

P11

BUCKS GRAB BIG WIN OVER WEST-LEADING T'WOLVES, TEMPER FLARE IN NEW ORLEANS



P13

OMAN'S FIRST VETERINARY PHARMA PROJECT SET FOR LAUNCH



P20

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO OMAN'S ANCIENT POTTERY TRADITIONS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KUWAIT EMIR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on the occasion of the National Day of the brotherly State of Kuwait. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the Emir of Kuwait wishing him good health, happiness and long life and praying to Al-lah the Almighty for the return of this occasion while the Emir of Kuwait and the brotherly Kuwaiti people have fulfilled their aspirations for further progress and prosperity.

NAVAL DRILL SEA LION UNDER WAY

The naval drill Sea Lion 1/2024, carried out by the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) at the Sea of Oman, is under way till February 29. The drill is conducted with the support of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The ships and crews taking part in the exercise on Saturday sailed towards the naval zone dedicated to the drill where a number of events and applications will take place in accordance to the plan.

OPINION

P8



Dr Hamed al Sinawi

Can therapy save a troubled marriage?

P9



Ana María Ibáñez

Rethinking inequality in Latin America

Royal attention to educational sector hailed

HONOURABLE LADY GREETES OMANI TEACHERS

MUSCAT: Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Saturday congratulated male and female teachers on the occasion of Omani Teacher's Day.

The greetings message reads as follows: "We are pleased to congratulate teachers, both male and female, in our dear country on the occasion of the celebration marking Omani Teacher's Day, which falls on February 24. We value teachers' central role in the educational process and their abundant contribution in grooming future cadres, empowering them with useful knowledge, sound values and sciences, so that they could in turn contribute to the service of the nation.

"We wish teachers success in accomplishing their important mission. We also extend our deep thanks to the administrative bodies and all personnel operating in the field of education. We appreciate their tangible efforts in upgrading the education system. "We wish that the endeavours of all be crowned with success. Many happy returns of the occasion." – ONA



MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, voiced deep thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the great attention the education sector has received and for designating February 24 each year as an official holiday for the teaching and administrative staff in public and private schools in recognition of their efforts in performing the roles entrusted to them.

Delivering a speech on the occasion of the Omani Teacher's Day, the minister praised the efforts made by teachers and their devotion in performing their educational mission to raise students in a sound manner and prepare them to contribute to building the comprehensive development process in this dear country.

The minister also appreciated the generous congratulations extended by Her Highness The Honourable Lady, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, to the teachers on this happy occasion as well as her deep appreciation for the efforts made by the administrative bodies and all workers in the educational field. **TURN TO P2**

A TREASURE OF KNOWLEDGE



The 28th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair entered its third day on Saturday with an overwhelming weekend crowd. According to some participants, the fair was highly successful last year, coming out of a two-year absence due to the pandemic. The Omani English language author Amar Naimi said, "I believe that the crowd this year has increased compared to last year. As an author, this fair is a great opportunity to meet readers and publishers, market my books, and also find books that I am looking for." **DETAILS ON P4**

Low pressure system to bring in rains

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Weather forecasters have been monitoring the belt of high and medium clouds interspersed with rain clouds over Iraq, Kuwait and northern Saudi Arabia, moving east-wards.

Oman Met Office had already alerted of trough of low pressure that is to have an impact on Oman this week.

Speaking to the Observer, the weather forecaster from Oman Met Office said the trough of low pressure that is to begin on Sunday will continue until March 1.

"It is not expected to be as strong as the previous low pressure," pointed out the weather expert.

The areas which are on focus would be Musandam, coast of the Sea of Oman, and isolated rains over Al Hajar and around the mountain ranges.

"The expected rainfall will be around 15 to 20 mm. The areas include the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North and South, and Muscat, but would be more pronounced over Musandam," said the weather forecaster.

The wave height could go up to two to three metres in the Sea of Oman and along the Musandam coast.

The impact of the trough is not expected to be heavy, according to the weather forecaster, the reason being



The expected rainfall will be around 15 to 20 mm. The areas include the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North and South, and Muscat, but would be more pronounced over Musandam

WEATHER FORECASTER

that when it reaches towards Oman the trough is expected to move towards north, so the impact would be just on the tip of the northern part of Oman.

Clouds advection and formation and scattered rains with occasional thunder showers are expected over the Governorate of Musandam and the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman and which may extend to Al Hajar Mountains.

Low clouds could cause low horizontal visibility as there are chances of low clouds or fog patches during late night to early morning over parts of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates and coastal areas of the Sea of Oman.

Strikes kill dozens as Gaza truce talks begin

GAZA STRIP: Dozens of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been killed in the latest Israeli strikes, the health ministry said on Saturday, after Israel's spy chief joined talks in Paris seeking to unblock negotiations on a truce.

The talks come after a plan for a post-war Gaza unveiled by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu drew criticism from the United States, and was rejected by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The talks also come alongside deepening fears for Gaza's civilians desperate for food. The United Nations' main aid body for Palestinians, UNRWA, said Gazans were "in extreme peril while the world watches".

Hamas said on Saturday that Israeli forces had launched more than 70 strikes on civilian homes in Gazan cities including Deir al Balah, Khan Yunis and Rafah over the previous 24 hours. The health ministry said at least 92



Palestinians flee their homes along with their belongings following Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday. – AFP

people were killed. Israel's military said it was "intensifying the operations" in western Khan Yunis using tanks, close-range fire and aircraft.

The Palestinian movement said fighting was raging in the northern Gaza district of Zeitun.

In nearby Jabalia refugee camp, tempers are rising and on Friday dozens of people held an impromptu protest.

"We didn't die from air strikes but we are dying from hunger," said a sign held by one child.

In the camp, bedraggled children waited expectantly, holding plastic containers and battered cooking pots for what little food is available. Residents have taken to eating scavenged scraps of rotten corn, animal fodder unfit for human consumption and even leaves.

Gaza's health ministry said a two-month-old baby identified as Mahmud Fatuh had died of "malnutrition".

"The risk of famine is projected to increase as long as the government of Israel continues to impede the entry of aid into Gaza," as well as access to water, health and other services, the charity Save the Children said. **SEE ALSO P6**



Oman condemns Israeli attacks on scribes at OIC Istanbul meet

ISTANBUL: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the extraordinary meeting of Information Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries in the Turkish city of Istanbul, on Saturday.

The meeting discussed the Israeli occupation's attacks on journalists in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Israeli attempts to mislead the international public opinion.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation was headed by Mohammed bin Said

al Balushi, Under-secretary of the Ministry of Information. The meeting discussed the Israeli occupation attacks that resulted in the death of civilians including 130 journalists in the Gaza Strip since October 7 and Israeli attempts to mislead the global public opinion by spreading false news.

The meeting aimed to exchange ideas and coordinate policy-making efforts within the OIC to confront the misleading media campaigns of the Israeli occupation. — ONA

HUMAN RIGHTS PANEL VISITS SAMAYIL CENTRAL PRISON



A team from the Oman Human Rights Commission led by the Commission's Chairperson, Prof Rashid bin Hamed al Balushi, visited the Samayil Central Prison. The team was accompanied by members of the Coordinating Committee for Justice and Coordination Affairs. The visit falls within the scope of the committee's tasks in Article 11 which are represented in conducting field visits to prisons and detention centres, in addition to building participation and cooperation. The visit was undertaken as per the consultative assessment given to the General Administration of Prisons by officers and supporters for the youngest workers in prisons.

National Student Conference enhances academic experiences

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Dr Maryam al Nabhani, Director-General of Private Colleges and Universities, at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, presided over the Second National Student Conference which was aimed at providing a platform for undergraduate students to showcase their research endeavours, promoting growth, collaboration and development across various domains at the Muscat College recently.

Organised by the College in association with the Oman IT Society, the high-end conference helped the students from across higher education institutions in Oman find ways to enhance their academic experiences.

"We organised the conference with the primary objective to provide a platform for students to share their research findings, engage



in networking opportunities, and cultivate a culture of research and innovation," said Dr Khalfan al Masruri, Dean, Muscat College.

He added that, with the participation of students from various Higher Education Institutes in Oman, the conference was able to foster collaboration and exchange of knowledge among the academic community.

"We are excited to host the 2nd National Student Conference and provide students with a platform

to showcase their research outputs and connect with their peers," said Dr Reshmy Krishnan, Chief Coordinator and Head of the Research Department, adding that the conference underscored the commitment to promoting academic excellence and nurturing a spirit of innovation among students.

A line-up of distinguished speakers including Dr Ali al Alawi, Laila al Hadhrami and Ali Hassan Moosa delivered keynote addresses covering a range of fields which was

attended by dignitaries from various ministries, other higher education institutions, industrialists and the media.

The conference also featured keynote speakers, panel discussions, and presentations by students on a wide range of topics. It proved to be a dynamic and enriching experience for all participants.

The selected papers were presented by the students on the second day of the conference in three parallel sessions.

Oman at American Travel, Adventure Expo

WASHINGTON: For the seventh consecutive year, the Sultanate of Oman is actively participating in the American Travel and Adventure Exhibition held in Washington. The exhibition, organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, features contributions from the Royal Oman Police, and the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Culture in Washington.

The exhibition, which concludes today, February 25, is organised by the Advanced Innovations Foundation for Events Management. Oman's pavilion, known for its



informative displays on Omani culture, including traditional attire, frankincense and silver

industries, aims to showcase the country to the American audience. The exhibition provides an opportunity

to highlight investment prospects and promote tourism, cultural and social aspects. — ONA

Derma conference emphasises scientific research in skin health

MUSANNAH: The First South Al Batinah Dermatology Conference recommended supporting scientific research and focusing on the preventive aspect of these diseases by intensifying health awareness on how to prevent them and avoid contracting them.

This came during the conference organised on Saturday by the General Directorate of Health Services in Al Batinah South Governorate under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, in the presence of their excellencies and officials.

The conference reviewed health, scientific and research developments in the field of treatment and prevention of various skin diseases, which contributes to raising the level of awareness among medical personnel about these diseases and how to treat them, with the participation of about 200 general doctors from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The conference included the presentation of a number of working papers that dealt with methods of treating and reducing the effects of skin blemishes, eczema, and the most important methods of preventing it, in addition to a number of topics related to bacterial and viral infections, skin allergies, and drug allergies. — ONA



61,195 teachers work in Oman public schools

FROM PAGE 1

Celebrating the Omani Teacher's Day marks an official recognition of teachers and appreciation of the active role they carry out in the educational process being the primary driver in the educational system.

A total of 61,195 teachers work in public schools of whom 18,800 are males and 42,395 females. The number of administrative staff in public schools stands at 10,652 including 4,306 males and 6,346 females. The number of teachers

increased by 7.7 per cent growth rate during 2020-2023 with an average annual growth rate of 1.9.

The Ministry of Education pays attention to developing teachers' performance. The number of full-time teachers who are holding master's degrees stood at 2,231 teachers by January 2022 while teachers with doctoral degrees stood at 337.

This is in addition to 1,483 part-time teachers with master's degrees and 166 part-time teachers holding doctoral degrees.

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MoCIIP, CPA approve value-packed Ramadhan kits

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With Ramadhan round the corner, hypermarkets have begun to sell Ramadhan packs for household essentials to cover the holy month.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) and Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) have consented to the boxes for Ramadhan.

According to the CPA instructions, a typical Ramadhan box contains 5 kgs of long grain rice, 2 kg sugar, 400 gm of milk powder. Other items include 25 pieces of tomato paste each weighing 70 gm, 170 g of evaporated milk, cream

160 gm, frying oil of 1.5 litre, all-purpose flour weighing 2 kg, semolina 500 gm, chickpeas 500 gm, Arabic coffee 500 gm, harees 1 kg, Gazal gram flour 1 kg, masoor dal 1kg, khalas dates 1 kg, oats 500 gm, tamarind 300 gm, salt 1 kg, macaroni 400 gm, and 450 gm of vermicelli.

Priced at RO 9,900, these kits have become a must-have and have been steadily in demand since it was launched a week ago, according to the representatives of various retail outlets.

“We are seeing an increasing number of customers buying Ramadhan box which we launched last week after obtaining the necessary permissions. It is truly value



The price of CPA's Ramadhan kits have been kept at RO 9,900.

for money as we have strictly followed the instructions of the CPA,” Retnakaran, manager of Lulu Darsait branch said.

The CPA has a Price Monitoring System, a virtual

consumer market that monitors the prices and consumer rights in place and prices of all essentials including fresh fruits and vegetables are constantly under the scanner.

The price monitoring system also aims to serve the consumer with a free and fair market, to raise the level of awareness, and to create a virtual consumer market that matches his aspirations. This also reinforces the need for a price monitor, under the impression that creating a safe and balanced market through timely updated price lists is the needed to educate the consumers enabling control over the markets.

The Price Observatory is a consumer's virtual window to a balanced and safe shopping world through a few clicks on the smartphone. It provides a consumer with a database and information on the prices of nearly 750,000 commodities

in as many as 21 commercial centres in the Governorate of Muscat, followed by other governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, which the Authority has monitored and provided through the Observatory.

The CPA official further said that efforts are on to ensure a smooth flow of foods, predominantly fruits and vegetables well before the beginning of Ramadhan.

“We make sure that the essential commodities are available before, during, and post Ramadhan besides ensuring that the suppliers comply with laws and legislations related to consumer protection, before the beginning of the holy month,” he added.

Kuwait Embassy distributes 900 books for National Day

KHALID AL BALUSHI
@khalid_albalushi94

As part of the celebration of the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day of Kuwait, the Embassy of Kuwait in the Sultanate of Oman organised a special event at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat. The embassy distributed more than 900 books covering various topics such as Kuwait's history, its rulers, maritime history, folklore, theatre, and the sciences of animals and plants.

The distribution event stood out for providing a wide range of scientific and artistic books, capturing the audience's attention with beautiful book covers. In addition, well-known magazines like 'Al Arabi Magazine' were featured,



Kuwait Embassy organised a book distribution programme as part of its 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation Day

evoking nostalgic memories for readers who remembered the magazine's popularity in the past.

The book sections and titles were diversified to cater to the interests and preferences of the attendees. The positive reactions were evident, as the distribution event witnessed a significant turnout, with people eagerly choosing and acquiring their

preferred selections.

This interactive event reflects the embassy's commitment to enhancing cultural exchange and fostering understanding between the two countries. The diverse array of books and magazines showcased underscores the focus on delivering culturally and scientifically diverse content that appeals to various audiences.

Oman at Azerbaijan APA General Assembly

BAKU: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Majlis Ash'shura discussed the topic of “Enhancing regional cooperation for sustainable development in Asia” during the 14th general assembly of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly.

The general assembly held from February 20 concluded on Saturday in Baku.

Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura, Head of Oman's delegation said that the meeting comes within the framework of boosting regional cooperation in a bid to



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Majlis Ash'shura Chairman, at the Asian Parliamentary Assembly in Baku.

achieve sustainable development in Asia. Al Maawali highlighted that sustainable development is a cornerstone of Oman's national agenda, aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable

Development Plan 2030. The Sultanate of Oman ranked first in the Gulf and fourth in the Arab world for achieving sustainable development goals, as per the 2022 Sustainable Development Report by the United Nations.

He urged the international community to condemn the situation in Gaza and emphasised the need for immediate measures to halt the ongoing conflict.

Al Maawali also held discussions with Professor Dr Sahiba Kafrova, President of the Milli Council of Azerbaijan.

— ONA

Naval drill Sea Lion continues till Feb 29



MUSCAT: The naval drill Sea Lion 1/2024, carried out by the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) at the Sea of Oman, continues.

Conducted with the support of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Maritime Security Centre (MSC), the naval exercise will end on February 29. The ships and crews taking part in the exercise on Saturday sailed towards the naval zone dedicated to the drill where a number of events and applications will take place in accordance to the plan. The implementation of the Sea Lion naval drill comes within the framework of the annual training plans set by the Royal Navy of Oman to maintain readiness of its fleet and personnel within the scope of the national tasks assigned to it. — ONA

Togetherness Company announces selling the following lands and properties:

- 1- R/C Land with an area of 2934 m² in Ghala Heights.
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- 4- R/C Building with an area of 547 square meters in Buraimi, a building containing 8 shops and 10 apartments
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- 6- Farm with Well & Tourism permit with area 45,000 square meters at Bidiyah.
- 7- R/C shops, with an area of 1944 square meters, it includes a market consisting of 19 shops in wilayat bidyah.
- 8- R/C Land with an area of 1044 square meters and an existing Running hotel in the Wilayat of Mahut/Hajj.
- 9- R/C building, with an area of 1,572 square meters, it includes hotel apartments and shops (running condition) in wilayat bidyah.
- 10- R/C Land in Masairah located at centre with area 600m².
- 11- 4 Industrial plots in Duqm, total area 30,000 square meters.
- 12- R/C Land with an area of 750 square meters in Duqm.

