

QATAR BEAT JORDAN TO RETAIN ASIAN CUP

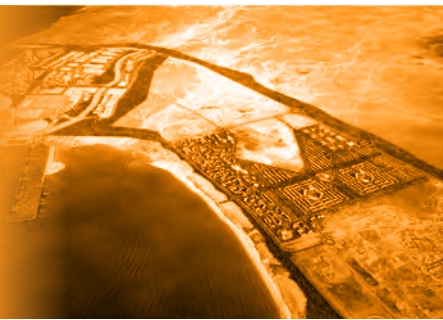
Hosts Qatar retained the Asian Cup with a 3-1 win on Saturday against surprise packages Jordan as Akram Afif scored a hat-trick of penalties. It was a fitting final act to a month of football that began with 24 teams and witnessed a series of dramatic games and plenty of goals. It will also help dispel the memories of Qatar's 2022 World Cup, when they lost all three games, the worst record of any host in the competition's history. **DETAILS ON P12**



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SURGE IN NEW BUSINESSES IN OMAN'S SPECIAL ECONOMIC, FREE AND INDUSTRIAL ZONES



P20
HOW AN ARTIST BALANCES HUMOUR AND ART IN HIS CARICATURES



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO IRAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to the President wishing him good health and happiness and the friendly Iranian people more progress and prosperity.

HM GREETINGS TO POPE FRANCIS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to His Holiness Pope Francis of the Vatican City State on the National Day of the Vatican City State. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the Pope wishing him good health and happiness and the friendly people of the Vatican City further progress and prosperity.

OPINION

P8



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
The boy who was raised as a girl

P9



Ray Petersen
Kids can't be right... all the time



CALEB EWAN CLINCHES OPENING OF TOUR OF OMAN

Australian rider Caleb Ewan of Jayco Al Ula team won the opening stage of the 13th edition of Tour of Oman 2024 which began on Saturday at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah. The 30-year-old produced an impressive show in the 181.5-km distance race which concluded at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre to claim the title of the stage. **DETAILS ON P10**

Heavy rains expected from Sunday

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre of Civil Aviation Authority has issued a warning that heavy rains are expected in many governorates of the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday and Monday, as rains are already reported in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate on Saturday evening.

The Civil Aviation Authority issued the first warning of heavy thunderstorms in the governorates of Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah South, Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah on Sunday and Monday.



It stated that the rains will be accompanied by active winds and hailstones, ranging between 30-60 mm, and will lead to the flow of wadis with active downward winds blowing at speeds ranging between 15-35 knots, and the height of sea waves along the coasts of Musandam Governorate and the Sea of Oman will range

between 1.5-3 metres.

The Civil Aviation Authority has called on citizens and residents to exercise caution during thunderstorms, not to cross wadis, avoid low-lying places, and not to go to the sea during the warning period.

The authority said that it is possible that the effects of the depression will begin on Sunday morning, with cloud formation, accompanied by scattered thunderstorms, and heavy rains till Monday evening.

Heavy rains accompanied by hailstones ranging between (30-60 mm) can lead to a flow of wadis, while active downward winds, speeds ranging between 15-35 knots (28-64 km/h) are expected.

To activate role of society in shaping visions

THEYAZIN TO OPEN 'TOGETHER WE MAKE PROGRESS' FORUM

YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, Feb 10

In response to the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to build bridges of communication with members of the public through open dialogues and activating the role of the society in shaping future visions and strategies, the Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers is organising the second edition of 'Together We Make Progress' forum under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Sunday.

The forum aims to open yet another channel of communication and interaction between the government and society to enhance trust and partnership, learn about development policies, programmes and government initiatives, providing an opportunity for citizens to express their opinions and suggestions and share their interests with officials in an

environment suitable for exchanging opinions.

HH Sayyid Theyazin will participate in the second session of the forum to be held on Monday which aims to open channels of communication with the participants and address their aspirations and proposals. Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, will take part in the session.

MAIN TOPICS

The main topics of the forum include society and citizenship, education and learning, scientific research, national capabilities, welfare and social protection, health, developing the youth sector and the labour market and employment and the local media. The first day of the forum includes two main sessions with the participation of ministers who will talk about the integration of their institutions with the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040. **TURN TO P3**

'Leap of Hope' highlights need to save Arabian leopards

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

International Arabian Leopard Day, a day dedicated to the critically endangered species to which the Sultanate of Oman is home, the first occurrence since February 10 was officially recognised by the United Nations in 2023, was observed across the region with awareness campaigns.

There are less than 200 Arabian leopards in the wild, and the dwindling numbers have led the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)



In Oman, there are between 44 and 58 Arabian leopards.

to classify these as critically endangered. In Oman, there are between 44 and 58 of these creatures, according to a study.

Accordingly, the Arabian leopard has been legally protected by several Royal Decrees and a ministerial decision No 101/02 which prohibits its hunting or capture. Under Royal Decree No 6/2003, the penalty for hunting or capturing Arabian leopards includes imprisonment for a minimum of six months and maximum five years, and a fine ranging between RO 1,000 and RO 5,000. **TURN TO P3**

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 25°C Min 17°C SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 21°C NIZWA: Max 25°C Min 15°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:43 FAJR: 05:26 DHUHR: 12:26 ASR: 15:40 MAGHRIB: 18:04 ISHA: 19:16



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Forum to build bridges of communication with public

FROM PAGE 1

The ministers will share statistical data about the sectors under their ministries as well as their strategic goals and the most important future projects.

The first session will be addressed by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, CEO of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education.

The second session will be addressed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Nasser Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, Chairman of the Board of the Directors of the Social Protection Fund, and Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

The first day of the forum will include an open discussion session with the supervisors of the national programmes at the exhibition accompanying the forum.

It will focus on the integration and interrelation of national programmes with the Oman Vision 2040 with the participation of Dr Ali Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, Sayyid Dr Munther bin Hilal al Busaidy, Deputy Head of the Oman 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Furujiah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, and Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Owaini Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance.

Over 50,000 visit Oman Innovation Fest

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The Oman Innovation Festival 2024, which attracted over 50,000 visitors over six days drew to a close at the Innovation Complex in Muscat on Saturday.

The festival showcased over 50 scientific and entertainment events catering to diverse segments of society. Over 35 government and private institutions took part in the festival. Over 400 people attended the Innovation and Knowledge Economy Forum, while 85 took part in the Energy Hackathon. Over 1,000 people underwent training and took part in interactive workshops.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation. In the Energy Hackathon, Team Stellar from the Sultanate of Oman clinched the first position for their pioneering



Visitors at the Oman Innovation Festival.

project on a self-cleaning solar panel system. Team EcoSat from the United Arab Emirates secured the second spot for measuring air pollution emissions. Team Carbo-EcoGen System from Oman and Qatar shared the third position with their device to reduce carbon emissions and recycling organic waste. In the innovation competition for governorates, Al

Sharqiyah South was the winner, followed by Al Sharqiyah North and Al Dhahirah in second and third places.

In the "Together We Innovate" competition, the "Virtual Science Lab" project by Khalsah bint Hamad al Bahriya won first place. The 'Leap' won as the best project in tourism, the 'Eternal Days' in education, the 'Cunning Rabbit



Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation, presiding over the closing ceremony in Muscat on Saturday.

– Photos by Khalfan al Ruzaiki

and Fox Algorithm to Counter Cybersecurity Attacks' in logistics, 'NC-Soil' project in food security, the 'Nadeem' in health, and the 'Environmentally Friendly Bags' in energy.

Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Balushi, the festival director, highlighted the importance of providing a space for innovation, noting the importance of discussing

challenges and working on an executable plan to address them.

Opportunities were provided for startup companies to showcase their innovations to a panel of investors from Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt. Four companies secured partnerships with investors, while the remaining companies garnered interest for cooperation.

Muscat to get storm water drainage soon

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Muscat Municipality (MM) will construct storm water drainage to tackle flooding in Muscat Governorate. MM has floated a tender for bids with a deadline on March 18.

The project will be executed in the wilayats of Al Amerat, Al Seeb, Bausher, Muscat, Muttrah, and Qurayat. It may be noted that nearly 45 per cent of the areas in the capital are vulnerable to floods from wadis while another 20 per cent is subject to coastal floods, according to experts concerned



45 per cent of the areas in the capital are vulnerable to floods from wadis

with the Greater Muscat masterplan.

The project directors of the master plan had called for the need to identify areas of strategic

high risk and take precautions to deal with worst-case scenarios for the population such as easy access to hospitals and safety shelters.

According to the National

Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change for the Sultanate of Oman (2020-2040) of the Civil Aviation Authority, urban planners should consider the impact of heavy rainfall that usually follows the low-pressure systems in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

A work team will be allocated for each wilayat and the scope of the works includes construction of drainage networks, unlined/ lined ditches, pipe/box culverts, slope protection, channelsn, reinstatement works and utilities protection/relocation, etc.

'Leap of Hope' highlights need to save Arabian leopards

FROM PAGE 1

The Office for Conservation of Environment found the first scientific evidence of the Arabian leopard's presence in two separate locations west of Dhalkut in Dhofar Governorate in November 2020. Around the end of last year, the Environment Authority (EA) stated that the rare sighting of three adult Arabian leopards together was captured by camera traps in the mountains of the governorate. "The sightings of three adult Arabian leopards together are an indication of Oman's successful efforts to conserve this rare species and the presence of a robust ecological system and biodiversity in Dhofar. However, the active involvement and awareness of the local community has been instrumental in the success of these conservation measures," an official from the EA said.

To mark the occasion, the Royal Commission of AlUla has launched 'A Leap of Hope', an international campaign highlighting the need to increase Arabian leopards in the wild.

Named 'Leap of Hope' after the Arabian leopard's athletic prowess and ability to capture its prey in the wild, this year's campaign also emphasises the pressing need to increase wild population numbers – a 'leap' being the collective noun for a group of leopards. Dr Stephen Browne, Wildlife and Natural Heritage Vice President at RCU, said: "The International Day of the Arabian Leopard Day is an important opportunity to draw the world's attention to the plight of the Arabian leopard and to conserve and safeguard AlUla's natural environment."

First govt run fertility centre to open on Feb 14

MUSCAT: The Fertility Centre at Al Wattayah Obstetrics and Gynaecology Complex is the first government fertility centre in the Sultanate of Oman. It helps to realise dreams of men and women to have children.

The centre, which will officially open on February 14, includes a medical team comprising experienced doctors, technicians and embryologists. It is equipped with the latest laboratories to provide free medical care services to help men and women towards parenthood.

During the first year since its opening, the centre seeks

to receive and treat 1,000 cases, with the number rising to 1,500 cases in the second year.

In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is used in cases of blocked fallopian tubes in women and those with ovulation disorders. It is also useful for men with low sperm count or poor sperm motility.

IVF will be based on best international practices to increase the chances of pregnancy. The age of woman undergoing IVF should not exceed 42 years. She should not have a healthy child, and her body mass index should not exceed 35, which will increase chances

of successful treatment.

The mother's age is the main factor determining the success of intracytoplasmic sperm injection.

As a woman gets older, the success rates decrease, and the success rate of ICSI at the age of 40 is very low compared to ICSI at 30 or 20. The centre also offers to freeze eggs and sperm for individuals suffering from chronic diseases and disorders that affect their fertility.

The centre will receive infertility cases referred from all hospitals and clinics across governorates of Oman.





NAJAH AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

The concept of healthier lifestyles has evolved over time. In the past it was more focused on physical wellbeing, today, it encompasses an overall wellbeing with an emphasis on mindfulness, mental health, and sustainable practices. Today, 'health' is a term we associate with equilibrium, mindfulness, and sustainability; embracing practices like meditation, yoga, and conscientious eating as essential components of our quest towards a healthier life.

As Lara El Hibri, a clinical psychologist, explains: "People are becoming increasingly more conscious about mental health and the way it is intertwined with their overall wellbeing. We are witnessing a general sense of awakening which seems to have been set off after the coronavirus pandemic. People are educating themselves about mental health as their lifestyles are becoming more sophisticated and life is being much more demanding. It will not be surprising then to encounter increasing numbers of individuals setting mental health goals or striving for better mental health outcomes as their new year's resolutions. Social media influencers are putting a greater focus on mental health and the way their own efforts to become mentally resilient contributed to their own success stories".

Mental health is interconnected to all aspects of our life; it is the foundation that jumpstarts our physical wellbeing by allowing us the clarity, peace of mind, sound decisions and motivation to inspire actions. Today, our nation addresses the importance of mental health wellbeing with wellness centres

MENTAL HEALTH IS
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INSPIRE ACTIONS.

across Oman that offer individual and group sessions for a variety of aspects to support an individual's mental health.

From individual therapy sessions to group sessions, discussions and workshops all aimed towards strengthening our resilience in the face of challenges, supporting us where we need it more, and understanding that everybody's challenges, while different, are able to be overcome with the right support, resilience and effort.

Offentimes, all we need is a little guidance to make a world of difference.

Tamsyn Pereira, child developmental psychologist, said; "I believe we need to explore more non-traditional forms of healing. I find that my clients benefit from understanding how culture, society and traditions play a huge role in shaping our personalities to express individual needs, set healthy boundaries, and specifically build healthy attachments in all relationships".

As we continue to embrace a holistic approach to health, recognising the interconnectedness of mental and physical well-being, these wellness centres and initiatives play a crucial role in guiding individuals toward a balanced and fulfilling life.

The evolving narrative around mental health, coupled with accessible resources, not only reflects a societal shift but also signifies a collective commitment to building resilient and flourishing communities. In this era of awareness and support, the journey toward better mental health becomes a shared endeavour, where everyone's unique challenges are acknowledged and met with the encouragement needed to overcome them.



N-radiotherapy meeting showcases breakthroughs

MUSCAT: The International Conference on Nuclear Radiotherapy saw over 150 physicians and allied medical professionals from both within and outside the Sultanate of Oman taking part. The conference, aimed to delve into the forefront of scientific advancements in nuclear radiation therapy.

