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# MUSCAT DAILY

AN APEX MEDIA PUBLICATION



Oman ascends  
to new heights with  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham**  
at the helm



## Visionary leadership for a brighter future

We are inspired by His Majesty's visionary leadership  
of a prosperous and brighter future for our dear Oman.

Congratulations to  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq**  
and the people of Oman on the occasion of the  
53<sup>rd</sup> National Day.



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## Heartfelt congratulations

We extend our warmest  
greetings to

**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**

-May the Almighty protect and guide him-

On the blessed occasion of Oman's 53rd National Day,  
may the Divine Grace shower Oman, its people and its esteemed leader with  
ever-increasing prosperity and progress.

Oman is boldly advancing towards the creation of a sustainable,  
economically resilient and socially progressive nation. In doing so, we  
wholeheartedly reiterate our dedication to providing everything required to  
realise the goals set forth in Oman's visionary roadmap for 2040.

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OMAN'S NATIONAL DAY

WARM FELICITATIONS TO  
**HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK**  
AND THE PEOPLE OF OMAN  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
THE **53<sup>rd</sup>** NATIONAL DAY



# STEERING OMAN TOWARDS PROGRESS

The year saw a series of decisions aimed at fostering a sustainable, inclusive and prosperous nation

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The dawn of 2023 brought with it new hope – and challenges – under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, as Oman continued on its path of development and economic diversification.

Through a series of Council of Ministers meetings chaired by His Majesty the Sultan, the year witnessed a plethora of decisions aimed at fostering a sustainable, inclusive and prosperous nation. The visionary approach, demonstrated through various policies and initiatives, presents a roadmap that resonates with the aspirations of the Omani people, the youth and the nation's future.

### Education

Central to His Majesty the Sultan's developmental vision is the enhancement of the education sector. Education is viewed not merely as a tool for personal growth, but as a cornerstone for national progress. Deliberations and subsequent decision to implement the 'Vocational and Technical Education System' for Grades 11 and 12 reflect a deep understanding of the evolving global educational landscape. This initiative, aligned with Oman Vision 2040, is designed to equip the youth with indispensable skills across a broad spectrum of professional and technical domains. It envisages a cadre of well-prepared individuals capable of steering Oman towards a knowledge-based economy.

In line with the attention accorded by His Majesty to the development of national competencies, the Council of Ministers approved the 2023-2027 External Scholarships Programme by introducing a scheme for grooming graduates who are capable of playing leading roles in various economic sectors. The candidates will be sent to major in important future specialisations at top international universities. The scheme will provide 150 scholarships over a period of five years, starting from 2023, worth RO36mn.

To encourage private higher education institutions to play a greater role in boosting the educational process, the Council of Ministers decided that private higher education institutions which were given land (lease based) will get ownership of the land, while at the same time exemption from prescribed fees.

### Economic resilience

The Council of Oman meetings underscored the imperative of diversification and innovation. The unveiling of the Oman Future Fund, with a capital of RO2bn, is a significant stride towards fostering a climate conducive to investment. This fund is poised to invigorate economic activities, encourage the private



*The 2023-2027 External Scholarships Programme will provide 150 scholarships in five years, starting from 2023, worth RO36mn*

sector to engage in partnerships and finance viable investment projects resonating with the sectors earmarked for diversification under Oman Vision 2040.

Moreover, His Majesty the Sultan's directive to channel a portion of the fund's capital towards bold investments in SMEs and startups is a testament to the recognition of the pivotal role these enterprises play in economic rejuvenation and job creation. It is an acknowledgment of the entrepreneurial spirit of Oman, aimed at creating a vibrant ecosystem where innovation thrives and contributes to

the national economy.

### Sports and cultural development

In an effort to promote a culture of physical fitness, community engagement and national pride, His Majesty the Sultan issued directives to initiate the establishment of an integrated Sports City. Envisioned to host regional and international tournaments, the city is a step towards placing Oman on the global sports map. Additionally, an emphasis on developing infrastructure for camel races augments the preservation and celebration of Oman's rich cultural heritage, while also aiming to spur tourism activities across the governorates.

### Social welfare

The social welfare of the citizens, especially the vulnerable segments, is one of the priorities of the government of His Majesty the Sultan. A decision to grant a 15% discount on electricity bills during the summer months reflects a compassionate governance approach, aimed at alleviating the financial burdens

on the populace.

Additionally, allocation of RO26.4mn for housing assistance by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning shows a commitment to ensuring adequate housing for all, thus enhancing the quality of life and social stability.

One of the most remarkable developments this year was the launch of Sultan Haitham City in the wilayat of Seeb. His Majesty the Sultan affirmed that the inception of the project stemmed from a trend to set up modern cities with international planning standards, integrated and interconnected facilities, and equipped with all services that meet the needs of residents. The city seeks to ensure the stability of families and spearhead model development in building sustainable cities.

As a result of its keenness to provide proper health cover and manage it in modern ways, the Council of Ministers also approved the establishment of a National Centre for Women and Children's Health at Sultan Haitham City.

### Regional and global stance

On the regional and international fronts, His Majesty the Sultan has adopted a balanced and principled stand. In his deliberations on the Palestinian crisis, he called for a peaceful resolution and emphasised on protecting civilian rights, which reflect Oman's unwavering commitment to fostering regional peace and stability.

His Majesty the Sultan also directed an unprecedented and generous donation of US\$3mn from Oman to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the besieged Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

His Majesty's call for the international community to adhere to humanitarian principles exemplifies Oman's neutrality and its endeavours to build bridges and promote a culture of peace and dialogue.

The visionary directives of His Majesty the Sultan underscore a holistic and progressive approach. As Oman navigates through the ordeal of global challenges, the roadmap laid down in 2023 is a beacon of hope and a blueprint for a prosperous, resilient and inclusive nation.



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Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

| Tender Number      | Description of Tender                                                                                                 | Last date to collect the tender | Tender return date |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| PRE/23/120 Re-Call | Design & Construction of Riprap Channel and culvert In Al Amerat                                                      | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/071 Re-Call | Design and Construction of Flood Mitigation Works in Madinat Sultan Qaboos, Barwasha                                  | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/090         | Design & Construction of Vented Flood and Road in Al Amerat                                                           | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/204 Re-Call | Maintenance of Expressway Sign Boards                                                                                 | 24/11/2023                      | 30/11/2023         |
| PRE/23/212 Re-Call | Renewal of Adobe Software                                                                                             | 24/11/2023                      | 30/11/2023         |
| PRE/23/232         | Demolition Works at different Locations at Muscat                                                                     | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/249         | Construction of Al Nahdha Walkway at Al Amerat                                                                        | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/250         | Proposed Road and Parking for Bab Al Salam Mosque in Al Mahela South                                                  | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/252         | Relocation, Disconnection of existing Street Light Feeder Pillar & Supply, installation of street light feeder pillar | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/263         | Technical Support Services for Oracle SUN Solaris Servers                                                             | 24/11/2023                      | 30/11/2023         |
| PRE/23/264         | Renovation of Football Pitch at Al Seeb Municipality                                                                  | 24/11/2023                      | 30/11/2023         |
| PRE/23/265         | Maintenance of fire extinguishers, hoses, sensors and fire pumps                                                      | 05/12/2023                      | 25/12/2023         |
| PRE/23/266         | Hire of Water Tankers at Al Seeb                                                                                      | 24/11/2023                      | 30/11/2023         |

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2- Clarification and Support:

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We salute the visionary leadership of  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**  
-May Allah protect, preserve, and bless him-  
and extend our greetings to the people of  
Oman on the occasion of the  
**53rd National Day.**

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An industrial powerhouse with a global presence in steel, Jindal Group is a leading player in the global steel sector. It is bolstering its commitment to the Sultanate of Oman by undertaking several strategic investments aimed at fostering socio-economic growth and supporting the nation's transition to a green, circular economy. Working in tandem with Oman's Vision 2040 plan to reduce the country's dependency on the oil and gas sector while diversifying into non-oil-based manufacturing, the group is flying the flag high. These investments under the Vulcan International Holding Company include Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, Sohar Steel, and Vulcan Pelletizing Plant in Sohar, in Duqm Vulcan Green Steel, and in Muscat Vulcan Green Energy.



