

His Majesty's condolences conveyed to Iran leaders

At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, an official delegation comprising ministers and top officials conveyed in Tehran the condolences and sympathies of His Majesty the Sultan to Dr Mohammad Mokhber, Acting President of the Islamic Republic, on the death of president Dr Ebrahim Raisi and his accompanying delegation. **DETAILS ON P5**

SUNRISE - 05:22 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:57 AM

DHUHR - 12:09 PM

ASR - 03:30 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:50 PM

ISHA - 08:10 PM



HM and King of Jordan hold talks

REVIEW ASPECTS OF BILATERAL COOPERATION BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

KING ABDALLAH II LEADS WELCOMING PARTY FOR HIS MAJESTY

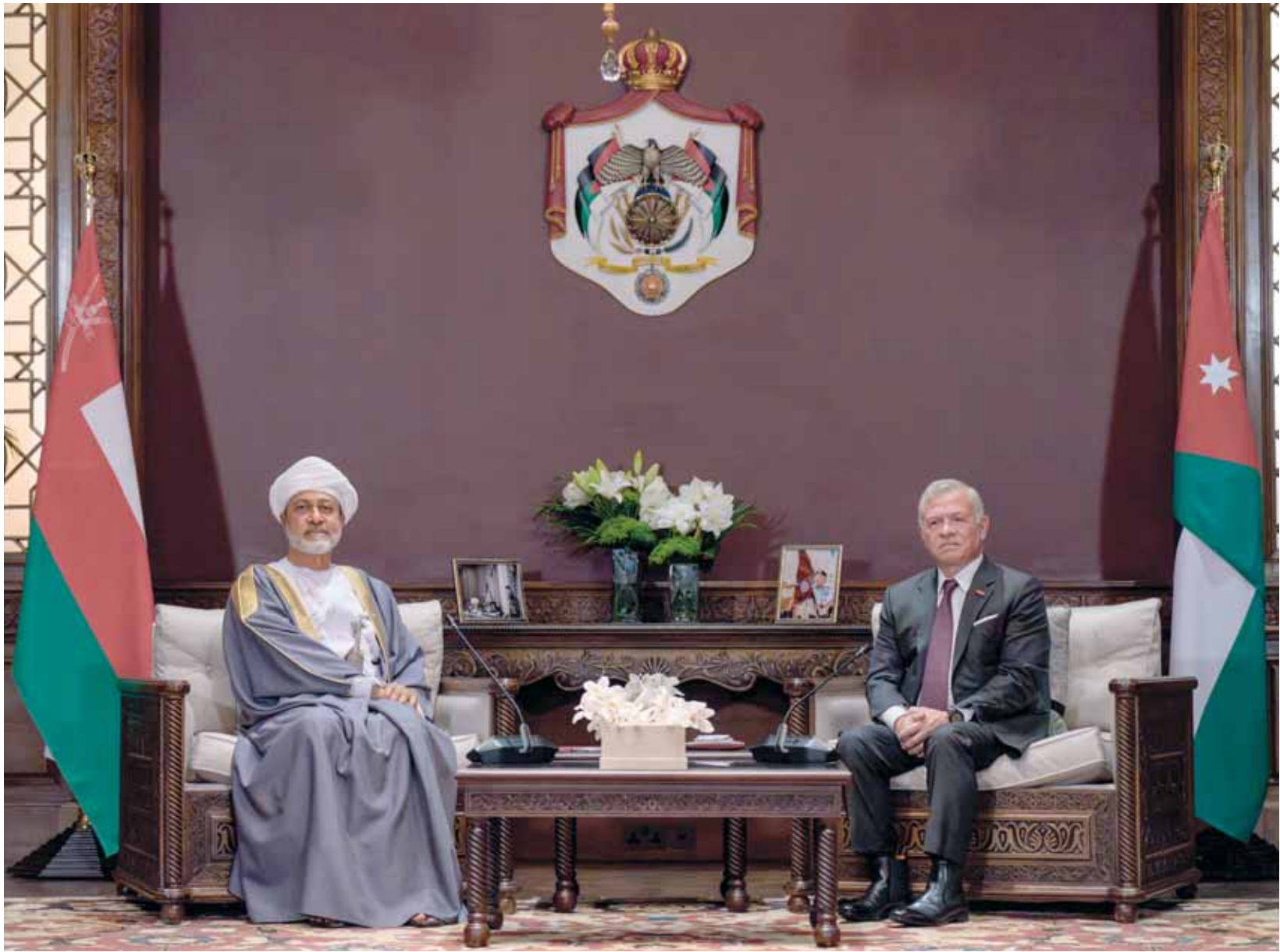
HIS MAJESTY AND JORDAN KING HOLD A CLOSED-DOOR MEETING

LEADERS EXCHANGE VIEWS ON ISSUES OF COMMON CONCERN

DISCUSS SITUATION IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

STRESS THE NEED FOR A PERMANENT CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AND MORE EFFORTS TO DELIVER AID



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdallah II held an expanded session of talks at Basman Palace in the capital city, Amman on Wednesday.

AMMAN: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdallah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan held an expanded session of talks at Basman Palace in the capital city, Amman on Wednesday.

At the outset of the session, the King of Jordan reiterated his welcome to His Majesty the Sultan, being an eminent guest of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, wishing His Majesty and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay. On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation to the King for the warm welcome and hospitality.

The session reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation and means of promoting them in various spheres to serve

the joint interests, within the context of the fraternal ties and historical relations binding the two countries.

The two monarchs also exchanged views on all issues of common concern on the Arab and international arenas, notably the current situation in the Gaza Strip and all of the occupied Palestinian territories. They stressed the need to reach an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, protect

civilians and intensify efforts to deliver sufficient humanitarian aid to all parts of the Gaza Strip.

Prior to the session, His Majesty the Sultan and the King of Jordan held a closed-door meeting.

The session of talks was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al

Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Afu, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, and Shaikh Fahd bin Abdulrahman al Ojaili, Ambassador of the Sultanate

of Oman to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the Jordanian side by Prince Faisal bin al Hussein (Head of the Mission of Honour that accompanies His Majesty the Sultan), Dr Bisher Khasawneh, Prime Minister of Jordan, Yousef Issawi, Chief of the Royal Court, Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Maj Gen Ahmad

Husni, Chief of the General Intelligence Department, Jaafar Hassan, Director of the King's Office, Kholoud Saqqaf, Minister of Investment, Amjad Qahiwi, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the Sultanate of Oman, and some senior Jordanian officials.

Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived on a two-day state visit. King Abdallah II led the welcoming party for His Majesty the Sultan. The Jordanian Monarch received His Majesty at the foot of the ramp in Marka Airport in Amman, wishing him a pleasant stay in Jordan. His Majesty the Sultan was accorded an official reception upon his arrival in Jordan. — **ONA**

SEE ALSO P2 AND 3

In honour of HM, King of Jordan hosts dinner

In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, King Abdallah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, hosted an official dinner at Al Husseiniya Palace in the capital Amman, marking His Majesty's visit to the Kingdom of Jordan. The dinner was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan, and some Jordanian senior officials. — **ONA**



HM, Jordan King exchange medals

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdallah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan exchanged honorary orders (medals) on the occasion of His Majesty the Sultan's current 'State Visit' to the Kingdom. His Majesty the Sultan decorated King Abdallah II with the 'Order of Al Said (Wisam Al-Said)', which is the loftiest Omani medal. The conferment of this Order reflects His Majesty the Sultan's pride over the depth of bilateral relations between Oman and Jordan and the strong ties of fraternity binding the peoples of the two countries. Meanwhile, King Abdallah II presented His Majesty the Sultan with the 'Order of al-Hussein bin Ali', the loftiest Jordanian medal. The award portrays pride over the deep-rooted historical relations binding the two countries and high level of affinity between Omani and Jordanian peoples.





HM, JORDAN KING DISCUSS COOPERATION



In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, King Abdallah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, hosted an official dinner at Al Husseinia Palace in the capital Amman, marking His Majesty's visit to the Kingdom of Jordan. The dinner was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan, and some Jordanian senior officials. – ONA



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His Majesty gets warm welcome in Jordan





High-level delgation accompanies His Majesty

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik landed in Amman a two-day state visit on Wednesday.

His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers; HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan; HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth; Khalid bin Hilal Al Maawali, Majlis Ashshura Chairman; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior; Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council; Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs; Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education; Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers; Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs; Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service; Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health;

Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces; Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman; Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman; Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman; and Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Ja'aboub, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan is accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority; and Shaikh Fahd bin Abdulrahman al Ojaili, Ambassador of Oman to Jordan.

— ONA



National University steps into 2nd phase of growth in sync with Oman Vision 2040



National University of Science and Technology has finalized a detailed Strategic Plan for the period 2024-30 in alignment with the Oman Vision 2040. This is the 2nd plan of the University for its continued development in form and content of the academics. The plan drawn up through an extensive engagement of its stakeholders stands out for the construct and the details.

Established in 2018 out of a merger of Oman Medical College and Caledonian Engineering College, the university has implemented its first strategic plan in 2019 for the next five years. Having deployed to strict adherence to the national priorities as reflected in the Oman Vision 2040, the university has grown in size with five colleges in the domains of Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering, Maritime and Advance Technology, and a student intake 4757. The university has established its branding competencies in

quality education, research and innovation under the visionary leadership of His Excellency Dr. Ali Al Bimani. The university has received accreditation for its medical programs by TEPDAD (The Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Medical Education Programs) in 2024 and the preparations for the institutional accreditation of OAAA are in the last phase. Consequent to the impending termination of the first plan in July 2024, the university has deployed appropriate steps to finalize the second plan to be in place for the next 6 years.

