

HM greets Finland President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sauli Niinisto of the Republic of Finland on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Niinisto and the people of Finland further progress and prosperity.



P12

TEN HAG CONFIDENT HE RETAINS BACKING OF MAN UTD PLAYERS



P13

PROPOSED DUQM-RIYADH RAIL LINK TO INTEGRATE AL DHAHIRAH ZONE



P20

FIRST LOOK INSIDE OMAN'S INNOVATIVE BOTANICAL GARDEN



MUSCAT

19.5% RISE IN FISH LANDING

The total quantity of fish landed by artisanal fishing in the Sultanate of Oman, till the end of September, stood at 483,984 tonnes, reaching a value of RO 285,857,000, up by 19.5 per cent, compared to the same period in 2022, when its total quantity was 405,013 tonnes, according to the preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The statistics also showed that the quantity of fish landed at the end of September through commercial fishing reached 29,366 tonnes, while the quantity of fish landed through coastal fishing reached 3,565 tonnes. The highest quantity of fish landed through artisanal fishing was recorded in the Governorate of Al Wusta, which reached 180,501 tonnes.

CHENNAI

13 DIE AS CYCLONE HITS INDIA'S SOUTH



Cyclone Michaung barrelled into the southern Indian coast on Tuesday with intense winds, its arrival preceded by torrential rains and flooding that killed at least 13 people, as officials assessed the damage. Tall waves crashed into southern coastal towns over the last two days as the cyclone approached, submerging entire villages and halting all transportation as more than 390,000 people felt its impact, authorities said. Michaung made landfall near the beach town of Bapatla in Andhra Pradesh state with winds of up to 70 mph that later dropped slightly as the 'severe' category cyclone weakened, the Indian weather office said. Further weakening is forecast in the next six hours.

ON BEHALF OF HM, SAYYID FAHD HEADS OMAN'S DELEGATION

GCC Summit calls for end to Israeli siege

DOHA: The final statement of the 44th GCC Summit held in Doha said that the GCC Supreme Council expressed its deep appreciation and gratitude for the great and sincere efforts made by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik during the Sultanate of Oman's presidency of the 43rd session pointing to the important steps and achievements the session witnessed.

On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation in the 44th GCC Summit, which was held in Doha, the State of Qatar, on Tuesday.

The Supreme Council expressed its hope to end escalations in Gaza, the targeting of Palestinian civilians, the forced displacement of Palestinians and towards a complete cessation of the war on Gaza Strip, ending the Israeli siege on Gaza, alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people. The Supreme Council stressed that the international community should shoulder the responsibility of dealing with this issue without applying double standards.

The statement said that the GCC Supreme Council oversees the implementation and complementation of the economic unity and the joint defence and security systems. Besides, the Council coordinates attitudes to enhance the solidarity and stability of the GCC states to avoid regional and international conflicts and achieve the aspirations and ambitions of their peoples.

The Supreme Council expressed its satisfaction over the steps taken to attain integration among the GCC states. The Supreme Council directed the competent authorities in the member states and the GCC Secretariat-General and the ministerial and technical committees to double efforts to complete the requirements of the Customs Union.

The final statement affirmed the GCC Supreme Council's adoption of the basic pillars of energy transitions, energy security, economic development and climate change by continuing with sustainable investments in hydrocarbon sources to maintain the stability of global energy markets while taking into... [TURN TO P2](#)



GCC leaders pose for a group photo in Doha on Tuesday. PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

ENHANCE SOLIDARITY AND STABILITY OF THE GCC STATES

SATISFACTION OVER STEPS FOR INTEGRATION AMONG STATES

DECLARATION CAUTIONS AGAINST THE DANGERS OF WARS

CONCERN OVER ESCALATION OF HATRED AGAINST MUSLIMS

Israeli forces storm Khan Younis in south Gaza

GAZA: Israeli forces stormed southern Gaza's main city on Tuesday in what they called the most intense day of combat in five weeks of ground operations, and hospitals struggled to cope with scores of Palestinian dead and wounded. In what appeared to be the biggest ground assault in Gaza since a truce unravelled last week, Israel said its forces - which were backed by warplanes - had reached the heart of Khan Younis.

"We are in the most intense day since the beginning of the ground operation," the commander of the Israeli military's Southern Command, General Yaron Finkelman, said.

"We are in the heart of Jabalia, in the heart of Shuja'iyya, and now also in the



Smoke rises above buildings in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, as battles continue on Tuesday. - AFP

heart of Khan Younis," he said. Khan Younis residents said Israeli troops and tanks had crossed through the Israeli border fence enclosing the coastal Gaza Strip and closed in on the

city from the east. After days of ordering residents to flee the area, Israeli forces dropped new leaflets on Tuesday with instructions to stay inside shelters during the assault. "For your safety, stay in the shelters and the hospitals where you are. Don't get out. Going out is dangerous. You have been warned," said the leaflets, addressed to residents of six districts amounting to around a quarter of Khan Younis. Palestinian health officials said large numbers of people had been killed in a strike on houses in Deir al Balah, north of Khan Younis. Dr Eyad al Jabri, head of the Shuhada Al Aqsa Hospital, said at least 45 people had been killed. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**

Tourism sector employs 16,799 Omanis, supports 23,979 SMEs



A programme is in place for a long-term sustainability.

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 5

The tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman has shown significant growth, with the total number of workers reaching 179,750, including 16,799 Omanis, as of October. The sector boasts 23,979 small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with 4,751 establishments under the Riyadh programme.

The tourism sector provides competitive advantages, including incentives such as revenue-sharing based on an 8-per cent service fee from hotel customers and classified restaurants to ensure sustainability and a conducive work environment.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism collaborates with various sectors to boost the national tourism workforce. It involves incentive programmes, employment fairs and the implementation of the New Tourism Law (Royal Decree No 69/2023), streamlining investment for job creation.

In line with Oman Vision 2040, the ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, works towards increasing Omani participation in the sector. Competence transfer from the Ministry of Labour to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is facilitated through the Labour Market Governance Committee for the tourism sector.

The ministry's initiatives aim to regulate the labour market, create job opportunities and enhance professional standards. Projects include partnerships for developing professional standards, specialised training programmes and sectorial labour market organisation through the cooperation programme signed in September 2022.

A notable initiative involves a training programme in tourism guidance in collaboration with Oman Tourism College. It supports developing and activating professional standards for tourist guides, ensuring experienced and high-quality outputs. [TURN TO P2](#)



GCC Summit calls for end to Israeli siege

FROM P1

...account technical developments by adopting the circular carbon economy as an integrated and comprehensive approach for addressing the challenges resulting from greenhouse gas emissions.

The Doha Declaration cautioned against the dangers of expanding confrontations and the spread of the conflict to other regions in the Middle East, unless the Israeli aggression stops, which will lead to dire consequences for the peoples of the region and for international peace and security, reiterating the GCC leaders' call on the international community to intervene to achieve a ceasefire and protect Palestinian civilians.

The GCC Supreme Council voiced concern over the escalation of racism and hatred against Arabs and Muslims in a number of countries warning that anti-Islamic rhetoric has reached dangerous levels creating a negative political climate in relations between countries especially the burning of the Holy Quran, the escalation of attacks against Arabs and Muslims and the deliberate targeting of them.

UNITY OF COUNCIL

Earlier, Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar,



Chairman of the 44th session, expressed his thanks for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on his appreciated efforts in chairing the 43rd session of the GCC Supreme Council and His Majesty's keenness to ensure the unity of the council and its accomplishments.

Shaikh Tamim added that, "The accelerating international and regional variables necessitate



persistent consultation and coordination between us in order to address them and avoid their consequences."

He pointed out that the summit convenes against the backdrop of unabated grave tragedy and unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip. He also expressed his confidence in GCC countries being capable of reaching understanding

and cooperation that can also contribute to resolving some regional issues.

On his turn, Jassem bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, GCC Secretary-General, said that the GCC stances on the Palestinian cause are a continuation of previous stances. He also stressed the danger of the Israeli occupation continuing its crimes and depriving the Palestinian people of their rights.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of the Republic of Turkiye (Guest of Honour at the 44th GCC Summit) said that the goal is to establish an independent and sovereign State of Palestine on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The official delegation of the Sultanate of Oman comprised Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Qatar, and Abdullah bin Khalfan al Balushi, Head of the Private Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers. — ONA



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said returned back home after heading Oman's delegation in the 44th GCC Summit, which was held in Doha. HH Sayyid Fahd was received by Shaikh Al Fadhil bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.



Tourism sector employs 16,799 Omanis, plans to replace expats

FROM P1

A tourism guidance programme is in place for long-term sustainability by gradually replacing expatriates in this field.

Job fairs, such as the third one in July this year, and collaborations with Oman Tourism College contribute to employment opportunities. The ministry signed a cooperation programme with the Ministry of Education (Oman is My Destination) to instil entrepreneurship among students.

The efforts extend to culinary arts programmes, national initiatives and qualifying Omani workers for hotel leadership positions. The ministry supports local communities through a project highlighting craft products.

A research project between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation focuses on developing professional standards. Efforts to nationalise the workforce include plans for replacing expatriates and creating new job opportunities.

The ministry aims to

introduce a jobs platform to connect government sectors, private institutions, workers and educational institutions. This platform will highlight job opportunities and training programmes, fostering the growth of Omani professionals in line with market requirements.

Encouraging entrepreneurship, supporting local communities and regulating Omani craft products

remain central to the ministry's objectives. Several projects and initiatives are in progress to achieve these goals.

NEW JOBS

Among the efforts made by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, which aims to increase the number of Omanis working in the sector, is the development and follow-up of the implementation of plans to replace and nationalise

the national workforce in the tourism sector in accordance with an effective and approved practical methodology among the partners, as well as creating new job opportunities for Omanis within tourism projects, programmes and experiences.

There are also efforts being made to introduce a jobs platform that will serve as a system for communicating and working with

all partners from the government sector, private sector institutions, workers, and training and educational institutions related to the sector, in order to highlight the job opportunities and training programmes offered by the sector in aim of increasing the number of Omanis in the sector and supplying the market with Omani cadres capable of practicing the profession in accordance with

the requirements of the labour market.

Also among the objectives of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is to encourage entrepreneurship, supporting local communities and regulating Omani craft products, while there are a number of projects and initiatives that the ministry is developing and seeking to implement to achieve the targeted goals.



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism aims to increase the number of Omanis working in the tourism sector and to introduce a jobs platform



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Oman chairs GCC academic accreditation meeting



The meeting reviewed strategic plan of Gulf Network for Quality Assurance (2021-2025). – ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman chaired the first meeting of officials tasked with higher education assurance in GCC states.

The meeting was held at the premises of the Advisory Board of the GCC Supreme Council in Muscat Governorate on Tuesday.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Jokhah bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, CEO of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Educational Quality Assurance. It was attended by heads of GCC higher education assurance and academic accreditation institutions.

The meeting reviewed the strategic plan of the Gulf Network for Quality Assurance (2021-2025), a proposal to establish a joint database for auditors and academic evaluators in GCC states, with the prime aim of disseminating knowledge and information on the quality of higher education.

The meeting also discussed a proposal to exchange training programmes and advisory services among GCC institutions entrusted with ensuring the quality of higher education and academic accreditation. — ONA

Royal Office Minister receives Ambassadors of India, Japan

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received on Tuesday Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman.

The ambassador expressed his thanks for the Sultanate of Oman in enhancing cooperation to achieve joint interests. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed several matters of mutual interest. Meanwhile, Gen Al Numani received Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman.

The ambassador expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's stances regarding several regional and international issues.

During this meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of joint cooperation.

They also highlighted the march of bilateral relations. — ONA



Gen Al Numani and Amit Narang reviewed several matters of mutual interest. – ONA



Gen Al Numani and Jota Yamamoto highlighted the march of bilateral relations. – ONA

PDO, Global CCS Institute sign programme for carbon capture, storage

DUBAI: A joint programme for carbon capture and storage was signed on Tuesday by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute (Global CCS Institute).

The signing ceremony took place in the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at COP28 climate summit in Dubai.

The cooperation programme seeks to provide technical support for the development of policies and regulatory directives pertaining to the technology of capturing, transporting, storing and using and storing carbon dioxide in the Sultanate of Oman.

The step was taken in pursuance of efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman—represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals—to cut down carbon emissions. It constitutes part of a project to prepare the structural framework for blue hydrogen and technologies for capturing, transporting and storing carbon dioxide.

The project is undertaken in partnership with energy firms interested in these technologies in Oman.

Global CCS Institute, is an international research institution that aims to accelerate the deployment of carbon capture and storage (CCS), a vital technology to deliver carbon neutrality, use the institute's technical expertise and develop policies and regulatory guidance.

The programme is aimed at realising Oman's strategy for an orderly transition to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. — ONA



MHT reprimands 30 unlicensed establishments

MUSCAT: As part of continuous follow-up of unlicensed establishments, officials from the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate reprimanded 30 establishments in the governorate that carry out daily rental without obtaining a license.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism also suspended the licenses of several hotel establishments in both the South and North Al Batinah Governorates and the Muscat Governorate, due to non-compliance with the general and special requirements granted for a tourist license.



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UNDERSTANDING THE
FUNDAMENTAL POINTS

STRATEGIC
APPROACH

DISCUSSION
WITH PEERS

CREATING A REALISTIC
TIMETABLE COVERING
ALL SUBJECTS

CREATING
MIND MAPS

SUMMARISING
KEY POINTS

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

As the first semester draws to a close, students are on the brink of the challenging exam period, a culmination of their efforts throughout the academic year. This phase demands a peaceful passage to avoid negative impacts on the psychological state, comprehension ability and final test performance.

Effective exam preparation involves a strategic approach that begins with a comprehensive review. Rather than memorisation, the focus should be on understanding the fundamental points of each lesson topic. Students can achieve this by actively engaging with the material through discussion with peers, summarising key points, or creating mind maps.

Psychological readiness is emphasised by social workers, urging students to approach exams with vitality, activity and high morale. Planning is pivotal during the pre-exam period, creating a realistic timetable covering all subjects, sections and chapters. This plan should factor in sufficient breaks for rest, sleep, exercise and a balanced diet.

Choosing a conducive study environment is essential for concentration and comprehension. A comfortable, quiet and practical space can significantly impact a student's ability to focus. Prioritising adequate sleep, ideally, 6 to 8 hours daily, is crucial for optimal cognitive function

and academic performance.

Nutrition also plays a role, with healthy, nutrient-rich meals enhancing concentration and sustaining energy levels during study sessions. A careful and thorough review, facilitated by mind maps, further reinforces the retention of academic material.

Parents and educators are responsible for instilling confidence in students dispelling fears associated with exams. Confidence is built by guiding students through regular studying and practice of expected test questions throughout the academic year. Empowering students to take charge of their learning journey, fostering a love for knowledge and emphasising the societal importance of education contribute to long-term success.

Maintaining a positive mindset is essential for achieving good grades. Excessive focus on results can lead to anxiety, hindering performance. Encouraging students to stay calm, positive, and not view exams as insurmountable obstacles helps create a conducive atmosphere for success.

