaikh Faisal bin Omar al Marhoon, Head of the Arab Department at the Foreign Ministry, delivered the Sultanate of Oman's speech, which affirmed Oman's support for the sovereignty and stability of Somalia and its territorial integrity.

Oman underscored the view that any threat to the territorial integrity or unity

Oman underscored the view that any threat to the territorial integrity or unity of any of the Arab countries poses a serious threat to Arab national security.

During the emergency session, the Arab League Council issued a resolution affirming support for the security, stability, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia.

It voiced solidarity and full backing to Somalia. It deemed

null and void the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Republic of Ethiopia and the province of Somaliland.

It described the MoU as "unacceptable" and a "flagrant violation" of the principles of international law.

It also affirmed that Somaliland constitutes an integral part of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

The resolution supported the Republic of Somalia's efforts to resort to the International Court of Justice to denounce the MoU, which, it stressed, is considered a blatant aggression against the sovereignty and unity of the Republic of Somalia.

— ONA



Shaikh Faisal bin Omar al Marhoon, Head of the Arab Department at the Foreign Ministry, delivered Oman's speech, which affirmed support for stability of Somalia. — ONA



OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ARABIAN GULF UNIVERSITY MEET

MANAMA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, took part in the 94th meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Arabian Gulf University. The ministry was represented during the meeting by Dr Bakhit bin Ahmed al Mahri, Under-Secretary for Higher Education. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Prof Omar bin Awadh al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Further, the meeting approved the minutes and recommendations of the board's 93rd meeting. It also reviewed the university president's report on the activities and projects of the university during the period from July till December 2023, as well as the university budget's closing statement, among other topics. — ONA

UTAS opts for IESCO research chair in AI ethics

JEDDAH: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) on Wednesday signed a cooperation agreement with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IESCO) to host the IESCO Research Chair for Artificial Intelligence (AI) Ethics.

The agreement was signed during the IESCO Executive Council's meeting held as part of the organisation's 44th session, being convened in Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), January 16-18, 2024.

Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, President of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, said that the IESCO Research Chair constitutes a general ethical framework for promoting the values of justice, humanity and participation in the use of technology and artificial intelligence. This, he explained, enhances the Chair's comprehensive global nature and its positive impact on the system of community values.

— ONA

Tender

Based on The Royal Decree of His Majesty the Sultan, May Allah Protect and Preserve Him, for the Establishment of Exemplary Ready-made Factories in The Industrial City of Mahas, The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'yn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
4/2024/PEIE/HQ-4	THE CONSTRUCTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AT MAHAS INDUSTRIAL CITY	05-02-2024	26-02-2024	ENGINEERING CONSULTANCY OFFICES	FIRST AND ABOVE	50

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Mada'yn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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madayn.om

مدائن
mada'yn

Gulf Drilling Wins OPAL Omanization Award

Y AND MINERALS
AWARD
FOR BEST PRACTICES
RD FOR BEST
S 2023
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MAIN SPONSOR
OLD SPONSORS

Gulf Drilling, which is a subsidiary of Mohammed Al Barwani Petroleum Services (MBPS), has been recognized and awarded as the "Large Contractor" winner of the OPAL Award for best practice 2023 in the "Omanization" category - empowering Omanis. The award ceremony took place this week under the auspices of HE. Engineer Salim Al Aufi, Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Engineer Salim Al Harthy, CEO of MBPS Worldwide, said: "I am thrilled with the team's success. Empowering Omanis is a core part of our pillars to achieve our goals and deliver value safely to our clients. Our team is constantly developing our local talents, and are proud of achieving +85% omanization."

Mr. Khalifa Al Naamani, Human Resources General Manager at MBPS, added: "There were significant projects which contributed to us receiving the 'Omanization' category award in the 'Large Contractor' segment. This included the Drilling Fluids Program which trains Drilling fluids engineers for 18 months to enter the field. We additionally actively conduct cross-postings to send our colleagues to MBPS subsidiaries outside of Oman to gain global experience. Finally, last year we enrolled over 25 employees in a specialized Leadership Program delivered by Harvard Business School. Many of these initiatives are organized by our in-house training institute, MBti, which supports employees but also conducts training for external clients."

MBPS is planning further initiatives to empower Omanis in the Oil and Gas industry. For example, the MBti Institute has launched several additional HSE courses and soft-skills courses, which will help prepare the path for more Omanis to lead their organizations' future.



Honourable Lady visits Al Buraimi Governorate

AL BURAIMI: Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Wednesday visited the Governorate of Al Buraimi. The visit covered Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities, Sa’ra Oasis and the Al Hillah Castle.

In the presence of Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, the Honourable Lady toured the sections of Al Wafa Centre and took note of rehabilitation and curative services it offers to people with disabilities.

The Honourable Lady was briefed about the centre’s departments, its specialty halls, the services rendered to all age groups of the disabled and the rehabilitation plans made to develop their intellectual and motor skills. She also listened to a detailed account of the centre’s goals and visions to support people with disabilities and groom them into active individuals capable of integrating into society.

The Honourable Lady spoke to those registered at the centre to get firsthand knowledge about the extent to which they benefited from the services provided. She was also briefed about the difficulties and challenges posed to the beneficiaries.

At the conclusion of the visit, The Honourable Lady thanked all those in charge of the centre and valued their dedication in developing the potential of this segment of society. She wished them success in performing their noble humanitarian mission.

Those in charge of Al Wafa Centre expressed their great delight

and gratitude to The Honourable Lady for timely visit.

The Honourable Lady also visited the Sa’ra Oasis in Al Buraimi, with its famous stream known as Sa’rani Falaj.

At the start of the visit, The Honourable Lady watched a visual presentation about the “Tale of Al Sa’ra Oasis” and Al Sa’rani Falaj, as well as efforts made by the people of the neighbourhood and government departments to revive the falaj after a break of 15 years.

She toured the oasis to learn about the activities that entertain visitors from different segments of society.

At the conclusion of the tour, those in charge gave one of the olive trees the name of “Al-Jalila” (The Honourable) in commemoration of The Honourable Lady’s visit and endeavours to support civil projects.

The Honourable Lady expressed her thanks to those in charge of the oasis, wishing them success in providing the best community services.

After that, The Honourable Lady visited the Al Hillah Castle in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi. She listened to a briefing about Al Buraimi Governorate and saw some of the traditional crafts made by self-employed families. She also toured an exhibition code-named “The Tale of Man”, a gallery comprising antiques and a visual arts exhibition.

Before the end of her tour of Al Hillah Castle, The Honourable Lady signed the Visitors’ Book.

At the conclusion of her visit to Al Buraimi Governorate, The Honourable Lady received a number of women from the governorate. — ONA



Recall

Genesis GV70, GV80 & G80

Recall Date: 18 January 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Genesis GV70	2021-2023	20
Genesis GV80	2019-2023	9
Genesis G80	2019-2023	42

Recall consequence

Description of defect:
Some vehicles might experience a front seat belt pretensioner malfunction.

Recall Action

Procedure:
Install front seat belt pretensioner anti-separation protection caps. (Front LH/RH)

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>
Toll free No 800950003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM with effect from Date 18/01/2024





Israel escalates Gaza indiscriminate strikes

GAZA: Israel stepped up strikes on the south of war-torn Gaza on Wednesday, ahead of the expected delivery of medicines for captives in exchange for humanitarian aid under a newly brokered deal.

Air strikes and artillery fire targeted Khan Yunis throughout the night, said a correspondent in the southern Gaza Strip's biggest city.

"It was the most difficult and intense night in Khan Yunis since the start of the war," said Gaza's government, whose health ministry reported 81 deaths across the Palestinian territory.

At least 24,448 Palestinians, about 70 per cent of them women, young children and adolescents, have been killed in Israeli bombardments and ground assaults, according to the Gaza health ministry's latest figures.

Palestinian groups seized about 250 hostages during the October 7 attacks, and around 132 remain in Gaza, including at least 27 believed to have been killed.

The fate of those still in captivity has gripped Israeli society, while a broader humanitarian crisis in Gaza marked by the threat of famine and disease has fuelled international calls for a ceasefire.

The agreement announced on Tuesday allowing medicines to reach the captives and aid to enter the besieged Palestinian territory was brokered by Qatar and France.



Israeli anti-war and anti-government demonstrators hold a rally in Tel Aviv. – AFP

Under the deal, "medicine along with other humanitarian aid is to be delivered to civilians in Gaza... in exchange for delivering medication needed for Israeli captives in Gaza," Qatar's foreign ministry said.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed the deal, under which 45 captives are expected to receive

medication.

The International Committee of the Red Cross welcomed the deal, saying it was "a much-needed moment of relief".

A security source in Egypt said a Qatari plane carrying medicines had arrived on Wednesday at El-Arish near the Rafah border crossing with Gaza.

France said the drugs would be sent to a hospital in Rafah where they would be handed over to the Red Cross and divided into batches before being transferred to the captives.

US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said he was hopeful Qatar-brokered talks could lead to another such deal "soon".



Palestinians stand in a line as they wait to receive food in Rafah. – Reuters

In Tel Aviv, anti-war protesters scuffled with police on Tuesday night, as some held up signs reading "End the siege" and "Stop the genocide".

"Civilians are getting killed by the Israeli bombings," said protester Michal Sapri. "It leads to nothing. Our hostages are still there. We're not going to release them (through) more military power."

The Israeli public has kept up intense pressure on Netanyahu's government to secure the return of the hostages, with officials repeatedly insisting military pressure is necessary to bring about any kind of deal.

— AFP

Blinken says US in demand as he mourns 'gutwrenching' scenes

DAVOS: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told business and political leaders in Davos on Wednesday he could not think of a time in his career when there had been more global challenges.

Blinken said that almost none of the problems that US President Joe Biden's administration wanted to address could be tackled in isolation, echoing comments on Tuesday by Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who called for greater global cooperation.

Describing the conflict in Gaza as "gutwrenching", Blinken said what was needed to resolve the situation was a Palestinian state with a government structure "that gives people what they want and works with Israel to be effective".

"The suffering breaks my heart," he said during a keynote session at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, adding: "The question is what is to be done."

The US Secretary of State said that Washington was hearing from virtually every country in the Middle East that they wanted the United States to be at the table in discussions over how to bring about an end to Israel's war in Gaza.

And he said Washington was also in demand elsewhere.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken attends the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. – Reuters

"There is a greater premium than ever on a US partnership," Blinken told the WEF panel audience.

Israel carried assault with a siege, bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza that have devastated the tiny coastal territory and killed more than 24,000 people, according to Gaza health

officials.

Summing up the challenges the United States was facing around the world, Blinken drew on the words of British wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

"When it comes to the hard things ... when you are going through hell, keep going," Blinken said.

— Reuters

Israel kills 9 in West Bank air strikes

TULKARM: Israeli air strikes killed nine Palestinians in two areas of the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, medics said, and the Israeli military described at least five of the dead as groups suspected of planning an imminent attack.

Among territories where Palestinians seek statehood, the West Bank has seen a surge of violence in parallel to the Gaza war that erupted on Oct. 7 with a shock cross-border attack.

An air strike on a car in Balata, near the northern West Bank city of Nablus, killed five members of a local cell of militants that planned a large-scale attack on Israelis, the military said in a statement.

It gave the name of the cell leader, who was among the dead, as Abdullah Abu

Shalal. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction said five of its members were in the car, including Abu Shalal.

Hours later, an air strike in the central West Bank city of Tulkarm killed four Palestinians, medics said. The military spokesperson confirmed that an operation

was under way in Tulkarm but did not immediately provide details.

In the three months since then, Israeli forces have killed at least 360 West Bank Palestinians, according to a statement by the Palestinian health ministry on Wednesday.

— Reuters



Israeli security forces stop and search a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance at the entrance of the Tulkarm refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. – AFP

UN agency chief warns of bleak post-war future for Palestinians

GAZA: The head of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, Philippe Lazzarini, warned on Wednesday of the bleak future facing Gazans after the war ends.

Following his fourth visit to the Palestinian territory since the war erupted on October 7, the UNRWA chief said many residents are no longer able to see "the future in the Gaza Strip".

"You have hundreds of thousands of people living now in the street, living in these plastic makeshift (tents), sleeping on the concrete," Lazzarini told journalists in Jerusalem.

The majority of Gaza's 2.4 million residents have been forced from their homes, while Lazzarini said more than 60 per

cent of buildings are estimated to be damaged.

The most extensive Israeli bombardment has hit the north, where journalists have witnessed scores of residential blocks reduced to rubble.

"The north for us is a pocket of humanitarian catastrophe," the UNRWA chief said.

"Would you even encourage anyone to go to the north when we know the north is infested by UXOs — unexploded ordnance — and rubble, and non-functioning services?" he asked.

Fighting has ravaged Gaza since unprecedented October 7 attacks on Israel that resulted in the death of about 1,140 people, according to a tally based on official Israeli figures.

At least 24,448 Palestinians, more than 70 per cent of them women, young children and adolescents, have been killed in Israeli bombardments and ground assaults, according to the Gaza health ministry's latest figures.

While Israel expects the war to rage on for months, half a million children aged six to 14 are estimated to have no access to education.

"My fear is that we have now a generation of lost kids," said Lazzarini, describing children who are living in "brutal" conditions and are deeply traumatised.

"This should concern all of us if we are talking about future peace and security and cohabitation. The more we wait... the more we

take risks for the future," he said.

Despite months of shuttle diplomacy between the belligerents and their allies, there remains no public plan outlining post-war governance or reconstruction in Gaza.

"When we talk about rebuilding Gaza, it's not anymore like before, where we had to rehabilitate some shelter and that was still doable," the UNRWA chief said, referring to previous rounds of fighting which lasted days or weeks.

"I don't see any country investing significantly in the absence of a solid, proper political project and roadmap," he said.

"And for this, you need countries to trust in this roadmap."

— AFP



Displaced Palestinians prepare food as they take shelter inside a building damaged during Israeli bombardment in Rafah. – AFP



Yemen aid groups voice ‘grave concern’ over Red Sea escalation

SANAA: More than 20 humanitarian groups have expressed serious concern about the military escalation in Yemen, warning it will delay shipments and push up prices in the heavily aid-dependent country.

After weeks of Yemeni groups attacks on Israel-linked shipping disrupted traffic in the Red Sea, US and British forces struck a series of targets in Yemen, prompting further exchanges this week.

“The humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains one of the largest in the world and escalation will only worsen the situation for vulnerable civilians and hinder the ability of aid organisations to deliver critical services,” said a joint statement by 26 aid groups working in Yemen.

“We urge all actors to prioritise diplomatic channels over military options to de-escalate the crisis and safeguard the progress of peace efforts in Yemen,” they said, voicing “grave concern”.

