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LIVERPOOL WIN LEAGUE CUP AS VAN DIJK STRIKES LATE TO SINK CHELSEA



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EXCISABLE GOODS SANS DIGITAL TAX STAMPS SEIZED IN OMAN



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INSIDE THE WORLD OF EDIBLE MASTERPIECES AND BESPOKE CAKES



MUSCAT

METEORITE SMUGGLING HAS COME DOWN

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said that it is important to empower stakeholders, especially customs officers at land, air and seaports to stop illegal trafficking of meteorites. Speaking at a seminar, Al Mahrouqi said, “It is very important to know the importance and existence of these meteorites as common people cannot differentiate between ordinary rocks in wadis or meteorites which are valued at millions of dollars.” **DETAILS ON P3**

PHASE I OF IBRI INDUSTRIAL CITY

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates ‘Madayn’ on Sunday celebrated the inauguration of Phase One of Ibri Industrial City. The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah. Highlighting the significance of developing an industrial hub in Al Dhahirah Governorate, Al Rawas emphasised that this inauguration marks a strategic continuation of the government’s goal to ensure balanced economic growth across the governorates.

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OPINION

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Alexander Schallenberg

Breaking the cycles of violence in Middle East

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Mark Leonard

The Trump effect takes Europe

Majlis Ash’shura to host Minister of Economy on Wednesday

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash’shura will host Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, on Wednesday (February 28), during its fifth regular session of the first annual convening for the 10th term (2023-2027).

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash’shura, pointed out that this will mark the first ministerial statement discussed

by Majlis Ash’shura during the first convening for the 10th term.

The statement, he added, will discuss several main topics, namely the performance of the Omani economy and prominent initiatives and projects of the Ministry of Economy, particularly in areas related to the contribution of economic sectors in the GDP.

He also said that the statement

will discuss three main axes, the first of which is the performance of the Omani economy and the most prominent initiatives and projects of the Ministry of Economy in particular.

With regard to the contribution of the targeted economic sectors to the gross domestic product, the growth rates achieved, the performance of the National Programme

for Economic Diversification (Diversification), and the most prominent challenges facing it.

The second axis includes an assessment of the overall economic performance until the middle of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025), while the third axis deals with the role of the Ministry of Economy in confronting regional and international economic

changes, by reviewing economic policies and draft laws related to development planning and areas of development, and the measures taken to raise the competitiveness of the Sultanate of Oman in various global indicators.

It is worth noting that the discussion of the ministry’s statement comes in accordance with Article (69) of the Oman Council Law. — **ONA**

HM GETS MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT OF SOMALIA



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from President Dr Hassan Shaikh Mohamud of the Federal Republic of Somalia. The message deals with the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Somalia. The written message was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received on Sunday Ali Mohamed Omar, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of joint cooperation in various fields and means of enhancing them to serve the joint interests. They also exchanged views on a set o regional and international issues. The meeting was attended by a number of officials from both sides. — **ONA**

Don’t deal with ‘fake’ Haj, Umrah providers

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The Sultanate of Oman has set up a Haj mission headed by Sultan bin Said al Hinai, the current head of the mission, to assist pilgrims, according to a decision from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The decision stipulated that Sultan bin Said al Hinai shall be the Head of the Mission, Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Kaabi as Deputy Chief of Mission for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Abdulaziz bin Masoud al Ghafri as Deputy Chief of Mission for Pilgrims Affairs and Haj Campaigns.

The decision was in implementation of Royal Decree No 6/99 defining the powers of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and approving its organisational structure, and the Civil Service Law issued under Royal Decree No 120/2004 and

**Omani Haj Mission which comprises the head of the mission, his deputy and his adviser, will be responsible for drawing up general policies for the work entrusted to the mission**

ALI AL HATTALI
Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs

the Executive Regulations of the Civil Service Law issued under Civil Service Council Decision No 9/2010, Ministerial Decision No 236/2004 promulgating the system of forming Omani Haj mission and determining their competencies.

The Omani Haj Mission lends support to pilgrims and assists them when performing the rituals.

The ministry has also warned of ‘fake’ or unlicensed companies that advertise on social media about providing Haj and Umrah services. It has urged people to deal with only licensed companies through the electronic registration system for pilgrims of Oman.

The ministry has recently released the list of those eligible for the Haj for the 1445 AH.

This year’s Haj mission will comprise representatives from the ministry, ROP, Oman Scouts, media, medical, and various Haj companies.

“Omani Haj Mission which comprises the head of the mission, his deputy and his adviser, will be responsible for drawing up general policies for the work entrusted to the mission,” said Ali al Hattali, communications officer at the ministry.

OIC communique calls for end to Gaza war

ISTANBUL: The Sultanate of Oman on Sunday concluded its participation in the extraordinary meeting of information ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries.

Held in Istanbul, the meeting discussed the Israeli occupation forces’ targeting journalists in the occupied Palestinian territories with the aim of misleading international public opinion.

Oman’s delegation at the meeting was headed by Mohammed Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information.

The meeting’s communique called on the rest of the world to recognise the State of Palestine and take concrete measures to stop the Israeli destructive war on the Gaza Strip, ongoing since last October 7.

The communique affirmed that that “The Two-State Solution is the only way to guarantee permanent, comprehensive and stable peace and security in the region”. It urged all countries to recognise the independent, sovereign State



A child eats a sandwich as he stands near a building damaged by Israeli bombardment in Rafah. — **AFP**

of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with Al Quds Al Sharqiya (East Jerusalem) as its capital.

The communique condemned “the

deliberate Israeli attacks on journalists”. It stressed “the need for the international community to take immediate action to hold the Israeli occupation forces accountable for violation of international law, notably by targeting journalists”. It called for conducting an immediate investigation and protecting all journalists.

The communique also denounced the ongoing military aggression launched by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people. It condemned the systematic oppression, massacres and genocide of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and in the occupied West Bank, including Jerusalem.”

The communique also rejected “the systematic disinformation campaigns launched by the Israeli occupation forces and the country’s spreading false information and fake news to cover up its brutality and the genocidal massacres it is committing in the Gaza Strip”. — **ONA**

SEE ALSO P6

Scattered rains as low pressure persists

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

Continued flow of clouds was experienced over parts of the governorates of Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South and Al Buraimi, with scattered rain. The impact is to be experienced in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, Dhofar, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi. Weather radar images indicated a rainstorm approaching towards the wilayats of Shinas and Liwa, with the possibility of rain clouds continuing to flow during the coming hours, according to Oman Met Office.

Along the coasts of the Sea of Oman winds will be easterly to northeasterly light to moderate and over rest of the governorates winds will be southerly to southwesterly light to moderate occasionally fresh along the Arabian Sea coasts.

Sea waves are expected to be moderate along most of the coasts with maximum wave height of 1.5 metres.

Southeasterly winds (15-35 knots) will continue to be active, causing dust and dust to rise and low horizontal visibility on Monday morning and will continue until the evening hours.

The weather forecaster from Oman Met Office said the the trough of low pressure that began on Sunday will continue until March 1.



Caring for Little Warriors:
Pediatric Hematology Oncology now available at Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair

Dr. Zainul Aabideen
Consultant - Pediatric Hematology, Oncology and BMT

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14-DAY SUR MARITIME HERITAGE FESTIVAL BEGINS

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

The Sur Maritime Heritage Festival began under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saidi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs in Sur on Sunday. Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism; Dr Bandar bin Fahd al Fuhaid, President of the Arab Tourism Organisation; Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, were present at the ceremony in the premises of University of Technology and Applied sciences, Sur.

The opening was also attended by under-secretaries, members of Council of Oman, governors, military and security commanders, heads of government departments, and members of the governorate's municipal council.

Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy,



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, with Dr Bandar bin Fahd al Fuhaid, President of the Arab Tourism Organisation in Sur on Sunday

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, delivered a speech in which he said: "Regional and international initiatives and programmes provide a good approach to understanding and applying best practices for promoting tourist destinations and highlighting their competitive advantage, especially the Arab Tourism Capital Initiative launched by

the Arab Tourism Organization. With its nine-standard frame of reference, it aims to understand tourism management, identify tourism resources and patterns, environmental conservation programmes, and be aware of the security and safety standards of the tourist destination to be nominated. So Sur is worthy of nomination for this initiative making optimal use of natural and



cultural resources in developing tourism. The wilayat is also unique in its pioneering maritime history, consisting of world heritage sites, natural oases, community initiatives, development projects, and tourism products that qualify it to be on the regional and international tourism map in the first place. This resulted in declaring Sur as the capital of Arab tourism for the year 2024."

Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Sur and Chairman of the Festival Organizing Committee, the festival, which continues until March 9 includes a package of entertainment, promotional and cultural activities that have been developed to achieve a number of goals in line with the Oman Vision 2040.

He said the festival comes in celebration of the selection of

Sur as the capital of Arab tourism for this year and constitutes a qualitative addition to the efforts to enrich domestic tourism and enable the governorates to fulfil their pioneering role in this framework.

Shaikh Dr Al Habsi said to avoid crowding the festival will be held in several locations, including Sunaysilah Fort, Khor Al Batah, Ras Al Hadd and Tiwi.

The wali said the festival includes new and diverse packages of heritage, tourism and entertainment events and activities, including a heritage village, a marine village, and an exhibition for productive families and small and medium enterprises, a honey and dates exhibition. The Sur Maritime Heritage Festival will have recreational and beach games, horse show, and boat race. It will also feature kite flying, paragliding, laser shows and other entertainment shows.

Workshops to help attract investment in creative sector

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in cooperation with Nazdhar (the National Programme for Investment and Export Development) organised workshops for cultural and creative industries. The workshops in 10 days will be attended by 100 participants.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, in his speech said workshops are in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 to integrate and enhance creative capabilities.

Al Busaidy said these workshops are based on the ministry's keenness to make the cultural sector among the vital sectors that contribute to the economic diversification of the Sultanate of Oman. The partnering with Nazdhar is hoped to produce many opportunities and capabilities that can be made commercially viable and achieve many national goals.

Many people concerned with cultural affairs will participate in these sessions, to discuss the reality of cultural creative industries and develop ways to make them economically feasible.

Nour al Mahrouqiyah, Supervisor of the Creative and

Cultural Industries Sector at Nazdhar, said, "We hope through these workshops to come up with tangible outcomes that develop the creative and cultural industries sector, solve any challenges facing its workers."

The workshops were divided into three tracks. The first track represented the possibilities for developing the cultural creative industries sector, and included five axes: the first axis was creative education and creative skills, the second was the creative infrastructure axis, the third was the creative institutions axis, while the fourth axis represented in financing cultural creative industries, the fifth is the axis of governance and legislation.

The second track is developing investment opportunity initiatives to invite investors, through which investment opportunity initiatives are identified to attract investment in priority sub-sectors such as cultural heritage and tourism, fashion, digital technology, entertainment and events, and films.

The third track is the challenges of investment projects in the sector, and aims to solve the challenges of investment projects, as sessions will be held with the relevant authorities associated with those projects.

Commanders view progress of naval drill 'Sea Lion'

MUSCAT: Several commanders on Sunday viewed the progress of the naval drill "Sea Lion 1/2024". The drill was viewed by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

The commanders were briefed on the drill and means of implementing it in a bid to achieve the desired objectives. They also viewed a live shooting at simulated naval targets.

The demonstration showcased high levels of preparedness and efficiency of the RNO personnel.

Further, "Sea Lion 1/2024" is conducted by the RNO with the support of RAO, the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The drill will run till February 29. — ONA



TELLING A REAL STORY OF SAMAYIL VILLAGE

MUSCAT: Al Din Theatre for Art and Culture presented 'Qarn Al Jariyah' show on Sunday with the attendance of HH Dr Taghreed bint Turki al Said, Honorary President of Al Din, at the College of Banking and Finance Services. 'Qarn Al Jariyah' presents a real story which happened in past in a small village in Samayil in Al Dakhiliyah called 'Qarn Al Jariyah' where a foreign man came to live in the village and married one of its women.

Dhofar Municipality implements several projects

SALALAH: The Dhofar Municipality has directed the contracting companies to start the implementation of several development projects.

They include road projects in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna in the areas of Hoorut, Aibut 1, and Aibut 2 to the tune of RO 457,179, the dualisation of Al Farouq road in Sahalnut area in Salalah at a cost of RO 4,535,782, the dualisation of Sultan Taimour road at a cost of RO 5,678,792 and the Atin intersection tunnel linking the November 18 road in the Wilayat of Salalah at a cost of RO 7,521,812.





Oman making strides in combating smuggling of meteorites: Minister

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) organised a workshop on Sunday focusing on 'meteorites in the Sultanate of Oman and combating illicit their trade.'

Speaking at the workshop, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said it is important to empower stakeholders, especially customs officers at land, air and seaports (to stop illegal trafficking) and small and medium enterprises operating as tour operators.

Al Mahrouqi said, "It is very important to know the importance and existence of these meteorites as common people cannot differentiate between ordinary rocks in wadis or meteorites valued at millions of dollars."

In the past, some rare lunar and Martian pieces (pieces of Mars) were stolen from the Sultanate of Oman at a time when monitoring capabilities and research were not efficient as they are today.

"But today concerned authorities, the Royal Oman



The ministry seeks to monitor meteorite samples as soon as they enter the airspace in the Sultanate of Oman

Police and other security agencies work together to preserve these possessions," the minister said.

Professor Beda Hofmann, Head of the Department of Earth Sciences from Switzerland and Professor Edwin Genus, head of the Department of Science at the Natural History Museum in Zurich, are part of the Omani-

Swiss meteorite research project team who said for more than 23 years, the team has been able to document more than 7,340 meteorite samples.

The ministry seeks to monitor meteorite samples as soon as they enter the airspace in the Sultanate of Oman, through the installation of devices, the results of which



were announced in October.

Engineer Hussain bin Ali al Ghafri, Director of the Heritage Department, said that the ministry is organising awareness and introduction workshops in coordination with the authorities to combat illicit trade and possible smuggling routes at all ports.

Programme on local administration underway

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Within the priority of developing sustainable governorates and cities, Muscat Governorate launched the specialised training programme 'Local Administration within the Priority of Development of Sustainable Governorates and Cities'.

The programme is aimed at qualifying employees in the category of department directors, their assistants and department heads with the aim of building leadership cadres capable of achieving a balance between comprehensive development and community participation in its pursuit of a sustainable future.

The training programme included discussions on aspects of analytical and interactive management to contribute to promoting local development, local administration in the Sultanate of Oman and the challenges and opportunities it faces.

In addition, the training programme provides participants with the opportunity to develop leadership skills and make strategic decisions that enhance positive interaction



The programme included discussions on aspects of analytical management between institutions and the local community.

The programme is held at the Oman Oil and Gas Institute at Sultan Qaboos University, and continues for a week from February 25 - 29.

The programme targets the job levels of assistant director, department director and the like and higher than the governorate and governors' offices.

The programme aims to introduce the target group to the nature of local administration, its origin and history and to clarify its foundations and general principles, as well as the governance of local administration in the Sultanate of Oman.

Consumer rights: CPA initiative to improve services

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) concluded the first edition of the Consumer-Friendly Institutions initiative under the auspices of Sulayem bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of CPA, to raise awareness of consumer's rights and duties in retail, commercial and industrial sectors.