The exam period, though challenging, is a critical phase that requires a balanced approach to retrieve a semester's worth of knowledge in a limited time. Students can navigate this period safely by adopting effective study habits, ensuring psychological readiness and fostering a positive attitude, paving the way for success and excellence.

NAVIGATE EXAM PERIOD WITH EFFECTIVE STUDY PLAN



GOVERNOR OF MUSCAT RECEIVES EGYPTIAN HOUSING MINISTER



MUSCAT: Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, on Tuesday received Dr Assem al Jazzar, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and his accompanying delegation currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. This visit stems from efforts to boost bilateral relations, enhance joint cooperation and exchange expertise in the field of housing and urban planning. The two sides reviewed projects related to housing and urban planning. — **ONA**

Italian delegation visits Defence College



MUSCAT: A delegation from the Defence Research and Analysis Institute (IRAD) of the Republic of Italy, on Tuesday visited the National Defence College (NDC) in the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies at Bait Al Falaj.

The guests were greeted upon their arrival at the college by Brigadier Abdullah bin Hamad al Harthy, Acting Commandant of the NDC. During the visit, the two sides discussed a range of topics of common interest, namely academic and training aspects.

Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college's facilities. They also toured the NDC's departments and various halls.

The Italian delegation also visited the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies in the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies at Bait Al Falaj.

Upon the delegation's arrival at the centre, they were received by the Acting Head of the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies.

The delegation was briefed on the centre's roles and tasks, as well as the various strategic and defence activities carried out by the centre.

The visit was attended by several senior officers at the centre. — **ONA**

Oil pollution control exercise Al Nawras delivers positive results

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 5

The events of the national oil pollution control exercise (Al Nawras 2023) in Sohar concluded last Monday. The primary goal of the exercise was to activate the national plan for addressing oil spills in Oman and the corresponding regional emergency plan.

These plans were developed based on the 'Protocol on Regional Cooperation in Combating Oil Pollution and Other Harmful Substances in Emergency Situations'. The exercise, conducted by the Environmental Authority, was crucial for coordination between the Environment Authority and various regional organisations involved in preparedness and response to oil pollution. It aimed to provide technical, scientific, and operational support in accordance with signed protocols and agreements.

The simulated scenario began at 8:10 am on Monday near the Port of Sohar. It depicted a collision between the oil tanker "MT Everton" and the departing tug "Pearl," resulting in an oil spill. The collision led to a breach in the cargo tank, causing a gradual



The exercise was crucial for coordination between the Environment Authority and various regional organisations involved in preparedness and response to oil pollution

leakage of 2,100 cubic metres of crude oil intended for export to Kuwait. Additionally, a crew member of the tug was 'injured' and required medical assistance.

The emergency plan for the Port of Sohar was activated, and initial response measures were initiated. The Environment Authority notified all national entities involved in the plan, and the Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Centre (MEMAC) was activated to support the port in response operations and pollution control.

Considering the incident's developments and the environmental and economic sensitivity of the region, the National Oil Pollution Combat Plan in Oman was elevated to Level 2. The National Committee for Emergency Management was mobilised, and the main incident management committee and operations room were



formed to monitor actions and support the port and established response teams in implementing the response plan. The exercise also tested the effectiveness of communications between the Environmental Authority and relevant regional organisations involved in oil pollution preparedness and response.

The Environment Authority utilised equipment from the national stockpile, activated response equipment for actual oil spill levels 1 and 2, and mobilised all service providers.

During the exercise scenario, the main incident management committee requested the National Emergency Management Committee to escalate the incident to Level 3. Assistance requests were made to neighbouring countries in accordance with regional emergency plan provisions, receiving approval for external

support.

The exercise was a collaborative effort by the Environment Authority, the Port of Sohar, and the Free Zone.

Various government, military, and security entities, including the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources, the Maritime Security Centre, the Royal Navy of Oman, the Civil Aviation Authority, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Royal Air Force of Oman, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority, the Royal Oman Police (Operations, Coast Guard), the Authority for Public Services Regulation, and the Environment Society participated in accordance with the national plan to combat oil pollution.

Aircraft movement at Muscat Airport is up 28 pc

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The number of passengers using the Muscat International Airport increased 32 per cent to 1,015,235 in October 2023 compared to the same period last year, according to the figures released by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

During the same period, aircraft movement at Muscat International Airport increased by 28 per cent to 8,827 in 2023 from 6,907 in 2022.

The freight movement at Muscat increased by 16 per cent to 15,173 tonnes from 13,119 tonnes.

The number of passengers using Salalah Airport increased 47 per cent to 89,518 in October 2023 compared to 60,766 during the same period last year.

During the same period, aircraft



The number of passengers using the Muscat International Airport increased 32 pc to 1,015,235 in October 2023

movement at Salalah increased by 4 per cent to 1,020 in 2023 from 981 in 2022. The freight movement increased by four per cent to 56 tonnes from 59 tonnes.

The number of passengers using Sohar Airport dropped 32 per cent to 1,389 in October 2023 compared

to 2,029 passengers in the same period last year. During the same period, aircraft movement at Sohar increased by 163 per cent to 121 in 2023 from 46 in 2022.

The number of passengers using Duqm Airport increased 14 percent to 7,348 in June 2023 compared to 6,467 passengers in the same period last year.

During the same period, aircraft movement remained static at 92.

The number of aircraft passing the Omani airspace increased by 15 per cent from 40,015 to 34,799.

The latest UNWTO data signals a strong rebound in international tourism! With an estimated 975 million international tourists from January to September 2023, the sector is closing in on 90 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

Geological heritage exhibition explores avenues for sustainability

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 5

The third edition of the Geological Heritage Exhibition, themed 'Sustainability and Job Opportunities', was inaugurated on Tuesday in Al Buraimi Governorate under the auspices of Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed bin Saud al Busaidy, the Governor of Al Buraimi.

The exhibition is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Petroleum Development Oman, and the Omani Geological Society and it aims to showcase Oman's geological heritage.

It is also meant to underscore its significance, and explore avenues for sustainability while generating economic opportunities and employment prospects for job-seekers.

Celebrating the diverse museum



The exhibition delves into the narrative of geological heritage and its historical evolution

system contributing to heritage and tourism destinations across provinces, this edition specifically highlights the geological potential of the Al Buraimi Governorate. Under the coordination of the Office of the Governor of Al Buraimi, the exhibition is set to run until the end of May 2024.

It encompasses six sections, delving into the narrative of geological heritage, Oman's geological diversity, its historical

geological evolution, and the importance of preserving and ensuring the sustainability of geological heritage.

Featuring distinctive geological heritage pieces from Oman, including fossils dating back approximately 800 million years, the exhibition showcases scientific models of extinct primitive elephants and dinosaurs, emphasising the uniqueness of Oman's geological treasures.



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Tender Announcement

Sale of Power and Water Desalination Plant

Sohar Power Company SAOG, the Owner of the Sohar Power and Desalination Plant (the "Plant") situated at Sohar Industrial Port Area, wishes to call for bids from interested parties for the sale of Plant, with preference given to buyers interested in purchasing the entire plant, whether to continue operations at the current site or to dismantle the equipment and move it to their business area for their own use.

Power Plant:

The power plant is designed to generate 585 MW at reference site conditions. It comprises three Siemens SGT5-2000E (formerly known as V94.2) gas turbine generators ("GT"), each fitted with Heat Recovery Steam Generators ("HRSG"), which utilize the exhaust heat of the GTs to generate high pressure and low pressure steam. The HRSGs are dual pressure natural circulation type, manufactured by Doosan Heavy Industries ("DHI"). The HP steam is supplied to one extraction-condensing steam turbine ("ST") to complete the combined cycle. The ST manufacturer is Alstom (now taken over by GE). The LP steam from the HRSGs combined with the extraction from the ST is supplied to the thermal desalination plant.

Water Desalination Plant:

The four Multi-Stage Flash (MSF) desalination units, are designed to deliver capacity of net potable water of 150,000 m³/day (each 37,500 m³/day) at design conditions. The MSFs are manufactured by DHI, one of the leading suppliers of MSF-type desalination units. Each MSF unit has 17 heat recovery stages and 3 heat rejection stages and has a performance ratio of 8.4 kg distillate per 2326 KJ of steam at a Top Brine Temperature of 110°C.

Other key balance of plant systems include seawater intake, DM Plant, Fire water, Effluent Treatment, Potabilization, Emergency Diesel Generator, Chemical dosing systems, Fuel oil tanks, Lab and Workshop equipment, etc.

Note that the entire Power and Desalination Plant, plant, and balance of plant equipment are located in the Sohar Industrial Port.

Interested parties may please contact us on info@soharpower.com with their contact details (including email). Details related to tender purchase shall be provided via email to the interested parties. Please note that the tender documents shall be issued after receipt of proof of payment of amount of RO 200/- (non-refundable).

Interested bidders shall specify the email address to which they would wish the tender documents to be sent.

Tender Documents Collection Date:

The tender will be available for collection from 7 December 2023. The last date for tender collection is 20 December 2023 before 3:00 pm.

Tender Submission Date:

The last date of tender submission is on 22 January 2024 before 5:00 pm.





Qatar's Emir, Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

QATAR EMIR SLAMS 'SHAMEFUL' INACTION ON BARBARIC WAR

DOHA: Qatar's ruler hit out at "shameful" international inaction over the war in Gaza as he opened a Gulf Cooperation Council meeting in Doha on Tuesday.

"It is shameful for the international community to allow this heinous crime to continue for nearly two months, during which the systematic and deliberate killing of innocent civilians continues, including women and children," Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said.

Qatar was a key mediator in negotiations that resulted in a seven-day truce, which saw scores of Israeli hostages exchanged for Palestinians prisoners and humanitarian aid, until it ended on Friday.

Qatar's ruler said his country was "constantly working to renew" the truce, but added this was "not an alternative to a permanent ceasefire".

He called for "an international investigation into the massacres committed by Israel" and for the Security Council "to assume its legal responsibility and act to end this barbaric war, and compel Israel to return to credible negotiations to achieve a just solution to the Palestinian issue".

International aid organisations have warned that civilians in the densely populated Strip are running out of places to flee to.

"Nowhere is safe in Gaza and there is nowhere left to go," said Lynn Hastings, UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories.

"If possible, an even more hellish scenario is about to unfold, one in which humanitarian operations may not be able to respond," Hastings said in a statement.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended the GCC session and accused Israel of "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity in Gaza", which he said "should not be left unanswered".

Both Türkiye and Qatar have opened channels of communication with Palestinian groups.

— AFP



People build a makeshift shelter in a new camp sheltering displaced Palestinians who fled their houses due to Israeli strikes, in Rafah. — Reuters

FAMILIES FLEE AGAIN TO SHRINKING, CROWDED POCKET OF LAND

KHAN YOUNIS: Fearful of being killed in an Israeli bombardment, families in Gaza were packing up and fleeing on Tuesday, heading for a pocket of land further south already crammed with displaced people without enough food, water or toilets.

Some were fleeing for the third or fourth time in less than two months.

Most of the Gaza Strip's 2.3 million people have been made homeless by the war, and the new phase of displacement since a week-long truce ended on December 1 is worsening an already catastrophic humanitarian situation.

"We are getting ready to leave Khan Younis, heading to Rafah. We have been here for about 50 days," said Abu Omar, a middle-aged man who left his home in the eastern part of the city and had been sheltering at the hospital camp with his family.

Rafah, further south on the border with Egypt, is one of the last remaining areas where the Israeli military has said civilians could go to escape the fighting, although it has been hit by many air strikes.

"There is no safe place... but at the end, we head to wherever we think there might be a bit of safety," said Abu Omar, standing by a car whose roof was piled high with possessions.

But in Rafah, displaced people said their living conditions were horrible.

"There are no bathrooms. We cannot even wash if we want to pray. There is no place for us to wash or pray. If we want to wash our kids' hands there is no place for that. There is not even a place where you can bake or get bread," said Enas Mosleh, sitting with her children in a shelter made out of wooden slats and transparent plastic sheets.

— Reuters

ISRAEL STORMS HOSPITALS



GAZA: Israeli forces launched strikes of the main city in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday, where hospitals were overrun with scores of Palestinian dead and wounded.

In what appeared to be the biggest ground assault since a truce collapsed last week, residents said Israeli tanks had entered the eastern parts of Khan Younis for the first time, crossing from the Israeli border fence and advancing west.

Some took up positions inside the town of Bani Suhaila on Khan Younis' eastern outskirts, while others continued further and were stationed on the edge of a housing development called Hamad City, residents said. After days of ordering residents to flee the area, Israeli forces dropped new leaflets on Tuesday with instructions to stay inside shelters during the assault.

Hospitals in the southern Gaza Strip are totally collapsing, they cannot deal with the quantity and quality of injuries that arrive at the hospitals

ASHRA AL QIDRA
Health ministry spokesperson

CHILDREN'S BODIES ON THE FLOOR

At Khan Younis' main Nasser hospital, the wounded arrived by ambulance, car, flatbed truck and donkey cart after what survivors described as a strike on a school being used as a shelter for the displaced.

Inside a ward, almost every inch of floor space was taken up by the wounded, medics hurrying from patient to patient.

A doctor carried the small limp body of a dead boy in a track suit and placed him in a corner, arms splayed across the blood-smeared tile. On the floor next to him, surrounded by discarded bandages and rubber gloves, lay a wounded boy and girl, their limbs tangled with the stands holding the IV drips in their arms.

WHO EMPTIES AID WAREHOUSE

GENEVA: The World Health Organization on Tuesday said that it had almost completely emptied its aid warehouses in southern Gaza while Israel's army "active combat" was looming.

Israel has denied that it ordered the WHO to empty its two warehouses in Khan Younis, as claimed by the head of the UN health agency.

Richard Peepkorn, the WHO's representative in the Palestinian territories, acknowledged that no official order had been given, but said his staff had been "advised" to swiftly remove their stocks from the warehouses.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva via video-link from southern Gaza, Peepkorn said the advice had been given orally to his team, and that "there's no paperwork on this".

After initially focusing its assault on the north of the war-torn territory, the Israeli army has now sent ground forces into the south and dropped leaflets telling Palestinian civilians in more districts to evacuate.

Israel declared war on the Palestinian enclave since October 7.

Israel has vowed to eradicate Palestinian resistance groups and secure the release of all the hostages held in the Gaza Strip.

The health ministry in Gaza

The number of operational hospitals in Gaza has dropped from 36 to 18, with three providing only basic first aid and others offering partial services

says the war has killed nearly 15,900 people in the territory, around 70 per cent of them women and children.

Israel's army on Monday sent dozens of tanks into southern Gaza as part of expanded action, as communications were cut

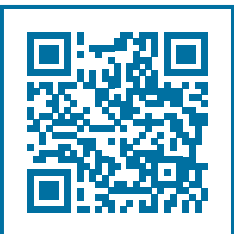
across the besieged territory.