Yemen is suffering one of humanitarian crises, according to the United Nations, with more than two-thirds of the population dependent on aid.

The groups have been targeting Israeli shipping in protest at Israel’s war against Gaza.

Following the US and British strikes on Friday, Yemen missiles have hit US and Greek-owned cargo ships in the region, and a



Honour guards and military cadets march as they carry coffins of fighters killed in recent US-led strikes, during their military funeral procession in Sanaa, Yemen. — Reuters

missile targeting an American destroyer was shot down.

Last month, the World Food Programme suspended food distribution in Yemen because of funding cuts and disagreements with the some Yemeni groups.

In October, Save the Children suspended operations in northern Yemen after a staff member died in detention in the capital.

“The impact of the security threat in the Red Sea is already being felt by humanitarian actors as disruption to trade is pushing up prices and causing delays in shipments of lifesaving goods,” said the statement released on Tuesday, whose signatories

Escalation will only worsen the situation for vulnerable civilians and hinder the ability of aid organisations to deliver critical services

included CARE, the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children.

“Further escalation could result in more organisations being forced to halt their operations in areas where there are ongoing hostilities”.

Meanwhile, the World Trade Organization’s chief Ngozi

Okonjo-Iweala on Wednesday said she was “less optimistic” about world trade in 2024, pointing to tensions in the Red Sea.

The head of the international trade body said weaker global economic growth, “worsening geopolitical tensions, the new disruptions we see in the Red Sea, on the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal” meant “we are less optimistic”.

She was speaking to journalists at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos where political and economic elites are meeting to discuss global challenges. — AFP

Arab League chief slams Ethiopia, Somaliland accord

CAIRO: Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit on Wednesday condemned a maritime accord between Ethiopia and the separatist region of Somaliland, describing it as “a clear violation of international law”.

Under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed on January 1, Somaliland agreed to lease 20 kilometres of its coast for 50 years to land-locked Ethiopia, which indicated it wants to set up a naval base and a commercial port there.

The agreement has raised regional tensions, and the Arab League has supported the Somali government’s rejection of the accord as a “violation of Somalia’s sovereignty and its territorial integrity”.

“The memorandum constitutes a blatant attack against Arab, African and international principles, and a clear violation of international law,” Aboul Gheit told an emergency meeting of Arab foreign ministers on Wednesday.

He also called on the international community to “prevent any action under any pretext that takes advantage of the fragility of domestic circumstances, or disrupts national dialogue”.



Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit

Somaliland, a former British protectorate overlooking the Gulf of Aden, declared its independence from Somalia in 1991 but is not recognised by the international community.

Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa, has been seeking access to the sea ever since the Red Sea coastal region of Eritrea declared independence in 1993.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s stated ambition to secure access to the Red Sea is a source of tension between the Horn of Africa nation and its neighbours and has raised concerns of a fresh conflict in the region.

Somaliland, with 4.5 million inhabitants and relative stability compared to Somalia, prints its own money and delivers its own passports. — Agencies

Sudan freezes ties with east African bloc: Foreign ministry

AL JAZIRA STATE: Sudan’s army-aligned government suspended ties with the east African bloc IGAD, accusing it of “violating” the country’s sovereignty by inviting a rival paramilitary chief to a summit.

Nine months after war broke out between the regular army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, the army has been losing territory while paramilitary leader Mohamed Hamdan Daglo has been touring African capitals. In a further boost to his diplomatic standing, IGAD extended an invite to Daglo to a summit in Uganda on Thursday, which he accepted.

Daglo confirmed his attendance in a statement early on Wednesday and called for negotiations “not only between the two sides” but including “national institutions supporting democracy, civil society, religious organisations, youth and all the people”.

But the IGAD invitation

prompted the foreign ministry, loyal to army chief and Sudan’s de facto leader Abdel Fattah al Burhan, to announce it was suspending its relationship with the bloc.

It accused IGAD of “violating Sudan’s sovereignty” and setting a “dangerous precedent”.

The bloc -- in parallel with the United States and Saudi Arabia -- had repeatedly attempted to mediate between the two warring generals, but to no avail.

The ministry had on Saturday accused the bloc of lending Daglo’s “militia” legitimacy by inviting it to a meeting that will be attended by member heads of state and government. Burhan had recently accused the bloc of bias and seeking to intervene in “an internal matter”.

Daglo is fresh off a tour of six African capitals including IGAD members, while analysts say the army chief is growing more and more isolated diplomatically as his



Sudanese supporters and members of the Sudanese armed popular resistance raise their weapons on a pick-up truck, in Gedaref, Sudan. — AFP

troops lose ground to RSF advances.

Meanwhile, the devastating nine-month war is spreading to a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an NGO reported late on Tuesday, sounding the alarm for the remains of the ancient Kingdom of Kush.

The Regional Network for Cultural Rights said it “strongly condemns the incursion by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)”, the paramilitary forces of general Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, “on the sites of Naqa and Musawwarat es-Sufra”. The NGO said the incident, which took place on Sunday, marked the second time since December that fighting had broken out at the religious sites, located in the northern River Nile state.

State authorities also reported “an incursion by the RSF, repulsed by the air force”, claiming that “calm has returned” without mentioning whether the sites suffered any damage. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BANGKOK

23 dead in Thai fireworks factory explosion

Twenty-three people have died after an explosion at a fireworks factory in central Thailand on Wednesday, the provincial governor said.

Images shared by the local rescue service showed metal debris littered on the ground, and a huge plume of black smoke.

The blast occurred at around 3:00 pm near Sala Khao township, in central Suphan Buri province.

“We received reports from EOD team that there were 23 confirmed dead,” Nattapat Suwanpra-



teep, Suphan Buri province governor, said, referencing the Explosive Ordinance Disposal group.

There was no indication of what may have caused the explosion.

— AFP

RABAT

Irrigated area shrinks as drought empties dams

Six consecutive years of drought have left Moroccan dams at critical levels, prompting a big drop in the area of land being irrigated, Morocco’s water and agriculture ministers said.

By mid-January, Morocco’s average dam filling rate had dropped to 23.2 per cent from 31.5 per cent a year earlier, water minister Nizar Baraka told a meeting, according to a royal palace statement.

The worst drought in more than two decades prompted au-



thorities to ban the use of drinking water to clean streets or irrigate parks in cities and to stop dam water being used to irrigate some key farming areas.

— Reuters

IBADAN

Blast kills two, dozens hurt as buildings collapse

At least two people were killed and dozens injured when explosives stored at a private residence detonated in Nigeria’s Oyo state, its governor said.

A witness saw several collapsed houses and wrecked cars from the impact of the blast, which sent panicked residents into the streets.

Emergency services and security officials used bulldozers to clear debris during a search and rescue operation on Wednesday in a neighbourhood of Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state, about 130 km



from Nigeria’s commercial capital of Lagos. Some houses had roofs blown off and windows shattered and their owners watched from a distance as officials searched for survivors. — Reuters



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In brief

■ LONDON



PRINCESS OF WALES IN HOSPITAL AFTER SURGERY

The Princess of Wales is facing up to two weeks in hospital after undergoing successful abdominal surgery, Kensington Palace announced. The 42-year-old wife of William, Prince of Wales, heir to the British throne, was admitted to a private clinic in central London on Tuesday, a statement said.

“The surgery was successful and it is expected that she will remain in hospital for ten to 14 days, before returning home to continue her recovery,” the palace said. “Based on the current medical advice, she is unlikely to return to public duties until after Easter (on March 31). — AFP

■ MADRID



SPAIN BREAKS OWN ORGAN TRANSPLANT RECORD

Spain carried out more organ transplants than ever before last year, conducting a total of 5,851 such procedures, a 9 per cent jump from 2022, Health Minister Monica Garcia said. With one in four donors in the European Union and 5 per cent of all donors worldwide, Spain, which has a population of 48 million, has been a global leader in organ transplants for over three decades.

Spain leads the way for various reasons, such as having a transplant coordinator at hospitals, usually a professional in intensive care, and it has also improved its expertise in organ donation in asystole, which occurs from donors who die after cardiorespiratory arrest.

— Reuters

■ BERLIN



SNOW, RAIN HAMPER GERMAN TRAVEL

Severe winter weather prompted the cancellation of hundreds of flights at Frankfurt airport, Germany's busiest, as the country faced heavy snowfall and freezing rain. A Frankfurt airport spokeswoman said 570 of 1,047 flights had been axed from the schedule by late morning as Germany's business capital prepared for dramatic weather conditions. By early afternoon, all remaining departures were struck from the schedule due to the onset of freezing rain although landings were still possible, a spokesman said. It was not immediately clear how long the disruption would continue. — AFP

RWANDA ASYLUM PLAN

Sunak faces major test in showdown

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces a major parliamentary showdown on Wednesday over his plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, with some of his lawmakers threatening to rebel after they lost an initial bid to toughen the proposed law.

The government comfortably defeated attempts to strengthen the bill late on Tuesday that had been backed by almost a fifth of lawmakers from Sunak's Conservative Party in what was the biggest rebellion yet against the British prime minister.

But he only won because most opposition parties voted against the rebels, whose action to try to toughen the legislation and close what they say are loopholes, has again exposed deep divisions in the governing party.

The Conservative rebels will now have to decide whether to back down or join forces with opposition parties to try to defeat the government at the law's final stage in the lower house of parliament, known as a third reading.

In an election year when the Conservatives are badly trailing the opposition Labour Party in the polls, some of those lawmakers who voted for the changes to the legislation might ultimately vote in favour to avoid being criticised by voters.

The government confidently predicted it would win the vote, despite one senior rebel lawmaker saying the scale of Tuesday's rebellion had given the group confidence it could defeat the government.

“We will get it through, but I'm going to listen respectfully



Dinghies are pictured on the quayside as UK Border Force vessel 'Defender', carrying migrants picked up at sea attempting to cross the English Channel from France, returns in Dover southeast England. — AFP

to my colleagues this afternoon,” said Michael Tomlinson, illegal immigration minister, adding that Sunak had promised to recruit more judges to process any asylum appeals.

But any government victory will come at a cost — Sunak has lost two Conservative deputy chairmen over his refusal to compromise and party divisions have only deepened.

Labour leader Keir Starmer used parliament's prime minister's questions to ridicule Sunak over his Rwanda plan, accusing the government of spending “hundreds of millions of pounds on a removals policy that doesn't



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak walks at Downing Street ahead of the asylum legislation debate in parliament in London. — Reuters

UK government faces showdown in parliament as senior Conservatives quit in protest

remove anyone”.

The government says it has paid £240 million (\$304 million) to Rwanda so far, and no asylum seekers have been sent there.

Starmer's words seemed designed to fire up the rebels, some of whom are still hoping to inflict a government defeat,

with one senior Conservative lawmaker saying: “Last night's numbers speak for themselves.”

Defeat would be a huge embarrassment for Sunak and would severely weaken his authority over his party, possibly leading to the party's third leadership election in less than two years.

But several more centrist Conservative lawmakers said the rebels would not be able to command the numbers needed for defeat, fearful of the wrath of voters before an election Sunak has said he expects will be held in the second half of the year.

— Reuters

Unrest erupts as Comoros oppn rejects presidential vote

MORONI, Comoros: Security forces in the Comoros clashed on Wednesday with protesters angered by the re-election of President Azali Assoumani, as opposition leaders denounced this week's vote as fraudulent.

Some demonstrators ransacked a former minister's house and set it on fire, as others tried to block roads in the capital. Police responded with tear gas and arrests, reporters saw.

Election officials said on Tuesday that Assoumani had won 62.97 per cent of the vote in Sunday's ballot, but the five opposition challengers cried foul, alleging ballot-stuffing and inconsistent results.

“Incontestably these ballots of Sunday January 14, 2024 are invalid. We denounce them and demand their pure and simple annulment,” the candidates said, in a joint statement.

Debris, furniture and burning tyres were scattered in several streets of Moroni and the Indian Ocean archipelago's largest street market lay deserted in the morning after the disputed poll results were announced.

Tear gas shots echoed through the streets well into the afternoon and black plumes of smoke billowed over the city as police and the army tried to clear roads



Opposition supporters during a demonstration in Moroni following the announcement of the presidential elections. — AFP

blockaded by demonstrators.

Government spokesman Houmed Msaidie, accused the opposition of organising the protests.

“There have been arrests, but I can't give you the figure for the moment. It's totally normal when there are people out there who want to disturb public order,” Msaidie said.

There have been no reports of deadly violence, but the Comoros — a three-island chain with a population of about 870,000 — is

politically volatile and has seen 20 coups or attempted coups since independence in 1975.

Official results released on Tuesday showed Assoumani, a former coup leader turned civilian president, won re-election in the first round.

But official turnout was unexpectedly low at 16 per cent and large discrepancies in the number of votes reportedly cast for the presidential and regional governor races have raised doubts about its regularity. — AFP

Thousands protest jailing of eco-activist in Russia

MOSCOW: Several thousand people demonstrated in the Russian republic of Bashkortostan on the Volga River on Wednesday against the conviction of local eco-activist Fail Alsynov, according to media reports.

A video shared by the media outlet Ostorozhno Novosti allegedly shows security forces using heavy force to disperse the crowd.

The police also used tear gas. Fifteen people were injured and several were detained, according to media reports.

Alsynov was sentenced to four years in prison on Wednesday for allegedly making racist statements.

Bashkortostan is some 1,440 kilometres east of Moscow.

More than 3,000 people gathered in front of the court building in the small town of Baymak to support Alsynov,

according to the independent website Vorstka. Observers said it is one of the largest protests in Russia since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine nearly two years ago.

The demonstrators chanted “Freedom for Alsynov” and demanded the resignation of regional head Radiy Khabirov, at whose request the trial of the eco-activist was initiated.

Alsynov was one of the leaders of the protests against the mining of the Kushtau limestone mountain in Bashkortostan for the chemical factory located there.

In the course of the demonstrations, Kushtau was declared a protected natural monument in 2020.

At the same time, the 37-year-old campaigned for greater autonomy for the republic and the protection of the Bashkir language. — dpa



Law enforcement officers disperse the crowd during a rally in support of activist Fail Alsynov, near a court building in Baymak in the Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia. — Reuters

OpenAI seeks to ally election meddling fears



ANNA TONG

The writer is the tech correspondent at Reuters

Artificial intelligence lab OpenAI published a blog post seeking to address fears that its technology will meddle with elections, as more than a third of the globe prepares to head to the polls this year.

The use of AI to interfere with election integrity has been a concern since the Microsoft-backed company released two products: ChatGPT, which can mimic human writing convincingly, and Dall-E, whose technology can be used to create “deepfakes,” or realistic-looking images that are fabricated.

Those worried include OpenAI’s own CEO Sam Altman, who testified in Congress in May that he was “nervous” about generative AI’s ability to compromise election integrity through “one-on-one interactive disinformation.”