Dr Imad bin Shannoun al Tamimi, a consultant physician in nuclear medicine and head of the Scientific Committee of the International Conference on Nuclear Radiotherapy (ICRT), emphasised that the event seeks to explore and deliberate on the latest scientific progress in the field, focusing on mechanisms and methods for enhancing



The International Conference on Nuclear Radiotherapy was held in Muscat last week.

nuclear radiation therapy.

Dr. Al Tamimi revealed that the conference agenda includes over 40 presentations across nine scientific sessions, featuring an esteemed group of international lecturers.

Nuclear radiation therapy, a relatively recent addition to



medical practices, is dedicated to treating and managing cancerous diseases while mitigating complications compared to traditional chemotherapy. He underscored that the conference represents a significant contribution to raising awareness about the importance of this

treatment method, promoting its dissemination in the Sultanate of Oman and educating healthcare professionals on the latest developments in the field.

One notable presentation was delivered by Dr Ajit Bade Oyvind S Broland from Norway, who shared insights

from joint research published in the *Frontiers* newspaper. The lecture, titled ‘Using Radioactive Elements with Targeted Alpha Particles to Treat Tumours’, highlighted innovative approaches in the application of nuclear radiation for therapeutic purposes.

The conference also featured the presentation of lifetime achievement awards to distinguished medical professionals in the field of nuclear medicine from Oman, acknowledging their substantial contributions to the development of nuclear medicine.

The opening ceremony of the conference was sponsored by Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry

of Health for Health Affairs. Alongside the conference, an exhibition showcased various aspects of nuclear radiation treatments, including posters and brochures from participating entities.

Organised by the Ministry of Health, represented by the General Directorate of Health Services of Dhofar Governorate and Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah, the conference received collaborative support from the International Association for Pharmaceutical and Molecular Therapy, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, the Sultan Qaboos Integrated Centre for Cancer Treatment and Research, and the Medical City for Military and Security Units. — ONA

OHRC takes part in Doha conference on food justice

DOHA: A delegation from the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) headed by Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of OHRC, concluded its participation in the International Conference on Food Justice from a Human Rights Perspective, which was held in Doha under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar.

The conference was organised by the Qatari National Human Rights Committee, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the League of Arab States. It aimed to provide a global dialogue platform for the exchange of knowledge and experiences, building capacities and reviewing legislation, policies, plans and

programmes concerned with food justice, and developing the basis and frameworks for organisations working in the field of food and human rights.

Dr Al Balushi presided over the third session of the second day. He also presented a working paper that dealt with the role of national human rights institutions, non-governmental organisations, civil society and stakeholders in enforcing the right to food and food justice according to a human rights-based approach. The role of the OHRC in cooperating with contractual, non-contractual and regional mechanisms and developing the role of the committee through monitoring, documenting and writing reports.

In his working paper, the chairman of the OHRC indicated that the OHRC monitored the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in promoting the right to food as the Sultanate of Oman ranked third in the Arab world in the 2022 World Food Security Index report issued by the British magazine *The Economist* in 2023.

Arabwood invites projects film-makers from Oman

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

Arabwood has invited ambitious international projects from the film-makers in the country to compete with the rest of the world in terms of quality and craftsmanship.

Arabwood, the term coined with the forthcoming Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF) which is to be held from March 3 to 7 this year, will host film screening, workshops and master classes.

Arabwood’s primary objective is to provide a robust platform for Oman’s film-makers to showcase their creativity, engage in international collaborations, and propel the Omani film industry to unprecedented heights, according to the organisers. “This initiative opens doors for aspiring film-makers, offering crucial support, guidance, and financial assistance for their projects,” Sudha Radhika, in charge of international coordination at the MIFF told the *Observer*.

Submissions for Arabic movie projects that vividly depict the rich tapestry of Arabian lifestyle and culture, with a special focus on incorporating stories from gulf region and scenic locations in Oman can be submitted. The deadline for submissions is March 1.

“We encourage Omani nationals or residents with a passion for film-making to collaborate and form teams of 2 or 3

members, ideally consisting of a writer-director and a producer, or a director, a writer, and a producer. We particularly welcome applications from producers with a proven track record of production experience and screenwriters who have demonstrated their capabilities through realised scripts in any format,” she added.

The selected teams will undergo comprehensive pre-production sessions facilitated by industry experts to refine their projects.

Arabwood is aiming at selecting 5 feature film projects, 10 short films, and 5 documentaries. The chosen teams will partake in one-on-one meetings with key decision-makers; gain visibility through project pitching, and network with industry professionals. By the programme’s conclusion, teams will possess all necessary documents to approach potential regional and international partners.

She further said that those who are interested in submitting project proposals, should adhere to the rules and regulations:

Project in submission should be in English; if originally in Arabic, provide a translated copy, along with its synopsis, treatment, suggestions for artists, technicians, cast, crew and locations.

This who submit nominations should provide comprehensive biographies and filmographies of the director, writer and producer.

Winners of Family Hero Programme feted

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Young Omani students, who were winners of the Oman Refco’s ‘Family Hero Programme’ were feted by Her Highness Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said with awards and certificates of appreciation at a glittering ceremony in Muscat last month.

‘Family Hero Programme’ is a transformative CSR initiative initiated by Oman Refco in collaboration with the National Training Institute (NTI), aimed at equipping the next generation with fundamental knowledge in household electrical repairs.

This pioneering initiative focuses on training young minds to troubleshoot and fix basic electrical issues in appliances such as refrigerators, air conditioners and washing machines.

As many as 20 enthusiastic students were trained in its inaugural phase programme held from January 14 to 24, 2024. HH Sayyidah Hujaija awarded the certificates to the participating Omani students.





MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (3/2024)

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PRE/23/215 Re-Call	Replacement of existing Lighting at Al Seeb	15/02/2024	22/02/2024
PRE/24/007	Paving Works at Al Amirat	26/02/2024	18/03/2024
PRE/24/033	Activation Works for Traffic Control Center – Phase 2	26/02/2024	18/03/2024
PRE/24/036	Remedial Works for Bridge at Muscat Governorate	26/02/2024	18/03/2024
PRE/24/037	Removal, Supply & Laying of Road Marking at Muscat Governorate	26/02/2024	18/03/2024

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ISC-Deccani Wing Oman hosts mega family event

MUSCAT: The ISC-Deccani Wing Oman mega-family event was held at the Al Rahba Farm House in Muscat on February 2. The event offered a wide range of activities for all ages from Hyderabad, India, residing in Oman. The event displayed a variety of games designed for women, men and children, ensuring wholesome entertainment for families.

Attendees were treated to a mesmerising magic show, fancy dress competition and an exhilarating live music performance.

Mohammed Mansoor Sabri, Co-Convener of ISC Deccani Wing, said, “We were thrilled to see the turnout surpassing our expectations. This further reinforces the community’s enthusiasm and support for the Deccani Wing initiatives.”

The Deccani Wing extended its gratitude to all sponsors, organisers, and volunteers who contributed to the success of the mega-family event. The event’s success can be attributed not only to the exciting activities but also to the generous support of sponsors, the dedication of organisers, and the hard work of enthusiastic volunteers. Their combined efforts transformed the event into a memorable experience for all who attended.



JOB VACANCY

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- Bachelor’s degree or higher in business, finance, or a related field.
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If you are interested please drop your CV at:
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US President Joe Biden meets with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in White House, Washington, DC. – AFP

Scholz, Biden urge Congress to agree on Ukraine aid

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned against any relaxing of Western support for Ukraine during the German leader's visit to the White House on Friday.

Scholz said that if the US Congress did not manage to vote in favour of further funding for Kiev, the ability of the Ukrainian armed forces to defend their own country against the Russian invasion would be threatened.

Support from the United States was "essential," Scholz said. "We are both convinced that this must happen, but also confident that the US Congress will in the end come to a decision (to provide aid)," he said after the talks with Biden, which lasted about one hour and 45 minutes.

Biden, who has been trying for months to get billions in new aid through parliament, has warned that a failure by Congress to approve it would be "close to criminal neglect."

Ahead of the meeting, Scholz said the funding was crucial also to send a clear message to the Russian President Vladimir

Putin about solid Western support. He condemned "lies" that Putin had told about the war.

Biden for his part praised Germany for its support for Ukraine: "You've done something no one thought could get done: You've doubled Germany's military aid to Ukraine this year. And it's really important."

"We got to step up and do our part now," Biden said ahead of the talks.

The meeting between Scholz and Biden was the centrepiece of a short 24-hour visit by Scholz to the US capital, his third such trip since Scholz became chancellor in 2021.

Republicans in the US Congress have so far blocked further aid packages for Ukraine, while Scholz has struggled to cajole fellow European leaders into substantially increasing funding and weapons shipments for Ukraine's military.

Scholz's lobbying efforts have focused in particular on several large, wealthy European countries such as France, Spain and Italy. — **dpa**

IMRAN KHAN'S PARTY SAYS IT AIMS TO FORM GOVERNMENT

ISLAMABAD: Candidates backed by the party of jailed Pakistani opposition leader Imran Khan plan to form a government, a senior aide to the former prime minister said on Saturday, urging supporters to peacefully protest if final election results are not released.

The South Asian nation of 241 million people voted on Thursday in a general election, as the country struggles to recover from an economic crisis and battles militant violence in a deeply polarised political environment.

Both Khan and his main rival, three-time former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, declared victory on Friday, increasing uncertainty over who will form the next government at a time when swift policy action is needed to address multiple challenges.

Gohar Khan, the chairman of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party who also acts as the former prime minister's lawyer, called on "all institutions" in Pakistan to respect his party's mandate.

At a press conference, he said if complete results of the polls were not released by Saturday night, the party would hold peaceful protests on Sunday outside government offices returning election results around the country.

Sharif said on Friday his party had emerged as the single largest group and would talk to other groups to form a coalition government.

By 5 pm on Saturday, results were still not in for 10 of the 265 seats contested in the election — 48 hours since the polls closed.



Supporters of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) protest outside an election commission office in Karachi. – AFP

The latest tally, posted on the election commission's website, showed independent candidates had won 100 seats, with Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) taking 72 seats.

At least 90 of the victorious independent candidates were backed by Khan and his party, a Reuters analysis showed — putting them well ahead of

Sharif's party.

Khan's supporters were running as independents because they had been barred from the polls by the election commission for not complying with electoral laws. Despite the ban and Khan's imprisonment for convictions on charges ranging from leaking state secrets to corruption to an unlawful marriage, millions of

Khan's rival Sharif had said would form coalition government as Khan-backed independents won most seats in national election

the former cricketer's supporters came out to vote for him.

However, under Pakistan's electoral laws, independent candidates are not eligible to be allocated reserved seats, 70 of which are meant to be distributed according to party strength. Sharif's party could get up to 20 of these seats.

Khan's close aide and media adviser, Zulfi Bukhari, told Reuters the party would announce within the next day the party banner they will ask independents to join. In Pakistan, independent candidates cannot form a government on their own and need to join a party.

"And we have no fear of independents going anywhere, because these are the people who have struggled for the last 18 months and endured all kinds of torture and oppression," Bukhari told Reuters in a WhatsApp voice message.

Whoever seeks to form the next government would need support from other parties with no one close to the seat threshold for a simple majority in parliament.

Beside Khan and Sharif, the Pakistan Peoples Party of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of assassinated premier Benazir Bhutto, remains a major player with at least 53 seats. — **Reuters**

Indonesians pack out stadiums for final election rallies

JAKARTA: Around 100,000 people filled a Jakarta stadium on Saturday for a huge rally in support of Indonesian presidential election front runner Prabowo Subianto, just days ahead of one of the world's biggest one-day votes.

Supporters also turned out in their tens of thousands for the final rallies of his rival candidates — former provincial governors Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo — in the battle to lead the massive, Muslim-majority nation.

Third-time candidate Subianto, the current defence minister, is

More than 204 million Indonesians will choose their next president, parliamentarians and thousands of local officials on Feb 14

leading Baswedan and Pranowo by double digits in polls ahead of Wednesday's vote.

"Me, my father and mother have supported Prabowo continuously since 2014," said Novita Agustina, a 24-year-old first-time voter who travelled four hours to see the ex-general speak.



Presidential candidate and Indonesia's Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto during a campaign rally at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta. – AFP

She lauded his work as defence minister and shrugged off rights groups' concerns about his track record, saying criticism was "just attacks from opponents... I don't want to hear anything bad".

Others praised his tenacity in running a third time for the presidency.

The crowd at the national stadium cheered as the 72-year-old Subianto launched into a characteristically fiery address.

"We will fight to bring prosperity for all people of Indonesia," he said.

"We will continue what was

already being built by previous presidents."

Many Subianto supporters wore blue shirts, some emblazoned with an AI cartoon image of his face that has become synonymous with his campaign.

Subianto has campaigned on a pledge to eradicate extreme poverty, provide free school meals to children and milk to pregnant women, and continue President Joko Widodo's development drive.

The capital's streets were brought to a standstill by throngs of scooters and cars heading to the rallies. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

MANILA

Quake halts search at Philippines landslide disaster

A strong earthquake in the southern Philippines halted a search for scores of people believed buried in a deadly landslide, forcing rescuers to vacate the area, officials said.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage from the magnitude 5.8 quake that shook the Mindanao region at 11:22 am but rescuers were ordered to stop their search in the remote gold-mining village of Masara.

A massive landslide buried



a bus terminal and 55 houses near an Apex Mining Co gold mine on Tuesday night, killing 28 people, mostly miners, and leaving 32 injured, according to an updated official tally. — **AFP**

TOKYO

US special envoy on N Korea to visit Tokyo, Seoul

The US special envoy on North Korean human rights issues, Julie Turner, will travel to Tokyo and Seoul from Monday, the State Department said.

On the visit through February 22, Turner will meet with government officials, activists and North Korean defectors, the department said in a news release on its website on Friday.

