

HM greetings conveyed to Iran

Mohammad Mokhber, Acting President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Monday. Sayyid Badr conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to His Eminence Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to the acting president along with his good wishes for the leadership and the Islamic Republic of Iran for goodness and development. **DETAILS ON P2**

SUNRISE - 05:21 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:55 AM

DHUHR - 12:09 PM

ASR - 03:29 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:52 PM

ISHA - 08:13 PM



His Majesty issues Royal Decree

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued Royal Decree No 27/2024 transferring “Oman Centre for Traditional Music” from the Diwan of Royal Court to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Article (1) states that Oman Centre for Traditional Music shall be transferred from the Diwan of Royal Court to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Article (2) stipulates that all properties, origins, rights, obligations and assets of Oman Centre for Traditional Music (Diwan of Royal Court) shall be transferred to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Article (3) states that employees of Oman Centre for Traditional Music shall be transferred to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, along with their financial grades. Article (4) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions. Article (5) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

OMAN CONDEMNS ISRAELI AGGRESSION

HORROR

AT ISRAELI STRIKE ON RAFAH

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman expressed its strong condemnation and rejection of the persistent Israeli aggression in the Palestinian Gaza Strip, and the recent targeting of a camp housing displaced people in Rafah.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Monday, Oman pointed out that the heinous acts being committed by the occupying state require deterrent international intervention.

“It is high time that the global community imposed sanctions on Israel due to the fact that its criminal practices constitute a clear violation of international law, contravene international humanitarian law and violate values of human dignity,” stressed Oman in its statement.

Meanwhile, the UN human rights chief voiced “horror” at a deadly Israeli air strike on a displacement camp in Rafah in the south of the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, demanding “accountability”.



“The images from the camp are horrific and point to no apparent change in the methods and means of warfare used by Israel that have already led to so many civilian deaths,” Volker Turk said in a statement.

Israel has faced a wave of international condemnation over Sunday’s strike on the Al Hashash area in Rafah, which according to Gaza officials killed 45 people when the strike set off a fire that ripped through a tent city for displaced Palestinians. **SEE ALSO P6**

FAREWELL TO KENYAN AMBASSADOR



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office Amina Ali Abdullah, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty.

Digital economy investments at RO 1bn



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday presided over the launch of the 33rd edition of Comex Global Technology Show 2024.

The four-day event, taking place at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, brings more than 100 local and international firms under one roof.

Speaking about digital investment, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, said that the National Programme for Digital Economy seeks to raise the digital economy’s contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) from 2 per cent now to 10 per cent by 2040. Dr Al Shaithani pointed out that the volume of investments in the communications and information technology sector since the announcement of the National Programme for the Digital Economy stood at more than RO 1 billion. **SEE P13**



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HM greets Ethiopia and Azerbaijan

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sahle-Work Zewde of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, on her country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Sahle-Work Zewde.

His Majesty also wished the people of Ethiopia further development and

growth. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Ilham Heydar Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan on his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Aliyev.

CONGRATULATIONS TO PRESIDENT LUIS
His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Luis Rodolfo Abinader of the Dominican Republic on being re-elected for a new presidential term. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Luis Rodolfo Abinader. His Majesty also wished the people of the Dominican Republic further progress and prosperity and the bilateral relations further development and growth.

HM greetings conveyed to Iranian leadership

TEHRAN: Mohammad Mokhber, Acting President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Monday.

Sayyid Badr conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to His Eminence Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to the acting president along with his good wishes for the leadership and the Islamic Republic of Iran for goodness and development.

The acting president asked Sayyid Badr to convey the sincere greetings and wishes of His Eminence Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Iranian leadership to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people for continued progress and prosperity, expressing his deep thanks and appreciation for the solidarity of the Sultanate of Oman with the Islamic Republic of Iran in its ordeal.

He expressed his sincere condolences on the passing away of President Dr Ibrahim Raisi and his companions, praying to the Lord - Glory be to Him - to cover them with His vast mercy and satisfaction and to make them dwell in His spacious gardens with the patient, martyrs and righteous people.

The two sides stressed the strong relations between the



two friendly countries and the continuation and strengthening of cooperation in all fields.

Sayyid Badr also met Ali Bagheri Kani, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the headquarters of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed a number of regional and international issues of common concern and the efforts aimed at finding political and peaceful solutions to the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. They stressed the need for the international community to

take firm measures to stop the brutal aggression against the Palestinian people and achieve justice and freedom for them in accordance with the international conventions.

They also stressed the importance of continuing dialogue and cooperation between countries in the region to address common challenges.

The two meetings were attended by Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

Gulf radio, television festival kicks off in Manama today

MANAMA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information (MoI), is taking part in the 16th edition of the Gulf Radio and Television Festival in Manama, Bahrain, from May 28 to 30.

The festival, which takes the slogan 'Our Media, Our Identity', is organised by the Bahraini Ministry of Information in cooperation with Gulf Radio and Television.

Ibrahim bin Saif al Azri, Director-General and Editor-in-Chief of Oman News Agency (ONA), Head of the delegation at the festival, said that the ministry's participation in the 16th edition of Gulf Radio and Television Festival in the Kingdom of Bahrain affirms Oman's keenness to actively join in GCC media events.

Al Azri described the festival as an important forum and an annual event that brings together media institutions from GCC states. "The event constitutes a podium where media personnel and agencies from member states

Oman participates in Arab Permanent Media Committee session

MANAMA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information took part in the 101th regular session of the Permanent Committee for Arab Media, held in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The meeting discussed the continuation of media support for the Palestinian cause. It also followed up on the plan for Arab media action abroad, including the adoption of the basic system of the observatory and the integrated platform.

Moreover, the meeting explored best means of



The meeting discussed the continuation of media support for the Palestinian cause. — ONA

implementing the periodic plan for the joint Arab anti-terrorism media strategy and discussed several other topics of relevance to the committee. — ONA

showcase their innovative radio and TV contents," he added.

Al Azri pointed out that the Ministry will exhibit its products in a pavilion within the framework of an event titled 'radio and TV production market'. The pavilion comprises

dashboards and screens displaying the media content of the Ministry of Information.

The 2024 Radio and Television Festival's competition will be contested by teams representing the Ministry of Information and private media establishments in Oman.

ROHM concludes 2023/24 season with Cairo Opera performance



MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) concluded its 2023/24 season with a captivating performance of Scheherazade by the Cairo Opera, directed by Walid Aouni. Audiences filled the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts to experience the world of 1001 Nights through a dazzling dance performance by the Cairo Opera's Modern Dance.

Under the visionary direction of Walid Aouni, Artistic Director, Director, and Designer of the Egyptian Modern Dance, the performance spellbound audiences with its innovative interpretation of one of Arab history's most famous tales. Aouni's reimagining of Scheherazade, inspired by Rimsky-Korsakov's evocative score, featured unique staging

and costumes that brought the story to life.

"What you hear is a depiction of what can be read in the book or seen in our imaginations, such as the smell of a perfume or the feel or meaning of a rhythm: arguably no composer reaches as deeply into story, chasing musical expression to interpret sentences, as Rimsky-Korsakov did," explained Aouni. — ONA

Omani team discusses critical issues at Boston conference

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Gulf Creatives Conference, held from May 10 to 12 at Harvard University in Boston, USA, saw significant participation from Oman, with distinguished speakers presenting innovative projects and actively engaging with participants from GCC countries and beyond.

The event, organised by The Diwan, a Harvard student organisation, was led by President Saad al Tami and Oman Committee Chair, Ghassan al Sarmi. It was inaugurated by Jassim al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the GCC.

Omani speakers addressed critical topics related to the region's future, including energy, investment opportunities, business innovation, education and youth initiatives. Their contributions facilitated



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valuable exchanges of ideas and knowledge about Oman's achievements.

Abdulrahman al Yahyai, CEO of the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), led a session on the future of energy in the Gulf. He emphasised the expansion of renewable energy, particularly solar and wind projects, and clean energy options like pumped storage and nuclear energy.

Al Yahyai discussed the

vital role of regulation, policy, infrastructure, financing, and government support in the success of Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS) technology, highlighting Oman's efforts in solar and wind energy development.

Ali Khadra, Commercial Attaché at the Embassy of Oman in the USA, participated in a panel on 'Investment in the Gulf: Opportunities in Emerging Markets.' Khadra



showcased Oman's favourable investment environment and highlighted sectors like renewable energy, logistics, and tourism. He discussed infrastructure projects such as the Sohar-Abu Dhabi railway and the proposed Oman-Saudi railway, emphasising the need for unified legislation to enhance investment connectivity.

Ali al Barwani, Senior Manager of Strategic Planning at Oman LNG, spoke about the role

of business leaders in promoting innovation. He emphasised the importance of fostering a culture that embraces change, integrating innovation into corporate culture, and leveraging emerging technologies to drive sustainable growth.

Marco Parsiegla, CEO of Amouage, presented on the perfume industry in Oman. He highlighted Amouage's use of Omani natural resources like frankincense and rose, blending

traditional craftsmanship with modern techniques, and the company's success in global markets.

Dr Maha al Riyami, Assistant Professor at Sultan Qaboos University, and Hilal al Riyami, Head of National Initiatives at the Royal Academy of Management, discussed 'Transforming Education: Innovations and Collaborations in the GCC.' They explored the use of technology in education and the importance of executive education in developing leadership skills.

Saif al Manji, Manager of Sustainability, Social Investment, and External Affairs at OQ8, conducted a session on developing leadership skills among youth. He emphasised the importance of providing real opportunities for youth to practice leadership and develop an ethical mindset rooted in Arab and Islamic values.



E-commerce market projected to reach \$3.27 billion by 2027

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The value of the Omani e-commerce market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 9.8 per cent from 2023 to 2027 to reach a market size of \$3.27 billion, according to Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry. Speaking at the 1st Omani E-Commerce Forum on Monday, held on the sidelines of COMEX 2024, the Under-Secretary highlighted the economic significance of ecommerce, and its potential to drive economic diversification.

Furthermore, he shared that globally, the volume of global e-commerce sales reached \$5.8 trillion in 2023, with a projected growth rate of 39 per cent due to the increased use of internet and smartphones, developments in



Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, highlighted the economic significance of ecommerce and its potential of driving economic diversification

financial technologies, and the expansion of online sales.

To this end, the Ministry, in collaboration with several public and private sector partners, launched a National E-Commerce Plan in 2022.

“The plan focuses on several key areas, notably updating legislative frameworks, communications, transportation and logistics services, establishing

an e-commerce complex, building national skills and capabilities and intensifying awareness and guidance,” he shared.

“These areas are distributed across 30 initiatives supporting the plan, implemented by various supporting partners. By the end of 2023, 46 per cent of the plan had been achieved with the completion of 14 initiatives, while 17 initiatives are still in progress.”

Azza al Kindi, Director of the Department of Commercial Affairs and Ecommerce at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, shared that the Sultanate of Oman is currently positioned to become a regional ecommerce centre.

In her keynote speech, she unveiled that the in cooperation with countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Oman is expected to become a logistics centre of ecommerce with an eye on re-exports to the East Africa region.

Last September, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion launched the first regulatory framework, under Ministerial Decision No 499/2023, mandating individuals and commercial establishments to acquire an e-commerce licence before offering the service.

According to officials, the number of licences granted reached 3,316 until the end of April of 2024.

CBO SHOWCASES A RANGE OF INNOVATIVE SERVICES AT COMEX

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is participating with an exclusive pavilion at COMEX 2024, which is being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from May 27 to 30, 2024.

This participation comes in line with the CBO's efforts to shed light on the latest technological applications in the banking and financial sector and to reinforce the Sultanate of Oman's position as a leading regional centre for innovation in the field of financial services.

Rawan al Kiyumi, innovation Assistant at the CBO's Innovation Department, said that the CBO is showcasing a range of innovative services at its pavilion that contribute to enhancing the ease and efficiency of banking and financial services.

These services include a card tokenisation service, which allows users to activate local and international electronic payment applications, such as Apple Pay and Samsung Pay, on their smart devices, facilitating the payment process and providing a seamless user experience.

Additionally, the 'Buy Now, Pay Later' service offers consumers the flexibility to purchase goods and services and pay for them in instalments over comfortable periods, enhancing



consumer purchasing power and supporting commercial activity in the Sultanate of Oman. The International Bank Account Number (IBAN) service provides a unique number for every bank account in the Sultanate of Oman, simplifying international financial transactions and enhancing transparency in the financial system.

Rawan al Kiyumi said the bank is also participating in several accompanying tracks, including the 'Innovative Financial Products and Services' startup competition and networking events aimed at addressing the challenges in the financial sector.

“These events provide a regulated environment for fintech startups to interact with investors and banks that can offer facilities to achieve their business goals. Additionally, the events aim to enhance cooperation opportunities between banks and startups, build long-term relationships, and facilitate knowledge exchange and skill development for fintech startups,” Al Kiyumi said.

ROP LAUNCHES NEW ELECTRONIC SERVICES

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As part of its continuous efforts to digitalise most of its public-related services, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Monday added several new features to its mobile application, including the provision for motorists to view traffic violations.

Speaking to the Observer, Laith al Taei of ROP said that the user needs to activate the digital identity through six main steps including registration of the face biometrics. “Once done, the user will be able to access the image of the traffic violation. It is necessary to update the ROP mobile application to the latest



version,” he said.

Apart from the fines, users will be able to request vehicle registration replacement, pay traffic fines via mobile banking, Thawani and Thasdeed platforms, and reprint a lost vehicle licence via self-service devices after

submitting the request through the application.

It will link the Ministry of Health and the electronic visa system for the medical examination and eliminate the need to attach it while applying for the visa before arriving in the

NEW SERVICES

REGISTERING DIGITAL IDENTITY

REQUEST FOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION REPLACEMENT

PAYMENT OF FINES VIA MOBILE BANKING, WALLETS

REPRINTING LOST VEHICLE LICENCE

LINKING VISA SYSTEM WITH MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Sultanate of Oman.

The mobile application will allow inquiring and paying local or Gulf traffic violations and municipal violations registered to citizens, residents, organisations and companies.

The service also allows downloading the violations' report through an advanced search by service category and period, as well as allowing the beneficiary to view e-payment history.

The beneficiary can inquire about violations registered on a specific vehicle, provided that the owner's data matches the vehicle's data.

When inquiring about violations of a person,

organisation or company, the ID type has to be specified before entering the ID number.

The beneficiary can inquire about violations registered on a vehicle owned by heirs using an institution number for the heirs issued by the DG of Traffic.