## Princess of poets

In a remarkable achievement for Omani literature, Aisha al Saifi emerged as the first Arab woman to win the 'Prince of Poets' contest in Abu Dhabi in March 2023. She triumphed over 1,800 poets, showcasing her poetic prowess live on television across ten episodes.

Aisha, a civil engineering graduate from Sultan Qaboos University, attributes her success to a lifelong passion for poetry. Her literary journey, beginning in fourth grade, has seen her works published in Omani and Arabic newspapers and translated into multiple languages. Aisha's victory, she hopes, will inspire future Omani poets to shine on Arab and international stages.

Reflecting on her journey, Aisha said, "I wrote my first poem when I was in grade 4 - a poem titled 'The White Dove' - which was a great motivation for me to embark on this creative journey in the world of classical Arabic poetry."

Aisha's poems have been translated into several languages, such as Persian, Greek, Spanish, English, German, and Portuguese. "The popularity of poetry in the Arab world cuts deeper, representing a core form of expression as old as language itself."



# PIONEERS AT FOREFRONT

The year saw many Omanis etching their names in the annals of excellence, bringing pride and recognition to the sultanate across various fields. From the realm of poetry to the corridors of medical research, these six individuals have demonstrated exceptional prowess and dedication. As Oman celebrates its 53rd National Day, we turn the spotlight on these luminaries whose achievements have not only elevated Oman's status on global platforms but also inspired a new generation of aspiring achievers.



**Sultanate of Oman**  
سلطنة عمان  
وزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار  
Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion



**Announcement No. 6/2023**

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion hereby announces that, due to the approaching end of the financial year 2023, the deadline for the submission of any financial claims pertaining to the year 2023 is set for Thursday, November 30, 2023. All companies, establishments, and individuals dealing with the ministry are required to submit their financial claims to the Department of Financial Affairs before the specified deadline. The ministry shall not be held responsible for any delays in processing claims received after the mentioned date.

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**SULTANATE OF OMAN**  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



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## Best vet in GCC

Omani veterinary specialist Dr Shahab Abdul Majeed al Balushi distinguished himself at the Almarai Prize for Veterinary Medicine, clinching the title of Best Veterinarian in the GCC.

Working with Al Bashayer Meat Company, Dr Balushi's contributions to veterinary medicine and scientific research have earned him recognition at the awards, previously in 2017 and now in 2023. His achievements underscore the vital role of veterinary medicine in ensuring human and animal health and food safety.

Expressing his gratitude, Dr Balushi stated, "This award is an honour not just for me, but for Oman. It's a testament to our commitment to veterinary science and animal welfare."

Dr Balushi also wants to assist other fellow veterinarians in their works as research in this field is expensive. "I also hope to establish an association for veterinarians to upgrade and develop veterinary services throughout the sultanate."



Razan explained, "My innovation harnesses the power of lycopene in a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way, offering a viable alternative to traditional lead-based shields."

Razan's innovation - creating a natural compound to shield X-rays - is a global first. She highlighted the paint's effectiveness, saying it absorbs 97% of X-rays. Additionally, the compound is water and moisture-resistant, heat-resistant up to 95%, inhibits mould and bacterial growth, and is non-flammable.

Further emphasising the innovation's practicality, Razan said, "The mould can also be used to extract lycopene, making this solution less expensive than current lead-based alternatives."

## Innovator par excellence

Innovator Amna bint Wahab al Rasbiyah was awarded the bronze medal at the Seoul International Invention Fair (SIIF) and received another recognition - 'Excellent Invention' award - from the National Research Council of Thailand.

Her innovative project focused on the synthesis of silica and calcium carbonate nanoparticles for refining wastewater treatment. This reflects her commitment to environmental sustainability and Oman Vision 2040.

In her own words: "This invention is not just about treating wastewater; it's about setting a precedent in environmental technology, aligning with Oman's vision for a sustainable future."

She pointed out that these awards represent recognition of effort and achievement, and encouragement for the work that has continued for five years. "Participation in such global forums enhances the awareness of Omani innovations and builds a strong reputation for the potential and capabilities of Omani youth at the global level."



## Shining in Asian Games

Young Omani athlete Hussain al Farsi made the nation proud by clinching a bronze medal in the men's 800 metres in the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China. Farsi's performance, clocking 1 minute 48.51 seconds, marks a significant achievement in Oman's sports history. His aspirations extend to elevating Oman's athletic standards and garnering more international recognition for Omani athletics.

Farsi spoke of his aspirations: "This medal is just the beginning. My goal is to raise Oman's flag higher in international arenas and inspire the youth in athletics."

This was also the first time that Oman has won a second medal in an Asian Games after sailors Walid al Kindi and Musaab al Hadi clinched silver medal in the men's skiff 49er event, marking a historic win for Oman.



## Grand prize for innovation

In the field of scientific innovation, Razan Hamad al Kalbania clinched the grand prize at the Korea International Women's Innovations Exposition (KIWIE) in July. Her eco-friendly chemical compound, which effectively reduces the intensity of X-rays, stood out among 353 entries from 18 countries.

Razan's groundbreaking paint, incorporating lycopene and offering numerous protective properties, represents a significant advancement in X-ray shielding technology.



## Advancing health research

Rashid Salim Rashid al Shibli, a bright mind from the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), garnered acclaim for his impactful research in the field of epilepsy.

His study titled 'Management of Seizures in Epileptic Patients Visiting the Emergency Department at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital' won the first place for the best scientific poster at the 3rd Oman Neurology Conference held in Salalah in September.

"The recognition of my research underscores our commitment to refining healthcare practices. It's about enhancing patient care and optimising the use of healthcare resources."

Shibli's research examined the treatment of 552 epilepsy patients from 2014 to 2017, to evaluate their management and outcomes during emergency department visits. His findings revealed a crucial insight: Many epilepsy patients did not require emergency department care, which underscored the need for comprehensive guidelines for managing recurrent seizures.