The number of operational hospitals in Gaza has dropped from 36 to 18, with three providing only basic first aid and others offering partial services.

Twelve hospitals still remain operational in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, according to the WHO.

Peepkorn explained that the WHO on Sunday had informed the Israeli army that it intended to move supplies out of the warehouses to assist a Doctors Without Borders team and also to provide assistance to UNRWA, the UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees.

"Then yesterday morning, we



S KHAM YOUNIS, S OVERRUN



Palestinian children queue to collect water amid water shortages during the ongoing war, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – Reuters

Two young girls were being treated, still covered in dust from the collapse of the house that had buried their family. “My parents are under the rubble,” sobbed one. “I want my mum, I want my mum, I want my family.”

Outside, men carried corpses in white and bloodied shrouds to be taken away for funerals. Around a dozen bodies lay on the ground. Five or six were taken away in a motorcycle cart.

Aisha al Raqb, a 70-year-old woman, said her son Iyad was among the dead and held out a blood-stained hand.

“This is his blood. This is his precious blood. May Allah have mercy on his soul. My darling. I (want to) smell his scent, smell his scent, oh God, oh God,” she said.

Gaza health ministry spokesperson Ashra al Qidra said at least 43 corpses had already reached Nasser hospital that morning.

“Hospitals in the southern Gaza Strip are totally collapsing, they cannot deal with the quantity and quality of injuries that arrive at the hospitals,” he said.

About 15,900 people are killed, with thousands more missing. — Reuters



USE AMID BRUTAL OFFENSIVE



A Palestinian child wounded during Israeli bombardment is carried inside into Nasser hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza strip. – AFP

were informed that you better remove as much as possible... Your warehouses are in an area where the population was told to evacuate, and which would most likely become an area of active combat in the coming days,” he said.

“When you are advised by an army that... you have 24 hours and after that... it’s very unlikely you can reach your warehouse, of course you comply,” Peeperkorn said.

“We took out almost 90 per cent of the supplies,” he said. “It was a panic movement.”

The supplies have been moved to a single warehouse in Rafah.

— AFP



An aid truck returns after unloading humanitarian aid at Egypt's Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip on December 4. – AFP

US AID CHIEF ANNOUNCES NEW HELP ON VISIT TO EGYPT

CAIRO: The US aid chief on Tuesday announced new support for the war-battered Gaza Strip on a visit to Egypt, as a renewed Israeli offensive again puts Palestinians at risk.

Samantha Power, the administrator of the US Agency for International Development, travelled to the Egyptian town of El-Arish, the gateway to Rafah, the border crossing that has been reopened but at limited capacity since the war started.

Power announced \$21 million in new US assistance that will include hygiene and shelter supplies and food for people in Gaza, where water and other basics have been in short supply.

USAID said the assistance was in addition to \$100 million announced by President Joe Biden on October 18.

Power accompanied the delivery by the US military of another 16.3 metric tonnes of previously announced assistance that includes medical supplies, winter clothing and emergency food.

“The United States continues to work around the clock to overcome diplomatic and operational hurdles for humanitarian access, present solutions to emerging humanitarian assistance challenges and significantly scale up this response to where it needs to be,” USAID said in a statement.

But the United States has also faced strong criticism in the Arab world for its military and diplomatic support of Israel.

The United States says it has pleaded with Israel to do more to protect civilians and to allow humanitarian assistance into the Gaza Strip.

The State Department said on Monday that Israel, after US appeals, began to let badly needed fuel into the Gaza Strip.

— AFP



Palestinians fleeing Khan Yunis arrive in Rafah further south the strip. – AFP

UN SAYS ‘NOT POSSIBLE’ TO CREATE ‘SAFE ZONES’ IN THE ENCLAVE

GENEVA: The United Nations warned on Tuesday that it was impossible to create so-called safe zones for civilians to flee to inside the Gaza Strip amid Israel’s bombing campaign.

Israel had initially focused its offensive on the north of the territory, but the army has now also dropped leaflets on parts of the south, telling Palestinian civilians there to flee to other areas.

“The so-called safe zones... are not scientific, they are not rational, they are not possible, and I think the authorities are aware of this,” James Elder, spokesman for the UN children’s agency UNICEF, told reporters.

His comments came as Israeli troops battled the Palestinians in the southern Gaza Strip after expanding their offensive deeper into the besieged area.

As Israel’s offensive pushes deeper into Gaza, international aid organisations have warned that civilians in the densely-populated territory are running out of places to flee to.

Elder insisted that the safe zones declared by Israel “cannot be safe nor humanitarian when unilaterally declared”.

The pretence that there is somewhere safe for people to flee to is “callous”, he said.

He stressed that in a proper safe zone, “you can guarantee the conditions of food, water, medicine and shelter”.

Elde stressed that none of that is assured in the areas designated as safe zones.

“These are entirely, entirely absent. You cannot overstate this. These are tiny patches of barren land, or they are street corners, they are sidewalks,” he said.

“There is no water, no facilities, no shelter from the cold and the rain (and) there’s no sanitation.”

Elder said the displaced have flocked to there had been around one toilet for every 400 people.

— AFP

The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

many manufacturing companies that lack principles and vision placed profit over humanity.

For example, many companies from our region and the West are donating to Zionist genocidal military campaign to ethnically cleanse Palestinians and Arabs.

The deep hatred these supremacist campaigns are sowing, due to the live coverage of children, women and men blown up by 2,000 pound bombs, means that current and future generations will rightfully fight to defend themselves and restore their dignity no matter how powerful and rich genocidal forces are.

We have a duty to divest, not only from any weapons company involved in making

These bombs but also divesting from companies in the supply chains that assist in oppressing vulnerable people.

The alternative for us is to ask and invest our money in companies that intentionally help entrepreneurs plant, make and create products not stained with any unfair and unjust practice.

Sustainable services

Services in general and digital economy applications in particular the backbone of today and tomorrow's economy. Delivery, ride hailing, and accommodation apps have a responsibility not to be digital and criminal at the same time by supporting

PUT OUR MONEY
WHERE OUR
HUMANITY
IS, MAINLY
IN THE MORE
SUSTAINABLE
ENTERPRISES
THAT SHOW
RESPECT FOR
EVERY HUMAN
LIFE, AND VALUE
BEHINDING,
EQUITY,
DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSION

killing and theft by investing in illegal settlements in the land of Palestinians. We have many options of investing in digital services that support local entrepreneurs, and in international businesses that respect human life and the more sustainable, local supply chains.

Innovations

We are witnessing one of the most historic and unique opportunities to positively support a more principled and reliable supply chain. These opportunities must envision a future beyond “buying local” campaigns or promoting local content development or In-Country Value (ICV). We learned from Covid-19 Pandemic that supply chains that lack vision are fragile, which disrupts and raises the cost of living for all of us.

Now, with hundreds of companies in the US, the UK and the EU and around the world killing and persecuting innocent people merely for yearning to freedom it's an opportunity for each and everyone of us to invest in a “global impact investing campaign” so that we can divest from oppression, and leave a positive impact and legacy.

We will benefit greatly from putting our money where our humanity is, mainly in the more sustainable enterprises, from everywhere around the world, that show respect for every human life, and value belonging, equity, diversity and inclusion.

PHILIPPE GRELARD

Workers at Paris's emblematic Notre-Dame cathedral have one year, starting on Friday, to finish restoring the gothic monument in time for its reopening following a monstrous fire in 2019.

Restoration of the Unesco-listed building, which usually welcomes some 12 million visitors each year, has hit several snags since people around the world watched in horror as its steeple crashed down in the blaze on April 15, 2019.

But its new spire has started to emerge against the French capital's skyline, and is expected to be fully completed when the city hosts the Olympic Games this summer.

And behind the scaffolding, hundreds of workers are racing against the clock to restore the rest of the cathedral in time for it to reopen its doors to the public on December 8, 2024.

"We're within the timeframe. We're confident and determined to meet the deadline but it remains a day-to-day battle," the civil servant in charge of restoration, Philippe Jost, told BFM TV last week. President Emmanuel Macron is expected to visit the cathedral on Friday, according to members of his entourage.

The monument's new spire is identical to the previous one, designed by the 19th-century architect Eugene Viollet-Le-Duc.

Its oak structure is to reach its full height of 96 metres (315 feet) by the end of the year. It will then be covered in lead ornaments before the scaffolding is taken down, Jost said.

The frames of the nave and the choir of the cathedral, which were also destroyed, are then due for completion, after which the reconstruction of the roof can begin.

The final stages are to include cleaning the interior — an area that covers some 42,000 square metres (452,000 square feet) — and installing new furniture in the autumn.

The work has been "entirely funded" by \$848 million in donations from France and abroad, Jost said.

Craftsmen and women from across France have contributed to Notre-Dame's revival.

A family carpentry workshop in the village of Hagetmau in southwest France, for example, is particularly proud of its contribution. — AFP

Maureen Dowd

Sam Altman, Sugarcoating the Apocalypse My favourite “Twilight Zone” episode is the one where aliens land and, in a sign of their peaceful intentions, give world leaders a book. Government cryptographers work to translate the alien language. They decipher the title — “To Serve Man” — and that’s reassuring, so interplanetary shuttles are set up.

But as the cryptographers proceed, they realise — too late — that it’s a cookbook.

That, dear reader, is the story of OpenAI.

It was founded in 2015 as a nonprofit to serve man, to keep an eye on galloping artificial intelligence technology and ensure there were guardrails and kill switches — because when AI hits puberty, it will be like aliens landing.

When I interviewed them at their makeshift San Francisco headquarters back in 2016, the OpenAI founders — Sam Altman, Elon Musk, Ilya Sutskever and Greg Brockman — presented themselves as our Praetorian guard against the future threat of runaway, evil AI, against bad actors and bad bots and all the lords of the cloud who had Mary Shelley dreams of creating a new species, humanity be damned.

“We are explicitly not trying to enrich ourselves,” Sutskever said.

Brockman was equally high-minded: “It’s not enough just to produce this technology and toss it over the fence and say, ‘OK, our job is done. Just let the world figure it out.’” But OpenAI is tossing a lot of alarming stuff over the fence. Musk is gone, and Altman is no longer casting himself as humanity’s watchdog. He’s running a for-profit outfit, creating an AI cookbook. He’s less interested in peril than investors, less concerned about existential danger than finding AI’s capabilities. “When you see something that is technically sweet,” Robert Oppenheimer said, “you go ahead and do it.” The government has nibbled the edges of regulation, but the quicksilver



Sam Altman at OpenAI headquarters in San Francisco. – NYT file photo

AI has already leaped ahead of the snaillike lawmakers and bureaucrats. Nobody, even in Silicon Valley, has any clue how to control it.

OpenAI's wild ride two weeks ago was farcical — a coup against Altman that collapsed and turned into a restoration. But it was also terrifying because it showed that we are totally at the mercy of Silicon Valley boys with their toys, egos crashing, temperaments colliding, ambition and greed soaring.

Whatever you want to say about Musk's recent unravelling — his manic edge; his offensive tweets; his strange, angular cybertruck — he has been passionate in working against rogue AI. The perhaps quixotic quest of aligning AI progress to protect human values has caused Musk many a sleepless night and many a fractured friendship.

He lured Sutskever, a dazzling Russian engineer, from Google to OpenAI. Larry Page, a co-founder of Google and an AI accelerationist, was furious at his good friend Musk for poaching Sutskever and broke with him. Page dismissively told Musk he was “a specist” for siding with the human species in the AI argument.

Musk also scrapped with Altman. As Walter Isaacson wrote in “Elon Musk,” the mercurial mogul summoned Altman in February, asking him to bring OpenAI's founding documents,

Not too long after, Musk tweeted, “I’m still confused as to how a nonprofit to which I donated \$100M somehow became a \$30B market cap for-profit. If this is legal, why doesn’t everyone do it?” Speaking to Kara Swisher, Altman called Musk a “jerk.” As with Shakespeare, personality clashes are shaping life-or-death decisions in the battle over AI. One thing that may have touched off the rebellion against Altman was that he diminished Sutskever’s role at the company.

We still don’t know exactly what happened. Did the board see some progress in the AI algorithm that jolted them enough to fire Altman for fear he was pushing products without enough regard for safeguards? Certainly, AI is getting better at reasoning, making fewer mistakes, hallucinating less — the term for making up stuff — and doing complicated math puzzles.

Musk recently praised Sutskever for having “a good moral compass.” Was the young engineer, who joined the doomers on the board and delivered the bad news to Altman before recanting, influenced by his mentor at Google, Geoffrey Hinton? Hinton, the so-called godfather of AI, was stunned by OpenAI’s miracle baby, ChatGPT, realising we may be only a few years from AI being smarter than we are.

— *The New York Times*

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

It's 'permacrisis' again!

Although the editors of the Collins English Dictionary chose “permacrisis” as the word to refer to the state of affairs in 2022, it suits 2023 as well, given the turn of events in the world this year.

Permacrisis, according to Collins, is an extended period of instability and insecurity, especially resulting from a series of catastrophic events that have seen people living through crises including war, inflation, climate change, and political instability.

Wars and conflicts over the last few years have caused immense human suffering and had an enormous global impact. We're shocked and anguished by the loss of life and the pain and suffering of so many people around us. All of us fear for the future, as the destruction directly or indirectly affects us.

Although we all long to live in peace and never see the death and devastation that war can bring, unscrupulous leaders are engineering situations of conflict that cause hardship to humans.

Unfortunately, 2023 will be added to the war years, as it will go down in history as very deadly and destructive, possibly spilling over into future years.

Look at events this year; although some of them have been carried over from last year—wars and conflicts, inflation, climate change, and political instability — all are explosive in their own right.

There has not been a single day this year without the images of the horrors of war. Russia's war on Ukraine, which began in February 2022, has been described as “more dangerous” than anything Europe has seen since the end of World War II.

The humanitarian situation in the south of Gaza is dire and unsafe following the outbreak of war in early October between Israel and Hamas.



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

UNFORTUNATELY, 2023 WILL BE ADDED TO THE WAR YEARS, AS IT WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS VERY DEADLY AND DESTRUCTIVE, POSSIBLY SPILLING OVER INTO FUTURE YEARS

Intense bombardment and fighting have killed thousands of people including children and uprooting over 1.8 million — around 80 per cent of the total population of the Strip.

About one million people are being pushed to relocate to the south, where living conditions were already overcrowded and desperate even prior to the current conflict.

A World Food Programme report attributes wars and conflict as the biggest driver of hunger, with 70 per cent of the world's hungry people living in areas afflicted by war and violence.

“Events in Ukraine are further proof of how conflict feeds hunger — forcing people out of their homes, wiping out their sources of income, and wrecking countries' economies,” it points out.

Economic inequality remains a significant challenge, with developing countries disproportionately affected, including by the effects of monetary tightening in the advanced economies.

Now look at the climate chaos and environmental degradation. They are further crisis multipliers. The climate crisis is one of the leading causes of the steep rise in global hunger.