The initiative, which will run for three years, is part of CPA's 10th strategic plan, which comes from Oman Vision 2040 to achieve standards that are compatible with the legislation, laws and regulations in force in the country.

During the closing ceremony, the institutions participating in the Consumer-Friendly Institutions Initiative were honoured. They contributed significantly to achieving the objectives of the campaign such as enhancing the spirit of competition, continuous



Sulayem bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of CPA, and dignitaries at the meeting

development of services provided to the consumer, and reducing the percentage of complaints submitted by the consumer against these institutions.

These criteria were evaluated according to the stages of registration, evaluation, and analysis, in addition to presenting the results. It is expected that the initiative will achieve an impact

in gaining consumer confidence and loyalty, increasing the sustainability of institutions and competitiveness in the market, in order to create a healthy and friendly environment for consumers. It was also aimed at enhancing investments based on a good reputation which institutions can obtain through an accredited certificate and a

detailed report that includes the market, the sector and the institution itself. The initiative seeks to ensure that institutions keep pace with best practices and raise consumer loyalty, which will contribute to improving the business environment, especially the retail and services sector in the Sultanate of Oman to embrace social responsibility.

Embassy of India hosts lecture on 'Mandvi to Muscat'

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 25

The Embassy of India in Muscat hosted the fourth lecture of the series, titled 'From Mandvi to Muscat: Indian Community and the shared history of India and Oman'.

Historian Professor James Onley, from the American University Sharjah, delivered an insightful lecture on the topic - "India and Arabia: Connections across Millennia." Professor Onley delved into various aspects of maritime trade between India and the Gulf, including ancient trade links that have shaped historical narratives of Oman.

He elucidated the intricate dynamics of the Gulf region's trade with India, shedding light on the influence of Gulf imports from India before the oil era and

their integration into Gulf material culture.

Additionally, Professor Onley provided valuable insights into the historical presence and interactions of Indian and Arab communities in both the Gulf and India, underscoring the cultural exchanges that have defined the region's heritage.

Professor Onley highlighted the cultural kinship between Indians and Arabs in general and Indians and Omanis in particular, emphasising their cultural influence on each other.

The lecture drew enthusiastic participation from a diverse audience, including members of the Indian community, Omanis of Indian origin, scholars and distinguished guests. Participants gained valuable insights into the shared history and cultural heritage of India and Oman.



The lecture drew enthusiastic participation from a diverse audience

DISPOSE DEAD ANIMALS IN THE RIGHT WAY

ABDULLAH AL NASRI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Disposing of dead animals? Surely, there must be more responsible methods for managing such waste!

Addressing this issue as a significant concern, the Al Musannah Municipality has released a statement highlighting the environmental risks posed by dead animals. The statement offers guidance to the community on preventing such occurrences, emphasising proper disposal methods, refraining from leaving carcasses by the roadside, and promptly reporting them to authorities for safe disposal.

To facilitate the proper disposal of dead animals, the be'ah Company has established a dedicated hotline, 1881, which offers free service for reporting and disposing of various types of deceased animals. However, the service does not cover cases where animals are found dead on roadsides or in public places due to illegal activity. It's worth noting that be'ah transfers dead animals placed near containers, following the guidelines of the Waste Collection Programme.

One of the negative issues that be'ah is currently addressing in Al Batinah North Governorate is the widespread phenomenon

The issue has become increasingly problematic throughout Oman, especially in Al Musannah, leading to numerous roadside accidents and making main roads hazardous and difficult to navigate due to the presence of dead animals.

NAIF AL NASRI
Resident of Al Musannah

of disposing dead animals on public roads, side streets and even in densely populated areas. This problem has escalated over time and has become particularly prevalent in various areas across the region. It's puzzling why individuals who discard animal carcasses expect them to be promptly removed by cleaning

crews. Perhaps they underestimate the enormous workload faced by the competent authorities, which extends from early morning to late at night. The focus of these authorities is primarily on general cleanliness and not specifically on monitoring sites where dead animals are dumped.

Naif al Nasri, a resident of Al Musannah, observed that this issue has become increasingly problematic throughout Oman, especially in Al Musannah, leading to numerous roadside accidents and making main roads hazardous and difficult to navigate due to the presence of dead animals.

In addressing this issue, Al

Nasri suggested contacting local authorities to properly dispose of dead animals, thereby ensuring the safety of main roads.

Abdulrahman al Nasri, a student at Mazoon College, also encountered a similar situation while commuting home from work. He came across a dead dog lying on the road, highlighting the lack of urgency and responsibility in removing such carcasses from public spaces.

To mitigate this problem, be'ah Company has initiated a campaign to collect and transfer all dead animals from roads to the relevant authorities for proper disposal.



FIRING UP IMAGINATION

The book fair has lined up an array of fun events and activities for young readers to boost their reading skills and creativity



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

THE 28th Muscat International Book Fair is not just about books. It has lined up an array of fun events and activities for young readers to boost their reading skills and fire up imagination.

The Children's Corner has 131 diverse activities which includes theatre and workshops, the Al Dhad Corner (Arabic Language Corner), the Children's Museum Corner, and the Green Corner that focuses on the goals of sustainable development. Cultural cafés are set up in a number of pavilions.

Dr Wafa bint Salim al Shamsiyah, member of children's activities and supervisor of Al Dhad Corner, said, "The activities and programmes in the Children's Corner are implemented by a number of governmental and private institutions and civil society initiatives in cooperation with the book management. The Children's Corner has attracted a number of institutions, including official and private ones, with the aim of creating diversity in the activities and programmes that the child desires to know."

Among the participants, an Omani start-up Framezone company is displaying the Little Entrepreneur game, which is a strategic and educational game, where the child learns the basic concepts of financial culture and entrepreneurship. The game represents an innovative step towards stimulating the learning process in an effective and enjoyable way. It focuses on the child's interaction with his surroundings by engaging in a set of interactive challenges that encourage creative thinking and promote concepts of social responsibility.



The Al Dhad Corner teaches entrepreneurial skills to children and young people. It introduces concepts like entrepreneurship and start-up companies through stories. This is part of the school education initiative of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

Children's activities include workshops, interactive competitions, plays, discussion and dialogue sessions, drawing and colouring, recycling, reading sessions, writing and listening to stories. In addition to that, workshops will be held in creative writing, poetry recitation, chanting, and shadow theatre.

The Children's Public Library also

participated in this exhibition. Sarah al Maamaria, the administrative officer at the Children's Public Library Corner, said, "The library supports the exhibition by holding cultural events and workshops for children. It annually presents about 15 to 20 workshops and activities for children with the aim of promoting children's culture."

The director of the Muscat International Book Fair, Ahmed al Rawahi, said the book fair aimed to bring in diverse activities and programmes. The Children's Corner focused on skills that stimulate the child's imagination and keep pace with their aspirations in the cognitive, technical, and creative fields.



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION
TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2024 (2024/75/ 3 - ع/ج - ر - ٢٠٢٤) (49589) at E-Tendering	GENERAL CLEANING SERVICES FOR MINISTRY OF INFORMATION PROPERTIES FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01.07.2024 TO 30.06.2026	Excellent First	5/3/2024	1/4/2024	25/-
2/2024 (2024/74/ 2 - ع/ج - ر - ٢٠٢٤) (49678) at E-Tendering	MAINTENANING (MINISTRY OF INFORMATION) GARDENS, LAWNS & TREES AT QURUM FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01.07.2024 TO 30.6.2026	Excellent First	5/3/2024	1/4/2024	25/-
3/2024 (2024/76/ 4 - ع/ج - ر - ٢٠٢٤) (49522) at E-Tendering	STUDY, SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND CONFIGURATION OF SWITCHES (CORE, DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS) AND DOMAIN CONTROLLER UPGRADE/REPLACEMENT	International Excellent First	7/3/2024	16/4/2024	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnaad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

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

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

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

3. The Ministry has the right to:

- 1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
- 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

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



Oman and India to hold joint expo on historical documents

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

To boost cooperation between Oman and India in historical archives, a delegation of the National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi visited the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) of Oman last week.

The delegation led by Arun Singal, Director-General of Archives presented important documents to Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of NRAA.

In discussions with Dr Al Dhawyani, Arun Singhal dwelt upon the historical ties between India and Oman and informed the Chairman about the existence of a large number of records pertaining to Oman in the NAI as well as in other repositories.

As a gesture of goodwill, Singhal handed over a list of 70 select documents pertaining to Oman that are available in the NAI. These documents cover a period from 1793 to 1953 and deal with a wide range of subjects. Along with the list, 523 pages of copies of records were also handed over to the Chairman, NRAA, which covered several important subjects.

Some of these important documents are change of Omani flag from red to white (1868); succession of Sayyid Faisal bin Turki as ruler of Oman after the death of Sultan Sayyid Turki (1888); official visit of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman to the Viceroy in India (1937); and Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between India and Muscat and Oman signed on March 15, 1953 at Muscat in English, Hindi and Arabic.

In addition, facsimile prints of three important treaties between the two countries were also gifted to the NRAA. These were treaty between the British India Government and the Sultan of Muscat (in Arabic and English), dated April 5, 1865; and Two Treaties concluded with the Imam of Muscat: one by Mehdi Ali Khan, dated October 12, 1798 and another by Sir John Malcolm, in his capacity as Envoy of the Governor-General of India to the Court of Persia, dated January 18, 1800.

These officials underscored the need for formalising institutional cooperation between both the countries. After the discussions, the draft of an Executive Programme of Cooperation (EPC) was finalised, which would now be submitted for approval and formally signed in the near future. Some activities agreed upon and included in the proposed EPC



Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of NRAA, sees documents handed over by his Indian counterpart Arun Singal



Some of the documents handed over by India to Oman

consists of organising a joint exhibition based on curated archival materials from both archives, together with a conference highlighting the historical relations between India and Oman; exchanging digital copies

of documents that hold mutual interest to enrich both collections; facilitating a framework for exchange programme involving experts in the fields of digitisation and preservation to share knowledge on best practices of both institutions; and bringing out a joint publication based on curated archival materials from both archives.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Singal said, “We had fruitful discussions on getting into an agreement. We hope to have a joint exhibition in about three months time which will be launched in New Delhi and Muscat as well as digitally.”

The exhibition would showcase some of the documents from both the archives that reflect the relationship. The collaboration could also include research training and such activities that would benefit both the archives.

The delegation also interacted with the representatives of the Indian diaspora who have been living in various parts of Oman for several generations, and many of whom have rich private archives. The NAI Director-General encouraged these members of the Indian diaspora to take care of the physical preservation of archival wealth in their possession as it serves as an authentic source of shared history between the two nations. He also offered NAI’s technical help in the conservation of their documents as well as in their digitisation so that the valuable information is preserved for posterity.

Workshop on survey of government services

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on Sunday organised an introductory workshop as part of ongoing preparations for implementing a public opinion survey (the 3rd of its kind) for measuring satisfaction with government services.

The workshop saw the participation of 50 government departments tasked with providing services to citizens, including services offered by Governors’ offices.

The participants reviewed major outcomes of the second public opinion

survey on satisfaction with government services. The 6-month survey was conducted by the NCSI last year.

The workshop elaborated on the survey’s questionnaire and methods of analysing results. It is worth noting that the NCSI’s Public Opinion Measurement Department carries out online opinion polls. The online questionnaire system is designed to conduct telephonic interviews, collect data quickly and highly efficiently and draft daily progress reports. This allows for conducting more than one opinion poll simultaneously. — ONA



NCSI’s introductory workshop on Sunday

Workshop held on analysing satellites’ images

MUSCAT: The 19th regional workshop on satellite applications was held on Sunday in Muscat.

The workshop discussed the topic of analysing outputs of weather monetarisation satellites and their various applications. The event was

participated by local and regional experts in the field.

Moreover, the workshop aimed to train aviation specialists in the Middle East region and to enable the trainees to analyse satellite images.

— ONA



The workshop discussed analysis of weather satellites.

— ONA

Minister receives CEO of US testing company

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, received Amit Sevak, CEO of US-based educational testing service company ETS, in Muscat on Sunday.

The minister welcomed the guest, praising the efforts made by the American Educational Testing Service in everything that would develop educational work.

During the meeting, a number of aspects of joint educational cooperation between the ministry and ETS were discussed, in addition to aspects of future cooperation to achieve the desired goals and objectives.

The guest praised the developmental achievements made in Oman.

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following International Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
109/2024/MAFWR/HQ-10	The Design, Construction and Deployment of a Marine Farm Artificial Reef Complex in AL Mussanah & Saham of the Sultanate of Oman	Tuesday 20/02/2024	Monday 11/3/2024	Sunday 31/3/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent grade	(40/-) Forty Omani riyals for international companies (10) Ten Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for International company that not have head quarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender)and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tenders:-

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2024/024	UNE LOT 01D/2024	04/03/2024	14/03/2024	52.500
DISC/ 2024/025	UNE LOT 01E/2024	04/03/2024	14/03/2024	52.500
DISC/ 2024/026	UNE LOT 01G/2024	04/03/2024	14/03/2024	52.500
DISC/ 2024/027	UNE LOT 02A/2024	04/03/2024	14/03/2024	52.500
DISC/ 2024/028	kV & LV Network Improvement Works 11 Of 2023/LOT-11	04/03/2024	14/03/2024	52.500
DISC/ 2024/029	kV & LV Network Improvement Works 11 Of 2023/LOT-12	04/03/2024	14/03/2024	52.500
DISC/ 2024/032	Supply of Safety Padlocks for Electrical Networks	04/03/2024	14/03/2024	52.500

- To purchase the tender document website via the link or the Barcode below: https://supplier.nama.om/4443/OA_HTML/OA.jsp?OAFunc=XXTEN_TENDER_FLOAT_DISC_F
- Every company wishing to participate in this tender must attach with its bid a bid bond in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman. Any bid that does not contain the bid bond will be disqualified.
- The original bid bond must be submitted in an envelope sealed with red wax and addressed to the chairperson of the minor tender committee and written on outside the Tender name and the Tender number and it should be paced in the tender box in Nama Dhofar Services in Salalah before 10:00 am of the last day for submitting Bids.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using “supplier portal”. No hard copies are accepted.
- The Tender fees are not refundable. However, Tenderers who are holding “Riyada” card issued from public authority for SME development will be exempted from providing the tender fee and the Bid bond.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person’s name and the company details.



Dhofar Integrated Services Company s.a.o.c.
CR Number 2185229, P.O Box 2609
PC 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number 2332523, Fax 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om



Gaza talks resume in Doha for immediate ceasefire

CAIRO: Negotiations for a ceasefire in Gaza have resumed in Doha between “experts from Egypt, Qatar, the United States and Israel”, as well as Hamas representatives, state-linked Egyptian media reported on Sunday.

An Israeli delegation led by Mossad chief David Barnea was in Paris on Friday discussing possibilities of a deal to ensure a fresh ceasefire and the release of captives held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Israel’s war cabinet agreed on Saturday to send a delegation to Qatar to continue the talks, according to Israeli media reports.

The talks are a “continuation of what was discussed in Paris” and “will be followed by meetings in Cairo,” reported Al Qahera News, which is linked to Egyptian state intelligence services.

As with a previous week-long truce in November that saw more than 100 captives and 240 Palestinian prisoners freed, Qatar, Egypt and the United States have been spearheading efforts to secure a new deal.