Ominvest extends its sincere congratulations and heartfelt greetings to

His Majesty Sultan  
**Haitham bin Tarik**

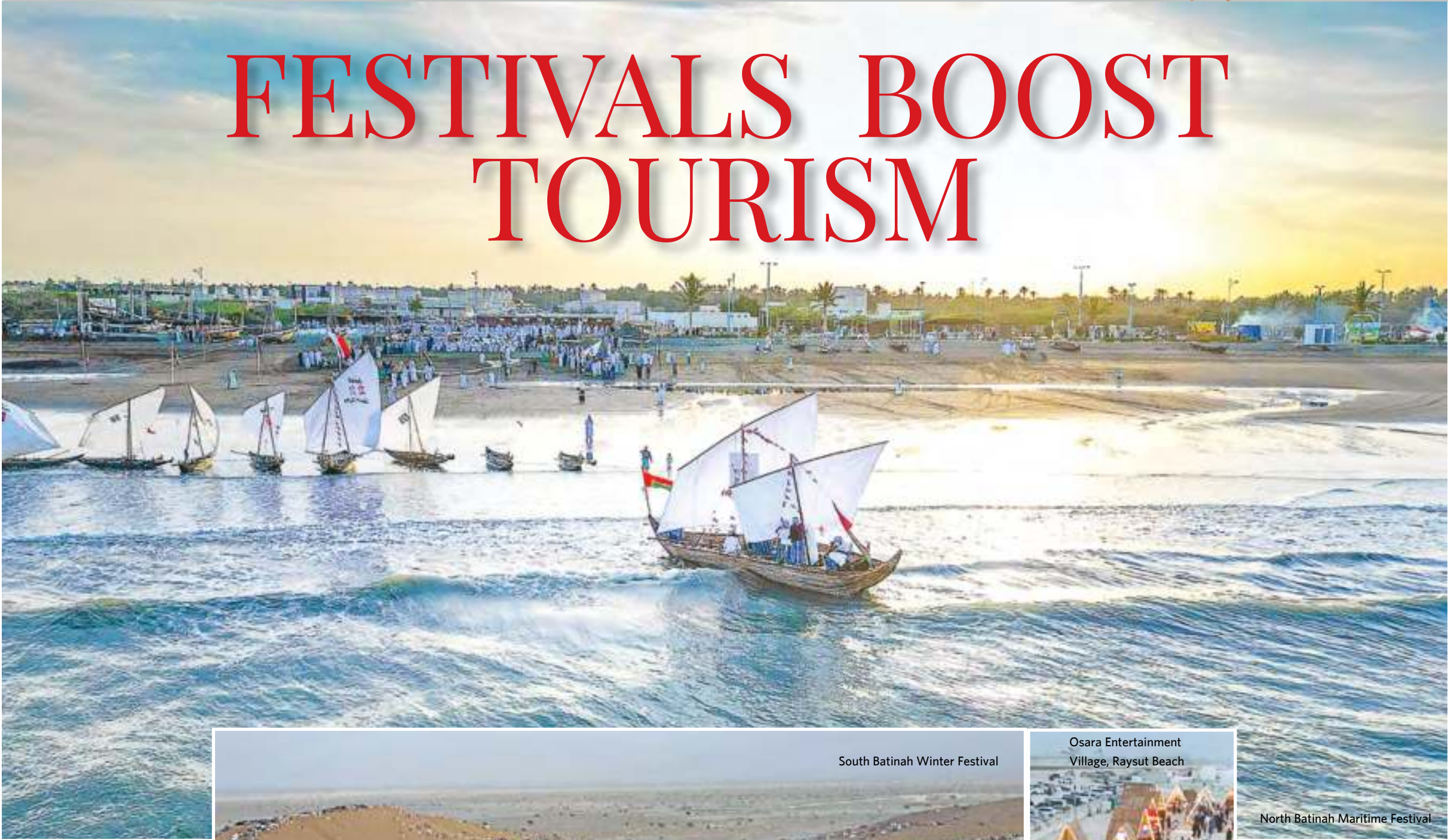
- May the Almighty protect and bless him -

and the people of Oman on the glorious occasion of  
the **53rd National Day.**

On this auspicious occasion, we extend our sincere congratulations to Your Majesty. Under your esteemed leadership, Oman continues its journey towards greater prosperity, development, and excellence. We wholeheartedly reaffirm our unwavering commitment and loyalty to Your Majesty and Oman, as we collectively pursue sustainable growth and progress.

**ominvest**

Transforming Businesses  
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**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) started a novel initiative this year of hosting festivals unique to each governorate with the objective of boosting tourism in remote corners of the sultanate and make Oman a year-round tourism destination.

These festivals are intended to stimulate local tourism, promote heritage and natural elements, and add value to the local community by supporting small and medium enterprises.

Starting on January 19, Muscat Festival - re-branded as Muscat Nights - returned after three years. The 17-day festivities took place at four locations: Qurum Gardens, Naseem Park, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and Oman Automobile Association.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Hamidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, said, "The goal of Muscat Nights 2023 is not limited to entertainment alone; it is set to promote domestic tourism as well and support local industries by providing a space for social and cultural interaction."

One of the main ideas behind



South Batinah Winter Festival



Osara Entertainment Village, Raysut Beach

North Batinah Maritime Festival

organising Muscat Nights was to encourage people to visit parks and be with nature, Hamidi added.

The Sohar Winter Festival at Souq Sohar was also held in January - 21 to February 4. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Balushi, Deputy Wali of Sohar and Chairman of the Organising Committee, said, "The festival had more than 45 cultural, entertainment and shopping activities, in addition to various competitions. The committee allocated more than 40 stalls for families engaged in cottage industries in the souq during the fest."

This was followed by the

Empty Quarter Festival in the wilayat of Thumrait, Dhofar from January 25 to February 3. The festival aimed to promote the governorate as a sustainable tourist destination, in addition to highlighting the potential of winter tourism to attract investors.

The Desert Adventures Festival in Sharqiyah Sands, in the wilayat of Bidiyah, North Sharqiyah from January 29 to February 4, was another successful event that saw thousands of tourists enjoying the famous sand dunes.

According to H E Azzan Qasim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in the Ministry

of Heritage and Tourism, the desert festival aims to revitalise winter tourism in North Sharqiyah, the wilayat of Bidiyah in particular.

"Such festivals stimulate local tourism, promote heritage and tourism sites, highlight the sultanate's mark on the tourism map, and create added value for the local community by supporting small and medium enterprises," said H E Azzan.

The inaugural Maritime Heritage Festival was held from February 3 to 19 in the wilayat of Sur, South Sharqiyah. It highlighted the historical and current role of Sur as a hub for ship

building activities.

The festival included the Maritime Heritage Village to narrate an account of the wilayat's storied past. An Omani Food Carnival at the festival hosted a series of interactive activities that allowed visitors to explore renowned Omani and international dishes, with a focus on fresh local seafood.

Visitors to the festival experienced simulation of the historical sea voyages of Omani ships.

The annual Dakhliah Festival was held from February 23 to March 4, which included several cultural, heritage, entertainment and adventure activities unique

to the governorate.

As summer approached, the focus turned to Dhofar. Almost 1mn people visited the governorate during the three-month khareef season that offered an array of events and celebrations.

The second edition of Jabal Akhdar Festival, held from August 3 to 19, attracted over 60,000 enthusiasts from both within and outside Oman.

The festival offered attendees a refreshing experience amidst scenic hills and pleasant summer weather, painting a panorama of pristine nature combined with an engaging family environment.

The event, a collaboration between the Governorate of Dakhliah and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, witnessed an array of activities that catered to all age groups. There were sections dedicated to children, youth, Omani cuisine, local farmers of Jabal Akhdar and one where children immersed in the culinary world with Omani chefs.

The festival's entertainment segment included international theatre shows like 'Aladdin' and 'Chemical Science'. Adventure enthusiasts were treated to the Jabal Akhdar Mountain Bike Race, a tourist walk and the Himam Trail Run. Paragliding performances further elevated the festival's thrill factor.

Ahmed bin Salem al Toubi, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs in Dakhliah, described the festival as a success. "It served as a platform to highlight our diverse services and development projects in Jabal Akhdar," he said.

Toubi informed that 34 institutions and 45 productive families participated in the festival and added that the governorate actively gathered visitor feedback to further enhance the festival's offerings in its future editions.