Contact at: - +968 92822040, 97365897
www.togethernessrealestate.com



Company registration announcement

Nakheel Oman Development Company invites companies specializing in the implementation of agricultural, irrigation and fencing projects, the drilling of borewells, the supply and installation of pumps of all kinds, irrigation equipment's and materials and the installation of RO plants, for Registration. The companies will be evaluated, classified, and qualified according to the company's 'base and criteria.

To apply, please follow the steps below:

- Organization profile.
- Organization grade (International - Local- SME)
- Highlight your relevant project experience in agricultural irrigation, specifying the project scope, size, duration, and specific tasks or responsibilities undertaken. Feel free to include any notable achievements or successful outcomes.
- Provide details of your certifications, licenses, or qualifications relevant to agricultural irrigation. This may include certifications in water management, irrigation systems, or sustainable agriculture practices.
- Include references from previous clients or partners who can vouch for the quality of your work and your ability to deliver successful irrigation projects in the agricultural sector.
- Fill and apply registration form.
- Submit the completed files and supporting documents electronically. You can do this by emailing them to yasir.ma@nakheel.om.
- Please ensure that all files are properly labelled and saved in a compatible file format (e.g., PDF).

Note: The registration will ensure that the company is eligible for any future bidding.

- Deadline for submission: 07/03/2024
- Contact No: 99328539



FROM PAGES TO TREASURES

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

THE 28th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair entered its third day and saw an overwhelming weekend crowd.

According to some visitors, the fair was highly successful last year, coming out of a two-year absence due to the pandemic. “It is just the beginning now but we are hopeful of the fair breaking the records in terms of the visitors.”

Amar Naimi, an Omani English language author, said, “I believe that the crowd this year is high compared to last year. As an author, this fair is a great opportunity to meet readers and publishers, market my books, and also find books that I am looking for.”

GUEST OF HONOUR FOR AL DHAHIRAH

Al Dhahirah Governorate is participating as a guest of honour in a corner that introduces the governorate and its historical and cultural role. The corner includes a collection of heritage finds, a special section for oil wealth, and several ancient manuscripts and correspondence related to the governorate.

The corner displays 3D video clips of the most prominent tourist attractions in the governorate and its affiliated regions.

Al Dhahirah Governorate shines as the guest of honour with historical treasures; Cultural Club unveils Translation Award 2024 and archaeological insights

More than 500 metal weapons were also found in it, in addition to 82 stone and ceramic vessels, making it the largest archaeological treasure of its kind in the Middle East and one of the most important archaeological sites in the Sultanate of Oman.

CULTURE CLUB

Since its founding in 1983, the Cultural Club has played a major role in supporting the cultural scene in the Sultanate of Oman and enriching the Omani library with many publications.

The club annually organises a group of diverse programmes, activities and events

in various cultural, literary and artistic fields. The club also launched the Cultural Club Translation Award 2024 initiative.

There was a lecture by Younis bin Saif al Shahoumi, a museum interpretation specialist at the National Museum, who talked about treasures that the museum contains, namely Al Sulami Treasure, the Al Waqba Treasure, and the Al Safa Treasure, in addition to the Bat site and the important antiquities.

The desert in Al Dhahirah Governorate is a huge treasure of metal artifacts hidden in a ruined tomb dating back to the third millennium BC.

THE AL WAQBA TREASURE

The Al Waqba Treasure was discovered in the town of Saddamah in the village of Al Waqba and contains 409 silver dirhams dating back to the early Islamic periods. This treasure gives a comprehensive overview of the powers that controlled the Gulf region at that time, and of the coins that were circulated in the Sultanate of Oman during that period.

He also referred to the recently discovered archaeological treasure of Al Safa in the sands of the Empty Quarter, about 50 kilometres southwest of the Wilayat of Dhank, and 70 kilometres west of the Wilayat of Ibri.

It is an industrial site open to mining on an area of 8 hectares, and there is no similar site in the ancient world. It contains about 600 artifacts and 200 furnaces that were used to produce charcoal and smelt bronze.



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces its Tenders for the following works:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2024 (2024/75/ 3 - ع / م - ر (49589) at E-Tendering	GENERAL CLEANING SERVICES FOR MINISTRY OF INFORMATION PROPERTIES FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01.07.2024 TO 30.06.2026	Excellent First	5/3/2024	1/4/2024	25/-
2/2024 (2024/74/ 2 - ع / م - ر (49678) at E-Tendering	MAINTENANING (MINISTRY OF INFORMATION) GARDENS, LAWNS & TREES AT QURUM FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01.07.2024 TO 30.6.2026	Excellent First	5/3/2024	1/4/2024	25/-
3/2024 (2024/76/ 4 - ع / م - ر (49522) at E-Tendering	STUDY, SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND CONFIGURATION OF SWITCHES (CORE, DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS) AND DOMAIN CONTROLLER UPGRADE/REPLACEMENT	International Excellent First	7/3/2024	16/4/2024	25/-

- All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

- The Ministry has the right to:
 - Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
 - Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



Taqah training helps 160 women find path to self-employment



The Rural Women Empowerment Programme held a programme to develop the skills of housewives and job-seekers.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, FEB 24

The Rural Women Empowerment Programme in the Wilayat of Taqah, organised by the Office of the Wali of Taqah, concluded on a high note on Thursday after a successful two-week programme. This pioneering initiative aimed to develop the skills of housewives and job-seekers, and support the exploitation of livestock and agricultural resources in the wilayat.

The programme witnessed a large turnout, with 160 trainees distributed across three training centres. The activities included specialised workshops on cheese making, jam and pickle making, as well as introductions to the concept of freelance work and ongoing agricultural activities in Taqah.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, the Development Bank, and the Social Development Department in Taqah presented informative presentations on financial facilities, packaging and canning techniques, and modern marketing methods.

Welcoming the opportunity to participate in the programme, the participants underlined its many benefits in honing their skills and acquiring new knowledge. They also expressed their hope for the organisation of more similar programmes to empower rural women and create new job opportunities.

Noor bint Mohammed al Awaid, one of the organisers at the Wali's Office, stressed the office's commitment to organising sustainable programmes to



empower rural women in the wilayat. She also emphasised the importance of these initiatives in supporting efforts to find work, exploit local resources, and promote local products.

Al Awaid expressed her gratitude and appreciation to the entities supporting the programme, including the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Taqah, the Social Development Department, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, the Development Bank, and Dhofar Food and Investment Company.

The Rural Women Empowerment Programme in Taqah serves as an example of the efforts made to strengthen the role of women in society and support their contribution to economic development.

DEZ empowers SMEs with strategic initiatives

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Entrepreneurs Meeting at its 10th meeting in Duqm Economic Zone (DEZ), Al Wusta Governorate, discussed opportunities available in the governorate and the challenges facing owners of small and medium enterprises.

The Authority reviewed its strategic directions, goals, and the existing services and initiatives to support and empower SMEs. These include financing programmes, business incubators, and regulations regulating the practice of home production businesses to the owners of SMEs in various sectors.



The Entrepreneurs Meeting held at the Duqm Economic Zone (DEZ), Al Wusta Governorate.

Halima al Zaree, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, said: "We consider meetings with the entrepreneurs

to be a collaborative platform to reach solutions to challenges, explore promising opportunities, and work as a team with our partners in the entrepreneurship ecosystem."

The total number of small and medium enterprises in the governorate reached 1,814 enterprises, of which 348 enterprises hold entrepreneurship cards.

The Pioneers Meeting in Al Wusta concluded with a review of the brainstorming results of participants, including effective solutions and initiatives to address the challenges facing entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs in the governorate in various sectors.

The meeting was also accompanied by the visit of Halima to Duqm Refinery Company and the petrochemical industries in DEZ to enhance the partnership and integration approach to support small and medium enterprises. The refinery's efforts to enhance local benefits were also reviewed. During the construction period, the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries allocated \$398 million to small and medium enterprises, including \$36 million to enterprises in the governorate.

They also visited Marafiq Company, and ensured the growth of Al Duqm as a commercial centre by following best industrial practices and maintaining high-quality standards in all operations.

وزارة الصحة
ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
831/2024/MOH/DGHSMU-1	Maintenance Works for Labor building in Lima Health Center at Governorate of Musandam	10/March/2024	Before 10 am on Sunday 07/April/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set
832/2024/MOH/DGHSMU-2	Maintenance Works of IPD Building and External Painting of OPD Building in Bukha Hospital at Governorate of Musandam	10/March/2024	Before 10 am on Sunday 07/April/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted **online** on the given website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any inquiries in regard to the tender, please contact through the information below:
[\(https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om\)](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)
Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Farewell for Counsellor at Pakistan Embassy

MUSCAT: The Pakistani community accorded a farewell to Amjad Mehmood Malik, the outgoing Counsellor at the Pakistan Embassy in Muscat. The event was organised by Mian Mohammad Muneer, former chairman of the Pakistan Social Club, and his team.

The programme was held under the auspices of Shaikh Najeeb bin Saleh bin Mohammad al Zadjali and Syeed Fiyaz

Ali Shah as the guest of honour. The programme highlighted the exemplary services of Amjad during his tenure at the Embassy with a documentary. Abid Mugal presented a poetry recitation wjo: Shabir and Arshad Ali Khan expressed appreciation for Amjad's invaluable services. The community also welcomed the newly appointed officials at the Pakistan Embassy.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Announcement of Public Auction No. (6/2024)

Muscat Municipality, represented by the public auction committee for the sale of a variety of different items according to the following details:

The First Group	(19) Mobile Homes (Caravans) and a Set of Various Materials, Scrap Iron
The Second Group	Air Conditioners, Water Coolers, Refrigerators, Various Cooking Appliances
The Third Group	Iron Shelves - Iron Beds - Various Furniture - Chairs and Seating Sets - Tables - Cabinets - Various Kitchen Utensils
The Fourth Group	A different group of Theater Equipment (Lighting Devices - Sound System Devices - Headphones)

Interested individuals for this Auction must comply with the conditions set out below:

- Those wishing to enter the auction must pay a fee of (4 OMR) Four Omani Rials that are not refundable, and a temporary deposit (refundable) is required to be paid an amount of (500 OMR) Five Hundred Omani Rials, to be paid electronically to the collector of the committee in the General Directorate of Public Administration & Financial Affairs at municipal presidency building in Darsait.
- The person who wins the **Auction** is obligated to pay the full price of the **items** if they were awarded to him plus 5% value added tax, and the **Auction** fees by (3 OMR) through electronic payment.
- Items** are sold in their current condition, and the municipality is not responsible for the loss or damage of part of it once its amount is paid. It also does not guarantee the validity of the **items** offered for sale or the safety of their technical condition. Those wishing to participate in the **Auction** will inspect the **items** on the specified days mentioned below.
- The **items** sold are not returned or reduced in price, and any request submitted in this regard will not be accepted.
- The buyer is obligated to transfer the **items** that have been awarded to him after paying their full amount within a period not exceeding one week from the date of purchase, and he bears full responsibility for the movables that were not transported within the specified period, and in the event that they are not transferred within the specified period, the municipality may resell the **items** at the buyer's own expenses.
- The date and location set for inspecting the movables and awarding the **Auction** are specified as follows:

Location	Building of the General Directorate of Projects and Afforestation- Wilayat Bawshar (Ghala)
The date/time of the inspection	From 3 to 04/03/2024 From 08:00 AM to 12:00 PM
A site for submission participation fees	Head office in Darsait at the committee cashier at the General Directorate of Public Administrative & Financial Affair
Auction date	06/03/2024 at 7:30AM in the morning
For inquires and coordination	Please contact the specialist of the committee member at (98070900)
Other terms	- The VAT specified in the law will be applied to successful buyer. - It is not allowed to enter the auction area until after showing the receipt of the subscription fee and insurance deposit. - Muscat Municipality may cancel or postpone the auction without providing any justification. - The insurance deposit will not be refunded to the buyer in two cases:- - Not paying the amount of the movables. - Not transferring the movables from the site within the specified period.

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
2024/001	CIVIL WORK	First & above Civil work - MAM	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	310 R.O
2023/039	CIVIL WORK	First & above Civil work - Salalah	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	675 R.O
2023/047	CIVIL WORK	First & above Civil work - MAM	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	860 R.O
2024/004	ELECTROMECHANICAL WORK - (RO PLANT)	First & above Electromechanical Work - Bidbid	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	165 R.O

***For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)**

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Musaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Musaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (**bill 1&2 separated file from bill3**)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.



Strikes kill dozens in Gaza as Paris hosts new truce talks

GAZA: Dozens of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been killed in the latest Israeli strikes, the territory's health ministry said on Saturday, after Israel's spy chief joined talks in Paris seeking to unblock negotiations on a truce.

The talks come alongside deepening fears for Gaza's civilians desperate for food. The United Nations' main aid body for Palestinians, UNRWA, said Gazans were "in extreme peril while the world watches".

Palestinians said on Saturday that Israeli forces had launched more than 70 strikes on civilian homes in Gazan cities including Deir al Balah, Khan Yunis and Rafah over the previous 24 hours. The health ministry said at least 92 people were killed.

Israel's military said it was "intensifying the operations" in western Khan Yunis using tanks, close-range fire and aircraft.

Palestinian groups said fighting was raging in the northern Gaza district of Zeitun.

In nearby Jabalia refugee camp, tempers are rising and dozens of people held an impromptu protest.

Gaza's health ministry said a two-month-old baby identified as Mahmud Fatuh had died of "malnutrition".

"The risk of famine is projected



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

The talks come alongside deepening fears for Gaza's civilians desperate for food. The United Nations' main aid body for Palestinians, UNRWA, said Gazans were "in extreme peril while the world watches"

Pressure has mounted on Netanyahu's government to negotiate a ceasefire and secure the release of the captives. A group representing their families planned what it billed as a "huge rally" to demand swifter action, coinciding with the Paris talks on Saturday night. White House envoy Brett McGurk held talks this week with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant in Tel Aviv, after speaking to other mediators in Cairo who had met Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh.

A source said the new plan proposes a six-week pause in the conflict and the release of between 200 and 300 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for 35 to 40 captives being held in Gaza. — AFP

THE WORLD DEMANDS CEASEFIRE



People protest in support of Palestinians and to demand an immediate ceasefire, on February 24 in Milan. – AFP

US opposes 'reoccupation'

BUENOS AIRES: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed Washington's opposition to any reoccupation of the Gaza Strip by Israel as well as any reduction of the Palestinian territory's size.

Blinken's remarks were in response to a plan for post-war Gaza put forward by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in which his country's army would have "indefinite freedom" to operate throughout the Gaza Strip once Hamas is defeated.

"There should be no Israeli reoccupation of Gaza. The size of Gaza territory should not be reduced," Blinken said in Buenos Aires, after attending a G20 meeting of foreign ministers in Brazil.

Israeli Prime Minister



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during a press conference at Casa Rosada Presidential Palace in Buenos Aires. – AFP

Benjamin Netanyahu has unveiled a plan for post-war Gaza that drew criticism and was rejected by the Palestinian Authority on Friday.

The new plan came after air strikes targeted homes in

southern Gaza, and as an Israeli delegation arrived in Paris hoping to "unblock" truce discussions.

Netanyahu's plan envisages civil affairs in a post-war Gaza being run by Palestinian officials without links to Hamas.

It also lays out that, even after the war, the Israeli army would have "indefinite freedom" to operate throughout Gaza to prevent any resurgence of terror activity, according to the proposals.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan dismissed Netanyahu's plan as unworkable.

"When it comes to the day after in the Gaza Strip, Netanyahu is presenting ideas which he knows fully well will never succeed," Hamdan said in Beirut. — AFP

HALCYON CAPITAL

AGENDA OF ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Halcyon Capital Holding Co. SAOC (invites all Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Sunday, 17th March 2024 at 3:00 pm through the electronic platform of the general meetings, which you can access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss the following Agenda. However, in case the AGM was not held on the said date, the Company will hold a second AGM on Sunday, 24th March 2024 at 3:00 pm to discuss the same following agenda:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December 2023.
- To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the financial statements (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss Account) in respect of the Company for the financial year ended 31st December 2023.
- To consider and approve transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2023 (as per the Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve transactions that the Company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31st December 2024 (as per Annexure 2).
- To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors of the company during the year ended on 31st December 2023. (As per the Annexure 3).
- To consider and approve the directors remuneration of OMR 100,000 payable for the year ended on 31st December 2023.
- To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors and sub-committees of the company during the next financial year ending on 31st December 2024. (As per the Annexure 4).
- To appoint auditors for the Company for the year ending 31st December 2024 and to fix their remuneration.
- To consider the election of the Board members from amongst the shareholders or non-shareholders.

Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete the prescribed nomination form. The completed forms should be sent to the Company at least five days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5:00 pm on Tuesday, 12th of March, 2024 shall not be accepted. The candidate must consider fulfilling the conditions prescribed for the membership of the board of directors.

According to the Articles of Association of the Company and the regulations for convening general meetings via electronic means by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(a) Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the general meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that the proxy person has an investor number in the MCDC.

(b) Voting on any of the items presented on the agenda starts three days before the date of the general meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting, and if the shareholder's share is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and he must re-vote again on the meeting day.

For further information, please contact Mr. Badar Mahfoudh Khalfan Al Wahabi on telephone 22004507.

Chairman

Halcyon Capital Holding Co. SAOC

P.O. Box 1273, P.C. 114, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Tel: (968) 22004500, Fax: (968) 22004546, E-mail: info@kitaracapital.com.

Hunger storms desperate families in the enclave

GAZA: At the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza, Abu Gibril was so desperate for food to feed his family that he slaughtered two of his horses.

"We had no other choice but to slaughter the horses to feed the children. Hunger is killing us," he said. Jabalia was the biggest camp in the Palestinian territories before the war, which began on October 7.

Gibril, 60, fled there from nearby Beit Hanun when the conflict erupted. Home for him and his family is now a tent near what was a UN-run school.

Contaminated water, power cuts and overcrowding were already a problem in the densely populated camp, which was set up in 1948 and covers just 1.4 square kilometres.

Now food is running out, with aid agencies unable to get in to the area because of the bombing — and the frenzied looting of the few trucks that try to get through.

The World Food Programme this week said its teams reported "unprecedented levels of desperation" while the United Nations warned that 2.2 million people were on the brink of famine. In the camp, bedraggled children wait expectantly, holding plastic containers and battered cooking pots for what little food is available.

The UN children's agency UNICEF has warned that the alarming lack of food, surging malnutrition and disease could lead to an "explosion" in child deaths in Gaza.

One in six children aged under two in Gaza was acutely malnourished, it estimated on February 19.

Residents have taken to eating scavenged scraps of rotten corn, animal fodder unfit for human consumption and even leaves to try to stave off the growing hunger pangs. — AFP

Sultanate of Oman

The Supreme Judicial Council

Tenders Announcement

The Supreme Judiciary Council announces its desire to submit the following tenders:

The specifications shall be as follows:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
06/2024	Manufacture, Supply and Install of Car Parking Shades with Supply and Installation of Interlock at Muscat Court Complex Building	28/02/2024	26/03/2024	Fourth	RO 25/-
07/2024	Custom Made Furniture, Supply and Installation at Nakhal Primary Court	03/03/2024	13/03/2024	Third	RO 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in The Supreme Judiciary Council, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:**
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:**
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



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In brief

■ VALENCIA



SPAIN APARTMENT BLOCK INFERNO TOLL RISES TO 10

Spanish rescue teams on Saturday found a tenth body at an apartment block ravaged by an inferno which erupted two days ago in the eastern port city of Valencia. “This morning... a new body was found,” the regional authorities in Valencia said. “The number of bodies found inside the building has risen to 10.” Faustino Yanguas of the Valencia fire brigade said the cladding material used on the facade of the building would have to be investigated. It was, he said, “a factor that contributed a lot” to the lightning spread of the flames — as were the strong winds at the time the blaze broke out. — **AFP**

■ PARIS



ANGRY FARMERS STORM INTO AGRICULTURE FAIR IN PARIS

A group of French farmers stormed into a major Paris farm fair on Saturday ahead of a planned visit by President Emmanuel Macron amid anger over costs, red tape and green regulations. Facing dozens of police officers inside the trade fair, the farmers were shouting and booing, calling for the resignation of Macron and using expletives aimed at the French leader. “I’m saying this for all farmers: you’re not helping any of your colleagues by smashing up stands, you’re not helping any of your colleagues by making the show impossible, and in a way scaring families from coming,” Macron said. — **Reuters**

■ SYDNEY



AUTHORITIES URGE HUNDREDS TO FLEE UNCONTAINED BUSHFIRE

A bushfire in Australia’s Victoria state raged out of control on Saturday, with authorities issuing a fresh evacuation alert at the highest danger rating for hundreds in the state’s west. The emergency warning followed the downgrading on Saturday of another bushfire, sparked earlier this week, that has killed livestock, destroyed properties and forced more than 2,000 people to leave western towns and head to the city of Ballarat, 95 km west of state capital Melbourne. Three homes and several outbuildings had been destroyed in Victoria’s bushfire emergency. — **Reuters**

Leaders in Kyiv pledge to back Ukraine

KYIV: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen vowed that Europe would back Ukraine until it was “finally free” as she and three other Western leaders arrived in Kyiv to show solidarity on the second anniversary of Russia’s full-scale attack.

The visit by von der Leyen and the prime ministers of Italy, Canada and Belgium — Giorgia Meloni, Justin Trudeau and Alexander De Croo — was a show of support as Ukraine suffers shortages of military supplies that are hurting it on the battlefield as Moscow grinds out territorial gains.

“More than ever, we stand firmly by Ukraine. Financially, economically, militarily, morally. Until the country is finally free,” Von der Leyen, who came with the others on an overnight train from neighbouring Poland, wrote on the social media platform X.

The leaders visited Hostomel airport, site of a ferocious battle at the start of the war, as Russia tried to fly in paratroopers to seize the capital Kyiv a few kilometres away.

“We are here today to say thanks to these men and women who on February 24 two years ago did not run away and instead fought,” Meloni said. “This place is a symbol of Moscow’s failures, a symbol of Ukrainian pride.”

Ukrainian President



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky (C) with western leaders visit the Memory Wall of Fallen Defenders of Ukraine on the second war anniversary, Kyiv. — **Reuters**

Volodymyr Zelensky embraced the Western leaders and delivered a televised speech against a backdrop of wrecked aircraft.

“Two years ago we met enemy troopers here with fire, and two years later, we

are meeting our friends, our partners, here,” he said.

“Any normal person wants the war to end. But none of us will allow our Ukraine to end,” he added. “The word ‘independent’ will always stand next to the word ‘Ukraine’ in

future history.”

Meanwhile, Russian drones attacked the port of Odesa for a second night running, hitting a residential building, killing one person, the regional governor said. In Dnipro, a Russian drone hit an apartment building and a

The visit by von der Leyen and the prime ministers of Italy, Canada and Belgium — Giorgia Meloni, Justin Trudeau and Alexander De Croo — was a show of support as Ukraine suffers shortages of military supplies.

rescue operation uncovered two dead.

Meanwhile, a source in Kyiv said Ukrainian drones had caused a blaze at a Russian steel plant, which a Russian official identified as one in Lipetsk that is responsible for about 18 per cent of Russian output.

Meloni and Trudeau were expected to sign security pacts with Zelensky during their brief stay, in line with deals recently agreed with France and Germany worth billions of dollars.

However, \$61 billion in aid promised by US President Joe Biden is being blocked by Republicans in Congress, casting a long shadow over Kyiv’s hopes of pushing back the much larger, better supplied Russian military. — **Reuters**

Trump vows to crush Haley as race heads south

CHARLESTON: Donald Trump and Nikki Haley go head-to-head in South Carolina’s Republican primary, with the ex-president expected to trounce his former charge in her home state as he closes in on the nomination.

Haley was a popular governor of the Palmetto State for six years before becoming Trump’s UN ambassador in 2017, but her old boss is backed by the party establishment and nearly two-thirds of voters in opinion polling.

The candidates largely swapped only glancing blows in the early nominating contests in Iowa and New Hampshire in January, but the rhetorical artillery fire has intensified since the primary narrowed into a two-horse race.

“Tomorrow you will cast one of the most important votes of your entire life and — honestly — we’re not very worried about tomorrow,” a nonchalant Trump told an election-eve rally in the city of Rock Hill.

Seeking to demonstrate that he was already looking beyond Haley, he vowed to show President Joe Biden and the Democrats “that we are coming like a freight train in November,” when the general election will be held.

Polls in the southern US state opened at 7:00 am local time. In a school near Charleston, about a dozen people came to cast votes in the first half hour.



Former US president Donald Trump gestures as he speaks at a “Get Out the Vote” rally at the Winthrop Coliseum in Rock Hill, South Carolina. — **AFP**

South Carolinians do not have to indicate party allegiance when they register to vote, and are allowed to have their say in either the Democratic or the Republican primary.

Haley — a more traditional conservative who espouses limited government and a muscular foreign policy — will rely on votes from moderates, although the tactic did little for her as she lost to Trump in each of the first four nominating contests.

The primary comes amid signs that the frontrunner is tightening his hold over the party as he pushes for

a reshuffle to install family members and allies at the top of the Republican National Committee.

His daughter-in-law Lara Trump has promised to spend “every single penny” of party funds on his presidential campaign should she become an RNC cochair, and has argued that paying his legal bills is of “big interest” to Republican voters.

Trump voiced support on Friday for preserving access to IVF programmes, calling on the state’s legislature to “act quickly to find an immediate solution” to ensure it remained available. — **AFP**

South Africa’s ANC kicks off election season

DURBAN: South Africa’s ruling ANC launched its election campaign on Saturday, hoping to overcome anger over high unemployment and a sluggish economy and to protect its three-decade-old majority.

In power since the advent of democracy in 1994, President Cyril Ramaphosa’s African National Congress has suffered a sharp decline in support.

Yet the party remains a formidable machine, with supporters at all levels of government across most of the country, and many South Africans retain proud memories of its lead role in the anti-apartheid struggle.

“Over the next three months we will explain to millions of our people why the ANC remains the party of choice in the 2024 election,” Ramaphosa declared at the launch of his party’s manifesto for the May 29 general election.

“In the next 50 years, the legacies of apartheid colonialism and patriarchy, which still loom

large in South Africa, will be a matter of history. Our confidence rests on that.”

Ramaphosa acknowledged that some party members have been found wanting in recent scandals, and vowed that candidates for elected posts would be rigorously screened.

“Yes, when our members make mistakes, we will correct them. We will make sure that they do the right thing,” he said. “Yes, we are renewing ourselves... We are becoming better.”

Tens of thousands of people dressed in the ANC’s yellow and green colours packed into a soccer stadium in the port city of Durban.

They had arrived from the early morning, proud on this day despite the ANC’s shrinking opinion poll lead.

“We were born under this political party and we will go through everything with it,” said Sthabile Nxumalo, 30, who runs a cosmetic business, as she queued to enter the venue with her sister. — **AFP**



Supporters display African National Congress (ANC) flags during the Election Manifesto launch at the Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban. — **AFP**

Can therapy save a troubled marriage?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

A couple came to my clinic seeking marital advice as they were reaching the end of their marriage and considering divorce. The husband explained that his wife is no longer emotionally available for him and their four-year-old son. She is often busy with shopping and going out with her friends while the wife says he is the one who is trying to control her and complaints about her shopping despite being financially well to do. They started arguing about small things and because they are worried about the psychological impact of their arguments on their son the wife is requesting divorce. They tried emotional separation where they live under the same roof but sleep in separate bedrooms. However, they were both concerned about the impact of real divorce on the son, so they agreed to give counselling a shot. Married people would realise that marital life goes through ups and downs and that the ideal marriage probably exists in fairy tales only and understanding this fact is essential for couples to

manage frustration. While the majority can work out their differences and focus on building a happy life for the whole family some struggle with constant conflict that makes them feel miserable and to save their marriage, they seek professional help. But can counselling save a broken marriage? Marital challenges manifest in various forms and magnitudes and every couple handles their conflicts differently. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to marriage counselling techniques. In most cases, marriage therapy works, but both partners should be willing to work on their relationship together. Marital counselling provides a safe place to identify the issues that cause the conflict in the presence of a neutral person who does not take sides. Each of the couples would be able to speak out his or her point of view without attacking the other and learn to reflect on their behaviour and how it can be modified instead of focusing on changing the other person. Negative communication patterns such as criticism, complaints, blame, anger, and sarcasm

MARITAL CHALLENGES MANIFEST IN VARIOUS FORMS AND MAGNITUDES. EVERY COUPLE HANDLES THEIR CONFLICTS DIFFERENTLY, THEREFORE, THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL WHEN IT COMES TO MARRIAGE COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES

make people more defensive. This will less likely to accept the other person's point of view, which is why marital therapy focuses on developing respectful communication without undermining each other and teaching them to express appreciation, affection, and kindness to each other. Such gestures can go a long way in strengthening the bond between the couple. Therapy will also help the couple work together to find mutually agreeable solutions by learning how to make decisions cooperatively. Therapy would also help in setting boundaries so partners would feel comfortable expressing their needs and limitations regarding what they will and will not accept. Sometimes smaller fights develop into bigger ones and the couple finds themselves in constant conflict. Therefore the therapist helps in identifying the areas in which both individuals need to change to reduce tensions. Finally, one needs to remember that fixing a broken marriage takes time and effort. Both partners need to be committed to the process and be patient with each other as they work toward healing and growth.

Canada headed for another brutal fire season

MARION THIBAUT

Beneath the ground in Western Canada, dozens of so-called “zombie fires” that started last year are still burning. And even though it’s the dead of winter, the lack of snow this year is compounding ongoing drought conditions, leaving Canadians already bracing for another brutal forest fire season. “We are having an exceptional winter after an exceptional summer,” laments Josee St-Onge, a spokesperson for Alberta firefighters. It’s a never-ending struggle. Even in bone-chilling temperatures, Canadian firefighters are still hard at work battling nearly 150 fires. This year there are 10 to 12 times more zombie fires burning in Western Canada than usual. They smoulder beneath the surface of the boreal forest through the winter, sustained by layers of dried peat and organic matter. Eradicating them is painstaking work. They are difficult to detect — only letting out wisps of smoke — and require deep scraping of the ground to expose the humus, or all the decomposed leaves and other plant material compacted into an up to 80-centimetre layer that burns slowly. In Alberta, the government declared an early start to wildfire season, which normally starts March 1. In addition to zombie fires from last year, authorities are also fighting new blazes that have sprung up this year. In British Columbia, a record number of fires are currently active. “Normally at this time of year, we might have seven or eight fires burning, but we have 91,” said Forrest Tower, a spokesperson for firefighters in Canada’s westernmost province, which historically has been the region most affected by fires. Zombie fires are especially feared by firefighters because they can reemerge as raging infernos after the spring thaw. In 2023, Canada experienced the worst fire season in its history. More than 18 million hectares of forests and grasslands burned, and some 200,000 people were displaced by blazes while smoke spread as far as the United States and Europe.