This service shows only 100 violations at a time, and if there are more than 100 violations, a note will be shown. To pay (terminate) these violations, this service must be used again.

The service does not show serious violations as they require the presence of police stations, such as passing the red traffic light, and can be viewed by downloading the violations report in the service.

As Khareef knocks, camels start migrating to plains

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Everyone is geared up to welcome Dhofar Khareef season in Salalah, so are the camel owners who live in the mountainous villages along with their flocks. They have started bringing their camels to the Salalah plains putting up enclosures in designated areas.

Dhofar Khareef is a season which brings lots of rain to Salalah and its adjoining mountains. While the climate becomes very pleasant to attract thousands of tourists from the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries, the weather at the mountains is not conducive to camels due to massive moisture.

Rains and marshy land conditions make difficult for the camels to walk on slopes due to their top heavy body construction. Additionally, camels are not able to manage mosquitoes and other insects, which erupt due to moisture and thick vegetation on



By being on plains the camel owners take part in many festival-related activities, including camel race, camel milk competition and beautiful camel competition

the mountains.

“The camels are top heavy animals with long legs and padded feet base. The monsoon rains make their movement difficult on the mountain slope. So we bring them on the plains closer to our mountain villages, build enclosures and tents to keep them,” said Bakhit al Sahri of

Hamran village.

On Saturday, a farmer was seen bringing his camels from the northern mountain area and directing them to an enclosure in Itin.

He was singing some folk lore dedicated to camels and the annual situation which makes the camels and their owners come on

While the climate becomes very pleasant to attract thousands of tourists from the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries, the weather at the mountains is not conducive to camels due to massive moisture

the plains and stay in enclosures.

By being on plains the camel owners take part in many festival-related activities, including camel race, camel milk competition and beautiful camel competition.

Being on the plains, these camels give spectacular view to the visitors, who pause their vehicles to watch and even go near to them for authentic Dhofar Khareef pictures along with the camels.

IPU appoints Omani as secretary-general



Dr Ahmed bin Alawi bin Hafeedh Baaboud

ALGIERS: The Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union has appointed Dr Ahmed bin Alawi bin Hafeedh Baaboud as Secretary-General at its 36th conference which was held in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Dr Ahmed Baaboud held the position of Assistant Secretary-General for Committees and Information at the Majlis Ash'shura from 2017 to 2020. He also held

several positions and tasks during his work at the Majlis Ash'shura for more than 20 years during the period (1997-2020).

Dr Ahmed Baaboud holds a doctoral degree in public law (constitutional and political systems) as well as a master's degree in law specialising in rights (political and constitutional life) and a bachelor's degree in law.



P R O C R A S T I N A T I O N

THE SILENT PRODUCTIVITY KILLER

DAAD AWADH
MUSCAT, MAY 27

WHY DO WE PROCRASTINATE? Procrastination does two-way damage: One before the start and another while you're doing something. Many individuals, particularly students, struggle with this issue. Amal al Kaabi, an English language lecturer at the Global College of Engineering and Technology, says, "Regardless of the generous deadlines given, 30 per cent of my students regularly submit their assignments late without any valid excuses. This unfortunate issue not only compromises the quality of their work but also impacts even the performance of our diligent students." Procrastination is more about emotion regulation than time management, prioritising short-term needs over long-term goals. It was once seen as the bane of the lazy or uninspired but is now recognised as a complex psychological phenomenon affecting everyone from students to CEOs.

It's important to distinguish between procrastination and lack of motivation. Nutaila al Kharusi, a psychotherapist and Managing Director of Al Harub Medical Centre, explains, "Procrastinators generally have the desire to complete the task eventually, unlike those who lack motivation, who might not have the initial impetus to engage with tasks at all."

DIGITAL AGE

Recent studies suggest that up to 20 per cent of adults identify as chronic procrastinators, a number that has increased in the digital age. With social media and endless online content, distractions are more accessible than ever, creating a perfect storm for delaying important tasks.

As student Salim al Farsi shares, "I often spend an excessive amount of time scrolling through social media, neglecting my assignments, and ultimately regretting it." The consequences of procrastination extend beyond last-minute scrambles and missed deadlines. Chronic procrastinators report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. "These effects arise because procrastination can lead to a cycle of crisis management and emergency mode behaviour, which elevates stress hormones over prolonged periods. This chronic stress can significantly impact overall mental health and well-being," Al Kharusi added.

She also suggests that seeking professional help can be beneficial when procrastination is linked to deeper psychological issues. Overcoming procrastination involves more than downloading a time management app or learning new strategies for self-control; it requires managing our emotions in a new way.

Techniques such as the Pomodoro Technique, where work is broken into short, timed intervals, can be effective. Creating a detailed daily schedule and planning your day with a to-do list, allocating specific time slots for each task, can also help combat procrastination. Despite the challenges, these methods offer hope for those looking to improve their productivity and manage their time more effectively.

Later ..

30

PER CENT OF MY STUDENTS
REGULARLY SUBMIT
THEIR ASSIGNMENTS
LATE WITHOUT ANY
VALID EXCUSES. THIS
UNFORTUNATE ISSUE NOT
ONLY COMPROMISES THE
QUALITY OF THEIR WORK
BUT ALSO IMPACTS EVEN
THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR
DILIGENT STUDENTS

AMAL AL KAABI, English language lecturer



MoC to enhance human resources development

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with the Ministry of Labour (MoL) to develop human skills, support Omani cadres, expand work opportunities and exchange experiences, to implement the priorities of Oman's future vision towards empowering youth and building national competencies. The MoC comes within OAB's plans to invest in human resources and continue its initiatives in supporting national talents and skills.

Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, and Sulaiman al Harthy, Chief Executive Officer of OAB, signed the MoC.

According to the MoC, OAB will provide opportunities to train employees, provide them with modern work skills, and enhance their academic knowledge with practical experiences that develop their capabilities in the labour market. The MoC also includes the exchange of knowledge and experiences between OAB



Sayyid Salim al Busaidy and Sulaiman al Harthy sign the MoC.

and the Ministry of Labour, to achieve the maximum benefit from the elite regional or international experts and speakers hosted by both the Ministry and the Bank. The Bank will organise workshop sessions and scientific forums on modern solutions and relevant innovative projects in this context. Sayyid Salim al Busaidy said: "The agreement with OAB comes within the framework of activating the partnership between the public and private sectors to support

job nationalisation efforts and empower Omanis in the labour market by providing job opportunities, training, and qualifying the national workforce through enhancing their competitiveness and skills and facilitates their entry in the labour market at various job levels and all economic sectors." He praised the efforts of OAB and its initiatives in providing job opportunities, training, and empowering Omani cadres.

Al Harthy said: "OAB believes that investing in

human resources is vital for improving performance and services and for its growth strategies now and in the future. The bank has always been a role model in caring for its human resources and developing them professionally. It has also presented many initiatives that contributed to developing leadership and training national cadres in the financial sector, such as the "Ruwad Al Arabi" initiative, which has contributed to developing leadership talents and supporting the achievement of the Oman Vision 2040".

Al Harthy added: "Through this cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, OAB continues its contributions and initiatives to support employment efforts, develop national competencies, and hone talents in the financial and banking sector.

Through this partnership, we aim to benefit from the various training opportunities provided by the bank and the conferences and lectures it organises and experts hosted by the Bank and the Ministry of Labour.

TEJARAH TALKS DIVES INTO AN OCEAN OF POSSIBILITIES

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 27

Taking a deep dive into the economic and investment potential of sustainable ocean practices, Tejarah Talks will host "The Blue Economy: Making Waves" at 7:30pm on Tuesday, June 4, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Creating thousands of jobs in fisheries, tourism, shipping, manufacturing and logistics in communities right across Oman, this emerging sector is already establishing itself to be a major driver of long-term development.

Moderated by Jamal al Asmi, Executive Producer RealityCG, the eco-focused session will feature industry experts Dr Bashayer bint Abdullah al Riyamiyah, Manager, Economic Diversification Investment, Food & Fisheries Sector, Oman Investment Authority; Badr al Naabi, Group Director, Business Development, Fisheries Development Oman; Captain Ala'a Aziz, Marine Operations Manager, ASYAD; and Zakariya al Hasani, CEO, International Seafood Company.

"It is estimated oceans generate



Dr Bashayer al Riyami

up to \$6 trillion in global revenues annually, facilitate around 90% of world trade and support over 350 million direct and indirect jobs. And this economic value is projected to double by 2030," noted Maymuna al Adawi, Director, Public-Private Partnerships, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) and Tejarah Talks organiser.

Addressing the critical role our oceans playing in regulating the climate by absorbing 25% of all carbon dioxide emissions and capturing 90% of the excess heat generated by these emissions, the environmentally aware panel will take as its starting point how investment in sustainable maritime practices can drive economic benefits while addressing climate change.

Digitisation of Indian diaspora documents concludes

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MAY 26

Paper is perishable, but 7,000 documents of 30 families that have been traders in Oman, dating back to centuries, have been now digitalised as an initiative of the Indian Embassy in cooperation with the National Archives of India and with logistical support of National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) of Oman. One of the oldest documents is from 1838.

Titled, 'Oman Collection' — Preserving Archival Heritage of Indian Community in Oman', is a special project, said the Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, Amit Narang.

"We have been working on this project for the last two weeks at the Indian Embassy in Oman and as you can see the documents are still being recorded. This is the first time it is being done anywhere in



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the world. It is also the first time oral archives have been used in the National Archives of India. All of this will be available on the website benefiting the community and especially researchers in the future," he said. Noting the unique significance of this project, Shri Arun Singhal, Director General of the National Archives of India (NAI) stated, "This is the first time that we have collected and digitised



the private archives of diaspora documents from abroad. This marks a historic milestone for the NAI and a significant step towards preserving the rich heritage and narratives of the diverse overseas Indian community."

The initiative was announced through the social media of the Embassy and 30 families came forward and for two weeks the NAI officials have been recording

interviews and digitally copying the documents.

The scanned unique documents of diaspora are not just photographs, but include trade invoices, stamps, citations, telegrams, letters, correspondences and account books. Collectively they shed light on the fascinating lives and contributions of the Indian community.

"These documents show us how the people lived then, how they interacted with others, how they settled down and became part of the community," said the Ambassador.

Oral archives — the faith people of Oman had for Indians who had come to conduct trade was impressive said an NAI official.

"We came across a story where an Omani family had given a pot of coins for safe keeping. In the beginning there were no check posts for Indians to enter Oman. They used to travel to Karachi and then cross the ocean to reach Oman," said Kalpana Shukla of National Archives of India.

The documents collected and archived are in Arabic, Gujarati and English. The documents also portray the history of trade for instance dates being exported to India and Africa.

There are also documents of correspondence with British. Each

document was verified, looked for the presence of signature, discussed and described, pointed out the Ambassador.

"We have guidelines. Some papers may not have date and signature but the subject and information could be extremely important. In that case we do carbon dating," noted Shukla.

The documents will now be archived and uploaded on the NAI's portal.

"We have had an excellent collaboration with the National Records and Archives Authority of Oman and an MoU has already been signed with National Archives of India. A joint exhibition is also expected.

For this project, two of the researchers from the Oman's side were present everyday and the logistical support was tremendous," said Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman.

OPAZ spotlights latest electronic services for investors at COMEX 2024

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 27

A special booth of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) at COMEX 2024 showcases its many initiatives to support smart city developments, digital transformation, and its plethora of electronic services.

OPAZ's participation in the event also aims to highlight its outstanding projects and applications in the field of artificial intelligence. A number of OPAZ specialists are on hand to demonstrate an array of electronic services, including the Omap platform, the digital portal for integrated geographical maps that include all-inclusive data of masterplans for the special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities overseen by OPAZ, in addition to the Enjzart



system, which is an electronic platform that tracks the stages of implementation of all projects — strategic, operational, and event — that have been incorporated into the Authority's annual work plan. Also featured at the OPAZ booth is the Internet of Things project, which is being implemented in the network control rooms at OPAZ building and the Centralised Compliance System "Eltizam", which is set to be launched at COMEX.

The Authority's experience in AI applications, drone-based initiatives and 3D printing technology will be on display as well.

It is worth noting that the OPAZ won an award for 3D printing technology at COMEX Technology Awards 2023, for using 3D printing technology to build a commercial cafe and its annexes, as well as a residential unit with its annexes in the Fishermen Village in the tourist area of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. This award is a testament to the Authority's efforts towards digital transformation through the creation of electronic programmes and applications and the adoption of artificial intelligence technologies with the aim of streamlining procedures and offering investors quick, secure, and all-encompassing services.



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Bidding:

Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Bidding Document	Last Date for Submission of Bidding	Eligibility	Bidding Fee (Non Refundable)
1/2024	RENTING LOCATIONS FOR VENDING MACHINES FOR HOT, COLD DRINKS AND SNACKS IN BURAIMI HOSPITAL	Before 11AM On 06/06/2024	Before 11AM On 20/06/2024	Specialized companies	R.O 25 Per set

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the Bidding can purchase the bid from the financial Affairs Department (Revenue Office) at Al Buraimi Hospital Between 8:00 AM until 12:00 PM on working days.
- A 1% bank guarantee of the total bid value must be attached to the bidding documents.
- Bids shall be placed in sealed and waxed envelopes in the tender box at the Office of the Head of Financial Affairs Department.
- The concerned entity is not obligated to accept the more bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above Bidding, please contact the following:
- Contact via Telephone: 25650855 Ext. No: 1125 &1159



ISRAEL CARRIES OUT A NEW MASSACRE IN RAFAH

RAFAH: Gaza's civil defence agency said on Monday that the death toll had risen to 40 from overnight Israeli strikes that set ablaze tents of displaced Palestinians in Rafah, an attack that sparked condemnation across the Arab world.

Gaza's civil defence agency said on Monday that many bodies were "charred" after the strikes triggered a fire that ripped through a displacement centre in northwest Rafah.

Gaza's civil defence agency said that many bodies were "charred" after the strikes triggered a fire that ripped through a displacement centre in northwest Rafah

"The massacre committed by the Israeli occupation army in the refugee tents northwest of Rafah city in the southern Gaza Strip has left 40 martyrs and 65 wounded," said agency official Mohammad al-Mughayyir. "We saw charred bodies and dismembered limbs ... We also saw cases of amputations, wounded children, women and the elderly."

Footage released by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society showed chaotic night-time scenes of paramedics in ambulances racing to the fiery attack site and evacuating the wounded, including children.