The San Francisco-based company said that in the United States, which will hold presidential elections this year, it is working with the National Association of Secretaries of State, an organisation that focuses on promoting effective democratic processes such as elections.

ChatGPT will direct users to CanIVote.org when

asked certain election-related questions, it added.

The company also said it is working on making it more obvious when images are AI-generated using Dall-E, and is planning to put a “cr” icon on images to indicate it was AI-generated, following a protocol created by the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity.

It is also working on ways to identify Dall-E-generated content even after images have been modified.

In its blog post, OpenAI emphasised that its policies prohibit its technology to be used in ways it has identified as potentially abusive, such as creating chatbots pretending to be real people, or discouraging voting.

It also prohibits Dall-E from creating images of real people, including political candidates, it said.

The company faces challenges policing what is actually happening on its platform.

When Reuters last year tried to create images of Donald Trump and Joe Biden, the request was blocked and a message appeared saying it “may not follow our content policy.”

Reuters, however, was able to create images of at

OPENAI EMPHASISES THAT ITS POLICIES PROHIBIT ITS TECHNOLOGY FROM BEING USED IN WAYS IT HAS IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIALLY ABUSIVE, SUCH AS CREATING CHATBOTS PRETENDING TO BE REAL PEOPLE

least a dozen other US politicians, including former Vice President Mike Pence.

Meanwhile, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said he had no issue with partner OpenAI’s governance structure, two months after the startup’s non-profit board temporarily ousted its chief executive without regard to investors’ interests.

The surprise November dismissal of OpenAI’s CEO Sam Altman over an alleged communication breakdown triggered a crisis at the startup behind ChatGPT, in which employees threatened to resign en masse and go work for Microsoft, which is backing OpenAI with billions of dollars.

“I’m comfortable. I have no issues with any structure,” Nadella said on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in Davos.

OpenAI’s board, charged with protecting the startup non-profit’s mission to develop powerful artificial intelligence that benefits humanity, ultimately restored Altman days later and now is in the process of filling out its membership.

“I expect us to make a lot of progress on that in the coming months,” OpenAI CEO Altman said at a later Bloomberg event in Davos. — Reuters

Austrian heiress pays to give away €25m fortune

KIYOKO METZLER

The rich and famous are paying top dollar for a place at this week’s Davos summit but heiress Marlene Engelhorn is on the other side of the fence at the glitzy Swiss resort, demanding that they pay more in taxes.

The 31-year-old is also pursuing an ambitious plan to pay people to come up with ideas for her to give away the bulk of her €25 million (\$27.4 million) wealth so she can escape what she calls a “dynastic rich swamp”.

“I’ve inherited a fortune and therefore power, without having done anything for it. And the state doesn’t even want taxes on it,” said the Austrian-German activist and founder of the Taxmenow initiative.

Engelhorn is joining several protests by a wealthy minority on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum calling for higher taxes on the rich.

The scion of the founder of BASF chemical giant, Friedrich Engelhorn, is among an exclusive group of millionaires pushing for governments to tax them more to bridge the growing wealth gap.

The estimated 2,150 billionaires around the world are \$3.3 trillion richer than they were in 2020, while nearly five billion people worldwide have grown poorer, the charity Oxfam said in a report on Monday, slamming “levels of obscene inequality”.

Engelhorn — who inherited millions when her grandmother died in 2022 — announced this month that a citizens group of 50 Austrians will be set up and paid to devise ideas for the future of her fortune.

To make the process more democratic, 10,000 randomly selected Austrians aged over 16 are being invited to apply to join the group by filling out a questionnaire. Fifty will then be selected.

From March to June, the group will gather on several weekends in Salzburg to develop solutions “in the interests of society as a whole”, according to a statement.

Engelhorn was not immediately available to comment on the project.

If the group does not manage to suggest ideas with broad support, the inheritance will be returned to the heiress.

Engelhorn, who studied German at university, said she will get a regular job after “more than 90 per cent” of her wealth has been redistributed.

“I’ll switch from the wealthiest one per cent of society to the less wealthy 99 per cent... I think that’s an improvement. — AFP

Haley’s missed opportunity: Iowa slows her roll into New Hampshire



Jonathan Weisman

The writer is a political correspondent at TNYT



Jazmine Ulloa

The writer is a politics reporter for TNYT

Nikki Haley had hoped to vault into New Hampshire before next Tuesday’s first-in-the-nation primary with a head of steam from a second-place finish in Iowa and a powerful case to make that the 2024 nomination fight was a two-candidate race between her and Donald Trump.

Instead, as Haley hobbles into New Hampshire, the pressure is on to show she can compete with Trump.

Her disappointing third-place finish in the Iowa caucuses on Monday showed that for all the hype, her momentum ultimately stalled in the face of a Republican electorate still in the thrall of the former president. That included not only Trump’s working-class base but also the bastions of college-educated Republicans in and around Des Moines that she was supposed to dominate.

In her speech after the caucuses, Haley, the former governor of South Carolina, sharpened her attack on Trump, questioning his age and his ability to unite a fractured country. She lumped Trump with President Joe Biden as backward-looking barriers to an American revival.

“The question before Americans is now very clear: Do you want more of the same or do you want a new generation of conservative leadership?” she asked, drawing loud applause and chants of “Nikki, Nikki.”

“Our campaign is the last best hope of stopping the Trump-Biden nightmare.”

Still, Haley’s final tally in Iowa most likely breathed some new life into the campaign of her rival, Gov Ron DeSantis of Florida, and indicated that, for all the excitement around her campaign in the closing weeks, her pitch may have limited appeal with Republicans.

With more than 95 per cent of precincts reporting late on Monday, Haley had 19 per cent of the vote, Trump 51 per cent and DeSantis 21 per cent. Vivek Ramaswamy, a tech entrepreneur and political newcomer who has relentlessly travelled the state



Republican presidential candidate and former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley holds a rally in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. – Reuters

on a largely self-funded bid, came in fourth, with 7.7 per cent, then dropped out and endorsed Trump.

Haley’s allies on Monday projected confidence that she was headed into more favourable territory in New Hampshire, where she hopes to turn the race into a head-to-head against Trump. The state’s Republicans are

HALEY’S DISAPPOINTING THIRD-PLACE FINISH IN THE IOWA CAUCUSES SHOWED THAT FOR ALL THE HYPE, HER MOMENTUM ULTIMATELY STALLED IN THE FACE OF A REPUBLICAN ELECTORATE STILL IN THE THRALL OF THE FORMER PRESIDENT

more moderate and less religious, and independents can vote in the primary, all factors that may work to Haley’s advantage.

“New Hampshire and Iowa are two very different states,” said Kimberly Rice, her campaign’s co-chair in New Hampshire.

“It is a 2-point difference,” said Rep Ralph Norman, R-SC, referring to the gap separating Haley and DeSantis.

And he argued it was DeSantis “who put his eggs in only one basket” — his campaign spent heavily in Iowa.

For Haley, who served as Trump’s first ambassador to the United Nations, a steady underdog campaign, aided by the struggles of DeSantis’ operation, was not enough to win over a very conservative Republican electorate driven by social issues like abortion and shaped by evangelical sensibilities.

She also may have faced the long-standing scepticism of Republican voters toward female candidates. After a Haley campaign stop in Waukee, Iowa, last week, Bruce Norquist, 60, a cybersecurity consultant from Urbandale, Iowa, said Haley was not strong, citing the threats posed to the country by disinformation campaigns from China and Russia and what he said were efforts to tamper with voting machines.

“I’m worried Nikki Haley isn’t sceptical enough,” he said. “Democracy is at stake.” The final Iowa Poll conducted by The Des Moines Register, NBC News and Mediacom showed her finishing second, but, under those headline numbers, the survey attested to serious problems for Haley.

Only 9 per cent of her supporters said they were extremely enthusiastic about voting for her.

— The New York Times

A time of upheaval

A few days into 2024, and events already seem bizarre. Starting with Israel's promises to continue military operations in Gaza and Russia's promise of a continuous offensive against Ukraine, to the vulnerable situations in Ecuador, Argentina, Guyana, the Red Sea, and other conflicts less visible in the media.

Then, with not just a pinch but lots of salt and pepper, the release of unsealed documents regarding Jeffrey Epstein's case brings a frenzy in many corners. Social media is filled with memes of respected scientists, celebrities and politicians. Unsurprisingly, there has been limited media attention to the alleged discovery of an illegal tunnel in New York City. 2024 has shown so far that it will be a colourful and challenging year.

Across continents, people feel entitled to grab whatever they like. From financial institutions not being transparent with investors to invasions of countries, land and properties. Social values, working ethics, contractual agreements and countries' relationships are all going through changes, and we don't know what lies ahead. All sorts of conflicts are mushrooming.

On my side, I lost a large property in an environmentally protected area of Rio de Janeiro to the militia (former police officers) and drug dealers. All the legal resources were used. I have tried to donate the property to a charity, an orphanage, or a facility for children with cancer, but the institutions could not ensure the safety of the residents. There is just so much one can do.

As far back as I can remember, we have always believed in institutions. We believed in those in power and that they would always do the best for humanity. The wealthy, powerful and well-connected, from the pinnacle of their seats, gazing down on the little people, would take care of us. Apparently, they knew it all and better.

However, everyone has been selling illusions. These days, we see the Instagram filter idea everywhere. It is becoming difficult to differentiate



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ACROSS CONTINENTS, PEOPLE FEEL ENTITLED TO GRAB WHATEVER THEY LIKE. FROM FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS NOT BEING TRANSPARENT WITH INVESTORS TO INVASIONS OF COUNTRIES, LAND AND PROPERTIES

between illusions and real stuff. From lip-smacking fruits that made my guests drool from the corner of their mouths to visually nicely packed pieces of meat for the festive seasons, everything was just for the eyes.

The myths of invulnerability, invincible armies, military power and superior intelligence have all been debunked. After all, who cares? The 'music chair' around politics and influence is deeply rooted. Then, as new batches of unsealed documents related to Epstein's alleged criminal offenses were released, several well-known and influential men had their names accidentally or incorrectly reported as being among Epstein's friends. 'The list', as it was popularly named, took social media into a frenzy. Political conspiracies, or just the weakness of the body, have also been exposed. That is when justice and the media can promote accountability.

Would we like to know the intimate relationships of the greatest painters, monarchs, and gods, as well as the events that took place within the walls of palaces or temples? The combination of very expensive fish and flutists during the 4th Century BC accounts tells us that forbidden pleasures were not different than they are today.

Companies such as Netflix will be creating fantastical stories based on contemporary affairs and providing us with a twisted and more liberal interpretation of misconduct. Movies like Fifty Shades of Grey, which fall within the boundaries of trashy psychological warfare, are commercially great successes. 'Documentaries' with similar contexts already fill the digital world.

Aside from any discussion on ethical conduct or the importance of reputation, the entire Epstein episode turns the spotlight on leadership. The released material lifts the veil on accountability and transparency. It is safer to look into human flaws through satire because if we scratch the social constructions of power and politics, the smoke that surrounds illusions will vanish, revealing interesting naked truth.

ENTERING THE SEA!



An Olive Ridley sea turtle hatchling released into the sea at Lhoknga beach, Indonesia's Aceh province, on Wednesday. – AFP

Are social norms really the main cause of low female employment?

In China, the painful custom of binding young girls' feet to alter their shape began in the tenth century and continued for a millennium, until it was outlawed in 1911. Although the practice did not truly end until the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, by 1990 China's female labour-force participation rate had climbed to 73 per cent — well above the OECD average.

In fifteenth-century Europe, women started wearing corsets, often reinforced with wood, bone, or even metal, designed to mold the upper body. Comfortable clothing that was easier to move in came into fashion only over the course of the twentieth century. And yet today, several European countries have the highest rankings in terms of gender parity across various dimensions.

Both practices — binding women's feet and constricting their waists — started among the aristocracy before spreading to the middle and lower classes. Given this trajectory, it is not surprising that adherence to beauty norms made it difficult for women to participate in economic or productive work.

Although China and Europe are poles apart culturally, both pushed women into subservient roles in



Ashwini Deshpande

Professor of Economics and Founding Director of the Centre for Economic Data and Analysis (CEDA) at Ashoka University

NEW RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT POLICYMAKERS MUST CREATE CONDITIONS FOR FEMALE EMPLOYMENT BEFORE SPENDING IMMENSE SUMS ON EFFORTS TO CHANGE CULTURAL NORMS

similar ways. Similarly, both societies were able to shed restrictive social norms — of which body modification is only one example — and make significant progress on gender equality.

It is important to understand how this happened, especially because international organisations and academics have increasingly focused on changing social norms as a means of achieving gender equality, designing toolkits and interventions aimed at nudging individuals towards new attitudes and practices. But they tend to forget an important lesson from history: social norms are products of material realities and, as a result, only shift in response to changes in those conditions, not because of a sudden change of heart.

Comprehending the complex evolution of social norms requires examining the long arc of history. The work of Nobel laureate economist Claudia Goldin exemplifies this approach. Focusing on the United States, Goldin found that "increased participation of women over the long run resulted more from a

changed nature of jobs, such as decrease in hours of work and the rise of white-collar work, than from shifts in social norms and attitudes."

This insight is particularly useful in India, where the proportion of women in paid work remains very low, despite high rates of economic growth and rapid poverty reduction over the last two decades. The discrepancy has sparked debate about which social norms are constraining female labour-force participation and, equally importantly, whether norms are the only limiting factor.



In India the proportion of women in paid work remains very low.

Our new study identifies the norms that matter. Foremost is Indian women's disproportionate responsibility for domestic chores, including cooking, gathering fuel, fetching water, household maintenance, childcare, and elder care. Indian women spend as much as ten times more time on these activities than men, one of the highest gaps globally. Moreover, with nearly universal marriage and a strong preference for sons, young women enter marriage and motherhood sooner than in other parts of the world and are expected to produce a male heir.

Despite the limiting effect of these norms, our data also reveal unmet demand for paid work on the part of women. Women move in and out of paid employment over short periods, indicating a willingness to take on such work when it is available. Constraints on mobility vary by caste status, with women from lower castes historically participating in the labour market at higher rates and also reporting a greater number of transitions, indicating the precarity of available work.

The low proportion of women in paid employment in India is a matter of serious concern, and policymakers should focus more on generating demand for female labour, rather than changing social norms. That means working to ensure the regular availability of paid work that women can access and incentivising employers to hire them. Several Indian states have already enacted gender quotas in public-sector employment. But with more than 90 per cent of India's workers in the informal sector, such quotas do not affect female labour-force participation rates substantially.

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Britain seal semifinal spot, Pakistan revive hopes



Malaysian players try to prevent a move by a Great Britain player during the FIH Olympic Qualifier Oman 2024 at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat, Muscat.