Now, just three months after the official end of the 2023 wildfire season, experts are already concerned about this year. “The snowpack is well below normal over a fairly large portion of Western Canada. It’s even quite spectacular in some places,” said Tower, pointing to 50 per cent less snow than usual in British Columbia, for example. —AFP

For a Ukrainian gardener, flowers offer a way forward



Margaret Roach

The writer is the gardening columnist for *NYT*

The Clematis that delight Alla Olkhovska the most among the 120 or so types she grows are not the familiar, large-flowered hybrids, as extravagantly beautiful as they are. It’s the small, less frequently grown species — the ones whose common names often include the phrase “leather flower,” many of them native to the Southeastern United States — that have stolen her heart. Their scaled-down charm makes them ethereal subjects for photography, another passion of Olkhovska’s. But what really impresses her is how well the tiny, bell-shaped blooms with thick petals stand up to the increasingly hot, dry summers her garden is experiencing. The whiteleaf leather flower (*C glaucophylla*) and scarlet leather flower (*C texensis*), for example, can really take the heat and just keep blooming and blooming, adapting to challenging environmental circumstances. Two years ago this month, a more sudden call to adapt was sounded — this one to the gardener herself, along with her fellow Ukrainian citizens. In Kharkiv, where she lives, and around the nation, war had arrived. Olkhovska, now 38, had been building up her plant collection in preparation for starting a small rare-plants nursery. But with war came a new assignment: to find a way, in the face of it, to support her family. There were already challenges. Olkhovska’s mother-in-law and grandmother rely on her as a caregiver. And her husband, Vitalii Olkhovskiy, who suffered lung and heart damage from a severe Covid-19 infection, was early in his ongoing rehabilitation when war broke out. The family was rooted in place, unable to afford relocating, as they watched so many neighbours do, following round after round of missile and drone attacks that ravaged the city and its infrastructure. With Ukrainians “not knowing what will happen next, and a very, very big decline in the standard of living,” Olkhovska said, she knew that starting



To support her family during wartime, Alla Olkhovska, began selling more seeds online, hoping to expand her foreign customer base. — *NYT*

OLKHOVSKA'S TASTE IN PLANTS, HAD MADE THE SEEDS FROM HER CLEMATIS COLLECTION ESPECIALLY MARKETABLE

a local nursery was no longer feasible; any customers would have to come from elsewhere. Shopping for plants, she added, is just not front of mind “when you’re afraid, and you don’t know what will happen with the territory — whether you’ll be able to stay there, or if you will survive the winter.” Nevertheless, it was her garden, and especially her Clematis, that provided, showing her the way forward. Cultivating Customers for Her Seeds Olkhovska began by doing the only thing she could think of: selling more seeds online. The internet, after all, was where she had started learning about plants

when she got her first computer at 20. Then, as now, hobbyists and experts would gather on foreign forums and, later, social media to swap horticultural knowledge and seeds. Perhaps, she thought, some of those connections might help her expand her small customer base. “Selling seeds — it was like my last resort, my last attempt,” she said. And she was far from confident that her plan would work. As it turned out, however, Olkhovska’s taste in plants, honed on those foreign forums, had made the seeds from her Clematis collection especially marketable. Different sells. “I like everything unusual, everything rare, everything difficult and challenging to grow,” she said, although difficult and challenging have been taken to an extreme these last two years, through no fault of the plants. Her affection for species plants over hybrids has helped, too, because many non-hybrid types can be grown more reliably from seed than the offspring of the large-flowered hybrids, which don’t resemble the parent plant. As she accelerated her efforts, more foreign orders arrived, including one last spring from Erin Benzakein of Floret, a flower farm and seed company in the Skagit Valley of northwestern Washington. — *The New York Times*

A debate for the decade...

Not since Joan of Arc has a young woman proven so divisive. Greta Thunberg is the darling of the media, and the protest culture, but like gold, is she really all that glitters?

The daughter of Swedish actor, Svante Thunberg, and operatic star Malena Ernman, she was born in that hotbed of liberalism, Stockholm, in 2003, so even now is still a babe in the woods. As a 15-year-old she was incredibly busy, as reputedly, not only did she ‘force’ her parents to renounce flying as a means of travel, but also to become vegan, among other lifestyle changes in support of her climate change beliefs.

She also withdrew from school, citing her climate beliefs as more important than her truancy, and to enhance her profile picketed parliament for three weeks. The tail wagging the dog maybe? Or weak parenting? Or someone seeing an opportunity? Or did her barely rational fears grasp her so dramatically, and did her parents truly identify her passion, not care, or abdicate their responsibilities, as parents.

In any case, Thunberg drew even more attention to herself when confronted by the media she fought her way front and centre as the group’s spokesperson, and her first words were to encourage all those present to use their mobile phones to record and share her words. That’s one positive aspect of autism which she was diagnosed with at some unspecified time, it brings a significant amount of focus, and can embolden one, removing any hesitancy. In fact, Thunberg herself has referred to it as her superpower!

But, born with a silver spoon in her mouth, and high expectations, how else could a teenager, without a smile, or a deferential gesture, berate the United Nations, in September 2019, “People are suffering, people are dying, entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?”

It was pure theatre, and Mum and Dad would have been so proud! A



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cautionary perspective was raised by political commentator Andrew Bolt wrote of Thunberg being, “So young, and with so many mental issues, and “chronically attracted to apocalyptic visions, fearful, anxious and disturbed.” And she is no hysterical child, no weirdo, no medieval witch! In fact, she appears to be anything but, though more in the way that the *London Times* writes of her as “a child of woke capitalism,” a dupe for the Swedish energy sector that stands to make billions for energy titans in Sweden and Europe. She could yet prove a poster child for the manipulation of her youthful, impressionable generation.

This wealth of green lobbyists, PR hustlers, eco-academics and think-tanks have their own agenda, and ironically, its one that Thunberg’s activities benefit immeasurably as the energy sector has prepared for green energies to deliver on the most significant contracts ever signed across Europe. Has “Team Thunberg proven a windfall for one of the greatest hustles ever imagined? I fear so, and that the cracks are showing. On November 23, the now 21-year-old Thunberg chanted “Crush Zionism” at a Pro-Palestinian protest in Stockholm, surely alienating much of her support, and providing grist to the mill of her detractors, by appearing as a serial protester, diluting her environmental message. However, it is not emotion, or entitlement, that are her greatest challenge now, as reliant upon what she wants the world to see, it is now the turn of science to fight back. Geophysicist John Bruyn says that for the last 7.5 millennia since the peak Holocene temperatures, the planet Earth has been warming and cooling slowly due to the Milankovic cycles of the Earth’s orbital elements, as a pre-cursor to believe it or not, a new, coming, ice-age, and he’s not the only one. The American Meteorological Society “does not agree.” Nobel Prize winner John Clauser says, “There is no climate crisis.” Professor Bob Carter says, “Climate is always changing — change is what climate does.” Michael E Mann says, “The tide may be turning.” The science says that global temperature is nothing more than a natural cyclical process.

GRETA THUNBERG WITHDREW FROM SCHOOL, CITING HER CLIMATE BELIEFS AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HER TRUANCY

IN SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE



The Eiffel Tower is lit in the colours of Ukrainian flag in Paris, on Saturday, on the second anniversary of the Russian war on Ukraine. – AFP

Rethinking Inequality in Latin America

Nearly everyone agrees that the unequal distribution of income, wealth, and opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has hindered efforts to build cohesive societies and robust democracies, as well as frustrating the ambitions of young people. But efforts to close the gap between rich and poor have fallen short, and progress has stalled. Governments urgently need better evidence on how to remedy this longstanding problem.

To this end, the Inter-American Development Bank has teamed up with the London School of Economics, Yale University, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and academics from more than a dozen leading universities to launch a comprehensive reconsideration of inequality in LAC. The project’s initial research — including critical reviews of the existing literature, fresh data, and new analyses — has already shown that inequality in the region is neither as predictable nor as static as many believe.

For starters, LAC is not uniformly unequal. Some countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama, have extremely high income inequality, whereas others, including Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Uruguay, have income disparities similar to that of the United States. Moreover, far from being a fixed feature of LAC societies, inequality has fluctuated over time. In most countries, it began to



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EVEN THOUGH IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IS UNACCEPTABLY HIGH, EFFORTS TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR HAVE FALLEN SHORT

rise rapidly in the 1970s, peaked in the 1990s, and then began to drift downwards. Inequality in the region today is lower than it was three decades ago, owing to educational gains (which narrowed the wage gap), commodity-fuelled economic growth, and a host of government social programmes. But it has essentially plateaued at unacceptable levels since 2014, when economic stagnation set in across the region.

A study tracking the evolution of inequality since 1980 until today shows that this broad pattern hides significant variations. For example, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru significantly reduced inequality between 1980 and 2010, even though their levels remain high compared to other countries at a similar stage of development. By contrast, inequality has steadily increased in Costa Rica over this period. The fatalistic assumption that the entire region is cursed by structural inequality that is impervious to policy interventions should be abandoned.

The project has also revealed that wealth inequality in the region seems to be more deeply entrenched than income inequality. Although data are still quite limited, one study finds that in Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay, around 1 per cent of the population controls 37-40 per cent of total wealth, while

the poorest half of the population controls only one-tenth. Moreover, many low-income households have negative equity, because their outstanding debts are greater than the combined value of their home, vehicles, and other assets.

There is also new evidence that the opportunities and potential income of children in the region tend to mirror that of their parents, implying low levels of intergenerational mobility. One study shows that between 44 per cent (Argentina) and 63 per cent (Guatemala) of current income inequality in nine LAC countries is explained by “inherited” factors. Among the variables that contribute to the persistence of inequality across generations are being born in a

low-income areas, belonging to an ethnic minority, and having parents with limited schooling or low-paying occupations. But here, again, the picture that emerges is more nuanced. In countries with a history of slavery or oppressing indigenous peoples, racial or ethnic factors predict much lower levels of intergenerational social mobility.

Finally, geography matters — but not always in predictable ways. The fact that 80 per cent of the LAC population lives in cities, for example, has reinforced the assumption that rural dynamics have little effect on income inequality in the region. But new evidence suggests that agricultural income gaps, owing largely to the low labour productivity of small farms, explain between 11

per cent (Uruguay) and 58 per cent (Bolivia) of overall income inequality in nine countries. So far, the project has confirmed that inequality in LAC is unacceptably high, while also demonstrating its fluidity and responsiveness to factors that can affect the degree to which it is “inherited.” Armed with this nuanced understanding, policymakers should abandon some approaches to the problem, refine others, and test entirely new strategies that are more tailored to their country’s specific needs. For example, countries such as Colombia and Peru, where many workers have informal contracts and thus pay little or no tax, would need a different set of policies for their tax and pension systems compared to countries such as Chile and Uruguay, where a larger share of the workforce contributes to pensions and social security.

While traditional strategies such as expanding and improving the quality of education and offering cash assistance to low-income households can be effective, they are not sufficient to reduce inequality in all settings. To achieve this, LAC governments must promote economic growth that can generate more productive (and formal) jobs and adopt a new generation of fiscal policies that give everyone a seat at the table.

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Efforts to close the gap between rich and poor have fallen short.

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Luck deserts Oman Beach Soccer team in bid to enter knockout stage

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Oman's long-serving national beach soccer team coach, Talib Hilal, expressed his full satisfaction with the team's performance in the 2024 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup (BSWC).
"We aimed to progress into the knockout stages for the first time after five presences in the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup (BSWC) event but were not lucky enough. Despite that, I am satisfied with the players' technical levels during all three games in the group stage," the coach told the Observer.
The national Beach Soccer team arrived in Muscat on

Wednesday after they completed their campaign in the global Beach Soccer event in Dubai. Oman players' hopes were dashed for the first time to the knockout stage after they suffered a shocking 3-2 defeat by Portugal in the dying minutes of the third and concluding round, during group D matches of the event on Tuesday. Oman began their campaign with a strong show despite the defeat against the five-time champion Brazil 5-3. Then, Oman team heroes bounced back strongly in the following match to register a 5-2 win over Mexico.
"The preparation for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup began one month before the events started. The domestic Beach Soccer league was going



in December and we began the actual warm-up in January.
"We did not press hard on the players during the camps to avoid any injury. The team managed to play four crucial preparatory games in Muscat against Italy

(two games), Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The national team won all these games.
"We played against Belarus in Dubai ahead of the World Cup and won them. Italy and Belarus are now competing in

the semifinals of the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup," he added
"In the opening match against Brazil, the team delivered a top show despite a 5-3 loss. Some of the team's players were playing for the first time and there was some lack of confidence and less experience, which led to the defeat. In the following game, the players captured the winning points to enter the last match with better encouragement. In the concluding game against Portugal, the players produced an excellent show but the luck was against them as they received a goal in the dying minutes of the game. Despite our exit, I am happy with the technical performance delivered by the players in all the three previous

games," the experienced coach added.
"We missed the service of Sami al Balushi and Mashal al Oraimi, both of whom are experienced and have played before the World Beach Soccer Cup events. On the other side, the mixture of the squad impressed during all the group's games but with no luck," he added.
"The team may participate in the Arabian Beach Soccer Championship and the West Asian Beach Soccer Championship. The details for both events will be unveiled soon. As head coach, I hope to get a better preparatory plan with more friendly games against tight teams. This will help us to excel better," he concluded.

Al Rustaq blank Sur; Al Nahda and Oman drop points

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Al Nahda and Oman dropped crucial points in their title race at the Omantel League after Al Nahda were held to a goalless draw by Al Shabab, while Oman Club played out a similar stalemate with Sohar in the round 12 of top tier league which concluded on Friday. The only win of the day was registered by Al Rustaq after they blanked Sur 2-1 to earn an essential victory under the guidance of their new national experienced coach, Sultan al Touqi.
Al Buraimi-based team and Al Shabab ended their game at a goalless draw at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. The result put Al Nahda in second place on 23 points, while Al Shabab remained in ninth on 11 points.
Al Rustaq claimed a 2-1 victory over Sur in the second match

of the day at Al Rustaq Sports Complex. Festus Abdul and Mohammed al Ghafri scored the goals for Al Rustaq, with Robert Jansa pulling one back for Sur. The win took Al Rustaq up to the eighth place on 14 points, while Sur dropped to tenth on 10 points.
The final match of the day was between Oman Club and Sohar which ended at a goalless draw at Seeb Stadium. Oman Club started the first half brighter and created a number of chances in the opening of ten minutes but they were unable to find the back of the net. On the other hand, Sohar players had a goal ruled out for offside in the 13th minute, but they otherwise struggled to create clear-cut chances.
In the deciding half, Sohar players entered with pressing hard and creating better chances. De Stefano almost put Sohar ahead in the 48th minute with a powerful shot that was saved by Oman

Club goalkeeper Abdulaziz al Hosni. Few minutes later, Daniel Etor came close with a dangerous header that went just wide. Oman Club failed to create any clear-cut chances in the second half, and the match ended in a goalless draw.
The result took Sohar in fifth place on 19 points, while Oman Club stayed in third on 23 points equal to Al Nahda. A win over Sohar would have seen Oman Club taking sole possession of second place for the first time, but the draw kept both teams' level on points with Al Nahda ahead on goal difference.
Seeb are leading the table order by 29 points from eleven games without a single loss. They are followed by Al Nahda on 23 points from the same number of matches and also unbeaten. Oman Club are third on the same points as Al Nahda, with Al Nasr fourth on 21 points.



Chinese turn to Ivankovic after Jankovic contract terminated

HONG KONG: Branko Ivankovic has been named China's new head coach, replacing Aleksandar Jankovic after the Serbian failed to take the country beyond the group phase of last month's Asian Cup.

The Chinese Football Association announced the move on Saturday. Ivankovic will lead the team into back-to-back World Cup qualifiers with Singapore on March 21 and 26.

"Due to the Chinese team's

failure to enter the knockout stage in Asian Cup, the contract between CFA and Jankovic terminated automatically," the organisation said in a statement.

"The CFA is thankful for the hard work of coach Jankovic and his coaching team, and wish them all the best."

Ivankovic was appointed "after the assessment of experts" and has previous experience in the country, winning the



The 69-year-old also coached Iran at the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany and has won league titles in his native Croatia as well as in Iran with Persepolis

Chinese Super League title in 2010 during an 18-month spell with Shandong Luneng.

The 69-year-old also coached Iran at the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany and has won league titles in his native Croatia as well as in Iran with Persepolis.

He took Oman to the third round of qualifying for the 2022 World Cup but left his role in the Gulf state after also exiting the Asian Cup in the group

phase in January.

China have only qualified for the World Cup once, making their debut appearance at the finals in 2002.

They are currently third in Group C of the second round of Asia's preliminaries for the 2026 finals after two matches, trailing leaders South Korea by three points.

Only two nations will advance to the next round of qualifying. — **Reuters**



Minnesota Timberwolves forward Kyle Anderson (1) works towards the basket as Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) defends during the second half at Target Center. — **USA TODAY Sports**

Bucks big win over West-leading T'Wolves in New Orleans

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points and grabbed 13 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks roared out of the NBA All-Star break with a 112-107 victory over Western Conference leaders Minnesota on Friday.

Damian Lillard drilled a step-back basket with 10.3 seconds remaining to seal the win, the Bucks holding off a frantic Minnesota rally that saw the Timberwolves slice a 17-point deficit to four on Anthony Edwards's three-pointer with 1:58 left to play.

Antetokounmpo grabbed two offensive rebounds and made three free throws to push the lead back to seven.

Two more clutch three-pointers from Edwards kept the Timberwolves in with a chance, but Antetokounmpo found Jae Crowder for a layup and Lillard

delivered the dagger with 9.2 seconds left to play.

"That's what Dame does," Antetokounmpo said. "We've just got to get out of his way and just let him be great. He thrives with those moments."

Edwards finished with 28 points, Karl-Anthony Towns scored 22 points and grabbed 14 rebounds and Rudy Gobert added 12 points and 19 rebounds for the Timberwolves.

But ultimately Minnesota couldn't overcome a disastrous third quarter in which the Bucks out-scored them 36-13.

Antetokounmpo was displeased with the Bucks' own sloppy spell early in the fourth.

"But we kept our composure," he said.