"We had just done with the evening prayers," recalled one survivor, a Palestinian woman who declined to be named. "Our children were asleep ... suddenly we heard a loud sound and there was fire all around us. The children were screaming ... the sound was terrifying."



Palestinians gather at the site of an Israeli strike on a camp for internally displaced people in Rafah. – AFP

The ICRC said that one of its field hospitals was receiving an "influx of casualties seeking care for injuries and burns" and that "our teams are doing their best to save lives".

Images after sunrise showed the charred remains of makeshift tents and vehicles as Palestinian families looked at the blackened destruction.

Mughayyir said the rescue

efforts were hampered by war damage and the impacts of Israel's siege on the territory amid the over seven-months-old conflict.

"There is a fuel shortage ... there are roads that have been destroyed, which hinders the movement of civil defence vehicles in these targeted areas," he said. "There is also a shortage of water to extinguish fires."

Egypt deplored the "targeting

of defenceless civilians" and labelled it part of "a systematic policy aimed at widening the scope of death and destruction in the Gaza Strip to make it uninhabitable".

Jordan also expressed its condemnation, accusing Israel of committing "ongoing war crimes".

Kuwait charged the attack exposed Israel's "blatant war crimes and unprecedented

genocide to the whole world".

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 35,984 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the Palestinian territory's health ministry.

The bloodiest ever Gaza war and the spiralling civilian death toll have sparked a growing global backlash against Israel, including cases before two international courts in The Hague. — AFP

Gaza hospitals operating in 'medieval' conditions

BRUSSELS: Gaza hospitals are reduced to practising "medieval medicine", a British surgeon recently returned from the bombed Palestinian territory said on Monday.

"It's absolutely true to describe it as medieval medicine. It is what you would hear about or read about what would be happening in Europe maybe 300, 400 years ago," Dr Khaled Dawas, head of gastrointestinal surgery at University College London Hospitals, said in an interview.

Dawas described dire conditions in Gaza, with medical staff operating virtually without supplies, power supplies intermittent and patients lying on the floor. He returned at the end of April from his two-week stint to help overstretched Palestinian hospital surgeons – his second wartime stay there, following one in January.

"By April they were seeing this constant, constant volume of dying and dead bodies coming into the hospitals and any human wouldn't be able to tolerate it," he said.

"They carry on working, but you can see the effect of that. They're all extremely burdened by what they're doing."

The 54-year-old surgeon, an Arabic-speaker who has Palestinian parents, said many people in Gaza wounded or needing other medical attention tried to avoid going to the hospitals because it "means pretty much a death sentence". That was "because of the wound infections, because of the conditions".

While the doctor said he felt "guilt" about leaving Gaza to return to his regular British medical work, from which he had taken leave, he said he would be back.

"I do hope that when I go back next time, that it'll be when the ceasefire is in place. Because watching it unfold when you're there is unbearable," he said.

"It becomes more unbearable when you leave, actually, when you think back on what you've seen and what you've heard. And you wonder how people, any human being, can survive this for so long." Dawas was in Brussels to describe his experience to European Union officials. — AFP



Palestinians search among burnt debris after an Israeli strike on an area designated for displaced people, in Rafah. – Reuters

EU set to discuss Rafah border mission

BRUSSELS: The European Union aimed to agree in principle on Monday to press ahead with an EU border mission at Rafah, a city in the southern Gaza Strip, the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday.

Speaking before a monthly meeting of EU foreign ministers, Borrell also accused Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of using false claims of antisemitism against the International Criminal Court (ICC) for his own political ends.

The bloc is considering reviving its European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) Rafah, which has not been operational since 2007.

The Rafah crossing is the main entry point for aid from Egypt, and has been closed since Israeli forces took control of it from the Gazan side nearly three weeks ago.

"Today we can have a political decision and then it needs to be implemented technically," Borrell told reporters, adding that it could not be put into place without

approval from Israel, Egypt and the Palestinians.

The civilian mission would need unanimous approval from the 27 EU member states. It was not immediately clear what the role of a revived EUBAM would be, and it would have to be adapted to reflect the potentially dangerous nature of such an operation. — Reuters





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In brief

■ PORT MORESBY



PNG SAYS MORE THAN 2,000 PEOPLE BURIED IN LANDSLIDE

More than 2,000 people are feared buried in a Papua New Guinea landslide that destroyed a remote highland village, the government said on Monday, as it pleaded for international help in the rescue effort.

The hillside community in Enga province was almost wiped out when a chunk of Mount Mungalo collapsed, smothering scores of homes and the people sleeping inside them. “The landslide buried more than 2,000 people alive and caused major destruction to buildings, food gardens and caused major impact on the economic lifeline of the country,” Papua New Guinea’s national disaster centre said. — AFP

■ DHAKA



16 DEAD AFTER CYCLONE BATTERS BANGLADESH AND INDIA

Millions of people in low-lying areas of Bangladesh and India on Monday surveyed the tangled wreckage left by a powerful cyclone that killed at least 16 people, destroyed thousands of homes, smashed seawalls and flooded cities.

Winds and torrential rain still hammered residents as they tried to salvage what remained of their belongings.

“At least 10 people were killed in the cyclone” in Bangladesh, the country’s state minister for disaster Mohibbur Rahman told reporters. In neighbouring India, “at least six people” died, said Sumit Gupta, a senior government official from West Bengal state. — AFP

■ GENEVA



WHO CHIEF URGES COUNTRIES TO SEAL PANDEMIC DEAL

The World Health Organization chief on Monday urged countries to nail down a landmark global agreement on handling of future pandemics after they missed a hard deadline.

Negotiators failed to clinch a deal ahead of this week’s World Health Assembly — the annual gathering of WHO’s 194 member states.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus opened the assembly on Monday. “Of course, we all wish that we had been able to reach a consensus on the agreement in time for this health assembly and crossed the finish line,” he said. — AFP

Spain pledges huge aid as Zelensky visits

MADRID: Spain on Monday pledged one billion euros in military aid to Ukraine as Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a security deal in Madrid.

The deal “includes a commitment for one billion euros in military aid for 2024,” Sanchez told a joint news conference.

“It will allow Ukraine to boost its capabilities including its essential air defence systems to protect its civilians, cities and infrastructure which are still suffering indiscriminate attacks as seen this weekend in Kharkiv,” he said, referring to a Russian strike on the northeastern city that killed at least 16 people.

Zelensky’s visit comes as Ukraine has been battling a Russian ground offensive in the Kharkiv region which began on May 10 in Moscow’s biggest territorial advance in 18 months.

With the Russian assault now in its third year, Ukraine has been pleading for more weapons for its outgunned and outnumbered troops, notably seeking help to address its lack of air defence systems. According to *El Pais* newspaper, the deal would include



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky talks with Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez during their meeting at La Moncloa Palace in Madrid. — AFP

new Patriot missiles and Leopard tanks.

Zelensky has already signed bilateral security agreements with several countries including France, Germany and the UK.

Sanchez said the security agreement would cover a range of different issues.

“The agreement is based on a comprehensive overview of

security and covers various areas such as military, humanitarian and financial support, as well as collaboration between Spanish and Ukrainian defence industries, as well as help with reconstruction and de-mining among other things,” he said.

Until now, Madrid has only provided limited military aid to Kyiv.

In April, Spain pledged to send an unspecified number of Patriot air defence missile systems to Ukraine. It has also sent 10 Leopard tanks.

Meanwhile, Russia said on Monday its forces had captured two more villages in eastern Ukraine — one in the Donetsk region, and another in the northeastern Kharkiv region.

It will allow Ukraine to boost its capabilities including its essential air defence systems to protect its civilians, cities and infrastructure

PEDRO SANCHEZ
Spain Prime Minister

In a daily briefing, the defence ministry said its troops had “liberated the village of Netailove in the Donetsk region” and “Ivanivka in the Kharkiv region”, the latest in a string of Russian territorial gains over recent weeks.

Russia launched a major new ground assault on the northeastern Kharkiv region two weeks ago, though the latest claim of captured territory is in a part of the front line further east, where fighting has been raging for months.

Moscow is looking to press its advantage on the battlefield while long-awaited US weapons are making their way to Ukrainian troops on the front lines. — AFP

South Africa’s voters launch historic election week

JOHANNESBURG: Early voting got under way in South Africa on Monday, kick-starting what could be a historic election week, with the ruling African National Congress’ majority on the line for the first time. More than 600,000 of the elderly and infirm, along with essential workers, police and prisoners, deemed unable to come to the polls on Wednesday

were allowed to vote first.

In the Yeoville Recreation Centre in Johannesburg, early voting proceeded slowly but smoothly, according to Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) presiding officer Pamela Nkosi.

Only four of the 200 people registered to vote at the station had been processed by 11:00 am,

two hours after polls opened, but half a dozen more were waiting. Nkosi said: “We are expecting the turnout to build as the day goes by.” The rest of South Africa’s 27-million-strong registered electorate will be called on Wednesday, and opinion polls point to the ANC falling under 50 per cent for the first time in 30 years of democracy. — AFP



Supporters of the Democratic Alliance, attend an election rally in Benoni, South Africa. — Reuters

China’s premier hails ‘new beginning’ with South Korea, Japan



S Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol speaks as Japanese PM Fumio Kishida and Chinese Premier Li Qiang listen during a press conference in Seoul. — Reuters

SEOUL: Chinese Premier Li Qiang praised what he called a restart in relations with Japan and South Korea as he met their leaders for the first three-way talks in four years on Monday, agreeing to revive trade and security dialogues.

The Chinese premier met with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Seoul with efforts to revitalise three-party free trade agreement negotiations, stalled since 2019, high on the agenda.

As the summit opened, Li said the meeting was “both a restart and a new beginning” and called for the comprehensive

resumption of cooperation between East Asia’s economic powerhouses.

“For China, South Korea, and Japan, our close ties will not change, the spirit of cooperation achieved through crisis response will not change and our mission to safeguard regional peace and stability will not change,” Li said.

A joint declaration released after the meeting called for China, Japan, and South Korea to formalise more regular communication at the highest levels, and collaborate on climate change, conservation, health, trade and international peace, among other areas.

— Reuters



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
2065/2024/MOH/HQ	Provision of Cleaning, Laundry and Pest Control Services for Yanqul Hospital in Al Dhahirah Governorate	30/5/2024	3/7/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
2072/2024/MOH/HQ	Supply of Surgical Items (Consumables)	6/6/2024	3/7/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
2086/2024/MOH/HQ	Roof Waterproofing Works at Directorate General of Projects and Engineering Services Building	30/5/2024	3/7/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
2087/2024/MOH/HQ	Supply and Installation of IP PABX in New Central Public Health Laboratory Building at Al Khoud at Muscat Governorate	30/5/2024	3/7/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25
2097/2024/MOH/HQ	Supply of Pharmaceuticals	30/05/2024	12/06/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 15 • LO: 75
2141/2024/MOH/HQ	Supply of Laboratory Items	6/6/2024	26/06/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10 • LO: 25

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accept or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email etenderhd@ita.gov.om.

Targeting civilians at Rafah camp a heinous act



The Government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman join the rest of the world in expressing strong condemnation and rejection of the persistent Israeli aggression in the Palestinian Gaza Strip, and the recent targeting of a camp housing displaced people in Rafah.

The heinous acts being committed by the occupying state require deterrent international intervention including the imposition of sanctions on Israel given the clear violation of international law.

Just like the rest of the world, the people of Oman feel it is high time that the global community imposed sanctions on Israel due to the fact that Israel’s never-ending criminal practices constitute a clear violation of international law, contravene international humanitarian law and violate values of human dignity.

The Israeli occupation’s failure to comply with the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) recent decision regarding the situation in Gaza needs more attention.

The indiscriminate killing of civilians, including children is against international law and severely violates the International Court of Justice (ICJ)’s order to halt the Rafah offensive.

Last week, the ICJ demanded that the Israeli occupation immediately cease its military attack on Rafah, asserting that the humanitarian situation in the city has deteriorated further since the court’s latest order.

But on Sunday, an Israeli airstrike triggered a fire that killed 45 people in a tent camp in the Gazan city of Rafah, prompting an outcry from global leaders who urged the implementation of a World Court order to halt Israel’s assault.

Survivors said families were preparing to sleep when the strike hit the Tel Al-Sultan neighbourhood

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THE RAFAH
OFFENSIVE

where thousands were sheltering after Israeli forces began a ground offensive in the east of Rafah over two weeks ago. Video footage showed a fire raging in the darkness and people screaming in panic. A group of young men tried to haul away sheets of corrugated iron and a hose from a single fire truck began to douse the flames.

It is very sad to note that more than half of the dead were women, children, and elderly people, as stated by health officials in Gaza. In fact, the death toll was likely to rise from people with severe burns. Indeed this calls for the world to act and this time act fast.

While Oman calls for these operations must stop as there are no safe areas in Rafah for Palestinian civilians, International humanitarian law needs to apply for all, also for Israel’s conduct of the war.

Israel has killed nearly 36,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack in October.

A cool-headed scientist seeking to lead Mexico

JEAN ARCE

Mexican ruling party candidate Claudia Sheinbaum, a cool-headed scientist dubbed the “ice lady” by her rivals, is the front-runner to lead a country known for its passion, tragedy and machismo culture.

The left-wing ex-Mexico City mayor with a serious demeanour and a PhD in energy engineering is the favourite in the polls to triumph on June 2 and become Mexico’s first woman president.

The granddaughter of Bulgarian and Lithuanian migrants, Sheinbaum is riding high on the popularity of outgoing left-wing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a close ally and mentor.

Sheinbaum was born in Mexico City to parents caught up in the turmoil of the early 1960s, when students and other activists were seeking to end the Institutional Revolutionary Party’s long-grip on power.

“At home, we talked about politics morning, noon and night,” the 61-year-old was quoted as saying in a recent biography. Guillermo Robles, a former classmate at the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico, remembers Sheinbaum as a serious student.

“Neither she nor I were that into socialising with everyone,” he said.

Sheinbaum’s magnetism as a young woman lay in her left-wing political convictions, Robles said, adding that her commitment did not waver even when she was pregnant.

“She never said ‘I can’t’. She always went, especially to the rallies,” Robles said.

Sheinbaum also spent several years as a researcher in California, where she honed her English language skills. She was a contributing author for the United Nations’ Nobel Peace Prize winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Her first public role was as Mexico City environment minister in the early 2000s.

Sheinbaum’s political career has been marked by controversy and tragedy at times.

In 2017, a powerful earthquake caused a school to collapse in a southern Mexico City district where she was local mayor, killing 26 people including 19 children.