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Great Britain overcame some stiff resistance from Malaysia 4-1 to seal a spot in the semifinals with their second win of Pool A in the FIH Men's Olympic Qualifier at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat late on Tuesday.

Pakistan rebounded from an opening defeat against Britain by blanking China 2-0 in an earlier Pool A match at the same venue.

World No 4 ranked Great Britain with two wins are on six points and top Pool A with a superior goal difference of +5.

China occupied the second spot with a fighting 3-2 win over Malaysia. Pakistan earned their first three points on Tuesday while Malaysia are fourth with no points.

The day's Pool A action started with an encounter between Pakistan and China.

China, who were confident after their thrilling opening win, matched a youthful Pakistan, who were desperate for a win to stay in the contention for a semifinal spot.

Pakistan struck the target in 42nd minute after Abu Mahmood scored from a penalty corner to break the deadlock.

In the 51st minute, Abdul



Pakistan and China players in action.

Rehman secured the win for Pakistan from another penalty corner. The last match of the day saw Malaysia putting up a

determined fight against Great Britain from the start at the Hockey Oman Stadium.

Will Calnan struck the

opening goal for Britain in the 19th minute from a penalty corner. Shahril Saabah utilised a penalty corner as Malaysia restored parity seven minutes later.

At the break the teams were level at 1-1.

TAKING CONTROL

Team GB came back strong in the third quarter to pump in two goals to take control. Sam Ward scored from a penalty corner in the 32nd minute while Zachary Wallace's field goal in the 39th minute made it 3-1 for Britain.

Ward hit his second goal with two minutes to go as Great Britain rounded off a 4-1 win.

In Pool B, Germany lead the

way on goal difference with New Zealand in second - both sides have 4 points. Chile are third with three points. Canada have no points after their second defeat.

The semifinals line-up will be confirmed with the last matches of the pools on Thursday.

Chile take on Germany in the first match at 2 pm. Canada meet New Zealand in the second Pool B match at 4.15 pm.

China play Great Britain at 6.30 pm and Pakistan meet Malaysia at 8.45 in the last match of Pool A.

The semifinals and placement matches will be held on Saturday while the final and third-place match take place on Sunday.

Iran emerge champions of ITF Asian U14 qualifiers

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Iran emerged champions in the West and Central Asia regional qualifying tournaments for the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Asia 14 and Under Development Championships 2024 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex tennis courts from January 8 to 16.

Turkmenistan came in second in the tournament competed by the players of the age of 14 and under from hosts Oman, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) was hosting international tennis events after a gap of nearly six years. Oman last hosted Davis Cup Asia Group 4 Championships in which Oman emerged champions in 2018.

The qualifying event consisted of two tournaments from January 8 to 11 and January 13 to 16 respectively.



Iran players celebrate with the winners trophy in Muscat.

In the concluding match, Iran's Ramtin, ranked 64th, was able to pull off a surprise victory over his compatriot Kiarash, ranked sixth, with scores of 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

In the girls' singles competition, Ilima of Turkmenistan snatched a dramatic victory from Hana of Iran 6-4, 1-6, 7-5.

Al Mutasim bin Hamoud

al Zadjali, OTA Chairman, crowned the winners, which began with the crowning of the winners in the first tournament.

In the boys' singles category, Iran's Kiarash Sadeghizeidi took first place, his teammate Ramtin Rafeeiboroujeni came second while Yemen's Mohammed Abdulkarim finished third.

In the girls' singles category, Turkmenistan's Ilima Guseynova



Turkmenistan players celebrate with their second place trophy.

won the title beating Iran's Hana Shabanpour while Iran's Golsa Rahimianamiri finished third.

In the boys' doubles category, Iranian pair of Ramtin and Kiarash emerged champions beating Iraqi pair of Ahmed Altaieb and Hassan Ghriari.

In the girls' doubles, Iran pair of Golsa and Hana claimed the title defeating Turkmenistan's Ilima and Aylara Kakabayevallara.

In the second tournament, Iran's Ramtin won the boy's singles title with his teammate Kiarash came runner-up

and Yemen's Mohammed Abdulkarim in third. In the girls' singles, Turkmenistan's Ilima emerged champion beating Iran's Hana while Golsa of Iran was third.

In the boys' doubles, Iran pair of Ramtin and Kiarash won the title beating Saudi Arabian duo of Ibrahim al Junaidi and Suhail al Farouqi. In the girls' doubles, Iran pair of Golsa and Hana emerged champions beating the Turkmenistan pair of Ilima and Aylara.

OTA chief Al Mutasim al Zadjali said the tournament was

successful one by all standards.

"We were able to organise the Asian level ITF tournament after a gap of six years. The 14 and under years age group tournament for boys' and girls' in West and Central Asia is a qualifying event for the World Tennis Cup finals for these categories. The eight participating teams expressed their satisfaction with the tournament from an organisational and technical standpoint. The OTA is geared up to host several such tournaments in the near future," he said.

Regarding Oman players performance, the OTA chief said it has been an average show.

"The performance of Omani players was average though several of them reached the consolation stages. The OTA will arrange a special program to participate in foreign tournaments to prepare them further and be more competitive as the Omani players lack strong match experience."

Oman Club edge Ahli Sidab in Ministry's Shield opener



Oman Club and Ahli Sidab players in action.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Oman Club clinched a thrilling 47-45 victory against Ahli Sidab in the first round of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Shield for the 2023-24 basketball season at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The match showcased a thrilling battle with both teams displaying strength and determination throughout the four quarters. Exciting moments of tied scores built up the suspense until Oman Club secured the win in the final moments.

The first quarter started with quick attacks from Oman Club,

and their players managed to assert dominance in the first 5 minutes, scoring 8 points through shots by Hussain al Kindi for two points, a three-pointer by Bassam al Musalmi, and three points by Haitham Bani Araba.

Ahli Sidab then narrowed the gap by scoring two points through the gap by scoring two points through scoring points, especially Oman Club, who maintained the lead to end the first quarter with a score of 14-9 in favour of Oman Club.

In the second quarter, the game continued with back-and-forth attacks, during which Oman Club scored 6 consecutive points through Omar al Hasani and

Bassam al Musalmi taking a 20-9 advantage. The attacks continued from both teams, with Oman Club scoring 5 points, while Ahli Sidab scored 9 points. The first half ended with Oman Club leading 25-18.

In the third quarter, the game strategy shifted, and Ahli Sidab took control by scoring 4 points, including a three-pointer by Hameer al Hasani and a point from free throw by his teammate Sami al Hasani.

Ahli Sidab managed to overturn the score in their favour at the end of the third quarter, leading 31-30.

In the final quarter, Ahli Sidab continued to score points

and reinforced their lead with 4 points, bringing the score to 45-41. However, Oman Club, with successful shots from Madh al Busaidy, Omar al Hasani and Bassam al Musalmi managed to equalise the score at 45-45.

In the last 6 seconds, Oman Club's Abdullah al Qasimi netted two points, securing a thrilling victory with a final score of 47-45 against Ahli Sidab.

The match was officiated by international referees Rashid al Mashifari as the first referee, Ahmed al Khasaibi as the second referee and Wafa al Sumairi as the third referee. The table officials were Jumaa al Hanai, Yaqoob al Nadabi and Majid al Akhzami.

Applying for Green Sports 2024 by Bank Muscat opened until Jan 31

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat recently launched the 2024 edition of its flagship Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, Green Sports. All local sports teams who would like to apply for the programme are invited to complete the registration before the 31st of January 2024.

All teams interested to participate in this year's edition can submit their applications digitally. For more information and to submit applications, teams should may visit: <https://bm.click/GS> and fill in the application form electronically using a computer, tablet or mobile phone. In case of any queries or doubts on the submission process, teams may email: GreenSports@bankmuscat.com, or call 24768595/24801200/24801625 for more details.

The Green Sports programme is developed to help local sports teams enhance their role in the community and provide suitable infrastructure that can help the youth develop their talents. The scope of Green Sports support for sports teams includes greening of football fields with natural

or synthetic turf, providing floodlights or water desalination equipment in areas facing water salinity. Over the previous years, the programme contributed to bolster the infrastructure of Omani sport especially football which helped in honing the sports, cultural and social skills of Omani youth.

This support has also enabled sports teams to hold various activities in the play yards and contributed to expanding the green spaces across the Sultanate of Oman.

The landmark Green Sports Programme is one of Bank Muscat's CSR initiatives, which draws from the values of leadership and partnership to create a positive impact on Omani society.

The programme aims to develop and provide a sustainable infrastructure for sports fields in Oman. It is a matter of great encouragement that Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 183 teams with over 50,000 team members across Oman and with yet another 20 teams to be added this year.



OCA U19, MCCC Yellow U16 and ISWK-I U16 post wins

MUSCAT: OCA U19 beat ISWK U19 in the U19 Junior League 2023-24 supported by Khimji Ramdas at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1.

OCA U19 posted a big total of 274 courtesy a brilliant century by Lakshmi Narayana Satish along with Kavish Shah scoring 41. Varshith SD, Saumya Sampat and Siddharth S picked 2 wickets. In reply, ISWK U19 bundled to a mere 87 as Prathiesh HR spun the web claiming 5 wickets and Aneek C picking 2 wickets.

MCCC Yellow U16 beat BSC U16 B in the U16 Academies League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy at the Municipality Grounds in Al Amerat.

Oijus Pachisia's scintillating 192 along with Jeet Shah's thundering 153 helped MCCC Yellow U16 post 403 in 30 overs. The swashbuckling pair notched 325 runs as second wicket partnership. In reply, BSC U16 B were bundled down to a paltry 101 as Ayush Karthyic, Mithul S and Jeet Shah pick 2 wickets.

ISWK CI U16 beat ISWK Tigers in the U16 Schools League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy at the Municipality Grounds.

Aryan Joshi's magnificent ton scoring an unbeaten 126 along with Rishab Gupta's knock of 125 and Marc Mathews scoring 72 helped ISWK CI U16 post a total of 357 in 30 overs. In reply, ISWK Tigers were restricted to 166-9 in 30 overs.

Rishab Gupta picked 3 wickets while Aryan Joshi and Naren Padmanaban picked 2 wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES
OCA U19 274 all out in 48.2 overs (Lakshmi Narayana 116 (114b); Varshith SD 2-41) beat ISWK U19 87 all out in 24.4 overs (Rishab Gupta 23 (30b); Prathiesh HR 5-7) by 187 runs. MCCC Yellow U16 403-1 in 30 overs (Oijus Pachisia 192 (86b), Jeet Shah 153 (80b)) beat BSC U16 B 101 all out in 28.5 overs (Ahmed Ali 36 (46b); Jeet Shah 0-2) by 302 runs. ISWK CI U16 357-3 in 30 overs (Aryan Joshi 126 (79b), Rishab Gupta 125 (69b)) beat ISWK Tigers 166-9 in 30 overs (Krish Vaibhav 29 (23b); Rishab Gupta 3-32) by 191 runs.



Lakshmi Narayana and Prathiesh HR of OCA U19



Jeet Shah and Oijus Pachisia - MCCC Yellow U16



Aryan Joshi, Rishab Gupta and Marc Mathews of ISWK CI U16

Troon International to manage Al Mouj Golf in new tie-up

MUSCAT: In a partnership that highlights its commitment to exceptional golfing experiences, Al Mouj Muscat has appointed Troon, a globally recognised leader in golf and club-related leisure services, to manage Al Mouj Golf (AMG). Situated in the heart of Muscat, the Greg Norman-designed Al Mouj Golf course stands as a jewel in the Middle East, poised to reach new heights under Troon's expert stewardship.

The strategic partnership will see Al Mouj Golf utilise Troon's international division, "Troon International", operating under the renowned Troon Golf brand. The collaboration encompasses comprehensive management of agronomy, marketing and operations, leveraging Troon's extensive Middle Eastern market expertise. Troon International, with its rich portfolio of world-class courses such as The Els Club Dubai and Al Zorah Golf Club in the UAE, Royal Golf Club Bahrain, and several Muscat-based golf clubs, brings a wealth of regional knowledge. This partnership offers AMG club members access to Troon's impressive network of regional and international courses, while attracting Troon's extensive golfer community to AMG, fostering enriched experiences for both communities.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Golf, said: "We are excited to embark on this journey with



Al Mouj Golf course



DJ Flanders

Troon International. With their unparalleled expertise in golf management and resort excellence, they stand as an ideal partner for Al Mouj Golf's vision and aspirations. This strategic partnership marks Al Mouj's ongoing commitment to further enhance our offerings, providing our members and guests with an extraordinary golfing experience. We are confident that



Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani

this collaboration will elevate Al Mouj Golf to even greater heights and cement its position as a leader in the world of golf."

DJ Flanders, Executive Vice-President of Troon International, commented: "Utilising our wealth of expertise in golf management and resort excellence, this partnership with Al Mouj Golf is set to unlock the full potential of this remarkable

destination. Collaboratively, our goal is to build upon its already esteemed reputation to ensure the club preserves its status as one of the world's premier golf destinations."

Al Mouj Golf's standing as one of the world's premier golf destinations is well-recognised, as demonstrated by its consecutive inclusion in the Top 100 Courses in the World in Today's Golfer, a distinction it shares with only one other course in the region. Further showcasing its dedication to excellence, Al Mouj Golf has been re-certified in the industry-leading GEO and Audobon standards for 2023, making it one of only a few golf clubs in the world to maintain both certifications. The course has served as the venue for several prestigious tournaments in recent years, most notably hosting the European Tour's NBO Open in 2018 and The Asian Tour elevated event the International Series in 2023.

Occupying a stunning two-kilometre stretch along the coastline that looks over the Sea of Oman, the golf course enjoys a breathtaking backdrop of Al Hajar Mountains. Its five waterfront holes perfectly encapsulates Oman's natural beauty. The golf precinct is a hub of fantastic attractions including 5-star hotel and resort, the Business Park and the top tracer technology, drawing numerous visitors to Al Mouj Golf course annually.



HOLDERS QATAR FIRST TEAM TO REACH LAST 16

Afif strikes all-important goal against Tajikistan

AL KHOR, Qatar: Defending champions and hosts Qatar became the first team to book their place in the Asian Cup last 16 with a 1-0 win over debutants Tajikistan on Wednesday.

China's 0-0 draw with Lebanon earlier in the day means Qatar are guaranteed to go through to the knockout round as Group A winners.

Livewire forward Akram Afif, who scored twice in Qatar's opening 3-0 victory over Lebanon, hit the winner early in the first half in front of 55,000 with another clinical finish.

Tajikistan finished with 10 men after Amadoni Kamolov was sent off for kicking out at Ahmed al Ganehi's face late in the game, the first dismissal of the tournament.