The same couldn't be said for the Miami Heat and the Pelicans in New Orleans, where the Heat triumphed 106-95 in a

rollercoaster of a contest that saw four players ejected after a brawl early in the fourth quarter.

Miami star Jimmy Butler returned after missing three games because of a death in his family and scored 23 points with nine rebounds before he was among those tossed in the melee that erupted after Miami center Kevin Love tried to wrap up Zion Williamson and the Pelicans star ended up on the floor. Butler and Naji Marshall got into a shoving match with Marshall briefly grabbing Butler's throat. Players flooded the court and Heat backup centre Thomas Bryant — who didn't even play in the game — was among those ejected as was New Orleans' Jose Alvarado, who appeared to throw a punch.

When order was restored New Orleans grabbed a 91-89 lead but the Heat — who led by as many

as 19 — responded with an 11-0 scoring run to regain control.

"Nobody wants to see anything like that," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said of the fracas, which he believed stemmed from a "misunderstanding" of what happened on the play when Williamson fell.

"I honestly think Zion slipped on the play when K-Love grabbed him," Spoelstra said. "And then everybody kind of over-reacted."

"I think they interpreted that K-Love threw (Williamson) down. On K-Love's best day, I don't think he could throw him down."

Williamson, who led the Pelicans with 23 points, said Love actually tried to protect him when he fell. He tried to calm things down, but he could see how the situation spiralled.

— **AFP**

'Out of power' Swiatek stunned by Kalinskaya

DUBAI: Iga Swiatek blamed fatigue for her semi-final defeat to Anna Kalinskaya in the Dubai semi-finals on Friday, admitting: "I didn't have power anymore" to up her level during the match.

Kalinskaya snapped Swiatek's seven-match winning streak and ended the world number one's bid for a rare Doha-Dubai title double with a commanding 6-4, 6-4 victory.

"I didn't have power anymore to give even more, which doesn't happen often," admitted 22-year-old Swiatek.

"I just felt out of control a little bit because of that. Usually when I tell myself what to do, I can improve my game. Today I was so out of power and tired that I just couldn't."

The 40th-ranked Kalinskaya was contesting her first WTA 1000 semi-final, and is into the first tour-level final of her career, where she faces Italian Jasmine Paolini.

Kalinskaya defeated Paolini last month at the Australian Open to reach her first Grand Slam quarter-final. They will square off once again on Saturday in another career-defining showdown.

Top seed Swiatek came into the semi-finals having won 25 of her last 26 matches and looking to follow up her title run in Doha last week with a first-time triumph in Dubai.

Kalinskaya had to battle through the qualifying rounds and has won seven matches in total this week in the emirate, including three top-10 victories over Jelena Ostapenko, Coco Gauff and now Swiatek.

"She's a great player. I knew if I didn't stay calm and I didn't stay aggressive she is going to destroy me. So that was my plan, to stay aggressive, to move her a lot," said the 25-year-old Kalinskaya. From 2-4 down, Kalinskaya won four games in a row to snatch in 53 minutes.

The Russian saved six of seven break points during that set, drawing 11 unforced errors off Swiatek's racquet.

Swiatek took a toilet break between sets but it didn't change the momentum as Kalinskaya clinched a fifth consecutive game on a loose forehand from her opponent.

- Racquet smash - Swiatek threw her racquet in frustration as she lost a sixth game in a row, falling behind 0-2 early in the second set.



Russia's Anna Kalinskaya celebrates winning her semi final match against Poland's Iga Swiatek. — **Reuters**



Poland's Iga Swiatek in action during her semi final match against Russia's Anna Kalinskaya. — **Reuters**

Kalinskaya claimed a second break of serve in game seven and served for the match at 5-2 but Swiatek wasn't ready to fold just yet and put pressure on the Russian by narrowing her deficit.

But even when she was staring down two break points while serving for the match for a second time, Kalinskaya didn't flinch, saving both and completing a milestone victory on the one-hour 41-minute mark. Earlier on Centre Court, Paolini overcame Romanian big-hitter Sorana Cirstea 6-2, 7-6 (8/6) to reach her first WTA 1000 final and become just the fourth Italian to make it that far at a tournament of this calibre on the women's tour.

The 28-year-old has pulled off some impressive wins this week in Dubai, knocking out 11th seed Beatriz Haddad Maia, former US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez, eight seed Maria Sakkari before Friday.

Paolini's reward is a place in the world's top-20 when the new rankings are released on Monday. — **AFP**

James Deane wins Oman intl drift championship after thrilling finish

MUSCAT: The Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) roared to a spectacular conclusion on Friday, leaving both online and in-arena audiences impressed. The sixth edition of the championship surpassed expectations, captivating a record-breaking number of viewers, much to the delight of the Oman Automobile Association (OAA).

Day 2 of the OIDC Round 3 finals exploded with a thrilling display of skill across three categories. Four talented Omani drivers, twelve drivers from across the Middle East, including second round's victor Ahmed Daham, showcased their diverse drifting style. But all eyes were drawn to the international category, where global drifters met. Famous names like James Dean and Nikolass Bertans joined the sixteen other international drivers, creating a full-on of experience and talent. With such a diverse and accomplished field, Day 2 promised an unforgettable spectacle, all competing for the ultimate glory: the OIDC championship round three title.

Held under the patronage of Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and graced by the presence of Brigadier Jamal bin Said al Tai, Vice Chairman of the Oman Automobile Association's Board of Directors, the third and final round of Oman's sixth edition international drift championship that took place on Thursday and Friday at Muscat Arena. The competition was divided into three categories: international, Middle East and National categories, with each category showcasing the best talent from its region.

International category:



INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY OVERALL

First place: Ireland's James Deane
Second Place: Jordan's Ahmed Daham
Third Place: Finland's Juha Matias

MENA CATEGORY OVERALL

First Place: Jordan's Ahmed Daham
Second Place: Kuwait's Ali Makhseed
Third Place: Oman's Ahmed Al Amri

NATIONAL CATEGORY OVERALL

First Place: Ahmed Al Amri
Second Place: Tariq Al Shaihani
Third Place: Reyadh Al Mabsali

OIDC CHAMPIONSHIP 2024 OVERALL

First Place: James Deane
Second Place: Ahmed Daham
Third Place: Juha Matias
Fourth Place: Netherlands's Clint Van Oort
Fifth Place: Ali Makhseed

In a thrilling showdown in the international category, Irish legend James Deane emerged victorious, leaving the competition in his wake. Kuwaiti driver Ali Makhseed claimed a well-deserved second place, while Lithuanian drifter Benediktas Cirba skilfully secured third.

Middle East category: Kuwait's Ali Makhseed took the first place followed by Emirati driver Hazaa al Hosani in second place and Jordan's driver Ahmed Daham in third place.

National category: Tariq al Shaihani emerged victorious in the national category, Ahmed al Amri in second, and Reyadh al Mabsali came third on the podium.

The OIDC Round 3 finals concluded with the crowning of champions in not only the three primary categories, but also in four additional categories.



Attieh's heroics are further evidence of golfing talent

MUSCAT: Khalid Walid Attieh made history in Oman by becoming the first ever Saudi amateur to make the cut in a pro golf tournament, emphasising the important role The International Series is playing for golf in the region.

Attieh's one-under round of 71 was enough to earn a priceless place in Saturday's third round at a star-studded International Series Oman, just a week after earning his spot in the filed by winning the Oman Masters.

Attieh was one of four Saudi players in the field along with of Othman Almulla, Saud al Sharif, Faisal Salhab, while Omani amateurs Azzan al Rumhy and Ahmed al Wahaibi also gained invaluable experience over the first two days in their home event at Al Mouj Golf.

Dubai-based youngster Joshua Grenville-Wood, Jordanian-English golfer Shergo Al Khurdi and the Moroccan duo of Ayoub Lguirati and Ayoub Id-Omar completed a healthy representation of the region in the US\$2 million event, the first of the season on The International Series.

Rahul Singh, Head of The International Series, said: "Khalid has given us an excellent example of the talent that is emerging from the region, and it will be interesting to see the impact that this has on golf in the region.

"While The International Series is an open, merit-based pathway onto the LIV Golf League, it is also about giving local talent opportunities to play against elite-level golfers, an opportunity they might not have anywhere else.

There have been encouraging signs of growth across the region on The International Series. In 2022, home hope Lguiratu finished T28 in the inaugural International Series Morocco, and he followed it up with a T37 in Egypt the following week, behind Al Kurdi who finished T27 and amateur compatriot El Mehdi Fakori, who came home T33.

Oman U19 cricketers ready to put their best foot forward

MUSCAT: Oman U19 cricketers are all geared up to put up a good performance at the upcoming ICC U19 Men's CWC Division 2 Asia 2024 event, which will be held in Thailand from February 26-March 5.

Oman, coached by Syed Aamir Kaleem, will be hoping to book a spot in the ICC U19 CWC Men's Division 1- Asia as one of the two finalists from the eight-nation tournament in Thailand.

Oman have been placed in Group B along with Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, and Bhutan while Group A comprises Bahrain, Thailand, Kuwait, and Malaysia.

Rahil Habibulla has been named skipper of Oman and his deputy will be Saumya Sampat.

Oman launch their campaign on February 26 and play Hong Kong on February 28 before concluding their Group



Oman U19 for ICC U19 Mens CWC Division 2 Asia 2024

engagement with a match against Bhutan on March 1.

Speaking before the team's departure to Thailand, Oman U19 head coach Aamir Kaleem said, 'We have had quite fresh bunch of boys forming the squad on this tour. We have had our camp since early January, working

meticulously on various aspects such as skill, fielding, strength and conditioning."

He added, "During the camp, we played quality senior sides and also held intra-squad match scenarios to pick our right combination for the tournament. I am pleased with the progress

and the boys are confident."

A former Oman International, Aamir Kaleem said, "The good thing is that the boys are in positive space and we are looking forward to playing quality cricket in the coming few days. We certainly aim to do well and bring glory, more importantly, qualify

for the next stage. I hope the boys bring out their best on the field and perform as a unit. The key would be for them to adapt to the match conditions quickly"

In the past, Oman U19 boys participated at home when the ICC U19 CWC Men's Division 2 Asia was hosted in Muscat in

2022. However, the boys lost in the semifinals to Hong Kong and failed to qualify. Recently, the boys played in the ACC U19 Premier Cup. They had finished second in their group and failed to make it to the semifinals.

Aamir Kaleem's boys will hope to end the recent disappointments, this time, at the Thailand tournament and qualify for the ICC U19 Men's Division 1 Asia.

SQUAD : Rahil Habibulla (captain), Saumya Sampat (vice-captain), Prathiesh HR, Jeet Shah, Varshieeth Dinesh, Thineth Sumanasekera, Gaurav Dinesh, Aneek Chakraborty, Arya Sampat, Omidu Medagoda, Siddharth Shankar, Rohan Ramachandran, Nitish Nadendla, Wajih Abbas.

OFFICIALS: Head Coach: Syed Aamir Kaleem, assistant coach: Syed Amir Ali, manager : Sher Mohammed Al Balushi.





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Oman insurance sector
expected to grow by
more than 10 per cent



Mustafa Ahmed Salman, Board of Directors member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

MUSCAT: The insurance sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in the Sultanate of Oman. Its contribution to the gross domestic product is about 1.23 per cent, and the growth rate of insurance premiums in 2022 reached about 13 per cent.

Mustafa Ahmed Salman, member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Chairman of the Chamber's Finance and Insurance Committee, confirmed that the insurance sector is growing increasingly and its growth in 2023 is expected to exceed about 10 per cent, indicating that raising the capital of insurance companies will contribute significantly to their ability to bringing investors and connecting businesses to grow better.

He said in a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA), "The contribution of the insurance sector to the gross domestic product of the Sultanate of Oman currently amounts to 1.3 per cent,

which is a good percentage compared to Arab countries, explaining that the volume of Arab insurance reached about \$45 billion and constitutes one per cent of the volume of global insurance."

He pointed out that the Finance and Insurance Committee of OCCI is working to study and develop laws, decisions and regulations related to the sector, monitor challenges, and present its proposals and visions to solve these challenges, indicating that increasing the contribution of insurance to the gross domestic product is achieved by establishing large projects and capital for insurance companies and strengthening their reserves.

Regarding the performance of insurance companies on Muscat Stock Exchange, he stressed that their prices are traded at appropriate prices and good dividends over the past years. Work is underway to have greater trading in the shares of these companies so that they can attract investors to buy and trade their shares.

— ONA

Al Aufi unveils bold vision for
energy transition in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 24

The Oman-France Clean Energy Forum was held at the Crown Plaza OCEC on February 22 with Oman Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim al Aufi, delivering a speech as a guest of honour that set the tone for collaborative efforts in the hydrogen sector.

The forum provided a platform for fruitful discussions and knowledge exchange between Omani and French stakeholders, aiming to explore the challenges and opportunities in advancing clean energy initiatives in Oman.

"Oman has taken a very forward and courageous move to push for the energy transition," Al Aufi remarked, capturing the essence of Oman's resolute commitment to tackling the challenges of traditional energy sources head-on.

Addressing the audience, Al Aufi highlighted the crucial importance of diversifying the energy mix to ensure a lasting legacy for future generations. "In order to sustain a future for our children, we need to start working now on alternative options," he emphasised, underlining the urgency of transitioning to renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power.

He also articulated Oman's progressive approach to energy diversification, emphasising the need for bold and forward-thinking initiatives to secure the



Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim al Aufi, speaks as a guest of honour at the Oman-France Clean Energy Forum.

nation's energy future.

The Minister acknowledged the inherent challenges in transitioning from conventional fossil fuels to cleaner alternatives but remained steadfast in his belief in the transformative potential of clean energy technology.

The Minister's address also shed light on Oman's proactive stance in attracting investments and expertise in the burgeoning hydrogen sector. Eng Salim al Aufi shared insights into the rigorous selection process for companies seeking to engage in Oman's hydrogen initiatives, showcasing the competitive landscape and the growing interest from industry players.

His transparency and

commitment to establishing a robust common infrastructure for the hydrogen industry underscored Oman's dedication to fostering a conducive business environment for sustainable energy projects.

"We promised the industry that we would establish a common infrastructure so that they (the investors) don't have to worry about that," Al Aufi stated, highlighting Oman's proactive approach to facilitating a smooth transition to clean energy technologies.

His words underscored the government's unwavering commitment to creating an enabling environment for private sector participation and

innovation in the clean energy sector and in overcoming logistical, supply chain, and infrastructure hurdles along the clean energy value chain.

Throughout his speech, Al Aufi showed confidence and optimism, emphasising the collaborative efforts required to turn Oman's clean energy vision into a tangible reality. With a clear focus on sustainability, innovation, and partnerships, Oman stands poised to emerge as a regional leader in the transition towards a low-carbon economy.

The Oman-France Clean Energy Forum is organised by Omani French Friendship Association, in collaboration with the French Embassy in Oman.

Oman inflation rate decreases in January 2024

MUSCAT: In January 2024, the inflation rate in Oman decreased by 0.1 per cent compared to the same month in 2023, based on the 2018 base year. This decrease was primarily due to lower prices in categories such as transportation by 3.4 per cent, education by 0.4 per cent, restaurants

and hotels by 0.2 per cent, clothing and footwear by 0.2 per cent, and communications by 0.2 per cent.

In contrast, prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased by 1.4 per cent, personal care items and services by 2.3 per cent, and

tobacco by 2.4 per cent. Prices in other categories remained stable.

Within the food and non-alcoholic beverages category, prices of fruits increased by 9.2 per cent, while staples like milk, cheese, and eggs rose by 6.7 per cent.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Oman's first veterinary pharma project set for launch

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Oman's first pharmaceutical plant, specialising in the production of medicines for the country's burgeoning livestock and farming industry, is set to commence operations at Al Buraimi Industrial City in the northwest of the country.

Al Pharabi Company for Veterinary Medicines Agricultural Co LLC, a subsidiary of publicly-traded Al Batinah Development & Investment Holding Co SAOG, will begin producing

commercial quantities of key veterinary pharmaceutical and dietary formulations – a milestone that will help strengthen Oman's biosecurity objectives.

The formal start of commercial production follows approvals granted by the Directorate-General of Animal Wealth (part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources), effectively green-lighting the launch of the project, according to Al Batinah Development & Investment Holding Co SAOG, which owns a 20% stake in the venture.



Domestic production of key veterinary medicines and dietary supplements will help strengthen Oman's biosecurity objectives.