The second strategic plan is aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and the National Strategies for Education of 2040. The plan has five strategic destinations. Each destination defines its intentions.

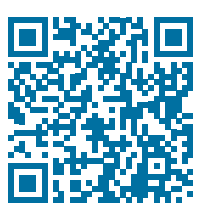
1. Pedagogy
2. Research
3. Community Engagement
4. Governance
5. Sustainable Growth

The plan presents 19 goals which are further split into

82 strategic objectives for sustenance and growth. Each strategic objective is expected to generate specific actions reflecting the institutional requirements of each campus. The plan is the best fit for multi-campus model and framework.

The plan has the following projections as its realizations, addition of two more colleges, 100% percentage program accreditation, institutional accreditation of OAAA, QS ranking in the width of 71-80, third position in the national ranking, and 10% increase of students enrolment per year. Furthermore, the plan stands out for its focus on Omanization of the human resources, capacity building for research and innovation, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the UNESCO in addition to its priority on enhancing the entrepreneurial skills of its learners. The second strategic plan of National University carries well defined pathways for **expansion** in size, **enhancement** in quality experience, and **engagement** on national and global priorities. The bottom line of the plan is its institutional resolution to facilitate the implementation of the priorities as defined in Oman Vision 2040. The plan was officially approved by the Board of Trustees and Board of Directors and is now ready for the implementation. National University has earned the credit of drawing up a doable plan as per the benchmarked criteria in the global higher education systems.





Oman delegation at the funeral of Dr Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran on Wednesday.

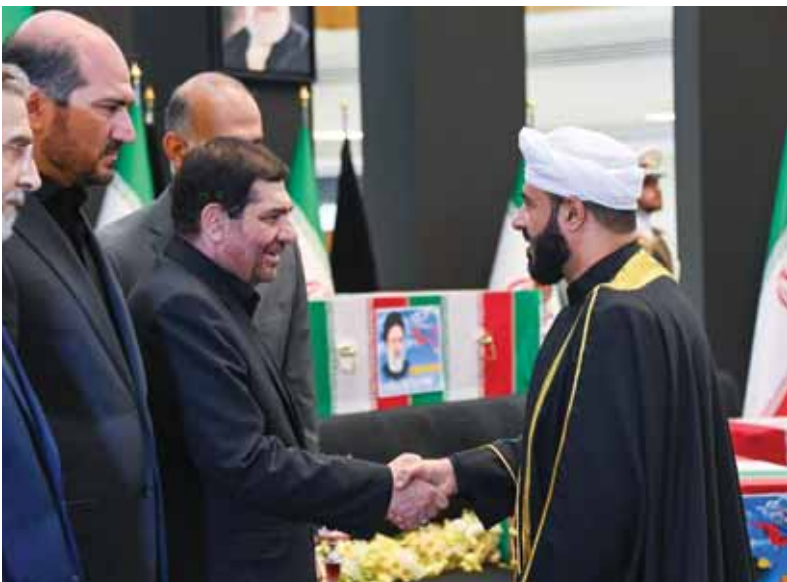
— ONA

HM’s condolences to Iran conveyed

TEHRAN: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, an official delegation comprising ministers and top officials conveyed in Tehran on Wednesday the condolences and sympathies of His Majesty the Sultan to Dr Mohammad Mokhber, Acting President of the Islamic Republic, on the death of late President Dr Ebrahim Raisi and his accompanying delegation.

The Omani delegation comprised Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information; Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs; and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The delegation expressed



His Majesty the Sultan's sincere condolences and deep sympathies to the Iranian leadership and the friendly Iranian people in this tragic occurrence, praying to Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy and forgiveness on the deceased and support their families with

patience and solace.

Dr Mokhber expressed his deep thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for his sincere condolences and noble feelings. He prayed to the Almighty to spare His Majesty and the Omani people all forms of evil and harm.

— ONA

Sayyid Fahd receives UN tourism chief, delegates

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers received on Wednesday Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and heads of the delegations taking part in the 50th meeting of the UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East and the Conference on “Investing in Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges in Sustainable Financing”, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman.

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd reviewed the importance of tourism as a primary support for the growth of the global economy. He also touched on its role in achieving positive returns on the social and economic aspects of countries.

He pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman attaches great importance to tourism, as it has devised plans and programmes that ensure attracting more investments in tourism projects. These, affirmed HH Sayyid Fahd, come in support of this sector's contribution to economic diversification and generating more job opportunities.

He also expressed his appreciation for the role of the World Tourism Organization in developing the tourism sector, which made the Middle East region in particular occupy an advanced position as the most developed region in attracting tourists in the world.

During the meeting, the conversation dealt with reviewing means to maximise the benefits of tourism to support international cooperation in the field of human resources qualification, exchange



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said with Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the WTO.
— PHOTOS BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said with Basmah bint Abdulaziz al Maymaniyah, Regional Director for the Middle East at the WTO

of experiences, and promoting tourism as a tool to support peace and stability in all parts of the world.

On their turn, heads of the delegations extended their thanks to the Sultanate of Oman for the good preparation for these meetings, lauding the achievements and remarkable progress achieved in Oman at all

levels. The meeting was attended by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism; Omar bin Said al Kithiri, Ambassador of Oman to Spain and its Permanent Delegate to the UN Tourism; and Basmah bint Abdulaziz al Maymaniyah, Regional Director for the Middle East at the WTO.

— ONA

Veterinary Medicine Forum launched



Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, at the forum in Muscat on Wednesday.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 22

The Veterinary Medicine Forum themed ‘One health and sustainable development 2024’ was launched under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in Muscat on Wednesday.

Present on the occasion were senior officials and other dignitaries. The event saw the participation of over 200 professionals working in veterinary medicine. Khalfan al Sharji, Director-General of Livestock, stated that this forum is an important opportunity to gain knowledge, exchange experiences, and learn about innovations and technological developments in animal health and veterinary services of Oman. He highlighted that animal health and the veterinary profession hold significant importance due to its social and economic impact.

Al Sharji said to regulate the animal health system there are

rules and regulations, which are continuously updated, along with the infrastructure comprising clinics, laboratories, and veterinary quarantines spread across governorates. He added that there are diligent efforts to develop these legislations, infrastructure, preventive programmes to protect livestock from diseases.

These efforts have resulted in improved animal health and veterinary services, with the livestock population reaching approximately 3.9 million heads in 2023. The number of fixed government veterinary clinics was 69, in addition to the veterinary hospital in Salalah and 41 mobile veterinary clinics. Around 4.477 million heads of animals were vaccinated in 2023, and about 2.9 million heads were treated.

Moreover, the number of private veterinary establishments, including clinics, pharmacies, and laboratories, exceeded 445. Al Sharji emphasised the important role of veterinary medicine in the “One Health” approach.

UN meeting explores challenges in tourism

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, hosted the 50th meeting of the UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East in Muscat on Wednesday.

The meeting deals with a number of topics related to developing the tourism sector in the region.

Moreover, the regional commission's meeting highlighted the action programme of the organisation during 2023-2024, as well as the priorities of the commission, which include medical tourism, tourism investment and means of funding joint regional tourism products.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, pointed out that the meeting touched on challenges facing the tourism sector. These challenges require joint efforts and regional cooperation to find sustainable solutions and develop strategies that serve achieving joint aspirations.

Al Mahrouqi added that the Arab region is witnessing noticeable growth in the tourism field. This, in turn, the minister explained, increases the need for utilising this growth to contribute to economic development in general and to provide job opportunities and



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, at the UN meeting in Muscat on Wednesday. — ONA

sustainability in particular.

On his turn, Ahmed Aqil Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism

of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pointed out that the tourism sector undertakes a main role

in augmenting the growth of the international economy and providing job opportunities. The sector, he added, supports global efforts that aim at achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Al Khateeb noted that the number of incoming tourists to the Middle East exceeded 122 per cent, compared to the levels of 2019 (pre-pandemic). Moreover, Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the UN Tourism said that the Middle East witnessed increasing tourism activities and that the tourism sector underwent many changes. These changes are due to technology developments, as well as changes in education and other fields.

— ONA





Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, OPAZ Chairman, Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, and Halima al Zari, President of ASMED, at the ceremony.

Business incubator to boost entrepreneurship in Musandam

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The Wilayat of Khasab celebrated the inauguration of the Musandam Business Incubator, a significant initiative designed to attract and support entrepreneurs.

Dr Ali bin Masoud bin Ali al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), presided over the ceremony in the presence of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, and Halima al Zari, President of Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development. The incubator currently houses 10 SMEs.

Dr Al Sunaidy expressed delight at witnessing young entrepreneurs transition from household activities to the newly launched incubator.

He highlighted the importance of business centres and incubators as critical infrastructure that provides a nurturing environment for business development and promotes commercial activity. These centres are instrumental in spreading the culture of entrepreneurship and enhancing the entrepreneurial spirit across various societal segments.

Manea al Shehhi, ASMED Director in Musandam Governorate, elaborated on the services provided by the

Musandam Business Incubator. These include shared workspace and offices for incubated projects and institutions, alongside essential resources and services for establishing and growing commercial ventures. The incubator also offers consultation, guidance, training, marketing and promotional services.