International pressure for a

ceasefire has mounted in recent weeks, as the death toll from Israel’s military offensive on the Palestinian territory nears 30,000, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Israel has vowed to destroy the Palestinian groups in response to its unprecedented October 7 attack in Israel.

In negotiations, Palestinians have demanded a ceasefire and Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza, which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dismissed as “delusional” as he vows to press further into the territory.

Fears have surged over Israeli plans for a ground invasion of Rafah, Gaza’s southernmost city where 1.4 million Palestinians have been pushed into sprawling tent cities right against the Egyptian border.

US, Arab and other mediators have voiced hope a deal can be reached before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on March 10 or 11, depending on the lunar calendar.

A reporter said there had been a number of air strikes in Rafah, a city along the territory’s southern



A vendor waits for customers along a street in Gaza City. – AFP

International pressure for a ceasefire has mounted in recent weeks, as the death toll from Israel’s military offensive on the Palestinian territory nears 30,000

border with Egypt where hundreds of thousands of Gazans have fled to escape fighting elsewhere.

The presence of so many civilians packed into the area has sparked concerns over Israeli plans for troops to finally push into the city, the last major urban centre they have yet to enter.

Despite the concerns, including from key ally the United States, Netanyahu signalled that the expected push had not been abandoned, adding that “at the beginning of the week, I will convene the cabinet to approve the operational plans for action in Rafah, including the evacuation of the civilian population from there”.

— AFP

War blocks aid, deepens Palestinians misery

GAZA: Concern deepens over the increasingly desperate situation faced by civilians in the devastated Gaza Strip. After more than four months of shortages inside the besieged Gaza Strip, the World Food Programme said this week its teams had reported “unprecedented levels of desperation”, while the United Nations warned that 2.2 million people were on the brink of famine.

In northern Gaza’s Jabalia refugee camp, bedraggled children held out plastic containers and battered cooking pots for what little food was available.

Supplies are running out, with aid agencies unable to get into the area because of the bombing, while the trucks that do try to get through face frenzied looting.

“We the grown-ups can still make it, but these children who are four and five years old, what did



A Palestinian girl walks along a garbage-filled street in Gaza City. – AFP

they do wrong to sleep hungry and wake up hungry?” one man said angrily.

Residents have resorted to eating scavenged scraps of rotten corn, animal fodder unfit for

human consumption and even leaves.

Save the Children said the risk of famine would continue to “increase as long as the government of Israel continues to impede the entry of aid into Gaza”.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 29,606 people, mostly women and children, according to a Saturday tally from Gaza’s health ministry.

The ministry said early on Sunday that another 98 people had been killed overnight, with the Palestinian media office reporting strikes along the length of the territory, from Beit Lahia in the north to Rafah in the south.

A reporter said there had been a number of air strikes on Saturday evening in Rafah where hundreds of thousands of Gazans have fled to escape fighting elsewhere.

The presence of so many

civilians packed into the area has sparked concerns over Israeli plans for troops to finally push into the city, the last major urban centre they have yet to enter.

At Najjar hospital in the city, a witness saw bodies carried from ambulances and placed in the courtyard of the hospital in body bags, while relatives grieved nearby.

Inside the hospital, medics treated several wounded men who were laid out on the floor, one with his head wrapped in bandages.

In Khan Yunis, which has seen heavy fighting in recent weeks, Israel’s military said it was “intensifying the operations” using tanks, close-range fire and aircraft.

“The soldiers raided the residence of a senior military intelligence operative” in the area, a military statement said.

— AFP



THE ‘HANDS OFF RAFAH’ RALLY

Protesters hold placards during the “Hands off Rafah” demonstration calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, in Rotterdam, Netherlands. – AFP

US-BRITISH STRIKES ON YEMEN ‘ESCALATE TENSIONS’

TEHRAN: Iran condemned on Sunday the latest strikes by the United States and Britain on Yemen, saying they were seeking to “escalate tensions and crises” in the region.

American and British forces carried out fresh strikes against 18 targets in Yemen, in response to a wave of attacks by Yemeni groups on Red Sea shipping.

“With such attacks, America and Britain seek to escalate tensions and crises in the region, and expand the scope of war and instability,” Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said in a statement.

He further condemned the United States and Britain for failing to “take immediate and effective action” to stop Israel’s deadly campaign in Gaza.

The Yemenis say their attacks on shipping around the Red Sea are in support of Palestinians in war-ravaged Gaza.

Israel’s withering military campaign in Gaza began following the unprecedented October 7 attack on southern Israel.

Regional tensions have soared

since the war erupted, stoking violence involving groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Following the Saturday attacks, Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said the US “will not hesitate to take action, as needed, to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world’s most critical waterways”.

“We will continue to make clear to the Yemeni groups that they will bear the consequences if they do not stop their illegal attacks, which harm Middle Eastern economies, cause environmental damage, and disrupt the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemen and other countries.”

The Yemenis military spokesman Yahya Saree said the attacks would continue until “the aggression stops” in Gaza.

Apart from the joint operations with Britain, the United States has also claimed to carry out unilateral strikes against positions and weaponry in Yemen, and has downed dozens of missiles and drones in the Red Sea.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that an



Smoke rises in the sky following US-led airstrikes in Sanaa, Yemen. – Reuters

American Navy vessel had shot down an anti-ship ballistic missile “launched into the Gulf of Aden from groups controlled areas of Yemen.”

The missile “was likely targeting

MV Torm Thor, a US-Flagged, owned, and operated chemical/oil tanker,” CENTCOM said on X, formerly Twitter.

US forces on Friday also shot down three attack drones near

commercial ships in the Red Sea and destroyed seven anti-ship cruise missiles on land, CENTCOM said.

The UK Ministry of Defence said four Royal Air Force Typhoon

FGR4s targeted “several very long-range drones, used by the Yemenis for both reconnaissance and attack missions,” on Saturday, at a site northeast of Sanaa.

— AFP



In brief

■ TOKYO



JAPAN TO SPEND EXTRA \$660 MILLION IN QUAKE RELIEF

Japan will spend an additional \$660 million rebuilding areas ravaged by a devastating New Year's Day earthquake, taking the total amount of quake relief to \$1.7 billion.

The new financial aid was announced by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida as he visited the quake-hit areas.

"The living conditions at temporary shelters are improving, but I will bear in mind that the reality remains tough as ever", Kishida said.

The inspection "renewed the government's determination to work toward providing more support", he said. — AFP

■ WARSAW



POLISH FARMERS BLOCK KEY ROAD INTO GERMANY

Polish farmers on Sunday blocked a major highway into Germany in the latest such protest against EU regulations and taxes.

Farmers across Europe have been protesting for weeks over what they say are excessively restrictive environmental rules, competition from cheap imports from outside the European Union. On Sunday, farmers from Poland blocked the A2 motorway near Slubice, in the east on the border with Germany.

"The blockade began at 1:00 pm. Both sides of the A2 motorway have been stopped," Ewa Murmylo said, a spokeswoman for local police. — AFP

■ DURBAN



ACCIDENT KILLS 9 ANC SUPPORTERS AFTER ELECTORAL RALLY

At least nine supporters of South Africa's ruling ANC were killed in a bus crash as they were travelling home after attending a key electoral rally.

Road and traffic authorities said about 70 people were aboard the vehicle when it lost control and rolled over near the eastern town of Paulpietersburg.

Eight people were killed in the impact. A ninth died later in hospital, police said.

The victims were among the tens of thousands of people that crowded into a football stadium in Durban for the launch of the African National Congress's election manifesto. — AFP



CHEGA party supporters hold flags during a rally in Graca neighbourhood, Lisbon. — AFP

Portugal electoral campaign begins with right looking to gain

LISBON: Portugal's official election campaign begins on Sunday, with the March 10 legislative vote likely to see a breakthrough by populist parties after an influence peddling scandal brought down eight years of Socialist government.

Portugal, which this April celebrates half a century since its "Carnation Revolution" put an end to an almost equally long fascist dictatorship, has avoided the right-wing and anti-establishment parties that have recently scored successes elsewhere in Europe. That exception is expected to end.

The Chega party ("Enough" in Portuguese), formed in 2019 by a former football commentator who has become an ardent critic of the country's political and economic elites, is credited with 15 to 20 per cent of the vote.

The surprise resignation of Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa, who is not running for re-election, has helped Chega, said Antonio Costa Pinto, a political scientist at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon.

"The theme of corruption, in this European conjuncture, favours the radical right," he said. Several European countries, including Italy, Slovakia, Hungary and Finland,

are run by coalitions either headed by or including far-right parties. The Netherlands could join this list after the victory of Geert Wilders in last November's legislative elections.

Chega, which is anti-immigrant but not always anti-European Union, already became the country's third largest political force in Portugal's January 2022 elections with seven per cent of the vote and 12 deputies in the 230-seat parliament.

Andre Ventura, its president, aims to displace the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD) as the dominant force on Portugal's right, which is expected to have a majority of the seats in parliament.

For the moment, the PSD is slightly ahead in the polls with about 30 per cent of the vote, just in front of the incumbent Socialist Party.

PSD leader Luis Montenegro, who has formed an alliance with two small conservative parties, has for the moment ruled out any coalition with Chega.

Costa's successor at the Socialist Party, Pedro Nuno Santos, has said he wouldn't block the formation of a minority government headed by the centre-right should they finish first but without a working majority. — AFP

TRUMP COASTS TO ANOTHER VICTORY IN RACE

CHARLESTON: Donald Trump cruised to a lightning victory in South Carolina's Republican primary, blitzing rival Nikki Haley in her home state and continuing his march to the nomination and a White House rematch with Joe Biden in November.

Trump completed a sweep of the first four major nominating contests, converting a year of blockbuster polls into a likely insurmountable lead going into the "Super Tuesday" 15-state voting bonanza in 10 days.

Haley had vowed to fight on regardless of the outcome but Trump, seeking to move quickly from the primary to the general election, didn't mention her once during a victory speech in which he turned his fire on Biden.

"We're going to be up here on November 5 and we're going to look at Joe Biden — we're going to look him right in the eye, he's destroying our country — and we're going to say, Joe, you're fired. Get out," Trump said to cheers at his victory party in state

capital Columbia.

Haley has repeatedly questioned the 77-year-old former president's mental fitness and warned another Trump presidency would bring "chaos," but her efforts appeared to do little to damage his standing among Republicans.

By about 7 am on Sunday, major national news outlets had Trump just shy of 60 per cent of the vote, with almost all votes counted.

US networks had felt able to call the race for Trump within seconds of the polls closing, suggesting little doubt over the outcome.

Trump had already won Iowa by 30 points and New Hampshire

by 10, while a dispute in Nevada led to the real estate tycoon running unopposed in the first official contest in the western United States.

Biden reacted to the South Carolina result with a brief written statement warning Americans of "the threat Donald Trump poses to our future as Americans grapple with the damage he left behind."

Meanwhile Haley reminded supporters as she congratulated Trump in her concession speech that she had already vowed to fight on, regardless of the outcome.

"I'm a woman of my word. I'm not giving up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden," she said.

Trump aides have been clear that they want to see off Haley long before the Republican National Convention in July -- and are expecting the party to coalesce around the front-runner ahead of the first of his criminal trials on March 25. — AFP



Former US Presidential hopeful Donald Trump (C) speaks at an "Election Night Watch Party" in Columbia, South Carolina. — AFP

Ukraine says half of Western arms delivered late

KYIV: Half of Western military aid to Kyiv is delivered later than promised, delays that hobble Kyiv's ability to defend itself against Russian attacks and cost Ukrainian lives, the country's Defence Minister Rustem Umerov said on Sunday.

Ukraine, which is struggling with an ammunition shortage, has for months said that Western aid is too slow to reach it and that the hold-ups have real consequences as the war against Russia enters its third year.

"At the moment, commitment does not constitute delivery," Umerov said during a forum dedicated to the second anniversary of Russia's attack.

"Fifty per cent of commitments are not delivered on time," he added.

Europe has admitted it will fall far short of a plan to deliver more than one million artillery shells to the country by March, instead



Firefighters work at the scene of a Russian missile strike that destroyed a train station, in Kostyantynivka, Ukraine. — Reuters

hoping to complete the shipments by the end of the year.

Umerov said such delays put Ukraine at a further disadvantage "in the mathematics of war" against Russia, which the West has said is increasingly building a war economy.

Umerov said that delayed aid

will mean Kyiv will "lose people, lose territories", especially given Russia's "air superiority".

"We do everything possible and impossible but without timely supply it harms us," he said.

Kyiv has in recent weeks been weakened by an ammunition

At the moment, commitment does not constitute delivery. Fifty per cent of commitments are not delivered on time

RUSTEM UMEROV
Ukrainian Defence Minister

shortage, with a vital \$60-billion US aid package blocked by political wrangling in the US Congress.

US President Joe Biden said the hold-ups directly contributed to Ukraine being forced to withdraw from the frontline town of Avdiivka earlier in February.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said on Sunday he was "deeply convinced that the US will not abandon Ukraine in terms of financial, military and armed support."

President Volodymyr Zelensky had pressed G7 leaders on Saturday to ensure the fast delivery of weapons.

The Ukrainian leader sought to rouse the country's military and political backers on the two year anniversary of Russia's attack, telling them: "Putin can lose this war" and "we will win."

After a year of static frontlines, Russia has in recent weeks been seeking to press its advantage on the battlefield.

Moscow's forces are trying to advance beyond the recently captured Avdiivka, where exhausted Ukrainian troops say delays to Western aid are hobbling their ability to hold off Russian attacks. — AFP

Innovation in teaching benefits teachers, learners



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature, Sultan Qaboos University

As Oman celebrated Teacher’s Day on February 24, it is an appropriate moment to consider the ways in which teachers’ roles are changing in the current world of vast and swift changes.

Traditionally, teachers have been seen to be givers of knowledge and wisdom. As Malcolm X once said, “Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today”.

The job of the teacher, for long, was to impart content, make children better citizens and inculcate enduring values.

This job description has expanded somewhat. No longer are teachers seen to be carriers of worldly wisdom. Learners are getting that from other sources, mainly bite sized reels on social media.

In many ways, teachers’ roles have already changed substantially.

Students look up to teachers for more than knowledge transfer. They are valued for their guidance and motivation as well.

This is why teachers need to be innovative in their classroom approaches.

While traditional teaching methods may not be adequate for today’s learners, using more creative methods such as interactive learning, problem solving and project based learning will all lend to rich teaching and learning experiences which are suitable for the 21st century learner.

Interactive learning is an active form of learning which uses hands-on approach of ‘learning by doing’. It encourages collaboration and other soft skills like time management and group behaviour.

Problem solving is another useful way of learning as students apply a concept, an idea or a formula to a real world situation.

There is ample evidence which shows that information is better retained when it is actually being used in a real world scenario rather than when it is lying in the pages of a book.

Similarly, project based learning uses existing and new knowledge to a given task.

This could include creating a short film or podcast, a mural on a class wall or websites for specific tasks.

TEACHERS HAVE THE MOST DIFFICULT MATERIAL TO WORK WITH — YOUNG MINDS THAT ARE EASILY MOLDABLE

This kind of project activates student interest, raises awareness and even creates real world opportunities. Students can include such projects in their portfolios.

All of this requires the active engagement of teachers. It is no longer sufficient to dig out old classroom material and recycle them each year.

Even if teachers do not change, students definitely do. They come already equipped with information and data.

What they need is training on how to use the information they already have, or can retrieve in seconds from a digital platform.