# Film fests showcase cultural richness

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

In a strategic move initiated by Oman Film Society (OFS), the sultanate is hosting an array of film festivals. The effort is geared towards nurturing the younger generation's talent in filmmaking, and spotlighting the diverse social and cultural dimensions of Omani life. These festivals, which began in mid-September and extend till March, are a testament to the nation's burgeoning interest in cinema.

According to Jamil al Yaqoobi, Chairman of OFS, the society is dedicated to presenting stories rooted in Omani history and culture. "Over the past few years, we've discovered remarkable talent who we support through workshops and seminars."



Batinah International Film Festival in Nakhal Fort

The 2023-2024 circuit started with the second edition of the Dakhliah Film Festival in

mid-September in Al Hamra, where nearly 50 Arab and international films vied for recogni-

tion over four days, accompanied by various artistic and cinematic events.

The Batinah International Film Festival, held from November 12 to 15, embraced the theme

'Human Relationship with the Land', reflecting Oman's deep connection with its environment. Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, the festival's director, described it as a creative melting pot for filmmakers to showcase their work and exchange ideas. He emphasised cinema's vital role in narrating stories and reinforcing cultural bonds.

The Dhahirah International Film Festival will be held in December.

Highlighting the success of the Dhahirah festival, the society's chairman Yaqoobi informed that the last edition attracted 175 films from 18 countries. "We were taken aback by the enormous response for a festival in a relatively remote region. We anticipate over 200 entries this year."

The next edition of the Shar-

qiyah International Film Festival will be held in January 2024. The previous edition held in January 2023 saw participation of nearly 120 film. Anwar al Ruzaiqi, Festival Director, is optimistic about more films - particularly from the Arab world - in the next edition.

The 2023-2024 film festival season will conclude with the much-anticipated Muscat International Film Festival, scheduled from March 3 to 7. Known for attracting global cinema stars, this festival is a high point in Oman's cultural calendar, showcasing the nation's growing film industry and its contribution to global cinema.

These festivals highlight Oman's commitment to cultural enrichment and its evolving role as a cradle for artistic and cinematic talent.

# S Sharqiyah on development spree

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

South Sharqiyah governorate is currently undergoing a developmental transformation with a myriad of projects valued at RO17.7mn.

These initiatives, integral to the governorate's comprehensive development programmes, have been planned to boost commercial and tourism activities, alongside creating family-friendly recreational spaces across various wilayats.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Sharqiyah, said that these projects are in alignment with the Oman Vision 2040's emphasis on sustainable and balanced development

across governorates.

"Our strategy is to tap each wilayat's unique advantages, thereby boosting their competitive edge and fulfilling the multifaceted aspirations of our citizens in social, economic, and environmental sectors," he stated.

In 2021 and 2022, the governorate spent approximately RO13.336mn on various development projects, with an additional RO4.347mn projected for the remainder of the current year.

Among the key projects is the beautification of the area around the commercial market in Sur (Phase One), with contracts already underway for design and supervision. The waterfront proj-



ect in Al Haddah and the beach park development in Ras al Hadd Niyabat, are also notable undertakings.

As part of the ongoing efforts to bolster South Sharqiyah's

tourism sector, the governorate has witnessed remarkable strides, with the region not only enhancing its infrastructure and public amenities but also making significant inroads into the

tourism and heritage sectors.

Dr Maawali informed that as of December 2022, 25 heritage and tourism projects have been identified, with the total confirmed and planned investment

value projected to reach RO90.51mn by 2025.

Of this, RO28.25mn represents the total investment value of already completed projects.

The governorate has released several tenders for crucial developments, including the enhancement of Al Hira and Saiq area in Al Kamel Wa al Wafi, along with municipal parks and coastal parks across various wilayats. Tenders for the Al-Ashkharah facade and the waterfront in Shaanzi, Masirah, are also in the pipeline.

They are poised to add significant value to the region.

Dr Maawali drew attention to the strides that are being made in the healthcare sector, citing four hospitals with a capacity of

390 beds, two health complexes, and 18 health centres.

The private sector further contributes with 11 health complexes, 41 clinics, and 69 pharmacies.

In the education sector, the governorate boasts of having 100 public schools, accommodating 62,997 students and 4,989 teachers, complemented by 64 private schools serving 10,419 students and employing 755 teachers.

These multifaceted developmental efforts underscore South Sharqiyah's commitment to a holistic and sustainable growth model, reflecting the broader goals of Oman Vision 2040 and reinforcing the governorate's role in the nation's progress.

## H M the Sultan to preside over military parade on Saturday

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, will preside over the military parade on Saturday, to be staged at the military parade ground of Adam Air Base in the Governorate of Dakhiliya on the occasion of the 53rd Glorious National Day.

Symbolic units representing the Royal Army of Oman, the Royal Air Force of Oman, the Royal Navy of Oman, the Royal Guard of Oman, the Sultan's Special Force, the Royal Oman Police, the Royal Court Affairs, and the joint military

musical band will take part in the military parade.

The parade will be attended by the members of the Royal Family, ministers, chairmen of the State Council and Shura Council, advisors, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces, commanders of military and security units, heads of the diplomatic missions of the Arab and foreign countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, members of the State Council and Shura Council, undersecretaries, governors, retired military commanders, judges, and other officials.



## Oman launches campaign to woo European tourists

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman is embarking on a special campaign in two key European countries from Thursday to woo foreign tourists.

In an effort to bolster the country's tourism by highlighting Oman's unique travel experiences around the world, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is launching this promotional campaign in Italy and Germany.

The campaign, scheduled to run for a week, will see Oman's rich heritage, natural landscapes, and adventure tourism showcased in Milan, Rome, Berlin, and Munich.

Haitham bin Muhammad al Ghassani, Director General of Promotion at the ministry, said through this campaign, the ministry is looking to establish direct communication channels with leading tourism companies in Italy and Germany.

"We aim to present the exceptional tourism experiences that Oman offers, focusing on

our country's rich heritage and natural wonders."

The campaign will see participation of 22 Omani tourism institutions for exploring business partnerships when they engage in open dialogues with 270 Italian and 150 German institutions.

These workshops and meetings are part of a strategic effort to attract European tourists, particularly those drawn to winter destinations.

Recent statistics underscore the campaign's significance, revealing a surge in European visitors to Oman.

The number of German tourists soared to 95,623 till September this year, marking a 240% increase from the same period in 2022. Similarly, the number of Italian visitors also saw a 279% jump with total number reaching 46,056 as against 12,155 recorded last year.

These figures reflect people's growing interest in Oman as a travel destination and underscore its potential for further growth through promotions.

### THE RESOLUTE SPIRIT OF A NATION ON THE MOVE

Congratulations and warm wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the citizens of Oman on the occasion of the 53rd National Day.

The values of peace and growth around which Oman has built its vision and development over the years continue to guide a nation on the move towards prosperity.

Lulu Group is proud to be an integral part of this illustrious march of progress and pledge our loyalty to the wise and visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on this glorious occasion.

# MoCIIP launches three electronic platforms to achieve comprehensive digital transformation

**Muscat** - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) launched on Wednesday three electronic platforms - Oman Business Platform, Oman Marouf Platform, and Hazm Platform.

The launch of these platforms aims at enhancing the digital transformation in the business field and taking advantage of the opportunities of digital technologies to improve efficiency and carry out businesses in a new and an innovative way.

The inauguration ceremony, at W Muscat Hotel, was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Dr Kamel bin Fahd al Said, Secretary General in the General Secretariat to the Cabinet, and in the presence of H E Qais bin Mohammad al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and a number of their excellencies and officials in the public and private sectors.