Qatar were returning to the tent-like Al Bayt Stadium, where they lost 2-0 to Ecuador in the opening game of the World Cup just over a year ago.

The 2019 Asian champions gave another solid performance, illuminated by a flash of brilliance from Afif. The forward raced onto a through ball from Almoez Ali in the 17th minute before stabbing it deftly past goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov.

Coach Tintin Marquez — only in the job since early December — made five changes to the starting line-up that faced Lebanon, dropping captain Hassan Al Haydos to the bench.

Tajikistan made a positive start and Rustam Soirov stung Qatar goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham's hands with an early shot from inside the box.

All that changed in the blink of an eye when Afif opened the scoring, but Qatar should have had more after dominating the rest of the first half.

Tajikistan had a close shave when Manuchekhr Safarov appeared to take a swipe at Ali in the box midway through the first half, only for a VAR check to rule out a penalty for Qatar.

The Central Asians escaped again when Zoir Dzhuraboev cleared off the line from Ali after a goalkeeping blunder from Yatimov shortly before half-time.

Tajikistan had a chance early in the second half when Alisher Dzhililov prodded the ball past the onrushing Barsham, but the striker could not catch up in time to steer it into the net. Kamolov was sent off in the 81st minute when he lashed out with his boot at Ganehi when going down under a challenge.

Tajikistan drew 0-0 with China in their opening game for their first point ever at the Asian Cup.

They still have a chance to qualify for the knockout round and face Lebanon on Monday.

Qatar play China in their final group match the same day. — AFP



Qatar forward Akram Afif celebrates after scoring his team's first goal during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group A match against Tajikistan at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha. — AFP

Saudi match to serve as motivation against Thailand: Branko

WALEED AL JAHWARI
DOHA, JAN 17

Saudi Arabian defender Ali al Bulaihi snatched a fatal goal in critical time to help Saudi snatch the first three points against Oman in the Group F match at Khalifa International Stadium in Doha on Tuesday night.

Oman were first to score through Salah al Yahyai, who converted a penalty kick in the 14th minute, to end the first half with a 1-0 lead.

Saudi recovered from the shock of Salah's goal and succeeded in equalising in the 78th minute with an individual effort by Abdulrahman Ghareeb, then followed by the decisive goal from Ali al Bulaihi, who fired the winner in the 90+6 minute.

Croatian Branko Ivankovic, head coach of Red Warriors, expressed his satisfaction with performance level against Saudi Arabia.

At the post-match press conference, Ivankovic said, "Oman team relied on an appropriate tactical plan to stop the Saudi team. And players

executed the plan well unless for some mistakes."

"The Omani players prepared well during the preparation period, and all teams in the group have the ambition to win. We are happy with showed level as a team in the opener. However, we were unlucky against Saudi, but our chances to qualify for the second round are still alive, and we will work to strengthen them by winning against Thailand," he added.

The Croatian coach considered the Saudi match's result to be a motivation to provide the best against Thailand.

Italian Robert Mancini, Saudi Arabia head coach, expressed his happiness over their victory over Oman team.

"The Saudi team demonstrated great technical capabilities and succeeded in establishing match control in the second half, despite the late goal due to organisational errors that were not taken into account, but we deserved to win the match."

"We worked to change the team's appearance in the second half by strengthening with

multiple elements and modifying the playing method," he added.

The Italian coach did not hide his great appreciation for the Oman team, describing them as a distinguished and strong team.

The Saudi victory is considered as twenty-second out of 49 matches in the history of Asian Nations Cup finals, compared to 13 draws and 14 losses.

The total fans attending the match were 41,987 at Khalifa International Stadium.

After Tuesday's matches in Group F, Saudi Arabia and Thailand earned three points each. Saudi Arabia top the group with better goal difference over Thailand.

Oman are third and Kyrgyzstan are fourth and last. Oman will meet Group F toppers Thailand on January 21 at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium, which accommodates 10,000 fans, in Doha at 6:30 pm Oman time.

Saudi Arabia will face Kyrgyzstan at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium which accommodates 45,000, in Doha at 9:30 pm Oman time.



Oman coach Branko Ivankovic reacts during the Group F match against Saudi Arabia. — Reuters



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NASRULLAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Notably, the design of the gathering station prioritises environmental stewardship, with zero flaring of harmful gases into the atmosphere and efficient



The Design-Build-Own-

Over 80 per cent of staff during the operational phase are nationals, and substantial financial contributions were made to local small and medium enterprises, demonstrating PDO's dedication to fostering economic growth within Oman.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The report also states that policy-making in Oman will likely focus on pro-growth structural reforms to improve the business environment, attract FDI and execute IPOs, which

Hussain al Yafai, CEO of Standard Chartered Oman, said: "We expect the Sultanate of Oman to continue to demonstrate resilience in the face of global uncertainties and project a positive credit rating trajectory in 2024 as a result of its strong fiscal performance and reform efforts."

The design incorporates a 23-kilometre gas pipeline network, 11 water injection manifolds, 10 main selector valves, and over 400 wells, enabling peak production volumes of 30,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd). Health, safety, and environmental considerations were paramount throughout the project, resulting in an impressive 4.2 million man-

In adherence to PDO's commitment to the World Bank's

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Shuangliang said in a



Welcoming the contract award, Shuangliang stated: "This successful bid demonstrates that the company's polysilicon reduction furnace system, green electricity intelligent hydrogen production equipment, lithium

Separately, the Oman unit of Monenco Consulting Engineers announced that it has been appointed by United

Of late, Oman has been making efforts to put in place the building blocks of a new economic sector centring around silicon production and related activities that could eventually enable the country's entry into high-tech solar PV and semiconductor manufacturing. Spearheading this drive is the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology with the support of, among other entities, Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

Chery enhances overseas after-sales service in 2023



MUSCAT: In 2023, Chery Group achieved a global automobile sales volume of 1,881,316 units, with over 930,000 vehicles exported. As of now, Chery Group has accumulated over 13 million global users, with 3.35 million overseas users, maintaining its position as the top Chinese brand for passenger car exports for 21 consecutive years.

The continuous increase in Chery's global sales volume can be attributed not only to the support and trust domestically and internationally of its brand and products but also to its exceptional commitment to providing excellent after-sales services.

To further develop the overseas after-sales service system and advance globally unified after-sales service standards, Chery's After-sales Service Department organised more than 20 offline hands-on trainings overseas in 2023.

These trainings covered 20 countries and regions, including South America, South Africa, and Asia, among others.

Through these hands-on trainings, Chery improved the after-sales staff's understanding of the customer management system, refined standard after-sales service procedures, and simultaneously improved the maintenance skills of service technicians.

Mr Li Wei, the head of the After-sales Service Department of Chery, stated, "To win customer satisfaction, our after-sales service must constantly

promote itself.

We adhere to the principle of localisation and provide services tailored to the real needs of customers in different countries and regions. We aim to offer higher-quality products and services to meet the increasingly diverse demands of customers."

These overseas trainings not only perfected the model of "learning through practice and using through practice" but also cultivated a group of high-quality, professional, and skilled after-sales service elites.

Recently, Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50.

Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth. Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J.D. Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM(IQS).

For more details please visit <https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS>

In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

For the latest Press Releases, Test Drive requests and more, please visit www.chery.om, www.youtube.com/@OmanChery, www.facebook.com/CheryAutoOman, and www.instagram.com/cheryoman.

For any further details & to ascertain the availability of stocks, please visit the Chery Showroom at Wattayah.

OQ receives four OPAL awards for best practices in energy sector

MUSCAT: OQ Exploration and Production and OQ Salalah, both OQ Group companies, garnered four OPAL Awards for Best Practice 2023. The awards ceremony, a landmark event in the energy industry, was held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

In this edition of the awards, OQ Exploration and Production was honoured for two of its projects. The oil and gas processing unit at Bisat-C field in Block 60, won first place in the 'Made in Oman for In-Country Value' category, while the Construction Assurance Safety Programme Evaluation Review (CASPER) received the second OPAL Award in the Health, Safety, Security & Environment (HSSE) category.

Additionally, OQ Salalah's innovative efforts have been recognised, with the Pressure Safety Valve Calibration Application (Smart PSV) receiving an award in the 'Research and Development' category and the Organic Solar Cell (OSC) project being acclaimed in the 'Energy Transition' category, showcasing OQ's commitment to sustainability and innovation in the energy sector.

Bisat-C Oil and Gas Processing Unit

Considered a flagship project



in the exploration and production sector, the Bisat-C Oil and Gas Processing Unit significantly contributed to maximising In-Country Value (ICV), while reinforcing OQ as a major developer of oil fields in Oman.

The CASPER Programme

The Construction Assurance Safety Programme Evaluation Review (CASPER), a groundbreaking innovation in the field of health and safety, is the first of its kind in Oman. Developed by the dedicated employees of OQ Group, this system is a testament to the company's commitment to leveraging digital technologies and modern methods in the

energy sector.

The PSV Calibration Application (Smart PSV)

The Pressure Safety Valve Calibration Application (Smart PSV) is an innovative new application designed to safeguard energy, oil, and gas facilities from the dangers associated with pressure relief valve (PSV) explosions and operational resource wastage.

This smart system streamlines the maintenance and calibration processes of PSVs and automatically generates engineering reports. By doing so, it significantly reduces the risk of human errors that can lead to

severe environmental, financial, and health issues in many oil and energy sector facilities worldwide

The Organic Solar Cell (OSC)

The Organic Solar Cell project is a pioneering initiative in the realm of renewable energy, featuring a sophisticated design with two layers of conductive glass. Between these layers, a special material functions to absorb sunlight and convert it into electrons, while another material facilitates the delivery of the generated electricity. This innovative technology is a significant step forward in the energy transition towards renewable sources.

NBO wins bank of the year award for 2023

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its pioneering position in the banking sector, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has won the prestigious 'Bank of the Year Award' for 2023 from 'The Banker', a globally recognised accolade. This award is presented exclusively to the best banks in 120 countries that meet the award's stringent criteria. NBO won this award in recognition of its strategic initiatives, continued growth, and technological advancement in the sector.

Mustahil bin Ahmed al Mamari, Assistant General Manager and Head of Strategy and Transformation at NBO, expressed his pleasure on the Bank achieving this milestone, saying, "We are pleased to have won this prestigious award. This achievement reflects the continuous growth achieved by the Bank over the past few years.

It confirms our commitment to enriching the banking sector in Oman with the latest digital solutions and distinctive products, implementing strategic initiatives that enhance growth and workplace culture, facilitating processes, procedures, and other aspects of our operations that directly affect the Bank's performance



and enrich our customers' experiences. We will continue to focus on our strategic priorities to achieve our goal and open new horizons for our customers and the banking sector in Oman."

The Bank won this award for its excellence in implementing 'Tamkeen', a strategic initiative that adopts a comprehensive transformation approach to enhance workplace culture and develop employees. It includes digital transformation and simplifying processes and procedures within the Bank by enhancing synergies between the business and operations

functions of the Bank. The initiative also aims to improve adaptation to digital developments in the sector, specifying opportunities to digitalise products and services, develop the branch network distribution mechanisms to achieve optimal efficiency and modify the digital strategy to be consistent with the digital aspirations of NBO.

As for simplifying processes and procedures, the Bank implemented the 'Lean Management' programme for more than 250 employees from various departments, providing them with the necessary capabilities to simplify multiple internal processes.

An annual calendar was also prepared to raise the level of effective participation and communication between the senior management team and employees at various levels to enhance workplace culture and employee engagement.

Additionally, workshops and lectures covering various topics were organised and presented by experts within the sector, together with a programme to reward employees.

All new MG Whale SUV Coupe arrives in Oman

MUSCAT: British-born automotive brand, MG is expanding its comprehensive range of sedans and SUVs in the Middle East as the brand kicks off 2024 with the launch of the all-new MG Whale SUV Coupe.

This sporty mid-size SUV is designed to cater to the travel requirements of younger buyers, ambitious professionals and families who reside in urban environments but are always aspiring to add a dash of adventure into their lives.

The futuristic design and the daring coupe-like silhouette of the MG Whale embody the youthful and progressive spirit of the people who live and work in the vibrant cities of the region.

The Whale-inspired details like its signature front grille and Baleen daytime running lamps help convey the playfulness,

intelligence, and grace of its namesake. Other marine-related cues include Whale-fin door mirrors and a Whale-tail spoiler and gearshift.

Additionally, traits like the two-tone glossy black roof, matte gold bumper accents, chrome dual exhaust pipes, and silver decoration add to the visual appeal of the SUV Coupe. The car also rides on stylish alloy wheels which have a large 19-inch diameter indicating its stylistic dominance over its competitors.

The SUV Coupe offers a well-laid-out, premium quality cabin that will ensure daily commutes and long journeys are quiet, hassle-free, and comfortable thanks to features like electric seat adjustments with memory seats, dual-zone air conditioning, and a power-operated panoramic sunroof.



Passengers will also be entertained and remain connected thanks to the superlative technologies and features like the 9-speaker BOSE sound system, 256-colour ambient lighting setup, and the seamlessly integrated dual 12.3-inch Curved Panoramic

Screen.

The comprehensive list of safety features includes an HD 360°surround view system and a host of active and passive safety features, electronic aids to make the journey incident-free as well as comfortable. Moreover, the MG Whale is built on a chassis

with a high-strength structure that is rated for high levels of torsional stiffness, which will provide maximum protection and a dynamic advantage.

The sleek SUV Coupe is driven by a powerful 2.0L turbocharged engine producing 231 HP and 370 Nm torque which is coupled to a reliable 8-speed automatic gearbox.

The forced-induction motor provides the torque necessary to transport five passengers and their luggage swiftly and efficiently, while the low-displacement configuration aided by the 8 speeds of the modern transmission helps minimise fuel consumption.

Tom Lee, Managing Director of MG Motor's Middle East operations, commented: "MG's campaign to deliver great value SUVs continues with the launch of our all-new Whale model. The MG Whale will be appreciated

by those who are progressive and believe in self-expression.

The emotive design language draws cues from the whale to reflect power and grace in its lines. It also offers an exceptional list of comfort options with an affordable package to cater to the demands and needs of our customers in the Middle East." All-new MG Whale models will also benefit from the brand's acclaimed six-year/200,000 km warranty.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked, "MG is demonstrating its progressiveness in terms of features and quality, while also recognising the specific needs of customers in the Oman. The newly introduced MG Whale stands out as a sporty and urban mid-size SUV tailored for our diverse audience segments."



Aramco CEO predicts tighter oil markets, sees Red Sea risks



DAVOS: Global oil markets will cope with Red Sea disruptions in the short run, although prolonged attacks by the Ansar Allah on ships would lead to a shortage of tankers due to longer voyages and a supply delay, the CEO of Saudi oil giant Aramco said.