Oman has placed significant emphasis on future strategic planning, exemplified by the Oman Vision 2040 and comprehensive development plans. These plans underscore the necessity of increased decentralisation during the current period. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's recent visit to Musandam highlighted the progress achieved through decentralisation, with the issuance of the governorate system and the municipal councils' law granting governors broad powers and the requisite financial and administrative resources to manage and develop their regions.

Musandam Governorate's strategic location presents numerous economic development opportunities, particularly in the tourism, fisheries and services sectors. The launch of the Musandam Business Incubator shows the governorate's commitment to harness these opportunities and foster sustainable economic growth.

Industrial sector plays crucial role in achieving Oman Vision 2040

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Oman's industrial sector is poised to play a pivotal role in achieving Oman Vision 2040, according to Mazen bin Humaid al Siyabi, Assistant Director-General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Delivering the opening speech at Al Roya Economic Forum held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Al Siyabi stressed that since the 1970s, the manufacturing sector has witnessed rapid growth and the percentage of its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased significantly over the past years.

He added that despite the fluctuations, this sector has become an essential factor in advancing the economy since the



Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and other dignitaries at Al Roya Forum in Muscat on Wednesday.

beginning of the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The contribution of manufacturing industries to the GDP of Oman in 2023 amounted to more than RO 3 billion.

The industrial sector by the end of the fourth quarter of 2023 attracted foreign direct investment of more than RO 1 billion.

"These data clearly reflect the important role played by the industrial sector in the economy of the Sultanate of Oman, and strengthening manufacturing industries to support the economy and

enhance the export capacity of the Sultanate of Oman is of crucial importance."

Al Siyabi further pointed out that the ministry is currently implementing a set of initiatives within the framework of the Industrial Strategy 2040, with the aim of supporting the national product and enhancing its competitiveness, both at the local or international level.

Al Siyabi said that the Made in Oman campaign is part of such development initiatives which aims to promote national products and give them priority in government procurement processes, in addition to creating a digital platform that promotes local products and services.

"The ministry is also working to improve the efficiency of the industrial sector, such as encouraging the adoption of industrial revolution technologies and the like," Al Siyabi said.

Impressive increase in winter tourists in Salalah

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@patkaushal

As the winter tourism season in Dhofar came to an end with the latest charter flying back from Salalah only two days back, the governorate witnessed an impressive increase in the number of winter tourists from many parts of the world.

According to sources in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Dhofar Governorate attracted 65,904 winter tourists in 469 chartered flights till April this year.

Going by the ministry's records, the governorate registered an increase of 18.4 per cent in the number of winter tourists from the beginning of the season in October to February this year with 35,000 visitors.

An additional 30,904 winter tourists arrived at the Salalah International Airport between February and April.



Dhofar attracted 65,904 winter tourists in 469 chartered flights till April this year.

Confirming the trend, Mehmet Tunc Mustecaplioglu, Area General Manager of Orascom Hotels Management of Oman, said, the properties at the Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) witnessed overall 95 per cent winter occupancy. It showed a 10-per cent increase in room occupancy and inventory during the season.

An elated Mehmet Tunc said

there would be far better services and facilities for the winter tourists in coming years, as the property is going through many value additions.

The Integrated Tourism Complex, according to him, hosted the tourists from 90 per cent of the winter charters that arrived in Salalah.

The charter operators for Salalah winter destination

included, Meeting point (Germany); FTI (Germany); Itaka (Poland); Fischer Czech Republic; Satur (Slovakia); Hydro Tour (Slovakia); Alpi Tour (Italy); Der Turistik (Eastern Europe – Romania) and Ibusz (Hungary).

To meet the rising demand for rooms in Dhofar, more than 20 prospects have been identified in the governorate for new four- and five-star hotel projects. The goal is to increase the total number of hotel rooms from 6,000 to 7,000 by the end of the year.

To enhance Dhofar's appeal as a premier tourist destination, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is crafting a promotion strategy targeting both Gulf and international markets. Upcoming events such as the Frankincense Season, the Empty Quarter Festival, and the Omani Culinary Arts Festival are expected to attract a diverse range of visitors, showcasing the governorate's rich cultural and natural heritage.

Social media may cause mental stress

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

May is the month for Mental Health, and the Not Alone campaign marked the event with a discussion on 'Following the Herd' on Monday in Muscat.

'Following the Herd' is a psychological phenomenon where individuals conform to the majority view within a group, bypassing personal judgment or distinctiveness. This tendency is driven by the natural inclination to be accepted and feel secure within a social context, according to HH Sayyidah Basma al Said, a mental health advocate and founder of Not Alone.

It also touched upon self-confidence as the speakers narrated their personal stories.

When individuals consistently conform to group norms and suppress their unique thoughts



HH Sayyidah Basma al Said

and behaviours, it can lead to a decrease in self-esteem and personal identity, creating feelings of dissatisfaction and psychological distress.

Moreover, the pressures of conforming to perceived social standards on platforms like social media can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy or anxiety, especially among younger users who are highly sensitive to peer approval and belonging.

In extreme cases, this can contribute to mental health disorders such as depression or social anxiety, highlighting the critical need for awareness and interventions that encourage authentic self-expression and diverse social exposure.

The evening featured guest speakers sharing their stories, some of which they had never expressed before.

Shaika al Khalifa, an entrepreneur from Bahrain, spoke about her personal experience on the confidence she has built over the years which enabled her to manage and focus in many areas of development.

Mohannad al Hattab, a Syrian comedian raised in Dubai, has attracted hundreds of thousands of followers on various social media platforms. According to him, his primary aim is to offer light-hearted entertainment that

brings joy, particularly in times of global tragedy, ensuring his channel remains a space solely for laughter. But in the current situation his subject turned to the Palestinian cause and he shared with the audience this personal journey.

Qusai Mansoor, a radio and TV presenter, who is also UNICEF's Oman child rights advocate, also spoke during the event.

According to experts, on social media, herd mentality shows up when people follow and share viral content, trending topics, or popular influencers. This often leads to a cycle where the same types of posts get more attention and likes, which encourages even more people to share them. This behaviour helps create echo chambers, where users mostly see content that agrees with their views.



MOU TO FUND EQUIPMENT FOR PAEDIATRIC SURGERY

The Ministry of Health signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Al Jisr Charitable Foundation in Muscat on Wednesday to fund paediatric surgeries for an amount of RO 300,000. The MoU was signed by Sulaiman bin Nasser al Hijji, Under-Secretary of the Health Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Dina Fawzi al Khalili, General Manager of the Foundation.

Dr Rashid al Alawi, Director-General of Khoula Hospital, said the MoU would bring in modern technologies and advanced medical equipment necessary for children's surgeries, allowing for conducting more high-quality surgeries for children; thus, reducing the waiting lists.



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THURSDAY | MAY 23 | 2024

7

IRELAND, SPAIN, NORWAY ANNOUNCE RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN STATE

DUBLIN: Ireland, Spain and Norway announced on Wednesday that they would recognise a Palestinian state on May 28, saying they hoped other Western countries would follow suit, prompting Israel to recall its ambassadors.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said the move was aimed at accelerating efforts to secure a ceasefire in Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza.

"We hope that our recognition and our reasons contribute to other western countries following this path, because the more we are, the more strength we will have to impose a ceasefire, to achieve the release of the hostages held by Hamas, to relaunch the political process that can lead to a peace agreement," he said in a speech to the country's lower house.

Ireland's Prime Minister Simon Harris announced the decision at a news conference in Dublin. He added that Ireland was unequivocal in recognising Israel's right to exist "securely and in peace with its neighbours", and calling for all hostages in Gaza to be immediately returned.

In Oslo, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said the only possible political solution between Israelis and Palestinians is "two states living side by side in peace and security".

Norway said the demarcation



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is applauded by MPs and members of government after delivering a speech to announce that Spain will recognise Palestine as a state on May 28, at the Congress of Deputies in Madrid on Wednesday. — AFP

of the two states should be based on pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as capital of both, but added that its border recognition should not prejudice negotiations over ultimate border lines.

Ireland also said the borders should be along 1967 lines.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz ordered the immediate return of the Israeli ambassadors from the three countries for consultations, and warned of further "severe consequences".

"I am sending a clear message today: Israel will not be complacent against those who undermine its sovereignty and endanger its security," he said.

The decision was welcomed by the Palestinian Authority and by Hamas.

Around 144 out of 193 member-states of the United Nations recognise Palestine as a state, including most of the global south, Russia, China and India. But only a handful of the 27 EU

members have done so, mostly former Communist countries as well as Sweden and Cyprus.

Britain, Australia and EU member Malta have indicated in recent months that they could soon follow suit.

Recognition of a Palestinian state is still opposed for now by Israel's closest ally the United States, which has the power to veto it at the United Nations and did so last month.

Washington says it favours

OMAN WELCOMES NATIONS' DECISION

The Sultanate of Oman has on Wednesday welcomed the decision issued by the governments of Norway, Ireland and Spain to recognise the State of Palestine.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman also expressed the hope that the rest of world countries that have not yet recognised the Palestinian state will follow suit, notably in support of the Palestinian people's right to gain independence and freedom in accordance with international law. — ONA

Palestinian statehood eventually, but only as a result of negotiations with Israel, a position it shares with European powers including France and Germany.

On Wednesday, Germany said it was a matter that required further dialogue. France said the issue was not a taboo for Paris, but the conditions had not yet been met.