The ministry aims at converting all the services it provides into electronic services to complement the efforts undertaken by the government in order to achieve comprehensive digital transformation, as well as to enhance the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

It also aims at facilitating the procedures for starting businesses in the sultanate, in order to encourage investors to establish projects that enhance the national economy, improve and facilitate the business environment, implement international best practices, and enhance Oman's international indicators in easing the business environment.

This step will also contribute to strengthen the competitiveness and innovation, accelerating import and export procedures and ensuring that products comply with the regulations and laws in force in Oman.

The ministry pointed out that during the last period, Oman has charted an ambitious path to move to a knowledge-based economy and to achieve access to the Oman digital society through developing the national strategy for the Oman digital society and e-government, which included all areas concerned with achieving the digital society and its components, including building human capabilities, rehabilitating the infrastructure, implementing the e-government approach, and building confidence and drawing up frameworks and legislation regulating this approach.

H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, said, "It is fortunate that the launch of the Oman Business Platform, Hazm platform, and the Marouf Oman platform, comes under the royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik - may Allah protect and preserve him - who has emphasised during the inauguration of the Council of Oman, on the importance of diversifying sources of income, based on technology, knowledge and innovation, in order to make the digital economy a priority and a tributary to the national



economy.

"While the ministry seeks through the launching of these platforms to transform all the services it provides into electronic services, as a continuation of the efforts that the wise government is undertaking to achieve comprehensive digital transformation as well as enhancing the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman."

H E Dr Masan added, "Thanks to Allah that

our country has come a long way in reaching the digitisation of most of the services provided, with the aim of facilitating, and speeding up the completion of transactions, and we seek to continue the efforts made in this regard. And today we are proud of the launch of the Oman Business Platform by MoCIIP, where the ministry seeks through the platform to direct investors to one platform for enhancing the business environment and provide self-

service to start any business for investors from outside the Sultanate of Oman."

The Hazm platform aims at ensuring the provision of safe and sound products, protecting the health and safety of the consumer, and facilitating customs clearance operations, while the launch of the Marouf Oman platform will contribute to create a legal and regulatory environment for developing and promoting e-commerce, documenting local electronic

stores, and organising sales-related operations through online purchasing, that will also contribute to facilitating, simplifying and accelerating business, easing import and export procedures, organising commercial work, and diversifying the national economy in Oman, he added.

The Undersecretary pointed out that the efforts made to achieve digital transformation in various fields are an extension of meeting the royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham, as he emphasised on the importance of improving the performance system in government entities through the digital transformation programme, as he stressed on the necessity of rehabilitating technical infrastructure and managing services, which will contribute to strengthening government services to achieve a qualitative leap in the field of interaction with society and developing the business environment for investors.

H E Dr Masan added, "Today we work in accordance with a coherent institutional framework of economic policies and legislation that keeps pace with changes. This practice embodies the clear vision and lofty aspirations for a more prosperous and developing future, affirming our determination to strive diligently and with renewed resolve to achieve this, and to continue the effort and giving, so that we can achieve greater successes during the next stage under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan."

For his part, Mubarak bin Mohammed al Dohani, Director General of Commerce and Head of the Digital Transformation Team at MoCIIP, gave a visual presentation in which he highlighted the services and facilities provided by Oman Business Platform, which was previously known as the 'Invest Easy' portal.

He said, "The new identity of the platform is characterised by ease of use, effectiveness where it has been designed in accordance with the latest standards followed in developing international websites, while it will contribute to improve Oman's rank in the global competitiveness reports, and expanding electronic services to include all government entities related to the business environment."

He added that the platform also aims at directing investors to one platform for the business environment and provide self-service to start a business for investors from outside the Sultanate along with an electronic application for smart phones.

Dohani clarified that the procedures and steps for completing transactions have been reduced and improved, where the platform provides 50 electronic services for the business environment, as the ministry launched a service that allows foreign investors from outside Oman to benefit from electronic services to bring more investments to the sultanate, where the service of 'Know Your Customer' - enables foreign investors to register and authenticate transactions on the platform with no need for the PKI feature.



# KOHLI, IYER AND SHAMI

India outplay New Zealand to enter final

Mumbai, India - Virat Kohli scored his milestone century and Mohammed Shami took seven wickets as India continued their stellar show, triumphing over New Zealand by 70 runs in a riveting high-scoring World Cup semi-final clash at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

Kohli recorded his 50th century in the 50-over format, surpassing the legendary Sachin Tendulkar. Opting to bat first, India set a formidable total of 397/4, powered by Kohli's masterful 117 and a scintillating 105 from Shreyas Iyer. The Wankhede Stadium, reminiscent of India's 2011 World Cup triumph, witnessed a formidable batting display.

In response, New Zealand, who had defeated India in the 2019 tournament at the same stage, faced a daunting target.

Despite Daryl Mitchell's valiant effort with an outstanding 134, the Kiwis were eventually dismissed for 327 in the 49th over. The winner of the Australia-South Africa encounter at Kolkata's Eden Gardens will face India in the final, scheduled for Sunday in Ahmedabad.

Mitchell's crucial partnership of 181 with Kane Williamson kept New Zealand in contention. However, Shami continued his magical form to emerge as



India's Virat Kohli celebrates his century against New Zealand

India's bowling hero. Shami's crucial dismissals of both openers and skipper Williamson tilted the game in India's favor. Mitchell, experiencing cramps after surpassing his century, continued to fight alongside Glenn Phillips, contributing to a 75-run partnership. Yet, Phillips' departure for a quick 33-ball 41 signaled the challenge ahead for the Black Caps. Despite Mitchell's exceptional innings, India's target proved insurmountable.

Shami's stellar figures of seven for 57, his third five-wicket

haul in the competition, played a decisive role in India's triumph. Kohli's milestone century, crafted from 113 balls, etched his name in history, surpassing Tendulkar's record. The 35-year-old maestro's acknowledgment, removing his helmet and bowing to the stands, drew cheers from the crowd and applause from Tendulkar and former football icon David Beckham.

Iyer's explosive 105, a display of power hitting with four fours and eight sixes off 70 balls, added late fireworks.



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53

AS OMAN CELEBRATES ITS 53RD NATIONAL DAY OF THE RENAISSANCE, WE EXTEND OUR WARMEST FELICITATIONS AND CONGRATULATIONS TO HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIQ AND THE PEOPLE OF OMAN, WISHING THEM CONTINUED SUCCESS AND PEACE.

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**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.**



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2040



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people of Oman on the occasion  
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# Fresh debris hampers rescue work at collapsed Indian tunnel

**Uttarkashi, India** - Heavy auger drilling machines have reached Chinyalisaur helipad in Uttarkashi to rescue 40 labourers who have been trapped inside after a portion of the under-construction tunnel collapsed on Sunday.

"These are being connected; drilling work will start soon," officials said.

"We have airlifted a latest machine from Delhi, the Indian Air Force is helping us. In the next few hours we will be able to install the machine and rescue work will resume," said Anshu Manish Khalko, Director, NHIDCL (National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited).

Meanwhile, protests broke out on Wednesday outside the Silkyara-Barkot tunnel in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi over the delay in rescuing labourers who have been trapped.

Even as relief and rescue oper-



SDRF personnel are seen inside tunnel which collapsed, in Uttarkashi, India on Tuesday (ANI)

ation continued on war footing, fresh debris falling from the roof of the tunnel are hampering the rescue work.