The role of teachers today is to inspire, set goals, and be role models that students look up to. This requires continuous development and renewed interest in the values of teaching.

Teachers have the most difficult material to work with — young minds that are easily moldable. Setting a high standard of learning and becoming an inspiration could be the noblest goal for a teacher.

Perhaps the most satisfying moment for a teacher is when young students say that they want to be like them. That is the ultimate tribute a teacher can get.

Economy, another victim of war in Sudan

Before the Sudanese army and paramilitary fighters turned their guns on each other last year, Ahmed used to sell one of Sudan’s main exports: gum arabic, a vital ingredient for global industry.

Now he’s out of business, and his story encapsulates the broader economic collapse of Sudan during 10 months of war.

Since combat between two rival generals began on April 15, Ahmed has been at the fighters’ mercy.

“When the war began, I had a stock of gum arabic in a warehouse south of Khartoum that was intended for export,” Ahmed said, asking to use only his first name for fear of retaliation.

“To get it out I had to pay huge sums to the Rapid Support Forces,” the paramilitaries commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Daglo who are at war with the Sudanese Armed Forces led by Abdel Fattah al Burhan.

“I had to pay multiple times in areas under their control, before my cargo got to areas controlled by the government,” Ahmed said recently.

But the government — loyal to the army — “then demanded I pay taxes” on the product, an emulsifying agent used in everything from soft drinks to chewing gum.

When the trucks finally made it to Port Sudan for export on the Red Sea, “authorities again asked for new taxes, and I had to pay storage fees six times more than before the war”, Ahmed said.

His gum arabic — like many other Sudanese products — never made it onto a ship.

According to Sudan’s port authorities, international trade fell 23 per cent last year.

The finance ministry, which didn’t set a national budget for 2023 or 2024 and has foregone quarterly reports, recently raised the exchange rate for imports and exports from 650 Sudanese pounds to 950.

But that is still far below the currency’s real value.

With most banks out of service, the only exchange rate that matters to ordinary Sudanese is on the black market, where the dollar currently goes for around 1,200 Sudanese pounds.

“It’s a sign of the destruction of the Sudanese economy,” former Sudanese Chamber of Commerce head Al Sadiq Jalal said.

To make matters worse, a communications blackout since early February has hampered online transactions — which Sudanese relied on to survive.

The war has led industries to cease production. Others were destroyed. Businesses and food stocks have been looted. — AFP



Alexander Schallenberg

The writer is Austrian Federal Minister for European, International Affairs

Breaking the cycles of violence that torment the Middle East

The Middle East has been plagued by cycles of violence for decades. However, the past months have brought a new dimension of devastation. Hamas attacks have pushed Gaza and the whole region to the edge of the abyss.

As in all conflicts, civilians bear the brunt. Israelis are traumatised by the slaughter of October 7 and families fear for their children, parents, and grandparents still being held captive in Gaza.

At the same time, scores of Palestinians in Gaza have lost loved ones, and lack shelter, food, and medical aid. I was deeply moved when I met with Austrian-Palestinian families we evacuated from Gaza and with Israeli mothers whose sons are still held hostage by Hamas.

There is no hierarchy of suffering. The pain and trauma of all civilians is heartbreaking. It is our joint responsibility to protect them and to put an end to their agony.

This is why I am traveling to Tel Aviv, Ramallah, Cairo, and Amman to listen and engage with partners. The roots of this conflict reach deep. Emotions run high. Positions have grown increasingly entrenched, including abroad. As the foreign minister of a country that is a decades-long, reliable partner of the Palestinian people while firmly acknowledging its unique historic responsibility towards the State of Israel, I consider it my duty to do whatever I can to open the space for diplomacy.

International law is the guiding principle of our foreign policy. A breach of international law is a red line, whenever and wherever in the world. That is why we unequivocally condemn Hamas’ continued rocket attacks, its terror tunnels, hostage-taking, and the cynical use of civilians as human shields. That is why we firmly stand by Israel’s right to self-defence in the face of terror.

That is why in line with international humanitarian law we urge Israel to take all possible steps to do more to protect innocent civilians

and to allow more aid into Gaza. It is also, why we categorically reject statements calling for a displacement of Palestinians, why we call for Gaza to remain Palestinian, and why we call for sanctions on extremist, violent settlers.

However, referring to noble principles is not enough. It is through persistent and tireless diplomacy on the ground that we will reunite the hostages with their loved ones and get more life-saving water, food, and medicine to the civilians in Gaza. This is Austria’s immediate priority. I am encouraged by recent talks supported by the United States, Qatar, and Egypt.

IT SEEMS DAUNTING TO CHART A PATH TOWARDS LASTING PEACE. BUT TO ME, THERE IS NO VIABLE AND LASTING ALTERNATIVE TO THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION AND IT IS THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

An agreement could prepare the ground for an enduring ceasefire and, eventually, a perspective for peace.

There is no time to waste. Every day brings more agony to the families of the Israeli hostages and the Palestinian children, women, and men in Gaza. We have mobilised €13 million of emergency aid for the people in Gaza and the stability of the region. More support will follow. In the past ten years, Austrian aid to the region amounted to more than €320 million.

In response to the shocking allegations that UNRWA employees were involved in the October 7 attacks, we and several other donors temporarily suspended our payments, pending thorough, comprehensive, and transparent investigations. However, we never stopped Austrian aid. We appreciate that the UN has now taken action and is working closely with international partners to

define benchmarks that will allow us to restore payments once allegations have been examined and there is clarity about the consequences. The United Nations must be above reproach.

Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve to live in peace, security, and dignity.

They say the Middle East is a cruel place for optimists. Indeed, in all the horror and trauma, it seems daunting to chart a path towards lasting peace. But to me, there is no viable and lasting alternative to the two-state solution. It is the only game in town.

I want a future in which terrorist groups do not threaten the security of Israel. Where a civilian administration in Gaza invests in the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the Palestinian people instead of digging tunnels and plotting attacks. Where Arab states have normalised their relations with Israel and all can reap the economic and political benefits from an integrated and interconnected Middle East. A future in which the Palestinians have realised their aspirations for a viable, democratic state under a reformed Palestinian Authority.

Families – both Israelis and Palestinians - deserve to feel secure in their homes, children deserve to play and go to school without fear, and women and men deserve to pursue their work and create a life in dignity for themselves and their loved ones.

Progress will not come easy and no doubt, there will be setbacks. However, if we have learned anything from October 7 and its aftermath, it is that we cannot continue as before. In my conversations with fellow Jewish and Muslim Austrians, with Israeli and Palestinian partners, and with colleagues from North Africa to the Gulf.

I have learned that despite many real or perceived differences, we can all unite around principles of common decency and humanity. Our courage and political will has to be equal to the task. Austria is committed to making this vision a reality and to preserving future generations of Israelis and Palestinians from the scourge of war.

Flash-lighting pathway for others

Congratulations to all teachers for celebrating Omani Teacher's Day. It is you who always play a significant and powerful role in people's life. You are the one who shapes students' future and make every profession of course. All those pilots, engineers, doctors and others were students in a classroom someday, and had been taught by teachers at schools, colleges and universities, so they became who they are today. Without teachers' encouragement and support, students' dreams would have never come true.

The Omani Teacher's Day (February 24) is the time to acknowledge the commendable dedication of the teachers towards their students. At such moments of celebrations, our feelings run deep down in our hearts and are mixed with happiness and thankfulness to our teachers. We highly appreciate the sacrifice of time and efforts which they made for us. May Allah bless all teachers!

On this day, we all, as society, students and parents, should show our gratitude and appreciation and express sincere thankfulness to all teachers for their efforts, dedication and sacrifices. Teachers spared no efforts to teach each every one of us who are today serving the nation in different fields. That is all because of teachers; they made citizens handling various positions starting from leaders to decision-makers, ministers, businessmen to people of other ordinary employees.

Actually, students start their journey of life with teachers since the early years of childhood. Some students kicked off their company with teachers at kindergarten, while others in first grade of school at the age of six. All teachers are admirable and great indeed. Teachers leave no stone unturned to feed students with knowledge as well as enlighten them with various life experiences and necessities throughout the school years.

They are teachers of life as being not merely teachers, but fathers, brothers and friends for their students. Likewise,



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

STUDENTS START THEIR JOURNEY OF LIFE WITH TEACHERS SINCE THE EARLY YEARS OF CHILDHOOD

female teachers are being mothers, sisters and friends for the girls as well. Teachers' role and goodwill are undoubtedly beyond just teaching and transforming knowledge.

Teachers not only teach with devotion, but benevolently raise students to make good citizens out of them who contribute in giving back to their nation. If truth is to be told, teachers are sometimes serving students more than parents do! A teacher is like a candle; it consumes itself to light the way for others. For many students, their dreams begin with a teacher who believes in them, who pulls, pushes and leads them to the next step in life.

Just let us all look back at our school days. Some teachers may be etched in our memory because they were unique, inspiring or they influenced our thinking in a way or the other. Today, we may recall our teachers' inspiration, which had an influence on our mental and spiritual growth. A teacher continues to impact a student's life far after the graduation from school. The teacher's influence works on a subconscious level, constantly shaping the personality of the student.

No doubt, everyone of us has unforgettable stories with teachers and school life in general.

Some of these were hard stories or incidents some of which we experienced decades of years ago. However, both the tough and easy experiences were useful ways of learning as with no pain no gain. Learning and achieving dreams have never been easy! It has been said that a teacher's purpose is not to create students in his own image, but to develop students who can create their own image.

Dear teachers, in teaching you cannot see the fruit of a day's work. It is invisible and remains so, maybe for 20 years. Your inspiring words are like beautiful footprints that have been etched in our hearts and minds forever. Thus, never give up on seeding the dreams of your students and good deeds. Congratulations benevolent teachers!

RISING FROM THE ASHES!



This photograph taken on Sunday shows the construction site of Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral with its new spire, on Île de la Cité, in Paris. Listed as World Heritage site by Unesco, the 14th century Gothic Notre-Dame Cathedral was partially destroyed including its spire during a fire on April 15, 2019. – AFP

The Trump effect takes Europe

Not for the first time, the central figure at this year's Munich Security Conference was someone not in attendance. This year was Donald Trump's turn.

Like most participants at this annual "Davos of Defence," I desperately hope that the presumptive Republican candidate will forever remain a former president. This is not merely out of sympathy for my American friends, who see him as a danger to the future of their republic, but also because I fear what he would do to the global order. As a European, though, I am somewhat grateful for Trump's existence. Even if he loses the election this November, he could end up becoming the European project's unwitting saviour. He has forced Europeans finally to rethink the core assumptions that have been hamstringing them with regard to the war in Ukraine, Europe's own defence, and European political unity.

As the war in Ukraine nears the end of its second year with no end in sight, Trump's candidacy is focusing European minds about what victory and defeat might entail. Everyone's ideal outcome is for Ukraine to recover all its territory. Watching the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, take the stage in Munich hours after learning of her husband's death, it was impossible not to recoil at the thought of giving Russia even one square inch of Ukraine. But as the war of attrition grinds on, it makes less and less



Mark Leonard
The writer is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict

IF DISASTER CAN BE AVERTED IN THIS YEAR'S US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, A SECOND-TERM BIDEN ADMINISTRATION WILL BE ABLE TO COUNT ON A MUCH BETTER PARTNER IN EUROPE, OWING TO THE MOBILISING EFFECT OF DONALD TRUMP'S CANDIDACY

sense to consider the matter only in territorial terms.

After all, an even bigger threat to Ukraine than territorial losses would be a Trump peace plan that both cedes territory and demilitarises the country, thus leaving it condemned to a perilous state of neutrality. Europeans are waking up to the fact that Ukraine can pursue its European and Western ambitions only through dual accession to Nato and the European Union. As Ivan Krastev argued recently, it may be time to start considering a "West German scenario."

Trump has also unwittingly lent urgency to the ongoing European debate about defence and security. Just last week in Munich, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen promised to hand over her country's "entire artillery" to the Ukrainians. More broadly, Europeans have already been contributing more aid (military and otherwise) to Ukraine than the United States has. Ahead of Nato's summit in Washington in July, 20 of the 22 EU members of the alliance (including Germany) are on track to spend at least 2 per cent of their GDP on defence.

True, most of this shift is the result of Putin's revanchism. But Trump's recent comments encouraging the Russians to "do whatever the hell they want" with Nato members that refuse to "pay

up" have raised the ante. Europeans must not only invest more but also change how the money is spent, not least by overcoming the old psychological divisions between Nato and the EU.

But perhaps Trump's biggest contribution has been to Europe's political unity. After he was elected in 2016, many feared the rise of an "illiberal international" that would have brought far-right populist parties in Europe into close alignment with Trump's White House and Putin's Kremlin. But if Trump is elected a second time, polling by the European Council on Foreign Relations (to be published soon) shows that he would not be welcomed enthusiastically in most

European countries, including even Hungary.

One striking consequence of the war (and of Brexit) lies in the repositioning of many right-wing parties. Most notably, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has carefully moved away from her previous Euroskepticism and made a point of cutting all of Italy's ties with Putin. In Poland, Donald Tusk's return to the premiership has united a traditionally sceptical electorate behind the idea of a more cohesive geopolitical Europe. The European Parliament elections in June may well result in a sharp turn to the right; but in many countries, the Trump threat could mobilise voters and help candidates who



Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen promised to hand over her country's 'entire artillery' to the Ukrainians.

are rallying behind European sovereignty.

Nor are these dynamics confined to the EU. The United Kingdom will probably elect a new government before the end of the year. In Munich, the Labour Party's impressive shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, made it clear that he would push hard for the closest possible relationship with Europeans on security and defence issues.

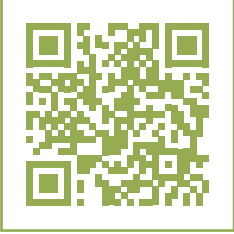
But nobody summed up the Trump effect better than (outgoing) Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who implored Europeans to "stop whining and moaning about Trump," and start focusing on getting their act together. Given the long-term trajectory of US domestic politics, Europeans would need to do this either way, regardless of who wins this November.

Should disaster be averted this time around, a second-term Biden administration could count on a much better partner in Europe. As many US watchers have noted, Trump is both the biggest threat to American democracy and the most powerful mobiliser of Democratic Party voters.

It is a risky business, but there is a chance that the Trump effect could leave the transatlantic order stronger than it has been for a long time.

sport

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Saham, Al Khabourah promoted to top league

ADIL AL BALUSH
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Al Batinah North teams, Saham and Al Khabourah, returned to Omantel League in style on Saturday. Saham registered their comeback to the top tier league after they claimed the Oman Football Association (OFA) First Division League (Tamkeen League) crown. In the finals they trounced Ahli Sidab 7-0 at Seeb Stadium on Saturday in the concluding round of the league.

On the other side, Al Khabourah secured the runner-up spot to the elite league class after they played out a goalless draw with Al Salam who were competing with Al Khabourah for the second ticket at Al Rustaq



Saham Club receives league shield

Sports Complex. In the last match of the concluding round, Al Ittihad registered a 3-0 win over Muscat at Al Saada Sports Complex.

After the completion of the final round games, Saham

topped in the overall standings with 18 points. Al Khabourah came in second by 16 points with superior goal difference to Al Salam who ended in third place with the same credit. Al Ittihad finished in fourth place



Players in action during the match

with 14 points while Muscat in fifth position with nine points and Ahli Sidab in sixth place with two points only.