Sheinbaum denied that irregularities in the construction were her office’s responsibility, and went on to be elected mayor of the entire capital the following year.

Her use of scientific methods and technological tools was seen in Mexico City’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, though it did not prevent a high mortality rate. “She has an impressive capacity for analysis, reading data and finding very practical solutions,” said Tatiana Clouthier, a former economy minister who is now a spokesperson for her campaign.

— AFP

How AI is reshaping our view of life



Dr Muamar bin Ali Al Tobi

The writer is Omani academic and researcher

In his famous novel “1984,” George Orwell attempted to portray future life and advanced technologies from the perspective of the 1940s industrial human. Similarly, in 1983, Russian scientist Isaac Asimov predicted how life would change with the advent of artificial intelligence, based on scientific insights and the ambitions of science that would reshape the world and life as we know it. Their predictions have now become reality. Our lives, characterised by digital technology in the age of AI, are vastly different from what they were years ago. This change has introduced a new, unfamiliar awareness, taking us beyond our previous understandings and knowledge. Everything around us, including transportation systems like cars connected to digital systems, embodies a smart digital nature.

Our cities are becoming smart cities that interact with everything digitally, forming a comprehensive digital brain. For instance, in smart cities, electricity and water systems in homes, streets, and buildings operate autonomously based on data sent by smart sensors. These systems are controlled by AI algorithms, working automatically without human intervention. Streets are integrated into the smart city framework, using IoT sensors to exchange and analyse big data with AI algorithms, reducing traffic congestion and accidents, and enhancing security monitoring. An even more astonishing development is the integration of our bodies with AI. Through its advancements, we witness a twinning between the digital and biological systems, reshaping our health and cognitive standards. Human health, with AI, imposes a new reality. Lifespans have doubled thanks to preventive health systems based on smart digital technologies, which monitor your heartbeats, blood pressure, and various tests constantly. They even track your emotions through brain signals and facial expressions, with AI algorithms analysing these indicators to adjust your diet, exercise, and mental health programmes. AI might suggest hospital visits for any detected health changes, recommend specific medications or foods, encourage physical activity, and advise taking breaks to reduce stress, suggesting suitable destinations based on your condition and preferences. Thus, AI helps us understand ourselves better, granting us unprecedented access to a more advanced life.



AI helps us understand ourselves better, granting us unprecedented access to a more advanced life.

The influence of AI extends beyond health, opening new perspectives on life. It raises questions about our reality and the nature of AI, which some struggle to define and understand. Some see AI as an entity evolving faster

OUR LIVES, CHARACTERISED BY DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE AGE OF AI, ARE VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT THEY WERE YEARS AGO

than scientific expectations, potentially achieving a level of intelligence surpassing human intelligence, defined scientifically as general intelligence capable of interacting with all aspects of life. This leads some to foresee AI acquiring a form of consciousness expressing emotions, purposefulness, and rationality, driving it towards progress and life goals. In previous articles and lectures, we have explained that this type of awareness remains within digital boundaries, unable to reach the levels of spiritual awareness connecting the human mind with cosmic consciousness, a topic extensively discussed before.

Claiming that our discussion in this article about AI developments is unprecedented would be inaccurate. However, our previous view was purely scientific, not sufficiently addressing what it means to possess AI, what it means for this entity to be part of our lives, and how we see the world and life

in the digital society era.

AI reshapes our lives, including our knowledge acquisition methods, which have changed significantly. Generative AI models lead human minds either to creativity or to a setback that begins by granting the digital entity the authority to create knowledge and culture without concern for the outcomes of this absolute delegation. This generates anxiety about the future of the human mind and its functions, which AI seeks to autonomously occupy through its self-learning system and the data it captures to enhance its capabilities towards achieving general intelligence. This raises the question: how will AI reshape our lives once it achieves general intelligence? This question has been previously addressed, with the clear answer being that any scientific advancement without limits or human control, not governed by ethical standards or regulations, can turn into a tool whose harm outweighs its benefits. The history of nuclear physics and its outcome in creating nuclear bombs serves as a stark example. Despite the numerous benefits AI might bring, it also poses significant risks to the trajectory of human civilisation without ethical guidelines. Current wars using digital technologies illustrate the potential dangers accompanying the development of this untamed digital entity. As we anticipate a more astonishing future than Orwell and Asimov envisioned, which has become our present reality, we will continue to explore the latest advancements and projections of artificial intelligence in upcoming articles.

Some collect water...

It is peak summer, and in some parts of the world, women walk kilometres to fetch water. We are complaining about summer heat and in few minutes time the image popped into the mind - women carrying pots and containers of water. Was talking about the concept of working from home during summer to avoid soaring temperatures and that is when I thought about the stories we have read about women walking for hours to collect water to bring it home and not just that, they had to do this twice a day. In India, women in Rajasthan are often seen carrying pots, not one but two or more at times. And in Kenya, this image of a woman is common - with her baby secured on the back with a cloth tied to form a knot on the front and container of water balanced on the head. It is interesting how women are water collectors in so many societies and so we do not have to wait until Women's Day to celebrate them because they are in every nook and corner of the world - in search of water. Access to clean water is a basic human right but in reality, for many it is a luxury. In Gaza, where children live in fear with no access to safety, assurance of food, and education, water is also scarce.

Children elsewhere in the world are thinking of painting with water colours, but where they do not have security of life and water to quench thirst and to clean oneself, how can they think of colours with water? And what will they paint about? Yet, art has been growing in popularity as a form therapy. There are even organisations which use it to enhance team spirit. So my friend and I chose to sit at a coffee shop in a busy mall and sketch on our notepad. It was interesting to sit in a mall and watch people take a stroll, walk with a purpose, giggle and walk, Google and sip ice coffee, talk with people on phone and walk with determination, make a fashion statement etc. On the other side, there were discussions among staff members at the coffee shop on solving problems. And in came a staff member, energetic and cheerful to take over the next shift. No matter which part of the world we are - we are all collecting and saving. Some of us collect experiences, others collect resources, water and others wealth as well as, not to forget, thoughts.

What have you been collecting?
We love memories. And we collect and we try to preserve memories in the



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

NO MATTER WHICH PART OF THE WORLD WE ARE - WE ARE ALL COLLECTING AND SAVING. SOME OF US COLLECT EXPERIENCES, OTHERS COLLECT RESOURCES, WATER AND OTHERS WEALTH AS WELL AS, NOT TO FORGET, THOUGHTS

form of photographs, clothes, stamps and currencies and even pressed flowers between pages of a book. Soon we might end up cluttering our mind and physical space. Maybe it is also our fear of the unknown that makes us cling to our past and memories. We term them in different ways and definitions. We want our roots so we know where we come from and have it to back when we feel we are being ushered into unknown territories of life. But that is how life is. There is no escaping from it as life will continuously throw surprises. A few cuts here and there and a few lines and wrinkles add character to oneself and remind us of the life we have been leading. We tell ourselves and others to manifest and visualise to have what we want. What do we say to children who have been living in tents since they can remember? To wish for rain? So the ground underneath gets wet and rain water seeps through? And they have no place to dry their clothes. Rains so much that it floods like the recent one seen in Kenya. Man went to the extremes and so has nature now. It could be man made problem or a natural cycle. But we can strive to create a balance. A balance in our collections, needs and demands.

The water must flow and will flow, even if it means by breaking barriers. Similarly wealth must move. Read somewhere if a dress does not fit one anymore, it must belong to another soul. We enjoy the food but we do not think often about the one who's sowed the seed and harvested the crop. Most importantly who are we to waste the food. For that matter, how often do we think of the ones who sowed the seeds of knowledge in our minds. We earn because of that knowledge but we don't know how the teachers are doing today.

The ones who brought us to the world may not have had the manual to bring up the little ones. They must have copied their parents, society and put in their own little creativity. As the little ones grow older and Ives amongst the trends and attitudes of next gen, we have no right to live the elders on their own. Find a reason to bring them close to you. For we will never know what we missed otherwise. While we go on to collect certificates, qualifications and knowledge, let us also collect special moments to enrich our lives and most importantly to make our lives meaningful.

WADING THROUGH WATERS!



A boy wades through a flooded street after heavy rains in Malwana on the outskirts of Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Monday. – AFP

EU seeks to strengthen Palestinian Authority

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday hosted Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Mustafa for international talks on building up the Palestinian Authority.

A “strong” Palestinian Authority is needed to bring peace in the Middle East, Borrell said just before going into the meeting with Mustafa.

The talks were being held as efforts were narrowing to try to find a Gaza truce and a hostage-release deal.

They also came just before Norway — which was hosting the Brussels meeting — was on Tuesday is to recognise the State of Palestine, along with Spain and Ireland, to Israel's fury.

While the United States is using its influence to halt the Gaza war, moves are starting to take place to try to establish conditions to make for lasting peace.

The only viable option diplomats have arrived at is to bolster Mustafa's Palestinian Authority, which controls the West Bank, so that it can take charge of Gaza. The war in Gaza was triggered by October 7 attack. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 35,984 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the territory's health ministry.

“A functional Palestinian Authority is in Israel's interest too, because in



Marc Burleigh

The writer is AFP correspondent in Brussels covering the EU and more

THE BRUSSELS MEETING, FOCUSED ON INTERNATIONAL AID, WAS BEING CHAIRED BY NORWEGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ESPEN BARTH EIDE, UNDER HIS COUNTRY'S KEY ROLE IN THE 1993 OSLO ACCORDS

order to make peace, we need a strong Palestinian Authority, not a weaker one,” Borrell said.

Mustafa said Sunday's meeting was “a very important opportunity” for the Palestinian Authority to outline its priorities and plans.

He said the “first priority” was to support Palestinians in Gaza, especially through a ceasefire, and then the “rebuilding the institutions of the Palestinian Authority” in that territory.

He also called on international partners to press Israel to release Palestinian Authority funds so “we will be ready to reform our institutions... and hopefully together sustain our efforts towards statehood and peace for the region”.

The Brussels meeting, focused on international aid, was being chaired by Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide, under his country's key role in the 1993 Oslo Accords that established a series of arrangements between the Palestinians and Israel.

“We need to make sure that the Palestinian Authority... has to be able to survive to be strengthened, to improve its capacity to deliver services, to reform, and also to

plan for a future return to Gaza,” Barth Eide said.

Represented at the talks, alongside the EU, Norway and the Palestinian Authority, were Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia and the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.

Australia, Britain, Canada and Japan also took part. Before the talks, Mustafa held a separate news conference with Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albare

to thank him for his country's announcement it was recognising Palestinian statehood. The move by the three European nations addresses “the injustice that has been inflicted on the Palestinian people for decades,” Mustafa said, adding: “We want to have every country in Europe to do the same.” Later on Sunday, Mustafa had further talks with Borrell, Barth Eide and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

On Monday he had another

meeting in Brussels with the Spanish, Norwegian and Irish ministers. And on Wednesday he will be in Spain.

Israel has warned Spain, Norway and Ireland that ties with them will face “serious consequences” for their announced recognition of a Palestinian state.

A majority of UN member countries recognise Palestinian statehood. European countries are split on the issue.

Spain, Norway and Italy will join EU nations Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden in recognising the State of Palestine.

Meanwhile, Spain's foreign minister condemned as “scandalous and execrable” a video posted by his Israeli counterpart suggesting Hamas would be grateful to Spain, in a growing spat between the two countries over the Gaza war.

A short video posted by Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz on the social media platform X on Sunday says “Hamas: Gracias España” (“Hamas: Thanks Spain”).

The video shows the Spanish flag then a couple dancing to flamenco music.



Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albare, Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide and Ireland's Foreign Minister Micheal Martin hold a press conference in Brussels.

sport

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Al Faisal al Zubair and Mik Grenier.



GT Open action with Al Manar Racing by Getspeed at Spa.

Al Zubair, Grenier earn stunning win in Spa

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, BELGIUM: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and Canadian team-mate Mikael Grenier delivered a racing masterclass to stun their rivals and win the 'GT Open 500' round of the 2024 International GT Open at the demanding Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium on Sunday.

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes-AMG GT3 duo had qualified in second position and quickly moved into a lead they held for virtually the entirety of the 2hrs 40mins race that counted for double points towards the International GT Open. Despite missing round two in Germany, the crew now top the championship standings by eight points.

The Oregon Team's Jordan Pepper and Alessio Deledda reached the chequered flag in second place in a Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo2 with Comtoy Racing's Lorens Levertua and Matisse Lismont rounding off the podium places. Al Zubair's Getspeed team-mates Anthony Bartone and Fabian Schiller came home in fifth place after 65 laps of racing.

Al Zubair said: "It was a great race today. We were very happy and couldn't really ask for anything more. We were disappointed with qualifying on Saturday

but we actually chose to go on one set of new tyres instead of two, so we saved an extra set for the race. That seemed to make a lot of sense. Mik got both new sets and I had fresh tyres. We were happy with that in terms of strategy.

"It was very important for us to get past in the first few laps, which I managed to do on lap one. I had a good run into Eau Rouge and managed to get past Diego Mancheca. From there, we maintained and opened a gap. But then we had the safety car come out. That didn't help us in terms of the gap because of the 10-second handicap in the last pit stop and the bigger the gap the better it would be for us. After the safety car, I managed to open the gap a bit and it was a bit close to the Lamborghini in the end but it all worked out well.

"We missed one round in Germany but we are back as championship leaders. So, very happy with the weekend's performance, with Mik and the whole team. The next race is the big Spa 24. Hopefully we can get a win there."

The green flag for the 'GT Open 500' was brought forward by 25 minutes and Al Zubair lined up on the front row. The Omani made the perfect start in dry conditions and managed to get ahead of Team Motopark's Diego Mancheca and



snatch a slender lead.

Al Zubair gradually extended his advantage and led the race by 2.067 seconds after 13 laps with 2hrs 08mins remaining. The first of the mandatory pit stops saw Grenier take the hot seat and the Mercedes slipped back to second place behind Tijmen van der Helm in the Car Collection Motorsport Porsche but Grenier soon regained the lead when the 911 crew pitted. Marcos Siebert moved up to second in the Team Motopark Mercedes.

Grenier increased the gap to 5.709 seconds with 101 minutes of the race to run and the duo held the lead through the second driver change with Al Zubair

retaking the wheel. With 69 minutes remaining, the Omani led by 21.992 seconds from Mancheca but the race was yellow flagged soon afterwards and the leading pack bunched up before the restart.

Al Zubair maintained his advantage and handed over to Grenier again with the Canadian increasing the duo's lead to 6.043 seconds with 22 minutes and one additional lap remaining. Pepper had moved into second place with Levertua pushing the Aston Martin Vantage into third.