Rescuers had prepared a platform for the auger drilling machine to insert large-diameter steel pipes into the debris-filled tunnel, that aims to create a passage through which labourers

could be brought out safely.

However, visuals from the site showed rescue officials using JCB machines to remove the fresh debris and working to mount the auger machine on the platform again to push the steel pipes into the tunnel.

Uttarakhand Director General of Police (DGP) Ashok Kumar

told ANI that relief and rescue work was proceeding on war footing, drilling work is being done with auger drilling machine.

"Due to natural obstacles, the speed of drilling is slow," DGP Kumar said.

DGP said that efforts are being made by the central agencies with the help of Air Force to bring

in a heavy auger drilling machine, which will speed up the rescue work.

He expressed hope about safely evacuating all the workers.

On Tuesday, District Magistrate Abhishek Ruhela along with the senior doctor of the District Hospital, Dr Prem Pokhriyal, went inside the tunnel and talked to the workers through the pipe.

Officials from the administration and police were present at the site to reassure anxious family members of the trapped workers who had gathered.

Uttarkashi District Magistrate Abhishek Ruhela, State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) Commandant Manikant Mishra, Superintendent of Police Arpan Yaduvanshi, Chief Development Officer Gaurav Kumar, and many other officers are present at the spot and are playing their role in the rescue operation.

ANI

## India: 36 dead as bus falls into gorge

**Doda, India** - Thirty-six people died and 19 others were injured after a bus fell into a gorge in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda on Wednesday

Union Minister Jitendra Singh confirmed in a post on X about the 36 deaths and said that out those injured six people were said to be in a critical condition.

Home Minister Amit Shah expressed his condolences and in a statement on X said that the local administration is actively engaged in the rescue operation at the site of the accident. The mishap took place as the bus carrying 55 passengers and on its way from Kishtwar to Jammu veered off the road and rolled down the steep slope near Trungal in the Assar area on the highway.

"Saddened to share the update from DC Doda Harvinder Singh from the spot of the accident. Unfortunately, 36 persons have died and 19 injured, out of whom 6 injured are serious," Minister Singh posted on X.

The Union Minister said that he had spoken to the Doda District Commissioner, Harvinder Singh and that the injured are being shifted to Government Medical College Doda.

Singh said: "Helicopter service to be arranged for shifting the more injured ones. All possible help, as required being provided. I am in constant touch."

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha expressed deep sorrow over the loss of lives.

"Extremely pained by the loss of lives in a tragic bus accident in Assar, Doda. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families & wishing for a speedy recovery of those injured in the accident. Directed Div Com & Dist Admin to provide all necessary assistance to affected persons," Sinha tweeted.

ANI

## Myanmar's famed Inle Lake chokes on floating farms

From a gently rocking boat, Nyunt Win tends a floating tomato crop in the cool water of Myanmar's famed Inle Lake, nestled in the Shan Hills and once the country's most popular tourist spot.

The floating farms have become as ubiquitous at the UNESCO-recognised reserve as its famed houses on stilts and leg-rowing fishermen, but locals warn that the plantations are slowly choking the lake.

The ever-expanding farms are eating up surface area, sending chemical runoff into the waters, and clogging the picturesque site with discarded plant matter, opponents say.

Nyunt Win once farmed on dry land near Inle, but he told AFP the 'productivity was not great'.

Several years ago he bought a share in a floating plantation and now makes 30,000 kyats (US\$14) per box of tomatoes.

"We're not prosperous but we can rely on this for a living," he said. But aquaculture comes at a cost to the lake. The farms must be anchored in place and the produce shielded from the sun - mainly by invasive water hyacinths.

The weed grows rampantly on the surface of Inle, depleting oxygen levels by blotting out light for other plants, so it makes for a free and abundant building block for plantations.

Out on the lake, Si Thu Win heaves mounds of water hyacinths and other aquatic plants from the water to shore up and protect his plants.

"The (tomato) plants do not last long if it's sunny," he says.

"To protect the roots, we have to cover them."



A man rowing a boat past his floating farm on Inle Lake in southern Shan State on October 17 (AFP)

Floating farms are 'ruining' the lake, an official from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation told AFP, requesting anonymity.

Local authorities have tried to corral the drifting refuse into designated areas, but they do not have the resources to manage, he said.

"That's why the lake is getting narrower," the official said.

Farmers like Nyunt Win deny they are strangling the lake. They say the bigger problem is that

law for Inle was proposed by the regional parliament in 2019 but has not progressed beyond a draft stage.

**Business**

Businesses around the lake also worry that its shrinking surface and environmental degradation will drive tourists away.

"Our Inle lake area was very big when we were young," said Kyaw Kyaw, 38, who owns a jewellery shop on the lake and employs 20 gold- and silversmiths.

*The ever-expanding farms are eating up surface area, sending chemical runoff into the waters, and clogging the picturesque site with discarded plant matter*

decades of slash-and-burn agriculture on the surrounding hillsides have caused soil to wash into the streams that feed Inle, slowly filling it in.

"When I was young the water would cover the top of a 12-foot bamboo pole," he said.

Now, during the summer months he can 'pick up handfuls of soil' from his boat, he said.

The farm boom has pitted tomato cultivators against the fishermen who ply the lake, with 24-year-old Nay Tun Oo alleging that chemical runoff from the crops pollutes the water.

"When I was young and attending school, the water in the lake was not that bad," he told AFP, adding that many species of fish that are good to eat can no longer be found.

A 2017 UN report found 'considerable overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides' on floating farms, polluting the lake and damaging the surrounding ecosystem. A new conservation

"As there are too many floating farms, the water we use for drinking and washing isn't clean anymore."

Inle was once a major tourist destination, drawing around 200,000 foreigners and a million locals a year before the COVID-19 pandemic dented travel.

But there has been no recovery thanks to a military coup in 2021 and clashes between the junta and its opponents across swathes of the country.

Inle Lake lies in the southern part of Shan state, the far north of which has seen fierce fighting over the past two weeks between junta forces and ethnic armed groups.

"It has been three years already... and no foreigners are visiting here," Kyaw Kyaw said.

Some of his metalsmiths are now learning other languages so they can go abroad for work, he said, while others are now working as carpenters.

AFP



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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Gulf International Chemicals SAOG (GIC), I am pleased to present you a brief report on the company's activities for the third quarter of 2023.

The Group's total revenue for the period under review was RO 1,389,026. The net profit after taxation amounted to RO 69,078 and the net asset per share stood at 126 Baiza.

During the third quarter of 2023, regional construction markets continued the slow pace. Both Oman and UAE markets are in oversupply and less demand situation for construction chemicals due to sharp reduction in construction projects which is mainly attributable to limited government spending on construction and infrastructure projects.

However, major raw material prices and disruptions in global supply chain have shown increased stability during the period. The construction chemicals industry globally has gone through tough times in the last 2-3 years which led to major consolidations (mergers and acquisitions) in the industry which in turn will have its consequences in our regional markets soon.

The outlook for the remaining of year 2023 is very conservative due to the competition from international companies, after the mergers in our local markets, which is expected to put further pressure on margins. The improvement in purchasing power will not be rapid in the construction sector in our local markets, as it is mainly linked to the improvement of regional circumstances and improvement in the local investment climate and the real estate market.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty's Government for its generous support and for paving the way for growth and prosperity.