"Special Envoy Turner's trip will underscore the US commitment to promoting human rights in North Korea,



increasing access to uncensored information within the closed country, and empowering survivor voices advocating for concrete change," the release said. — **Reuters**

SAIX

Thunberg joins banned anti-motorway protest

Climate activist Greta Thunberg joined a banned anti-motorway protest in southern France where police fired tear gas and made arrests a day earlier. A global figure in the fight against climate change, Thunberg has been fined by one Swedish court for her direct action protests there. But she saw another case against her thrown out by an English court last week. Wearing a Palestinian scarf and an anorak, Thunberg joined other protesters under heavy rain at the site in Saix



where a new motorway — the A69 linking the southwestern city of Toulouse to the town of Castres — is planned. They held up banners saying "Stop A69". — **AFP**



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gaza

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PALESTINIANS PREPARE FOR RAFAH ASSAULT

DOHA/TEL AVIV: Israeli air strikes killed 17 people in Gaza's Rafah overnight, medics said on Saturday, as over a million Palestinians cramming into the border city await a full-blown offensive with the rest of their enclave in ruins and nowhere left to run.

Four months into the war in Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said it has ordered the military to develop a plan to evacuate the population of Rafah and destroy four Hamas battalions it says are deployed there.

Unlike in previous Israeli assaults on cities during the war, when the military ordered civilians to flee south, no other relatively unscathed area remains in tiny Gaza and aid agencies have warned that large numbers of civilians could die.

"Any Israeli incursion in Rafah means massacres, means destruction. People are filling every inch of the city and we have nowhere to go," said Rezik Salah, 35, who fled his Gaza City home with his wife and two children for Rafah early in the war.

The conflict in Gaza began on October 7 when Hamas gunmen stormed border defences to attack Israeli towns, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and dragging around 250 hostages back to Gaza according to Israeli tallies.

Israel responded with a massive bombardment and ground offensive in which about 28,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have been killed, according to medical authorities in Hamas-run Gaza.

The conflict has threatened to spread across the Middle East, with Israel and Lebanon's Hizbullah regularly trading fire, and flare-ups in Syria, Iraq and



A firefighter extinguishes a burning car hit by an Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters



A Palestinian boy stands at the site of an Israeli strike on a house in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

on one Rafah house killed 11 people and wounded dozens more, while a second strike killed six people in another house, medical officials said.

In the other main southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, where many displaced people initially fled before an Israeli offensive there last month, the Palestinian Health Ministry voiced alarm at Israeli operations around the main Nasser Hospital.

The ministry said Israeli forces had surrounded the hospital and were shooting in the vicinity, and it was concerned about the fate of 300 medical staff, 450 patients and 10,000 people sheltering there.

Footage circulating on social media, which could not independently verify, showed tanks at the hospital gates.

Israel's military said in an update on fighting on Saturday that its forces were continuing "intensive" activities in Khan Younis as well as northern and central Gaza, killing fighters, seizing weapons and striking infrastructure.

It did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the situation at Nasser hospital.

In Gaza City, the first major population centre that Israel's operation targeted after ground forces invaded in late October, residents reported fierce fighting on Saturday.

An Israeli official who declined to be named said that Israel would try to organise for people in Rafah to be moved back northwards ahead of any assault.

Egypt has said it will not allow any mass displacement of Palestinians into its territory. Palestinians fear that Israel means to drive them from their homeland then forbid

— Reuters

Six-year-old Gaza girl found dead days after pleading for help

GAZA STRIP: Six-year-old Hind Rajab pleaded to be rescued, after her family's car came under fire in war-ravaged Gaza City, leaving her alone, frightened and wounded, surrounded by the bodies of her dead relatives.

"I am so scared," she had said in a desperate phone call to the Palestinian Red Crescent. "Call someone to come get me, please."

But after more than two weeks of frantic efforts to reach her, Hind's body was recovered on Saturday, along with those of relatives and two Red Crescent rescue workers sent to find her.

The Red Crescent and the health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip confirmed the grim discovery, and blamed Israeli forces.

Hamas urged human rights groups and the international community to document what it called a "horrific crime".

Hind's mother, Wissam Hamada, blamed her death on "the unbelievers" Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Joe Biden "and all those who conspired against Gaza and its people".

"I will question before God on Judgment Day those who heard my daughter's cries for help and did not save her," she said.



Palestinian girl Hind Rajab

Hind's highly publicised case comes as aid agencies warn that children and families are bearing the brunt of Israel's war with Hamas.

Children are dying "at an alarming rate" in Gaza, the UN children's agency Unicef said. Thousands have been killed and many more wounded, with others at risk because of lack of food, water and medicines, it added.

Hind was last heard from after becoming trapped in the family's vehicle with other relatives as they tried to flee Gaza City from an Israel advance.

"Hind and everyone else in the car is martyred," the girl's

I will question before God on Judgment Day those who heard my daughter's cries for help and did not save her

WISSAM HAMADA
Mother of Hind Rajab

grandfather, Baha Hamada, said on Saturday.

A number of family members found them when they went to Gaza City's Tel al Hawa area looking for the car near a petrol station where it had last been spotted, he said.

"They were able to reach the area because Israeli forces withdrew early at dawn today," added Hamada, one of the last people to speak to the girl on the telephone.

"She was killed by (Israeli) occupation forces with all those who were with her in the car outside the petrol station in Tel al Hawa," the ministry said in a statement.

The Red Crescent said the Israeli military "deliberately targeted the ambulance upon its arrival at the scene" despite "prior coordination" allowing it through.

Earlier this week, family members said the group found its path blocked by advancing Israeli tanks and was fired on as it tried to flee.

Hind initially survived the shooting and managed to talk to her family by telephone and make an emergency call, which the Red Crescent published on February 3.

"For over three hours, Hind desperately pleaded for rescue from the occupation (Israeli) tanks surrounding her, enduring gunfire and the horror of being alone, trapped among the bodies of her relatives shot by the Israeli forces in front of her eyes," it added.

Nothing more was then heard from the young girl, even as the ambulance was sent to get her, the organisation said. Her grandfather said she was wounded in the back, hand and foot.

"She was frightened, terrified," he said sobbing. "Hind is my first grandchild, she's a piece of my heart."

— AFP

Medics say Israeli forces raid Khan Younis hospital

GAZA STRIP: Israeli forces on Friday raided a hospital in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis which has been besieged for weeks, said the Palestinian Red Crescent Society which runs the facility.

"The occupation (Israeli) forces stormed Al Amal hospital and started searching it. We're finding it difficult to communicate with our crews inside the hospital," a PRCs statement said.

The Israeli army confirmed troops were carrying out an operation.

"Based on intelligence indicating Hamas is conducting terrorist activities within Al Amal hospital in Khan Younis, a precise sweep and clear operation to locate terrorists and dismantle infrastructure in the vicinity has commenced," the army said.

Later on, the PRCs said Israeli forces had arrested eight of its team members at the hospital, including "four doctors, as well as four wounded individuals and five patients' companions".

Al Amal has been caught in fierce fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas fighters, with the Red Crescent reporting "intense artillery shelling and heavy gunfire" continuing around the hospital on Thursday.

The medical organisation has in recent days made repeated pleas for supplies and protection, reporting severe shortages of oxygen, medicines and fuel to power the hospital.

Earlier this week, the Red Crescent said some 8,000 people who had sought shelter at Al Amal and its nearby Khan Younis headquarters were evacuated.

A video published by the organisation showed a medic wheeling an elderly woman through a damaged street on a



Mourners react following the death of Palestinians in Israeli strikes at Abu Yousef A Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

hospital bed.

Around 40 displaced people, 80 patients and 100 staff remained following the evacuation, the PRCs said on Monday.

Hospitals are granted special protection under the laws of war, but they have been repeatedly hit in Gaza over the past four months.

There are no fully functioning hospitals left in the Palestinian territory, the United Nations said on Wednesday, while just over a third of them are working at limited capacity.

Health facilities have been overwhelmed by the scale of casualties, with more than 67,000 people wounded during the war in Gaza.

Israel's relentless air, sea and land assault has killed at least 27,947 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

The war erupted with an unprecedented October 7 attack by Hamas activists on Israel which resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people, mostly civilians, according to a tally based on official Israeli figures.

— AFP

The boy who was raised as a girl



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

In 1965 twin boys Brian and Bruce were born to a Canadian. Unfortunately, a circumcision procedure at the age of two resulted in a tragic accident, causing Bruce to lose his male organ.

The couple felt devastated but had some hope after consulting Dr John Money, a psychologist from Johns Hopkins Hospital who was a pioneer in sex change at that time.

Dr Money believed that gender identity is shaped by social upbringing and not genetic or hormonal. Dr Money recommended a sex operation and hormonal treatment, so Bruce was brought up as a girl called Brend.

The family kept the big secret from the twins and Dr Money conducted regular sessions to train Bruce — who is now Brenda — to play with girls’ toys and dress like girls and later join a girls’ school.

He continued to observe the twins and record their behaviours. In his paper, he wrote about Brenda “The girl had many tomboy traits, such as abundant physical energy, a high level of activity, stubbornness, and being often the dominant one in

a girl’s group”.

However, Brenda suffered from severe psychological and emotional difficulties reaching the point of contemplating suicide.

It was at this critical juncture that the parents decided to reveal the truth — Brenda had been born a boy. Within weeks of this revelation, Brenda chose to revert to her original identity and undergo hormonal therapy and a sex change operation to become a boy named David. He even married a woman but could not have children himself.

When he reached the age of thirties, he became more depressed, lost his job, and was separated from his wife.

In May 2004 he committed suicide. This case challenges the social learning theory of gender development which argues that if children receive positive reinforcement, they are motivated to continue a particular behaviour but if they receive punishment or other indicators of disapproval, they tend to stop that behaviour.

When applied to gender development, children are praised when they look and do what is expected of their gender culturally and they get punished if

THE SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY OF GENDER DEVELOPMENT ARGUES THAT WHEN CHILDREN RECEIVE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT, THEY ARE MOTIVATED TO CONTINUE A PARTICULAR BEHAVIOUR BUT IF THEY RECEIVE PUNISHMENT OR DISAPPROVAL, THEY TEND TO STOP THAT BEHAVIOUR

they do the opposite.

However, this theory alone cannot explain how one identifies as a male or female because genetic factors and sex hormones play significant roles.

This is very important when one tries to understand sex change operations which have become more popular in Western countries and gaining popularity in other cultures.

Advocates of these operations focus mainly on the social influence of gender roles which can be misleading to many people causing them to rush into adopting surgical measures without assessing the psychological elements.

While reading more about this subject you often learn about people who regret the sex change and continue to experience negative emotions along with being rejected by their friends and family or not getting the emotional peace they were hoping for.

In my opinion, people experiencing gender dysphoria, i.e. not accepting the body they are in should seek a medical opinion from a trustworthy doctor before making any major decisions that could make their lives more miserable.

Indonesia candidates turn to K-pop to pull votes

SATYA ADHI, AGNES ANYA

Indonesia holds its presidential election on Wednesday but candidates are looking to another country’s export to win votes -- K-pop, the South Korean sensation that has swept much of the world.

At an event held by young volunteers for candidate Anies Baswedan in the capital Jakarta, die-hard K-pop fans had photoshopped his face with sunglasses on merchandise fashioning him in the style of a South Korean pop star.

In Indonesia, megastars BTS and other K-pop groups are extremely popular, giving politicians another route to appeal to young people. Millennials and Gen Zers make up more than half of the country’s electorate.

Hundreds gathered in a noisy crowd on Thursday evening, some holding posters, paper fans and stickers emblazoned with Baswedan’s face in a K-pop style.

“It is funny, very contemporary,” said tax analyst Nurul Hidayah, a supporter of Baswedan.

“Usually the campaign materials are old-fashioned, too boring. But this is very fun.”

Others had put his cartoon image on T-shirts and his campaign’s name on neon products.

Baswedan is battling front-runner and Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto, and former Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo for the presidency.

The country’s own BTS fanbase -- known as ARMY -- has held online fundraisers to support political causes before, and now candidates are trying to rally them behind their own campaigns.

Baswedan has replicated K-pop stars’ livestreams on the campaign trail, posting videos of himself on TikTok answering supporters’ questions from his car.

It has earned him the nickname “Park Ahn Nice” online, which is a modified phonetic Korean translation of “Sir Anies”.

“I think it is a good strategy for them to use the K-pop trends,” said 32-year-old entrepreneur Hafidz Surapranata.

“This campaign is really unique.”

Some K-pop fans were no longer “allergic” to talking about politics because of the campaign tactics, according to digital anthropologist Karlina Octaviany.

“It is effective in gaining voters’ awareness,” she said. A Twitter account set up by alleged K-pop fans to promote Baswedan’s campaign has amassed more than 120,000 followers. — AFP



Norimitsu Onishi

The writer is a Japanese-Canadian journalist and Paris correspondent for TNYT

In remote Canada, a college becomes a magnet for Indian students

On a college campus in northern Canada, eight hours by car from Toronto, most of the students who fill the classrooms are from a country half a world away: India.

The young men and women stretching on mats in the gymnasium are more likely to be from Punjab or Gujarat, two Indian states, rather than rural Ontario. Hindi and Punjabi drowned out English in the cafeteria’s lunchtime cacophony.

In the surrounding city of Timmins, the servers at two new Indian restaurants do not ask customers how spicy they want their dishes. A shuttered bar named Gibby’s has been reopened as a Sikh temple, or gurdwara, where students from the school, Northern College, gathered on a recent evening.

“We feel like we are in India,” said Mehardeep Singh, 20, a general arts and science major, who led a prayer. “In every class, there are only three or four local people. The rest are from India.”

Northern College traditionally drew its students from the province of Ontario’s vast, sparsely populated hinterland, a region dominated by miners and loggers. Today, a whopping 82 per cent of the public college’s students come from abroad — nearly all from India.