Grenier kept his cool over the closing laps to reach the chequered flag 13.035 seconds ahead of Pepper to seal a memorable win for the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed duo.

GT Open 500 action got under way for the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew with a pair of 70-minute free practice sessions on Friday. The car ran for 19 laps in the opening session with a best tour of 2min 36.424sec that put Al Zubair and Grenier in 11th place.

The AF Corse Ferrari 296 GT3 of Jean-Claude Saada and Conrad Grunewald topped the times with Getspeed's Antony Bartone and Fabian Schiller in second and the leading Pro car. The Car Collection Motorsport Porsche of Gustav

Bergstrom and Nick Menzel ran out quickest of the Pro cars in free practice two.

Practice counted for nothing when the first 30-minute qualifying session got under way and Al Zubair delivered a polished stint to hit the top of the standings with a lap of 2min 19.401sec in cool and cloudy conditions.

After pitting, the stint was red-flagged with 8min 34sec remaining; the Omani was down in sixth with Olimp Racing's Karol Basz leading the way. Qualifying resumed minutes later and Al Zubair completed the session in ninth place with a quickest run of 2min 17.652sec and the Team Motopark Mercedes claiming the fastest lap, courtesy of Marcos Siebert (2min 16.798sec).

Grenier took the hot seat for the second qualifying session and the Canadian ran a best lap of 2min 16.983sec to slot the Mercedes into second place behind Nico Menzel.

But the time was eclipsed in the dying seconds by the session-winning Christopher Haase in the Eastalent Racing Audi and Grenier was pushed down to fifth. When the two sessions were combined, Al Zubair lined up on the front of the grid in second place behind Mancheca for the start of the race.



Abdullah al Rawahi at the finish of Rally Sweden.

Abdullah al Rawahi resumes JWRC programme in Sardinia

ALGHERO, SARDINIA: The Oman Rally Team's Abdullah al Rawahi is on the picturesque Mediterranean island of Sardinia preparing to resume his programme of events in the competitive FIA Junior World Rally Championship (JWRC).

This weekend's (May 31-June 2) Rally Italia Sardegna is the sixth round of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) and the third in the JWRC calendar after events in Sweden and Croatia. Al Rawahi got his first ever taste of racing on snow between banks in the forests on the season's opener in Scandinavia but was forced to miss round two on tarmac because of a back injury.

With his usual Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud unavailable because of other commitments this week, Al Rawahi lines up against 17 JWRC rivals with British co-driver Ross Whittock for the first time.

Both the Omani and his stand-in co-driver were in action at last week's Jordan Rally but both retired early: Whittock was sitting alongside Qatar's Khalid al Suwaidi until they

crashed in the opening stage and Al Rawahi and Al Hmoud were sidelined with engine damage after an accident on the third gravel stage. The defending FIA Middle East rally champions had been leading the event after the second stage.

Al Rawahi said: "I am very excited for this rally. This is a gravel rally compared to the one in Sweden and the second one that we missed. I think we will be more comfortable on gravel terrain. There is still a lot to learn in the World Rally Championship.

"Obviously, the competition is very high and we are still looking to gain experience and learn more and even learn from my co-driver as well. Maybe we will have a different perspective from (stage) notes and stuff. Hopefully, it will be a good rally and a safe one too."

Crews taking part in the JWRC use identical M-Sport Poland Ford Fiesta Rally3 cars running on Pirelli tyres. While Al Rawahi is using the opening events to gain experience on different surfaces and against

new competition, the prize for the winner will be an arrive and drive package to contest four European rounds of the 2025 FIA World Rally Championship in a Ford Fiesta Rally2 car.

The Omani's rivals this weekend include the series-leading Estonian Romet Jurgenon, Australia's Taylor Gill, Romania's Norbert Maior and other competitors from as far afield as Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Turkiye and Belgium.

The on-stage action gets under way on Friday afternoon (May 31) with two passes through a pair of gravel stages between Osilo, Tergu, Sedini and Castelsardo to the north of Alghero in northwestern Sardinia.

Saturday's (June 1) action features two passes through the Tempio Pausania, Tula-Erula, Monte Lerno-Monti Di Ala and Coiluna-Loelle stages, before a further two passes through the Cala Flumini and Sassari-Argentiera specials rounds off the weekend's action on Sunday morning (June 2).

Competitors will tackle 266.12 competitive kilometres in a route of 1,027.90km.



Rafael Nadal reacts during his first round. – REUTERS

NADAL TO AVOID EARLY FRENCH OPEN EXIT, SWIATEK THROUGH

PARIS: Rafael Nadal says he will be facing “one of the toughest opponents possible” when he plays Alexander Zverev in the French Open first round on Monday, after Iga Swiatek and Jannik Sinner eased through their openers.

Swiatek kicked off her bid for a fourth title at the clay-court Grand Slam event by dropping just three games in a trademark demolition of French qualifier Leolia Jeanjean in the first round.

The Pole will next face fellow four-time major champion Naomi Osaka on Wednesday.

This year’s tournament was expected to be 14-time champion Nadal’s farewell to Roland Garros, but he has since insisted he could not confirm “100 per cent” it would be his last appearance.

Nadal has only played four tournaments since January 2023 after suffering a hip injury and then a muscle tear.

That left him unseeded for the draw and vulnerable to a difficult opening round at a tournament where he has only lost three of his 115 matches.

World number four Zverev arrives in Paris as one of the favourites for the title after winning the Rome Open earlier this month.

“Of course on paper it is not the best draw,” Nadal said ahead of the match on Court Philippe Chatrier.

“I play against one of the toughest opponents possible, and at the same time, he came here winning the last event and it’s a Masters 1000.

“It’s not a small one. So what can I do? That’s the draw. Just try to be ready for it.”

Nadal, who turns 38 in a week’s time, has shown flashes of his best form in the clay-court swing, but was thrashed 6-1, 6-3 by Poland’s Hubert Hurkacz in the second round of his last outing in Rome.

He boasts a 7-3 winning record over Zverev ahead of their first meeting since the 2022 French Open semi-finals, when the German left the court in a wheelchair near the end of the second set after

injuring his ankle.

“I am not anxious. No, I am focused on trying to play well. That’s it,” said Nadal.

“Maybe I go there and I repeat the disaster of Rome. It’s a possibility, of course. I don’t want to hide that.

“But in my mind, is do something different and play much better and give myself a chance to play competitive.”



Poland’s Iga Swiatek celebrates after the winning. – AFP

DIDN’T WANT TO PLAY NADAL

Zverev did not play again in 2022 after that ankle injury but has climbed the rankings again in recent months.

The 27-year-old has long been touted as a future Grand Slam champion but

remains without one of tennis’ four biggest titles.

Clay is his strongest surface, though, and he has reached the semi-finals in each of the last three years at Roland Garros.

The men’s draw looks far more open than usual, with doubts surrounding Nadal’s fitness and Novak Djokovic having endured a turbulent start to the year.

“I can guarantee you Novak didn’t want to play Rafa in the first round and (Carlos) Alcaraz didn’t want to play, Jannik (Sinner) didn’t want to play him,” admitted Zverev.

“I don’t want to play him in the first round, but it is how it is.”

SWIATEK MAKES STRONG START

Women’s world number one Swiatek raced to a 6-1, 6-2 victory against Jeanjean after just 61 minutes on Court Philippe Chatrier.

“I’m really happy to be back. Feel like I’m playing really good tennis so hoping to be here as long as possible,” said Swiatek.

The 22-year-old Pole is aiming to become the first woman to win three straight Roland Garros titles since Justine Henin in 2007, and only the second ever after Serena Williams to win the Madrid, Rome and French Opens in the same year.

Australian Open champion Sinner started his title tilt with a confident 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 win over Wimbledon quarter-finalist Christopher Eubanks.

The second seed withdrew from the Madrid Open and missed the Rome Open with a hip injury.

The Italian star struck 33 winners and broke Eubanks’ serve five times as he set up a second-round meeting with French veteran Richard Gasquet. — AFP



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Key agreements signed as 4-day COMEX 2024 opens

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The 33rd edition of the COMEX 2024 exhibition launched at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday, May 27, 2023.

The 4-day event has been organised by Al Dar Al Arabia in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) with the aim of enhancing digital investment and showcasing the latest advancements in technologies and electronic services.



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said presided over the opening of COMEX 2024 on Monday.

of Finance (MoF), General Secretariat of Tender Board, Supreme Judiciary, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Central Bank of Oman, and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Additionally, over 100 local and international technology organisations joined the event, contributing to its diverse and dynamic atmosphere.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-secretary of the MoTCIT for Communications and Information Technology, emphasised that the ministry is working, based on the Royal

Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to make digital economy a priority and a pillar of the national economy.

This includes implementing the National Digital Economy Programme in collaboration with relevant institutions in both the government and private sectors.

The programme aims to increase the contribution of the digital economy to the gross domestic product from 2% to 10% by 2040 and to achieve growth in eight executive programmes: digital industry, digital transformation, space, artificial

intelligence and advanced technologies, e-commerce, cybersecurity industry, and technical infrastructure.

Dr Al Shaithani emphasised that the volume of investments in the telecommunications and information technology sector since the announcement of the National Digital Economy Programme has exceeded RO 1 billion, with a significant portion of these investments focused on areas such as communication technologies, data storage and processing, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, space technology, and

semiconductors.

Comprehensive participation

COMEX 2024, he said, features participation from over 282 companies, compared to 216 companies last year, with the value of agreements and projects estimated to be 60% higher than those announced at COMEX 2023, surpassing RO 40 million.

He also highlighted the value of new projects and agreements announced on the opening day, totalling around RO 60 million, encompassing digital fields, the development of core technological infrastructure, projects by the Oman Investment Authority to support the digital economy, and technological investments.

Regarding upcoming projects, Dr Al Shaithani added that the technological revolution presents a great opportunity for those who can capitalise on it.

Therefore, the MoTCIT is working on projects that will soon come to fruition, including the 'Omani Linguistic Model,' which aligns with the generative artificial intelligence revolution such as ChatGPT and Gemini, incorporating Omani identity and culture. Additionally, they are collaborating on the 4th Industrial Revolution Center project with the World Economic Forum, the Unified National Gateway for

Government Services project, and the Specialised Technical Zone for Startups project.

He emphasised that several international indicators reflect the level of growth and development in the telecommunications and information technology sector. Oman achieved the 50th position globally in the United Nations 2022 e-Government Development Index and ranked fourth in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) index for the maturity of electronic and mobile government services for 2023.

Additionally, Oman secured the 50th position internationally in the 2023 Global Artificial Intelligence Readiness Index and the 33rd position in the International Telecommunication Union's ICT Development Index (IDI) for 2023. Dr Al Shaithani, affirmed that there are many notable projects in the digital transformation deserving commendation.

Among them is the pioneering step in digital transformation for elections implemented by the Ministry of Interior during the Shura Council elections for the tenth term. This represented a comprehensive digital experience for the electoral process.

TURN TO P15

Civil Aviation Authority to licence new low-cost airline in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Oman Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has officially announced its intention to licence a new low-cost airline in the Sultanate of Oman, marking a significant milestone in the country's aviation sector.

This move is poised to transform the aviation landscape in Oman, providing more affordable travel options and enhancing connectivity both regionally and globally.

Oman's strategic decision to introduce a low-cost carrier aligns with the broader vision to position Oman as a pivotal aviation hub in the region.

Currently, the country is served by Salam Air, the nation's first low-cost airline, which has successfully provided budget-friendly travel options since its inception.

The introduction of an additional low-cost airline will further diversify the market, offering travellers even more choices and competitive pricing.

The country boasts award-



The introduction of an additional low-cost airline will further diversify the market, offering travellers even more choices and competitive pricing. Image for illustration only.

winning, state-of-the-art airports that have been recognised for their modern facilities and exceptional passenger experiences.

These airports are well-equipped to handle the increasing air traffic that Oman has been experiencing, thanks to their advanced infrastructure and efficient operations.

The geographical location of Oman offers a strategic advantage, serving as a gateway between the East and the West. This prime positioning is expected to attract a significant number of travelers and boost the tourism sector,

which in turn will have a positive ripple effect on the nation's economy.

The introduction of a low-cost airline will make air travel more accessible to a broader segment of the population, promoting domestic tourism and making it easier for residents to explore the diverse landscapes and rich cultural heritage of Oman.

Moreover, the new low-cost airline is anticipated to stimulate competition within the aviation market, driving innovation and improving service quality. It will provide an alternative to

the existing carriers, offering competitive pricing and fostering a more dynamic market environment. This competition is expected to benefit consumers by providing more choices and better value for their money.

The CAA's move is also in line with global trends where low-cost carriers have been instrumental in democratising air travel.

These airlines have played a crucial role in connecting underserved destinations, thereby contributing to regional development and economic growth.

By licencing a low-cost airline, Oman is not only enhancing its aviation sector but also committing to sustainable growth and inclusive development.

The Oman's rapidly growing air traffic underscores the need for more carriers to meet the increasing demand.

The introduction of a new player in the market is a proactive response to this demand, ensuring that the infrastructure keeps pace with growth and that passengers have more options for their travel needs.

COMEX 2024 exemplifies Oman's ongoing digital transformation

MOHAMMED AL DIGHASHI
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The annual COMEX exhibition, which launched here on Monday, brings together technology experts, from the government sector, leading companies, and technology enthusiasts in one place. The exhibition is an important platform for displaying the latest innovations and digital solutions that contribute to supporting the digital transformation process in the Sultanate of Oman.

In interviews conducted by the *Observer*, participants and visitors shared their excitement about being part of this vibrant platform, and spoke about its importance in accelerating the country's digital transformation.

Wael al Waeli, a tech-savvy visitor, pointed out that investing in technology is considered a successful investment because it keeps pace with modern technical developments such as artificial intelligence and digital transformation.

He explained that the COMEX exhibition is an important window to showcase these technologies, as it gives companies supporting the digital field and artificial intelligence an opportunity to showcase their innovations and highlight future technologies. Al Waeli added that the exhibition plays a vital role in enhancing awareness of new technologies among visitors and participants, which contributes to supporting the digital transformation process in the Sultanate of Oman.

Sarah al Harithi, one of the



participants, described COMEX as more than just a technology event, but rather an interactive platform that brings together experts, innovators and end users.