Significantly, with the availability of indigenously produced livestock medicines, Oman's long-standing dependence on imports is set to be eased. The project is backed by Syrian-based Al Pharabi Company for Veterinary and Agricultural Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd, a leading player in the Arab region, which owns more than 350 medical preparations registered under its trade name 'Al-Pharabi'.

Set on a roughly 10,000 sq metre site in Al Buraimi, the plant features three production lines in its first phase, designed

for capsule, liquid, and powder production.

Plant capacity is proposed to be ramped up to include a total of six production lines for the formulation of a range of products, such as injections, liquids and sterilisers, powder formulations, capsules, ointments, vitamins and feed additives.

The Oman plant also aims to leverage the reach of its parent Syrian company to market its products across the Arab and African regions, in addition to catering to the domestic and Gulf markets.

Oman inflation rate decreases in January 2024



Muscat Governorate recorded the highest decline in inflation rate.

FROM PAGE 13

The miscellaneous food items category saw a 4.2 per cent increase, and sugar, jam, honey, and confectionery prices went up by 3.6 per cent. Other increases include oils and fats by 2.3 per cent, bread and grains by 1.5 per cent, vegetables by 1.3 per cent, meat by 0.7 per cent, and non-alcoholic beverages by 0.7 per cent.

However, fish prices dropped by 10.3 per cent. The Muscat Governorate recorded the highest rate of decline in inflation at the end of January 2024 compared to the same period last year, as the index decreased by 0.4 per cent and also decreased by 0.1 per cent in the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah North.

In contrast, it rose by 0.7 per cent in the Dhofar Governorate and by 0.5 per cent in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. It was 0.3 per cent in Al Dhahirah Governorate, 0.2 in Musandam Governorate, and 0.1 per cent in each of the Al Sharqiyah South, Al Batinah South and Al Buraimi governorates, while the rate stabilised in Al Wusta Governorate. — ONA

OFA, French Embassy host inaugural Oman France Clean Energy Forum

MUSCAT: The Omani French Association (OFA), in collaboration with the French Embassy, proudly hosted the inaugural Oman France Clean Energy Forum on February 22, 2024. Held as part of the esteemed French Weeks, the event brought together key stakeholders and experts to explore the challenges and opportunities in advancing clean energy initiatives in Oman.

The forum, graced by esteemed guests including the Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, and the Ambassador of France, Veronique Aulagnon, served as a platform for fruitful discussions and strategic partnerships.

Commencing with an inspiring address from OFA President Sulaiman al Harthy, the event set the stage for insightful conversations. Ambassador Veronique Aulagnon introduced the keynote speaker, Minister Eng Salim al Aufi, whose profound insights paved the way for engaging panel discussions.

Generously sponsored by Oman Arab Bank, the forum comprised three comprehensive panels addressing crucial aspects of clean energy transition:

Panel 1: Clean Energies Supply Chain in Oman Context



Ambassador of France to the Sultanate of Oman, Veronique Aulagnon, gives a memento to Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim al Aufi, during the Oman France Clean Energy Forum.

Moderated by Lionel Rabin from Haltiq, this panel delved into topics such as mega production projects, storage and transport strategies, exportation strategies, and the competitiveness of clean energy in Oman. Distinguished speakers from leading organisations such as ENGIE, EDF, Vallourec, Veolia, and Air Liquide provided valuable

perspectives.

Panel 2: Legislation and Certification for Low Carbon Energy

Chaired by Dr Khalil al Hanashi from the National Hydrogen Alliance (Hy-Fly), this panel explored the need for international regulations in the realm of low carbon energy. Experts from Apave, Bureau

Veritas, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals of Oman, the International Energy Agency (IEA), and the Oman Sustainability Center offered nuanced insights.

Panel 3: Financing Large Clean Energy Projects

Moderated by Zahra Abdul Amir from Oman Arab Bank, this panel tackled the challenges of clean energy bankability. Industry leaders from Société Générale, Crédit Agricole CACIB, Intercontinental Energy, EDF, Nama OPWP, and the Ministry of Finance shed light on financing structures and capital considerations.

The forum concluded with a compelling speech from the Head of Economic Department at the French Embassy, emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts in achieving sustainable development goals. Attendees were then invited to a networking lunch, fostering further exchange of ideas and opportunities.

The Oman France Clean Energy Forum stands as a testament to the commitment of both nations towards a greener, more sustainable future. Through collaboration, innovation, and strategic dialogue, we pave the way for a cleaner and brighter tomorrow.

NBO market outlook 2024 reveals valuable insights on private debt

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its unwavering commitment to delivering valuable insights and opportunities for clients, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) held recently its highly anticipated Market Outlook event for 2024.

Distinguished speakers Peter Vincent and Andrew Parker, representing Franklin Templeton and Blackstone Credit, respectively, provided valuable insights on the current

market dynamics and introduced private debt, a compelling facet within the alternative investment landscape for the current year.

Ali bin Mustafa al Lawati, Assistant General Manager - Head of Private Banking & Segments at NBO, said: “As we navigate the intricate landscape of the financial markets in 2024, NBO remains dedicated to empowering our clients with the knowledge and insights necessary for informed



Peter Vincent and Andrew Parker, representing Franklin Templeton and Blackstone Credit respectively, provided valuable insights on the current market dynamics and introduced private debt.

investment decisions. The Market Outlook event is a testament to our dedication, and we take pride in holding it for the second consecutive year.

We introduced private debt to our clients, aligning with the growing interest in non-traditional investment avenues. We were honoured to have Peter Vincent and Andrew Parker on the same platform.

Their expertise and insights undoubtedly provided our

audience with invaluable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities presented by various risk factors for the year ahead.” For the second consecutive year, NBO hosted successfully the prestigious event that united industry leaders to shed light on the market's trajectory. The event attracted a significant number of attendees and provided expert insights on navigating the intricate financial landscape of 2024.

Meethaq Islamic Banking inaugurates new branch in Al Rustaq

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat inaugurated its newest branch in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq in the Governorate of Al Batinah South.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Yahya bin Suleiman al Nadabi, Wali of Al Rustaq and was attended by esteemed guests, customers and officials from Meethaq Islamic Banking.

During the ceremony, Shaikh Dr Yahya, Wali of Al Rustaq was introduced to Meethaq's comprehensive suite of Islamic Banking services and facilities. It also highlighted Meethaq's strategic vision to maintain its leadership position within the sector and outlines forthcoming steps in expanding its branch network to new locations.

With this new addition, Meethaq's strengthens its remarkable network to 28 branches across different governorates, reinforcing its preeminent standing in offering Islamic Banking services and



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Yahya bin Suleiman al Nadabi, Wali of Al Rustaq and was attended by esteemed guests, customers and officials from Meethaq Islamic Banking.

establishing itself as the largest Islamic window with branches in Oman.

On this occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager - Meethaq Personal Banking, said: “The opening of Meethaq's latest branch in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq reflects our commitment as a foremost Islamic financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman.

Meethaq continually enhances and diversifies its services and

facilities to deliver good-quality services through our branches, meeting the evolving needs and aspirations of our customers.

This new branch extends our reach, ensuring accessibility for our valued customers in Al Rustaq and neighbouring areas. They can benefit extensively from all our banking services and products available through this branch, including opening accounts, provision of cards and financing facilities.

Meethaq remains steadfast in its strategy to expand its network and offer the best Islamic Banking services in the Sultanate of Oman.”

The new branch offers various Shari'ah-compliant services and facilities for individuals, catering conveniently to customers in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq. Staffed by proficient Omani cadres, the branch operates on weekdays from Sunday to Thursday, from 8 AM to 2 PM, ensuring optimal service delivery.

Suhar Investment Forum to see the participation of more than 20 countries

MUSCAT: The Suhar Investment Forum, an international event in Al Batinah North Governorate, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in the region, will be inaugurated on February 26, 2024 under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said.

The two-day forum at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Suhar will be attended by delegates from over 20 countries.

The two-day forum will discuss the investment climate and environment in Al Batinah North Governorate, showcasing the latest developments in the investment landscape with the participation of government officials, experts, businessmen, and investors from various sectors.

Ahead of the forum, the OCCI branch in Al Batinah North Governorate disclosed the details of feasibility studies for 104 investment opportunities with a total capital value of approximately RO 1 billion. These opportunities span eight main sectors including - industrial, logistics, circular economy, mining, food security, tourism, information technology, and healthcare—and are expected to create about 9,000 job opportunities.

Eng Saeed bin Ali al Abri (pictured), Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce



and Industry branch in Al Batinah North Governorate and Chairman of the Forum's Organising Committee, stated that the forum will feature keynote speeches, visual presentations, and four panel discussions on the themes “Suhar – A preferred Destination for Investment,” “Suhar - Incentives and Opportunities,” “Suhar - Growth and Investment Opportunities,” and “Suhar - Supporting the Goals of Oman Vision 2040.”

The Suhar Investment Forum aims to showcase successful foreign investments in the governorate, highlighting the safe and business-friendly environment created through efforts to support various sectors.

The forum will bring together government officials from different entities and institutions responsible for investment sectors, providing an opportunity for investors to directly interact with them.



Oman's real estate general index up in Q4 2023

MUSCAT: Residential land prices led the general index of residential real estate prices in the Sultanate of Oman, recording a 1 per cent increase in the Q4 2023, with a value of RO 163.3 million, according to statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The residential land price index recorded a growth of 5.5 per cent, amounting to RO 112.3



million, while the residential apartment price index decreased by 10.2 per cent, recording a value of RO 18.2 million.

The price index for villas also decreased by 6.2 per cent, amounting to RO 25.2 million, and other houses by 7.6 per cent, amounting to RO 7.6 million.

The general residential real estate price index recorded an increase of 0.7 per cent compared to the Q3 2023, where

the residential land price index recorded an increase of 0.2 per cent.

The prices of residential apartments also increased by 1.9 per cent, villas by 0.7 per cent, and other homes by 6.1 per cent. On the other hand, the number of residential real estate sales transactions increased by 3.9 per cent in Q4 2023, compared to a decrease of 26 per cent in Q4 2022. — **ONA**

Total credit balance granted by banking sector reaches RO 30.4 bn



MUSCAT: The total credit balance granted by the banking sector in Oman increased by 4.3 per cent to reach RO 30.4 billion by the end of December 2023. Private sector credit, in particular, grew by 4.7 per cent, totalling RO 25.5 billion by the same period.

Data on the distribution of credit across sectors shows that individuals held the largest share of credit at 45.2 per cent, followed by non-financial companies at 45 per cent.

Meanwhile, financial companies held 6 per cent, and other sectors accounted for 3.8 per cent.

Total deposits in the banking sector experienced a 12.4 per cent growth, reaching RO 29.1 billion by the end of December 2023. Private sector deposits also increased by 10.6 per cent, totalling RO 19.2 billion during the same period.

Looking at how private sector deposits were distributed among different sectors, figures show that individuals held approximately 49.3 per cent, followed by non-financial companies with 32.4 per cent, financial companies with 15.4 per cent, and other sectors with 2.9 per cent. — **ONA**

Development Bank names new CEO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Development Bank, a leading institution in supporting economic growth and progress in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the appointment of Hussain al Lawati (**pictured**) as its new Chief Executive Officer, effective from Sunday, February 25, 2024.

With a career spanning over 18 years in the banking and finance sector, Al Lawati's extensive background in strategic planning, innovation, growth and acquisition and strategic partnerships ideally positions him to lead Development Bank's mission forward.

His leadership at Muscat Finance as CEO showcased his ability to drive business growth, manage large teams and execute significant digital transformations.

Prior to his tenure at Muscat Finance, Al Lawati held senior management roles at Bank Dhofar, including DGM & Chief Corporate Banking Officer and AGM & Chief Retail Banking Officer where he managed substantial assets and introduced key regulatory compliant solutions and CRM systems.

"I am excited to be asked to lead Development Bank at this important time. Driven by a talented and experienced team the bank is a well-respected brand with a long and rich history of



helping Omani businesses of all sizes succeed. My role is to set out the next stage of the bank's journey and build a strategy for growth and innovation."

As CEO of Development Bank, Al Lawati will leverage his extensive experience to enhance the bank's operations, drive innovation and support Oman's economic development.

His leadership is expected to bring a new era of growth and success to the bank, aligning with its goals of fostering sustainable development and ensuring innovative Omani businesses have access to the right capital to start and scale.

"Hussain has worked at the very highest levels of Omani banking and finance, delivering outstanding results and strong growth. Given his proven track record, strategic acumen and dedication to excellence make him the perfect choice to lead Development Bank.

On behalf of the Board, I am delighted to welcome Hussain as CEO and look forward to working with him in the exciting years ahead," remarked Eng Mohammed al Ghassani, Chairman, Development Bank.

OPAZ delegation tours Jordanian industrial and tourism projects

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), led a high-level of Omani officials on a visit to Jordan over the weekend.

Al Dheeb was accompanied by Yaqoub bin Badr al Ruqayshi, Deputy Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Hilal bin Mubarak al Rashidi from OPAZ's Investment Development Sector. The delegation met with Nayef Hamidi al Fayezi, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority.

This visit comes within the framework of ongoing efforts spearheaded by Qais bin Mohammed al Youssef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, to build on cooperative ties between the two organisations.

In addition to discussing investment and commercial matters, the meeting covered environmental activities, port systems, logistics, renewable energy projects, and green industries.

It also focused on economic and investment



Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman – OPAZ, meeting with a Jordanian official during the delegation's visit.

cooperation between the two brotherly countries. Al Dheeb shared details about the volume of investments in industrial cities, free zones, and special economic zones, as well as the area allotted for artificial intelligence and renewable energy sectors in the SEZ at Duqm (SEZAD).

In addition, he shed light on initiatives related to modern industries, mining, gypsum, pharmaceutical, medical, and petrochemical sectors, as well as projects involving the generation of green hydrogen and its derivatives in collaboration with global multinational corporations.

A presentation was also made on Al Rawdha SEZ which is coming up in the Wilayat of Mahdha in Al Buraimi Governorate, as well as the new

integrated economic zone on the Saudi Arabian border. The two zones feature land ports that will make it easier for goods to be moved between different countries.

These zones will be integrated with the existing free zones in Salalah, Suhar, Al Mazayouna, Muscat International Airport, Duqm Port, and the ports of Salalah and Sohar which are proposed to be linked by rail with the Arab Gulf countries.

The Omani guests visited Aqaba Development Corporation, the Aqaba Authority's investment branch, Aqaba Company for Ports Operation and Management, the Ayla project, various tourism initiatives on the southern shore, and a number of industrial projects and cities in the Aqaba region.

Oman hosts third edition of World Travel Week — Middle East

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will host the third edition of the "Global Travel Week — Middle East" event today, Sunday, at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel over four days.

The event will feature 94 tourism specialists from various countries worldwide and around 31 Omani tourism establishments, in addition to hotels.

This event is part of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's efforts to promote luxury tourism sector in Oman, attracting tourism companies and professionals from various countries to meet with their counterparts from tourism institutions and work on mutual cooperation.

During the event, introductory



This event is part of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's efforts to promote luxury tourism sector in Oman.

trips will be organised for major international tourism companies to get a better understanding of tourist attractions and experiences in various governorates of Oman to provide a comprehensive

picture for these companies.

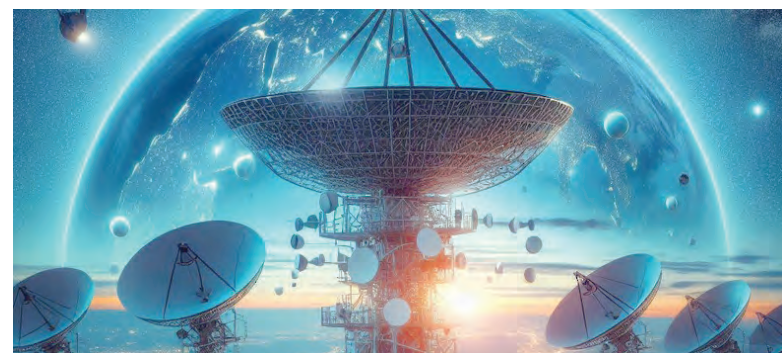
Fourteen tourism companies were selected to conduct introductory trips in the Dhofar Governorate. Haitham bin Mohammed al

Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said, "This event is a valuable addition to the list of luxury tourism companies and has proven through its previous editions that it adds high value to businesses and companies."

He added that the ministry's hosting of this event will contribute to strengthening international cooperation in the field of luxury tourism, exchanging experiences and knowledge, and strengthening the position of the Sultanate of Oman as a luxury tourist destination on the global stage.