How a Canadian college — in a remote town most Canadians have never visited, where winters can feel subarctic — became a magnet for young Indians is the story of the many forces buffeting the country.

Public colleges and universities, hit hard by budget cuts, have grown dependent on the higher tuitions international students must pay. For students from abroad, the institutions can be a conduit to permanent Canadian residence, and for Canada, the students help reduce labour shortages and increase the country’s flagging productivity.

More than 60 per cent of foreign students in Ontario’s public colleges are from India — a dependence that the



Harinder Singh and Menakpreet Kaur, both early childhood education students at Northern College, during an in-class exercise with local children, in Timmins, Ontario. — TNYT

province’s auditor general identified as a risk to the schools’ long-term survival.

As a result, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s accusations in September that the Indian government was involved in the killing of a Canadian Sikh separatist near Vancouver, British

CANADA’S PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES INCREASINGLY RELY ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY FROM INDIA, EVEN AS TENSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS HAVE FLARED

Columbia, sent tremors through Ontario’s educational institutions.

The episode has strained relations between Canada and India, which categorically denied any involvement and forced out 41 Canadian diplomats.

At Northern College — where Indians make up 96 per cent of all foreign students — officials said they would intensify efforts to recruit more students from Africa and Indonesia to reduce their dependence on India.

“We don’t want all our eggs in one basket,” said Audrey Penner, the college’s president, adding that if the tensions between India and Canada persisted, “our market might dry up regardless of any efforts that we take.”

Founded in 1967, Northern, like other public colleges in Ontario, was established to develop a workforce suitable for its region. That meant training young people to work in mining, technology and health care.

Before Northern College looked overseas, its student population peaked a quarter-century ago at about 2,000, Penner said, but declining regional birthrates and migration to bigger cities pushed enrolment down to about 1,300 a decade ago. At the same time, Northern and other colleges began facing cuts in government funding and tuition freezes.

Northern — and other colleges and universities in Canada — began aggressively looking overseas. The Canadian government said it was on track to host 900,000 foreign students this year, three times as many as a decade ago.

Northern appeared to tap into an increasingly rich segment of the Indian population, with many students saying they were the first in their families to study overseas.

— The New York Times

Kids can't be right... all the time

Apparently many kids in our classrooms today feel they need to be perfect, and that making mistakes is just the first crack in a wall of invincibility, and that's why so many of them demonstrate poor classroom behaviour. They don't have our experience of 'making mistakes.' We do all make them.

This issue was raised by researchers Adelson and Wilson (2009), when they investigated flipped scenarios, where kids today feel the need to be perfect, in the face of seemingly faultless teachers, who when they make mistakes, 'fix' them without missing a step. "For children who believe their best is rarely good enough, perfectionism can lead to guilt, lack of motivation, low self-esteem, depression pessimism, obsessive and compulsive behaviour and a sense of rigidity."

So, the level of perfection the kids see in front of them, day after day, simply creates more pressure within them, to either be similarly 'perfect,' or creating a distraction, a diversion, rather than to possibly be wrong when they are asked for a response. They don't know that teachers will rarely ask a young learner for a response without knowing they know the answer. It's almost teaching 101. So, we have a live opportunity for change within such environments. We must create environments that will ease the pressure they must feel, allowing more class contributions, developing greater self-appreciation, self-confidence, and self-esteem, all massive influences on effective learning.

Our learners will interact much more effectively with us, whether as teachers, or later as lecturers, if we exhibit some sign of vulnerability. Not for a moment suggesting that we should be looking to manufacture a situation of vulnerability, but rather to be awake to an opportunity to do so, should one present itself. Thomas Kane (2012), prominent in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, was asked, "Do you really think you can quantify the 'art' of teaching?" He responded



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that was not the question we should be asking, as it is impossible to codify all the nuances of great teaching. However, he felt that the teacher's usefulness may depend less on their ability to be without peer, than them having a reliable image, not outstanding, not super, but reliable. In other words, not to be perfect, but like their students, flawed somewhat, allowing them to feel better about themselves, while they are in the classroom.

The psychology of learning is fickle, yet, if we are to believe Maslow's (1943) 'Hierarchy of needs,' ensuring our students feel safe, secure, and comfortable, and being able to relate to their teacher, comes a very close second to their physiological needs of food, water, and shelter. Graham Holderness (1989) explained that the teacher is often idolised, but a flawed hero draws greater empathy. So, it may never be a terribly 'bad' thing to have some element of themselves, 'laid bare,' that flaw and its virtue ensuring they retain the learner's admiration and respect, for longer.

Setting a high benchmark in terms of something, anything, is important, and two things that are very simple to implement, and are remarkably effective in setting standards for our learners. These clearly reinforce the character of our teaching processes, but also offer numerous opportunities for developing effective learning relationships in line with the 'human' element of being a teacher. Being early to class, well-prepared, and having some processes in place sets a standard that can be casually laced with informality.

Being fastidious about having the day, date, topic, and a starter task on the board, with relevant resources gives certainty every lesson, and make it easy for them to 'ease' into the learning. These are not things that the students will identify as staggeringly important, but they will understand, without being told, this is the way it must be. Teachers don't want to be heroes, but do want to change lives, and if all it takes is a little self-deprecation... we can do that!

THE LEVEL OF PERFECTION THE KIDS SEE IN FRONT OF THEM, DAY AFTER DAY, SIMPLY CREATES MORE PRESSURE WITHIN THEM

YEAR OF THE DRAGON!



The head of a dragon rests on top of the staircase before the start of celebrations at the St Paul's Ruins in Macau on Saturday, on the first day of the Lunar New Year of the Dragon. – AFP

The competitive edge of doing good

It seems counterintuitive, but in a capitalist economy, doing the most good can provide a competitive edge. I am not referring to businesses that donate a tiny percentage of their profits to charities or tell you that they are reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. I am talking about businesses that donate 100 per cent of their profits — or close to it — to effective charities that do a lot of good.

Newman's Own, the American food company founded in 1982 by the actor Paul Newman and author A E Hotchner (both now deceased), is an early example of a business donating 100 per cent of its profits to charity. The profits go to the Newman's Own Foundation, which to date has distributed over \$600 million to charities working for disadvantaged children. Hugh Jackman cites Newman's Own as an inspiration for his own charitable foundation, Laughing Man Coffee.

Perhaps the most prominent company operating along these lines today is Patagonia, the American outdoor-clothing company founded by Yvon Chouinard in 1973. Nearly 50 years later, when the company was valued at around \$3 billion, Chouinard gave it to a non-profit organisation, ensuring that all its profits will be used to protect the environment and fight climate change.

The arrangement commenced in September 2022. So far, profits amounting to \$71 million have been allocated for environmental initiatives



Peter Singer

The writer is Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, is Founder of the nonprofit organisation The Life You Can Save

MANY COMPANIES BELIEVE THAT DONATING A TINY PERCENTAGE OF THEIR PROFITS TO CHARITIES OR PROMOTING EFFORTS TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE-GAS EMISSIONS IS GOOD FOR THE BOTTOM LINE. IN FACT, GIVING AWAY 100% OF A COMPANY'S PROFITS CAN BE EVEN BETTER FOR BUSINESS

that include stopping a proposed mine in Alaska and conserving land in South America, as well as for helping to elect pro-environment Democrats in the United States.

Chouinard's decision, supported by his wife and two adult children, to give away his company, is especially laudable because, to enable the non-profit organisation to have the option of supporting political candidates, the family had to forego substantial tax benefits from their huge donation.

Wonderful as it is that Patagonia's profits will always support the protection of the environment, the company's success does not prove that doing the most good provides a business with a competitive advantage. After all, although Patagonia is notable for many beneficial policies, including donating 1 per cent of its total sales to environmental organisations and promoting the repair, exchange, and recycling of its clothing, these innovations largely came after the company was successful. Its initial success reflected, to a significant degree, the desirability of the goods it was selling.

Now that it is clear that all of Patagonia's profits will go toward protecting the environment, will the company do even better? Vincent van der Holst, an online marketer, believes that it will.

He argues that companies that donate their profits to good causes "grow faster, live longer, and are more profitable." Accordingly, he has created BOAS, a platform for selling vintage jeans that has pledged to donate 90 per cent of its profits to effective charities saving the lives of children dying from preventable diseases in low-income countries. (Disclosure: I have invested €500, or \$537, in BOAS, with the expectation that the most significant return on my investment will be the knowledge that it has helped to save lives.)

BOAS is not yet earning enough to be cited as an example of a successful company that was founded for no other reason than to earn money for good causes. Humanitix, a ticketing agency founded by two Australians, Adam McCurdie and Joshua Ross, in 2016, is a better example of a business gaining a competitive edge by donating 100 per cent

of its profits to highly effective charities.

McCurdie and Ross went on a hiking trip through Sri Lanka shortly after the end of that country's tragic civil war in 2009. The poverty and hardship they witnessed made them resolve to work together to help children who had been less fortunate than they had been.

McCurdie was an engineer, and Ross a financial analyst. How might they work together to do the most good? The unexpected answer was to start a ticketing agency. Like most people who buy tickets for events online, they disliked seeing the price of their tickets go up when the ticketing agency added its fee, aware that their purchases were increasing the profits for a faceless group of owners. Yet the convenience of booking tickets online means that for most event organisers, there is no feasible alternative to using an

agency, and no basis for choosing one agency rather than another.

But what if there were a ticketing agency that did not make profits for its (presumably rich) owners, but was wholly owned by a charitable foundation, so that, by law, all its profits would go to a cause that almost everyone would endorse, like helping children in extreme poverty? Ticket purchasers would feel more positive about that agency than they do about other agencies, and some of their positive feelings would flow toward the event itself, and its organisers, who would have a reason to prefer that ticket agency over others.

That was McCurdie and Ross's theory, anyway. With support from the Atlassian Foundation and the government of New South Wales, they were able to test it. Humanitix has become the fastest-growing ticketing platform in Australia and New Zealand, and is now establishing itself in the United States. Despite the need to reinvest much of its profits to ensure future growth, Humanitix has already donated \$4 million to effective charities assisting children and is on track to donate an additional \$5 million in 2024.

The theory works for ticketing agencies. Doing the most good does provide a competitive edge. Further applications are waiting to be discovered.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



In a capitalist economy, doing the most good can provide a competitive edge.



Caleb Ewan clinches Tour of Oman opening

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Australian rider Caleb Ewan of Jayco Al Ula team won the opening stage of the 13th edition of Tour of Oman 2024 which began on Saturday at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah. The 30 years old produced an impressive show in the 181.5 km distance race which concluded at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre to claim the title of the stage. He controlled the first stage race leadership ahead of other rivals in the race. Syritsa Gleb from Astana Kazakhstan team won the white jersey as he was the best young rider while Oscar Pelegri Ferrandis of Burgos-BH team claimed the golden jersey and named as most active and aggressive rider during the race.

With his triumph, the race winner Caleb Ewan finished the race within the shortest time as he clocked four hours 23 minutes and 28 seconds. This allowed him to clinch the red jersey, as well green jersey following his highest general points in the race till now.

“It is special moment for me finally as this victory is the first win for me in this season. I had few opportunities so far this year but I did not manage to win. I am happy with this triumph and looking for more in the forthcoming races. In general, the race was pretty easy but the hard part was at the middle with some climbs beside some windy at the end of the race,” the champions said.

“The weather is very nice in Oman as it is not cold and it is not hot as well. It is the perfect weather for the riders to compete and show their top skills. It is expected to rain in the coming few days based on the weather predictions but we hope as



Caleb Ewan celebrates after clinch the red jersey



Spanish Oscar Pelegri Ferrandis delivered the golden jersey



riders to have suitable climate to vie properly in the race,” the Australian rider ended.

Caleb Ewan was the fastest in the mass gallop at the end of stage

1 of the Tour of Oman 2024 in front of the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre where he took his first victory since his return to Jayco Al Ula team. On

a slightly rising final straight, the Australian ‘Pocket Rocket’ got the better of Bryan Coquard (Cofidis) and Alexander Kristoff (Uno-X Mobility) in what could

very well be the only opportunity for the sprinters this week in the Sultanate of Oman.

The star of Astana Kazakhstan team received the white jersey

as he was the best young rider in the race while Spanish Oscar Pelegri Ferrandis of Burgos-BH team from Spain delivered the golden jersey as he was the most aggressive rider during the race following his led in the first sprint and being the second in the next sprint.

“The race was very good. I implemented during the race an initial plan to do better during the race and then I dropped my level in between to save some energy. Finally, I managed to end among the top 20 riders. This is my first time to be in Oman and very happy in the podium to claim the most aggressive rider,” the Spanish rider said

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of the Automotive, Construction Equipment and Renewable Energy cluster in MHD, the chief guest delivered the awards to the top winners in presence of Shaikh Faisal bin Humaid al Qasimi, President of the Arab Cycling Federation and Saif bin Sebaa al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association, beside many other officials.

Oman national team cyclists produced an impressive show during the race despite the difference in the experience. Oman’s rider Mundher al Hasani managed to be among the first batch riders during the initial part of the race.

He managed to keep himself with the top ranking cyclists until the middle of the race, but not in final stages when the competitions raised up and were very strong between the experienced riders.

On Sunday, second stage of the tour with 170.4 km will start from Al Sifah in Wilayat of Muscat and will conclude in the Wilayat of Qurayat. The stage profile feature some climbs in Arqi.

Al Nahda all set to face Al Riffa in AFC Cup semi-finals

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Al Nahda Club delegation has arrived in Manama, Bahrain capital, geared up to compete against Al Riffa in the first leg of the semi-finals of the West Zone in the 2023-2024 AFC Cup.

This marks Al Nahda Club’s second appearance in the knockout stages out of four participations, after clinching top spot in group A during the initial round. Notably, they reached semi-finals of the AFC Cup back in 2008. The second leg is scheduled to be hosted by Muscat at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in February 19.