Saham back to the top flight league after its absence in two seasons. The Al Batinah

North club players delivered an impressive show to emerge champions of the First Division League following their top victory against Ahli Sidab by 7-0. Salim al Rushaidi, CEO of Tamkeen Investment Group,

gave away the winner's shield to Saham captain after the match in presence of Saham fans, OFA officials and club representatives.

Al Khabourah confirmed their promotion after a long absence from presenting in the top flight league for six years. In 2017, Al Khabourah dropped to the second division league but returned back to the first division before marking their top attendance in Omantel league from the next season.

On the other hand, two teams from Omantel league who were placed 11th and 12th may drop to the first division league. Currently, Al Wahda and Bahla are in the danger zone as the former have seven points while the latter have six points.

OBA discusses hosting of U-18 3x3 championships

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) met on Sunday to discuss preparations for hosting the Gulf and Arab U-18 3x3 Basketball Championships. The tournaments will be held at The Wave Muscat from March 1 to 4.

The meeting was chaired by Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, OBA Chairman and Chairman of the Organising Committee for the Championships. Dr Ali bin Salam al Ameri, Vice President, Mohammed bin Nasser al Hassani, Acting Secretary-General, members of the Board of Directors and heads of the organising committees for the two championships attended the meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, Al Naabi stressed Oman's readiness to host the Gulf and Arab 3x3 Basketball Championships. He said: "The association has started early technical and administrative preparations to host the Gulf 3x3 Basketball Championship, which will be held from March 1 to 2, and the Arab 3x3 Basketball Championship, which will be held from March 3 to 4. This is in coordination with the Gulf Organising Committee and the Arab Basketball Federation."

The technical committee of the championships has completed the installation of the training court for the participating teams at The Wave, and the main court will be installed on Tuesday.

Al Naabi emphasised that Oman



OBA Official discusses preparations for hosting the Gulf and Arab U-18 3x3 Basketball Championships

always welcomes all its brothers from the GCC and Arab teams participating in the competitions. He looked forward to the two championships appearing in a technically and organisationally advanced manner.

He pointed out that the organising committees for the championship include young men and women who have the necessary experience to organise various championships. He praised the efforts of the association's partners

and supporters in making the championship a success, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, The Wave Muscat, and Oman Sail. He wished all the participating Gulf and Arab teams' success in the championship.

The meeting then discussed the tasks and responsibilities of the committees, stressing the importance of coordination between all committees to ensure the success of the championship.

Dr Al Ameri, Vice President of the Association and Chairman of the Technical Committee for the Championships, spoke about the committee's efforts in completing its work, which began with the preparation of the training court for the participating teams. Work is underway to install and equip the

main match court in cooperation with partners The Wave Muscat and Oman Sail.

The committee is also preparing the venue for the 3x3 Basketball Coaching Course, which will be held on the sidelines of the championships.

Dr Al Ameri explained that the technical meeting for the championship will be held on February 29 at the Intercity Hotel.

Mohammed bin Nasser al Hassani, Chairman of the Public Relations Committee, reviewed the committee's responsibilities, starting from receiving and accompanying the delegations until their departure. He also explained that the committee members will be distributed to the participating teams.

Bank Muscat Organises Himam Marathon for persons with disabilities



Marathon participation united in one photo

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in Oman, organised “Himam Marathon by Bank Muscat” dedicated to celebrate the achievements of persons with disabilities. The event took place at the Bank’s Head Office in the presence of Shaikh Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Muscat, and a number of executive management members and representatives from the Special Olympics Oman. The Marathon witnessed a wide participation of more than 250 persons with physical, mental, hearing disabilities, besides people with Autism and Down Syndrome, along with their families.

Such initiatives significantly contribute to integrating the handicapped in society, providing them the platform to showcase their sports abilities to help them achieve their ambitions.

The Marathon featured races tailored for people with Autism,



First place winner in the men category

Down syndrome, physical, hearing and visual impairment, challenging them to complete an 800-metre race track. The competition demonstrated participants’ sports spirit and determination. The top three males and the top three females in each race, totalling 24, won worthy prizes. Shaikh Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Muscat, handed over the prizes to the winners.

To make the event more exciting, Bank Muscat organised a dedicated area for entertainment including



First place winner in the girls category

children play area, games and other activities.

On the occasion, Hamza bin Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager — Credit, Bank Muscat, said: “We are delighted today with the launch of ‘Himam Marathon’ aiming to support this important segment of society. We are also much delighted to see this exciting competition between contestants, reflecting their strong determination in overcoming obstacles. It is really a matter of great significance to look after persons with disabilities, honing their skills

and developing their abilities”.

Al Ajmi stressed on the importance of enabling the disabled and integrating them in society in alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 to ensure an equal decent life for all. “Bank Muscat has always been keen to support persons with disabilities as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives crafted to all segments of society. I would like to extend my deepest congratulations to everyone for making this initiative a success.

Participants of the Himam Marathon expressed their enthusiasm and thrill at being a part of this exciting event. Nabeel bin Khamis al Kindi, said: “This is absolutely marvelous. It confirms the bank’s keenness in supporting the Disabled. I call upon other institutions to follow Bank Muscat’s suit in organising events like this and enable this category.” Rahma bint Marhoon al Hasaniyah, was also delighted with her

participation. She stated: “It is important to organise sports events for us and we thank Bank Muscat for considering this Marathon which we are all happy with”. Also, Maher bin Abdurassul al Balushi, said: “Such gestures are of a high importance to us and they help us explore our potentials and identify our strengths.” Bank Muscat seeks to launch initiatives that serve various segments of society, especially those with disabilities, and also to cooperate with various relevant institutions and associations. The bank continues to implement sustainable initiatives in order to enhance its leadership position in the field of Social Responsibility and Community Service. This comes out of Bank Muscat’s keenness to partner with various government and private institutions, civil and charitable associations in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman to implement these sustainable programmes that serve the community.

UTAS holds annual sports events for women in Suhar

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, FEB 25

University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) held 20th annual sports championship for women from February 20 to 25 in Suhar. This championship is in line with the university’s commitment to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 by supporting and enhancing the role of women in sports and developing citizenship values.

Dr Huda bint Salim bin Hamdan al Shailiyah, Vice Chancellor of the University for IT and student services, said the sports championship is part of their university journey, stressing that the development of students goes beyond the academic aspect. This championship provided an opportunity for students to get to know each other and exchange experiences in games. A wide and diverse participation is expected in sports such as football, volleyball, chess, badminton, and electronic games.

Dr Hilal al Maqbali, deputy dean, said: “The championship witnessed participation of 300 students from different branches of the University around the Sultanate of Oman.

Students from Muscat, Al Musannah, Al Rustaq, Salalah, Sur, Ibri, Ibra, Shinas, Nizwa and Suhar took part.

The event also included competitions in football, table tennis, volleyball, badminton, chess, and electronic games, which were organised for the first time in the tournament.

The university also allowed women and girls from the local community to attend the competitions.



UTAS annual sports events for women

ISM U16 win Inter-School, OCA U16 win Inter-Academy Under 16 title

MUSCAT, OMAN: Indian School Muscat U16 beat Indian School Wadi Kabir U16 by 5 wickets in the finals of Oman Cricket Inter-School U16 Junior Domestic League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy SAOC at Municipality Grounds recently.

ISWK U16 posted 185 in 30 overs courtesy Saumya Sampat’s 36 and a collective contribution from the other batters. Vihaan Chauhan picked 2 wickets for ISM U16. In response, ISM U16 chased down the target with one over remaining courtesy Giriharan KK’s 69 along with 36 from Siddheswaran and 31 from Jeet Shah. Arav Pillai picked 3

wickets.

Oman Cricket Academy U16 beat Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre Yellow U16 by 7 wickets in the finals of Oman Cricket Inter-Academy U16 Junior Domestic League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy SAOC at Municipality Grounds recently.

MCCC Yellow U16 was bundled for 187 courtesy a 3-wicket haul from Vignesh Karthikeyan and two wickets each for Mohammed Abrar and Mohammed Aseel. Hafiz Mohammed and Jeet Shah scored 50 each respectively. In response, OCA U16 chased the target courtesy 66 from Kavish Shah, 46



1- OCA U16 - Champions

from Christo Tredoux and 45 from Saumya Sampat by 7 wickets with 10 balls remaining.

In the Prize Distribution ceremony, Alkesh Joshi, Treasurer Oman Cricket, Kiran Asher Board Member, Oman Cricket, Paul Martin, Mazoon Dairy and Duleep Mendis Chief Development Officer Oman Cricket graced the stage.

For Inter-School tournament, Saumya Sampat of ISWK U16 bagged the Best Batsman while Jeyapranesh Ayyapan of ISAS U16 was awarded Best Bowler and Rishab Gupta of ISWK Cambridge was adjudged Best All-Rounder.

For Inter-Academy tournament,

Jeet Shah of MCCC Yellow U16 bagged the Best Batsman while Vignesh Karthikeyan of OCA U16 was awarded Best Bowler and Saumya Sampat of OCA U16 was adjudged Best All-Rounder.

Brief Scores: ISWK U16 185/10 in 30 overs (Saumya Sampat 36(31), Vihaan Chauhan 2/28) lost to ISM U16 A 186/5 in 29 overs (Giriharan KK 69(55); Arav Pillai 3/25) by 5 wickets.

MCCC Yellow U16 187/10 in 29.1 overs (Hafiz Mohammed 50(38); Vignesh Karthikeyan 3/26) lost to OCA U16 188/3 in 28.2 overs (Kavish Shah 66(55), Jeet Shah 1/24) by 7 wickets.



Liverpool win League Cup as Van Dijk strikes late to sink Chelsea

LONDON: Liverpool won the League Cup in dramatic fashion as Virgil van Dijk's header late in extra-time sealed a 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley on Sunday.

Jurgen Klopp's injury-hit side finished a gruelling clash with a host of raw youngsters on the pitch, but it was their experienced captain who clinched the club's 10th League Cup triumph.

Van Dijk earlier had a goal controversially disallowed by VAR, but the Dutch defender pounced to nod home with just two minutes left.

It was Liverpool's first trophy following Klopp's bombshell announcement that he will step down at the end of this season.

The German will hope Liverpool's first silverware since the 2022 FA Cup will be the springboard for an incredible farewell tour.

Quadruple-chasing Liverpool sit top of the Premier League, face Southampton in the FA Cup fifth round on Wednesday and take on Sparta Prague in the Europa League last 16.

It was another bitter Wembley experience for Chelsea, who lost the 2022 League Cup and FA Cup finals against Liverpool.

Blues boss Mauricio Pochettino has asked Chelsea fans not to judge him on "winning titles" in the midst of a troubled first season in charge.

But Chelsea remain without domestic silverware since the 2018 FA Cup and had only themselves to blame after missing a host of chances in normal time.

Ravaged by injuries to 11 players, Liverpool's list of star

absentees included Mohamed Salah, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Alisson Becker, Darwin Nunez, Diogo Jota and Dominik Szoboszlai.

That meant starts for 20-year-olds Conor Bradley and Harvey Elliott, while six of Klopp's substitutes were 21 or younger.

Despite their youthful line-up, Liverpool settled quickly as Luis Diaz led the charge.

Taking advantage of Chelsea's hesitant defending, Diaz advanced into the area for a fierce strike that forced a good save from Djordje Petrovic.

Against the run of play, Chelsea should have taken the lead with their first incisive raid.

Conor Gallagher's cross deflected to Cole Palmer just six yards out, but his strike produced a superb save from Caoimhin Kelleher.

Ryan Gravenberch joined Liverpool's ever-growing injury list when he was stretchered off after the midfielder's leg twisted awkwardly in a challenge with Moises Caicedo.

Raheem Sterling thought he had given Chelsea the lead with a close-range finish from Nicolas Jackson's cross, but the goal was disallowed for a tight offside against the Senegal striker before his assist.

Responding to Chelsea's improvement, Liverpool were inches away from taking the lead through Cody Gakpo, whose glancing header from Andrew Robertson's cross hit the far post.

Liverpool kept coming and Bradley's goalbound shot was brilliantly blocked by Levi Colwill, who threw himself into

the fray to repel the close-range effort.

Liverpool looked to have broken the deadlock on the hour when Van Dijk climbed above Ben Chilwell to head in Robertson's free-kick.

But VAR intervened, prompting referee Chris Kavanagh to disallow the goal for offside against Wataru Endo, who blocked Colwill from marking the Dutch defender.

Axel Disasi should have rubbed salt into Liverpool's wounds but the Chelsea defender made a complete hash of a close-range chance. Chelsea went close again as Gallagher met Palmer's cross with a flick that cannoned off the far post.

Gallagher wasted a golden opportunity to win it in the final minutes, receiving Palmer's pass in acres of space but taking a heavy touch that allowed Kelleher to save. In a pulsating finale, Kelleher made two more saves from Palmer and Christopher Nkunku in quick succession to force extra-time.

Bobby Clark, James McConnell, Jarell Quansah and Jayden Danns were all on by now, but if Liverpool's youngsters lacked Chelsea's experience, they were never overawed.

Danns almost guided his header over Petrovic and Elliott was inches away when he volleyed against the post. Liverpool would not be denied and with penalties just two minutes away, Van Dijk met Kostas Tsimikas's corner with a header that flashed past Petrovic as Klopp raised his arms with a smile that bordered on disbelief.

— AFP



Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk and Caoimhin Kelleher celebrate after winning the Carabao Cup final on Sunday. – AFP





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First phase of Ibri Industrial City launched

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 25

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) celebrated on Sunday, February 25, 2024, the inauguration of Phase One of Ibri Industrial City under the auspices of Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah.

Highlighting the significance of developing an industrial hub in Al Dhahirah Governorate, Al Rawas emphasised that this inauguration marks a strategic continuation of the government’s goal to ensure balanced economic growth across its diverse governorates.

“Aligned with the core objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040, this project aims to present a dynamic and competitive investment landscape that appeals to both local and foreign investors.

The introduction of an industrial city in Al Dhahirah Governorate is poised to catalyse a significant qualitative leap in manufacturing industries and commercial activities, which will eventually play a role in generate job opportunities, encourage exports and the establishment of export industries, while also stimulating economic sectors such as transportation and banking,” Al



Several agreements were signed for investments in the new hub.

Rawas stated.

He further added, “Al Dhahirah’s strategic location, bordering Saudi Arabia and the UAE, will further support international trade operations. Coupled with its proximity to important hubs like Sohar Port, Khazaen Economic City and Nizwa Industrial City, as well as oil and gas concession areas and raw materials such as metals, marble and copper, the governorate holds immense potential for sustainable economic growth.”

Salah al Alawi, Director General of Ibri Industrial City, said, “The industrial city spans an extensive

area of 10 million sqm, with Phase One successfully completed at a cost of RO 9 million, covering 3 million sqm.

The presence of a fully-equipped industrial city will serve as a pivotal factor in driving development and fostering an ideal environment for the private sector to engage in a diverse range of industrial, commercial and service activities.”

Al Alawi further highlighted the commitment of Madayn to promote investment in Ibri Industrial City through the introduction of a comprehensive incentive package.

This package grants investors exemption from rental value for a period of two years for all new projects, followed by a reduction

in the rental value for a period of three years by 50 per cent for contracts concluded during the period from 2021 to 2024.