Best Regards,  
Chairman

### CONSOLIDATED UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 SEP 2023 (EXPRESSED IN OMANI RIALS)

|                                                                   | Group 2023       | Group 2022       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>ASSETS</b>                                                     |                  |                  |
| <b>Non-current assets</b>                                         |                  |                  |
| Property, plant and equipment                                     | 91,502           | 133,613          |
| Right-of-use assets                                               | 11,507           | 12,629           |
| Intangible asset                                                  | 61,273           | 69,185           |
| Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income | 207,763          | 506,191          |
| Deferred tax asset                                                | 74,017           | 80,232           |
| <b>Total non-current assets</b>                                   | <b>446,062</b>   | <b>801,850</b>   |
| <b>Current assets</b>                                             |                  |                  |
| Inventories                                                       | 281,464          | 254,482          |
| Trade and other receivables                                       | 1,192,166        | 1,072,391        |
| Terms deposits                                                    | 700,000          | 550,000          |
| Cash and bank balances                                            | 396,090          | 306,568          |
| <b>Total current assets</b>                                       | <b>2,569,720</b> | <b>2,183,441</b> |
| <b>Total assets</b>                                               | <b>3,015,782</b> | <b>2,985,291</b> |
| <b>EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>                                     |                  |                  |
| <b>Capital and reserves</b>                                       |                  |                  |
| Share capital                                                     | 2,100,000        | 2,100,000        |
| Legal reserve                                                     | 599,722          | 598,850          |
| Fair value reserve                                                | (194,195)        | (169,020)        |
| Revaluation reserve                                               | 50,110           | 50,110           |
| Retained earnings                                                 | 88,073           | (13,380)         |
| <b>Total capital and reserves</b>                                 | <b>2,643,710</b> | <b>2,566,560</b> |
| <b>Non-current liabilities</b>                                    |                  |                  |
| Lease liabilities                                                 | -                | 12,760           |
| Employees' benefit liabilities                                    | 95,935           | 81,844           |
| <b>Total non-current liabilities</b>                              | <b>95,935</b>    | <b>94,604</b>    |
| <b>Current liabilities</b>                                        |                  |                  |
| Lease liabilities                                                 | 12,990           | 914              |
| Trade and other payables                                          | 258,692          | 323,213          |
| Income tax payable                                                | 4,454            | -                |
| <b>Total current liabilities</b>                                  | <b>276,136</b>   | <b>324,127</b>   |
| <b>Total liabilities</b>                                          | <b>372,071</b>   | <b>418,731</b>   |
| <b>Total equity and liabilities</b>                               | <b>3,015,782</b> | <b>2,985,291</b> |
| <b>Net assets per share (OMR)</b>                                 | <b>0.126</b>     | <b>0.122</b>     |

### CONSOLIDATED UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 SEP 2023 (EXPRESSED IN OMANI RIALS)

|                                       | Group 2023     | Group 2022     |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Revenue from contracts with customers | 1,389,026      | 1,555,903      |
| Cost of sales                         | (943,533)      | (1,275,706)    |
| Gross profit                          | 445,493        | 280,197        |
| Other income                          | 56,189         | 46,026         |
|                                       | <b>501,682</b> | <b>326,223</b> |
| <b>Expenses</b>                       |                |                |
| General and administrative expenses   | (298,687)      | (263,464)      |
| Selling and distribution expenses     | (121,627)      | (93,562)       |
| Profit from operations                | 81,368         | (30,803)       |
| Finance cost                          | (543)          | (774)          |
| Profit before tax for the period      | 80,825         | (31,577)       |
| Taxation                              | (11,747)       | -              |
| Net profit after tax for the period   | 69,078         | (31,577)       |
| Earnings per share                    | 0.003          | (0.002)        |

# Israeli army raids Gaza's major hospital, carries out explosions

Ramallah, Palestine - Palestine has called for urgent international protection for medical staff, patients and displaced people at Al-Shifa Hospital after the Israeli army raided the facility on Wednesday.

The army carried out 'explosions' in the basements of several buildings in the hospital complex. "The Israeli army is the sole party firing inside the Al-Shifa Hospital and its surroundings," a source from inside the medical facility said.

"The Israeli army is holding dozens of displaced people and medical staff in the backyard of the hospital, interrogating them," the source said, explaining the current situation inside Gaza's major health facility, which has been almost out of service due to increased bombing by Israeli forces.

According to reports, 'the Israeli army is carrying out extensive searches in the buildings it has invaded'. "Israeli army snipers have taken positions on the roofs of several tall buildings in the hospital, creating holes in them," the same source said.

The Israeli raid 'represents a flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law, and the Geneva Conventions, and an extension of all the violations and crimes committed by the occupation against our people,' the Palestine Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

It held the Israeli government



'fully responsible for the safety of the medical staff and thousands of patients, displaced and children, including premature babies, inside the complex'.

According to Gaza's government media office, there are around 1,500 medical staff, 700 patients, 39 premature babies, and 7,000 displaced people inside the medical complex.

As the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip entered its 40th day, at least 11,320 Palestinians have been killed, including over 7,800 women and children, and more than 29,200 others have been injured, according to the latest figures from Palestinian authorities.

Thousands of buildings, including hospitals, mosques, and churches, have also been damaged or destroyed in Israel's re-

*Babies are being born into a nightmare... Their families are being cut off from the basics. Pregnant women are giving birth without medical care*

**JASON LEE**

lentless air and ground attacks on the besieged enclave since last month. The Israeli death toll, meanwhile, is around 1,200, according to official figures.

**15,000 babies to be born**

Nearly 15,000 babies are ex-

pected to be born in Gaza between October 7 and the end of 2023, all of them at 'grave risk amid escalating violence' and with 'medical care, water and food at crisis levels', London-based Save the Children said on Tuesday. "About 15% of women giving birth are likely to experience pregnancy or birth-related complications," the humanitarian organisation said in a press release.

Their projection is based on recent UN data estimating that around 180 women give birth each day in the besieged Palestinian enclave and accounts for the rates of multiple births in the occupied Palestinian territory. "Clean water is scarce, food and medicines are running low, and pregnant or breastfeeding women are struggling

to find food. Hospitals and health facilities already facing severe shortages are under attack, putting thousands of patients, including pregnant women and newborns, in grave danger," the statement noted.

It cited Maha, a Save the Children staff member in the Gaza Strip who was displaced to the south but used to shelter outside Al Shifa Hospital.

"The scenes at the hospitals were horrible. Pregnant women in the hallways screaming in pain. Unidentified newborn babies in incubators, without any living family members.

"The fuel had run out. I had to flee. I don't know if they survived," she said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 22 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are now 'non-functional'.

"Babies are being born into a nightmare, a humanitarian catastrophe. Their families are being cut off from the basics. Pregnant women are giving birth without medical care and premature babies are dying in incubators," said Jason Lee, Save the Children's country director in the occupied Palestinian territory.

He said that fuel must be allowed into Gaza to power the generators and healthcare facilities must be protected.

"The violence must stop. We need a cease-fire. We need it now," he added.

ANADOLU AGENCY



Ukrainian deminers use a mine trolley to clear a field of landmines laid by Russian troops near the city of Balakliya, Kharkiv region on May 19 (AFP)

## New use of landmines drives up casualties

Geneva, Switzerland - New use of landmines, including extensive deployment by Russia in Ukraine, drove a global rise of new casualties from the weapons last year, a monitor said on Tuesday.

According to the Landmine Monitor, 4,710 people were injured or killed by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) across 49 states and two other areas in 2022.

Civilians - half of them children - accounted for 85 per cent of those casualties, it said.

That number of overall casualties was actually a bit lower than a year earlier, when 5,544 such casualties were recorded.