Meanwhile, Al Riffa Club



Al Nahda Club delegation in Manama

secured their spot in the West Zone semi-finals for the fifth time in their six participations by leading group C. They will kick off the first leg against Al Nahda at the Khalifa Sports City Stadium

in Manama on Monday. Al Riffa’s journey to the semi-finals has seen challenges, notably falling short in previous attempts to reach the final in 2010 and last year.

The second semi-final in West Zone sees Lebanese Champions Al Ahed, winners of the 2019 edition, facing Iraqi side Al Kahraba. The first leg will be played at a neutral venue at the

Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat, on February 13.

Al Ahed has qualified for the knockout stages for seventh time in their history, participating in the tournament for the eleventh

time, with this being their fourth appearance in the West Zone semi-finals since the current format was implemented in 2017.

Al Ahed is the only Lebanese team to have won the AFC Cup title. They qualified for the knockout stages as the best second-placed team in the West Zone groups and will face Al Kahraba, who are making their debut in the tournament and topped Group B.the second leg set on February 20th at Basra International Stadium.

The winners of the semi-final round will progress to the West Zone final, scheduled for April 16, and 23, to determine the contender for the 2023-2024 AFC Cup final slated for May 5.



A Qatar fan holds up a banner inside the stadium. – REUTERS



A Jordan fan inside the stadium. – REUTERS



Qatar's fans cheer for their team. – AFP



A Jordan fan waves the national flag ahead of final match.– AFP



Jordan fan inside the stadium before the final.– REUTERS



A Qatar fan looks on while wearing a scarf.– AFP



QATAR BEAT JORDAN TO RETAIN ASIAN CUP WITH AFIF HAT-TRICK



Al Haydos walks with Asian Cup trophy as his team celebrates. – AFP

DOHA: Hosts Qatar retained the Asian Cup with a 3-1 win on Saturday against surprise packages Jordan with Akram Afif the home hero with a hat-trick of penalties.

It was a fitting final act to a month of football that began with 24 teams and witnessed a series of dramatic games.

It will also help dispel the memories of Qatar's World Cup, when they lost all three games, the worst record of any host in the competition's history.

Playing in front of 86,492 spectators at Lusail Stadium, which staged the World Cup final 14 months ago, Jordan were in their first Asian Cup final and contesting the biggest game in their history.

Ranked 87th in Fifa's world rankings, 29 places below their opponents, they fell behind midway through the first half when forward Afif held his nerve with a penalty for his sixth goal of the tournament.

Qatar fully deserved their half-time lead but Jordan roared back to equalise through Yazan al Naimat's smart finish.

The underdogs were level however for just six minutes, Afif



Meshaal Barsham celebrates with the Best Goalkeeper Award trophy. – AFP

slotting home once again from the penalty spot after the referee was advised by VAR to go to his pitch-side monitor.

This time there was to be no Jordan comeback and Afif scored again from the spot for his hat-trick in injury time, again after a VAR intervention. At the final whistle the triumphant Qatari substitutes raced from the bench and threw Afif in the air.

AFIF HOLDS NERVE

Qatar came into the final attempting to become the fifth team to lift back-to-back Asian titles and hoping to erase the bitter memories of their home World Cup.

Qatar parachuted in the Spaniard Tintin Marquez to replace former Real Madrid coach Carlos Queiroz just a month before the Asian Cup,



Akram Afif celebrates with the Top Goal Scorer Award trophy. – AFP

in a major gamble that paid off handsomely.

His side started the final the better and had a couple of early sniffs at goal through danger man Afif, before Jordan's centre-forward Naimat stung the palms of home goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham.

Qatar went ahead on 22 minutes when the livewire Afif, playing off the left, was clipped in

the box by Abdallah Nasib.

Afif brushed himself down to plant his spotkick into the bottom corner, just beating the outstretched arms of Yazeed Abulaila, to join Iraq's Aymen Hussein as the joint leading scorer in the competition.

In an unusual celebration, the 27-year-old Afif did a card trick, produced a playing card with his picture on it before the image

flipped to an "S".

Jordan, who defeated Son Heung-min's South Korea 2-0 to reach the final, had their best chance in first-half injury time but Mousa al Tamari's first-time effort was blocked by Mohammed Waad.

Hussein Ammouta's Jordan were disappointing in the first half but they cranked up the pressure in the second, Montpellier's Tamari, captain Ehsan Haddad and Yazan al Arab all forcing Barsham into saves.

The goal was coming and in the 67th minute it duly arrived, Naimat bringing the ball down with his right foot and then thrashing in with his left on the half-volley for his fourth of the tournament.

Qatar and Afif responded almost immediately however, and he produced the card trick once more after beating Abulaila from the spot for a second time, this time in even more convincing fashion.

It was Afif, inevitably, who won the third penalty and he did the business once again for his eighth goal of the tournament.

— AFP



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Oman records RO 7 billion trade surplus

MUSCAT: The trade balance of the Sultanate of Oman recorded a surplus of RO 6.997 billion at the end of November 2023, compared to a surplus of RO 9.587 billion during the same period in 2022, according to preliminary statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The statistics indicate that the value of commodity exports at end-November 2023 reached RO 20.636 billion, representing a decrease of 11.4% compared to the same period in 2022, which recorded RO 23.289 billion.

Meanwhile, the value of commodity imports for Oman amounted to RO 13.639 billion, a decrease of 0.5% compared to the same period last year, which was RO 13.702 billion.

The decline in export value is mainly attributed to a decrease in Oman's exports of oil and gas to RO 12.525 billion, a decrease of 17.7% compared to the end of November 2022, which was RO 15.215 billion.

On the other hand, the value of Oman's crude oil exports reached RO 8.9 billion at the end of November 2023, registering a decrease of 17.3% compared to the same period in the previous year. The value of refined oil exports declined to RO 1.3 billion, a decrease of



The value of commodity exports at end-November 2023 reached RO 20.636 billion.

23.5%, and the value of liquefied natural gas exports decreased to RO 2.3 billion, a decrease of 15.7%, compared to the end of November 2022, which was RO 2.7 billion.

The statistics revealed a decline of 1.4% in the value of non-oil commodity exports at the end of November 2023, amounting to RO 6.767 billion, compared to the end of November 2022, which was RO 6.866 billion.

Metal products accounted for the highest value of non-oil commodity exports, reaching RO 2.5 billion, an increase of 20.3%,

followed by ordinary metals and their products with RO 1.2 billion, a decrease of 11.1%, and chemical industries and related products with a value of RO 929 million, a decrease of 30.3%.

The value of plastic and rubber exports also decreased by 21.6% to RO 814 million, while live animals and their products increased by 23% to RO 365 million, and the value of other product exports reached RO 948 million.

Regarding re-export operations from Oman, their value increased to RO 1.3 billion,

an increase of 11.1% at the end of November 2023 compared to the end of November 2022. The value of re-exports in transportation equipment had a growth of 5.2%, reaching RO 377 million.

Additionally, the value of re-exports in machinery, electrical equipment, and parts increased by 18.5% to RO 361 million. The value of "live animals and products of the animal kingdom" amounted to RO 103 million, showing a significant growth of 77.4%.

On the other hand, metallic

IN TERMS OF NON-OIL COMMODITY EXPORTS, THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA TOPPED THE LIST WITH A VALUE OF APPROXIMATELY RO 981 MILLION AT THE END OF NOVEMBER 2023, AN INCREASE OF 29.7% COMPARED TO THE END OF NOVEMBER 2022.

products accounted for the largest value of commodity imports for Oman, reaching RO 3.8 billion at the end of November last year, which is a 4.6% decrease.

Machinery, electrical equipment, and parts followed with a value of RO 2.1 billion, demonstrating a growth of 7.5% by the end of November 2023.

In terms of non-oil commodity exports, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia topped the list with a value of approximately RO 981 million at the end of November 2023, an increase of 29.7% compared to the end of November 2022.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates led the re-export trade from Oman with a value of RO 465 million by the end of last November. The UAE also ranked first among the highest exporting countries to Oman with a value of RO 3.6 billion, a decrease of 8.6% compared to the end of November 2022.

Total investments in Madayn reach RO 7.4 billion



MUSCAT: More than RO 7.4 billion is the total investment in all industrial cities under the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi (**pictured**), the CEO of Madayn, stated that the celebration of Omani Industry Day this year aligns with the continuous growth and expansion of Madayn in various indicators.

This growth is attributed to the esteemed attention of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who aims to provide a suitable investment environment for local and foreign investments in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Al Hadabi mentioned that the additional investment in Madayn during 2023 exceeded RO 207 million, bringing the total investment in all industrial cities, including Muscat and Al Mazyunah Free Zone, to more than RO 7.4 billion.

The number of established projects reached 2,063 in different stages, employing 55,242 workers, with 38% being Omani nationals, while the total area of Madayn industrial cities reached about 163.2 million square metres, with 33.6 million square metres already leased.

He highlighted the Madayn Residential Complexes project, a new value-added initiative in collaboration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, to support entrepreneurial ideas and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman. The project aims to provide ready-to-use model factory complexes in industrial cities to enable the industrial sector and attract more investments.

Additionally, Al Hadabi emphasised the importance of digital transformation, aligning with the national vision and the general framework of the unified government digital transformation programme. Madayn has made significant progress in this aspect, achieving a 74% readiness level in the government digital transformation programme, reflecting the success of its efforts.

Madayn continually works on improving investor services across its industrial cities by streamlining procedures. The Masar service centres aim to enhance the services and relationships with partners, providing integrated services and accurate statistical data for investors. These centres received over 60,000 visits in 2023, providing more than 55,000 diverse services with an average processing time of 3 minutes.

Furthermore, a new interactive system for receiving and responding to inquiries is being developed to enhance efficiency and responsiveness using modern technologies.

The introduction of the Madayn electronic management system significantly improved administrative and financial operations, replacing multiple previous systems. — **ONA**

Surge in new businesses in Oman's special economic, free and industrial zones

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 10

In recent years, the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed a remarkable surge in the number of companies operating in its special economic, free, and industrial zones. According to the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the administrator of special economic, free, and industrial zones in Oman, as of the end of 2023, the total count of companies reached an impressive 3,300, contributing to the thriving business landscape of the nation.

There are a total of 1,966 existing factories in the special economic, free, and industrial zones in Oman. This unprecedented growth has been fueled by substantial investments, with a total capital of RO 17 billion allocated to these zones.

Among the numerous flourishing zones, the Special Economic Zones at Duqm (SEZAD) has emerged as a major hub for investment and development.

With 26 factories established,



The Salalah Free Zone boasts 48 operational companies, contributing significantly to the overall economic landscape.

the zone has attracted RO 6 billion worth of investments, serving as a testament to its irresistible potential. This impressive figure includes both existing projects, amounting to RO 4.2 billion, as well as ongoing investments worth RO 1.8 billion, which encompass several integral projects such as the renowned Jindal Steel Project.

However, Duqm is not the only zone witnessing continuous progress and expansion.

Other strategic zones such as the Salalah Free Zone, Al Mazyunah Free Zone, Madayn, Sohar Free Zone, and Khazaen Economic City have also experienced substantial growth.

The Salalah Free Zone, for

instance, boasts 48 operational factories, contributing significantly to the overall economic landscape. Similarly, the Al Mazyunah Free Zone houses five factories, each making valuable contributions to the region's prosperity.

Madayn, an affiliate of OPAZ focusing on the management

of industrial cities, comprises the bulk of the investment, with an astounding 1,840 factories already established. This thriving industrial zone has attracted a sizable portion of the total capital, further enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's economic prowess.

Additionally, the Sohar Free Zone hosts 40 factories engaged in a variety of sectors, thus diversifying the economic activities within the region.

The newly established Khazaen Economic City, with 7 factories, is in its early stages of development, showcasing immense potential for future growth and prosperity.

The Sultanate of Oman's commitment to fostering investments is evident through collaborations between Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and other government bodies.

These partnerships have resulted in lucrative negotiations for prominent projects, set to be announced in the near future. As a result, the Sultanate of Oman will continue to attract more investors, further bolstering its economic landscape.

Experience world-class service with Meethaq Islamic Banking Savings Account



MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking, from Bank Muscat, solidifies its dedication to financial inclusion with a progressive savings account. This account is designed to provide customers with a range of Shari'a compliant product and services, aligning seamlessly with Meethaq's ongoing commitment to excellence.

Meethaq encourages customers to open a savings account that cater to various customer segments, including the elderly who can conveniently receive their social benefits while enjoying an array of various advantages.

Demonstrating leadership in customer-focused solutions, the savings account helps customers achieve their long-term objectives and also contributes to fostering a robust savings culture in Oman.

Key features of the Meethaq savings account include a competitive rate credited to the customer's account on a monthly basis, no minimum balance requirement for profit eligibility, free life Takaful for customers maintaining an average balance of RO 30,000, no minimum balance fee and Debit Card with a daily cash withdrawal limit of RO 600 on local ATMs.

Moreover, customers benefit from the convenience of managing their accounts

seamlessly through 24x7 electronic banking services, enjoy global purchases at millions of Visa endorsed shopping outlets, pay bills for electricity, water, telephone, internet and school fees.

Opening a Meethaq savings account is a hassle-free experience, supported by a straightforward documentation process and the flexibility of multiple currencies, including RO, \$, AED and £.

The account is based on the mudarabah contract, a form of Islamic sharia'a compliant partnership. All Meethaq products undergo a rigorous Shari'a compliance review and certification by the Shari'a Supervisory Board and are developed in accordance with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

Reaffirming its commitment to excellence in the banking sector, Meethaq Islamic Banking has received several prestigious awards from esteemed regional and global institutions.

Customers interested in applying for the Meethaq savings account can visit their nearest Meethaq branch or contact the 24x7 call centre at 24656666 for further details. Additional information is available on Meethaq's website: <https://www.meethaq.om/en/depositproducts/Pages/details.aspx#saving>.