The decision by the three countries marks a further step in Israel's international isolation, which has grown sharply since its forces began their assault in Gaza in response to the attack on October 7. The decision will not produce any immediate changes on the ground in either Gaza or the West Bank but it steps up the pressure for a resumption in long-stalled efforts to reach a political settlement based on an independent Palestinian state existing alongside Israel.

Alon Liel, a former director-general of Israel's foreign ministry and a critic of Netanyahu's

government, said by phone from Tel Aviv that the move by Spain, Ireland and Norway could have an important impact on Israeli public opinion. A joint action, and the equalising of the status of Israel and Palestine in the international sphere, was "a nightmare for the current Israeli leadership", he said.

This is the start of countries that Israel cares about, that are role models for Israel, recognising a Palestinian state.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has long rejected such a two-state solution and his resistance has increased since he went into government with a clutch of hard right religious nationalist parties at the end of 2022.

Spain and its allies have spent months lobbying European nations, including France, Portugal, Belgium and Slovenia, to garner support for the recognition of a Palestinian state.

— Reuters

Huge crowds bid farewell to Raisi

THE PRESIDENT WILL BE BURIED IN MASHHAD ON THURSDAY AFTER FUNERAL RITES

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led prayers for late president Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday as huge crowds thronged the capital Tehran for his funeral procession.

Flanked by top officials, Khamenei said prayers over the coffins of the eight dead from Sunday's helicopter crash, who also included foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

A sea of mourners filled the open space around Tehran university, where the prayers were held before the funeral procession moved on to Enghelab and Azadi squares.

State television said that Raisi, who had been widely seen as Khamenei's most likely successor as supreme leader, had received a "million fold farewell" from the people of Tehran.

"We have lost a prominent personality. He was a very good brother. He was an efficient, competent, sincere, and serious official," Khamenei told visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al Sudani.

The leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, joined the procession, as did the deputy leader of Hezbollah, Naim Qassem.

"I say once again... we are sure that the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue its support for the Palestinian people," Haniyeh told the crowd to chants of "Death to Israel".

In the capital, huge banners have gone up hailing the late president as "the martyr of service", while others bade



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei performs prayer at a funeral for Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran on Wednesday. — Reuters

"farewell to the servant of the disadvantaged".

Tehran residents received phone messages urging them to join the funeral procession.

"I was sad, I came to calm my heart and calm the heart of the supreme leader," said one mourner who gave her name only as Maryam and said she had travelled from Varamin, south of Tehran, to pay her last respects.

Raisi's helicopter crashed into a fog-shrouded mountainside in northwestern Iran on Sunday as he headed back to the city of Tabriz after attending a ceremony on the border with Azerbaijan.

A huge search and rescue

operation was launched, involving help from the European Union, Russia and Turkey. State television announced Raisi's death early on Monday.

The Iranian military said on Wednesday that domestically produced drones had played the key role in locating the crash site.

Funeral ceremonies for Raisi and his entourage began on Tuesday with processions through Tabriz and Qom drawing tens of thousands of black-clad mourners.

From Tehran, the bodies will be taken to Iran's second city of Mashhad, Raisi's hometown in the northeast, where he will be

buried on Thursday evening after funeral rites at the Imam Reza shrine.

Khamenei, who wields ultimate authority in Iran, has declared five days of national mourning and assigned vice president Mohammad Mokhber, 68, as caretaker president until a June 28 election for Raisi's successor.

Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri, who was Amir-Abdollahian's deputy, has been named acting foreign minister.

The country's armed forces chief Mohammad Bagheri has ordered an investigation into the cause of the helicopter crash. — AFP

35,709 Palestinians killed in Israel's offensive on Gaza

GAZA: At least 35,709 Palestinians have been killed and 79,990 injured in Israel's military offensive on Gaza since October 7, the Gaza health ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, an Israeli raid on the West Bank city of Jenin stretched into a second day on Wednesday, an AFP correspondent reported, after eight Palestinians were killed the previous day.

Explosions and gunfire were heard from inside the adjacent Jenin refugee camp, the AFP correspondent said.

The Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah said Israeli troops had killed eight people and wounded nearly 20

during the raid, which began on Tuesday morning.

An AFP correspondent saw four bodies at Jenin's Khalil Suleiman government hospital morgue.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa and medical charity Doctors Without Borders reported that surgeon Usaed Jabareen, from the government hospital, was among those killed.

A school teacher and a student were also among the dead, Wafa reported, quoting hospital director Wissam Bakr.

The Israeli army said it had raided the house of Ahmed Barakat, who was suspected of involvement in an attack on an Israeli civilian last year. — AFP



A Palestinian girl carries cans to collect water as she walks by houses which were destroyed in an Israeli strike in Khan Younis on Wednesday. — Reuters

Focus on relationship enhancing skills



Dr SAJI UTHUPPAN

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The author is a
Lecturer of English

It is a fact that successful educational leaders are those who do not ignore their emotions. Obviously, we need to manage and control our emotions better— and by better, I mean by not managing and controlling, but by utilising and exercising them.

‘I need to control my emotions’ is oft-spoken self-talk that we may hear ourselves saying as we reflect on our actions. Or occasionally we may have someone suggest that we need to manage our emotions better. But do we? Is the assumption that emotions and leadership are the oil and water of the workplace actually true?

We have spent generations being told that our emotions are those things that should be encircled and subdued. It has fomented the ideas that we should ‘leave our personality at the door’ and ‘keep business and personal separate.’ Recent researchers found that academic leaders who coped and adjusted to the pandemic the best were those who were able to utilise, and not ignore their emotions. Before the pandemic, strong leaders were often expected to focus their leadership on process, accountability and strategic planning that presented

a very controlled picture of leadership.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the pandemic changed this mindset. We saw leaders who were vulnerable, who were open to listening and acknowledged they might not have all the answers. These were leaders who whole-heartedly embraced the ambiguity and looked to thrive in the uncertain messiness. This shift can be difficult for some as it requires them to reflect on not only what they must do, but more deeply, who they must be as leaders.

When we hear the word emotion in the workplace, it has often been sidled up with other words that on their own sound harmless but in fact spread an underlying frame of mind and intention.

Obviously, the factors such as control, manage, and harness imply that emotions and expression, work in opposition to our ability to lead and make decisions. They hint that emotions are the antithesis of a good leader. They are negative. They will lead to distraction. And because of that, they will make us appear weak. Strong leaders are those who can maintain the separation and not be affected or show emotion.

The use of these words makes emotions

EDUCATION IS A
RELATIONSHIP-
DRIVEN SECTOR
AND TO IGNORE
THE TOOLS AND
SKILLS THAT
ENHANCE, BUILD
AND GROW
RELATIONSHIPS
WOULD
PROFESSIONALLY
BE A BACKWARDS
STEP. IT
REQUIRES A NEW
UNDERSTANDING
AND A NEW
MINDSET OF
EFFECTIVE
LEADERSHIP.

appear like a deficit. By integrating vulnerability into our leadership approach, we can build stronger relationships, invite collaboration and open a pathway for more difficult but important conversations, which will improve the wellness and performance of the company and everyone within.

It increases the potential of empowerment and as such increases the likelihood of shared responsibility and collective leadership. Building emotional connections will take the pressure off the individual leader and share it across their teams. Emotions are a key tool for forming alliances, building trust, conveying importance, demonstrating empathy, growing inclusion, and can be viewed as the hidden power of effective leadership.

Education is a relationship-driven sector and to ignore the tools and skills that enhance, build, and grow relationships would professionally be a backwards step. It requires a new understanding and a new mindset of effective leadership. It requires us to look at our emotions from a new perspective. Not as things to control, but as tools to utilise. The captain of the ship has sailed and it is time for us to lead in a new way.

Deforestation worsened deadly Brazil floods

ANNA PELEGRI

The floods devastating southern Brazil have been exacerbated by deforestation, much of it driven by soybean farming, according to experts, who urge the country to restore its forests and their vast water-retaining root systems.

The key agricultural state of Rio Grande do Sul has been hit by an unprecedented climate disaster for the past three weeks, with cities and rural areas alike inundated by torrential rains that have left more than 150 people dead and some 100 missing.

It is the region's fourth extreme weather event in less than a year, a phenomenon scientists say is driven by climate change — and also deforestation.

“There’s a global component to climate change, and also a regional one, which is the loss of native vegetation. That increased the intensity of the floods,” says biologist Eduardo Velez of MapBiomas, an organisation that uses satellite images to track deforestation.

According to the group, Rio Grande do Sul lost 22 per cent of its native vegetation, or 8.9 million acres, from 1985 to 2022.

Those wildlands have largely been replaced by fields of rice, eucalyptus and especially soybeans, of which Brazil is the world’s biggest producer and exporter.

Native forests help ensure water permeates the soil, preventing it from accumulating on the surface, says Jaqueline Sordi, a biologist and journalist.

Vegetation also holds soil in place, helping to prevent erosion and landslides.

The deep brown color of the water that has flooded the state capital, Porto Alegre, along with 90 per cent of Rio Grande do Sul’s towns, “shows just how many tonnes and tonnes of soil were washed away” in the rains, Velez said.

In a vicious cycle, that mud has now accumulated in the beds of rivers, making them shallower — and therefore more likely to flood next time.

Rio Grande do Sul “urgently” needs to restore more than a million hectares of forests in order for them to adequately perform their proper environmental role, according to a 2023 study by the sustainable development group Instituto Escolhas.