With ever-worsening climate emergencies, record heat, and growing competition over dwindling resources, people are forced to move, and vulnerabilities and insecurities skyrocket.

According to a UN report, the world was on course for a rise of up to 2.9C, far above the levels agreed at COP21 in Paris. Under the landmark Paris accord, countries agreed to limit global temperature rises to well below 2°C and ideally to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

If we fail to hold warming to that level, as scientists have long said, it will no longer be possible to avoid many of the more dire consequences of climate change.

GETTING ACQUAINTED!



Two one-year-old giraffes inspect their new enclosure after completing their routine quarantine and are becoming acquainted with a bachelor herd of four adult giraffes at the Werribee Open Range Zoo in Melbourne on Tuesday. – AFP

Decarbonising our food...

When political leaders, policymakers, environmental advocates, and

philanthropists gathered for this year's United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28), food systems will be high on the agenda for the first time. Given that the food sector accounts for one-third of all greenhouse-gas emissions, its inclusion is long overdue.

Fortunately, the two challenges need not compete for our attention, because transforming food systems is also a powerful way to reduce our global dependency on fossil fuels. As our organisation shows in a new report, Power Shift: Why We Need to Wean Our Industrial Food Systems Off Fossil Fuels, food systems, from farm to plate to landfill, account for at least 15 per cent of annual global fossil-fuel use – equal to that of the European Union and Russia combined. And if the current approach to industrial food production continues, that figure is expected to increase significantly.

Today's industrial food system is increasingly fossil fuel-intensive. Fossil fuels go into synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, as well as the plastics that are used in everything from the coatings for those pesticides and fertilisers to most food packaging. Moreover, most packaging is needed to store ultra-processed foods – from meat and dairy to sweets and sugary drinks – all of which require highly energy-intensive manufacturing and petrochemicals in the form of plastics.

Worryingly, the energy sector views the food system as a promising growth market. Food-related



Anna Lappé
is Executive Director of the Global Alliance for the Future of Food



Patty Fong,
Programme Director of Climate, Health, and Well-being at the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, is lead on the Power Shift report

AVERTING CATASTROPHIC CLIMATE SCENARIOS REQUIRES THAT WE PHASE OUT FOSSIL FUELS AND TRANSFORM FOOD SYSTEMS AT THE SAME TIME

plastics and synthetic fertilisers account for approximately 40 per cent of all petrochemical products, and the International Energy Agency predicts that petrochemicals will drive nearly half the growth in oil demand by 2050, outstripping sectors like aviation and shipping. Similarly, research from the Centre for International Environmental Law has shown that fossil-fuel companies are banking on the expansion of these markets. The industry “is eyeing the food system,” CIEL's Lisa Tostado told us, “from inputs like pesticides and fertilisers to production and processing, as a dangerous escape hatch.”

Finally, we're also seeing a push to use more agricultural land for incredibly inefficient energy production. The United States already dedicates about 40 per cent of its corn harvest to ethanol fuels, which are estimated to be “at least 24 per cent more carbon-intensive than gasoline.”

Given increased marketing of and demand for energy-intensive food, decoupling food production from fossil fuels is essential to meet our climate goals. Even if all governments delivered on their 2030 climate pledges, fossil-fuel use in the food system alone would consume our remaining 1.5° Celsius carbon budget by 2037.

Fortunately, there are many ways to phase out fossil fuels in food systems. These include strategies to end the use of fossil-fuel-based fertilisers and pesticides, and to move away

from input-dependent crop-based energy systems like corn ethanol; shifting to renewable energy for processing, cooling, and drying food; supporting minimally processed, less energy-intensive foods and encouraging plant-rich diets; and encouraging the uptake of seasonal, locally grown food.

Shifting away from industrial methods towards more sustainable ways of farming not only would protect the planet. It also would create jobs, improve health, protect biodiversity, and help address the roots of hunger. Evidence from around the world shows that approaches like agroecology and regenerative agriculture are effective in driving a shift away from fossil-

fuel dependency. With these strategies, yields remain steady or improve, while emissions fall, farmworkers' health improves, and biodiversity is protected.

There is no technical barrier to shifting from dependence on synthetic inputs toward agroecological and regenerative food production, or to replacing fossil-fuel energy with renewable sources. But many governments offer very few subsidies to support these transitions, and many more incentivise business as usual. According to the OECD, every year between 2019 and 2021, public funds totalling \$528 billion were channelled to agricultural and food-production practices that are generally bad

for the climate, the environment, and human health.

Now that we have come to understand just how endemic fossil-fuel usage is across our economies, we must take pains to ensure that all sectors are included in the transition to a fossil-fuel-free future. Despite COP28's staging in a petrostate, we are pleased to see food finally taking centre stage. But that discussion must not be isolated from the one about ending the use of fossil fuels as fast as possible. There will be no food-systems transformation without phasing out fossil fuels, and there will be no phasing out fossil fuels without food-systems transformation.

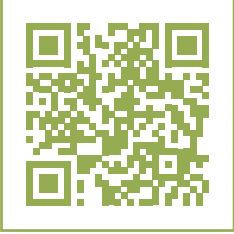
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The energy sector views the food system as a promising growth market.

sport

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Oman Club bag title in first OTA club championship



The top four placed club players pose with their trophies along with the officials of OTA and the clubs.

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, DEC 5

Oman Club were crowned champions in the first edition of Oman Tennis Association (OTA) All-Club Tennis Championship recently. Bahla Club finished runners-up and Salalah claimed the third spot in the championship which concluded at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex tennis courts on December 2.

The three-day championship was competed by eight clubs after Sohar Club and Jaalan Club pulled out before start of the tournament.

The Oman Club beat Bahla in the final 2-0 after national team players Munir al Rawahi and Younis al Rawahi posted dominant wins over their Bahla opponents in the singles matches. Munir beat Bahla's Sandy 6-2, 6-4 while his brother Younis thrashed Mudar Mustafa 6-0, 6-0 as Oman Club clinched the title.

Salalah Club finished third after edging Nizwa 2-1 in the third-place play-off. Salalah's Shrikant defeated Nizwa's Wael al Barwani 9/2 to put his team 1-0



Oman Club with the champions trophy.

up. Nizwa's Warith al Shaibani made it 1-1 after beating Salalah's Imad al Sulaimani 9-6. In the deciding doubles match, Salalah duo of Abdullah al Fadil and Shrikant prevailed over a fighting Nizwa pair of Abdullah al Yahyai and Warith al Shaibani 5-10, 10-5, 10-6.

In the semifinals, Bahla beat Salalah 2-1. In the opening singles, Bahla's Sandy beat Salalah's Shrikant 6-0, 6-2. In the second singles, Salalah's Imad al Sulaimani made it 1-1 after edging Bahla's Mudar Mustafa 9-7 (7-1), 3-6, 10-6. However, Bahla claimed the deciding doubles rubber with Antar and

Sandy thrashing Salalah duo of Shrikant and Saeed al Sulaimani 6-0, 6-0.

In the second semifinal, Oman Club prevailed over Nizwa Club 3-0. In the first singles, Oman Club's Oshi beat Nizwa's Wael al Barwani 6-1, 6-2. In the second singles, Oman Club's Younis al Rawahi beat Nizwa's Abdullah al Yahyai 6-2, 6-0. In the doubles match, Munir al Rawahi and Saeed al Hashimi edged out Abdullah al Yahyai and Warith al Shaibani 4-6, 6-3 (7-10).

GOOD INITIATIVE
OTA Chairman Mutasim bin Hamoud al Zadjali presided over



Bahla players receive the runners-up trophy.

the concluding ceremony in presence of OTA officials and the club representatives.

"We are happy with this good gathering of clubs in this tournament, through which the federation sought to gather players and involve clubs in the competitions organised by the OTA from time to time. We expect the number of clubs to increase in upcoming tournaments," the OTA chief said.

Mutasim al Zadjali added that such tournaments contribute to spreading the game and making presence among the clubs. "We strived during the past period to spread the game among the clubs

through some programmes and activities, including mini-tennis, and there were many outcomes at that time. We hope that this tournament will contribute to boost the game and that the number of players will increase."

Jihad bin Abdullah al Sheikh, Vice-Chairman of Oman Club, expressed satisfaction in winning the title.

"We are happy that the club's players won the title of this tournament, which is the first of its kind in tennis in Oman. The club's players presented a good level since the start of the tournament and reached the final match. Everyone enjoyed the final match

and all the clubs benefited from this participation. More clubs need to take up the game and we expect that it will spread in the coming years if clubs continue to participate in such competitions."

Oman Club's Younis al Rawahi expressed his happiness at winning the club championship title, pointing out that the tournament was successful and the level of organisation was good in the opening edition.

"We were keen to participate in this tournament because its success and such tournaments contribute to developing the level of players as well as creating a good competitive atmosphere between the clubs and their players."

Younis' brother Munir al Rawahi said that everyone enjoyed and benefited from the tournament during its three days.

"The tournament was a great opportunity for us as players as there were no tennis tournaments throughout the past period, which affected the technical level of the tournament and the players. Such tournaments contribute greatly to technical benefit, and we hope such tournaments continue from time to time."

Seeb secure third straight volleyball Super Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 5

Seeb spikers added another title to their kitty after defeating Oman Club 3-0 to emerge champions of the 2023 Volleyball Super Cup in Muscat on Monday night. The triumph meant, Seeb won the Super Cup title for the third time in a row.

In a thrilling clash at the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Seeb players produced top show to end all the three sets in their favour at 26-24, 25-21 and 25-18.

The match began strongly from both sides as they were seeking for a positive start. Seeb spikers including Saud al Mamari and Adam al Jalbobi assisted the team to take the lead after a tough competition in the opening set as they ended it at 26-24.

In the following set, Oman Club made good efforts to take lead through right defending and perfect attacking towards opponents by Ali al Shibli and Muhanad al Rashdi. However, Seeb players benefited later on from the mistakes made by Oman Club players to overcome the advantage and won the set 25-21.

In the deciding set, there was no

quick response from Oman Club spikers as Seeb players continued their solid display. Later on, Oman players tried in some part of the third set to make a comeback during the remaining minutes but Seeb's experience prevailed in the end to win the set and match at 25-18.

After the completion of the match, the chief guest of the match Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Labour for Human Resources, delivered the cup to the captain of Seeb team in presence of Eng Ibrahim al Maqbali, Chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA), and Seeb board members.

The head coach of Seeb team, Jamal al Mamari, praised the players performance. "This is the eighth title for me with Seeb team and it is the 10th and 12th for some players with the club. Thanks to the efforts made by the board members in volleyball sport. Our focus now shifts to shine in the external events," he said.

On the other hand, Seeb are leading the Oman First Division Volleyball League 2023-24 with 18 points while Al Salam are positioned in second place with 15 points.



Seeb players celebrate with officials after winning the volleyball Super Cup.

HALIBURTON HELPS PACERS OUST CELTICS

PELICANS ADVANCE TO SEMIFINALS IN NBA CUP

LOS ANGELES: The Indiana Pacers, fuelled by Tyrese Haliburton's first career triple-double, beat the Boston Celtics 122-112 on Monday to reach the semifinals of the NBA's new in-season tournament.

The New Orleans Pelicans also booked their spot in Thursday's semifinals in Las Vegas, shaking off a slow start to beat the Kings 127-117 in Sacramento.

In Indianapolis, Haliburton scored 26 points with 10 rebounds and 13 assists and the Pacers put together a 9-0 scoring run with less than two minutes remaining to take control of a tightly contested battle.

The Pacers, ranked sixth in the Eastern Conference regular-season standings, knocked out the East-leading Celtics and will face either the Milwaukee Bucks or New York Knicks in the semifinals.

The Bucks host the New York Knicks in the quarters on Tuesday and Haliburton said the Pacers will be ready for either one. "We're a young, hungry group and we want to win every night," Haliburton said. "So we're excited to be there, but we're not complacent being there. We want to win."

Buddy Hield added 21 points for the Pacers, who had seven players score in double figures to the delight of the 16,000-plus crowd at Gainbridge Fieldhouse.

"The atmosphere is crazy," Haliburton said of the playoff-type intensity in the arena, which was just what the NBA was looking for when it launched the in-season tournament hoping it would lend excitement to the early stages of a long season.

"I love this," Haliburton said. Jayson Tatum scored 32 points



Indiana Pacers' Tyrese Haliburton (0) dribbles while Boston Celtics' Derrick White (9) defends in the second half at Gainbridge Fieldhouse. – USA Today Sports

and grabbed 12 rebounds and Jaylen Brown added 30 points and nine rebounds for Boston, who dominated inside in the first half but just couldn't keep the prolific Pacers offense in check in the second.

Boston out-scored Indiana 32-14 in the paint and out-rebounded them 34-19 in the first half, leading 55-48 at the break.

The Pacers turned the tables in the second half. Haliburton,

held to seven points in the first half, scored eight in the first four minutes of the third quarter.

Boston coach Joe Mazzulla said 18 turnovers — six of them in the third quarter when the Pacers briefly pushed their lead to 11 — doomed the Celtics. "When you turn the ball over you just let them get out in transition," he said.

Even so, a game that featured 16 lead changes was all tied up at 105-105 with 1:33 to play when Indiana

delivered the final blow.

INGRAM POWERS PELICANS

Haliburton drew a foul on a step-back three-pointer and converted the free throw to give the Pacers the lead for good.

Hield drilled a three-pointer and Aaron Nesmith threw down a dunk before the Celtics could respond and the Pacers held on.

In Sacramento, the Kings led by as many as 15 points in the first

quarter, but the Pelicans clawed back to lead 69-61 at half-time and never trailed in the second half as they handed the Kings their first defeat of the tournament.

Pels star Zion Williamson had a relatively quiet night with 10 points, but Brandon Ingram scored 30 and Herbert Jones added 23 as six New Orleans players scored in double figures.

De'Aaron Fox led the Kings with 30 points. Domantas Sabonis

notched a triple-double of 26 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists for Sacramento, who had won all four of their group-stage games.

The Pelicans will play the winner of Tuesday's quarterfinal between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Phoenix Suns. The title game is on Saturday in Vegas — where the finalists will be competing for the first NBA Cup and the \$500,000 in prize money per player for the winning team. — AFP

Oman juniors shine in Pan Arab golf in Saudi

MUSCAT: Over 100 players from 12 countries competed in the Junior and Ladies' Pan Arab Golf Championship, played at Riyadh Golf Club in Saudi Arabia recently.

Hosted by the Saudi Golf Federation the tournament featured five categories; Ladies, Girls Under-15 and Boys Under-13, Under-15 and Under-18. Each category was contested at both individual and team level from November 28 to 30.

Oman was represented at Under-18 level by Ahmed al Wahaibi, Mahir Sampat and Avi Hamlai, at Under-15 by Pransh Jagwani, and at Under-13 by Mohib al Kathiri, Yusuf al Rumhy and Taimour al Busaidy.

Against very strong competition, the Oman Under-18 team produced a fine final day to climb into fourth spot in the team standings, with leading player Ahmed al Wahaibi carding a level par final round to finish in fifth position as an individual.