This event enjoys wide participation from experts and specialists in the field of luxury tourism from various countries of the world. — **ONA**

CAA hosts regional workshop on satellite applications



MUSCAT: The Regional Workshop on Satellite Applications organised by the Centre of Excellence for Satellite Applications at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in cooperation with the European Organisation for Satellite Applications will begin today, Sunday, and will last for several days.

The workshop aims to train aviation specialists in the Middle East on analysing satellite outputs for weather monitoring and its various applications. It includes practical discussion sessions that enable trainees to analyse satellite images and processing methods.

Participating in the workshop are several experts from the European Organisation for Satellite Applications and local experts from Oman and regional countries.

The Centre of Excellence for Satellite Applications at the Civil Aviation Authority is one of the most important centres responsible for training countries in the region on satellite applications and analysing their outputs to serve real-time forecasts in tracking weather phenomena such as tropical cyclones and other phenomena that affect communities. — **ONA**

ITB Berlin 2024 to spotlight Oman's stunning tourist treasures



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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

The Sultanate of Oman announced several months ago its active participation in the International Tourism Bureau in Berlin for the year 2024. Oman, as the official host country for this global event in Federal Germany at ITB Berlin 2024, is thus participating in the largest tourism and commercial event in the world, attended by hundreds of countries and tourism and hotel institutions and global aviation. Thousands of people working in the tourism industry in the world will also attend this event annually. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism hopes that from its participation in this global event, its active

participation in the exhibition will provide new opportunities to showcase its tourism potential to the world public and as an exceptional tourist destination in a region that maintains the highest tourism standards. The Berlin International Bureau (ITB Berlin) is attended annually by thousands of people specialised in international tourism, along with leading experts, media professionals, journalists, politicians, and influential opinion makers from all over the world. In this regard, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, confirms that Oman is committed to providing a wonderful and lasting experience in this event that covers all

matters related to and possible tourism expectations and is pleased to be the host country for this global event for the year 2024. This participation of Oman is not the first of its kind, but it has enjoyed strong participation and representation in this exhibition for many years, as the exhibition has great demand and is distinguished by presenting various tourist attractions of countries and their tourism potential. ITB Berlin is a strong platform to display a variety of the many offers offered by participating countries. Oman, as the host country for 2024, will showcase most of the tourism components that exist in the country in order to highlight the tourist attractions

that today help attract internal and external investments and provide job opportunities for Omanis. Oman is distinguished and famous for its many different tourist attractions, where visitors and tourists can look forward to relaxing places and practicing various activities, whether in golden sand dunes and green oases, or in high mountains and wonderful caves, in addition to hiking and swimming in sandy beaches, and climb cliffs that stretch for miles. There is great potential for tourists to practice diving, hiking and climbing near the available tourist attractions. The International Tourism Bureau in Berlin is scheduled to focus on exhibiting companies,

investment owners, and institutions that manage tourism in the world, as the exhibition aims to strengthen countries' brands as a global catalyst for the tourism industry, in addition to giving a greater role to improving the current relationships of institutions and working to attract new customers. This event also explores ways to further develop the tourism business and target new audiences and exhibitors, in addition to finding the full range of entertainment services used in the tourism industry in general. The exhibition also gives a great opportunity for countries and participants to exchange views and conduct real and virtual business from anywhere in the world.

The crossroad between fintech and crypto



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of fintech stayed fintech, while others migrated to crypto. For example, according to a report by McKinsey & Company published in late 2023, the global funding by fintech segment total value between 2018 and 2022 grew significantly for Embedded Finance and Banking as a Service (BaaS) from \$1.2 billion to \$4.0 billion (almost 4x) and for SME and corporate services from \$2.5 billion to \$7.6 billion (over 3x). Similarly, the global funding growth in percentage by fintech segment saw the same two segments attracting 36% and 32% more funding, respectively.

Conversely, lending, on the one hand, and operations and infrastructure, on the other hand, lost steam under fintech and migrated to blockchain. Specifically, lending, which was the biggest segment in terms of market volume at \$9.9 billion, grew to only \$11.6 billion between 2018 and 2022, while operations and infrastructure dropped from \$3.9 billion to \$3.5 billion. In terms of funding in percentage, lending only attracted 4% more funding during the same period, and Operations and Infrastructure lost 3% of the investments.

At the same time, with tremendous acceleration in 2021, lending protocols on blockchain were flying high. In February 2021, Uniswap had a market cap of almost \$6.9 billion and AAVE \$3.97 billion, representing 33.52% and 19.32% of the DeFi industry, respectively.

The Uniswap innovation of Automated Market Makers not only made them the most popular protocol in the industry but opened a new avenue for developers to build products without a traditional order book. At the same time, AAVE enabled ultra-short duration, uncollateralised flash loans designed to be integrated into other products and services, thus allowing incredible flexibility for anyone to build products at the back of their technology.

Overall, it is clear that at some point toward the second part of the last decade, a partition happened between Fintech and Blockchain, which resulted in the origin of DeFi.

China's low prices are luring more visitors from Hong Kong

BY ALEXANDRA STEVENSON,
ZIXU WANG AND OLIVIA WANG

Shuen Chun-wa, 81, and her husband hurried toward a green bus with two dozen other Hong Kong residents, dragging empty suitcases. They had purple tour stickers on their jackets and were headed to shop in Shenzhen, a bustling Chinese city that sits on the northern side of the border with Hong Kong. It was Shuen's second trip to Shenzhen to find bargains in a year. Last time, she got dental implants. "You can count how much I need to pay," she said. She paid \$9,000 in Shenzhen for a procedure that would have cost \$25,000 in Hong Kong. "I don't have the money. So I went to Shenzhen."

Since China opened its borders in January 2023 after several years of pandemic isolation, Hong Kong residents have made Shenzhen a weekend destination to shop, dine and, yes, even visit the dentist.

Tired of high costs, poor service and limited choices at home, Hong Kongers are going to Shenzhen to buy groceries, go out for meals and discover new bubble tea shops.

Hong Kong remains one of the most unaffordable cities in the world, and its battered economy and plunging stock market have made everyone more money conscious.

In China, a stalling economy has led to a steady decline in prices, falling by the most since the global financial crisis in 2009 and verging on a phenomenon known as deflation.

The shopping migration is a reversal of the days when mainland Chinese flocked to Hong Kong to shop for everything from luxury bags to baby formula. Now for Hong Kongers, China's slowdown offers a rare break in prices. All it takes is a short bus or subway trip across the border to the mainland.

On social media and in chat groups, hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers talk about new food offerings in Shenzhen



Hong Kong residents wait to buy pastries at a Bao Shifu shop, a chain popular with tourists, in Shenzhen, China. – NYT

TIRED OF HIGH COSTS, POOR SERVICE AND LIMITED CHOICES AT HOME, HONG KONGERS ARE GOING TO SHENZHEN TO BUY GROCERIES, GO OUT FOR MEALS AND DISCOVER NEW BUBBLE TEA SHOPS.

including pastries filled with seaweed and pork floss. They share tips about where to find bubble tea including one place where the tea is made by robot.

Tour operators that once focused on package tours to Japan and Thailand are also organising buses to shopping centres in Shenzhen to visit stores including Sam's Club.

Some weekends, there are so many Hong Kongers in Shenzhen malls that locals have joked that the visitors have "occupied" them.

Their presence in Shenzhen, a city with a population of 17 million, is visible everywhere. Some stores tailor their advertising by using Cantonese, Hong Kong's local Chinese language, to draw tourists into their shops.

Restaurants offer discounts for customers with phone numbers that include Hong Kong's 852 area code. In one big shopping mall near a border crossing, opticians and dental clinics promise cheaper service than Hong Kong that requires only a short trip.

"Cross the border to check your teeth with zero distance," a giant neon pink advertisement lured.

On a busy day, the GoodFeel Dentist clinic might see more than 100 customers from Hong Kong, said Lan Xinghua, a sales director at GoodFeel Dentist.

He said the company's revenue doubled when the Hong Kong border opened last year. To get even more business, the clinic set up a stall near the Luohu Port border crossing. Employees are expected to speak Cantonese as well as Mandarin, China's official language.

"Hong Kong customers spend more lavishly and don't usually bargain too much," Lan said. Sometimes entire families come to get their teeth cleaned and fixed.

The two cities are divided by a border that distinguishes mainland China from Hong Kong, a Chinese territory that long operated with some degree of autonomy but has come increasingly under Beijing's sway.

Many Hong Kongers travelling to the mainland to shop had not been there since 2019. That was when pro-democracy protests engulfed Hong Kong and the government responded with a crackdown, stamping out the political tolerance that had distinguished Hong Kong from

mainland China. Now people in Hong Kong, using online forums that are censored or inaccessible on the mainland, discuss whether it is safe and politically acceptable for people who disagree with China's government to visit Shenzhen even simply to shop and dine. For many, the answer is "yes."

"Life and political opinion can be separated," said Chak Yeung, 31, a Hong Kong resident who works in the tech industry. He was involved in the past with student organisations that participated in protests, but he doesn't see any conflict between his political views and what he does for fun on the weekends.

Hong Kong has a separate currency from China, and its merchants still rely heavily on cash for payments. China's main form of payments is digital: The two primary payment apps, WeChat and Alipay, have only recently been available to Hong Kongers and not everyone is familiar with them.

To help visiting shoppers, posters plastered in Shenzhen's stores and subway stations explain how Hong Kong residents can use WeChat and Alipay. Tourists can also pay in Hong Kong dollars and not convert their money to Chinese renminbi.

— The New York Times

Bosch to cut 3,500 jobs in home appliances unit

FRANKFURT: The Bosch group said it would axe 3,500 jobs at its BSH home appliances subsidiary by 2027, the latest in a series of cuts among German manufacturers as they struggle with rising costs and weaker demand.

The company had to “reduce complexity and costs” in order to “safeguard its competitiveness” in a challenging economic environment, BSH said in a statement.

It was “essential to review existing structures” and adapt to new growth markets, it said.

“This includes adjusting personnel structures and personnel costs to the new requirements.”

The global jobs cull would affect “indirect” workers, BSH added, referring mainly to administrative positions.

Around 1,000 jobs will be cut



Appliance and Electronics World Expo (AWE) in Shanghai

this year already, it said.

BSH was founded as a joint venture by Bosch and Siemens in 1967, before becoming a wholly Bosch-owned subsidiary almost a decade ago.

It employs around 60,000 people globally, 17,000 of them in Germany.

Germany's once-mighty industrial sector is struggling to

emerge from a downturn, having been hit hard by soaring energy costs following Russia's war in Ukraine, as well as the impact of higher interest rates and cooling exports.

The Bosch group already announced plans in December to slash 1,500 jobs at its auto supply business, as Germany's crucial car industry undergoes major changes as part of the shift towards electric vehicles.

BSH rival Miele meanwhile said earlier this month it would scrap up to 2,700 jobs as part of a cost-cutting drive.

Chemicals giant Bayer said last month it was planning “significant” reductions in staffing.

It was joined on Friday by rival BASF, which said there would be “further job cuts” as it unveiled a one-billion-euro savings plan. — AFP

US airlines hike checked baggage fees

WASHINGTON: United Airlines on Friday became the third major US airline to hike checked baggage fees for customers travelling in North America after American Airlines and JetBlue Airways announced similar increases.

United passengers flying economy in the US after February 24 will pay \$40 for a first checked bag, or \$35 paid in advance. A second checked bag will cost \$50 at the airport and \$45 in advance.

Maintenance and labour contract costs have risen for carriers while pricing power has weakened in the US domestic market.

US airlines collected nearly \$6.8 billion in baggage fees in 2022 — and \$5.5 billion in the first nine months of 2023.

Four years ago, United raised prices for checked bags at airports by \$5 to \$35, or \$30 if travellers pay in advance online.

This week, American Airlines raised fees for a first checked bag to \$35 if booked in advance online, or \$40 at the airport.

JetBlue said it was hiking



People walk to their flight gates at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois. — Reuters

checked baggage prices because “the cost of doing business has gone up significantly due to increased wages, higher fuel costs, and other inflationary pressure, and we remain unprofitable since Covid.”

JetBlue said the cost of a first bag was rising to \$35 if booked online in advance or \$45 at the airport.

JetBlue said the price hike is “one step we are taking to return our company back to profitability and cover the increased costs of transporting bags.” Senator Richard Blumenthal, who chairs

the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, said in November he was investigating airline fees for baggage, seat selection and ticket changes.

In September 2022, the US Transportation Department proposed requiring airlines to disclose fees for baggage, ticket changes and family seating the first time an airfare is displayed.

Congress in 2018, under heavy pressure from the airline industry, dropped plans to require “reasonable and proportional” baggage and change fees.

— Reuters

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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AMENDMENT TO THE LEGAL FORM

Based on the provisions of Article 13 of the law 18/2019 and its amendments announces, the company (Aal Tech Marine and Industrial) is registered at Commercial Registry under the number (1341764). It is in the process of changing the form of company from Individual Firm/Merchant to SPC (Sole proprietorship company). Anyone who has an objection to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Secretariat of the Commercial Registry, The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Muscat within one month from the date of publication of this announcement.





TRAVEL TALES

A street vendor carries umbrellas on a rainy day next to the Eiffel Tower, which is closed to the public on the fourth day of its staff's strike, in Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Tourists take photos of the sunset at the Historic Town in Cartagena, Colombia. — AFP



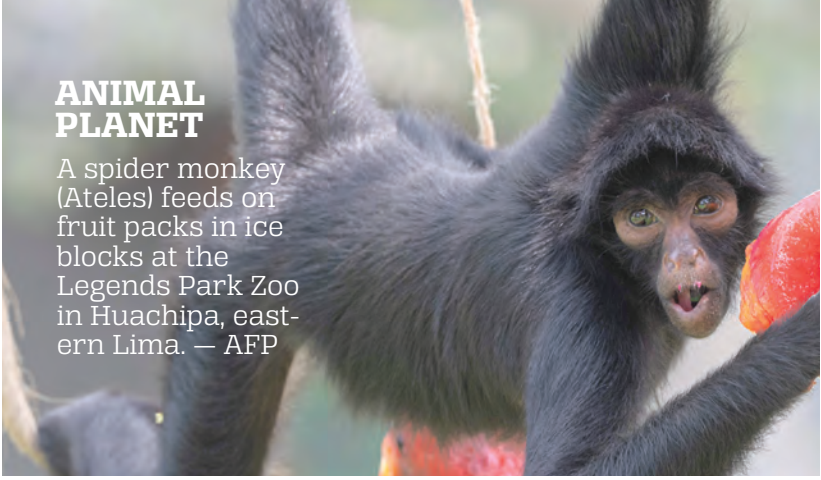
CULTURE

A Kuwaiti man wearing a mask attends celebrations in Kuwait City with the colours of the Gulf emirate's flag in the background, marking the 63rd National Day and the 33rd Liberation anniversary from Iraqi occupation. — AFP



ART

US singer Taylor Swift performs on stage during a concert as part of her Eras World Tour in Sydney. — AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

A spider monkey (Ateles) feeds on fruit packs in ice blocks at the Legends Park Zoo in Huachipa, eastern Lima. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 25, 2024 | SHAABAN 15, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | .features@omanobserver.om



Breathing new life into Oman's ancient pottery traditions

Founded by Marwa al Hasni and Waleed al Shriqi, the Taleed Pottery shop aims to revive Omani pottery traditions. Inspired by millenia-old craft and techniques passed down from generation to generation, these artisans offer workshops and unique, colourful pottery pieces.... **P20**



DISCOVERY

Animal prints turn to stone at Roberto Cavalli for Milan Fashion Week

ANIMAL PRINTS ARE in the DNA of Italian fashion brand Roberto Cavalli, but this week, designer Fausto Puglisi turned the animal to mineral. Puglisi turned his gaze to marble for his new collection at Milan Fashion Week, a new twist for the flamboyant brand known for its skin-baring, eye-popping styles. Gone were the brand's signature leopard, cheetah, zebra and python prints.