But Velez says there is still no “heavyweight” plan to do that in Rio Grande do Sul, despite a deal it signed last year with other states in southern and southeastern Brazil to reforest 90,000 hectares by 2026.

— AFP

Why do people make music?



Carl Zimmer

Music baffled Charles Darwin. Humanity’s ability to produce and enjoy melodies, he wrote in 1874, “must be ranked amongst the most mysterious with which he is endowed.”

All human societies made music, and yet, for Darwin, it seemed to offer no advantage to our survival. He speculated that music evolved as a way to win over potential mates. Our “half-human ancestors,” as he called them, “aroused each other’s ardent passions during their courtship and rivalry.”

Other Victorian scientists were sceptical. William James brushed off Darwin’s idea, arguing that music is simply a byproduct of how our minds work — a “mere incidental peculiarity of the nervous system.”

That debate continues to this day. Some researchers are developing new evolutionary explanations for music. Others maintain that music is a cultural invention, like writing, that did not need natural selection to come into existence.

In recent years, scientists have investigated these ideas with big data. They have analysed the acoustic properties of thousands of songs recorded in dozens of cultures. On Wednesday, a team of 75 researchers published a more personal investigation of music. For the study, all of the researchers sang songs from their own cultures.

The team, which comprised musicologists, psychologists, linguists, evolutionary biologists and professional musicians, recorded songs in 55 languages, including Arabic, Balinese, Basque, Cherokee, Maori, Ukrainian and Yoruba.

Across cultures, the researchers found, songs share certain features not found in speech, suggesting that Darwin might have been right: Despite its diversity today, music might have evolved in our distant ancestors.

“It shows us that there may be really something that is universal to all humans that cannot simply be explained by culture,” said Daniela Sammler, a neuroscientist at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics in Frankfurt, Germany, who was not involved in the study.

Databases of songs collected by ethnomusicologists sometimes lack



Gakuto Chiba of Japan. In a new study, researchers found universal features of songs across many cultures, suggesting that music evolved in our distant ancestors. — NYT

important details. It can also be hard for researchers to make sense of the structure and lyrics of songs from other cultures. Computers, likewise,

SINGING IN CHORUSES, SHARING RHYTHMS AND MELODIES, COULD HAVE BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER WHETHER AS A COMMUNITY OR IN PREPARATION FOR A BATTLE.

are not very good at recognising many features of music.

“We thought we should involve the insiders,” said Yuto Ozaki, who earned his doctorate at Keio University in Japan by helping to lead the project.

Ozaki’s colleague, Patrick Savage, took on the job of recruiting the singers. “It was a combination of the network I’d already built up through the first decade of my career along with going to conferences and making small talk and meeting people,” said Savage,

now a musicologist at the University of Auckland.

All of the team members picked traditional songs from their cultures to record.

In addition to singing, they recited the lyrics of the songs without a melody so that the team could later compare the music and speech. And for a further point of comparison, the researchers played their songs on a wide range of instruments, including sitars and melodicas.

In each recording, the researchers measured six features, such as pitch and tempo. Despite their variety, all of the songs shared a number of features that set them apart from speech. The pitch was higher and more stable, for example, and the tempo was slower.

Sammler cautioned that the singers in the new study were mostly academics and that the songs they chose might have introduced some bias into the research. “It’s essentially academics singing material that may not be representative,” she said.

But she also noted that another study, not yet published in a scientific journal, came to a similar conclusion. In that study, researchers analysed songs from 18 languages and pinpointed many of the same features.

It’s possible that songs have distinct features because they have a special role in human communication separate from speech, said Aniruddh Patel, a psychologist at Tufts University who was not involved in the study.

What’s more, our brains appear to be sensitive to those features. In 2022, Patel pointed out, researchers discovered human neurons that only responded to singing — not speech or music played on instruments.

What sort of evolutionary benefit would come from that signal is still a matter of debate.

“Maybe music was needed to improve group cohesion,” Ozaki said. Singing in choruses, sharing rhythms and melodies, could have brought people together whether as a community or in preparation for a battle.

But Sammler didn’t think that the new study ruled out other roles for music, such as helping parents bond with their children. “It could support a lot of theories,” she said.

— The New York Times

Connecting communities...

The first pillar of development is the human aspect, followed by communication. While technological breakthroughs drive the creation of jobs, products and services, communication connects people's knowledge, skills and participation.

As the key link between social growth, technology and structural changes, communication shapes the future, ensures sustainability and directs change.

Social development revolves around structural changes with the construction of roads, airports, and ports, which serve as connections between communities: the innovator, the consumer, the entrepreneur, the scientist, the educator, and so on.

So, technology is in everything we do, and it is a constant and changing force. Crafting stones, starting fires to prepare food, and smelting metal to build bridges and wheels are examples of social transformation. Knowledge and skills are transferable, and that makes life interesting.

Before the discovery of oil around 1964, Oman was an agrarian country, with agriculture serving as a source of livelihood and economy. In the 1970s, things changed, and the strategy was planned to create employment and encourage investment. The transition to modernity altered the lives of Omani people. Villagers started moving out of their farms and into the cities to take on new roles and nurture a growing urban society.

Cities and villages slowly flourished with real estate development, hospitality and structural facilities. Much still needs to be done.

We appreciated that the then 'modern Oman', replaced traditional education, which focused primarily on religious studies, Arabic and basic math, with a more diverse curriculum. Since then, education has advanced significantly, with universities and educational institutions catering to various nationalities, as well as the establishment of academic research and accrediting bodies. We live in a dynamic process characterised by strong relationships between citizen engagement, technological development and research awareness. These suggest that education plays a vital role in supporting social activities.



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THE TRANSITION TO MODERNITY ALTERED THE LIVES OF OMANI PEOPLE. VILLAGERS STARTED MOVING OUT OF THEIR FARMS AND INTO THE CITIES TO TAKE ON NEW ROLES AND NURTURE A GROWING URBAN SOCIETY

The perspectives on communication and technology help to build a tapestry of the fields of the humanities. That is, reflecting on societal challenges and how they relate to the national priority agenda. By 1995, Oman had launched Vision 2020 to promote economic diversification and stimulate economic growth. It was the first country in the Arab Peninsula to implement a foresight programme. Nowadays, the focus is on Vision 2040, which has people and society as its pillars.

To showcase Oman as an international centre of study and development, it is vital to discuss, listen to and learn from different communities. And that has been the topic, Connecting Communities, that I addressed as a keynote speaker for the 7th Sohar University Research Conference 2024, themed Consolidating National Priorities Towards Global Reach.

Sharing information and expertise is one way to promote social empowerment. Connecting academics with students, industry and technology, as well as communities, is crucial for understanding the geopolitics of development and collaborative actions.

Jobs, services and products are essential factors for economic growth and social progress, but information and communication are equally significant. Perhaps it is time to step back from the consumption of cultural commodities to meet the needs of society and industry while also preserving natural resources.

Embracing advancements in commerce, finance, education, housing, health and the environment, including offering proposals for public policies, revolves around structural changes.

It is a dialogue between the private and public sectors in which both communities (the private and the public) identify what they want, what they need and how they can work together to meet their requirements and improve their lives (the society).

The entire human history is tangled with innovations that we, as individuals, create. Without the human factor and its ingenuity, social empowerment and economic growth might take a longer time to provide positive results, despite all good intentions.

People are about social relationships and cultural and societal experiences. Community and society are utterly linked through communication.

TAKING SHELTER



People take shelter under a tree as they wait for transport amid heatwave on a hot summer day in Islamabad on Wednesday. – AFP

Don't believe the AI hype

According to tech leaders and many pundits and academics, artificial intelligence is poised to transform the world as we know it through unprecedented productivity gains. While some believe that machines soon will do everything humans can do, ushering in a new age of boundless prosperity, other predictions are at least more grounded. For example, Goldman Sachs predicts that generative AI will boost global GDP by 7 per cent over the next decade, and the McKinsey Global Institute anticipates that the annual GDP growth rate could increase by 3-4 percentage points between now and 2040. For its part, The Economist expects that AI will create a blue-collar bonanza.

Is this realistic? As I note in a recent paper, the outlook is far more uncertain than most forecasts and guesstimates suggest. Still, while it is basically impossible to predict with any confidence what AI will do in 20 or 30 years, one can say something about the next decade, because most of these near-term economic effects must involve existing technologies and improvements to them.

It is reasonable to suppose that AI's biggest impact will come from automating some tasks and making some workers in some occupations



Daron Acemoglu

The writer is Institute Professor of Economics at MIT

IF YOU LISTEN TO TECH INDUSTRY LEADERS, BUSINESS-SECTOR FORECASTERS, AND MUCH OF THE MEDIA, YOU MAY BELIEVE THAT RECENT ADVANCES IN GENERATIVE AI WILL SOON BRING EXTRAORDINARY PRODUCTIVITY BENEFITS

more productive. Economic theory provides some guidance for assessing these aggregate effects. According to Hulten's theorem (named for economist Charles Hulten), aggregate "total factor productivity" (TFP) effects are simply the product of the share of tasks that are automated multiplied by the average cost savings.