Taking top honours by some margin was the team from Morocco, the UAE in second and Egypt finishing in third place just 8 strokes ahead of Oman.

In the Under-13 category, the Oman team went one better claiming third place and the team bronze medal. Played over



Oman Under-13 team claimed the bronze medal.

two rounds the best two scores from the team of three each day made up the team score. Mohib al Kathiri's scores on both rounds counted and were complimented by Yusuf al Rumhy on day 1 and Taimour al Busaidy on day 2, a great team performance and a fantastic achievement.

In gold position were the Egyptian team with Tunisa claiming silver.

The teams were ably supported by Ahmed al Jahdhamy, General-Secretary and Head of Delegation, Ghalib al Busaidy, OGA Board Member, and men's national team player Azzan al Rumhy offering technical support.

Munthir al Barwani, Chairman of the Oman Golf Association, praised the players' performance.

"We are delighted with the team's performances in Saudi Arabia. The Pan Arab competition is a significant step above that of the GCC with some very strong teams. Our Under-13s claiming the bronze medal with such a young team bodes very well for the future. We extend our thanks to all involved in hosting and running the event, and to our sponsors and partners here in Oman along with the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth for their ongoing support."

Warner angst adds spice to Australia's sleepy home summer

MELBOURNE: Home Tests against an undermanned Pakistan may struggle to excite even the most ardent Australian cricket fan but angst over David Warner's farewell tour has given the series a much-welcomed boost.

Since his Test debut against New Zealand in 2011, Warner has been front and centre in Australian cricket, whether as a poster boy for brilliance or a whipping boy for the team's occasional transgressions.

The 37-year-old is in the spotlight once again as he looks to bow out of Test cricket on his own terms amid considerable doubt over his place in the side.

Former team-mate Mitchell Johnson gave voice to that doubt with a sledgehammer column that highlighted Warner's waning output in Tests and suggested selectors were too close to the left-hander.

While Johnson's takedown drew a scathing response from some media pundits, many in the Australian cricketing community feel a lingering discomfort more than five years on from the Newlands ball-tampering scandal.

'Sandpaper-gate' was arguably the nadir of Australian cricket in the modern era, with Warner adjudged villain-in-chief



after a Cricket Australia integrity probe.

Opening partner Usman Khawaja spoke for many when he said Warner, along with fellow ball-tampering conspirators Steve Smith and Cameron Bancroft, had "paid his dues" by serving a 12-month suspension.

Yet plenty of fans would agree with Johnson that indulging Warner with a "hero's send-off" in the third Test at his home Sydney Cricket Ground would be hard to swallow.

Warner remains saddled with a lifelong leadership ban following Newlands, despite his campaign last year to have it rescinded. That came to nothing when he angrily pulled out of the process, accusing a Cricket Australia-appointed panel of seeking to dredge up unsavoury details about 'Sandpaper-gate'.

He has kept his counsel amid the recent furore, declining interviews while allowing his long-serving manager James Erskine to defend his character and return fire at Johnson.

Warner may hope his bat will do the talking, much as it did during the recent World Cup in India when his mountain of runs helped Australia to a record sixth title. — Reuters

UNBEATEN AL HILAL FINISH ATOP GROUP

U Z B E K S I D E N A S A F Q A R S H I A D V A N C E I N A S I A N C H A M P I O N S L E A G U E

RIYADH: Four-time winners Al Hilal ended their Asian Champions League group campaign unbeaten thanks to a 2-1 home victory against Iran's Nassaji Mazandaran on Monday.

The Saudi side, runners-up last year, had already qualified for the last 16 as Group D winners, allowing manager Jorge Jesus the luxury of starting in-form striker Aleksandar Mitrovic and attacking midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic on the bench.

Ruben Neves, another summer signing, was not part of the squad, with Brazil superstar Neymar out for the majority of the season after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and meniscus in his left knee on international duty in October.

However, Al Hilal needed only four minutes to take the lead against Nassaji Mazandaran at the Prince Faisal bin Fahd Stadium, when winger Michael finished Mohammed Al Breik's low cross at the back post.

Al Hilal, who replaced Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou at half-time, doubled their advantage on 54 minutes courtesy of a clever half volley from reigning Asian Player of the Year Salem al Dawsari.

Mitrovic and Milinkovic-Savic were introduced on the hour mark, although it was not enough to prevent Nassaji Mazandaran from pulling a goal back 13 minutes from time. Mahmoud Ghaed Rahmati halved the deficit with a thunderous volley following a clearance from Al Hilal defender Kalidou Koulibaly.

In the group's other match, Uzbekistan's

Navbahor booked their place in the last 16 with a 2-1 victory against Mumbai City in Pune.

While Navbahor progress by finishing second, Mumbai ended their campaign with six defeats from six matches.

In Group B, Uzbek side Nasaf Qarshi qualified for the knockouts by drawing 2-2 against Qatar's Al Sadd in a match that featured a goal for each team in injury-time. UAE club Sharjah, meanwhile, dropped to third and thus exit the tournament after they let slip the lead to lose 2-1 to Jordan's Al Faisaly in Amman.

Elsewhere, Iraq's Air Force Club condemned Uzbekistan's AGMK to a sixth successive Group C defeat with a 3-2 victory in Erbil. Both teams went into the match without any chance of advancing to the knockout rounds.

Al Ittihad concluded Group C with a 2-1 win against Iran's Sepahan in Mecca.

Former Celtic winger Jota grabbed the winner for the Saudi champions, who welcomed back Egypt international Ahmed Hegazy from long-term injury.

Also in Group C, Iraq's Air Force Club condemned Uzbekistan's AGMK to a sixth successive defeat with a 3-2 victory in Erbil. Both teams went into the match without any chance of advancing to the knockout rounds.

The 10 group winners and the six best second-placed teams advanced to the knockout rounds, which begin in February.

The final takes place, across two legs, in May. — AFP



Nassaji's Iranian forward #08 Mehrdad Abdi is marked by Hilal's Saudi midfielder #28 Mohamed Kanno during the AFC Champions League Group D match at Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Stadium in Riyadh. — AFP



Al Hilal's Saudi midfielder #29 Salem al Dawsari celebrates his goal during the AFC Champions League Group D match against Iran's Nassaji Mazandaran at Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Stadium in Riyadh. — AFP

Ten Hag confident he retains backing of Man Utd players

LONDON: Under-fire Erik ten Hag is confident he retains the backing of Manchester United's players after the club were angered by reports he had lost some of the dressing room.

The Dutchman's challenging second campaign in charge continued on Saturday when his team fell to a meek 1-0 defeat at Newcastle.

A 10th defeat of the season in all competitions led to some reports that Ten Hag had lost the confidence of up to half of his players, with references to concerns over his style, tactics and signings.

As a result, the club banned four media outlets shortly before Tuesday's press conference to preview the midweek Premier League clash against Chelsea.

United said the action was taken for not "contacting us first to give us the opportunity to comment, challenge or contextualise", adding they believed it was "an important principle to defend".

Asked if he believed he still had the requisite buy-in from his players to be successful, Ten Hag said: "Oh yes, I'm sure.

"But you can see, for instance, the comeback against Brentford, the Burnley game, the Fulham game, so every time the team is there, showed great character.

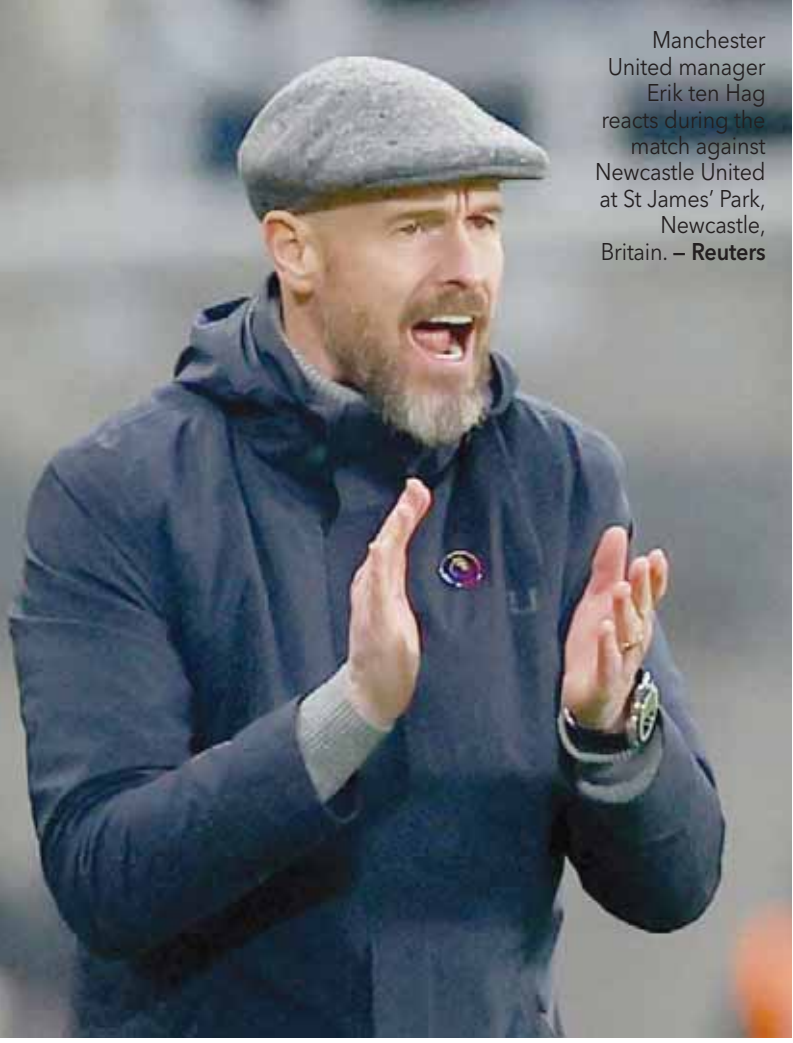
"Great determination, resilient, so yeah, we are together.

"And you can see you can't play such great football what we did lately if there is no unity."

Ten Hag downplayed Newcastle as "one bad performance" after the 3-0 league win at Everton and the 3-3 Champions League draw at Galatasaray, and addressed the bans handed out to journalists.

"They should come to us first and not go around our back printing articles," the United manager said. "That's not the right thing.

"I think we have another relationship, and then they should give that to us beforehand. We have a normal



Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag reacts during the match against Newcastle United at St James' Park, Newcastle, Britain. — Reuters

“Of course there are always in every team players who are playing less, who are less happy.... you have to wait for their chance and that can come, but, no, there are no issues

ERIK TEN HAG
Manchester United manager

and professional discussion and debate about it.”

Pushed on whether he was concerned there was truth behind reports of player unhappiness, the United manager said: “No.

“Of course there are always in every team players who are playing less, who are less happy.... you have to wait for their chance and that can come, but, no, there

are no issues.”

There were no questions in the press conference about Wednesday's match against Chelsea, who are managed by Mauricio Pochettino — the man considered Ten Hag's main rival for the Old Trafford post in 2022.

The former Ajax boss quickly oversaw improvements on and off the pitch at United, but this season there has been criticism about the manager's approach.

"I listen always to my players," the Dutchman said. "And I give them always the opportunities to tell (me). If the players have a different opinion, of course I will listen.

"But they haven't told me, or maybe one or two (have), but it's about in general, so the majority, they want to play like this — proactive, dynamic, brave. That is what they want.

"You can see the players are behind it because of the performances against Everton, Galatasaray, and we are really improving." — AFP



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Proposed Duqm-Riyadh rail link to integrate Al Dhahirah Zone

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 5

A proposed rail link being weighed between the industrial hub of Duqm on Oman’s southeastern coast and the Saudi capital Riyadh is envisioned to also connect a major economic zone currently in the early stages of development in the Sultanate of Oman’s Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Rail-based interconnectivity between the GCC states will be among an array of topics for deliberation during the 44th session of the GCC Supreme Council, which began in the Qatari capital Doha on Tuesday.

According to a report by Qatar News Agency (QNA), the Summit is expected to impart fresh impetus to a new phase of rail-based integration between the six member countries in support of the bloc’s ambitions to boost trade and economic ties.

Deliberations during the Summit will seek to build on recent measures to realise the GCC’s ambition to implement the ‘Gulf Railway’ — an estimated \$15



Bilateral rail projects will complement the ambitious Gulf Railway slated to be in operation by 2030

billion project that will extend a total distance of 2177 kilometres. A GCC Railway Authority was constituted last year, with a commitment to bring the GCC-wide network into operation by December 2030.

A GCC Railway Project Committee, with representatives from the respective transport ministries of the Gulf states, is currently discussing a land transport strategy, as well as a unified law for international land transport across their borders.

Significantly, the Gulf Railway

project is being progressed amid an uptick in bilateral railway projects between neighbours within the GCC. Oman, for example, is collaborating with Saudi Arabia in the proposed establishment of a railway linking Duqm with Riyadh to serve the Economic Zone in Al Dhahirah Governorate (EZAD) that the two countries are developing near Ibri in Oman, the QNA report points out.

Covering an area of 388 sq km, EZAD will be developed just 20 km from the border crossing established on Oman’s border

with Saudi Arabia in The Empty Quarter (Rub Al Khali). EZAD will also leverage its advantageous proximity to the massive Saudi market to target manufacturing, mining, oilfield, logistics, renewable energy and a host of other investments.

In an interview with local media earlier this year, Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary for Transport at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Technology, had confirmed that both countries were studying prospects for the construction of a railway line to link Duqm to Riyadh through the border crossing in Ibri.

Another example of bilateral railway links is the Oman-Etiihad Rail project, which was launched by Oman and the UAE in September 2022 to implement a 303-km railway network connecting the industrial port city of Suhar with Abu Dhabi. The project, catering to both freight and passenger travel, is expected to be operational five years from the start of construction.

OCCI unveils ‘Made in Oman’ initiative at Al Mouj Muscat



‘Made in Oman’ campaign aims to heighten consumer awareness

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 5

Building on last week’s high-profile launch of the ‘Made in Oman’ campaign, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) held a roadshow — part of a countrywide rollout of the new logo — at The Walk in Al Mouj Muscat. The latest event was in line with the Chamber’s commitment to empowering national industries to take their rightful place in the Omani market, a representative said.

The collaboration between OCCI and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in the ‘Made in Oman’ campaign aligns seamlessly with OCCI’s strategic objectives, mirroring the overarching goals of the ‘Oman 2040’ vision. This joint effort between the public and private sectors aims to bolster productivity, ensure sustainability for private entities, especially in the industrial sector, and foster economic growth, as emphasised by the OCCI representative.

Within this framework, the ‘Made in Oman’ campaign aims to heighten consumer awareness about national products, accentuating the promotional aspect as a complement to their inherent quality and competitiveness. OCCI, through diverse initiatives, seeks to support national products by organising exhibitions in commercial centres and branches across provinces. Additionally, the campaign targets the global stage, striving to enhance the competitiveness of national products in international markets.