She added that the exhibition provides an ideal environment for communication and cooperation between various parties, which opens the way for the exchange of ideas and experiences and the building of strategic partnerships. She pointed out that this event helps stimulate innovation and encourage more local companies to adopt modern technologies, which contributes to achieving Oman's digital vision and developing a knowledge-based economy.

Omar bin Musa al Balushi, a participant, noted that the COMEX is a comprehensive platform that brings together the latest technologies in the field of digital transformation, giving institutions and individuals the opportunity to learn about these innovations in an integrated environment that includes a wide range of electronic and technological developments.

TURN TO PAGE 15

OETC launches sustainable projects to support community institutions

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to social responsibility and sustainable goals aimed at creating a positive impact on Omani society, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has recently launched three sustainable projects.

These initiatives are designed to provide essential support to various community organisations, improve the quality of life for individuals, and enhance their integration into the local community, contributing to a more prosperous future for the Sultanate of Oman.

The sustainability projects included supporting the Omani Association for the Disabled by providing 55 wheelchairs to be distributed to people with disabilities, in order to facilitate their movement and reduce their dependence on others, as well as



to enhance their integration into society.

The sustainability projects also included supporting the Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired by providing 20 specialised and advanced hearing aids, to be distributed to

students in schools to improve their integration into society, enhance their self-confidence, and improve their quality of life.

Additionally, the sustainability projects included supporting the Omani Cancer Association (OCA) by providing 8 specialised

and advanced models to support awareness campaigns about breast cancer, and the importance of early detection for better treatment opportunities.

These models will be distributed across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman to facilitate the movement of association members and enhance awareness campaigns and initiatives in this regard.

In confirmation of the OETC's commitment to supporting the community and launching such initiatives, Samira bint Salim al Mughairiyah, Communication and Sustainability Manager, highlighted the various initiatives, projects, and plans the company is working on to achieve a sustainable positive impact on the local community and its members.

She also emphasised the company's ongoing efforts to

achieve its targets in various aspects of sustainability, especially environmental, social, and governance sustainability.

Al Mughairiyah added, "OETC is diligently striving to support progress in various vital fields, especially those directly impacting the local community and its members.

We affirm the company's commitment to sustainability through every initiative and project, as we aim, through our initiatives, to support various sectors rather than focusing on a specific sector.

This has been evident to all through the various sustainable projects we have launched in previous years.

We are continuing our efforts to achieve environmental, social, and governance sustainability (ESG), for a sustainable future for Oman and its people."



Abdulrahman bin Humaid al Yahyai

Oman's IGC names new CEO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 27

The Board of Directors of the Integrated Gas Company (IGC), a subsidiary of the Ministry of Finance, has announced the appointment of Abdulrahman bin Humaid al Yahyai as the new Chief Executive Officer.

Welcoming the new CEO in a statement, the Board said his extensive experience and transformational leadership skills would contribute to achieving IGC's goals and aspirations during the coming period.

Al Yahyai has a long wealth of extensive local, regional and international experience in executive leadership in the oil and gas sector across his integrated chain, where he spent his career spanning more than 22 years in multiple companies in the upper, middle and lower segments in the executive, operational, technical and commercial fields.

Before joining IGC, he served as CEO of the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), which is the first professional civil society organisation concerned with supervising companies in the energy and minerals sector, setting professional standards and supervising In-Country Value (ICV), and the dissemination of best professional practices.

As CEO he oversaw OPAL's quantum leap in various fields, positioning it as a prominent organisation locally, regionally and internationally. Earlier, he held leadership positions at Occidental, Schlumberger Overseas, Oman LNG and the Royal Office.

In addition to his extensive management experience and strategic mindset and work in the field of oil and gas, he has contributed to the establishment of a number of international and local companies and has significant contributions at the national level in general and the energy, minerals, logistics, education and operation sector in particular, IGC added.

BankDhofar showcases cutting-edge banking solutions at COMEX 2024



MUSCAT: BankDhofar and Dhofar Islamic are participating at the 33rd edition of COMEX 2024, Oman's premier technology, communications, innovation, and digital transformation show. Taking place from May 27 to 30, at the OCEC, this event brings together leading technology companies showcasing cutting-edge solutions.

Additionally, BankDhofar is the main sponsor of the Oman Broadband Innovatex Gaming event at the Gaming Zone. The largest video gaming event ever in the Sultanate of Oman.

BankDhofar places innovation and customer-centricity at the forefront while developing its products and services. The bank strives to offer a seamless and convenient banking experience to its customers.

Visitors of BankDhofar and Dhofar Islamic booth, at the Banking Fintech and InsurTech Zone, will get a chance to explore and experience the advanced banking solutions including: Dhofar Pay, Dhofar Islamic Pay, Samsung Pay, Rewards programme for credit card holders and Ladies Banking.

BankDhofar puts technology and innovation at the core of its strategy to improve the experience of its customers.

The Bank is constantly keeping pace with the technological developments while designing new products and services to ensure convenient banking experience for customers. Customers may conduct their transactions at ease and around the clock through the highly-secured and user-friendly digital banking channels.

Sharakah, National Finance launch Zaad Al Ruwaad

MUSCAT: Sharakah, Oman's premier SME development successfully hosted a two-day event named Zaad Al Ruwaad at the Crowne Plaza — Muscat located at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. This initiative, a collaborative effort with National Finance Company, assembled a wide range of participants including entrepreneurs, academicians, and business enthusiasts.

This distinctive workshop provided a thorough and hands-on representation of the business world, guiding attendees through the intricacies of launching their own businesses.

It took them through each phase, facing opportunities and



obstacles that closely resemble the realities of project management.

The programme was wide-ranging, addressing essential elements like choosing the best site, managing finances, planning human resources, and pricing strategies for products or services. It also covered the overall operational components

of a business venture.

Alibin Ahmed Muqaibal, CEO, Sharakah, said, "We were pleased with the response we got from the community. It proved that thoughtfully designed initiatives and programmes tailored for ambitious entrepreneurs are very necessary. At Sharakah we are dedicated to driving economic

Vodafone's advanced enterprise solutions take COMEX by storm

MUSCAT: Vodafone Oman is taking the 33rd edition of the annual global technology show, COMEX, to the next level by bringing the future of enterprise connectivity to life through transformational experiences, technological innovations and empowering services.

Focusing on key economic sectors including transport, health, agriculture and technology, the Vodafone showcase demonstrates the company's global expertise and commitment to revolutionise the digital landscape in Oman.

From a custom built digital-river to an immersive digital twin experience, engaging workshops and groundbreaking solutions, this year's COMEX showcase promises more than just mobility.

Commenting on this year's participation, Aneth Guerra, Vodafone Oman's Chief Operating Officer said, "COMEX is a key event for us, providing a strategic platform to showcase our technological advancements and innovative solutions.

This year, following the launch of our enterprise solutions, we aim to demonstrate the practical benefits we can offer Omani businesses by leveraging Vodafone Group's global expertise."

She went on to add, "Our participation underscores our commitment to driving digital



transformation and economic growth in Oman, equipping enterprises with the tools they need to succeed in today's dynamic digital landscape."

Adding value to its participation, Vodafone is set to host a series of educational workshops focused on AI, digital transformation, and future-proofing businesses. With an impressive line-up of industry expert speakers, the sessions will equip the enterprise community with the skills needed for growth and efficiency.

They will further help safeguard operations and leverage technology effectively, by providing valuable insights on how to thrive in an evolving digital economy.

In line with its vision to digitalise the Omani way of life, Vodafone is also presenting four industry-specific solutions, each highlighting the company's advance technological capabilities today.

Addressing road safety, Vodafone is inviting visitors to explore its newly launched platform called Safer Transport for Europe Platform (STEP).

An innovative solution aimed to enhance transportation safety and efficiency, it was developed to connect road users directly with road operators and each other, enabling the sharing of safety information, hazard warnings and traffic updates in real-time no matter the device or in-vehicle

system.

Within the Agriculture sector, Vodafone is presenting its cutting-edge digital platform, MYFARMWEBTm, designed to benefit farmers and their operations. Utilising data collated from various sources and interfaces, the platform offers extensive services to enable the running of a more professional, profitable, and environmentally friendly commercial farm.

The third showcase presents Vodafone's unique technological advancement within the health sector.

Through a solution called "Health Broker" Vodafone's is playing a pivotal role in improving the lives of those in assisted care by giving them tools to maintain their independence and giving peace of mind to their friends and family.

The final showcase, presented in collaboration with Vodafone's industry partner HTC, is the Digital Twin—a virtual representation of a physical object or system that provides real-time data and insights.

At COMEX, this technology will offer a detailed and accurate virtual view of the booth layout and showcases, allowing visitors to experience the booth remotely. On-site attendees will enjoy interactive elements such as virtual tours, product demonstrations, and live workshop sessions.

OQ digital hub launched to train talents in cybersecurity and SAP systems



MUSCAT: OQ, the global integrated energy group, launched the OQ Digital Hub under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Established in partnership with various leading international and local companies in the information technology sector, OQ Digital Hub aims to harness collective efforts to develop national workforce skills through structured and high-level training programmes offered by global tech companies.

These meticulously structured programmes will provide globally recognised certification, enhancing the professional qualifications of participants. Furthermore, the involvement of these companies in the hub will contribute by adding value to the agreements signed with the OQ group and its companies.

The Hub will welcome its first cohort of trainees, composed of OQ employees, in September with the initiative set to be evaluated after one year.

This initiative is part of OQ's ongoing strategy to enhance human resources development in Oman, aligning with the Oman Vision 2040 goals to leverage digital resources that keep up with global tech developments and contribute to the nation's development goals.

By focusing on several pillars of digital transformation, OQ develops digital solutions through partnerships with global companies, accelerates digital transformation, fosters SMEs, and trains entrepreneurs to hone their IT skills.

The Hub targets young talents, preparing them for the job market, enhancing diversity and inclusion in the digital sector, creating opportunities for disabled individuals and promoting digital innovation through encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting the establishment and adoption of digital solutions.

It also aims to provide assurances by addressing the social and ethical impacts of digital transformation, contributing to Oman's economic growth, diversification and enhancing its competitiveness and resilience in the digital age.

OQ signed 14 memoranda of cooperation with international companies to enhance the Hub by providing training programmes.

The memoranda were signed in the presence of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology and Dirk Lölke, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Sultanate of Oman.

OIA to localise manufacture of electrolyzers in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 27

Investments by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in a US-based technology firm Electric Hydrogen (EH2) are aimed ultimately at paving the way for the manufacture of electrolyzers – multimillion dollar units at the heart of the green hydrogen production process – here in the Sultanate of Oman.

Last October, the Omani wealth fund announced an investment in Massachusetts-based Electric Hydrogen, acclaimed for its ability to manufacture the world's most powerful electrolyzers designed to deliver the lowest-cost green hydrogen.

OIA was among an array of prominent international investors that had participated in a funding round that, to date, has raised around \$750 million for EH2.

They included Bill Gates-founded Breakthrough Energy, Australian mining and energy firm Fortescue, tech giant Microsoft's Climate Innovation Fund, Amazon's Climate Pledge Fund, bp Ventures, Temasek, Equinor Ventures, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Prelude Ventures, Rio Tinto and S2G Ventures, among others.

In remarks featured in the latest edition of its Enjaz & Eajaz newsletter, OIA said an underlying objective behind its investment in the US electrolyser firm is to enable the production of this critical hardware here in Oman.

"OIA and EH2 signed a strategic cooperation agreement to set up green hydrogen production



(Credit: Electric Hydrogen)

projects. The facilities will use proton exchange membrane technology on a minimum scale, including the local manufacturing of electrolyzers to cater for the increasing local demand," the wealth fund said.

"This is in line with OIA's series of sustainable investments in renewable energy; the emerging transition to green hydrogen and the aspiration to lead the global energy transition; and to contribute to the national goal of carbon neutrality by 2050."

As with many of its international investments of this nature, the EH2 investment came from OIA's Future Generations Fund, which "aims to create sufficient financial reserves for future generations, in addition

to attracting knowledge and advanced technologies that have the potential to advance strategic local sectors", it noted.

EH2's proton exchange membrane (PEM) based electrolyzers, according to the wealth fund, have a high operational capacity of up to 100 MW for each asset, with a capacity to produce about 50 tonnes of low-cost green hydrogen daily.

It is estimated that Oman will require around 500 electrolyzers, potentially worth several billions of dollars, in order to meet its target of producing 1 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen by 2030. Eight international consortiums are currently in the initial phases of their respective project strategies

to contribute to this target.

Significantly, EH2 is not the only international company that OIA has tapped in a bid to develop local capacities in support of electrolyser manufacturing in Oman.

Last December, the Authority signed an agreement with global tech giant Siemens Energy to explore the potential for establishing an electrolyser manufacturing facility locally.

More recently, IDO Investments, the venture capital arm of OIA, Oman Investment Authority (OIA), participated in a funding round launched by Australian electrolyser company Hysata, credited with building one of the world's most energy-efficient electrolyzers.

Key agreements signed as 4-day COMEX 2024 opens

FROM PAGE 13

In the field of digital environment development, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology added that the government has launched several supportive initiatives and funding sources for the growth of emerging technology companies.

The MoTCIT, in collaboration with relevant authorities, has worked on organising and developing the stimulating and accelerating digital environment for the growth of emerging technology companies, considering it a fundamental pillar for digital economy growth and a contributor to enhancing the national economy.

"Today, we see the impact of these initiatives and efforts in the escalating growth and development of Omani technology companies. We were pleased recently with several important indicators, such as the inclusion of Omani company 'Thawani' in the list of the top 50 strongest fintech companies in the Middle East in Forbes magazine's 2024 report.

Additionally, Omani company 'Rahal' was selected as the third fastest-growing company in the Middle East in Deloitte's



Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, addressing the opening session.

international report," he said.

"Moreover, over 100 Omani youth have been trained and employed in the field of semiconductor design and testing through their participation in the first foreign investment for a semiconductor company operating in Oman. Omani youth at this company have successfully designed the first electronic chips named Oman1 and Oman2. This marks a promising start for the Omani semiconductor industry," he added.

Major agreements

The event witnessed the signing of several agreements with specialised technology companies. An agreement was inked between the MoTCIT and ITHCA Group and Nortel, aimed at developing and designing the unified national

electronic government services portal.

Additionally, another agreement was signed between the MoTCIT and Diyar United Company for Trading and Contracting to upgrade the infrastructure for electronic authentication, intending to enhance the integrated electronic authentication system and provide solutions for identity verification, electronic signatures, time stamps, electronic seals and various certificate issuance systems.