Amin Nasser (**pictured**) said he expected the oil market to tighten after consumers depleted stocks by 400 million barrels in the last two years, which left Opec's spare capacity as the main source of additional supply to meet rising demand.

Attacks by the Ansar Allah on ships in the Red Sea have forced many companies to divert cargoes around Africa.

The Ansar Allah say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians during Israel's ongoing war with Gaza.

"If it's in the short term, tankers might be available... But if it's longer term, it might be a problem," Nasser said in an interview on the sidelines of this week's World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos.

"There will be a need for more tankers and they are going to have to take a longer journey." Container vessels have been pausing or diverting from the Red Sea that leads to the Suez Canal, the fastest route from Asia to Europe, where about 12 per cent of world shipping passes.

The alternative route around South Africa's Cape of Good Hope adds 10-14 days to the journey. Aramco can bypass the Bab al Mandab strait near Yemen, from where the Ansar Allah launch attacks, via a pipeline connecting its eastern oil facilities with its western coast and giving it quicker access to the Suez Canal, Nasser said.

Some oil products might have to sail around Africa, Nasser said, adding that he does not expect the Ansar Allah to attack Aramco's facilities again as a result of peace talks between Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Nasser said he saw oil demand at 104 million barrels a day (bpd) in 2024, meaning growth of roughly 1.5 million bpd after growing by 2.6 million bpd in 2023.

And demand growth, combined with low stocks, will help tighten the market further, he added.

Nasser said global stocks have shrunk to the low end of a five-year average after consumers depleted offshore and inland reserves by 400 million barrels over the past two years.

"The only card available today is the spare capacity, which is around 3.5 per cent globally. And as demand picks up, you will erode that spare capacity unless there is additional supply," — **Reuters**

Nama Water inaugurates commercial operation of Al Ghubra temporary station

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Aiming to guarantee the continuity of water supply to citizens and resident subscribers, Nama Water Services announced the commercial launch of Al Ghubra temporary station. The newly launched station can process up to 20,000 cubic metres per day.

Elaborating on that, Eng Abdullah bin Mohammed al Naimi, Chief Operation and Maintenance Officer at Nama Water Services, said: "The launch of Al Ghubra temporary station is intended to support the existing station, cover the current increasing water needs in Muscat Governorate during peak water demand."

"This is in line with the company's commitment to ensuring water security by strengthening the existing station to meet the water needs in the region and keep pace with urban expansion in terms of residential, commercial, or government facilities," added Eng Al Naimi.

Highlighting the phases of the commercial operations, Eng Abdullah al Naimi noted: "The commercial operation of Al Ghubra temporary station will continue for five years until the completion of the construction of Al Ghubra station (3), which is still in the early stages of construction. It is an independent station from Al Ghubra station (2).

"The expansion of Oman's water infrastructure network underscores the government's commitment to long-term water



The launch of Al Ghubra temporary station is intended to support the existing station, cover the current increasing water needs in Muscat Governorate during peak water demand.

ENG ABDULLAH AL NAIMI

Chief Operation and Maintenance Officer

security and its role as a critical driver of urban and economic prosperity."

Eng Al Naimi reiterated Nama Water Services' commitment to the smooth delivery of water services to all subscribers, ensuring that they receive a continuous, reliable and sustainable water supply.

Nama Water Services is moving forward in achieving its strategic objectives and contributing to sustainable development based on sound scientific and methodological foundations and in line with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040. The company's strategic plan (2023-2027) envisions a set of



future objectives that ensure the availability of safe drinking water and sanitation services at the best economical cost.

The objectives are aimed at attaining the optimal utilisation of water resources while concurrently safeguarding them from depletion and pollution, in line with the needs and rights of current and future generations.

The company is committed to providing water to its subscribers and working to align production capacity with the anticipated demand from the beneficiaries of its services. It also seeks to make its overall system flexible to ensure the continuity of water supply.

Mohammed al Hinai, Director of Al Ghubra temporary station, stressed the operational readiness of the station according to the planned capacity of 20,000 cubic metres per day. He highlighted that the station serves as a backup

for the existing station and ensures that sufficient water is available to residents in the area.

"The station operates using reverse osmosis, a system used in many countries around the world. The mechanism of this technique is summarised as transferring water from the highest concentrated solution to the lowest concentrated solution through a semi-permeable membrane by pressure to purify the water by passing it through a number of stages in which water is separated from other salts and minerals," Al Hinai explained.

"The station, which was recently operated, is capable of producing the specified quantity and preventing any shortage in water supply in the region."

He reassured and concluded that the operational efficiency of transferring water between the existing stations and the interconnection between

desalination plants would avoid any shortage in the water supply to Muscat Governorate.

Nama Water Services provides its services to more than 4 million people through the distribution of water, collection of wastewater, transportation, treatment, disposal and supply of treated water. Its total subscriber base exceeds 896,000 subscribers for both water and wastewater networks.

The company is achieving a steady increase in water production to keep pace with population growth and increasing demand for water. In 2022, more than 444 million cubic metres of drinking water were produced, an increase of more than 4 per cent.

The company primarily relies on desalinated seawater to provide drinking water and reduce reliance on groundwater, aligning with the government stipulations in this context.

Oman emerges as the most affordable tax-free country for relocation in 2024

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The Sultanate of Oman has garnered significant attention as the most affordable tax-free country for individuals seeking to relocate, according to a report by expat insurance firm William Russell.

With its thriving economy, attractive lifestyle and tax advantages, Oman has become an appealing destination for many expatriates looking to establish a new home.

The study conducted by William Russell analysed several factors, including cost of one-way economy flight from London, cost of one-way flight from New York City, cost to buy apartment per square metre, cost to rent apartment per month, average monthly net salary (after tax), cost of utilities per month, and monthly costs (single person). Oman excelled in all these areas, making it an ideal choice for expatriates seeking financial stability and a high standard of living.

One of the primary attractions of relocating to Oman is its tax-free status. The country boasts a favourable tax regime, with no personal income tax on individuals and businesses. The



The report said Oman is the cheapest country to purchase or rent an apartment.

This advantage allows expatriates to keep a larger portion of their earnings, making Oman an enticing option for professionals seeking to maximise their financial resources.

According to the report, Oman earns a relocation score of 7.92 out of 10. A one-way economy ticket from London to Muscat will cost expats around \$227. Meanwhile, a one-way ticket from New York City to Muscat will cost around \$492.

Furthermore, Oman's cost of living proves to be highly affordable, making it an attractive prospect for individuals looking to stretch their incomes.

A c c o m m o d a t i o n, transportation and consumer goods are comparatively less expensive than in other popular expat destinations. The



availability of affordable housing options, coupled with a wide range of amenities and recreational activities, contributes to a comfortable and enjoyable lifestyle for residents.

The report said on average, the Sultanate of Oman is the cheapest country to purchase or rent an apartment in, as well as being the most affordable country in terms of monthly costs (excluding rent). It is also the third cheapest country for monthly utility bills, costing around \$103.

In an e-mail interview with the *Observer*, William Cooper (**pictured**), Marketing Director at William Russell, London, said, "The problem with many tax-free countries is that the cost of living is exceptionally high. Monaco and the Bahamas, for example, are simply not affordable for ordinary people who are looking to optimise their income."

As for the Sultanate of Oman, Cooper said, "Oman stands out as a tax-free country, with good links to other major countries and a good quality of life on offer. Expats seem to agree. In the past few years, we've seen a 400-per cent increase in quotes for our insurance products from expats relocating to Oman."

The overall quality of life in Oman is exceptional, with a safe and welcoming environment for expatriates. The country's rich cultural heritage, stunning natural landscapes and vibrant expat community contribute to a fulfilling and enjoyable expatriate experience.

Kuwait came in 2nd with 6.49 points, followed by Bahrain with 6.36 points, UAE came in 4th with 5.84 and Brunei with 5.58 points.

Completing the top ten include Maldives, Qatar, Bahamas, Monaco and Cayman Islands.

OPAZ signs memorandum of collaboration with OQ



MUSCAT: A Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) was signed by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and OQ with the aim of enhancing and expanding their collaboration in the areas of environment, health, safety and security.

Additionally, the agreement sets goals for sustainable development, zero carbon neutrality, and the establishment of an institutional framework for the exchange of information and experience in these domains.

The agreement was signed by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Deeb, OPAZ Deputy Chairman, and Ashraf bin Hamad al Mamari, Chief Executive People, Technology and Culture in OQ.

The signing of the MoC seeks to further public interest in integrated environmental management while also achieving the national strategic objectives of the Zero Neutrality Plan 2050.

To that end, OPAZ and OQ will collaborate more closely, exchange knowledge and insights, and create avenues for communication in the fields of environment, health, safety and security.

Additionally, EHS experts will get together on a regular basis to talk about possible problems and come up with workable solutions.

Sincere efforts required to bolster Omani industry

Among the issues recently reviewed by the Council of Ministers is the issue of the national product and the need to pay attention at all administrative, technical, and diplomatic levels as well.

Industry is considered one of the important economic sectors in the state's economic diversification policy, which everyone is working to increase its presence in the various Omani governorates.

It is considered one of the foundations through which more job opportunities can be provided for citizens in the future, localised, and integrated among them, in addition to developing entrepreneurs' projects in this sector.



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This will reduce the foreign import bill, and dependency on other countries, and thus lead to improving and increasing the country's trade balance surpluses.

What we want to raise in this regard relates to some of the challenges, problems and obstacles facing industrialists in marketing and selling their products to government private institutions and companies.

In this context, some Omani industrialists believe that despite the directives of the relevant agencies to government institutions and the private sector to embrace the national product, the problem lies in the application and implementation process.

One of the Omani industrialists indicated in his complaint to us in a private message requesting that its contents be communicated to state officials, in which he said a state-owned company recently awarded a tender to purchase paper tissues and paper cups of all kinds from some Gulf companies and factories, ignoring the offers submitted to similar Omani companies.

By purchasing these products, it did not consider the right of preference that should be given to Omani industrial companies at a rate of 10 per cent, as is the practice in procurements.

Industrialists in Oman believe that the state-owned company in question did not bother to contact the Omani bidders to negotiate the prices and explore whether they could match the quotes offered by the external

bidders.

An industrialist in Oman believes that employment salaries in this sector are large because of the implementation of the "Omanisation" policy, contrary to what is followed in neighbouring countries, which are given the freedom to choose and employ cheap workers.

This requires that government institutions and private ones in Oman submit their offers and purchase their products from local factories in the first place.

Rebuffing Omani products, especially by a state-owned company, will not contribute to achieving the goals of the vision to which we aspire.

It is also a shame for customers of that company to patronise product from another country when similar national products are available locally at competitive prices and with superior quality as well. Correcting this path is important to improve the industrial conditions in the country.

Here we refer to the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the concerned authorities regarding the necessity of preparing a national policy for local content with the aim of reducing imports and increasing exports and adopting the "National Policy for Local Content (2024-2030)" which aims to create a national system responsible for organising and follow up on local content in all sectors, with the need to motivate all consumers to choose Omani products.

The ECB should change three bad habits

The European Central Bank too often finds itself "behind the curve" of events, and we believe the blame lies with its decision-making process, rather than its institutional setup or personnel.

As ECB President Christine Lagarde revealed at the December 14, 2023, press conference, "We did not discuss rate cuts at all... between hike and cut, there's a whole plateau, a whole beach of hold."

This statement was not just peculiar, but unhelpful. At the time Lagarde uttered it, six-month annualised eurozone core inflation (excluding food and energy prices) was at 2.5 per cent, based on ECB data, having fallen for several months, to the surprise of everyone.

While virtually all ECB Governing Council members now argue that monetary policy is restrictive, the totality of inflation and activity data – hard and soft, coincident and leading – ought to have invited a discussion about whether it is too restrictive.

Lagarde's comment was nonetheless instructive, because it shows that the ECB is anchoring the timing of a potential rate cut to the timing of the last hike – that is, to the past.

The implication is that the ECB's decision-making process is not only too slow (outside of crises) but also excessively backward-looking.

Many recent examples support this conclusion. One was the late start to the recent tightening cycle. The ECB's net asset purchases ended only in June 2022, and it began its hiking cycle only in July 2022.

Another example was the ECB's surprising decision to raise its policy rates in September 2023, when inflation had already been falling fast for several months.

And yet another was its announcement, on December 14, 2023, that it would reduce the reinvestment of its Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program (PEPP) portfolio during the second half of 2024, before discontinuing reinvestments at the end of the year.

There are three reasons for the ECB's inertia: an excessive focus on reaching a broad consensus within the Governing Council; the disproportionate weight



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European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium. – Reuters

given to lagging data; and the "built-in" persistence of policy.

Lagarde's consensus-focused approach is partly making up for her predecessor Mario Draghi's tenure, which left the ECB unusually divided, and she deserves credit for repairing those divisions rather than papering them over.

But monetary-policy views across the ECB's Governing Council often vary widely, owing to economic divergences and different attitudes toward inflation across eurozone member states.

Under such circumstances, consensus-focused decision-making will consistently come at the expense of timeliness and effectiveness.

The ECB also seems to have downgraded the importance of forecasts in its decisions. Again, this adjustment is understandable given the large forecasting errors of recent years.

But "naive" forecasts based on coincident indicators or past trends are unlikely to fare any better; it is a classic case of fighting the last war. Consider the ECB's obsession with declining core inflation and wage growth.

Unless there are clear signs of a wage-price spiral (there are currently none), wages – especially negotiated wages – are among the most lagging data in the inflation process.

Finally, the ECB's policy measures tend to be very persistent. Its interest-rate decisions and asset purchases regularly feature extensive time-dependent forward guidance, sometimes extending years ahead.

Such policy persistence was sometimes essential in the past – as with the original asset-purchase programme launched in 2015, or the initial series of very long-term refinancing operations. But when conditions change quickly, policy persistence sets the ECB up for a trade-off between time-dependent forward guidance and appropriate state-dependent policymaking.

Taken together, these three factors have put the ECB structurally behind the curve. Fortunately, there are three tweaks it can make to arrive at timelier policy decisions. First and foremost, ECB decisions should be anchored in forward-looking information. Of course,

the future is uncertain, so this approach is necessarily probabilistic. Given the rigidity of the ECB's formal macroeconomic projection process, it would benefit from the inclusion of alternative forecasts, scenarios, and qualitative discussions of future trends.

The ECB already produces a lot of high-quality, relevant analysis that fits the bill.

ECB Chief Economist Philip Lane, among others, was early in presenting work – at the ECB Watchers conference in March 2023 – that suggested eurozone inflation could fall quickly. The ECB also now analyses inflation trends in impressive, and appropriately disaggregated, detail.

Second, Lagarde should re-prioritise timeliness relative to the breadth of the consensus achieved or when policy was last changed.