While average cost savings are difficult to estimate and will vary by activity, there have already been some careful studies of AI's effects on certain tasks. For example, Shakked Noy and Whitney Zhang have examined the impact of ChatGPT on simple writing tasks (such as summarising documents or writing routine grant proposals or marketing material), while Erik Brynjolfsson, Danielle Li, and Lindsey Raymond have assessed the use of AI assistants in customer service. Taken together, this research suggests that currently available generative-AI tools yield average labour-cost savings of 27 per cent and overall cost savings of 14.4 per cent.

What about the share of tasks that will be affected by AI and related technologies? Using numbers from recent studies, I estimate this to be around 4.6 per

cent, implying that AI will increase TFP by only 0.66 per cent over ten years, or by 0.06 per cent annually. Of course, since AI will also drive an investment boom, the increase in GDP growth could be a little larger, perhaps in the 1-1.5 per cent range.

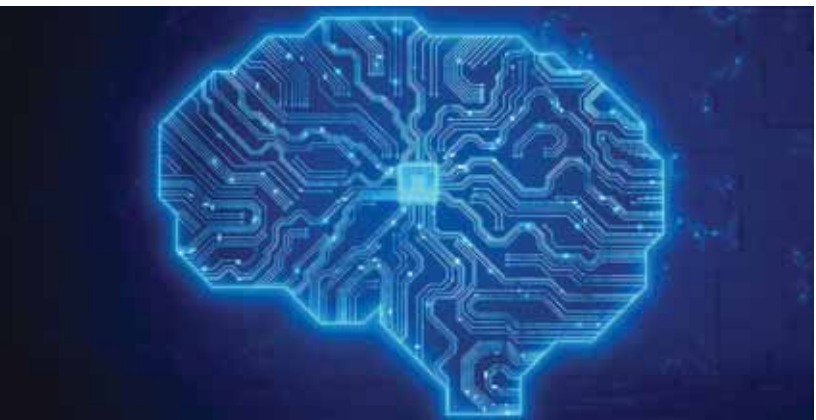
These figures are much smaller than the ones from Goldman Sachs and McKinsey. If you want to get those bigger numbers, you either must boost the productivity gains at the micro level or assume that many more tasks in the economy will be affected. But neither scenario seems plausible. Labour-cost savings far above 27 per cent not only fall out of the range offered by existing studies;

they also do not align with the observed effects of other, even more promising technologies. For example, industrial robots have transformed some manufacturing sectors, and they appear to have reduced labour costs by about 30 per cent. Similarly, we are unlikely to see far more than 4.6 per cent of tasks being taken over, because AI is nowhere close to being able to perform most manual or social tasks (including seemingly simple functions with some social aspects, like accounting). As of 2019, a survey of essentially all US businesses found that only about 1.5 per cent of them had any AI investments. Even if such investments have picked up over

the past year and a half, we have a long, long way to go before AI becomes widespread.

Of course, AI could have larger effects than my analysis allows if it revolutionises the process of scientific discovery or creates many new tasks and products. The recent AI-enabled discoveries of new crystal structures and advances in protein folding do suggest such possibilities. But these breakthroughs are unlikely to be a major source of economic growth within ten years. Even if new discoveries could be tested and turned into actual products much faster, the tech industry is currently focused excessively on automation and monetizing data, rather than on introducing new production tasks for workers.

Moreover, my own estimates could be too high. Early adoption of generative AI has naturally occurred where it performs reasonably well, meaning tasks for which there are objective measures of success, such as writing simple programming subroutines or verifying information. Here, the model can learn on the basis of outside information and readily available historical data.



What about the share of tasks that will be affected by AI and related technologies?

sport



POCHETTINO
LEAVES
CHELSEA
AFTER JUST
ONE SEASON
IN CHARGE

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino has left Chelsea after just one season in charge by mutual consent, the English club announced on Tuesday.

The Blues finished sixth in the Premier League thanks to a fine run towards the end of the season but missed out on Champions League qualification and a trophy.

“Chelsea FC can confirm that the club and Mauricio Pochettino have mutually agreed to part ways,” Chelsea said in a statement.

In just two years under the ownership of an American consortium fronted by LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and private equity group Clearlake Capital, Chelsea have spent over £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) on new players.

The vast majority of that was spent on rising stars and Pochettino pointed to a lack of experience and a lengthy injury list for failing to achieve consistent results.

Chelsea lost the League Cup final 1-0 to Liverpool after extra-time and pushed Manchester City all the way before losing in the FA Cup semifinals by the same score.

But there had been signs that Pochettino’s project was coming together in a run of five consecutive wins to end the campaign that ensured Chelsea will be in Europe next season.

They will qualify for the Europa League if Manchester United lose to City in the FA Cup final and the Conference League if the Red Devils shock the English champions.

“Thank you to the Chelsea ownership group and sporting directors for the opportunity to be part of this football

club’s history,” said Pochettino.

“The club is now well positioned to keep moving forward in the Premier League and Europe in the years to come.”

Chelsea sporting directors Laurence Stewart and Paul Winstanley said: “On behalf of everyone at Chelsea, we would like to express our gratitude to Mauricio for his service this season.

“He will be welcome back to Stamford Bridge any time and we wish him all the very best in his future coaching career.”

FOUR MANAGERS IN TWO YEARS

Pochettino is the fourth manager to depart under Boehly’s regime after Thomas Tuchel, Graham Potter and Frank Lampard.

According to the Daily Telegraph, Pochettino met Boehly for dinner on Friday before his departure was confirmed after an end-of-season review with Stewart and Winstanley.

The 52-year-old arrived in west London with the task of getting Chelsea back on track after they finished 12th in the 2022/23 Premier League season.

The Argentine had to bed in another influx of new signings as Chelsea broke the British transfer record to buy Moises Caicedo for £115 million.

He suffered a difficult start as they won just three of their opening 10 Premier League games.

But led by the stunning form of Cole Palmer, only City, Arsenal and Liverpool picked up more points than Chelsea in the second half of the season.

According to reports Stuttgart’s Sebastian Hoeness, Girona boss Michel, Ipswich Town’s Kieran McKenna and Enzo Maresca of Leicester are among those in contention to be next in the Stamford Bridge hot seat. — AFP

Fifa development adviser visits Oman

OFA, Fifa aim to implement strategic technical development plans

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 22

As part of football world governing body Fifa’s efforts to support the national associations in developing football and achieving the required sustainable growth in the sport at both regional and international levels, Fifa Development Adviser for West Asia and Africa, Dr Belhassen Malouche, visited the Sultanate of Oman during May 18 to 22. The main target of the visit was to discuss the progress of the national teams’ programmes, objectives and outline the strategic development plans for the future periodic of 2023 to 2026.

The Tunisian expert explained the Fifa’s global football development programme to the Oman Football Association (OFA) officials. Also, he discussed various technical and



organisational aspects with OFA officials besides focusing on the strengthening the cooperation between Fifa and the OFA on developing Oman’s football infrastructure in line with international standards and Fifa’s global development goals.

During the visit, Dr Malouche reviewed many current projects of OFA and discussed the

organisational structure of the technical department. He went through the executive plan of the technical programme for 2024 besides determining the technical programmes for the national teams and talents to be supported by Fifa. Additionally, it assessed the status of women’s football and the opportunities for its development with Fifa’s support



in this field.

The experienced soccer professional reaffirmed on the significance of developing technical and coaching staff as he highlighted that by improving the national teams standards through advanced training programmes and courses. Also, to implement the best international practices in this area. He confirmed on the

necessity of developing women’s and youth football to promote the sport and spread it in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Tunisian expert met many officials at the OFA including Mohsin al Masrouri, Vice-Chairman, Mohammed al Yahmadi, Secretary-General and some of the OFA board directors.

On sidelines of his visit to

Oman, the Fifa Development Adviser for West Asia and Africa visited part of the under way second session of the AFC Coaching License Course ‘A’ level organised by the OFA. The Tunisian thanked OFA for this essential step which enable the participants to gain the maximum required experience in coaching and delivering advanced training programmes to produce quality national coaches.

In last November, the national project ‘Football Talent Development Center’ had launched by OFA and this programme initiated by (Fifa) in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth and in partnership with JSIS. The project was aimed to inspire emerging young football talent by providing top-notch coaching, state-of-the-art facilities, and opportunities to realise their full potential.



USA upset Bangladesh with T20 win in Houston

MIAMI: The United States pulled off a shock five-wicket win over Bangladesh in a Twenty20 International in Houston on Tuesday giving the Americans a timely boost ahead of next month's T20 World Cup.

The USA will host group stage games in the tournament which is being co-hosted with the West Indies, and the three-match series with Bangladesh is their main warm-up.

Bangladesh are ranked ninth in the world T20 rankings while the USA are placed 19th, below Nepal and Oman, but the Americans were more than a match for their more experienced opponents.

Bangladesh were restricted to 153-6 with Towhid Hridoy top-scoring with 58 from 47 balls and off-spinner Steven Taylor picking up two for nine from three overs.

But the USA reached the target with three balls to spare thanks to a brilliant 61-run partnership between Corey Anderson and Harmeet Singh that saw them over the line.

The USA were 94-5 with five overs remaining before the pair turned on the strokes,

with former New Zealand international Anderson making 34 off 25 balls with two sixes while ex-Indian Under-19 player Singh hit three sixes and two fours as he struck 33 off just 13 deliveries.

After Anderson hit a six from the penultimate ball of the 19th over, the Americans needed nine off the last six balls.

Anderson smashed Mahmudullah over long-on for another six and then took a single before Singh struck the next ball over extra-cover for four to win the game.