Additionally, all fees listed in the Investment Regulations were reduced by 50 per cent for all projects. “These incentives resulted in a notable increase in investor interest, with 10 projects now underway in Ibri Industrial City, boasting an initial investment totalling RO 6.5 million. Several of these projects have already commenced construction and development activities,” Al Alawi said.

Ahmed al Farsi, Director of Projects at Madayn’s Directorate General of Facilities and Infrastructure, stated that Phase One of the development project

of Ibri Industrial City, includes the construction of roads, truck parking zone, water network and water tank, firefighting network, sewage networks and collection tank, dyke for protection against rainwater, and security system with surveillance cameras.

On the occasion, four agreements were signed for the establishment of projects in Ibri Industrial City.

Seeh Al Sarya Company will set up an Oil & Gas facilities plant with an investment of RO 6 million.

Fifth Wave of Food Industries Company inked a pact to set up a coffee roaster, Raad Ibri Company will invest in a coal processing plant. Al Mizah United Company plans to set up a cardboard making plant at the hub.

Excisable goods sans digital tax stamps seized in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 25

An inspection of outlets by officials of Oman’s Tax Authority has yielded a haul of goods that failed to feature Digital Tax Stamps that must be affixed to all products sold in the Sultanate of Oman that are subject to Excise Tax.

The Tax Authority said in a recent post that the haul included cigarette packs and tobacco seized during inspections of dozens of outlets in Dhofar Governorate.



A tax official inspecting excisable goods at an outlet in Dhofar (Picture credit: Oman Tax Authority)

imported, stored and marketed in the country.

In the process, any trade in counterfeits or smuggled goods is easy to detect, while the excise tax liable to be paid on all such goods is fully recovered by tax authorities.

The affixing of digital stamps is currently mandatory for cigarette products, tobacco products and their derivatives, among other excisable goods. Manufacturers and importers of excise products who do not comply with the Digital Tax Stamps scheme are liable to various penalty provisions prescribed under the Oman Excise Tax Executive Regulations (administrative penalty of RO 500 to RO 5,000).

“The Tax Authority calls upon all companies to adhere to the guidelines, terms, and conditions applied, and that importers and traders should ensure that all tobacco goods and cigarettes are labelled with tax stamps while trading,” the Authority added.



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Invitation to Annual General Meeting of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

The Board of Directors of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG (the “**Company**”) has the pleasure to invite the shareholders of the company to the Annual General Meeting (“**AGM**”) to be held at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 13 March 2024 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC (“**MCD**”) website (www.mcd.om).

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3p.m. on Sunday, 17th March 2024 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC (“**MCD**”) website (www.mcd.om) to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
 2. To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
 3. To consider and approve the Auditor’s report and the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
 4. To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2023 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year 31 December 2024 (**Annexure 1**).
 5. To notify the General Assembly with transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2023 (**Annexure 2**).
 6. To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023(**Annexure 3**).
 7. To consider and approve the Board of Directors performance report for the financial year ended 31/12/2023. (**Annexure 4**).
 8. To ratify the payment of Directors’ remuneration for an amount of RO 15,000 (Rials Omani Fifteen thousand only) for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
 9. To consider and approve the allocation of a budget of RO 15,000 (Rials Omani Fifteen thousand only) to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2024.
 10. To elect a new Board of Directors.
- Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company’s head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company at least five working days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5p.m. on Sunday, 7th of March 2024 shall not be accepted.
11. To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and approve their fees.

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the CMA we would like to call your attention to the following:

- a. only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM through electronic means, provided such natural person has an investor number with the MCD.
 - b. voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder’s balance is changed either by increase or decrease, the voting process shall stand canceled and must re-vote at the AGM.
- Please join online at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.

For more information, please contact **Mr. Salim Al Amri** of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG on telephone No. **9884 9480**.

Chairman
**AHMED SYAHRANI BIN
SULAIMAN**

Legal Advisor
**AL BUSAIDY MANSOOR JAMAL & CO.
BARRISTERS & LEGAL CONSULTANTS**

External Auditor
KPMG L.L.C

Fahad Express celebrates 50 years in style with a glittering ‘birthday’ bash



MUSCAT: Fahad Express, one of the first travel agencies in the country, on February 19, 2024 celebrated its 50 years at the Crowne Plaza, Al Qurum. To mark their 50th anniversary, the agency celebrated with a special night replete with travel memories, live entertainment and surprises.

The owners and the top officials of Fahad Express, who gathered at the event, noted that they were celebrating “half a century of adventures” as they embarked on “a new chapter of exploration together”.

New identity of Fahad Express

The occasion also saw the unveiling of a new logo in line with the achievement of the 50

years’ milestone. “The market has evolved over the last 50 years and the customer experience of booking their travels has changed.

After understanding the changing needs of customers and viewing market trends and to celebrate 50 years, we created a new identity that reflects a complete and personalised approach,” Jannat Shafaei, Marketing Director at Fahad Express, said.

“The refreshed logo has put in a modern touch while still retaining the essence of the previous one. It is now more bold, yet simple and conveys trust, peace of mind and reliability, which are values that we stand by,” Jannat Shafaei added.

Omani industries secure deals as Gulfood 2024 concludes

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), successfully concluded its participation at Gulfood 2024 in Dubai, UAE.

Food industry leaders, investors and producers showed keen interest in the diverse range of Omani products showcased at the Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion.

Hamood al Balushi, Assistant Director-General at Madayn, emphasised that the remarkable turnout for Omani products at Gulfood, which exceeded expectations this year, underscores their exceptional quality and reputation both regionally and internationally.

“This year’s participation has enabled Omani industries to receive more export requests, sign commercial deals, renew existing ones, and explore entry into new markets,” Al Balushi pointed out.

Al Balushi further stated, “This year, Madayn, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, worked towards expanding participation by enabling more Omani companies and factories to



join the exhibition. Additionally, the Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion provided free spaces for the SMEs to interact with exhibition visitors and showcase their products, recognising their significant contribution to the local economy.”

Al Balushi also emphasised on the keen interest expressed by global investors and business owners in setting up or expanding existing businesses in the Sultanate of Oman’s industrial cities.

The representatives of Madayn, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry briefed the visitors on Oman’s investment environment and the support and incentives offered by the three bodies. On his part, Moosa al Moosawi, Director of Exhibitions and Products Promotion at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), highlighted that OCCI’s participation at Gulfood reflects its commitment to promoting and supporting Omani industries, and complementing the initiatives led by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Madayn.

Ooredoo reveals winners of second edition of Manzili draw

MUSCAT: Ooredoo has announced the second set of lucky winners of Manzili, Ooredoo’s mega home Internet raffle draw. Fabulous prizes were again up for grabs, including free lifetime home Internet subscriptions, three, six, and nine month home Internet subscriptions, smart TVs, Mesh WiFi devices, and PlayStation 5 consoles.

Ooredoo announced the winners during a fun-filled event at the iconic and historic Nizwa Fort as it reaches out to customers across communities and regions in Oman.

The telco aims to be ‘in sync’ when providing a personalised and seamless customer service



and wants to ensure its products and services upgrade everyone’s worlds. Congratulations to the prize winners, and stay tuned

because the grand prize draw will be held on a soon-to-be-confirmed date in March, where Ooredoo will give away a brand-

new home in a prime location in Oman! Yes, you read that right: A home!

Automatically entering the prize draw is super easy as customers simply subscribe or upgrade to any new 5G or Fibre Home Internet connection for RO 28 per month and above.

There are many different sales channels to find out more about Home Internet plans.

You can visit any Ooredoo store or dealer across Oman, the Ooredoo website www.ooredoo.om or the award-winning Ooredoo App. To learn more about Manzili, including prizes and terms and conditions, please visit <https://shop.ooredoo.om/home-broadband/>.

OQGN appoints Ubhar Capital as liquidity provider



The shares of OQ Gas Networks are traded on the MSX

MUSCAT: Omani financial services company Ubhar Capital has been appointed as a liquidity provider for OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, after obtaining the necessary approvals from the regulatory authorities.

Ubhar Capital is the largest and most diversified financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman with more than thirty partnerships in the countries of the region and twenty other business relationships across more than dozens of countries.

Ubhar Capital was the first company to obtain a licence to practice market making and liquidity providing activities on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The company has the necessary technical and administrative capabilities to provide the service.

Ubhar Capital will begin trading in OQGN shares from March 3, 2024 independently, within specific controls and standards according to the requirements of the regulatory authorities.

The liquidity provider is appointed to enhance liquidity on the shares of listed companies and meet their needs through the trading mechanism to reduce the discrepancy between the bid and ask prices, and work to raise the daily trading volume and reduce price fluctuations, which reduces the risk of weak liquidity on the listed shares.

Shaikh Abdulaziz al Sa’adi, CEO of Ubhar Capital, commented: “We are pleased to have been appointed as a Liquidity Provider for OQGN. Ubhar Capital will aim to create healthy and consistent levels of trading, improving the bid/ask spread and enhancing the order book.

Liquidity provision has proven its efficacy in improving liquidity, which reflects on the shareholder value and is an indicator of the issuer’s commitment to shareholders. We welcome OQGN on board, and we assure its shareholders of our commitment to deliver the agreed upon mandate.”

Kia unveils forthcoming ‘Platform Beyond Vehicle’ business in MEA

MUSCAT: Kia Middle East and Africa (MEA) announces the forthcoming introduction of its revolutionary ‘Platform Beyond Vehicle’ (PBV) model in the MEA region, scheduled for 2026.

To celebrate the announcement, Kia hosted an event to introduce the modular vehicles on February 20 and 21, 2024, at Banyan Tree, Bluewaters Island, Dubai.

Guests, including media representatives, governmental entities, fleet customers, and business owners from key markets across the region, were in attendance to witness the unveiling of Kia’s latest total mobility solution.

Kia’s PBVs represent the brand’s vision to be a Sustainable Mobility Solutions Provider beyond the traditional concept of automobiles.

As such, PBVs are a powerful combination of fit-for-purpose



EVs with advanced software technology designed to open the door to new businesses and lifestyles — by reimagining the concept of space thanks to advanced, tailored interiors that provide flexibility and freedom.

The newly established model aims to address the unmet requirements of a diverse customer base within the MEA fleet vehicle segment.

It will provide tailored mobility solutions optimised for the region’s specific market and business conditions, helping to overcome challenges related to limited transportation options and one-dimensional product offerings that currently exist.

SooHang Chang, President, Kia Middle East & Africa, commented on the new model: “The introduction of Kia’s PBV

to the Middle East and Africa signifies our commitment to pioneering future-forward mobility solutions for fleets across the region.

Operating on a customer-centric model, the PBV business is dedicated to delivering freedom and flexibility through modular, customisable vehicles catering to the diverse needs of businesses and individuals alike.

Above all, Kia’s aim is to ensure all PBV vehicles are simple to operate and intuitive to engage with, regardless of where, when and how they are used.”

“The debut of this product marks a significant milestone for Kia Middle East and Africa since our brand relaunch in 2021, and we will continue to meet the rapidly evolving needs of the market reiterating our position as the leading sustainability mobility solutions provider in the region,” he added.



ONEIC wins Salalah sewerage system O&M contract

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC), a publicly traded company listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), has secured a contract worth RO 11.623 million for the operation and maintenance of Salalah's sewerage system and associated facilities.

The five-year contract, which includes the operation and maintenance of the treated effluent outfall network and the Harib Wastewater Treatment Plant in Dhofar Governorate, is set to commence on May 1, 2024. ONEIC views this contract as showcasing its innovative approach and expertise in the realm of wastewater management. The company anticipates diverse experiences and substantial financial gains from this significant undertaking.

Just over a week ago, ONEIC won a pair of contracts from Oman Electricity Transmission Company SAOC (OETC) worth RO 41.963 million for the construction of 132kv/33kv electricity transmission lines in Dhofar Governorate. The new lines will ensure a steady and dependable supply of electricity, supporting Dhofar's ongoing development and prosperity.

Established in 1974, ONEIC operates in diverse sectors, including engineering and construction, energy, environment and manufacturing.

Committee reviews work progress of business readiness team



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy

MUSCAT: The National Competitiveness Committee (NCC) yesterday held its first meeting for 2024 under the chairmanship of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The meeting reviewed NCC's decisions for 2022 and 2023 and developments in the Future of Growth Report (formerly the Global Competitiveness Report), as the evaluation methodology and structure of the report were changed. The meeting also discussed the work progress of the Business Readiness and Economic Freedom Team, which is led by the National Programme for Investment and Export Development "Nazdaher".

It also touched on the outputs of the health indicators workshop, which aimed at addressing the mechanism for calculating health indicators linked to international indicators and followed by the National Competitiveness Office.

International Museum Construction Congress makes debut in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 25

The International Museum Construction Congress (IMCC) is set to make history as it takes place in Oman for the first time, marking a significant milestone for the global museum industry. Already on its 8th year, IMCC is designed for international museum leaders, architects, project managers, project directors, museum leadership, facilities and security administrators involved in new construction, renovation, or expansion of museums.

Brian Mandrier, the managing director of IMCC, sheds light on the event's significance, objectives, and potential impact on the industry in an interview with *Observer*.

"The decision to host the Congress in Oman was carefully considered, with the aim of leveraging the country's rich cultural heritage and strategic location to create a unique platform for industry professionals to converge and exchange ideas," he said.

Mandrier emphasises the importance of this milestone, highlighting the opportunities it presents for fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among museum stakeholders from around the world.

With a focus on advancing the development of the museum industry, the Congress happening



Marta Oliveira delivers the opening remarks during the International Museum Construction Congress being held in Oman.

on February 25-27, will address a wide range of themes and topics relevant to the sector.

From innovative construction techniques to sustainable design practices, more than 120 attendees from over 20 countries can expect to gain valuable insights from leading experts and practitioners in the field. Guests and attendees will be toured to Oman's landmarks including the Oman National Museum, Oman Across Ages Museum and the Royal Opera House.

Marta Oliveira, IMCC Oman Chairperson, enthusiastically highlighted the unparalleled opportunity awaiting attendees to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Oman's cultural and historical treasures. "Delving into the vibrant mosaic of the nation's heritage, participants will

Museum welcoming the guests and attendees. Meanwhile, Eng Al Yaqdhan bin Abdullah al Harthy, Director General of Oman Across Ages Museum, delivered the keynote session. Notable guests and speakers are slated to share their expertise, offering attendees a diverse and enriching learning experience.

OPPORTUNITY

Marta Oliveira, IMCC Oman Chairperson, enthusiastically highlighted the unparalleled opportunity awaiting attendees to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Oman's cultural and historical treasures. "Delving into the vibrant mosaic of the nation's heritage, participants will

have the privilege of exploring an array of remarkable museums and cultural landmarks, including the prestigious Unesco World Heritage Sites that grace the Omani landscape," she said.

Beyond the confines of traditional museum spaces, Marta added, Omaan is beckoned with a dazzling array of natural wonders that captivate the senses and ignite the imagination.

"From the intricate aflaj water management systems that showcase the ingenuity of ancient civilisations to the fragrant frankincense trees that have symbolised prosperity and trade for centuries, every corner of this enchanting land is steeped in history and significance."