Here, too, there are promising signs that a change could be made relatively easily.

ECB Executive Board member Isabel Schnabel recently softened her own position on additional rate hikes, quoting the famous quip from John Maynard Keynes: "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?"

Third, time-dependent forward guidance should be limited to cases where its merits are evident and essential. In uncertain times, such cases will be rare.

There is nothing stopping the ECB from making this change.

It sometimes acts very quickly and decisively indeed, such as when rolling out the PEPP in March 2020, when overriding its extreme forward guidance for asset purchases in March 2022, and when announcing the Transmission Protection Instrument in July 2022.

In those situations, purpose trumped consensus and pre-existing guidance. But an extreme situation is an unnecessarily high bar for timely decisions. The economic outlook remains fluid, including for inflation globally and in the eurozone.

More surprises surely await. Uncertain times call for leadership and agility – the willingness and ability to respond flexibly and appropriately to unforeseen changes in circumstances, even when there is no immediate crisis at hand.

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China sees one of its worst years of growth since 1990

BEIJING: China's economy last year grew at one of its slowest rates in more than three decades, official figures showed, as it was battered by a crippling property crisis, sluggish consumption and global turmoil.

The figures were in line with expectations and even beat Beijing's target but will likely pile fresh pressure on officials to unveil more stimulus measures to kickstart business activity and get the country's army of consumers spending again.

China's National Bureau of Statistics revealed that gross domestic product expanded 5.2 per cent to hit 126 trillion yuan (\$17.6 trillion) last year.

Markets in Asia fell on the news, with Hong Kong's exchange closing down 3.7 per cent and Shanghai off more than two per cent.

The reading is better than the three per cent recorded in 2022, when strict zero-Covid curbs destroyed activity, but marks the weakest performance since 1990, excluding the pandemic years.

While 5.2 per cent would be looked on enviously by other governments such as the United



Vehicles move along a street at Central Business District (CBD) in Beijing. — AFP

States and those in the euro zone — which each expanded around two per cent in 2022 — it is well down from the levels around six or seven per cent enjoyed in the 2010s.

After lifting its draconian

Covid measures at the end of 2022, Beijing set itself a growth target of "around five per cent" for last year.

The economy enjoyed an initial post-pandemic rebound, but ran out of steam within months

as a lack of confidence among households and businesses hit consumption.

"With investment in the property sector falling, the economy is more dependent on the manufacturing sector and

CHINA'S NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS REVEALED THAT GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT EXPANDED 5.2 PER CENT TO HIT 126 TRILLION YUAN (\$17.6 TRILLION) LAST YEAR.

service sector," Zhiwei Zhang, President and Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said in a note.

Snd Teeuwe Mevissen, China economist at Rabobank, said: "The main challenges for China continued to be the malfunctioning real estate sector and related to it low levels of private consumption."

Statistics last month showed deflation continued for the third month in a row, likely deepening consumer reluctance to spend.

And exports, historically a key growth driver, fell last year for the first time since 2016, reflecting how tensions with the United States and a stuttering global economic recovery are compounding Beijing's struggles to kickstart growth at home.

China's GDP figures remain a key source of insight into the

health of the world's second-largest economy, despite being eminently political.

Officials are due to release their growth target for 2024 in March. Between the third and fourth quarters — figures more reflective of the real-time economic situation — it only grew one per cent. And December saw retail sales — a key indicator of household spending — slow after a rebound the previous month.

Unemployment also increased slightly to 5.1 per cent — though the statistics effectively exclude millions of migrant workers from rural areas. Official statistics also showed China's population decline accelerated in 2023, extending a downward streak after more than six decades of growth as the country battles a looming demographic crisis.

"What China saw last year was possibly the most disappointing post-Covid recovery imaginable," Shehzad Qazi, managing director of China Beige Book, a consultancy firm that tracks the Chinese economy, said. "The economy limped to calendar's end," he said. — AFP

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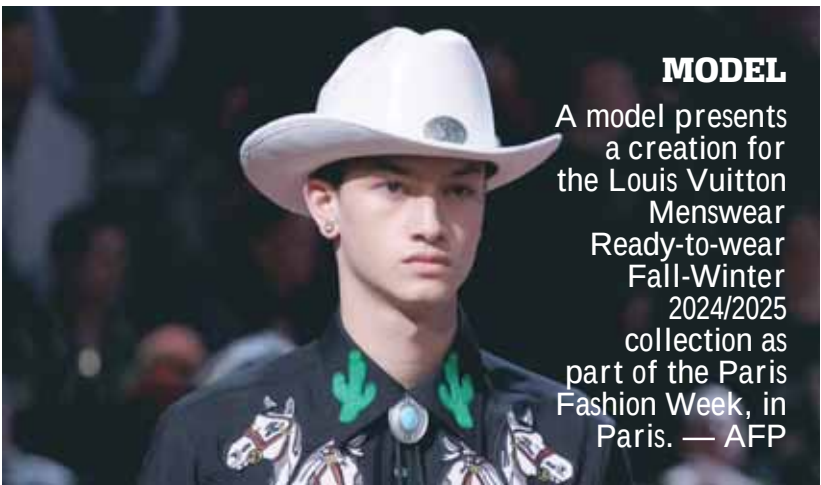
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MODEL
A model presents a creation for the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2024/2025 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. — AFP

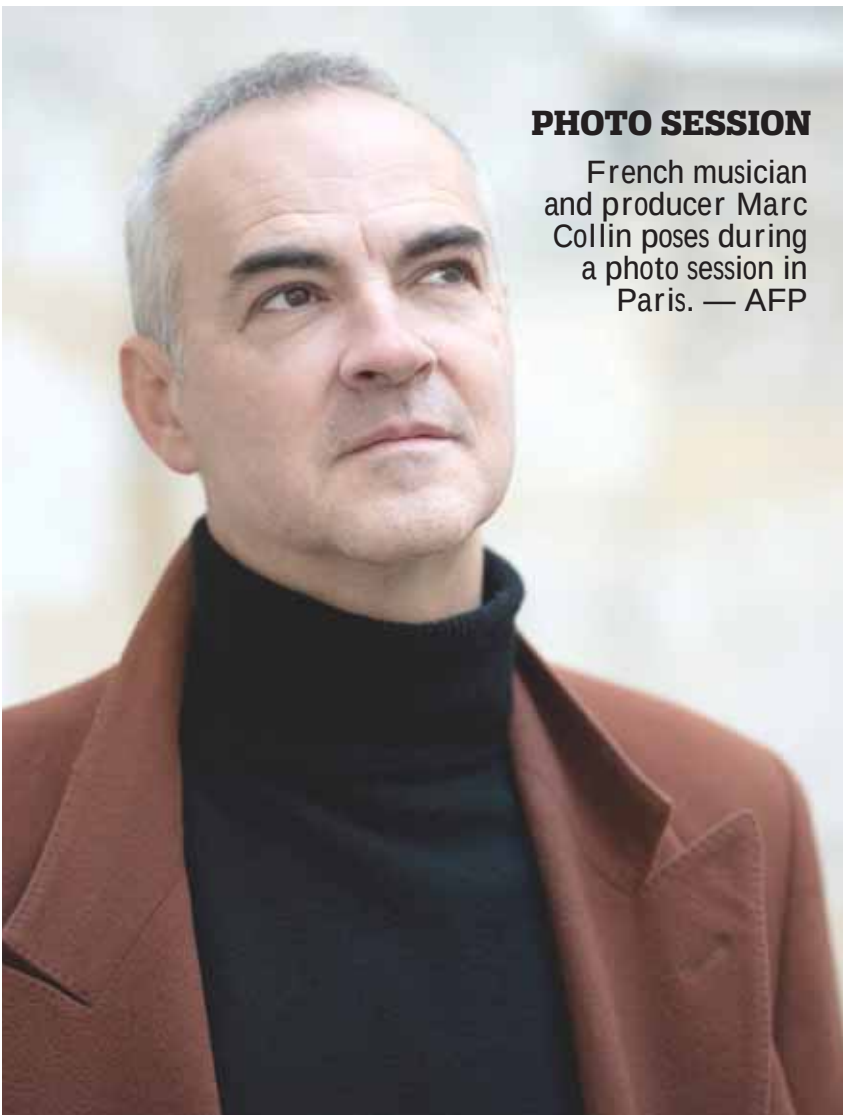
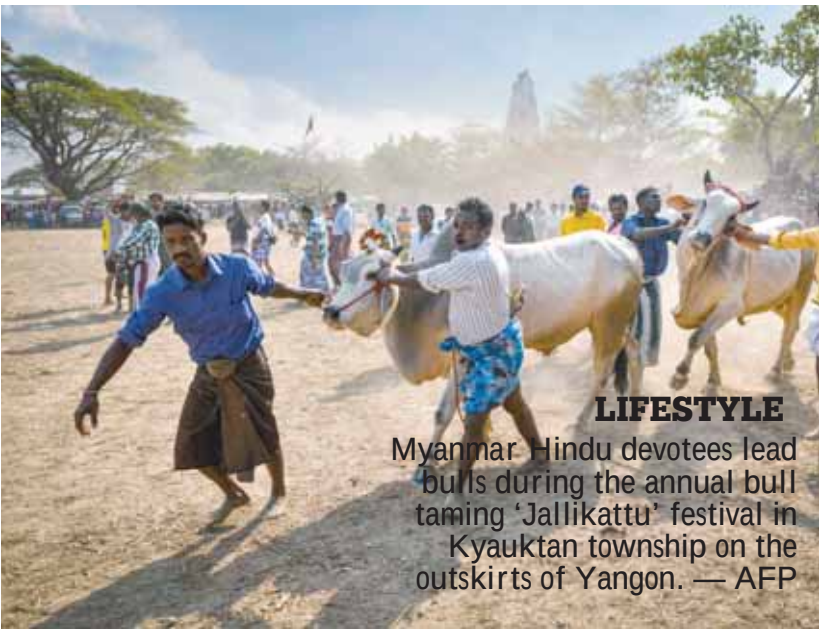


PHOTO SESSION
French musician and producer Marc Collin poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE
Myanmar Hindu devotees lead bulls during the annual bull taming 'Jallikattu' festival in Kyauktan township on the outskirts of Yangon. — AFP



MUSIC
Elton John gestures as he presents the Musical Excellence Award for Bernie Taupin during the 38th Annual Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony in Brooklyn, New York, US. — REUTERS

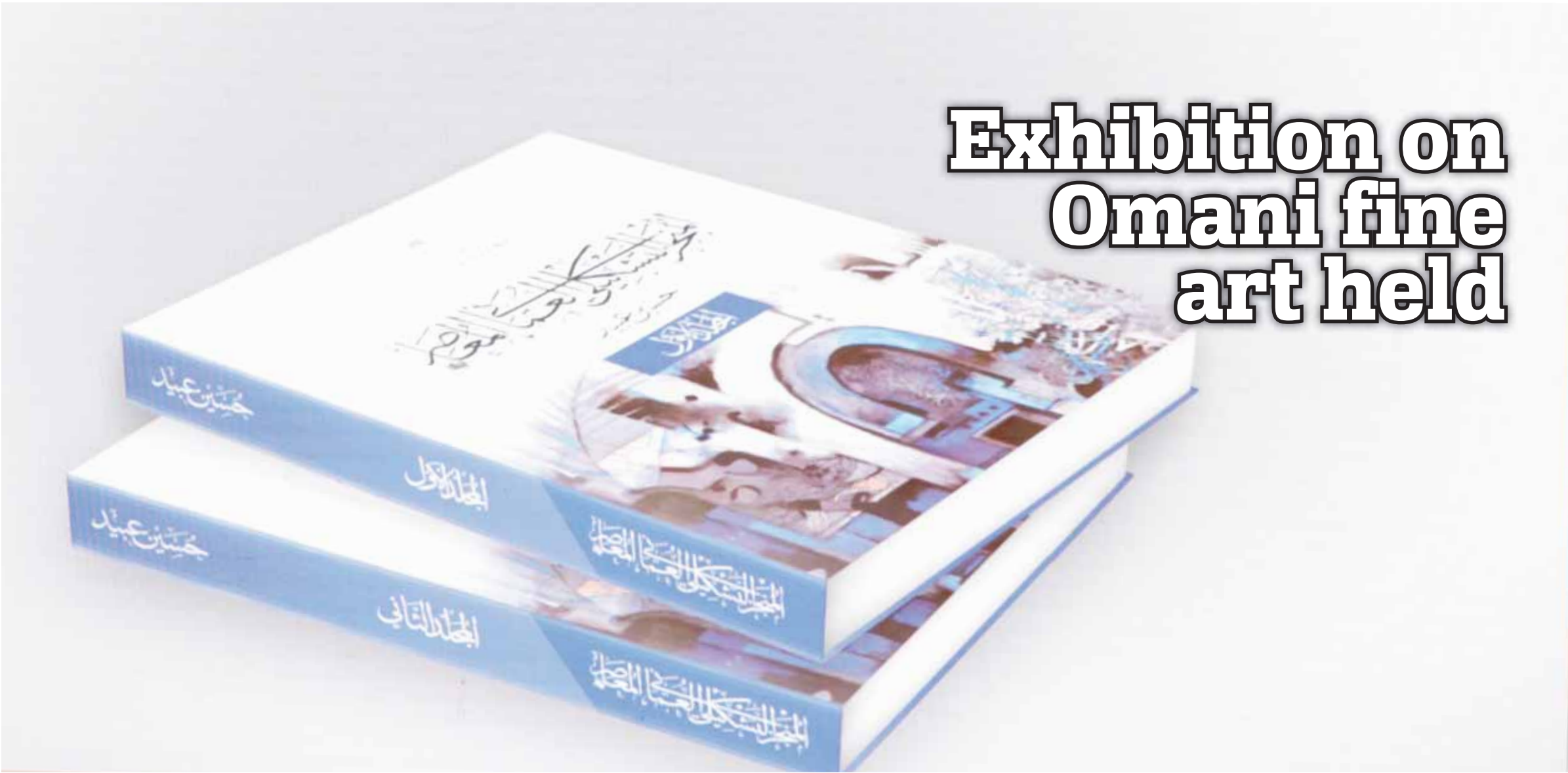


FASHION
A still image from the sets of 'Amerikatsi' in Armenia, 2020. — REUTERS

art & life

THURSDAY | JANUARY 18, 2024 | RAJAB 6, 1445 AH

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Exhibition on Omani fine art held

STAFF REPORTER

THE 111 FINE ART Exhibition opened at Sablat Rouzana hall in the Airport Heights under the auspices of Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, recently.

The opening ceremony began with a visual presentation of the event which coincided with the Sultanate of Oman's celebrations of the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to the throne. The presentation was lauded by the audience and was distinguished by feelings of loyalty and patriotism to the Sultanate of Oman and His Majesty the Sultan.