"It's a great feeling," said Singh.

"I was backing myself and the main aspect of the game was to stay in the game till the last. It came down to our best efforts in the last over and I think that was our plan," he said.

"Definitely Corey brings a lot of experience. He himself played a lot of big tournaments, big games. He knows how to finish games and how to stay calm under pressure, finish till the last ball...we all look up to him," he said.

The second game of the series will also be in Houston on Thursday. — **AFP**

Starc stars as Kolkata thrash Hyderabad to reach IPL final

AHMEDABAD, India: Mitchell Starc struck three early blows to help Kolkata Knight Riders storm into the IPL final with an eight-wicket thrashing of Sunrisers Hyderabad in Ahmedabad's searing heat on Tuesday.

Two-time champions Kolkata bowled out Hyderabad for 159 as Starc returned figures of 3-34 in the first play-off — qualifier 1 — at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

"We needed to pick early wickets," player of the match Starc said after the dominant win, which took Kolkata into their fourth IPL final. "The spinners were effective and the whole bowling department was bang on."

Starc, a left-arm quick, once again justified his price tag from the December auction after he became the most expensive buy in IPL history when Kolkata got him for \$2.98 million.

The figure quickly broke a record after Hyderabad brought Pat Cummins for \$2.5 million in the same auction and later made him captain.

Venkatesh Iyer, on 51, and skipper Shreyas Iyer, on 58, remained unbeaten in Ahmedabad as Kolkata achieved their target with 38 balls to spare.

Hyderabad will have another shot at making the final when they clash with the winner of the eliminator in the second qualifier on Friday in Chennai.

"We all have played enough cricket, and going to a new venue (Chennai) helps us as well, so we gotta keep this behind and move on," said Cummins.

Ahmedabad remained hot as temperatures in the afternoon soared above 44 degrees Celsius (111 degrees Fahrenheit) for the second successive day.

The 132,000-capacity stadium had many empty seats. Stadium



officials said more than 75,000 fans turned up as they braved the heat carrying water bottles for hydration.

Bowlers also took regular drinks on the outfield between overs.

Most of India's northern states have remained under government heatwave alerts since last week, with capital New Delhi recording 47.4 degrees Celsius.

'MESMERISING' BOWLING Starc struck with the second ball of the match when he had fellow Australian Travis Head bowled

for a second successive duck in the T20 tournament.

It was Starc's twin strikes in his third over that rattled the opposition as he sent back Nitish Kumar Reddy and Shahbaz Ahmed with successive balls as Hyderabad slipped to 39-4 in five overs.

Rahul Tripathi, who made 55, and Heinrich Klaasen, who scored 32, hit back in a stand of 62 before Varun Chakravarthy broke through with his spin to send back Klaasen.

"I think the way every bowler stood up to this occasion, the way they came in and took

wickets, that was imperative," said Shreyas of his team's bowling show.

"The attitude and approach of all bowlers was to take wickets and they did. When you have a variety in the bowling line-up, it's mesmerising."

Tripathi was run out and wickets kept tumbling before Cummins boosted the total with his 24-ball 30.

In reply, Rahmanullah Gurbaz gave Kolkata a strong start with his 23 off 14 balls and fellow opener Sunil Narine made 21 before being dismissed by Cummins. — **AFP**

Inter move into Oaktree era as Scudetto parade ends at Verona

MILAN: Inter Milan end their triumphant Serie A season at Verona on Sunday night in a state of limbo after the champions were taken over by US investment fund Oaktree.

Officially crowned kings of Italy last weekend after winning the Scudetto with five games to spare, Inter's future has been in the balance for months due to the 395 million-euro (\$428 million) debt with Oaktree that was hanging over the heads of outgoing owners Suning.

And outgoing president Steven Zhang's angry statement at the weekend, in which he accused Oaktree of "jeopardising" Inter's financial stability, made it clear that a change of ownership was in the offing.

What happens next is unsure, although Oaktree confirmed that Inter would move ahead with the current personnel who have helped take the club to the top.

That means the heads of sporting operations Giuseppe Marotta and Piero Ausilio, and coach Simone Inzaghi, staying on, while a fire sale of players is very unlikely.



Inter Milan's Argentine forward Lautaro Martinez lifts the trophy during the trophy ceremony for the Italian champions after the Italian Serie A match between Inter Milan and Lazio in Milan on May 19. Inter celebrated their 20th Scudetto. — **AFP**

However Oaktree said that there would be "an initial focus on operational and financial stability", suggesting a period of belt-tightening just as a series of contract extensions, including that of captain Lautaro Martinez, are due to be discussed.

Argentina forward Martinez, whose current deal expires in

2026, told the Gazzetta Dello Sport on Tuesday he was expecting and wanted to sign a new deal next week but admitted "the situation with the club could delay everything".

"Let's wait and see, I don't know what's going to happen between now and next week but we don't have any problems,"

Lautaro said.

Inter's new ownership will be the big story from the final weekend of the season, which will be low on drama with most of the big questions settled.

The five teams taking part in the Champions League are already decided, with the only question being whether Atalanta

can finish higher than fifth with their game in hand against Fiorentina being played a week on Sunday.

Atalanta, who host Torino, are two points behind Bologna and Juventus who sit in third and fourth respectively ahead of their final fixtures with Genoa and Monza.

Should Gian Piero Gasperini's side win the Europa League on Wednesday night and finish the season in fifth Roma would be handed a spot in Europe's top club competition.

Daniele De Rossi's Roma have nothing to play for as they are guaranteed to finish sixth, but they also have Empoli's Serie A fate in their hands.

Roma travel to Tuscany where a win would make 18th-placed Empoli the third and final team to be relegated to Serie B.

Empoli are just inside the drop zone, one point below Udinese and two from Frosinone with that pair also facing off at the same time on Sunday.

Should the teams in 17th and 18th place finish level on points there will be a two-legged play-off to decide which side joins

Sassuolo and Salernitana in the second tier. — **AFP**

PLAYER TO WATCH: Olivier Giroud — France's all-time top scorer will say goodbye to Milan fans at the San Siro on Saturday is his last match with the seven-time European champions before finishing his club career at Los Angeles FC.

Giroud signed for Milan from Chelsea in the summer of 2021 and became an instant hit with supporters, scoring twice on his home debut and netting key goals as he won the Serie A title in his first season in Italy.

The 37-year-old, a World Cup winner with Les Bleus in 2018, has scored 48 goals in all competitions for Milan including 16 this season.

SERIE A FIXTURES (TIMES GMT)
Thursday: Cagliari v Fiorentina (18:45)
Friday: Genoa v Bologna (18:45)
Saturday
Juventus v Monza (16:00), AC Milan v Salernitana (18:45)
Sunday
Atalanta v Torino, Napoli v Lecce (both 16:00), Empoli v Roma, Frosinone v Udinese, Lazio v Sassuolo, Verona v Inter Milan (18:45)



Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum shoots the ball against the Indiana Pacers in the first half for game one of the Eastern Conference finals for the 2024 NBA play-offs at TD Garden. – USA Today Sports

CELTICS
GRIND TO
OVERTIME
PACERS WIN IN
EAST FINALS
OPENER

LOS ANGELES: The Boston Celtics needed a late rally to force overtime against the Indiana Pacers before emerging with a 133-128 win in game one of the Eastern Conference Finals on Tuesday.

Boston's Jaylen Brown sank a three-pointer from the corner with 6.1 seconds remaining to tie the scores at 117-117 and take it to overtime.

Then Jayson Tatum made a crucial late three-pointer to push the Celtics to victory and a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven series.

Tatum top-scored for Boston with 36 points, 10 of them in overtime, collecting 12 rebounds and four assists with Brown putting up 26 and Jrue Holiday 28.

Indiana, who fought back from large deficits several times in the game, were led by Tyrese Haliburton's 25 points, 10 assists and three rebounds with Pascal Siakam making 24 points, seven assists and 12 rebounds.

Brown was far from happy with the performance from Boston, who had almost a week off after their 4-1 series win over Cleveland.

"A lot of ups and downs, I don't think we played our best," said three-time All Star Brown.

"We almost dropped the game on our own floor. So we have got to come out and be better," he added.

The Pacers came into the game on the back of a gruelling game seven win against the New York Knicks on Sunday and Boston were the fastest out of the traps.

With the loud home crowd sensing Indiana were struggling, Al Horford's 26-foot three pointer made it 12-0.

The Pacers got back into the game and levelled it 64-64 at half-time. A 13-point run in the third put Boston 87-77 up but again Indiana came back and with less than two minutes to go they led 115-100.

COSTLY TURNOVERS

Indiana turned the ball over twice in the final 30 seconds of regulation before Brown's crucial three pointer, over the top of Siakam.

When Haliburton was unable to get off a last-gasp shot the game went to overtime.

A step back three-pointer from Tatum with 43 left put Boston four points up.

After Derrick White's layup extended the advantage to six with 25 seconds left, the game was beyond the Pacers.

"We were able to make some plays at the end but we have got to be better to be honest, but I'll take the win," said Brown.

Pacers head coach Rick Carlisle said he was to blame for allowing the Celtics to take the game to overtime.

"The loss is totally on me," he said.

"With 10 seconds left in regulation, we should have just taken the time out, advanced the ball and found a way to get it in and made a free throw or two and ended the game.