Rusail and Barka plants receive new power purchase awards

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

SMN Power Holding SAOG, a Muscat-based investor in power and water projects in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced that two of its wholly-owned power subsidiaries have received Letters of Award from the national power off-taker that would allow for the plants to remain in operation beyond the respective terms of their Power Purchase Agreement (PPA).

In filings to the Capital Market Authority (CMA), SMN said its 99.9% owned subsidiary, Rusail Power Co SAOC, has received a Letter of Award from Nama Power

IN A SEPARATE FILING, THE HOLDING COMPANY SAID ITS 99.9% OWNED SUBSIDIARY, SMN BARKA POWER CO SAOC, HAS ALSO RECEIVED A LETTER OF AWARD FROM NAMA PWP FOR A 9-YEAR TERM

and Water Procurement Company (PWP) for a new Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for a 6-year term.

"The Company has accepted the award on 22nd February 2024 and is currently working with PWP on the finalisation and approval of the PPA and other project agreements. Further updates will be announced

in due course," it stated.

In a separate filing, the holding company said its 99.9% owned subsidiary, SMN Barka Power Co SAOC, has also received a Letter of Award from Nama PWP for a 9-year term.

The Company wishes to take this opportunity to express its gratitude to the Authority of Public Services Regulation (APSR), PWP, its shareholders, Board of Directors and other stakeholders for their continued support and collaboration throughout the Power 2024 tendering process and is looking forward to continuing to be working with PWP and other stakeholders during the new PPA term," it further added.



SMN Power is a significant player in Oman's power and water sector.

Suhar Investment Forum to spotlight RO 1 billion worth of business opportunities

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

The 1st Suhar Investment Forum began on Sunday, February 25 in the seaport city under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said. The two-day has been organised by the Al Batinah North Branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Various presentations will highlight the investment climate



Eng Saeed bin Ali al Abri

in Al Batinah North Governorate and will be attended by several government officials.

A recent report by OCCI — Al Batinah North identified over a 100 investment opportunities in the governorate with a total capital value of around RO 1 billion and the possibility of creating 9,000 jobs.

The main eight sectors identified in the report include healthcare, information technology, logistics, circular

economy, industry, food security and tourism.

In a statement, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Al Batinah North Governorate and Chairman of the Forum's Organising Committee, Eng Saeed bin Ali al Abri, emphasised the significant reception the forum has received.

"The Forum has received an overwhelming response with a confirmed participation of over 20 countries and more than 600

delegates and participants having registered for the event," he said. The forum will include keynote speeches, presentations and panel discussions highlighting the investing landscape of Suhar, he added.

A number of MOUs and agreements will be signed on the margins of the event, while delegates will be given a tour of the city's key locations such as the Suhar Port and Freezone and the Suhar Industrial City.

Unlocking the potential of Sukuk in financing Oman’s sustainable development

MOHSIN SHAIK SEHU
MOHAMMED

As Oman charts its course towards a greener energy future, aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fostering a climate-resilient economy, the challenge of financing this transformation in a sustainable manner looms large for our modest-sized economy.

The estimated price tag, reaching tens of billions of US dollars, underscores the substantial investment required. For instance, Oman’s nascent green hydrogen industry alone aims for \$40 billion in investment by 2030.

When factoring in the costs of decarbonising various sectors

and developing climate-resilient infrastructure, the overall figure becomes astronomical.

Recognising this financial challenge, the Omani government, through the Ministry of Finance, underscores the pivotal role of Islamic finance, particularly sukuk, in supporting this seismic shift towards a sustainable future. The recently unveiled Sustainable Finance Framework outlines the intention to issue Green, Social, and Sustainability bonds, loans, or sukuk for projects delivering environmental and social benefits.

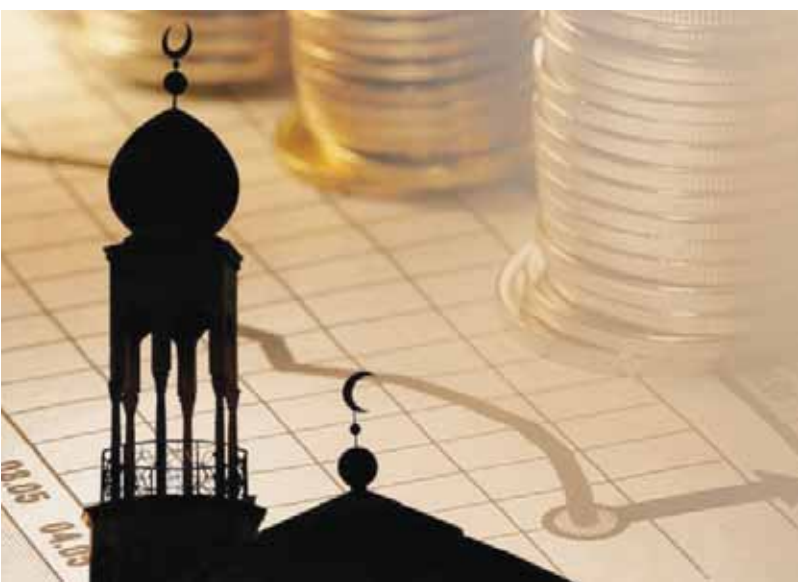
Islamic finance, inherently sustainable in nature, operates on principles such as shared reward, tangible underlying assets, and the avoidance of purely financial transactions.

Often referred to as

‘responsible investing,’ Islamic finance shares common ground with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles.

The key to unlocking sharia-compliant Islamic finance lies in leveraging Oman’s Islamic capital market, established in 2012 under the Islamic Banking Regulatory Framework. The market, predominantly centred around sukuk (Islamic bonds), has witnessed significant growth since its inception, with both private corporations and the Omani government issuing sukuk in Omani Rial and Dollar denominations.

Given the substantial funding required for Oman’s green energy initiatives, local banks may fall short, leaving the capital market as a viable avenue for raising the necessary funds through sustainable bonds or sukuk.



While Omani Rial-denominated issuances risk absorbing liquidity in a constrained market, dollar-based sukuk issuances offer access to a vast pool of sharia-compliant investors. These sukuk can be

issued under Regulations to target global funds, with the option to later tap into the US market through S144A.

Dollar-based sukuk have the potential to attract not only Muslim investors but also

non-Muslim investors, as seen globally, reflecting their broader appeal. Conventional bonds may exclude Sharia compliant investors who prefer instruments structured around Islamic principles.

In Oman, the outlook for sustainable finance based on Islamic principles is promising, especially when directed towards inherently green and sustainable projects aligned with Oman’s Net Zero Strategy and the UN SDGs.

Initiatives related to renewables, green hydrogen production, zero-carbon transportation, and water management can secure funding through instruments such as green sukuk and blue sukuk.

(The author is Head of Investment Banking & Capital Markets at Dhofar Islamic – BankDhofar)

Strategic clarity fuels US oil giants’ M&A spree

US and European oil giants sell the same product in the same global market. But they are on diverging paths. While American groups like Exxon Mobil and Chevron are buying up smaller drillers, their European rivals such as Shell, BP and TotalEnergies are largely sitting on their hands.

Part of the explanation is a transatlantic disagreement about the long-term outlook for oil. If the world is to limit increases in temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, demand for oil needs to shrink from 100 million barrels a day to 24 million barrels by 2050, according to the International Energy Agency.

Faced with this scenario, fossil fuel producers have a limited range of options. They can keep pumping and hope they outlast smaller rivals; pivot to other forms of energy that emit little or no carbon dioxide; or gradually wind themselves down while returning cash to shareholders.

There is one other alternative, though: simply assume that demand for oil will not decline. Forecasts circulated by US oil giants suggest they have chosen the fourth option.

In January Exxon Mobil, headed by Darren Woods, said daily demand under its central scenario for 2050 would be roughly the same as the current 100 million barrels, while natural gas consumption would rise by 25%.

Chevron boss Mike Wirth is more circumspect, but cites third-party forecasts that assume daily oil consumption will lie in a range between 70 million and 112 million barrels in the decade from 2040 to 2050.

The Europeans are fuzzier and a lot less bullish. Under its “Archipelagos” scenario Shell sees daily oil demand of 90 million barrels in 2050, but only around 40 million barrels using estimates in one called “Sky 2050”.

BP’s “New Momentum” model assumes 73 million barrels of daily 2050 consumption, but a separate net zero scenario cites only 21 million barrels.



GEORGE HAY

The author is an associate editor in Breakingviews’ London office.

FACED WITH THIS SCENARIO, FOSSIL FUEL PRODUCERS HAVE A LIMITED RANGE OF OPTIONS. THEY CAN KEEP PUMPING AND HOPE THEY OUTLAST SMALLER RIVALS; PIVOT TO OTHER FORMS OF ENERGY THAT EMIT LITTLE OR NO CARBON DIOXIDE; OR GRADUALLY WIND THEMSELVES DOWN WHILE RETURNING CASH TO SHAREHOLDERS.



An aerial view of Exxon Mobil’s Beaumont oil refinery, in Beaumont, Texas. – Reuters

TotalEnergies, meanwhile, reckons demand for oil and biofuels could range between 51 and 71 million barrels a day.

Any of these 2050 visions could be correct. But if higher oil demand scenarios transpire, US oil group investors will be big winners.

Production by US oil majors will grow 6% a year between 2022 and 2030, according to Bernstein analysts, while big European groups will only pump 0.6% more. If oil prices remain at their current \$84 a barrel level, the Americans will make substantially more money.

This calculation helps explain why Exxon recently forked out \$64.5 billion in a share-based deal for Pioneer Natural Resources, while Chevron paid \$53 billion for its US rival Hess.

Woods and Wirth’s dealmaking also comes with a built-in hedge in case optimism about oil demand proves misplaced. Exxon’s Pioneer deal will help the group to reduce production costs and emissions emanating from the drilling process, Wood Mackenzie analysts say allowing it to be more profitable than the

competition even if oil prices fall.

Gulf giants like Saudi Aramco make a similar case, arguing that market-beating low costs will allow them to be the industry’s “last man standing” as demand for the black stuff dries up.

This logic might spur new BP boss Murray Auchincloss, TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanné and Shell’s Wael Sawan to bulk up in oil as well. But their lack of a clear long-term forecast complicates matters. If the oil market is going to shrink substantially, it will be impossible for all the industry’s major players to keep pumping at their current level.

At the same time, though, the European groups’ view of oil’s future is not sufficiently bleak to justify a head-long rush away from fossil fuels and into buying green energy groups like \$25 billion RWE, \$24 billion Orsted, or \$22 billion SSE.

The transatlantic divergence owes much to investors’ preferences. European shareholders have tended to be more antsy about climate change, while US institutions have been less bothered about pivoting

away from investing according to environmental, social and governance criteria.

Global sustainable funds saw outflows in the fourth quarter for the first time since Morningstar Manager Research started keeping tabs in 2018.

Even Exxon’s climate-minded activist investor Engine No. 1 voted down shareholder proposals for the group to reduce emissions, and supported the Pioneer transaction.

The disconnect shows up in valuations: including debt, Exxon and Chevron are valued at nearly 6 times the EBITDA analysts forecast them to make in 2024, according to LSEG data.

Shell, BP and TotalEnergies languish on less than 4 times. For all their apparent strategic clarity, it’s possible that Exxon and other oil bulls are wrong about future oil demand.

If world leaders finally take climate change seriously, they might implement stringent carbon taxes, which could prompt a slump in demand for oil. Crude prices could then fall to \$24 a barrel, according to an Exxon analysis incorporating the

IEA’s net zero scenario. US groups would then have to rapidly redirect capital spending into lower-carbon fuels like hydrogen, where future demand is still uncertain.

US oil majors also face the obvious problem of elevated emissions from all the extra oil they plan to pump. One option is to suck the carbon they belch out of the air.

But to cancel out the vast increase in emissions, each of the industry giants would have to invest \$25 billion in developing carbon capture, storage and removal capacity every year until 2050 while spending another \$10 billion a year on average to maintain their current oil production, the IEA reckons.

That’s substantially more than their current average annual capex budgets. Still, investors value clarity, which European groups lack.

BP’s Auchincloss wants to devote 25% of the group’s capital spending to low-carbon investments by 2025, but attempts so far to gain scale quickly in renewable energy have stuttered.

— Reuters



China's woes won't slow US economy, says Treasury's Adeyemo

WASHINGTON: US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo (pictured) said that he is concerned about China's excess manufacturing capacity spilling over to the global economy, even if China's current economic woes are unlikely to slow US growth in the near term.

"I am not concerned about the headwinds from China having a large impact on the US economy," Adeyemo told a Council on Foreign Relations event in New York, referring to challenges from its property sector, an aging population and a worsening business climate for private firms.

"The thing that I am fundamentally concerned about from China is excess capacity



US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo speaks at the Royal United Services Institute in London. — Reuters

coming from China and hitting the global economy," Adeyemo said.

China's heavily subsidised manufacturing capacity for electric vehicles, solar panels and other goods has followed industries such as steel and

aluminium in producing more goods than China can consume, he added.

"Fundamentally that overcapacity is going to go somewhere," Adeyemo said, adding that US tariffs and tax credits for EVs and their batteries will help keep Chinese EVs out of the US market and allow American firms to compete more fairly.

"This is going to be a challenge for the global economy and it's something we are talking directly with the Chinese about," Adeyemo said.

"They need to compete on a level playing field, not just with the United States, but with countries around the world."

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is expected to raise her concerns about Chinese excess capacity with counterparts on the sidelines of a Group of 20 finance ministers meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil, next week, a senior Biden administration official said.

Adeyemo, who presented a new round of US sanctions on over 500 Russian-linked targets a day before the second anniversary of Russia's attack of Ukraine, downplayed the potential for damage to the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency from such measures.

He said it was important that sanctions be multilateral and targeted to maximise their effectiveness. — Reuters

Qatar to boost gas output with new mega field expansion

DOHA: Qatar on Sunday announced new plans to expand output from the world's biggest natural gas field, saying it will boost capacity to 142 million tonnes per year before 2030.

The new North Field expansion, named "North Field West", will add a further 16 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per year to existing expansion plans, Qatari Energy Minister Saad al Kaabi said at a press conference.

"Recent studies have shown that the North Field contains huge additional gas quantities estimated at 240 trillion cubic feet, which raises the state of Qatar's gas reserves from 1,760 (trillion) to more than 2,000 trillion cubic feet," said Al Kaabi, who also heads the state-owned QatarEnergy firm.

These results "will enable us to begin developing a new LNG project from the North Field's western sector with a production capacity of about 16 million



Qatar Energy CEO and Qatar's State Minister for Energy, Saad al Kaabi, speak during a news conference in Al Kharsaah, Qatar. — Reuters

tonnes per annum," he said.

This will bring Qatar's production capacity to 142 million tons once "the new expansion is completed before the end of this decade" — a nearly 85 per cent rise from current production levels, Al Kaabi added.