Following the opening ceremony, the chief guest along with the attendees toured the exhibition which contained over 90 artworks by twenty-five artists from the founding generation of the Omani fine art movement who appeared in the 1970s as well as the subsequent generations representing various artistic trends and schools.

The following artists took



part in the exhibition: Anwar Sonia, Mohammad al Sayegh, Maryam al Zadjali, Hussein Obaid, Hussein al Hajri, Saud al Hunaini, Hassan Mir,



Abdullah al Hunaini, Khamis al Hunaini, Abdel Nasser al Sayegh, Mohammad Fadel, Mohammad Mahdi, Idris al Hooti, Said al Alawi, Alia al



Farsi, Abdul Karim al Maimani, Naila al Maamari, Hafsa al Tamimi, Abdul Rahim al Hooti, Samia al Gharibi, Juma al Harthy and Sami al



Siyabi. Artworks by the late artists: Ayoub Malang, Mohammad Nizam, and Musa Omar, were also on display. Sayyid Said bin Sultan al

Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, expressed his happiness for presiding over the exhibition.

He said: "This exhibition comes as a culmination of what the march of fine art over the past decades was embodied by the generation of founders who contributed to laying the first building blocks for Omani fine art, and in confirmation of the status of fine art in all its forms and directions in the Sultanate of Oman."

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, expressed his happiness for presiding over the exhibition which, he said, embodies the march of fine art over the past five decades by the founding generations of fine art who laid the foundation of the fine art movement in the Sultanate of Oman.

A book entitled 'Achievements of Contemporary Omani Fine Art', which closely documents the journey of the Omani fine art movement, was released during the event.



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Telugu community celebrates 'Sankranti Sambaralu'

THE TELUGU COMMUNITY in Oman celebrated 'Sankranti Sambaralu' in Muscat last week at Al Falaj Hotel, in the presence of veteran actor Dr Murali Mohan.

The event was orchestrated through a collaboration between Royal King Holding, represented by Renny Johnson and Prasanth Goud, and Chiru Mega Youth Force (Telugu Community of Oman), represented by Ramdas Chandaka along with his team members.

The Chiru Mega Youth Force Muscat (CMYF), a Telugu social group in Oman, is a non-profit organisation engaged in humanitarian activities in the Sultanate of Oman, providing social services. CMYF has organised numerous blood donation camps at the Bausher Blood Bank, and has received awards from the Ministry of Health.

An impressive turnout of over 1,200 people attended the cultural celebration, where Dr Murali Mohan honoured blood donors and volunteers.

Tollywood actresses Ester Valerie Noronha, Latha Chowdary, Rajitha, Madhumani, Pinky, Swarna Latha, and Sonia Chowdary, along with singers and the D-Dance team, entertained the audiences. Singers Hanuman, Swati Satyabhama and Mounika Yadav sang various film songs, while the famous comedy track by 'Jabardast' Sudhakar mesmerised the audience.

The D-Dance team, led by Govind, showcased an extraordinary dance performances, and the event was skilfully anchored by Madhavi Reddy.

Ventriloquist M SR Naidu from Andhra Pradesh delighted both children and adults with his performance.

HONEY BADGER

Honey badger makes rare appearance in Al Wusta Governorate

AN OMANI CITIZEN from the Wilayat of Mahout, Governorate of Al Wusta, spotted a honey badger, a rare appearance for this species in the area.

A honey badger (also known as ratel) measures 10 to 30cm in length and weighs 5 to 15 kilograms. It gets its food (honey) with the help of a bird called 'honeyguide'. It can live about 7-8 years in the wild and up to 20 years in captivity.

A honey badger, which inhabits meadows and dry lands alike, exists in Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates, as well as countries in Africa and South and West Asia. — ONA



MONKEY

Giant ancient ape species extinction linked to climate change

AN ANCIENT SPECIES of great ape was likely driven to extinction hundreds of thousands of years ago when climate change put their favourite fruits out of reach during dry seasons, scientists reported in study published in 'Nature'.

The species, Gigantopithecus blacki, which once lived in southern parts of the People's Republic of China, represents the largest great ape known to scientists—standing 3

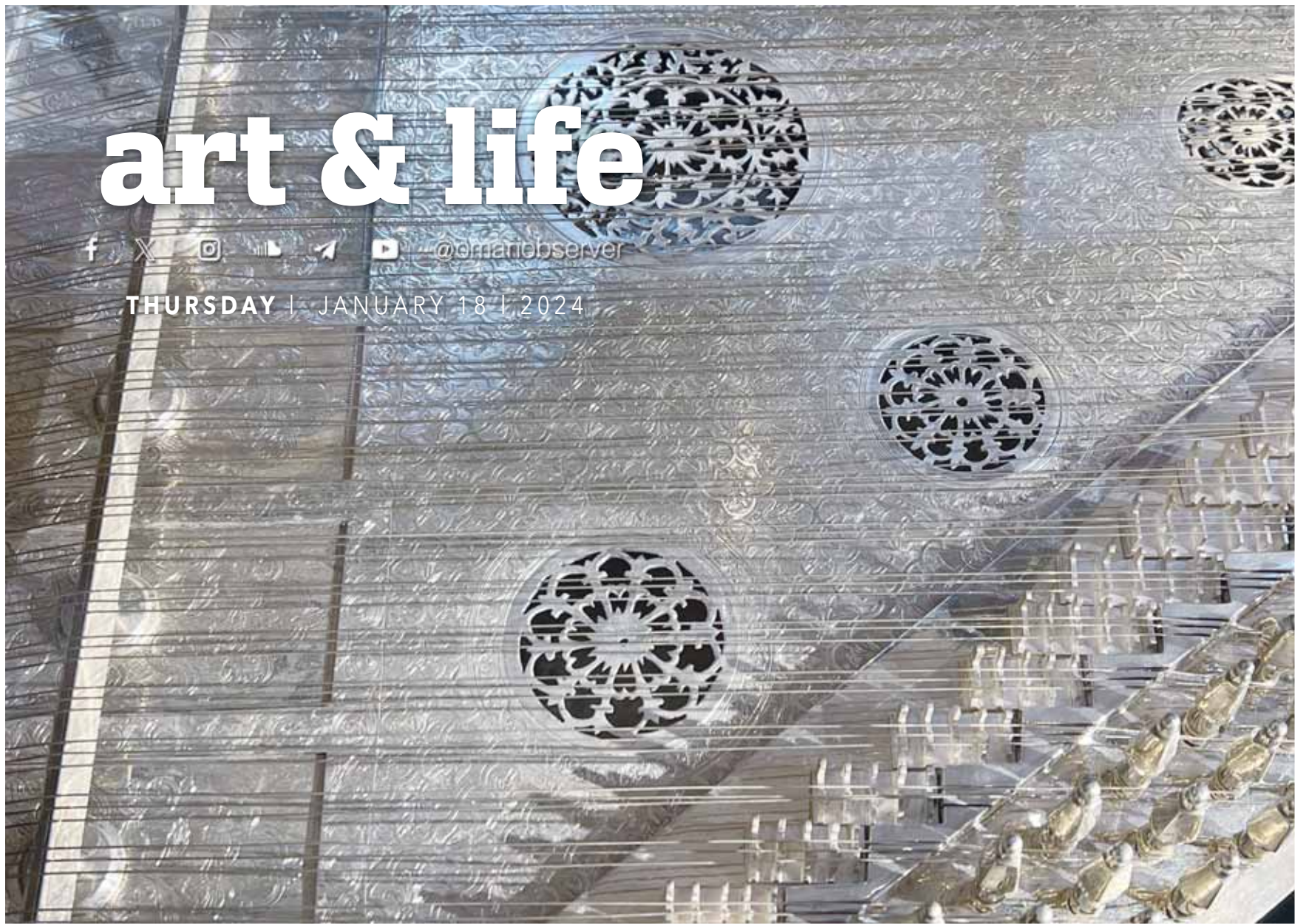


meters tall and weighing up to 295 kilograms.

The study suggests that the ape's size became a vulnerability as its inability to climb trees in search of food during dry seasons contributed to their decline.

The giant apes survived for around 2 million years, primarily consuming fruits and flowers, until a changing environment led to decreased fruit production around 600,000 years ago.

The species likely went extinct between 215,000 and 295,000 years ago. — ONA



OPERA

Explore the Musical Exhibition... a must visit at Royal Opera

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The 'Musical Exhibition' at Royal Opera House Muscat is an experience which is not to be missed by visitors.

Located at the Royal Opera House and open from 10 to 6 all days, the exhibition offers a captivating journey into the rich tapestry of music, weaving together technical science, cultural origins and the diverse sounds of Oman. The immersive experiences, from the rhythmic storms echoing the country's natural landscapes to the interactive exploration of musical concepts, provide a profound appreciation for the art form.

With a blend of informative displays, interactive installations and a diverse array of musical instruments, the exhibition transcends mere observation. The exhibition presents an inspiring insight into many aspects of music, from its technical aspects to its philosophy, origin, cultural contexts and varieties.

The first rooms are free and include a library with books on music, art, history and architecture for both adults and children, as well as exquisite artifacts such as the stunning silver-plated instruments made in 1995 for late Sultan Qaboos, and the Bösendorfer Chopin piano with a pyramid mahogany finish, made in 2000 for the 150th anniversary of Chopin's death.

A nominal fee of RO 3.5 is being charged before venturing into another world that presents you with an immersive experience, the first in Oman.

Walking into the musical room next is an immersive experience, beginning with the sounds of Oman from its oceans, shores, mangroves, aflaj, deserts to its mountains, recorded by the team. First, a six-minute immersive experience and a chance to encounter the sounds of Oman.

This audio-visual journey is an immersive experience. Feeling the sounds resonate from all around you as the ocean lights up on all four walls and the rains begin, making you feel as if you were in a real



thunderstorm; the screens almost cracking from its fierceness before the storm breaks into a sound of birds, and the footage changes to transport you across the wadis and aflaj of Oman with the road of the ocean before going up over the mountains and into the desert. Enter the dunes, the infinite and golden, the sound of sand flying in the air and all around to the theme of rhythm and a harmony made utilising all of these sounds of Oman, including the local chants and folk songs.

As explained, "Before humans communicated with language, the world around us was in harmony — a natural symphony. Experience a journey from the high peaks of Al Hajar Mountains to the depths of the sea in Oman, through the mangroves of the shore to the vast Al Sharqiya desert sands."

The next room explains science, pulse, sound waves and vibration, timbre, with interac-

tive installations exploring these concepts. Explaining, "sound is a natural phenomenon and without it there is no music."

With information and observations that make you contemplate and understand in greater depths the essence of sound and harmony in sound (music), it explains, "The first rhythm we feel is the pulse of our mother's heartbeat" and gives the visitor the experience of seeing and hearing our own heartbeat with an impressive machine that spans almost the length of the room, inviting you to grip both handles as advised to see as well as hear your heartbeat move across the installation.

From a science pod that lets

you discover the great pioneers of music to discovering and listening to different types of scales from quarter tone, Western chromatic to the Phrygian Mode and Maqam Hijaz, everything is experiential, much of it is interactive. All of it is incredibly informative.

You'll learn the science and making behind stringed, woodwind, piano, and other instrument types; you'll even look at the mechanism of how a piano functions. Immerse yourself in the story of our beloved oud and explore the significance of community, emotions, and our lives' stories in relation to music alongside its potential to unite and promote collaboration.

The Musical Exhibition is definitely a place to visit for inspiration and information and a wonderful ambiance. You'll leave with a new and more informed appreciation for music and its significance in our lives.

THE CHANGING WORLD



Shaddad al Musalmy

'Young age' no longer means a healthy life

AGE, IN TODAY'S world, is not the reason behind several health disorders that many are experiencing. Be it the elderly or the youth, the majority are struggling with one condition or the other.

Gone are the days when joint pains were a story we would hear from our elders and when I say elders, I draw a line that crosses the 60 years plus.

I imagine it as two cars racing. The first represents years of age and the latter represents health issues. In the early times, the years of age would be on the frontline while leaving behind health issues by probably not more than ten years.

This means a sixty-year-old adult would look and feel like a forty-year-old. But, at this moment in life, health issues are very much ahead of the actual age, implying that a thirty-year-old adult may own health issues that normally occur at an older age. Here, I mean almost a twenty-year gap difference.

Knees, hips, shoulders, and other joint problems are becoming increasingly common.

'Arthritis' has become a very popular yet serious condition. To put it in simple terms, arthritis means inflammation of the joint areas. Trust me, as simple as it may sound, it is not a piece of cake.

After struggling with intense leg pain and sleepless nights and days without knowing where the actual pain originated from, the queen of my house stormed into the government hospital emergency room where she was diagnosed with osteoarthritis.

This is when she started digging deep into having more knowledge about arthritis particularly osteoarthritis, which is a form of arthritis that mostly attacks hips, knees and hands.

It is when the cartilage and protective tissues in between the underlying joints wear and tear out hence making movements extremely difficult with severe pain, and cracking-like sounds because it is now a bone-on-bone friction without the cartilage or gel that is naturally found in between.

Name all the ugly pains you can imagine here, in fact, her doctor was surprised to see that in her late thirties, which according to the doctor is much way younger for her to have such health issues that are as common in the sixty-plus as he claimed.

There are a million words if not more that I would like to elaborate or express further on what she went through but unfortunately, the space here is too small for me to write it all down. I will share some of the best parts of her journey that led her to where she is today.

Arthritis is a battle that you as the carrier have to fight and deal with on your own. It takes extreme courage, positivity, self-love and motivation to fight arthritis because you will not stay immobile or on painkillers forever.

You need to fight and defeat it by changing your lifestyle. Eating a healthy diet and exercising with arthritic friendly exercises and routine can take you there as it took her. Maintaining a healthy body weight will also help you intensely.

A weight reduction by at least four kilograms only off your body will make your pain less by at least thirty per cent. Keeping up with physiotherapy is a great way too. I am not a doctor but I learned all this through physiotherapy sessions on YouTube channels with experienced manual physiotherapists because it's something I told her she had to do daily since getting a daily appointment at a government hospital is not possible, especially for out-patients.

With all said, I learnt that arthritis is a uniform that many are wearing now regardless of age. I have also heard stories from people who are much younger than she is. In fact, talking to her doctor, I came to know that such a problem is more common now.

There are moments my queen thought she would never stand or walk again normally, moments that she would cry and become emotional due to pain. Her muscles were so weak that she could not go on with her normal daily routines, but today she can happily testify that if she could fight it her own way, why can't anyone?

Today, she walks freely, runs her errands normally, and smiles more. Arthritis does not heal fully as doctors say but by paying attention to your body and maintaining a healthy lifestyle style, you will feel much better.

Shaddad al Musalmy is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT shadadm75@gmail.com