OCCI, through its multifaceted initiatives, offers robust support for national products, including the provision of free permanent and temporary display spaces, financial support, guidance, marketing consultations, and various other services through the Trade and Retail Committee.

In a collaborative endeavour, OCCI and MoCIIP are driving the ‘Made in Oman’ initiative, elevating national industries and nurturing economic growth.

be’ah signs MoU at COP28 to enhance ESG in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
DUBAI, DEC 5

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah), a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with finance company MSCI Inc, to boost Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices in Oman.

The agreement was signed by Eng Tariq al Amri, Chief Executive Officer of be’ah, and Henry A Fernandez, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of MSCI.

In a statement, Al Amri



outlined how the agreement will help achieve Net-Zero and sustainability objectives of Vision 2040. “We believe that through our new partnership with MSCI, we can deliver our strategies to scale sustainability across the country

by supporting Omani companies to adopt innovative and effective ESG solutions. By improving ESG performance on an enterprise level, we can realise be’ah’s mission and enable the Net-Zero and sustainability objectives identified

in Oman Vision 2040.”

MSCI CEO Henry Fernandez emphasised the role sustainability plays in global investing. “An increased focus on sustainability continues to reshape global investing, and MSCI is proud to help advance sustainable practices in Oman. Our solutions can provide a clear framework for understanding long-term risks and opportunities across industries,” he added.

ESG, which stands for Environmental, Social and Governance, refers to a framework used by investors in order to make socially responsible investments.

Oman-Korea bilateral trade hits \$5.6 bn in 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 5

The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Korea continue to enjoy mutually-beneficial economic ties with bilateral trade reaching an impressive \$5.6 billion in 2022.

Kim Kiejoo, Ambassador of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, said the figure is a testament to the vibrant dynamics of the bilateral relationship.

Speaking at the National Day and Armed Forces Day reception hosted by the Korean Embassy on Monday, December 4, 2023,

Ambassador Kim reaffirmed Korea’s commitment to “aligning the partnership with Oman Vision 2040 and contributing to its fulfilment.” He further expressed the intention to advance collaboration between Korea and Oman in developing green hydrogen industry and in achieving zero carbon emission by 2050.

The reception was attended by Korean community members, Omani participants represented by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of



Dignitaries attending the Korean National Day and Armed Forces Day reception on Monday

Transport, Communications and Informational Technology, as well as members of the diplomatic corps. They jointly commemorated a long-standing partnership between Korea and Oman that has grown from strength to strength since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1974.

In his address, Ambassador Kim highlighted the partnership that has steadily thrived on the basis of three robust pillars extending across the political, economic and cultural fields. He defined the strength of the partnership by underlining that “the common

thread of shared commitment to peace and prosperity has prevailed throughout the last 49 years to the mutual benefit of our two countries and beyond.”

Commenting on growing cultural ties between the Korean and Omani people, Ambassador Kim expressed his willingness to further promote cultural exchanges in commemoration of the forthcoming 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2024. Educational exchanges are expected to contribute to deepening cultural ties on the basis of the Korean Scholarship Programme (KSP), he added.

Imtidad graduates honoured by National Finance and Sharakah

MUSCAT: National Finance and Sharakah joined forces to honour the achievements of graduates from the Imtidad programme at a graduation ceremony held recently. This initiative signifies a crucial collaboration between National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate, and Sharakah, Oman's leading SME development company. The programme is a cornerstone of their collective efforts to stimulate and support local projects. Leveraging Imtidad, the Corporate Responsibility arm of National Finance, the initiative aims to foster projects with a positive and sustainable impact.

Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, reflected on the history of successful collaboration with Sharakah. The joint venture seeks to bring about a developmental shift in small and medium enterprises, enabling them to solidify their support for the national economy and community life development in alignment with Oman Vision 2040's national priorities. Al Farsi stated, "This partnership confirms



our commitment at National Finance to empower Omani youth to invest their potential and direct their energies and knowledge toward establishing a solid path for their entrepreneurial projects. This positions them to compete locally and globally, dealing effectively with external variables and contributing to the country's economic growth." Ali bin Ahmed Muqibal, CEO of Sharakah, emphasised the importance of such partnerships in creating a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem. He shared insights into the SME Growth Programme, which garnered an overwhelming response of 225 applications, ultimately selecting six promising

enterprises. Muqibal stated, "At Sharakah, we have always believed in the power of collaboration and its significant role in fostering a thriving ecosystem for SMEs. Our comprehensive approach, covering seven critical areas of business, is designed to address gaps and enhance profitability effectively. The SME Growth Programme is a commitment to nurturing entrepreneurial talent and guiding these businesses toward sustainable growth. We take pride in our role as facilitators and mentors in this dynamic ecosystem." The event celebrated the success of the graduates, highlighting the spirit of collaboration and the power

of collective effort. It included a short visual presentation by the founders/spokespersons of Sulook and Tasleem Taxi, both beneficiaries of the Imtidad Project. Additionally, a short video detailed the journey and achievements of the project, emphasising its significant positive impact on SME growth.

The ceremony concluded with the distribution of certificates of graduation to the beneficiaries, marking a significant milestone in their entrepreneurial journey. It further underlines the ongoing commitment of National Finance and Sharakah to fostering a thriving business environment in Oman.

NBO hosts global economic outlook for its Corporate Banking customers

MUSCAT: Continuing its efforts to add value for its customers and unlock growth opportunities, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently held its Global Economic Outlook 2024 event for its corporate customers at the bank's head office. The seminar was designed to empower the bank's corporate customers by providing them with valuable insights into the economic outlook of 2024 and its regional impact.

The highlight of the event was an informative panel discussion led by Giridhar Varadachari, General Manager and Chief Financial and Operating Officer at NBO, featuring Naveed Kamal, Chairman of Middle East and Africa Banking at Citi Bank. The discussion delved into crucial economic indicators such as GDP growth projections, inflation rates, and industry-specific trends. Addressing potential challenges and opportunities, the panel aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the economic landscape in 2024.

Speaking on the event, Mohammed al Jabri, Assistant General Manager and Head of Global Transaction Banking from NBO said, "At NBO, we recognise the pivotal role of sophisticated financial information and enriching banking insights in facilitating well-informed decision-making for our corporate customers. As part of our commitment to our customers, this professional platform serves to foster value-driven connections, equipping

our customers with the essential tools to drive their growth potential and ultimately achieve their desired business objectives."

"In an ever-changing market, we acknowledge the dynamic nature of our corporate customers' needs. The global economy undergoes constant shifts due to various geopolitical factors, impacting the decisions of corporate customers in terms of investment and liquidity management. At NBO, we aim to strengthen our relationship with our customers, supporting their journey through a comprehensive range of products," Mohammed Al Jabri added.

NBO extends a diverse array of corporate banking solutions tailored to businesses of all scales. These include working capital financing, cash and liquidity management, transaction banking, corporate advisory, and treasury and trade services to empower customers with financial tools and expertise to enhance operations, mitigate risks, and make informed decisions.

Complementing these offerings, NBO provides a suite of digital solutions to its corporate banking customers, including the secured Corporate Internet Banking platform. This platform is a one-stop shop for businesses, streamlining day-to-day financial operations from account services and fund transfers to utility payments, direct debit, and a comprehensive trade portal—all while minimising the need for physical visits to the bank.



US crypto industry lobby spending on track

WASHINGTON: The cryptocurrency industry was on track to hit a new record for federal lobbying spending, after a year in which firms scrambled to repair their reputations and advance friendly legislation, according to data provided to Reuters by nonprofit research group OpenSecrets.

Crypto companies spent \$18.96 million in the first three quarters of 2023 on lobbying, compared with \$16.1 million during the same period in 2022. That was despite last year's spectacular meltdown of crypto exchange FTX, which had been a top-ten spender. Last year, companies including FTX spent nearly \$22 million on lobbying in total.

Coinbase, the largest US crypto exchange, led the pack again, spending \$2.16 million, followed by Foris DAX, which operates Crypto.com, the Blockchain Association and Binance Holdings.

"Our goal is to engage directly with policymakers, build relationships and bridge the education gap to build a commonsense regulatory framework," said Kristin Smith, CEO of the Blockchain Association, in a statement.

Crypto companies have been expanding in Washington, in part to try to mend their reputations following a string of scandals last year, including the collapse of FTX, whose former CEO Sam Bankman-Fried had been a familiar presence in Washington. He was found guilty



of fraud last month by a jury in a Manhattan federal court.

Crypto firms have also been trying to combat growing regulatory scrutiny, especially from the US Securities and Exchange Commission which says the industry has been flouting its rules. Lobbying escalated after the SEC sued Coinbase and Binance in June for allegedly failing to register tokens, claims they deny.

The industry has also been pushing the SEC to approve a spot bitcoin exchange-traded fund (ETF), which would open up the world's largest cryptocurrency to millions more investors. Optimism that the agency will green-light the product after losing to a key court on the matter in the summer helped drive bitcoin to a 20-month high on Monday.

Crypto companies have also been trying to advance friendly legislation in the House of Representatives and scored a victory in July when a congressional committee in that chamber passed two major bills that lobbyists say would help provide clarity over which existing financial rules apply to crypto companies. — Reuters

Toyota GAZOO racing shines at Japan rally

MUSACT: Toyota GAZOO Racing (TGR) World Rally Team (WRT) has scored a flawless 1-2-3 podium finish on home roads at the FIA World Rally Championship's (WRC) Rally Japan to complete a season of success in style. Elfyn Evans, followed by Sébastien Ogier and Kalle Rovanperä, all claimed victory in their No. 33, No. 17, and No. 69 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1 Hybrid Electric Vehicles respectively.

The triumph, for Evans and co-driver Scott Martin, is their third of the season and the ninth in 13 rallies this year for TGR. Toyota, meanwhile, had already sealed its manufacturers' title during round 11 of Rally Chile before Rovanperä and Jonne Halttunen secured their second drivers' and co-drivers' titles on the penultimate event, the Central European Rally.

Akio Toyoda, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Toyota Motor Corporation and TGR-

WRT Chairman, commented: "To foster the culture of rallying through continuous improvement in a Japanese way' and 'to make the rally an essential autumn tradition in Japan'. Rally Japan this year made all of these things come true. The most impressive thing was that we were able to use Toyota Stadium as one of the special stages allowing us to watch the top drivers driving up close and in front of that many spectators. It was a rally full of exciting and amazing experiences for both fans and drivers. If we continue this kind of rally events, I am sure that motorsport will become a culture in Japan and be more popular. I would like to thank everyone who worked so hard to make Rally Japan 2023 a great success."

This was the WRC's second visit to the technical and demanding asphalt roads in the mountains of the Aichi and Gifu prefectures around Toyota City.



Heavy rain added significantly to day one's challenges, and this was where Evans built the foundations of his victory. Two stage wins in the most extreme wet morning weather helped him to open up a

lead of almost one minute and 50 seconds over his team-mates. Day two and three brought further changeable and slippery weather conditions, but Evans managed both days expertly to seal the win.

Meanwhile, Ogier and Rovanperä focused on maximising the team's result rather than their own positions in tricky weather conditions to finally emerge in second and third place.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race.

Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.



Moody's cuts China credit outlook to negative

BENGALURU: Ratings agency Moody's on Tuesday cut its outlook on China's government credit ratings to negative from stable, citing lower medium-term economic growth and risks from a major correction in the country's vast property sector.

The downgrade reflects growing evidence that authorities will have to provide financial support for debt-laden local governments and state firms, posing broad risks to China's fiscal, economic and institutional strength, Moody's said in a statement.

"The outlook change also reflects the increased risks related to structurally and persistently lower medium-term economic growth and the ongoing downsizing of the property sector,"

Moody's said.

The move by Moody's was its first change on its China view since it cut its rating by one notch to A1 in 2017, also citing expectations of slowing growth and rising debt.

While Moody's affirmed China's A1 long-term local and foreign-currency issuer ratings on Tuesday, it said it expects the country's annual GDP growth to slow to 4.0% in 2024 and 2025, and to average 3.8% from 2026 to 2030.

Most analysts believe the economy is on track to hit the government's annual growth target of around 5% this year, but activity is highly uneven.

The world's second-biggest economy has struggled to mount



First stone laying ceremony of a new water purification plant, financed by China, in Santiago Texcuangos

a strong post-Covid recovery as a deepening crisis in the housing market, local government debt

risks, slow global growth and geopolitical tensions have dented momentum. A flurry of policy

support measures have proven only modestly beneficial, raising pressure on authorities to roll out more stimulus.

Local government debt reached 92 trillion yuan (\$12.6 trillion), or 76% of China's economic output in 2022, up from 62.2% in 2019, according to the latest data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

After years of over-investment in infrastructure, plummeting returns from land sales, and soaring costs to battle Covid-19, economists say debt-laden municipalities now represent a major risk to the economy.

China's Finance Ministry said it was disappointed by Moody's downgrade, adding that the economy will maintain

its rebound an positive trend. It also said property and local government risks are controllable.

"Moody's concerns about China's economic growth prospects, fiscal sustainability and other aspects are unnecessary," the ministry said.

In October, China unveiled a plan to issue 1 trillion yuan (\$139.84 billion) in sovereign bonds by the end of the year to help kick-start activity, raising the 2023 budget deficit target to 3.8% of gross domestic product (GDP) from the original 3%.

The central bank has also implemented modest interest rate cuts and pumped more cash into the economy in recent months, pledging to sustain policy support. — Reuters



Sohar Power Company appeals bankruptcy rejection order

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, DEC 5

Publicly traded company Sohar Power Company SAOG has announced the filing of an appeal with the Seeb Appeals Court against the rejection of its bankruptcy application by the primary court on November 13, 2023.

In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on December 4, 2023, Sohar Power's Chief Executive Officer, Sreenath Hebbar, said the company's management is also in the process of issuing a tender and inviting bids for the sale of the power and desalination plant either as a complete plant or in separate packages.

This move is seen as a

proactive measure by Sohar Power to ensure that the company's assets are valued and sold in a fair and transparent manner, in the event that its bankruptcy appeal is unsuccessful.

Sohar Power has been facing financial challenges since the expiration of its Power & Water Purchase Agreement (PWPA) with Nama Power & Water on May 15, 2022.

The company has been unable to secure a new contract with Nama, and efforts to extend the company's operating life have been unsuccessful.

The company's outstanding debts amount to RO 39 million, while its shareholder equity reflects a negative value of RO 30.8 million.

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, DEC 5

South Korea is hosting a key hydrogen forum in Muscat on December 12, 2023 that seeks to capitalise on commitments by a number of Korean firms to participate in Oman's massive green hydrogen production industry.

The '2nd Korea-Oman Green Hydrogen Strategic Forum 2023' will take place on the sidelines of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) Conference and Exhibition – the preminent showcase of the Sultanate of Oman's green hydrogen ambitions – to be held during December 12 – 14, 2023. While GHSO 2023 will be held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), the Korean forum will take place at the nearby Crowne Plaza Hotel OCEC.

Underscoring the significance of Oman's green hydrogen industry for Korea, a high-level delegation of government officials, as well as top executives of leading Korean energy, infrastructure and automotive giants will be presenting at the forum.