The QatarEnergy chief said the firm will "immediately commence" with engineering works to ensure the expansion is completed on time. — Reuters

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Any objection towards my name change my please be communicated to Embassy of India Muscat Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, P. Box: 1727, Postal Code: 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AMENDMENT TO THE LEGAL FORM

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



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TRAVEL

Visitors queue under the Eiffel Tower to enter, on the day of its reopening after a strike, in Paris. — AFP



FASHION

A model walks the runway during the Bottega Veneta collection show at the Milan Fashion Week Womenswear Autumn/Winter 2024-2025. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Chilean-US actor Pedro Pascal poses in the press room with the award for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Drama Series for "The Last of Us" during the 30th Annual Screen Actors Guild awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A fishing boat approaches the island of Petatan in the municipality of Cojumatlan de Regules, Michoacan state, Mexico. — AFP



CULTURE

A child carrying a lantern visits a park during the Lantern festival in Beijing. — AFP

art & life

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INSIDE THE WORLD OF EDIBLE MASTERPIECES & BESPOKE CAKES

Maryam al Hadhrami transforms cake making into an art form, crafting bespoke creations that reflect her clients' occasions. With meticulous attention to detail and a passion for culinary creativity, she elevates cakes to edible masterpieces... **P20**



FASHION

Dolce & Gabbana play with the tuxedo for women's wear at Milan Fashion

DOLCE & GABBANA OFFERED an array of looks inspired by the tuxedo at Milan Fashion Week on Saturday, where the Italian luxury label presented a mainly black womenswear collection for next fall.

The autumn/winter 2024 show, called "Tuxedo", opened with cropped jackets and tied skirts slit at the front, followed by outfits and coats inspired by the formal wear.

Models wore sashes with knee-length shorts or cigarette trousers, halternecks and waistcoats inspired by tuxedo jackets and embroidered lace dresses.

Designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana put bows on black sheer blouses as well as shoes, sometimes sparkling.

The looks were mainly all in black, with dabs of leopard print, a few shimmering silver creations and a chiffon blouse and dress adorned in large gold polka dot prints.



Models, including Naomi Campbell, wore black hats with netted veils.

Earlier at Ferragamo, designer Maximilian Davis looked to the 1920s for inspiration, presenting dresses with dropped waistlines, feather embellishments or sequins.

Wool jackets and coats with broad shoulders were contrasted with organdie dresses and sheer skirts in the collection called "Spirit" and which featured autumnal hues, bright red, mustard and black. Footwear consisted of thigh-high boots, stilettos and shoes adorned with feathers.

"The 1920s used clothing as a way to celebrate freedom," Davis said in show notes.

"And that expression of freedom is something which resonates with me, with my heritage, and with Ferragamo."

Milan Fashion Week runs until Monday. — Reuters

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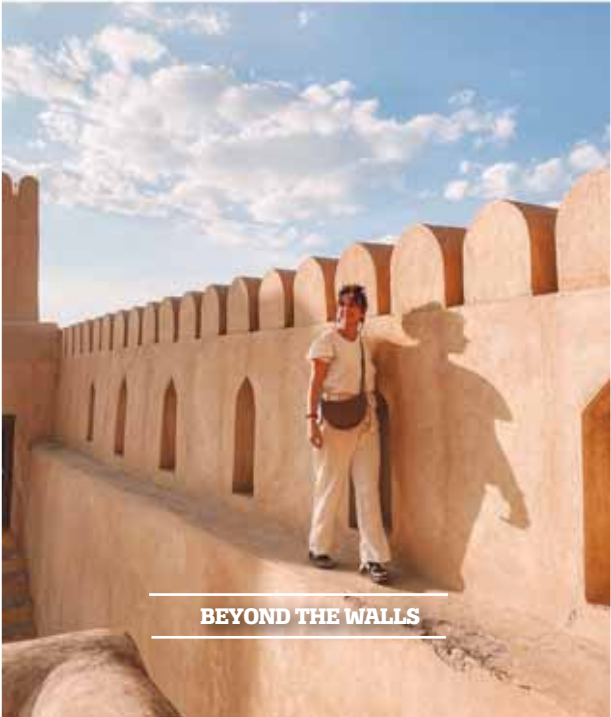


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Prada Schools the TikTok Crowd

MIUCCIA PRADA, currently American Vogue's pioneering septuagenarian cover girl, was standing backstage after the Prada show, bedecked in emeralds and jade and looking slightly terrified as Emma Watson and hordes of well-wishers and journalists swarmed around her like locusts. Such is life when you transcend the role of designer and become more like a divining rod that indicates which way the cultural water is flowing. And that is?

Towards "history," she said as her co-creative director, Raf Simons, sipped prosecco beside her. Or to be specific, towards the way history teaches us about where we are going. As Simons said in a news release later, "You can only realise your future if you know your past."

It's not a blinding insight — if we don't learn from our actions, we are doomed to repeat them, and so on — but at this particular time, when it often feels like we actually are repeating them and memories are awfully short, it's worth a reminder (as Prada said backstage). Besides, fashion can bring the point to life as well as any lecture. Maybe better.

History has been much in the air in Milan. Maybe it's because it was two years ago this week that Russia invaded Ukraine, or

because the US presidential election feels like it's dangerously on rewind. Maybe it's because history-based films like "The Zone of Interest" and "Killers of the Flower Moon" and "Oppenheimer" are sweeping the awards season, which parallels the ready-to-wear season. Or maybe it's as simple as the fact that history is a living thing in fashion, given how many European houses are concerned with preserving their own heritages, constantly looking backward to define their identities. Probably all of the above.

The issue was front and centre at the Moschino show, where Adrian Apollaza was making his debut as creative director of the brand that Franco Moschino built on a base of style and pointed cultural activism masquerading as a bit of fun. Jeremy Scott reinvented it as high camp, and Apollaza is now charged with taking it forward.

The first thing he had done, the designer said backstage before the show, was "go to the archive. My idea was to really dig into Franco's world. I was overwhelmed with all the pieces that they have." Then, he said, he picked certain notable points to revisit.

The result was a whistle-stop tour through Moschino iconography in 41 looks. The cowboy? He

was there, in the form of truncated wrangler hats with baseball cap backs and long, cancan skirts over faded denim. The pointed slogans? They were there, too: see one long knit dress with "Peace" cascading down the centre, or an oversize T-shirt telegraphing "Love." There were smiley face knits, pearls, question mark and polka dot suits and surreal cloud prints; even a paper bag handbag stuffed with groceries.

The clothes were more relaxed and easier to wear than the exaggerated looks that distinguished Scott's tenure; so was the jokery, which was less geared towards social media memes than lightening up the weight of the everyday. What was missing, however, was any sense of Apollaza, and how he might want to make the brand his own.

He only arrived at Moschino in January, so to be fair, he hasn't had much time. Perhaps — hopefully — that will change with his next collections. Otherwise, all that's left is a very professional, somewhat pallid, exercise in nostalgia.

A place where it is easy to get stuck. Nostalgia, after all, implies a certain passivity — things were better back then! — which is risky messaging for brands selling the future. Which is perhaps why Prada and Simons were at such pains to avoid it.

Instead they were mining their grab bag of fashions past for female totems — bows above all (and not the TikTok kind; the kind that could school the TikTok crowd), but also fur trim and silk bloomers, aprons and linen handkerchiefs and lingerie, land girl suiting, 1950s va va voom sheaths and '60s shifts — and then actively messing with them, chopping it all into pieces and collaging the fragments back together to force reconsideration. Not with frustration, but with affection.

Sleeveless shells flew little bows like fringe down the front and were layered over silk bloomers. Some skirts had bigger bows, like bustles at the back; other heavy tweeds turned out to be false fronts that revealed silk slips

at the rear. Midcentury cocktail dresses were re-imagined in technical nylon with the sort of multi-utility pockets normally seen on the ski slopes. Ditto one fantastic trapeze coat.

Top-handle bags weren't tucked into the crook of the arm, they were looped on by dint of a mini belt. A bag belt? Everything seemed to be worn with a jewel-tone velvet cap, which called to mind the sort of headgear associated with beat cops, French Legionnaires and Civil War soldiers, depending on your reference points (in any case: the police of the moment).

It was a little incongruous and often kind of awkward, but also compelling, the uniforms of a madcap historian pouring martinis at a cocktail party and riffing on Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir and how we got to here.

Backstage, Prada was quoting a philosopher whose name she could not remember, but whose words she paraphrased as, "Taking away a piece of the past is separating it from its cage." She and Simons may not know where we go next (that would be demanding too much), but at least they are offering the tools to think about it in style. — **NYT**

ENTERTAINMENT

'Oppenheimer' wins top SAG prize as actors hail strike success

"OPPENHEIMER" TOOK top honours at the Screen Actors Guild Awards on Saturday, as Hollywood stars partied at their union's first prize-giving gala since staging its longest-ever strike last year.

The prestigious prize for best performance by a cast at the SAG Awards is historically a strong predictor for the Oscars, and makes "Oppenheimer" a formidable frontrunner for best picture. Christopher Nolan's epic drama about the father of the atomic bomb also took the awards for best actor for Cillian Murphy, who plays the titular scientist, and best supporting actor for Robert Downey Jr, portraying his bitter rival.

"Thank you for the invitation to play a genuine part in making this scarily important film," said Kenneth Branagh, speaking on behalf of the cast.

The mood at the gala was celebratory all round, as members of SAG-AFTRA — the union that represents some 120,000 performers, including A-list stars — congregated in numbers for the first time since the strike ended in November.

Branagh recalled how the film's cast had walked out of their London premiere last July as the work stoppage was about to begin.

"We went from the red carpet and we didn't see the film that night. We happily went in the direction of solidarity with your good selves.

"So this, this is a full circle moment for us," he said, to loud applause.

The guild ultimately extracted hard-fought gains including better pay and protections against artificial intelligence (AI) from studios including Disney and Netflix.

"You survived the longest strike in our union's history with courage and conviction," said SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher.

Warning that AI could "entrap us in a matrix where none of us know what's real," Drescher said "seminal" gains made in talks would "set the trajectory for many generations to come."

- OSCARS BEST PICTURE RACE OVER? -

"Oppenheimer" has been relentlessly scooping up awards all season. The movie has already won top prizes at the Golden Globes, Critics Choice Awards, Directors Guild of America Awards, and Britain's BAFTAs.

It now adds the top SAG-AFTRA award for best cast, which has led to recent best picture Oscar wins for movies such as "Parasite," "CODA" and "Everything Everywhere All at

Once."

Many of the same actors who vote for the SAG Awards also make up the largest voting bloc for the Academy Awards, which will be held this year on March 10.

"Oppenheimer" saw off "Barbie," "Killers of the Flower Moon," "American Fiction" and "The Color Purple" for top honours.

In the best actress category, Lily Gladstone ("Killers") bested her main rival Emma Stone ("Poor Things") in a closely watched result that throws that Oscars race wide open.

The Indigenous actress, who portrays an Osage woman being exploited by nefarious white neighbours in Martin Scorsese's 1920s-set epic, began and ended her acceptance speech in her native Blackfeet language.

Supporting actress prizes have been going consistently this season to Da'Vine Joy Randolph ("The Holdovers"), and Saturday's gala was no different.

And Barbra Streisand received a lifetime achievement award, earning a rapturous standing ovation in a rare public appearance for the 81-year-old.

- NETFLIX AND CHILL -

The night also honoured television. "The Bear" took comedy wins for its overall cast, and for stars Jeremy Allen White and Ayo Edebiri.

"Succession" won the drama series cast prize, while Elizabeth Debicki won best actress for "The Crown" for her portrayal of the late princess Diana.

Pedro Pascal took best actor for "The Last of Us," admitting he was drunk as he became one of many performers to take advantage of the Netflix telecast's relaxed tone — and different rules on what is permissible — by dropping an F-bomb.

The 30th SAG Awards became the first Tinseltown award show to stream globally on Netflix.

The streamer has been cautiously moving into the live events space in recent years, with a Chris Rock comedy special and a celebrity golf tournament.

Moving to Netflix from smaller US cable networks TBS and TNT gave the SAG Awards access to the streaming giant's 260 million-strong subscriber base — and meant no commercial breaks.

"Personally, I can't wait to get home and have Netflix recommend this show to me based on all the other stuff that I've watched myself in," joked Idris Elba, who opened the gala. — **AFP**

Inside the world of edible masterpieces and bespoke cakes

art & life

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BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

Cake making is an art and it is an art that is filled with challenges.

Cherished by many, a baker must navigate several hurdles with precision and skill.

Cake makers are aware that even the slightest deviation can significantly alter the texture and flavour profile of the cake, underscoring the importance of meticulousness in the kitchen.

While cake making may pose its challenges, it is through dedication, practice, and attention to detail that every baker can rise to the occasion and create confections that delight the senses and nourish the soul. Every baker, once they mastered cake baking, become, in their own rights, artists.

Maryam al Hadhrami, an artist with a flair for culinary creativity, has elevated cake-making to an art form with her edible masterpieces. Her journey from mere baking to crafting bespoke creations has garnered attention and admiration alike.

"Cakes are my canvas, and each creation is an expression of my passion for culinary artistry," she shares on her Instagram handle, damica-kee.

For Maryam, a celebration without cake is incomplete. Be it birthdays, graduations, or weddings, her cakes are more than just desserts; they are personalised works of art that evoke emotional connections with her clients.

"Understanding the essence

of the occasion is crucial," Maryam explains. "I delve into every detail, from the theme to the guest count, ensuring that each cake resonates with the event."

"Before executing any order, I like to understand the customer's perception toward the order and I ask about all the details of the occasion, such as the number of attendees, the theme of the event and the artistic features of the party such as decoration, costumes, etc. Then she

everyone, but these are Maryam's conditions and standards that distinguish her and make her cakes an ideal choice for purchase.

"I strive for everyone to be able to order and taste my cakes that are attractive, have a delicious taste and are at a reasonable price. The most important feature is that each cake is a single piece or version that cannot be repeated. Each cake is special for the customer, designed perfectly for him and has an aesthetic connection to his occasion," she highlighted.

Unlike many artists, Maryam does not have special rituals while making cakes, but she certainly loves to be alone and have fun when making cakes, as she pointed out, "Most of the time I spend long hours on each one of them without feeling the time, due to my complete immersion and focus on completing the cake in the best possible way."

Many aspiring artists struggle to turn their passion into a source of income. As Maryam explained, the artist must try many artistic fields then choose the field in which he can make products repeatedly with love and without boredom or affectation. The products in the market may be repeated, but the artist can certainly be distinguished by the professionalism of manufacturing, the materials used, and the artistic direction of each product.

Maryam started this business in 2021 in light of the excess free time and artistic stagnation during the Corona pandemic period and her desire to use her artistic energy away from papers and paintings.

Reflecting on her journey, Maryam expressed, "One question consumed my thoughts: 'How can I create edible masterpieces?' Today, the admiration from satisfied customers fuels my drive." This acclaim has opened doors to collaborations with various institutions, companies, and cafes, enabling her to craft bespoke cakes for diverse occasions. Continuously refining her skills and defining her unique cake-making identity, Maryam eagerly anticipates sharing her creations with a wider audience and realising her dream of owning a bakery.

For Maryam, a celebration without cake is incomplete. Be it birthdays, graduations, or weddings, her cakes are more than just desserts; they are personalised works of art that evoke emotional connections with her clients

try to quote from these details the ideal idea of making the required cake that is completely related to the occasion," she clarified.

Her portfolio boasts unique designs tailored to individual preferences. From a "brick" cake symbolising a new home to a "Wooden Tree Trunk" cake celebrating a woodworker's birthday, Maryam's creations are as diverse as her clientele.

Speaking about one of her most challenging but rewarding creation, Maryam said that creating the "brick cake" was fulfilling as "I was able to control the shape of the bricks and cement from the first time."

These days, it is not easy to find creative, handmade products with prices accessible to