Puglisi instead transformed those intricate designs into veins of marble in compelling grey, beige and white hues, and even green, mustard yellow and amethyst. "I was very tired of animal print," the creative director said backstage after the show. "Zebra is 20 years ago." If the animal skins appeared to have escaped the clutch of Roberto Cavalli, they reappeared on Friday at Blumarine, where newly named designer Walter Chiapponi opened his show with a very glam (faux) leopard coat and chose leopard tights as his go-to accessory. More than 50 brands are showing off Fall/Winter 2024-2025 women's collections in Milan this week, attended by over 100,000 fashion buyers, media and brand representatives. Whether on oversize puffer jackets, slinky dresses, trenchcoat or minis, Puglisi's choice to represent marble was a refreshing departure for the label, sacrificing none of its flashy, sexy spirit but adding a touch of Baroque decadence. Puglisi said he was inspired by his personal collection of antique marble. "I love it to death," the Sicilian designer said of the colourful marble seen throughout Italy, whether in villas of Pompeii or the

Baroque churches in Rome. An inspiration board backstage included photos of St Peter's Basilica in Rome and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul — both decadent in their abundant use of ancient marble. Puglisi said at first he was concerned that the marble would impart a cold feel to the clothing. He was proved wrong. "Marble is very cold, but this is hot," he said. **- BOMBERS AND BOWS -** If Cavalli managed to make cold hot, labels Max Mara, Fendi and Prada brought cozy back to the runway. Ribbing and cable knits featured prominently, with new riffs on sweaters by Fendi's Kim Jones, who saw them as modified shrugs or capes, only partially covering the body but adding an extra layer of luxury. At Max Mara, creative director Ian Griffiths opened the show on Thursday with the brand's classic full-length wool coat — this one in navy, a sophisticated moneyed look. In a collection inspired by French writer Colette, Griffiths brought sensuous volume to the backs of jackets, modifying them as ultra-chic bombers, while decorative pinking at the hems of long coats imparted a

light touch. A ribbed wool band evoking a kimono's obi cinched the waist on black pants and skirts, while flat panels cascading from the back of a black miniskirt were a more minimalist, modern take on ruffles. At Prada's runway show on Thursday, models sauntered over a raised transparent floor covering grass and autumn leaves below in a show the co-designers Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons said was based on memory and history. Strips of silk satin in black, pale pink or grape fluttered from the front of sleeveless shift dresses, while airy, transparent tunics came decorated with floral garlands in plush velvet. Prada's collection was marked by a "fusion of men's sartorial references with lingerie and strict sharpness juxtaposed with bows and crystals", said Harrod's buyer Simon Longland. Feminine twinsets in contrasting colours — purple and orange here, pink and moss green there — were paired with wool skirts past the knee with thick cuffs at the hem. Whether at the shoulders, waist or bodice, bows peppered the collection, while rich fake sable adorned the shoulders, neckline and hem of cocktail dresses in ivory. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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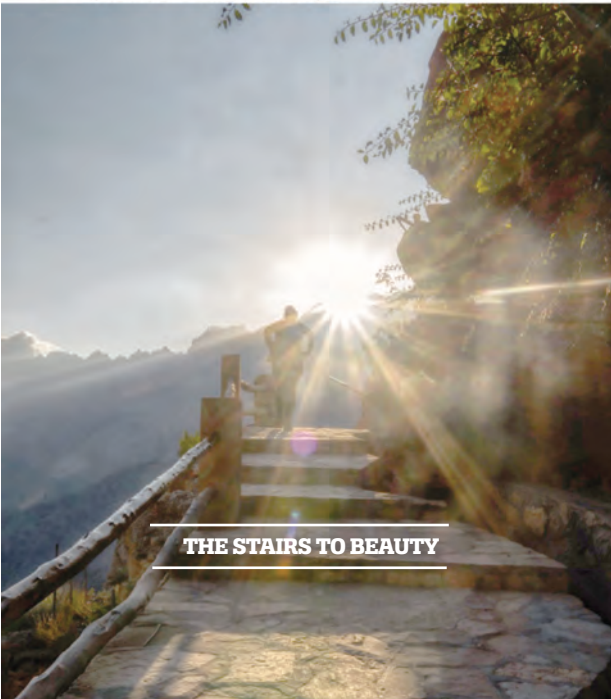
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10 years on, the legend of flamenco icon Paco de Lucia lives on

SPANISH GUITAR LEGEND Paco de Lucia, who died 10 years ago on Sunday, couldn't read music but his talent revolutionised flamenco, causing its popularity to spread around the world.

Wherever he played, he filled theatres and concert halls around the world, from London to New York, Paris and Moscow, San Francisco and Tokyo, shattering the image of flamenco as something complex and only of interest to a fringe audience.

"Flamenco was always marginalised in Spain because it was the music of gypsies, of Andalusians, of poor and working-class people," he once said, referring to the southern Andalusia region where was born and raised.

But his virtuosity brought the dramatic rhythms and passion of flamenco to the most prestigious music halls and this week, the main tribute event was held in New York's Carnegie Hall, bringing together the world's best flamenco artists with others like Panamanian salsa legend Ruben Blades.

The secret of de Lucia's success was his capacity "to make beautiful melodies and then dress these up with the best harmonies," guitarist Jose Carlos Gomez said in the southern port town of Algeciras.

"That's why Paco is so popular both with music connoisseurs and ordinary people."

He died of a heart attack on February 25, 2014 at the age of 66 while he was "playing with his children on the beach" at Playa del Carmen in the Mexican Caribbean where he had a house, reflecting his love of

the sea, swimming and fishing.

Such were the passions he had growing up in Algeciras where he was born in 1947, spending his childhood in places like El Rinconcillo beach where AFP met Gomez, a close friend of the family, whose own latest album "Las Huellas de Dios" ("God's Fingerprints") is a tribute to his idol.

It was here that de Lucia used to frequent a beachfront bar called Casa Bernardo where he would drink beer and eat fried fish, which inspired him to write a rumba by the same name.

BORN TO PLAY GUITAR

Born Francisco Sanchez Gomez to a Portuguese mother and a Spanish father, he was known as Paco -- the short form of Francisco -- "de Lucia" meaning "of Lucia", his mother.

Growing up in a gypsy neighbourhood, it was his father, also a guitarist, who introduced him to music and encouraged him to practise for hours.

When he was eight, his father put a guitar in his hands and told him: "I can't send you to school, I can't teach you a career, the only thing I can give you is this guitar," he once said in an interview. The same thing happened to his brothers, Ramon and Pepe, who

also went on to have careers in flamenco.

De Lucia took to it so well that it was as if he had "been born to play the guitar," says Gomez, saying he was such a natural that he could concentrate on experimenting and composing more than others.

By the time he was 12, he was earning at flamenco "tablaos" -- the intimate bars that are home to the authentic form of the tragic gypsy lament and dancing. Despite having no formal training, he moved to Madrid at 15 and by 18 had released his first album.

He was the first flamenco artist to obtain a chart topper with his instrumental rumba "Entre dos aguas" which was released in 1973 and saw him bringing flamenco closer to jazz with a sextet including wind instruments and an electric bass, in a major break with tradition.

Also revolutionary was his introduction of a cajon, a Peruvian box drum instead of two or three palmeros (rhythmic clappers) which made flamenco "more acoustic" and "more intimate in terms of staging", explains top percussionist Paquito Gonzalez who recorded an album with him.

- 'ORPHANED BY HIS DEATH' -

When de Lucia played in Madrid's Teatro Real in 1975, it stoked controversy for being the first flamenco performance in the Spanish capital's prestigious opera house, but also because he played with crossed legs rather than the traditional posture with the guitar resting on one leg, steeply angled upwards.

He was like "one of those explorers with a machete in hand who went into the Amazon and began cutting down branches and making a path," guitarist Jose Quevedo 'Bolit' told AFP at Pena La Buena Gente, a club in Jerez de la Frontera that draws flamenco fans, of which there are many across Andalusia.

And it was after one drunken night in Jerez that de Lucia and the singer Camaron de la Isla decided to work together, going on to produce several legendary albums.

When Paco de Lucia "became a global star, almost without realising it, he created what is now the flamenco industry", says Quevedo.

"It was a total turning point which brought about the 'professionalisation' of flamenco, creating a more rewarding life for many artists", he said.

And when he died, "the flamenco world felt very orphaned", says dancer Monika Bellido who runs a flamenco academy in Algeciras.

"The whole world loved Paco." -- AFP



MUSIC

Beyonce becomes first Black woman to helm top country songs chart

AHEAD OF THE release of her album that's set to take the country music scene by storm, Beyonce this week became the first Black woman to top the US charts in that genre.

Her song "Texas Hold 'Em" dropped smack in the middle of the Super Bowl earlier this month, and has debuted on the Billboard charts on the number one slot of "Hot Country Songs."

A second single, "16 Carriages," is also on that chart, clocking in at number nine.

"Prior to the triumph for 'Texas Hold 'Em,' no Black woman, or female known to be biracial, had previously topped" that chart, said industry tracker Billboard.

Country is a quintessentially American style of music with influences from Africa: the banjo notably grew out of instruments brought to the United States by enslaved people in the 1600s and 1700s.

And yet on the surface contemporary country has developed an overwhelming white image.

The issue came to a head in recent years when Lil Nas X soared to viral fame with his infectious, record-breaking "Old Town Road," a single that mashed banjo twangs

with thumping bass and dominated the industry's most closely watched singles chart in 2019.

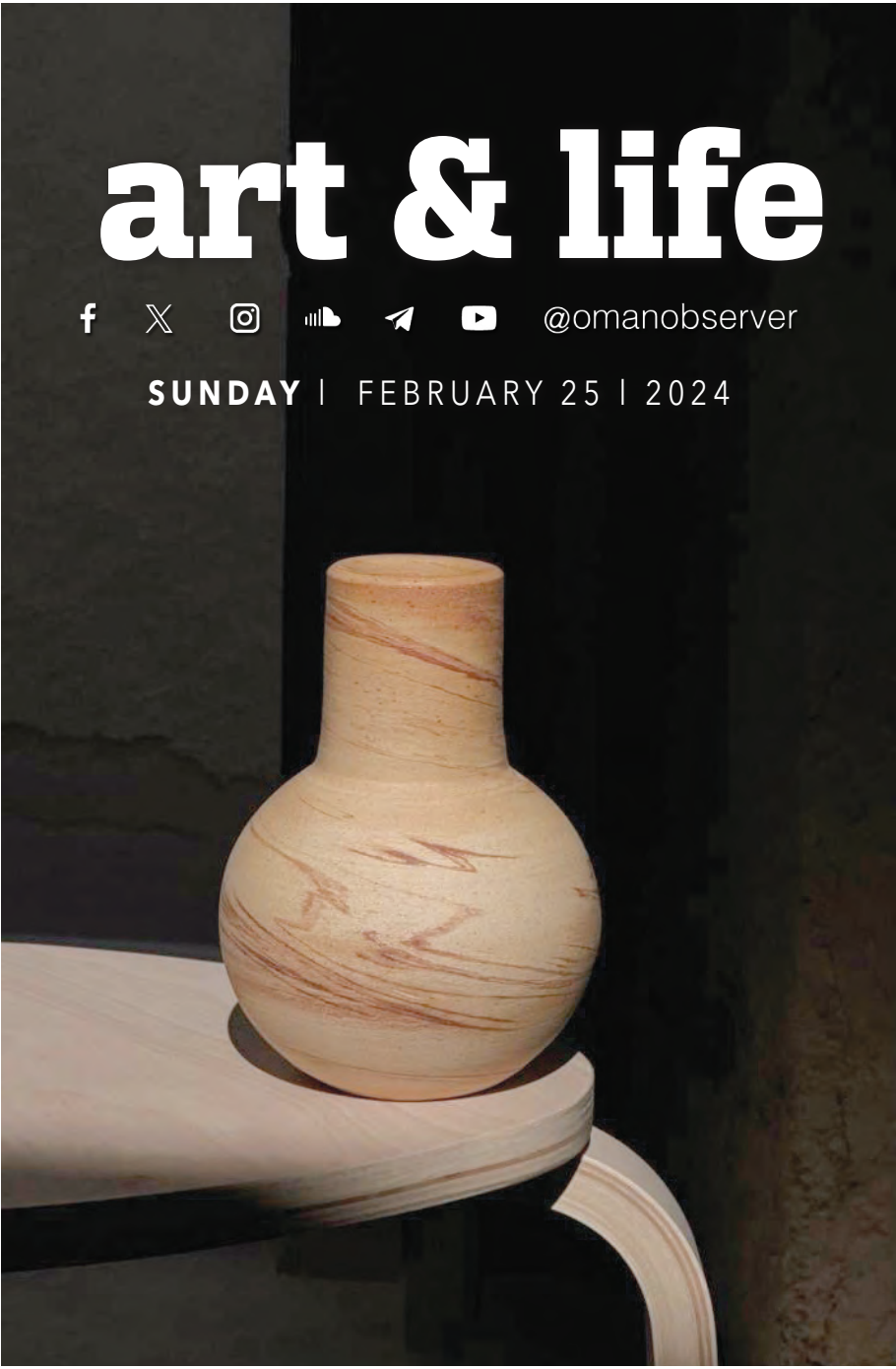
Controversy famously stoked the artist's rise to fame after Billboard removed the fusion novelty song from the country charts but left it on the rap list, triggering accusations that the Atlanta musician's work was pigeonholed purely because he is Black.

The tension simultaneously offered a moment to spotlight the vast contributions of Black artists to country both past and present, including today's stars like Mickey Guyton and Brittney Spencer.

Beyonce's new studio album, her eighth, is for release March 29, and as of now is characterised simply as "Act II."

"Act I" refers to the 42-year-old's album "Renaissance," an ode to disco and house which reigned over the summer of 2022 as it paid homage to the Black, queer and working-class communities that moulded the electronic dance genre, which first developed in Chicago in the 1980s.

She now appears primed to take a similar approach to country, reclaiming it as an emblem of Black American history. —AFP



Breathing new life into Oman's ancient pottery traditions

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

Oman, even in ancient times, is strategically located along the ancient trade routes which is why historical records proved that the country has facilitated the exchange of pottery techniques with neighbouring civilisations, fostering diversity and evolution in Omani pottery.

Since pottery has been discovered in the archaeological sites of Bat, Al-Khutm, and Al-Ayn, many researchers had been sharing that ancient pottery-making techniques reflect the ingenuity of early Omani civilisations. These artisans, through methods like coiling and molding, crafted pottery that not only served practical purposes but also showcased their cultural identity. Eventually, as civilisation progressed, influences from Islamic traditions further enriched the craft, introducing intricate designs and glazed surfaces that became emblematic of Omani pottery.

The history of pottery in Oman details a rich cultural heritage and through the build up of knowledge, it also demonstrates artistic evolution, spanning millennia. Thankfully, there are still many places all over the country that managed to save a lot of the techniques in pottery including the historic city of Bahla.

To ensure the further preservation of Oman's millenia-old craft, significant efforts are under way to revive the craft of pottery through workshops, courses, and various projects.

This was the initial goal of Taleed pottery shop. Its founders, Marwa al Hasni and her partner Waleed al Shriqi, have been dedicated to reintroducing the art of pottery to Omanis and reinstating its cultural significance.

The journey began when Marwa completed her higher education in accounting and sought to explore a fulfilling creative outlet. After experimenting with various activities, she found herself drawn to pottery. Her interest was further piqued during a month-long workshop conducted by Musallam al Abri from the SMEs Development Authority.

It was during this workshop that Marwa realised pottery was her true

calling. With the support of Said al Adawi, the owner of Oman Handicrafts Centre, who provided her with a suitable workspace, Marwa began honing her craft. As demand for her unique creations grew, she and Waleed al Shriqi decided to establish their own pottery business, Taleed, in 2022.

Due to increasing orders, Taleed expanded to a larger shop in Bahla Fort. The name "Taleed" in Arabic refers to legacies inherited from ancestors, a fitting homage considering Bahla's historical significance in pottery production, boasting numerous pottery sites and workshops dating back centuries.

Furthermore, Bahla Fort holds immense historical importance, narrating tales of ancient Oman and showcasing the beauty of Omani arts, particularly its architectural marvels. Recognised on the World Heritage List for its extraordinary architecture, Bahla Fort serves as a testament to Oman's rich cultural heritage.

Taleed has conducted numerous workshops in Bahla, Nizwa, and Muscat, training over 100 children and 50 adults. Additionally, it participated in the Sharjah Omani Week Exhibition in the United Arab Emirates.

The Taleed pottery shop comprises two sections: the products section and the workshops section. The products section showcases the pieces in an aesthetically pleasing manner for sale, while the workshops section provides a space for visitors and trainees to engage in pottery practice, offering a unique opportunity to experience the charm of this art form firsthand.

What sets Taleed apart is its innovative approach to pottery, incorporating colours and designs that diverge from the traditional monochrome style. Each piece is uniquely crafted for the shop, ensuring its exclusivity.

However, like any venture, Taleed has faced challenges along the way. The lack of a dedicated space for pottery production has necessitated moving pieces to different sites for firing, resulting in fragility and significant time and effort lost during the process.

Despite these challenges, the efforts to preserve and promote this handicraft offer a remarkable opportunity to inspire individuals with talents and encourage their further development.