The line-up includes Seungyup Lee, Vice President of GS Energy; Kwangho Lee, Regional Representative of Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO)



Model of the POSCO-backed green hydrogen project planned in Duqm SEZ

Middle East and CIS; Nabil Nachi, Head of MEA CV New Business of Hyundai Motor, and Dr. Chang-Keun Yi, President of Korea Institute of Energy Research (KIER). Kiejoo Kim, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, will be addressing the event as well.

Presenting from Oman are: Dr Firas al Abduwani, Director General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen, Ministry of Energy and Minerals; Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director – HYDROM; Dr Rashid al Abri, Director of the Sustainable Energy Research Center, Sultan Qaboos University; Dr Abdullah al Abri, Energy & Investment Consultant, IEA; and Dr Khalil al Hanashi, Senior Energy Renewal Advisor, The National Hydrogen Alliance (HY-FLY).

"The Forum is aimed at increasing the level of understanding of strategies and policies of Korea and Oman and at pursuing broader scope of mutual collaboration of stakeholders," said the Korean Embassy in an accompanying note.

"It intends to attract participation and engagement of Korean and Omani stakeholders from public, industrial, research and academic sectors as well as from the international organisations including Korean firms that constitute a part of a value chain of hydrogen sector."

Already the building blocks of a promising partnership in green hydrogen development have been set in place between the two countries. In June, a consortium jointly helmed by Korean steel giant POSCO and French energy utility Engie was awarded a 340

km2 land block in Duqm to develop a major green hydrogen and ammonia project. It centres on the production of 220,000 tonnes of green hydrogen with renewable energy coming from a 5 GW upstream complex. All of this output is targeted for export to POSCO's steel mills in Korea.

Other partners in the consortium are Samsung Engineering, Korea East-West Power Co. (EWP), Korea Southern Power Co. (KOSPO), and FutureTech Energy Ventures Company Ltd (a unit of PTTEP).

Additionally, both countries have pledged to enhance bilateral cooperation in the establishment of green hydrogen infrastructure, installation of hydrogen charging stations, expansion of hydrogen commercial vehicles and development of waste-to-energy businesses.

"The partnership between Korea and Oman in the green hydrogen sector offers substantial and mutual gains, leveraging each other's strengths and capacities. The bilateral partnership will extend to stakeholders in the green hydrogen industry at regional and global levels, contributing to the fulfilment of zero-carbon emissions by 2050 and the pursuit of a new paradigm of energy security," the Korean Embassy added.

Asian stocks slide as focus turns to US jobs

SINGAPORE: Asian stocks slipped to three-week lows, and Hong Kong's unloved Hang Seng index slumped to a one-year trough on Tuesday, while bonds and the dollar steadied as investors tempered expectations for cuts to US interest rates and waited on US jobs data.

The Australian dollar fell 0.6% after the central bank left interest rates on hold, as expected, and emphasised that the future direction of rates would depend on data.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan was down 1% in late afternoon trade, with Hong Kong doing most of the dragging with a 1.6% fall. The Hang Seng is down more than 17% for the year so far, while world stocks are up almost 15%, as investors have streamed out of Chinese assets while the economy stumbles.

Japan's Nikkei was 1.4% lower at a three-week trough, mostly

thanks to falling chipmaking stocks. S&P 500 futures fell 0.2%, and European futures were flat.

Gold hung on above \$2,000 after a wild session on Monday when it hit a record high in Asia before recoiling sharply lower.

"The market has more or less priced the soft landing scenario (for the US economy) to perfection," said Bank of Singapore strategist Moh Siong Sim. "Overnight there was a bit of a reality check -- maybe it was too ambitious." Treasuries had come under a little pressure on Monday as traders calibrated pretty aggressive pricing for US interest rate cuts. Two-year yields rose 9.1 basis points (bps) and were steady at 4.62% in Asia trade. Having been encouraged by a benign inflation report three weeks ago, futures imply about 125 bps of cuts in 2024.

US job openings data is due at 1530 GMT, and broader hiring figures, which had last month



Traders work on the floor of the NYSE in New York

showed signs of a slowdown in the job market, will be published on Friday.

"While it's understandable the market has embraced the recent improvement in inflation and

softer October labour market data, strong momentum in the economy remains," ANZ analysts said in a note to clients. "We, therefore, expect that the (Fed), while encouraged by recent

inflation improvements, will continue to adopt a hawkish policy stance." In currency markets, the dollar, which suffered its sharpest monthly decline for a year in November, rose slightly

overnight. The euro sat at \$1.0841 on Tuesday, just above support at its 200-day moving average. Core inflation in Tokyo slowed in November, though the yen strengthened a little to 146.88 per dollar. The Australian and New Zealand dollars retreated from multi-month highs on Monday. They were last a little weaker, with the Aussie dropping to \$0.6583, where it was testing support at its 200-day moving average.

The Reserve Bank of Australia left interest rates on hold and said, as it had a month ago, that future rate settings would depend on data. "We suspect that markets were expecting a more hawkish statement given the unusually long time before the next RBA meeting on 6 February," said Lenny Jin, global FX strategist at HSBC. "The RBA did not forcefully push against the ongoing trend of easing financial conditions that has occurred globally since November." — Reuters

Immigration remains a major problem for the UK



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Immigration was a major issue at the referendum in June 2016 on Britain leaving the European Union and it hugely influenced the voting at the time. While there has since been a change in people’s movement from the continent to the UK with numbers dramatically declining, there has however, been a rise in the number of people from outside the EU countries arriving in the UK.

Net immigration has reached a new peak with 745,000 more people moving to the UK than departing last year, official figures have shown. The Office for National Statistics said its net migration total for 2022, which had previously been estimated at a then record figure of 606,000, had been revised upwards after census returns showed it to be at a significantly higher level than previously thought.

The statisticians said the rate of migration had slowed since then with the most up-to-date figures

covering the 12 months to the end of June showing a net inflow of 672,000 migrants. But the numbers will bring new pressure on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak — who has been criticised for focusing on small boat arrivals rather than the overall scale of migration – to find ways to bring the figures down.

The statistics came as separate figures showed that rising migration has also triggered a record 578,000 jump in the population of England and Wales in the year to the end of June, adding to the need for more housing and increasing demand for public services.

The immediate focus, however, was on the record net migration figure. A breakdown, covering the 12 months to the end of June, shows that it was the result of an inflow of 1.2 million people balanced against a much smaller outflow of 508,000 people.

Most of those arriving were from outside the European Union, with 968,000 migrants moving

THE STATISTICS CAME AS SEPARATE FIGURES SHOWED THAT RISING MIGRATION HAS ALSO TRIGGERED A RECORD 578,000 JUMP IN THE POPULATION OF ENGLAND AND WALES IN THE YEAR TO THE END OF JUNE, ADDING TO THE NEED FOR MORE HOUSING AND INCREASING DEMAND FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

to Britain from countries in Asia, Africa and elsewhere, with the largest number coming from India, Nigeria, Pakistan, China and Ukraine. Immigration from EU countries was much lower, at 129,000, and only fractionally up on the previous year’s tally. Britons returning from a life abroad made up the rest of the inflow.

The figures show that a third of migrants from outside Europe came for work, with a big increase in arrivals taking jobs in health and social care. There were also large numbers of international students with 39 per cent of those coming from outside Europe doing so to study.

The statisticians say that the large increase in net migration, which the Conservative government once wanted to cut to below 100,000, follows the introduction of a new immigration system introduced at the start of 2021. It aimed to replace the free movement of EU citizens into Britain with a “points-based”

system that made it easier for those outside Europe to move to the UK.

With the intention of most migrants coming to the UK of being based in London, the Capital’s population has risen to almost nine million despite growing more slowly than any other region of England and Wales, latest official figures show.

The Office for National Statistics said that 8,886,180 people were living in the capital in the middle of last year. That represented a 0.7 per cent increase on the equivalent total the year before when the number of people had dropped by a similar proportion because of the Covid crisis.

But they said the London rise was the smallest regional increase across England and Wales – which saw a combined population growth of 578,000 — because of the large numbers of existing residents moving in other parts of the country almost outweighed the numbers of migrants arriving from overseas to the capital.

Asian power generation gets cleaner, even as coal emissions rise

SUDARSHAN VARADHAN

Asia boosted clean electricity output and slashed its share of fossil fuels faster than North America and Europe from 2015, data shows, underscoring resistance by Asian nations to a western push to choke private financing for coal-fired power.

There is wide agreement that increasing clean power, such as wind and solar, is central to curbing carbon emissions to fight climate change. On Saturday at the UN climate summit, 118 governments, led by the US and the European Union, pledged to triple the world’s renewable energy capacity by 2030.

However, China and India did not back the COP28 pledge as it was twinned with curbing use of fossil fuels, which they see as essential to reliably meeting rapidly rising power demand.

Bolstering their view, even with coal, higher financing costs and weaker access to funds, Asia outpaced Europe and North America in fighting climate change by key measures since the Paris climate agreement of 2015, a Reuters analysis of data found.

Asia boosted clean power, including hydro and nuclear, as a share of overall power output by about 8 percentage points to 32 per cent between 2015 and 2022, a review of data from energy think tank Ember showed.

By comparison, clean energy’s share in the power mix in Europe rose over 4 percentage points to 55 per cent, while in North America it climbed by more than 6 percentage points to 46 per cent.

“There cannot be any pressure on India to cut down emissions,” India’s power and renewable energy minister R K Singh said on November 30.

Asia slashed the share of fossil fuels in power generation by 8 percentage points to 68 per cent in 2022 from 2015, abating more gas and coal use than Europe and North America.

ASIA BOOSTS CLEAN POWER FASTER THAN WEST

POWER SECTOR EMISSIONS IN ASIA STILL RISING

WEST STEPS UP GAS-FIRED POWER AS ASIA CUTS SHARE

INDIA SEES NO ENERGY TRANSITION WITHOUT STORAGE



Smoke rises from chimneys near solar panels in Shaanxi province, China.

Over the same period, Europe’s dependence on fossil fuels fell 4 percentage points while North America’s narrowed by 6 percentage points.

“The data shows that the West is not moving fast enough on scaling up renewables and storage,” said Hogeveen Rutter, who works with private companies on behalf of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Rutter said delays in approvals for renewables, storage projects and grid interconnections in Europe and the US have hampered growth of clean energy use in the West.

ASIAN EMISSIONS RISE

To be sure, fast-growing Asia, home to half the world’s population, accounts for three-fifths of global emissions from power generation, including from sectors exporting goods and services to the west.

And India and China continue to build new coal-fired plants to meet rapidly growing electricity demand.

That means power generation

emissions by Asia will continue to climb, after having risen nearly 4 per cent annually since the Paris accord as electricity demand has soared, while emissions in Europe and North America declined, the Ember data showed.

However, Asian governments have argued that the world’s wealthiest countries should help poorer countries cut emissions, citing rich nations’ higher per capita emissions and their unabated fossil fuel use in the last century.

This year, western nations expressed unwillingness to fund early retirement of polluting plants in Indonesia — the world’s seventh largest coal-fired power generator, despite commitments to help it decarbonise.

“Asian countries with access to finance have been able to move much quicker, while other parts of Asia need more concessionality to catch up. This illustrates the need for the West to assist with concessional funding for storage to move away from coal,” ISA’s Rutter said.

Funding shortages and high-priced tariffs for renewables have hindered Indonesia’s move away from coal, while access to funds have enabled rapid expansion of green energy in China, analysts say.

A report released on Monday estimated developing countries will need \$2.4 trillion a year in investment to cap emissions.

WEST TURNS TO GAS

Some western nations are looking to curb finance for coal, calling it the “number one threat” to climate goals. Despite challenges, Asia, along with Europe and North America, have cut the share of coal in power use, although at a slower pace.

However, both Europe and North America are increasing use of natural gas — often described as a transition fuel — to make up for part of the decline in coal-fired power generation, while gas makes up a shrinking share of power generation in Asia.

The share of gas rose 3 percentage points to 26 per cent

of European power generation in 2022 from 2015, with North America boosting the share of gas-fired power by 6 percentage points to 36 per cent, despite tepid power demand growth.

Cuts in nuclear power have slowed Europe and North America’s fight to reduce emissions, although nuclear’s share of their power mix remains well above Asia’s.

“The progress the West has made is to cut use of dirty coal and use relatively less-polluting gas,” said Ghee Peh, an analyst at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

India, the world’s second largest coal user, has argued for the phase-down of all fossil fuels instead of singling out coal, and plans to oppose the plan to ban private finance for coal. It wants rich nations to invest more in energy storage to back up renewables.

“We cannot phase out fossil fuels unless we have nuclear or until storage becomes viable,” Singh said.

— Reuters

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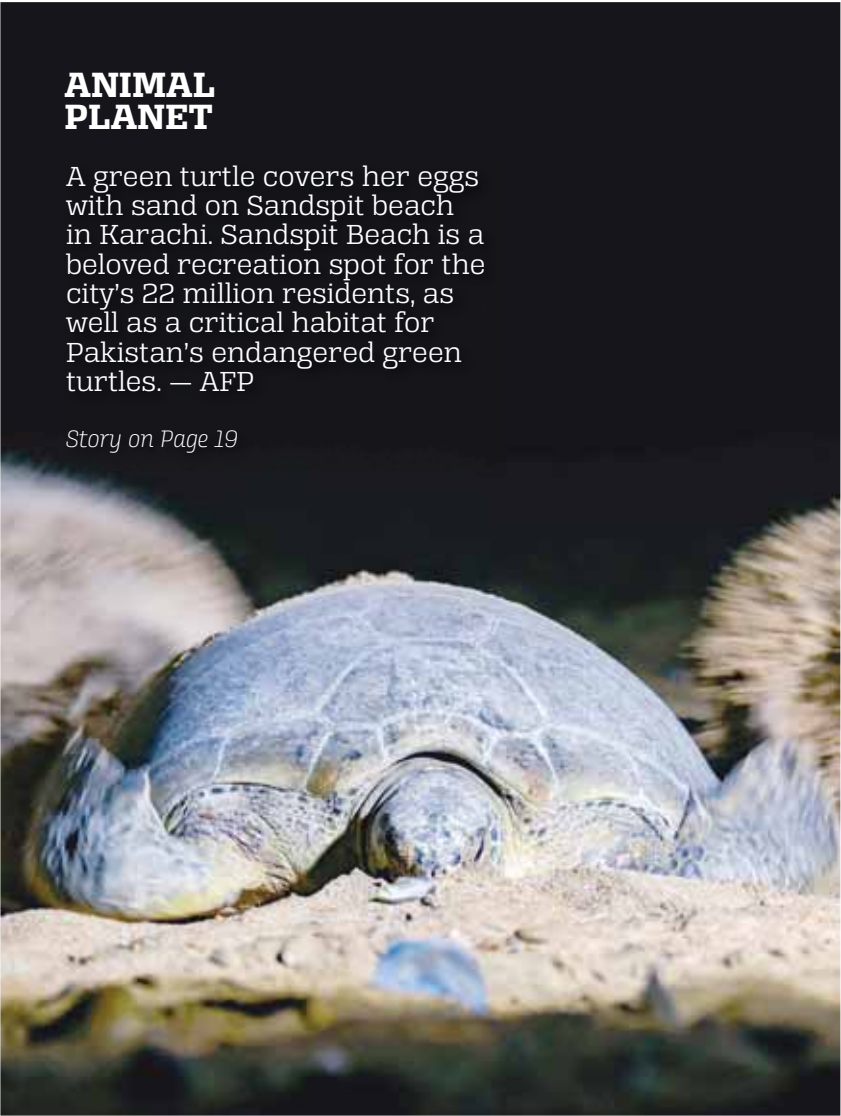
LIFESTYLE