Get more from every drive with the Lexus hybrid electric range

MUSCAT: Lexus has pioneered the hybrid electric technology becoming a popular luxury brand that takes luxury ownership experiences to all-new levels. The Lexus hybrid electric range revolutionises luxury with its bold performance and fuel-efficient driving experiences. In Oman, the Lexus Hybrid Electric range includes the ES, LS, LC, NX and RX.

The Lexus ES Hybrid has an impressive design language that makes a lasting impression. From the headlights to the sleek profile, the ES Hybrid is a head-turner from every angle.

The Lexus ES Hybrid is available with two powertrain options. The ES Hybrid is automatically charged either by petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

Furthermore, it hosts number of advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional car and does not require special fuel.

The ES Hybrid offers an impressive 24.1 km/L mileage. The LSH is available with a 3.5-litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System that combines the internal combustion engine with the electric traction system to produce 354 hp. The LS Hybrid is fitted with a compact, lightweight, lithium-ion hybrid battery. It is 20



per cent smaller than the nickel-metal hydride unit featured in the previous Lexus LS 600h, yet has a higher power density.

Using lithium-ion technology has also reduced the component's weight, helping reduce the car's overall mass, thus supporting overall fuel economy of 16.1 km/l, emissions performance and handling balance.

The Lexus LC500 Hybrid is a powerful, emotionally stirring realisation of the vision of Lexus master driver Akio Toyoda for a flagship production coupe that echoes the spirit of the hand-built Lexus LFA supercar and delivers the visual impact of the Lexus LF-LC concept.

The LC is the first Lexus hybrid

to use a compact, lightweight lithium-ion battery. The battery pack fits neatly between the rear seats and the luggage compartment and has a high-power density.

Lexus developed a new Multi Stage Hybrid System specifically for the LC500 Hybrid. Like other Lexus hybrid configurations, the Multi Stage Hybrid System teams the gasoline engine with two electric motors/generators, but similarities end there. The Atkinson-cycle 3.5-liter V6 gasoline engine uses D-4S direct fuel injection, and lightweight valve train components allow a 6,600-rpm redline, with Dual VVT-i ensuring ample torque across the engine speed range.

The LC Hybrid offers an impressive mileage of 17.1 kmpl. The fifth-generation RX Hybrid has been completely reimagined to deliver greater style, comfort and performance with a choice of three powertrains, two of which are electrified.

All Lexus Hybrid vehicles are available with 8 years/160,000 Kms battery warranty (whichever is earlier). In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 Kms (whichever is earlier) and 1st year 2 free pickup and drop for periodic service and 24 hours free on-road assistance from e-Fetch for 3 years.

NBO holds workshop on online trade portal to empower businesses

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to empowering businesses and fostering growth by leveraging technology to deliver customer-centric solutions, National Bank of Oman (NBO) organised a workshop on its cutting-edge Online Trade Portal.

The workshop, which featured a live demonstration of the portal, was held at the NBO Head Office recently. The workshop aimed to enhance the overall trade experience of NBO's corporate clients and facilitate the onboarding process for them, ensuring a smooth transition to the digital platform.

Mohammed bin Yahya al Jabri (pictured), Assistant General Manager and Head of Global Transaction Banking at NBO,



said: "The Workshop on the Online Trade Portal underscores our commitment to providing innovative and efficient solutions to our corporate clients. We believe that it will serve as an interactive platform for corporate clients to gain first-hand experience of the Online Trade Portal's capabilities and functionalities. This digital offering is set

to revolutionise the corporate banking experience as it not only streamlines their trade finance operations but also elevates their overall banking experience."

The Online Trade Portal is a comprehensive platform that enables NBO's corporate clients to seamlessly execute transactions for a diverse array of trade products, including Letter of Credit, Guarantees, Loan Against Trust Receipts, and documentary collections.

The portal provides real-time insights into transactions, offering clients immediate access to information such as transaction status, advice, swift messages, and outstanding balances.

Through the provision of real-time demonstrations and

addressing inquiries, NBO seeks to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the portal's capacity to improve business operations.

This will empower clients to readily embrace the future of trade finance through seamless digital transformation.

NBO continues to play a pivotal role in the economic development of Oman by supporting businesses and individuals in achieving their financial goals.

Comprehensive details regarding NBO's array of accounts, products, and exclusive offers are readily accessible at www.nbo.om, available through direct communication with the NBO Call Centre or via the user-friendly NBO App.

BEC opens a state-of-the-art Carrier Experience Centre

MUSCAT: Bahwan Engineering Company (BEC) who have been at the forefront of introducing market leading, high efficiency Carrier air-conditioning solutions in Oman for over 45 years, inaugurated a state-of-the-art Carrier Experience Centre in Mabela, Oman on February 4, 2024.

HH Faisal bin Abdulrawoof bin Abbas al Said graced the occasion as chief guest at inaugural event, which was attended by representatives from media as well as senior management representatives from Carrier and BEC.

"We take pride in being an Omani company that over the decades, has helped clients in a comprehensive range of market verticals such as healthcare, hospitality, banking, education, residential, commercial and



government high rise buildings, airports, and other iconic projects in achieving faster returns on investment, lower operating costs, and higher operating efficiencies," said a senior BEC Management representative present on the occasion.

"This Carrier Experience

Centre is not just retail expansion, but a showcase of the world-leading quality, cutting-edge technology, and globally trusted reliability from Carrier that is available for Omani homes and residential buildings," he added.

Carrier has been innovating heating and cooling solutions

since 1902 when its founder, Willis Carrier, developed the first modern air conditioning system and changed the way the world lives today. Working on a philosophy that 'big innovations are not just for big buildings', Carrier offers expert solutions including VRF, ducted, ductless,

packaged products and window room air conditioners that ensure high efficiency and premium comfort in homes, offices, apartments, retail and other applications.

"Carrier products with their high efficiency and sustainable design contribute directly to the objectives of Oman's National Strategy for an Orderly Transition to Net-Zero," said Madhanagopal Chandrakumar, Chief Executive Officer of AHI Carrier.

"As in other parts of the world, we have started to see effects of global warming in the region as well in the form of more tropical storms, more days with temperatures exceeding 45°C, and reports of increasing desertification. It is highly commendable that in the Government of Oman's planned orderly transition, decarbonisation takes priority

and would optimise for all five of the transition objectives," added Chandrakumar.

"Decarbonisation is where we add tangible value through engineered technical solutions and high efficiency equipment, that in applications in the GCC, have reduced energy requirements by more than 40 per cent, contributing greatly to decarbonisation.

We are also completely aligned with Carrier's 1 gigatonne goal where the objective is to help customers avoid more than 1 gigatonne of GHG emissions by 2030. Our home and light commercial HVAC solutions imbibe our vision of sustainability and empower individual customers and end users to contribute towards a healthier planet," Chandrakumar concluded.



Omran hosts visit of WTTC President and CEO to Oman

MUSCAT: Julia Simpson, President & CEO of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), has concluded her historic strategic visit to Oman, held from February 6 - 9, 2024.

This visit, hosted by Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), an affiliate member of WTTC, marks a turning point in global tourism, underscoring Oman's rapid development and strategic focus in the sector, perfectly aligned with WTTC's vision for sustainable growth.

Tourism growth and economic impact in Oman

Under the guidance of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in partnership with Omran Group and key stakeholders, Oman's tourism sector has achieved unprecedented growth, surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

In 2023, the country welcomed a total of four million visitors.

This growth significantly contributes to the national economy, aligning with Oman's Vision 2040 economic plan, which targets raising tourism's contribution to GDP from 2.6% to 6%-10%.

Omran Group's strategic role

As the country's primary driver in tourism development, Omran Group, valued at nearly \$1.5 billion and managing over 4,000 hospitality keys, is pivotal in shaping Oman's tourism future.



The visit underscores Oman's rapid development and strategic focus in the tourism sector.

The Group's strategy integrates economic growth and diversification, respecting and harmonising with Oman's rich cultural and natural heritage.

Omran Group's approach encompasses independent operations, collaborations with government, private sector, SMEs, and local communities, focusing on positive environmental and societal impacts and preserving traditional culture and values.

Julia Simpson, during her visit, praised Oman's significant progress in tourism, driven by Omran Group's strategic initiatives, which aligns with WTTC's principles of sustainable and inclusive growth in global Travel & Tourism.

Additionally, Dr Hashil al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, emphasised the Group's

commitment to the National Tourism Strategy 2040, focusing on nurturing a skilled workforce and promoting sustainable tourism development.

During her visit, Julia Simpson, WTTC President & CEO said: "It has been an absolute pleasure discovering this beautiful destination which continues to attract travellers from around the world. Last year, we saw a significant boost in international arrivals, up by a third on the previous year, highlighting Oman's truly global appeal.

"Our recent Economic Impact Report forecasts that Oman's Travel & Tourism sector will grow four times faster than the national economy over the next 10 years. The National Tourism Strategy 2040 will support the sector's significant economic growth."

Future prospects and international engagement

The future of Oman's tourism sector is promising, with an anticipated annual growth of 7.4% from 2023 to 2027. Ranked among the top 20 global destinations in 2023, the country is poised to elevate its global presence further.

As the Official Guest Host Country at ITB Berlin 2024, Oman, through Omran Group's participation, is set to showcase its growing tourism potential on the world stage.

This strategic participation and visit by Julia Simpson, also opens avenues for exploring potential collaboration with WTTC to host one of its prestigious events in Oman, further reinforcing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a prominent player in the global tourism arena.

Nama Water Services' efforts to treat and reuse wastewater in Oman



MUSCAT: Nama Water Services aims to implement the best international practices in treating and reusing wastewater as part of Oman's strategic direction to protect groundwater sources from depletion. This initiative also contributes to environmental sustainability by increasing green spaces and enhancing food security through irrigation of crops using treated water.

Nama Water Services is involved in implementing innovative engineering projects in wastewater treatment, ensuring complete purification of water for reuse in various sectors. One of these projects is the supply of treated water to the Shakhakheet area in the Wilayat of Barka.

Abdulkarim bin Mohammed bin Zaher al Hinai, Senior Operations and Maintenance Manager at Nama Water Services in Al Batinah South and Al Dakhiliyah governorates, explained that the project aims to utilise treated water for irrigation in order to preserve groundwater reserves and expand cultivated areas, ultimately enhancing food security.

He further stated that the project to supply treated water to the Shakhakheet area involves a

cost of RO 2.3 million and a one-year implementation period. The water will be delivered through pipes with lengths exceeding 40 kilometres and diameters ranging from 63 mm to 500 mm.

Currently, 54 farms have submitted requests for water connection out of the planned 60 farms in the first phase. In the future, there are plans to expand the treated water network to cover a larger area from Sultan Qaboos Street towards Al Batinah North Governorate up to the Al Batinah Expressway, ensuring the supply to over 200 farms. This expansion aligns with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources' goals, as well as with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, by increasing agricultural land and enhancing food security.

Nama Water Services is responsible for constructing the network and delivering treated water. The first year of water supply will be free of charge, with subsequent connections subject to nominal fees. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources will play a role in raising awareness among farmers about the importance of using treated water and conducting soil testing before and after water supply.

MUSALIH: ONE-STOP ALL-OMANI CREWED PLATFORM FOR HOME REPAIR SERVICES

CONNECTING FREELANCE OMANI TECHNICIANS WITH OPPORTUNITIES IN THE LUCRATIVE HOME REPAIRS SECTOR

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 10

Musalih, a one-of-a-kind online platform that connects freelance skilled Omani technicians with customers in need for services on demand, seeks to capitalise on a lucrative home maintenance market currently valued at around RO 200 million annually.

Founded by Omani entrepreneurs Sultan al Zidjali, Hamed al Mahrouqi and Younis al Rawahi, the platform first launched in August 2020 with the goal to localise the repair and maintenance market, presently dominated by expat players.

"[The maintenance and repair market] is a huge market," said Sultan al Zidjali, CEO. "The market size is over 200 million Omani rials. If this cash flows out of Oman, the capital is lost. Localising this sector ensures that the economic cycle remains within Oman," he stressed.

Significantly, the platform also has the potential to



address unemployment challenges in the country by offering freelance opportunities to Omani technicians, instead of solely relying on traditional employment.

Musalih currently boasts a deck of 600 registered freelancers who have an earning potential of RO 400 -700 per month depending on the tasks they choose to perform.

Additionally, the company has also signed multiple annual maintenance contracts which provide freelancers with a fixed monthly income.

However, despite its promising business model, the company still faces challenges mostly pertaining to cultural perceptions.

According to the CEO, individuals usually prefer to hire expatriates over Omanis, due to perceived quality and cost issues.



The home maintenance and repair market is valued at around RO 200 million per annum in Oman

SULTAN AL ZIDJALI
CEO, Musalih



To bolster confidence in the robustness of its services, the platform operates on the basis of a clearly defined and transparent pricing scheme with tariffs that are either on par or sometimes lower than prevailing market rates.

In addition, all services are backed by a 30-year warranty. According to the CEO, the company currently offers services in three main areas: air-conditioning, plumbing, and electrical services.

Customers can request

for services through the (Musalih) mobile application or website.

Alternatively, they can also contact the company via Whatsapp, text message or phone call. The company currently operates in six governorates including Muscat, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Al Dakhiliyah.

Furthermore, the company actively collaborates with local entities including the Ministry of Labour, Petroleum Development Oman and the National Training Program to train technicians.

Last year, the company signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Labour to train 600 technicians.

According to the CEO, the company is in the process of expanding to other governorates in the country.

Additionally, the company plans to increase its service portfolio to include services such as refrigerator repair, roadside assistance and gardening. Musalih has a goal of onboarding 5,000 freelancers by 2030.

From zero to 1 million (Part II)



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

Another oversimplification states that we “just” need to gather 5,000 people to pay \$17 a month for a 12-month subscription, or 250 people to pay \$333 a month for a year.