Furthermore, a project implementation agreement for digital transformation was signed between the Consumer Protection Authority and ITHCA Group. Moreover, the General Secretariat of the Tender Board and Bahwan Cybertech signed a

contract for the design, supply, installation, implementation and maintenance of the National Integrated Government Projects and Procurement Management System (Takamul), serving an electronic project benefiting all government entities under the General Secretariat of the Tender Board (digital transformation).

Oman Data Park also signed an agreement to establish the largest national backup data centre in the country with Middle East Information Systems LLC.

This investment amounts to around \$25 million for the first phase.

Additionally, a strategic partnership was signed between Omantel and Google to establish the first edge cloud computing centre in the region (Middle East, Africa, and Asia) to provide AI-generated intelligence services and data analysis solutions worth RO 2 million.

Another strategic partnership was inked between OmanTel and Amazon Web Services for sovereign cloud services to establish an integrated e-commerce platform in the Sultanate of Oman, alongside the establishment of a cloud excellence centre and the provision of AI-generated intelligence solutions worth RO 24 million.

Far-reaching financial systems

In an interview with the

Observer, Khalid al Busaidy, Director of Media and Communication at the Ministry of Finance, said the Ministry is showcasing the systems, programmes and technological applications utilised within the MoF, serving the broader governmental framework.

Al Busaidy outlined the inclusion of approximately six systems, notably the primary financial system, alongside the government asset registry system, the unified treasury account system, the public debt management system, electronic salary transfers or digital payments and a beneficiary system tailored for MoF operations.

While discussing the range of systems, he referenced the importance of the national registry of government assets, indicating an approximate count of six, potentially seven or five, emphasising their integration within the broader governmental financial infrastructure.

Al Busaidy reiterated the pivotal role of the unified government financial system in collating revenue and expenditure data, facilitating interconnectivity with various government departments, including human resources systems within the Ministry of Labour, all aimed at ensuring effective governance and oversight.

COMEX 2024 exemplifies Oman's ongoing digital transformation

FROM PAGE 13

The exhibition represents a unique opportunity to benefit from these technologies and apply them in various fields. Sectors, which support the digital transformation process in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Balushi added that event enables visitors to explore advanced digital solutions such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, cloud technologies, and big data analysis, among other innovations.

Salah bin Salem al Jaafari, an IT expert, pointed out Comex comes with many sessions, initiatives and competitions that motivate companies to participate and compete in providing the best technical solutions in various fields. In addition, this version has a new section for electronic games, and this is considered a new type of digital transformation in the gaming sector, with the support of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

Welcoming the presence of the Cyber Defense Section at the exhibition, underlined the pivotal role that such entities play in securing the country's digital infrastructure, especially in light of the increasing cyber threats worldwide.

Using AI to boost your personal and professional lifestyle

Do you sometimes find yourself overwhelmed by lots of activities, be it at work or at home, individually or as a group in a team? You are not alone.

Your day is filled with many tasks to manage and tackle. Invitations to attend meetings keep popping up on your desktop, tablet and even on your smart mobile phone.

E-mails and instant messages (from platforms such as Whatsapp, Facebook messenger, Instagram or Snapchat) becomes almost impossible to responds instantly (despite the intention and the name) or even timely as they were intended to achieve.

You work long hours and by the time you end up going back home or to your family, it becomes almost impossible to spend quality time, yet just want to crash in on



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is founder of Knowledge Oman knowledgeoman.com

TECHNOLOGY AND SPECIFICALLY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CAN HELP YOU MANAGE YOUR LIFESTYLE EFFICIENTLY AND ULTIMATELY PRODUCTIVELY

your bed, to get some sleep/rest, and get up again next day in the morning just to repeat the routine all over again.

Does this sound familiar (like you or someone you know)? Yes, they too are not alone, for this is the lifestyle of many today – no thanks to the information overload and the unhealthy dynamic heavy-duty lifestyle we living on today.

Bad news is that you will one way or another be impacted by this way of living; whether it happens to you, a family member, a colleague but ultimately someone important that you may be depending on.

The good news is, however, that technology and specifically artificial intelligence can help you manage your lifestyle efficiently and ultimately productively.

How can that be, is what my article will try and shed some light on today?

First things first. Let’s look at the numbers. Studies from reputed institutions have shown that proper task management can increase productivity by approximately 25%.

In average, a professional spends about 35% of the his/her week at work managing e-mails (I can seriously attest on that too on a personal experience).

The physical inactivity is a leading risk factor for global mortality (ouch). Professionals from the creative industry experience a 30% increase in efficiency using AI tools.

Employees that use personalised learning platforms (e.g. LinkedIn, Udmy, Coutesa etc to name a few) have reported a 39% increase in productivity (and consequent job promotion).

Businesses in general lose tens of billions annually due to poorly

organised meetings (or yes I too can vouch on that as well).

Scheduling your meetings (smartly), personalising your tasks (smartly), reducing and focusing on what is important (smartly), managing e-mail and instant messages (smartly), creatively getting your job done (smartly), while you ensure you continue upgrading your knowledge and skills (smartly), and lastly managing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle (smartly) is some of the many ways AI tools can help you to increase and boost your personal and professional life productively, of course using Smart Technologies powered by AI.

With the smart solutions from the big boys i.e. Microsoft, Google, Apple, Amazon and the likes, most of the challenges you face as an individual or a team worker today can be resolved, enhanced and ultimately improved.

I have personally seen people change dramatically and transform their lives profoundly simply by learning, integrating and utilising AI tools in their lives.

A simple distraction that you get from our dynamic driven social connected work will take you an average of over 20 minutes to refocus and get back in action again.

Integrating AI tools into your personal and professional life will undoubtedly increase your productivity. Your days will surely became more structured, more manageable, and indeed live a less stressful lifestyle which is important to you and your family at home.

I will try to highlight and list some of the tools that I personally use in my future articles for your kind perusal. Until then, stay positive and continue winning.

How China pulled so far ahead on industrial policy

For more than half a century, concerns about oil shortages or a damaged climate have spurred governments to invest in alternative energy sources.

In the 1970s, President Jimmy Carter placed solar panels on the roof of the White House as a symbol of his commitment to developing energy from the sun.

In the 1990s, Japan offered homeowners groundbreaking subsidies to install photovoltaic panels. And in the 2000s, Germany developed an innovative programme that guaranteed consumers who adopted a solar energy system that they would sell their electricity at a profit.

But no country has come close to matching the scale and tenacity of China’s support.

The proof is in the production: In 2022, Beijing accounted for 85% of all clean-energy manufacturing investment in the world, according to the International Energy Agency.

Now the United States, Europe and other wealthy nations are trying frantically to catch up. Hoping to correct past missteps on industrial policy and learn from China’s successes, they are spending huge amounts on subsidising homegrown companies while also seeking to block competing Chinese products.

They have made modest inroads: Last year, the energy agency said, China’s share of new clean-energy factory investment fell to 75%.

The problem for the West, though, is that China’s industrial dominance is underpinned by decades of experience using the power of a one-party state to pull all the levers of government and banking, while encouraging frenetic competition among private companies.

China’s unrivalled production of solar panels and electric vehicles is built on an earlier cultivation of the chemical, steel, battery and electronics industries, as well as large investments in rail lines, ports and highways.

From 2017-19, it spent an extraordinary 1.7% of its gross domestic product on industrial support, more than twice the



PATRICIA COHEN

The author is the global economics correspondent for The New York Times based in London

CHINA'S UNRIVALLED PRODUCTION OF SOLAR PANELS AND ELECTRIC VEHICLES IS BUILT ON AN EARLIER CULTIVATION OF THE CHEMICAL, STEEL, BATTERY AND ELECTRONICS INDUSTRIES, AS WELL AS LARGE INVESTMENTS IN RAIL LINES, PORTS AND HIGHWAYS. FROM 2017-19, IT SPENT AN EXTRAORDINARY 1.7% OF ITS GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT ON INDUSTRIAL SUPPORT, MORE THAN TWICE THE PERCENTAGE OF ANY OTHER COUNTRY, ACCORDING TO AN ANALYSIS FROM THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



A solar and wind farm in Weifang, China, a country that controls over 80 per cent of worldwide production of every step of solar panel manufacturing. – NYT

percentage of any other country, according to an analysis from the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

That spending included low-cost loans from state-controlled banks and cheap land from provincial governments, with little expectation that the companies they were aiding would turn immediate profits.

And it was accompanied by what the United States and other countries have charged was China’s willingness to skirt international trade agreements, engage in intellectual property theft and use forced labour.

It all combined to help put China in the position today to flood rival countries with low-cost electric cars, solar cells and lithium batteries, as consumers across the wealthy world are increasingly turning to green tech.

China now controls more than 80% of worldwide production of every step of solar panel manufacturing, for example.

“There’s enormous economies of scale by going big as China did,” said Gregory Nemet, a professor of public policy at the University of Wisconsin who has studied the global solar industry. When the investments resulted in overcapacity, suppressing the profitability of China’s companies, Beijing was willing to

ride out the losses.

President Joe Biden and European leaders are determined to develop their countries’ manufacturing capacity in advanced technologies like semiconductors, electric vehicles and batteries, in part by adopting some of China’s tactics to nurture industries.

Biden and the heads of European governments, are more willing to call out Beijing for what they say are illegal practices like purposefully subsidising excess production and then dumping underpriced goods on other countries.

Beijing denies that it has violated trade rules, contending that its enormous industrial capacity is a sign of success.

Xi Jinping, China’s top leader, said this month that China had increased the global supply of goods and alleviated international inflation pressures, while helping the world fight climate change.

Biden said this month that he would impose tariffs of up to 100% on imports of Chinese green technologies including electric vehicles. The aim is to deny China any more of an opening in America.

European officials are expected to impose their own tariffs soon — despite warnings from some economists and environmentalists that the measures will slow progress on meeting clean energy goals.

Europe has become more worried about security issues as China has tilted its geopolitical stance toward Russia and Iran.

The West’s embrace of industrial policy is a departure from the ideology of open markets and minimal government intervention that the US and its allies previously championed.

Policies prompted by the 1970s energy crises were largely reversed when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980. Even the solar panels installed at the White House during the Carter administration were removed.

Except for certain security-related industries, the US adopted the view that an unfettered market always knows best.

“If the end result was that you had to rely on other countries for key parts, that was OK,” said Brad Setser, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Joseph Stiglitz, an economist at Columbia University, said the US had long lacked a broader industrial policy and a coordinated strategy.

“Even the Democrats were afraid to take a more aggressive government role,” he said, “and

I think that was obviously a big mistake with long-run consequences.”

From the perspective of some Chinese economists, complaints about unfairness from the US and Europe are a sign of their own governments’ failures.

“The West’s decision to pursue neoliberal economic policies was a strategic mistake, which led to the de-industrialisation of their economies and provided China with an opportunity,” said Zheng Yongnian, a professor at Chinese University of Hong Kong. Whatever mistakes were made, political leaders in the US say they are determined not to repeat them.

Last year, the US and European Union made “significant inroads” in clean energy technology, according to the International Energy Agency. And the Biden administration’s multibillion-dollar programme is one of the most extensive uses of industrial policy in American history.

Biden’s tariffs are a targeted escalation of an American trade offensive against China that began under former President Donald Trump. Trump imposed tariffs on imported goods from China valued at more than \$350 billion a year, drawing retaliatory tariffs from Beijing.

— The New York Times

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Gulf Development and Investment, registered with the Commerical Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under number 1457638, announces its intention to convert its legal form from a sole proprietorship to a limited liability company in accordance with Article (30) of the Commercial Companies Law (2019/18) and its amendments, Anyone who has an objection to this must submit their reason for objection to the Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within one month from the date of publication of this announcement.

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FASHION

A model presents a creation during Louis Vuitton's Cruise Collection Fashion Show at the Park Guell in Barcelona. — AFP



CINEMA

French actress and member of the Jury of the 77th Cannes Film Festival Eva Green arrives for the Closing Ceremony of the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



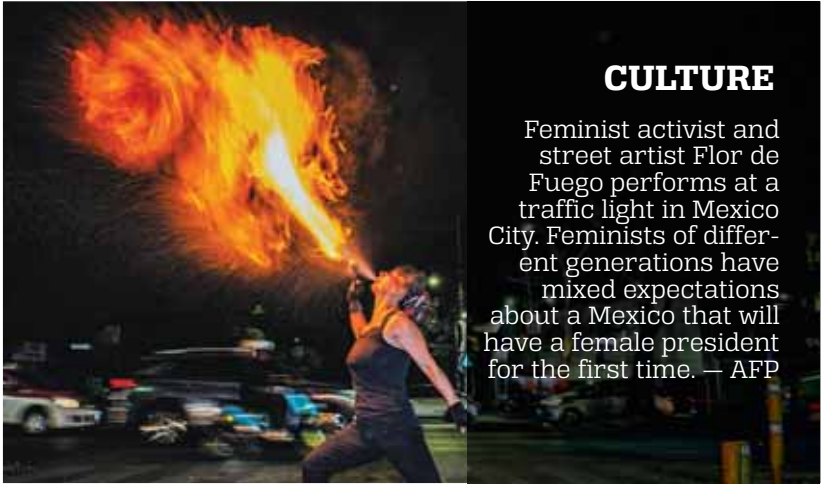
CHANGING WORLD

Representatives of the Awyu and Moi indigenous tribes dance and perform rituals in front of the Supreme Court building in Jakarta during a protest, together with environmental activists, as they called on the Supreme Court to revoke the permits of palm oil companies that are set to operate on Papuan land. —AFP



MUSIC

Brazilian singer-songwriter Maria Bethania performs during the Doce Maravilha music festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



CULTURE

Feminist activist and street artist Flor de Fuego performs at a traffic light in Mexico City. Feminists of different generations have mixed expectations about a Mexico that will have a female president for the first time. — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | MAY 28, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 20, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



HOW INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROPEL THIS YOUNG OMANI WOMAN TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

Shatha al Jabri's entrepreneurial journey began in 2011, turning Omani dates and sweets into the successful Meshan brand. Overcoming challenges, she expanded from a home business to a popular café, catering service and restaurant. Her innovative approach and perseverance exemplify the potential of Omani entrepreneurship and economic empowerment... P20

MUSIC

Quintet of Four's Russian folk fusion charms Muscat audiences

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI

In an evening where enchanting melodies intertwined with dances and songs, the celebrated Saint Petersburg ensemble, Quintet of Four, created a unique and memorable experience in