Spectators enjoy the music during the Trans Musicales music festival in Rennes, western France. — AFP



FOOD

Various kinds of kimchi are exhibited at the National Kimchi Show at the Food Festival House on Ryomyong Street, Pyongyang. — AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

A green turtle covers her eggs with sand on Sandspit beach in Karachi. Sandspit Beach is a beloved recreation spot for the city's 22 million residents, as well as a critical habitat for Pakistan's endangered green turtles. — AFP

Story on Page 19



ENTERTAINMENT

US actress America Ferrera arrives for the Critics Choice Association Celebration of Cinema and Television: Honoring Black, Latino, and AAPI Achievements, at Fairmont Century Plaza in Century City, California. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

Volcanic ash spews from Mount Marapi during an eruption as seen from Lasi village in Agam, West Sumatra. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | DECEMBER 6, 2023 | JUMADA AL ULA 22, 1445 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

First look inside Oman's innovative botanical garden

Oman Botanic Garden, a pioneering project that showcases native flora and emphasises conservation, sustainable practices, and aims for global recognition through biodiversity preservation and eco-friendly initiatives will soon become the newest landmark destination for tourists and enthusiasts to experience Oman's indigenous flora under one roof... **P20**

CULTURE

US returns \$1 mn in stolen antiquities to Nepal

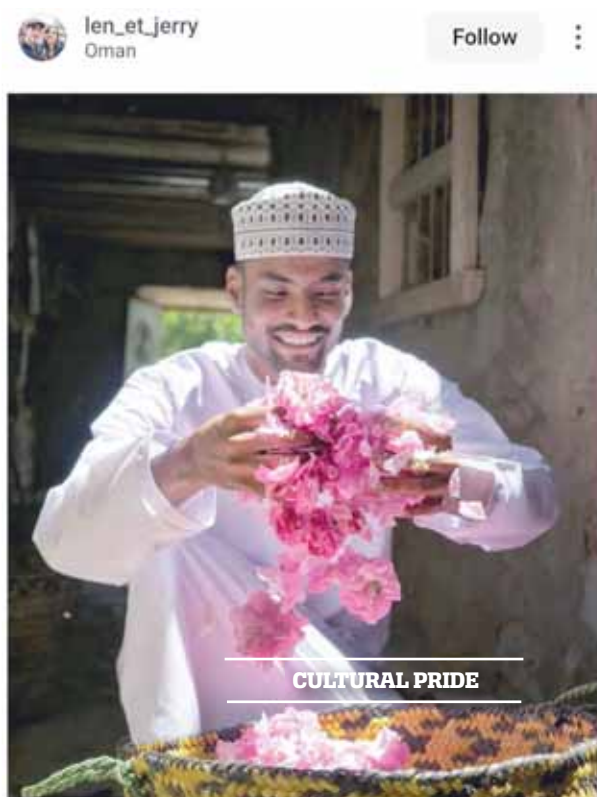
THE UNITED STATES HAS returned four antiquities worth \$1 million to Nepal, including a pair of gilt copper masks representing a Hindu deity, following anti-trafficking operations, New York authorities said on

Monday. One of the items was seized as part of a probe into Subhash Kapoor, whom Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg described as an "allegedly prolific looter who helped traffic items" from several Asian countries. Between 2011 and 2023, officials claim to have recovered more than 2,500 items trafficked by Kapoor and his network, Bragg's office said in a statement. "The total value of the pieces recovered exceeds \$143 million," it added. "We will continue to target antiquities trafficking networks no matter how complex. I thank our outstanding team of analysts and attorneys... for recovering and returning these beautiful pieces," Bragg said. The four items given back to Nepalese authorities were handed over at a ceremony in New York. "The return of these illegally exported four masterpieces is a sig-



nificant step in reclaiming Nepal's cultural heritage and preserving its historical treasures," said Nepal's acting consul general in New York Bishnu Prasad Gautam. The masks, from the 16th century and collectively valued at \$900,000, depict Shiva, part of the Hindu trinity. "Both masks were stolen in the mid-1990s as part of a series of break-in robberies from the home of the family" whose relatives made them, Bragg's office said. In recent years, the New York's Met and other prestigious museums have agreed to return trafficked works, in particular pieces from countries riddled by conflict from 1970 to 1990. Under Bragg, who has been in office since 2022, more than 1,000 pieces worth \$190 million have been returned to 19 countries, including Cambodia, China, India and Pakistan. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Green turtles fight to survive against Pakistan's urban sprawl

AGAINST THE BACKDROP of the mega port city of Karachi, choked with traffic and construction, four green turtles emerge from the frothy Arabian Sea seeking a spot to lay their eggs.

Three immediately retreat to the water, put off by the glittering lights and heavy beat of a nearby beach party.

But one trundles towards the end of the beach bank, its flippers whipping sand into the air before settling on a dry spot of sand in which to deposit 88 golf ball-sized eggs.

Six conservationists tasked with protecting the last surviving turtle species to nest in Pakistan stand guard nearby.

"Being human doesn't only call for loving another human being. These animals also require the same attention and love," said Ashfaq Ali Memon, the head of marine wildlife at Sindh province's Wildlife Department.

Sandspit Beach is a beloved recreation spot for the city's 22 million residents, as well as a critical habitat for Pakistan's endangered green turtles.

The eight-kilometre stretch of beach is being relentlessly

encroached upon by the construction of concrete beach houses that have, metre-by-metre, eaten into the strip of sand where turtles nest.

"Once I saw someone disturbing a turtle while she was laying eggs. She ran off for safety, leaving a trail of eggs behind her. That was a very painful scene," said Haseen Bano, Memon's wife who supports the work of the volunteers.

POLLUTION THREAT

Marine turtles have covered vast distances across the world's oceans for more than 100 million years but human activity has tipped the scales against the survival of these ancient creatures, the World Wildlife Fund says.

Until the early 2000s, the beaches of Pakistan's coast were the nesting habitat for five endangered turtle species.

Now only the green turtles come to shore to lay their eggs on just two beaches in Karachi and on uninhabited islands in Balochistan province, further down the coast towards Iran.

Alongside construction, noise and garbage pollution,

WWF-Pakistan has also reported that diesel and petrol fumes have caused deformities in hatchlings.

As well as major disruption to their nesting habitats, thousands of turtles are also injured or killed in fishing nets every year.

Named for the greenish colour of their cartilage and fat, they are classified as endangered across the world.

LIVING DINOSAURS

Sindh Wildlife Department has a dedicated team of six volunteers, paid according to fluctuating donations, who patrol the beaches after dark during nesting season between August and January.

"When the turtles arrive to use the pits, our volunteers are present to take care of them and to ensure no one can disturb them," Amir Khan said.

The 88 — a decent batch for a young female — were delicately collected the same night and taken to a protected coastal conservation centre and reburied in the sand for the 45-60 day hatching cycle, away from the danger of stray dogs, mongoose and snakes.

Baby turtles just a few hours old and only about two-inches long are meanwhile brought to the water's edge in buckets by volunteers and released one-by-one, swimming off into the night.

Data on the number of green turtles is not available in Pakistan but, for the past few years, the number of hatchlings has increased.

In 2022, volunteers successfully hatched 30,000 eggs and the current year's count has already passed 25,000 just over halfway through the season.

Khan said these "living dinosaurs" will continue to struggle against the accelerating urban sprawl of the city and the dangers posed by fishermen.

"It feels good to take care of these turtles, they boost the beauty of our beach," said Mohammad Javed, a 29-year-old volunteer who inherited the caretaker legacy from his father. —AFP

FILM

Details of the first Ain Short Film Festival revealed

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
PHOTOS BY FAHAD AL HADRAMI

THE AIN SHORT FILM FESTIVAL'S main committee held a press conference to unveil details about the festival's inaugural edition, organised by the Ministry of Information through the General Directorate of Electronic Media. The festival is scheduled to take place from January 24 to 28, 2024.

Saleh bin Ahmed al Muqeemi, the artistic director of the Ain Film Festival, expressed, "The

competition emerged to promote various facets of arts and culture, coinciding with the launch of the Ain platform, which hosts various genres of visual works. The need to establish the Short Film Festival arose to enhance the film industry in the Sultanate of Oman and support both professional and emerging filmmakers. The goal is to contribute to the development of the creative content industry."

The artistic director emphasised that the festival would significantly contribute to Omani



creative content. It will provide opportunities for both professional and emerging film-makers to participate in three main categories: short narrative films (5 to 30 minutes), short documentary films (5 to 30 minutes), and children's films (5 to 15 minutes).

The competition has outlined several rules and regulations. Participants must be Omanis,

and the film's producer or director is responsible for the full intellectual property rights. The film or any part of it should not have been previously screened, broadcast, or made available on any television channel, Internet platform, mobile phone, or any public

platform worldwide. The competition requires films to be submitted in Arabic, including all Omani dialects. The platform has the right to broadcast the participating films, and festival registration implies relinquishing rights to the platform.

The total value of the

actress award, editing, soundtrack, and cinematic make-up, in addition to the grand prizes such as the best film in the three competitions.

Moreover, the festival includes a series of workshops aimed at building the technical skills of aspiring film-makers. These workshops cover various aspects of film-making, including screenplay writing, cinematography, production, film criticism, and the practical realities of the cinematic market, both regionally and globally. The goal is to nurture the talents of emerging professionals in the field of film-making.

He added that the themes for participation include good citizenship, tourism, youth and sports, the technological and digital future, artificial intelligence, and social media. Through these themes, the festival aims to address the positives and negatives of society, as well as aspects of humanity, culture, Omani identity, sciences, knowledge, and social issues.

award is RO 42,000, distributed among the best screenplay, best cinematography, best actor and





art & life

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First look inside Oman's innovative botanical garden

BY VINOD NAIR
PHOTOS BY MIDHUN RAJ

The Oman Botanic Garden (OBG), situated in the outskirts of the capital, will not only be the first of its kind in the region but also perhaps among the biggest in the world. Located just around 35 km from Muscat International Airport, the project has been designed to represent the native flora in naturalistic habitats that reflect the rich botanical heritage of the region. Additionally, it serves as a one-stop destination for various avenues such as research, fun, learning, expert interactions, and an extraordinary visitor experience. Set to be completed in 2024, OBG will offer a cable car experience to

our master database, including their original location, the method of propagation, ethnobotanical uses, and more. The majority of the information about plant uses can only be sourced from specific local experts. Al Farsi added, "Once we receive the seeds, they are conserved for short-term curing until they are sent to us. Curing is a process of holding the plant seed in specific climate conditions for a short duration before moving to very different storage conditions. Seventy per cent of the total flora is part of a seed collection, and upon receiving them, we commence propagation and cultivation. The nursery must be set to the right climate conditions, which are necessary to propagate all the native plants." The dedicated team conducts



visitors for the first time in the country. Other amenities will include open playgrounds, event spaces, and interactive areas. The garden demonstrates a sustainable approach in its design, construction, and operation. The nursery in Oman Botanic Garden serves as the basis for work in the garden, supplying all required plants spread over an area of 20,000 sqm. It includes three covered glasshouses, four greenhouses, shade areas, and open areas. While the Garden is still under construction, the Observer gained access to its nursery and learned about the flora during an interaction with Dr. Khalid Al Farsi, head of the horticulture department. He said, "We record all the information about each single plant in

propagation using different procedures according to the plants' needs, such as soil type and temperature. Plants sourced from the mountains of Jabal al Akhdar need different temperatures than those sourced from down south in Dhofar. Al Farsi highlighted that the focal point isn't merely the process of propagation and cultivation, but the underlying science, gathered information, and the developed database. "All plants and seeds are coded and fed into the system so that they can be accessed anytime using the accession number (like an ID). The Oman Botanic Garden is also committed to conserving the plants specified in the Red List, which has increased over time. "We obtained and successfully grew some plants from places like Dhofar."

It is crucial to note that trees were saved from urban expansion. In the garden, we refrain from uprooting trees from their original environments. The outdoor habitats in the garden include sand deserts, central deserts, gravel deserts, date palm areas, agricultural terraces, and wadis. The indoor habitats, contained within two large biomes, represent the Dhofar mountains and Hajar mountains. "We aim to plant almost all the species from each natural habitat of Oman. This approach will help us identify the best plants suitable for landscaping and gardening." The horticulture team is responsible for managing, evaluating, and caring for all plants produced and grown in the garden. It supervises the propagation and production of

plants in the nursery, protecting plants from diseases and insect pests, as well as caring for all plants grown in the garden facilities. Since the establishment of the nursery, the focus has been on building the capability of technical staff to propagate and produce Omani wild plants. There have been efforts to design new protocols for the best methods to grow and care for these plants. OBG currently contains the largest living collection of plants in the Arabian Peninsula that live outside their original habitat in the world. The number of plants in the nursery is about 70,000, belonging to more than 380 plant species. One of the most important goals of the garden is to support the preservation of plants living outside their natural habitats by propagat-

KEY FACTS

GARDEN SIZE	500 HA
NURSERY SIZE	20,000 SQM
FIELD TRIPS	1,000
SPECIES IN THE SEED BANK	800
RED LIST SPECIES IN OMAN	261
NEW SPECIES	20
TOTAL # OF PLANTED SPECIES	98,000
RES LIST SPECIES IN THE GARDEN	85
SEEDS IN THE SEED BANK	1,00,00,00
PLANTS IN THE NURSERY	70,000
TREES RESCUED [CONSTRUCTION]	2,000
TOTAL FLORA	1,443
SPECIMENS IN THE HERBARIUM	5,000
TOTAL FLORA COLLECTED	60%
SPECIES IN THE NURSERY	380

ing threatened plant species. Currently, the nursery includes about 85 species of plants listed on the Red List. The garden employs the Integrated Agricultural Pest and Disease Management (IPDM) strategy in the nursery. The plant health team protects and treats plants in the garden using sustainable methods that reduce health, environmental, and economic risks. The team has also achieved self-sufficiency in examining plant samples, diagnosing any infection with harmful agricultural pests, determining treatment mechanisms, and documenting all of this in reference protocols. OBG aims to gain international recognition by obtaining platinum LEED certificates, which certify Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Obtaining this certificate indicates the garden's efficient water usage, safe use of locally recycled materials, reduced energy consumption, and investment in renewable energy sources.