This is a stunt that 1 per cent of entrepreneurs manage to achieve in 12 months starting from scratch. First of all, what is the subscription for? And how was the service developed? Is it an app?

Apps are hard to code, slow to develop, expensive to launch, and tough to maintain. Most importantly, we live in a society where most people expect services to be free. We can count

on the fingers of one hand how many subscriptions we pay in our lives. Netflix? YouTube Premium? Disney Plus? HBO? Spotify? What else? A gym we rarely visit? That’s about it, right?

So if selling products and enrolling users in subscriptions is not an option, what’s left? Well, first of all, let me clarify: I’m not saying these goals are impossible, but I believe each is a long-term plan.

It’s not something we start in January and are ready to achieve by December. Some very rare examples can prove me wrong, but in the majority of cases, the journey is a bumpy road, and when the sail is set straight, then the numbers are just the

confirmation of our overall direction.

If we truly have an extraordinary product that people are willing to pay \$200 to use, then we should not aim to sell 5,000 units, but 5 million.

If we have a “killer” app on the market, we shouldn’t aim to enrol 5,000 users, but 500 million.

What I’m trying to say is that starting a venture with the intention of reaching a revenue goal of \$1 million is not the right way to approach entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurs are often in love with their products and totally addicted to their service. They can’t sleep at night thinking

of ways to improve it.

Those entrepreneurs might occasionally set monetary goals for themselves, often in alliance with their CFOs, but most of the time, they are focused on building and deploying, rather than dreaming and counting.

I have yet to see someone build the next big super app because they were inspired by a zero-to-\$1-million video on YouTube.

The underlying motivations are completely different in those that succeed. I also don’t want to discourage those who currently have a job.

The goal of becoming a millionaire is certainly achievable for you too. Often

we see “YouTube Gurus” telling us that only entrepreneurs who work 20 hours a day can afford to become millionaires.

This is not true. Especially for those in jobs offering bonus schemes, they can use their bonus to acquire wealth over time through stocks, real estate, or other appreciating investments.

Lastly, being a millionaire doesn’t necessarily make people happy. If you’re holding a stable job and are happy where you are, with your old boring stability, don’t quit your job because a YouTube video told you so.

Instead, try to find opportunities to expand within your current job by adding more value to the organisation.

Beyond oil: Diversifying investment strategies for sustainable growth in the GCC



VIKAS LAKHWANI

The author is chief revenue officer of CPT Markets

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has for decades pegged its economic growth on its rich energy reserves with most of its infrastructure development expenditure being met by oil earnings.

But while this continues to be the case, at least for the most part, the region is at a point whereby it now needs to diversify its investments, which will ultimately reduce its reliance on fossil fuel reserves for the sake of its economic prosperity and development.

According to the latest World Bank update, growth in the GCC is expected to pick up again to 3.6 per cent in 2024 after closing at one per cent in 2023. Driven largely by its dependence on oil revenues, these economies need to think beyond oil and explore other revenue streams in a bid to boost their overall growth.

The time has now come when the GCC is now at a crossroads that transcends its reliance on oil-driven economies. The need for sustainable growth has now sparked a wave of transformative shift in investment strategies within the region.

This paradigm shift is not merely strategic but is intrinsic to ensuring sustained and resilient growth.

The region needs to explore multifaceted dimensions of diversification and delve into the strategic initiatives that will enable it to shape its investment landscape, with a particular emphasis on sustainable growth.

Envisioning a future beyond oil

The vision for the future of investment strategies in the GCC entails a departure from reliance on oil. There is a noticeable shift towards diversification into other equally lucrative non-oil sectors such as renewables, tourism, logistics, and technology in a bid to attract foreign direct investments (FDI) into the respective GCC economies.

It is a well-known fact that sustainability is a cornerstone of this long-term vision, with increased investments in green technologies, circular economy initiatives, and a focus on impact investing aligned with environmental, social, and

governance principles.

To drive this important agenda, the region has consciously taken deliberate and concrete steps to diversify investment portfolios beyond its traditional oil and gas sectors.

Sovereign wealth funds that have traditionally been tied to oil revenues, are now strategically distributed to ventures outside the oil industry, including substantial investments in infrastructure initiatives and foreign markets.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are also now emerging as strong catalysts for growth for the region. This PPPs are increasingly leveraging the efficiency and innovation of the private sector to cultivate other emerging sectors like renewable energy.

Simultaneously, regulatory reforms are also streamlining business processes and fostering an environment conducive to innovation.

Investing in sustainable industries

Investments in industries contributing to environmental and social well-being, such as renewable energy and technology, are both ethically sound and economically promising. As the global demand

for clean energy grows, coupled with declining costs of renewable technologies, investing in sustainable industries presents a compelling business case for the region.

Beyond financial returns, these investments will facilitate economic diversification, which in turn help industries to create new jobs, attract the much-needed foreign capital and, most importantly, enhance the region’s sustainability credentials.

It is also worth noting that the social and environmental benefits of sustainable investment strategies, including improved air quality and active participation in mitigating climate change, will underscore a commitment toward positive impact.

Navigating challenges

Paradigm shifts will naturally throw curve balls and navigating these challenges will require a prudent and well-thought-out, all-hands-on-deck game plan. Thorough due diligence, which involves the meticulous assessments of market needs, regulatory landscapes, and the financial viability of new ventures, is a critical first step towards achieving this elusive objective.

Building robust risk

management frameworks is, therefore, crucial to help mitigate potential pitfalls such as volatile commodities prices, emerging technological disruptions, and geopolitical uncertainties.

Additionally, the adoption of portfolio diversification as a philosophy coupled with spreading investments across various sectors and asset classes, significantly helps to minimise the concentration risk and ultimately enhances the overall resilience.

On its part, government policies also play a pivotal role in fostering a conducive environment for diversified investments. Through supportive regulations, streamlined licensing processes, and incentives for ESG-compliant investments, the region can ultimately create an attractive and sustainable investment climate. Other critical factors such as talent development initiatives, coupled with strategic infrastructure development, will also further bolster the appeal of emerging sectors.

Capitalising on market trends for sustainable growth

Understanding and capitalising on emerging market trends is paramount for sustainable growth, both

economic and social, in the GCC.

With the rise of digital technologies, including blockchain, artificial intelligence, and fintech — innovations that are currently transforming traditional industries and creating new growth opportunities — the sustainable investing dream can become a reality.

It’s, therefore, important for the region to prioritise fostering innovation hubs, attracting top talent, and supporting knowledge-based industries. Moreover, the region must also appreciate the growing importance of ESG considerations as a paradigm shift.

By integrating digital technologies, fostering innovation, and incorporating ESG principles into investment strategies, organisations in the region can strategically position themselves as contributors to a sustainable and responsible future.

The journey beyond oil in the GCC is a profound shift towards sustainability and resilience. Embracing diversified investment strategies paves the way for a future defined by innovation, sustainability, and enduring prosperity.

DRIVEN LARGELY BY ITS DEPENDENCE ON OIL REVENUES, THESE ECONOMIES NEED TO THINK BEYOND OIL AND EXPLORE OTHER REVENUE STREAMS IN A BID TO BOOST THEIR OVERALL GROWTH.

ITHCA invests in US firm GSME for semiconductors

MUSCAT: In a historic move, the ITHCA Group has reaffirmed its dedication to technological progress by investing in the US-based semiconductor design and service company, GSME, marking a significant milestone for the Sultanate of Oman.

This groundbreaking investment is structured into two phases, with the initial phase completed in 2023 and the subsequent phase finalised in February 2024, coinciding with the successful development of the first two test chips, Oman-1 and Oman-2, entirely crafted by Omani engineers during their training.

ITHCA's strategic investment in GSME not only represents a noteworthy financial achievement but also signifies a remarkable technological advancement for Oman. This pioneering initiative underscores the nation's



The agreement was signed by Engineer Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group, and Engineer Farhat Jahangir, CEO of GSME.

commitment to nurturing innovation and emerging as a prominent player in the global semiconductor industry.

Moreover, it highlights ITHCA's steadfast dedication to investing in cutting-edge technologies and leveraging local Omani talent to drive the design activities within the company.

The agreement between the ITHCA Group and GSME was

officially signed by Engineer Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group, and Engineer Farhat Jahangir, CEO of GSME.

Engineer Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari emphasised that this strategic investment in GSME marks a significant financial milestone and technological leap forward for the Sultanate of Oman. He reiterated that this investment, a first of its

kind in Oman, underscores the nation's commitment to fostering innovation and emerging as a key player in the global semiconductor arena.

Additionally, Al Mandhari underscored ITHCA's dedication to investing in emerging technologies and cultivating high-value ICT capabilities and human capital, thereby contributing positively to the national economy and human resources.

As the global demand for advanced semiconductor solutions continues to soar, this investment underscores Oman's ability to meet these demands head-on. With a strategic vision and unwavering commitment to excellence, Oman is solidifying its position as a key influencer in shaping the future of semiconductor innovation worldwide.



Oman's natural gas domestic production and imports increase

MUSCAT: The total domestic production and import of natural gas in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately 53.925 billion cubic metres by the end of December 2023, with a 3.6% increase compared to the same period in 2022, which stood at 52.061 billion cubic metres.

Statistics from the National Center for Statistics and Information revealed that

industrial projects accounted for 58.7% of natural gas usage in Oman until the end of December 2023, totalling 31.638 billion cubic metres.

The total usage of natural gas by various sectors in Oman: oil fields — 13.252 billion cubic metres, power generation stations — 8.773 billion cubic metres, and industrial areas — 259.7 million cubic metres. — ONA

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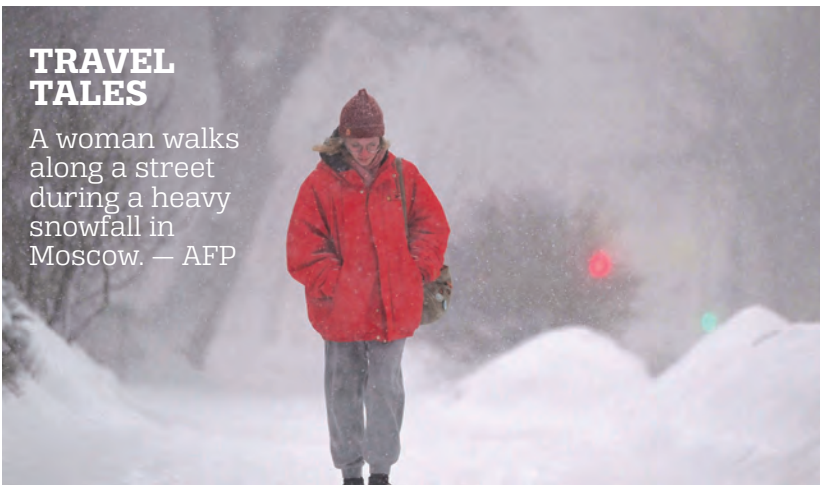
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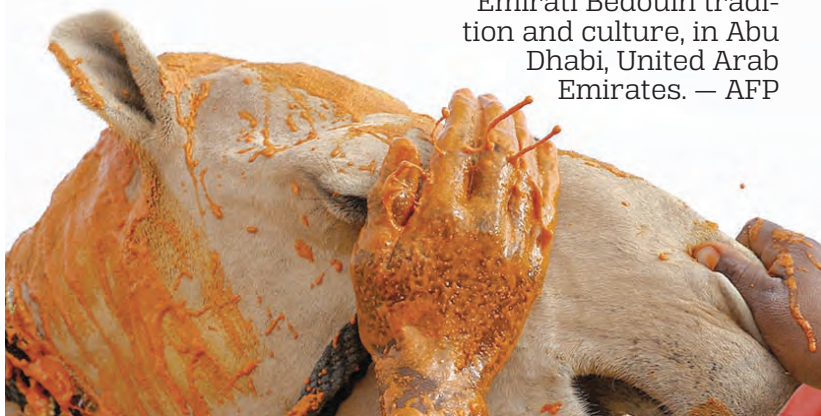
ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Golden Jewel Trading Contracting(SPC)**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1301346**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO **10,000.000** to **10,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.





TRAVEL TALES
A woman walks along a street during a heavy snowfall in Moscow. — AFP



LIFESTYLE
People paint the winning camel with saffron, at the Al Dhafra Festival, an annual celebration of Emirati Bedouin tradition and culture, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Canadian television host Lilly Singh arrives for the premiere of "Bob Marley: One Love" at the Regency Village Theater in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



EVENTS
Egyptian writer Mohamed El-Fakharany, winner of Best Novel of the 55 edition of Cairo International Book Fair, poses for a photograph with his trophy at Egypt's International Exhibition Center in Cairo, Egypt. — AFP



CULTURE
People walk past by a figure of a dragon placed at the entrance of a store at a tourist area in Beijing ahead of the Lunar New Year of the Dragon. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 11, 2024 | SHAABAN 1, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER f x v t y www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



How an artist balances humour and art in his caricatures

Fahd al Zadjali, a caricature artist for *Oman*, blends art and humor to engage readers. Influenced by his childhood and inspired by renowned caricaturists, he employs wit and satire to depict societal issues.... **P20**

THE OPERA

Lunch Music unveils Teatro Carlo Felice Di Genova's talented cast

BY GEORGINA BENISON
PHOTOS BY KHALID AL BUSAIDY

ON SATURDAY LAST WEEK, 'Lunch Music' gave the understudies of the production by the Teatro Carlo Felice Di Genova a chance to shine while giving the audience an informal taste of things to come in the full opera. The free, hour-long presentation took place in the Opera Galleria, all accompanied on the Grand Piano by the impeccable fingers of Andrea Severi. It was quite tricky at first to realise who was playing which character without context, but words in the

songs, or references to a name gradually helped to align each singer's rôle. It opened with the children's choir singing from the gallery, serenading those seated below with, 'Over Hill, Over Dale'. Their grasp of Britten's neo-classical atonal language was excellent — along with their English diction! Oberon was sung beautifully throughout by English counter-tenor, James Laing who explained that the rôle was originally created for Alfred Della, and so is slightly low in register. Opposite was Italian Soprano, Anna Maria Sarra as the formidable Titania with a bracing duet, 'Ill Met By Moonlight'. Baritone Paolo Ingrassciotta performed a stunning recitative as Demetrius in, 'I Know A Bank', joined by Oberon and Mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bernini as Hermia, plotting to put a fairy spell on Titania. The chorus now sat on cushions in front for a lovely, clear two-part lullaby, 'Fair Love'. Bottom is a favourite character in the play, performed here splendidly by Barnaby Rea, while Soprano Angela Nisi as Helena teased and cajoled him in a light satire of rustic song. 'How Now Mad Spirit' saw the return of Oberon singing to Robin, a non-singing, speaking sprite, which everyone loved.