But Loren Persi, a co-author of the annual report, noted a dramatic increase in the number of casualties linked exclusively to landmines, explosive devices intentionally placed above or underground that kill and wound people during and long after conflicts. "The number of casualties recorded as specifically caused by antipersonnel landmines increased ... by just over 50 per cent, to 628 in 2022 from 414

antipersonnel mine casualties in 2021," Persi told AFP.

The report determined that the highest number of casualties recorded last year from both landmines and ERW was Syria, at 834.

But it was perhaps the surging casualty numbers in Ukraine that was the most shocking.

Amid Russia's full-scale invasion, which began in February last year, the number of civilians injured or killed by landmines and explosive remnants of war in Ukraine soared more than 10-fold in 2022 to 608, up from 58 in 2021.

Yemen and Myanmar both recorded more than 500 casualties in 2022, the report said.

The Landmine Monitor report was released ahead of an annual meeting of state parties of the Mine Ban Treaty, which was adopted in 1997.

That treaty, which currently counts 164 state parties, prohibits the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of antipersonnel mines.

AFP

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INTERVIEW: ESO PRESIDENT

# ‘Adopt sustainable lifestyles’

On the occasion of Oman’s 53rd National Day, Dr Amor al Matani, president, Environment Society of Oman (ESO), reiterates its commitment to continue to protect Oman’s natural heritage for future generations. ‘Biodiversity loss and climate change are two of the most pressing environmental issues of our time,’ he points out in an interview

Hubert Vaz

**After taking over in March 2023, how satisfied are you with the current structure, goals, progressive strides and time management of undertaken projects of ESO?**

At the annual general meeting held in March 2023, the ESO Board launched the new ESO Strategy for 2023 to 2027, which sets our mission, vision, core values, and priority areas. The goals have been set with clear and aligned key performance indicators that will support these goals while the ESO team strives to achieve the performance measures. Our targets are clear while we remain committed to playing a leading role in conserving Oman’s natural environment, which is its heritage, through research, education, advocacy, and conservation.

**What short-term and long-term plans have you drawn up for the next five years?**

Our five-year strategy is accessible via our website. We aim to continue to protect Oman’s natural heritage for future generations. We aim to achieve this by focusing on research on threatened and endangered species to inform conservation management efforts and building the capacity of Omanis within the environmental sector. Furthermore, we focus on educating and raising awareness in communities on the importance of adopting more sustainable lifestyles and advocating for environmental sustainability. Our programmes and activities align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Oman Vision 2040 and our nation’s ambitions to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

**As a non-governmental organisation, with a mandate to work in line with government**

**policies/strategies for conservation of the environment, what type of support do you think ESO needs to fulfill its annual goals?**

As the only non-profit and non-governmental organisation in Oman, one of the biggest challenges we face every year is to raise funds to support our research, programmes and activities and create a sustainable income source to maintain our human resource capacity. We continue to raise awareness and develop fundraising strategies to encourage individuals, companies and other local and international entities to support us in making a real and measurable difference when it comes to our environment. Any entity interested in supporting our work, can find more information on our website.

**Are there any specific hurdles that ESO faces every year? How do you think it can tide over these hurdles?**

We have a great responsibility to engage the public and other stakeholders in our mission, which means in making a positive difference to the environment and in fighting climate change and we need to raise funds to achieve our goals. As explained earlier, one of the main challenges we face is getting financial support. We continue to work towards encouraging the private sector and other potential stakeholders to support our efforts through corporate membership, fundraising initiatives, sponsorships of our core projects, and donations.

Increasing our human capacity is directly linked to increasing financial support because with sufficient resources we will be able to recruit and retain employees to meet our human resource requirements. Our limited capacity causes some limitations when considering expanding our scope beyond what we are currently handling. There are multiple pressing environmental issues that we are interested in taking on but, unfortunately, we do not currently have the capacity to lead on.

**Do you think it would be beneficial to entrust the key tasks before ESO every year to smaller independent entities that work autonomously yet are all accountable and part of the same parent organisation (ESO).**

If I understood your question correctly, this may not be directly applicable to ESO as no such entities exist here in Oman that could support ESO in this way. However, all of the work and achievements of ESO have to do with the strength of our local and international partnerships. Several of our research programmes are implemented with the supports of specialised subject matter experts and coordinated with international bodies.

Recently, for example, we entered into a partnership with BirdLife International, the world’s largest nature conservation partnership as it is a strategic global partnership of conservation organisations in over 100 countries around the world. They are working to conserve birds and to promote sustainability in the use of natural resources.

**Is there need to enhance efforts by ESO towards roping in/engaging a larger number**

**of young volunteers (Omani/expatriate) to educate communities and work towards sustainability?**

Realising the need to enhance the capacities of Omanis in the areas of environmental research and sustainability, ESO launched the Capacity Building Programme to recruit young Omanis, provide them with in-house training and field experience to develop their environmental skills.

Some individuals who were part of the Capacity Building Programme continued to stay with ESO and others have proceeded to pursue successful environmental careers in the private sector while they continue to remain volunteers and ambassadors of ESO.

ESO recognises the value in volunteer support and continues to receive volunteers on an annual basis who support our various programmes and initiatives, whether through data collection, supporting photography and videography for our events or joining our beach clean-up events. Of course, there is always scope to develop this programme further.

**What environment conservation issues are typically important in Oman and require a large portion of ESO’s attention as well as resources annually?**

Biodiversity loss and climate change are two of the most pressing environmental issues of our time.

With regards to the loss of biodiversity, ESO continues to conduct and support research on threatened and endangered species to understand their status and the threats these species face. This information is then transferred to key decision makers to support conservation measures.

Climate change is a pressing issue and we need the community at large to be informed about it in order to support the government’s ambitions towards net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Based on the understanding of the need to build a more environmentally conscious community, ESO launched the Oman Climate Dialogues in partnership with ASYAD.

**With regard to generation of resources, do you think there is need for more innovative approaches to engage the corporate sector as well as individuals?**

Today, there is an urgent need for corporates and other entities to support environ-

mental initiatives that align with achieving the net-zero emission targets and environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) targets. While ESO’s goals and activities align with most of these priorities, there is a gap in communicating these targets in a way that meets the needs and expectations of corporates.

Additionally, a lot of corporates are KPI-driven. Therefore, there is a need to find a middle-ground where our core projects are communicated in a manner that aligns with the KPI expectations of corporates.

**What type of marine and terrestrial research has ESO undertaken during the past two decades – is it an ongoing process? Has there been any collaborative efforts with neighbouring GCC states?**

All of our research programmes can be accessed by the public via [www.eso.org.om](http://www.eso.org.om). ESO currently has four flagship programmes: the Whale and Dolphin Research and Conservation Programme, the Sea Turtle Research and Conservation Programme, the Raptor Research and Conservation Programme, and The Frankincense Tree Research and Conservation Programme.

**What, according to you, is the need of the hour for ESO – protection of endangered species in Oman, ensuring cleaner oceans along the sultanate, anti-litter campaigns, education/empowerment of fishermen, creating greater awareness on sustainability and educating the younger generation, or any other issue?**

All these topics that you just mentioned are essential and need to be collectively addressed. We need to all stand together as a nation to address these challenges, which are interrelated, just like their solutions. Our biodiversity, the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that together form our natural world, plays a huge role in our ecosystem to maintain balance and support life, including the lives of us humans.

When it comes to encouraging our younger generations to become more environmentally conscious, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with the support from sponsors, we organise the NAMAT competition for schools on an annual basis.

(Detailed interview: [www.muscatdaily.com](http://www.muscatdaily.com))

Photo: V K Shafer

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