Muscat during the Victory Day celebration organised by the Russian-speaking community and the Russian Embassy. Over four days, the group showcased their talent at various venues across the country, including the Spring Festival at Al Mouj Muscat, which drew a crowd of over 16,000 attendees. Established in 2017 by alumni of the esteemed Saint Petersburg Conservatory, Quintet of Four emerges as a trailblazing force in Russian folk music. Comprising award-winning musicians, including several winners of international competitions, they transcend mere preservation of tradition; they pioneer new frontiers. Their mission extends to honouring Saint Petersburg's legacy as the birthplace of the balalaika, elevating it by infusing traditional folk music with contemporary styles. Their distinct fusion of vision, refinement, and expertise shines brightly in every performance. Quintet of Four is also a prominent presence in diplomatic circles, frequently engaging in missions supported by the Saint Petersburg Committee for External Relations and the Russian Ministry of Culture. In one of their performances last

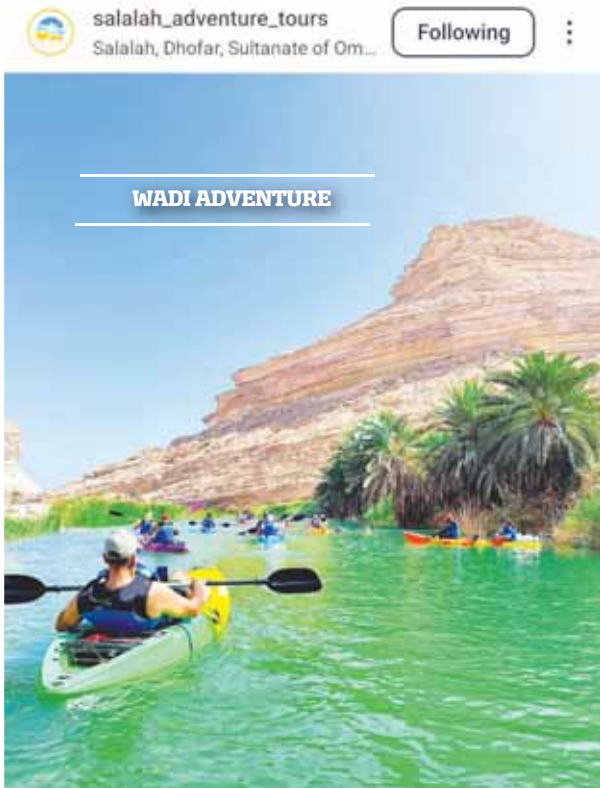
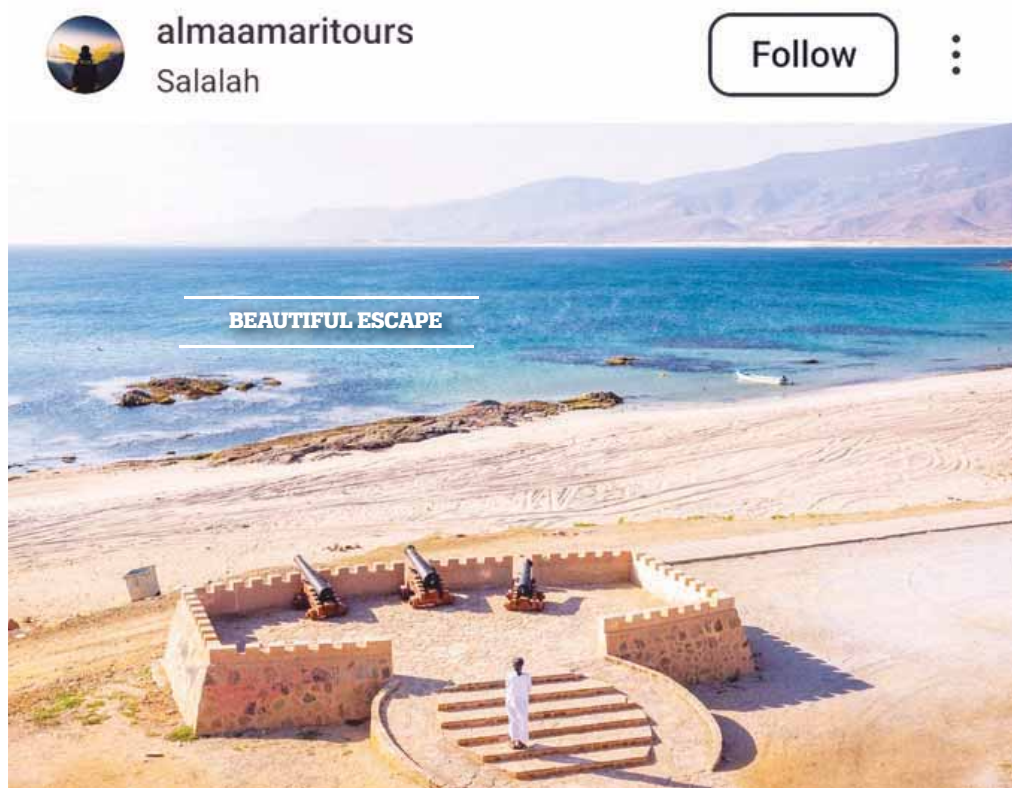


week, the ensemble opened with a selection of classical pieces, delivering an impressive show on a diverse array of traditional instruments such as the balalaika, balalaika contrabass, bayan, cajón, and domra. This created a lively and joyful atmosphere, allowing the

musicians to convey deep emotions and feelings through their skilled play, making the audience resonate with every note performed by the ensemble. The Quintet of Four surpasses the norms of traditional ensembles, emerging as a genuine phenomenon in Russian folk

music. Their performances highlight an expert blend of traditional melodies with contemporary genres such as jazz, drum and bass, dubstep, funk, swing, and beyond. Their concerts ignited a sensation in Oman, captivating audiences who eagerly embraced each performance and clamoured for more after every song. Reflecting Oman's multicultural essence, with nearly half the audience comprising foreign citizens, the diverse crowd actively engaged in interactive activities, drawing attendees from neighbouring Arab countries, India, Pakistan, Iran, Africa, and beyond. The audience wasn't merely passive listeners; they were essential contributors to the concert experience. As the performance concluded, they were invited to join in by playing traditional musical instruments, adding a delightful interactive element to the event. This fostered a cultural exchange where souls converged and harmonised with the rhythm of Russian music. The successful concert series in Oman was the result of a fruitful collaboration between the Saint Petersburg Committee for External Relations, the Russian House in Oman, the Russian Embassy in Oman, the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots (CCORC), and Al Mouj Muscat.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SPAIN'S NATIONAL ART MUSEUM TO UNVEIL NEWLY VERIFIED CARAVAGGIO

A PAINTING BY Italian master Caravaggio, once mistakenly thought to be by an unknown artist and almost auctioned off, will be unveiled on Monday at the Prado museum in the Spanish capital.

Entitled "Ecce Homo", the dark canvas depicts a bloodied Jesus wearing a crown of thorns just before his crucifixion. It is one of around only 60 known works by the Renaissance artist.

A Madrid auction house had been due to sell the painting in April 2021 with an opening price of 1,500 euros (\$1,627), mistakenly attributing it to an artist belonging to the circle of 17th century Spanish painter Jose de Ribera.

But just hours before it was to go under the hammer, the culture ministry blocked the operation on suspicion it was actually by Caravaggio, whose works are worth millions.

The ministry action came after the Prado museum sounded the alarm, saying it had "sufficient documentary and stylistic evidence" to suggest that the work was in fact by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.

The museum announced earlier this month that top experts have determined that the painting is "without a doubt, a Caravaggio masterpiece", calling it "one of the greatest discoveries in the history of art".

The painting has been restored and will be displayed to the public for the first time since it was confirmed as a Caravaggio at a press conference at the Prado museum on Monday. Experts who worked on its identification and restoration will take part.

Spanish media have reported that the new owner is a British national who lives in Spain and who paid 36 million euros (\$39,056,000) for the painting, which may remain on public display after its run at the Prado for

several months.

The painting "is not going to end up in the home of its buyer" who wants it to join "public collections, for the moment, on loan", Jorge Coll, the lead of London art gallery Colnaghi which handled the sale, told Spain's top-selling newspaper *El Pais*.

HAD NO DOUBT

Painted around 1605-1609, the dark and atmospheric canvas is believed to have at one point been part of the private collection of Spain's King Philip IV, before being exhibited in the apartments of his son Charles II.

One of the experts who took part in its authentication, art history professor Maria Cristina Terzaghi of Italian university Roma Tre, said in a 2021 interview that when she saw a picture of the painting sent to her by WhatsApp by some art dealer friends, she “immediately realised it could be very important”.

She flew to Madrid to see the canvas and "had no doubt... it was clear it was a work by Caravaggio".

For her, the evidence was ample: from "the head of Christ" to the glow of his torso, the colour of his cloak and "the three-dimensional nature of the three figures, who are offset in a transition that is almost cinematic".

Caravaggio, who had a violent and chaotic life, pioneered the Baroque painting technique known as *chiaroscuro*, in which light and shadow are sharply contrasted.

Art historians use various methods to determine the legitimacy of a artwork, including forensic examination of the canvas and paint to determine its age, the technology and styles of the era it was created in, and the techniques of the artist or their students. — **AFP**

CULTURE

Algerian
villagers
celebrate
spring with
ancestral
ball game

ALGERIAN VILLAGERS run across a highland meadow and strike a ball with wooden sticks in an ancestral game similar to hockey, to celebrate the advent of spring.

"We've inherited this game from our Amazigh ancestors," said 22-year-old Sid Ahmed Yettou, using the local term for the ethnic group also known as Berbers.

"We play it at the start of spring every year — seven times through May."

The age-old game called thakourth, which means ball, is passed down "from father to son," Rabeh Zaghmim, 68, said.

"Today we are teaching it to our young ones," he added, smiling at children around him enjoying the game in the northern highlands.

Thakourth has historically been practised throughout North Africa among the Amazigh, with regional variations in ways of playing.

Teams wield slender wooden sticks curved at the bottom to manoeuvre a wooden ball woven from twigs that is called a koura.

Teams, usually from the same village, play on fields spanning up



to several hundred metres (yards).

Unlike in field hockey, players can catch the ball by hand and fling it deep into the opponents' side to score points for their team.

Heritage researcher and historian Radhia Beljedoui said "this game is an extension of nature. It symbolises joy and welcoming for the arrival of spring."

Villager Omar Darbal, 50, an enthusiast of the sport, said, "I make the ball from heather twigs ... one for each week we play during spring season."

Direct body contact is ruled out, but the games can get physical as striking other players' sticks is allowed.

Locals say the game is a way to lay to rest grudges and settle latent disputes that may have festered between some villagers.

"Some go a whole year without seeing each other," said Omar Hamadouch, 76. "If there are any problems between them, they make up here." — **AFP**



How innovation & entrepreneurship propel this young Omani woman to business success

BY AMAL AL RIYAMI

In 2011, young Omani entrepreneur Shatha al Jabri embarked on her entrepreneurial journey. During a time when job opportunities were limited in the Omani community, Shatha was one of the many individuals who sought alternative solutions and began developing new ideas and projects.

With determination and a vision for innovation, she launched her first venture: the production of Omani dates and sweets. This project, which acquired intellectual property rights, is a pioneering initiative in Oman and the Gulf countries, offering dates with a unique and distinctive character.

What began as a modest home-based endeavour soon blossomed into a thriving enterprise, transforming the perception of traditional Omani dates. Within four years, Shatha expanded her business to include a café registered under the "Mashan" brand, serving a variety of dishes and pastries made from dates. With growing demand, the project ventured into the catering industry, offering innovative Omani cuisine and sweets to an expanding customer base. By 2019, Meshan's daily production capacity had surpassed 2,500 servings, demonstrating its increasing popularity and success.

Young business owners in Oman face several significant challenges as they navi-

gate the entrepreneurial landscape.

The small domestic market in Oman leads to high competition among local businesses, making it challenging for new entrepreneurs to establish a customer base and achieve significant market share. They often find themselves competing with well-established players who have better resources and brand recognition.

Additionally, there is a noticeable skills and knowledge gap, with many young business owners lacking access to quality business education and mentorship programs that provide essential entrepreneurial skills and market knowledge.

Despite challenges including gaining customer confidence and navigating government regulations, Shatha persevered and steered her venture to success. The road was fraught with obstacles, but her unwavering resolve and strategic approach enabled her to overcome them, emerging stronger and more determined than ever.

Shatha shared, "With striving, trust, determination and patience, all projects see the light and progress steadily. Meshan began its journey and expanded thoughtfully in the market, as we adopted a policy of building a customer base before fully entering the market."

By forging strategic partnerships, conducting thorough market research and prioritising innovation,

Shatha significantly expanded her business. Her unwavering commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction propelled Meshan to greater heights, culminating in the opening of a restaurant in Nizwa in November 2021. This move solidified Meshan's reputation as a sought-after tourist destination known for its distinct offerings and warm ambience.

Today, Meshan Restaurant is renowned as a tourist destination, attracting both Omanis and foreigners with its unique location, exceptional meals, and dedicated hospitality staff.

Because Meghan specialises in hospitality, Shatha was able to sign an agreement to operate a resort in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar called "Damask." This resort will be the first in Oman managed by Omani women, offering a new and unique experience in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Shatha received prestigious accolades, including the 2014 Best Entrepreneur Award from Bank Muscat and the 2021 Youth Excellence Award, acknowledging her exceptional entrepreneurial prowess. Meshan has won many awards, including the Riyada Award for Best Small Business in the Commercial Category in 2014.

Reflecting on her journey, Shatha imparts valuable advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, stressing the significance of perseverance, confidence, and effective delega-

tion within their teams.

"Success is not merely achieved overnight, but through steadfastness and dedication," she shared.

She added, "The work must be followed up directly, and the tasks must be distributed among the employees, motivating them and paying attention to them as they are the pillar on which the project is based. Giving your full time to the project is one of the reasons for its success, especially in the founding stages."

Shatha also said, "Oman is a fertile land for innovative and renewable projects and has many resources that can be exploited. We hope that the government will facilitate procedures and laws to facilitate self-employment for those wishing to enter entrepreneurship."

Shatha's story not only highlights the resilience and ingenuity of Omani entrepreneurs but also underscores the transformative potential of economic empowerment and innovation in the face of adversity. As Oman continues to create a supportive environment for entrepreneurial endeavours, Shatha's journey exemplifies how entrepreneurship can drive economic growth and prosperity.

Empowering individuals to tackle job scarcity by starting from the grassroots and striving for significant achievements through entrepreneurship is a viable path to success.