Then an argument ensued over the mixed-up identities central to the plot. In, 'I Helen Goddess', Helena and Hermia got into a right barney using Britten's whole-tone scales and harmonies to great effect, and later their lovers, Demetrius and Theseus — sung by Baritone Roberto Lorenzi —

joined them with an animated Quartet. Now things became very funny with the five Labourers telling us about Bottom's Dream in, 'The Eye of Man Hath not Heard'. In the play they are to eat no garlic or onions for fear of breathing over each other. 'Now Fair Hippolyta our Nuptial Hour'

— sung by Mezzo, Adriana Di Paola — sees some confused love identity under influence of the potion, and 'If We Offend' descends into sheer slapstick, straight out of Shakespeare (Libretto adaptation by Sir Peter Piers, Britten's long-term collaborator). It is explained how each actor will depict Wall, Hole, Lion, Lantern (to depict Moon) — in 'O Grim Look'd Night' and 'O Wall'. Britten has set this as an English folksong parody. Thisbe is afraid of Lion in the play but falls in love with Bottom — wearing a head of a donkey, now asleep — and sings him, 'Asleep my Love' in a Ballad parody. 'The Iron Tongue' is a spoof on the 'dangerous Lion' and as such returns to Britten's complicated, atonal chords over a pedal bass. This leads to the gay Finale ensemble in, 'Now Until the Break of Day' with Oberon and Titania taking solos centre stage with children and the whole cast in a sweet 4-part polytonal chorus, 'Trip away, Make no stay. Robin has the last word — as he does in the original. The full Opera will be staged on Friday and Saturday evenings, with a pre-performance talk at 6pm to explore the secrets behind this production. An informative programme by ROHM then, to bring Shakespeare and Opera closer to Muscat audiences.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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FOOD TALK

Did a delicious mistake lead to this national dish?

IF YOU EVER ORDER sopa, or soup, in Paraguay, don't expect to be served a steaming bowl of broth. What you'll get instead is a dense and cheesy hunk of cornbread.

This bread, also known as sopa Paraguaya, is one of the country's most popular dishes. Cornmeal, onion, cheese, milk and eggs are mixed together to make a custardy cornbread, with a texture similar to bread pudding, that is commonly served alongside grilled meats.

The bread can be difficult to find in the United States, where nearly 30,000 Paraguayans live — the smallest Latino group in the country, according to census data.

And it can be challenging for Paraguayan American cooks to ensure that the moist texture of the bread remains the same when using American ingredients. Instead of the creamy queso Paraguaya that's traditional in the recipe, for instance, many chefs and cooks substitute similar cheeses like mozzarella, Muenster and Monterey Jack.

There are many origin stories about the bread, all with a similar gist: In the mid-1800s, when Carlos Antonio López was the president of Paraguay, corn soup was often served for lunch. But one day, the president's chef got carried away with the cornmeal and added too much. In an attempt to fix the dish, the chef put the sopa into the oven and served it to the president as cornbread. The leader loved the bread so much that he decreed it a national dish and named it sopa Paraguaya.

Paraguayans have been making the sopa ever since, said Bridget Maria Chesterton, a history professor at Buffalo State University. But the first published version of the recipe was from a 1931 cookbook by Raquel Livieres de Artecona.

Other Paraguayans, like Liliana Rodas de Araujo, said the



bread was being baked for many years before the presidential chef's mistake. Rodas de Araujo said the Cario-Guaraní — a group of Indigenous Paraguayans who lived near her native city, Asunción — likely used native corn and baked a similar type of bread when they learned about dairy from Spanish colonists.

RECIPE: SOPA PARAGUAYA (CHEESY CORNBREAD)

Recipe from Nancy Ojeda
Adapted by Christina Morales

Crisp at the edges and creamy in the centre, this dense, cheesy cornbread from I Love Paraguay, a Paraguayan restaurant in New York City, has a texture similar to bread pudding. Paraguayans serve it for many meals in the country, but especially alongside asado (grilled meats). Although the bread is extremely popular, its true origins are murky. Many people will tell a similar story: In the mid-1800s, when Carlos Antonio López was the president of Paraguay, he liked to eat corn soup. But his chef made a mistake and added too much cornmeal, and instead served the president a cornbread. The president reportedly loved it so much that he named it sopa Paraguaya. But



others say that the bread has deeper roots from the Cario-Guaraní, a group of Indigenous people in Paraguay, who made a similar type of cornbread.

Yield: 12 to 16 servings
Total time: About 1 1/2 hours

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup corn oil
1 large yellow onion, finely diced
1½ teaspoons fine sea salt
1 cup corn kernels (canned or fresh)
8 large eggs, whites and yolks separated
4 cups/566 grammes precooked yellow cornmeal (preferably P.A.N.)

4 cups whole milk
2 1/4 cups/8 ounces grated Muenster or mozzarella

PREPARATION:

1. Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Using a little bit of the oil, grease a 9-by-13-inch baking pan.
2. In a medium skillet over medium heat, add the oil and onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, 10 to 15 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in the salt and let the onions cool down for 5 to 10 minutes.
3. While that cools, transfer the corn kernels to a blender and blend them into a coarse purée, scraping down the side of the blender as needed; set aside.
4. In a stand mixer (or large bowl), beat the egg whites on medium-high with the whisk attachment until they are light, frothy and uniformly white, about 2 minutes (or 3 to 4 minutes if whisking by hand). They should at least triple in volume. Next, whisk in the yolks, one at a time; set aside.
5. In a very large bowl, combine the cornmeal and the puréed corn, mixing by hand with a rubber spatula until well incorporated. Then add the cooked onion with all of the corn oil and mix again until no dry streaks remain. Stir in about half the milk. Next, add all of the cheese and about half of the egg mixture and fold until combined, pulling the wet mixture from the edges into the centre. Add the rest of the egg mixture and milk and fold until fully combined. (The mixture will look wet, similar to a cake batter.) Transfer to the baking pan.
6. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, until the top is golden brown. (If you place a toothpick or knife through the centre, it should come out clean.) Let it cool for 15 to 20 minutes before serving. (The sopa is best enjoyed while still warm. It will firm up as it rests.) The sopa will keep, covered tightly in aluminium foil, in the refrigerator for up to 4 days, or frozen for up to one month.
— NYT

ENTERTAINMENT

The day the music died (on TikTok)

THINGS WERE GOING well for Cody Fry, a singer-songwriter and producer known for his lush pop songs. He was looking forward to a pair of concerts with Ben Rector and the Colorado Symphony at the Boettcher Concert Hall in Denver. And on Monday his management team called him with exciting news: One of his songs, "Things You Said," a romantic duet with Abby Cates, was gaining TikTok traction in China.

More than 750,000 videos were created with that song in a single day, Fry said in a TikTok video. It was the kind of organic viral moment that artists and marketers dream of, the kind that can't be forced.

But by Thursday, many of the fan-made videos featuring "Things You Said" went mute. The sudden TikTok silence came about after Universal Music Group, the world's largest music company, pulled its catalogue from TikTok after its contract with the platform expired.

In addition to Fry, who is signed to Decca Records, one of the company's many labels, Universal artists whose videos went silent include SZA, Taylor Swift and Ice Spice.

Picture a TikTok video of somebody dancing to a snippet of Swift's "Bejeweled." Now picture that person dancing in complete silence.

"Help, this is so awkward with no music," a comment read on a recent TikTok posted by Ice Spice, a rapper whose music regularly sparks a big reaction on the platform.

"This sound isn't available," reads the caption where a video's music information would typically go.

TikTok trends can account for millions of views, which can help make or break a career.

"It's everything you hope for as an artist," Fry said by phone on Thursday during an intermission in his first Denver show. "To have it cut short just as it was ramping up in its infancy is just — it's pretty devastating."

On Tuesday, Universal Music sent an open letter in advance of the expiration of its contract with TikTok. The letter criticised the social media giant for its mishandling of the rise in artificial intelligence-generated music on the platform. It also said that TikTok had been unwilling to agree to royalty rates that Universal deemed acceptable.

"Ultimately TikTok is trying to build a music-based business, without paying fair value for the music," Universal wrote.

TikTok disagreed with that view in a statement posted on Tuesday.

"Despite Universal's false narrative and rhetoric," the statement said, "the fact is they have chosen to walk away from the powerful support of a platform with well over a billion users that serves as a free promotional and discovery vehicle for their talent."

The company added that it had reached "artist-first" agreements with every other label and publisher" and accused Universal of "self-serving actions."

Fry said that he was fully supportive of artists' being paid fairly for their work. But he couldn't help feeling as if he were caught in the middle of a battle between two corporate giants.

"The people who are going to be affected are artists like me," Fry said. Referring to TikTok and Universal, he added, "They're going to be fine."

"For me," he continued, "this is career-making stuff. For other artists that have songs that are going viral, those moments fade and they don't come back when the negotiations are finally resolved."

TikTok has become a driving force in the music industry, a way for up-and-coming artists to score record deals and for established artists to increase their audiences. If you want to make it in music in 2024, it is all but a requirement that you have a social media strategy. Several artists, including Halsey and Florence Welch, have discussed the pressure to have a strong TikTok presence.

"It's true all record labels ask for are TikToks and I got told off today for not making enough effort," FKA twigs wrote in a video in 2022.

Fry said his record deal with Decca resulted in part from his TikTok success, when another one of his songs went viral in 2021. At the time, he didn't have an account, he said, and his brother had to show him the app.

Noah Kahan, who has recorded for Republic Records, a Universal label, since 2017, addressed his fans in a TikTok video on Thursday.

"So, like you, I have read the news about the UMG catalogue being taken off TikTok," he said. "Some of my songs aren't going to be on there anymore. I won't be able to promote my music on TikTok anymore."

Then, with a slight grin, he added: "But, luckily, I'm not a TikTok artist, right?" Kahan, whose album "Stick Season" has provided the soundtracks for countless TikTok videos, has 2.3 million followers on the platform. — NYT



How an artist balances humour and art in his caricatures

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
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Caricature plays a pivotal role in newspaper art due to its ability to captivate readers visually, simplify complex ideas, and convey humour. Its exaggerated depictions of individuals or situations serve as potent tools for satire, critique, and social commentary.

By injecting humour into serious topics and spotlighting societal issues, caricatures engage readers and encourage critical thinking. Moreover, they aid in identity recognition, making public figures more memorable.

With a rich cultural history, caricature artists are esteemed for their talent in shaping public opinion. Ultimately, caricature enriches newspapers by adding entertainment, depth, and dimension to their content.

Three of the world's most popular caricature makers are Al Hirschfeld, Mort Drucker, and Gerald Scarfe. Al Hirschfeld's distinctive linear style and ability to capture the essence of his subjects made his works iconic in the entertainment industry.

Mort Drucker's skillful caricatures in *MAD* magazine set the standard for satirical cartooning, influencing generations of artists.

Gerald Scarfe's bold and provocative caricatures, particularly his political cartoons for *The Sunday Times*, challenged societal norms and sparked critical dialogue. Their works are important for their ability to entertain, provoke thought, and shape public discourse through humour, satire, and incisive social commentary.

In recent centuries, journalistic caricature has emerged as a formidable force, with artists dissecting complex political and social issues, distilling them into clever and humorous compositions.

Found primarily within the pages of newspapers, these caricatures serve as potent vehicles for artists to convey their perspectives, their concise and expressive nature amplifying their impact on society.

With each stroke of the pen, caricature deftly merges comedy with artistic vision, leaving an indelible mark on the cultural landscape.

In Oman, one notable figure as a caricature artist is Fahd al Zadjali, a visual artist, and cartoonist for the *Oman* newspaper. His passion for this art form began in his childhood, growing up in an artistic family environment.

Inspired by his late elder sister's talent, Fahd developed a wide-ranging imagination filled with cartoon images he observed on TV channels and in illustrated magazines. Starting to create beautiful paintings, he received praise from teachers and friends, eventually showcasing his work on social media and becoming a part of Oman's daily newspaper pages.

Notably, in addition, he has achieved the status of being the first international caricature judge in the Gulf region, a source of pride for himself.

Speaking to *Oman Daily Observer*, Fahd shared that "Caricature is characterised by several elements that distinguish it from other visual arts."

He added, "It relies on humour and satire, intelligently breaking traditional rules, reflecting the artist's personal vision and analysis of issues in a humorous way."

He shared, "Caricature effectively contributes to expressing political opinions, but it requires the artist to be knowledgeable about the issue, using visual language to depict facts in a stimulating and innovative manner. Caricature can be a powerful means of expressing criticism and rejecting political events and decisions."

As an integral part of the entertainment section of *Oman*, Fahd has produced dozens of artworks in his career so far and is fondly followed by readers, especially for his artistic commentaries on day-to-day life.

One of his popular works includes touching on the husband and wife relationship in the context of the Middle East, and his works always elicit happy reactions from his followers. Al Zadjali emphasised the responsibility of cartoonists to balance freedom of expression with respect for cultural and political contexts.

Caricature, according to Fahd, is a visual language that artists must understand and use correctly, requiring awareness, intelligence, and artistic vision.