"But it didn't happen and we made some other mistakes," he added, referring to the team's turnover problems. — AFP

Al Zubair, Grenier resume International GT Open at Spa

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, Belgium: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and Canadian team-mate Mikael Grenier resume their part-time programme in the 2024 International GT Open by tackling the third round of the series at the demanding Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium this weekend.

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes-AMG GT3 duo finished first and fourth in the two races that were staged during the opening round at the Autodromo Internacional Algarve in Portimao in April but did not take part in round two in Germany last month.

But the Spa encounter offers a completely new challenge for entrants and runs to a different format to the other rounds of the championship. Known as the 'GT Open 500', the weekend



Al Faisal al Zubair

will be fought out over one longer race on the 7,004km circuit instead of two shorter ones. Once again, teams will be divided into Pro, Pro-Am and Am classes.

The 'GT Open 500' will



The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes in International GT Open action.

last for 2hrs 40mins and one additional lap. There will be the two usual qualifying sessions with both Al Zubair and Grenier tackling one stint apiece. During the race there will be three mandatory pit stops and each

driver will need to perform two race stints with no double stints permitted in the regulations. Double points will be awarded at the finish.

Al Zubair said: "Looking forward to the GT Open

weekend. This time it will be quite different because it is an endurance race in the GT Open. Instead of being two races, it will be one long race and qualifying will be based on an average of both drivers.

This system will be a bit different but I think it will be good for us in terms of preparation for our big Spa 24 next month.

"We showed in Portimao that we have a strong partnership with me and Mick Grenier. We also have a strong package with the Mercedes and the Getspeed car. We are looking forward to it and 'inshallah' we come up with another win and get good points."

Competition for the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew comes from the likes of Team Motopark, Eastalent Racing's

Audi, Getspeed colleagues Anthony Bartone and Fabian Schiller and the Team Oregon Lamborghinis.

The International GT Open will share the circuit this weekend with Euroformula Open, GT Cup Europe and the Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine entrants.

GT Open action gets underway with the first 70-minute free practice session from 11.55hrs on Friday (May 24). Free practice two is scheduled for 16.10hrs.

The first of the 30-minute qualifying sessions fires into life at 11.05hrs on Saturday (May 25) with the second session starting at 13.40hrs.

The International GT Open 500 will take a rolling start from noon on Sunday (May 26).





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Governorates’ competitiveness index and tourism allocations unveiled

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 22

The 2024 Governorates Economics Forum kicked off at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Wednesday under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The forum, organised by the Ministry of Economy, discussed the current state of development in the governorates, work programmes and strategic visions aimed at expanding the horizons of local development economically and socially and overcoming challenges.

The forum witnessed the launch of two new initiatives to support local development in the Sultanate of Oman.

First was the unveiling of a Governorates Competitiveness Index: A strategic tool for directing investments and identifying development priorities, which contributes to ensuring the achievement of the Oman Vision 2040 goals aimed at strengthening the national economy and maximising the economic and social impact of development projects.

Additionally, a tourism initiative was announced, aimed at revitalising and supporting the tourism sector in the governorates, with an allocation of RO 15 million for the year 2025 to finance the best projects that support the tourism sector in the governorates.

The forum brought together all strategic partners from



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, presiding over the opening of the Governorates Economic Forum 2024.



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

the government and private sectors, experts and civil society institutions, with the aim of enhancing community participation in formulating strategies and identifying future prospects in line with the priorities of the Governorates Development Programme.

Speaking at the forum,

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, said the new Governorates Competitive Index will provide a comprehensive picture of the development performance of each governorate, identifying opportunities and challenges, enhancing transparency, and supporting decision makers in

developing development policies and plans based on accurate and reliable data.

This indicator will be used to evaluate the results achieved and measure performance through a set of standards and sub-indices that cover various aspects — economic, social, infrastructure, education, health and other vital sectors.

The Governorates Economic Forum, he said, has been organised with a goal to enhance decentralisation and develop the governorates in line with the ambitions of Oman’s future vision and the objectives of the tenth five-year plan.

These ambitions support economic diversification, expand the streams of growth, and find sustainable sources for generating job opportunities by enhancing the performance of the economic diversification sectors, he stated.

The Ministry of Economy, after adopting the tenth five-year plan, created the “Governorate Development Programme” project, which came in implementation of the Royal Directives of His Majesty the Sultan to allocate RO 20 million to each governorate during the years of the current five-year plan (2021-2025), starting in 2022.

Dr Al Saqri stressed that financing local development is an essential pillar in empowering the governorates and promoting decentralization, and the allocations stipulated by the Royal Directives have contributed to creating a shift in the number and quality of new projects in the governorates.

A clause has also been added in the state’s general budget for annual allocations to support the implementation of projects with a development impact.

This has had a direct impact on improving the lives of citizens in all governorates and achieving their socioeconomic well-being, he stated.

The tenth five-year plan, he stressed, witnessed a significant increase in the number of projects that were implemented and are being implemented between the years 2021 and 2023 in various governorates.

As many as 606 projects during this period were undertaken, encompassing the development and beautification of tourist sites, waterfronts, support for youth projects, developing markets, parks, and sports trails, and establishing arenas for festivals and exhibitions. **TURN TO P15**

Agriculture Ministry highlights potential of halal food industry



Dr Ahmed al Bakri, Under-Secretary for Agriculture.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 22

Oman’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources highlighted the significance of the halal global food industry at the 2024 Russia-Islamic World forum, which was held recently in Kazan, Russia.

A report on the forum, issued by the Omani Embassy in Russia, quoted Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary for Agriculture, as saying: “Halal products are currently experiencing significant growth worldwide, as well as an increase in their marketability according to the concept of the Islamic economy.”

According to Dr Al Bakri, the growth of the halal market is driven by several factors including the growing economies of Islamic countries.

“The main driver for the growth of the global halal market lies in the development of the economies of Islamic countries and the increasing demand for halal products from new markets. This has resulted in the global halal market value growing to an estimated \$3 trillion.”

Significantly, the Halal World Institute estimated the value of the global halal economy market at \$2.5 billion in 2023, and is expected to reach \$4.6 billion by 2030.

Parallel to the 15th edition of the Forum, which took place from May 14-19, was the Russia Halal Expo, which showcased over 4,500 global halal-certified products.

Panel to map out growth of biodiesel sector in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 22

Key players in Oman’s biodiesel production sector have welcomed a decision by Omani authorities to constitute a committee to look into an array of underlying shortcomings that continue to impair the growth of this promising example of the country’s growing circular economy.

Most biodiesel production in the country is linked to the processing of Used Cooking Oil (UCO), among a host of other mainly organic waste oils.

But the handful of players operating in the sector have bemoaned, among other factors, lack of effective regulation, absence of supportive legislative, poor uptake of biodiesel

by corporates, continued subsidisation of fossil-fuels, and the presence of unauthorised players who have largely captured the UCO collection business.

To help address these and other concerns, a special committee has now been set up with representatives from a number of government agencies and other stakeholder organisations, a leading Omani biodiesel producer has revealed.

Maher al Habsi, Co-Founder and CEO of Wakud — the biggest of Oman’s biodiesel producers, said the panel will study the prices of UCO, which is the basic resource for biodiesel production.

Also as part of its mandate, the panel will chalk out a roadmap to support the long-term development of the sector.



Biodiesel consumption in Oman continues to be minuscule because of subsidised motor fuels.

In a post, Al Habsi said the announcement came in a meeting held under the auspices of the Environment Authority, with the attendance of other stakeholder organisations, and representatives

of UCO collectors and processors.

“We have been waiting for this decision for a long time, particularly with regard to the goal of setting an appropriate price per tonne of UCO,” he said.

“This expected decision will support the biofuel sector, which suffers greatly from subsidies enjoyed by petroleum products which makes the sale of biofuel impossible as major local companies refuse to pay the price difference.”

He further added: “This bold step will support a promising sector that will drive plans to reduce carbon emissions and achieve carbon neutrality in the Sultanate of Oman.”

For want of structural support mechanisms, the vast proportion of UCO ends up either dumped in drains or in landfills.

In the past, volumes that were captured by unauthorised collectors were typically siphoned out of the country for processing

overseas. But with the Omani government looking to support the growth of a local circular economy, biodiesel producers are hoping to see more volumes coming to their processing facilities.

According to the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah), roughly half of the estimated 94,000 tonnes of cooking oil currently imported into Oman should ideally be captured after use for processing into biodiesel or other sustainable products. But the collection is barely around 4,000 tonnes per annum, mainly from industrial caterers, major hotels and food industry operators. At a minimum, the collection potential of UCO can be as high as 11,000 tonnes per annum, says be’ah.



NBO Asian market overview empowers businesses with key economic trends and insights

MUSCAT: In line with its ongoing efforts to empower corporate customers, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently hosted a session on the Asian market and its impact on the supply chain.

The highly anticipated event featured leading experts in the field, providing insights into the latest economic trends and dynamics. The session facilitated networking among CFOs and demonstrated NBO's commitment to building business success through informed discussions.

The event hosted Charlie Lay, a regional economist from Commerzbank AG, as the keynote speaker. Lay offered a comprehensive overview of the Asian market, highlighting key developments and the resulting effects on global supply chains.

Following his presentation, a panel discussion with NBO's General Manager and Chief Financial and Operating Officer Giridhar Varadachari further explored these topics, allowing for deeper dialogue and audience engagement.

Mohammed bin Yahya al Jabri, Assistant General Manager and Head of Global Transaction Banking at NBO, said: "NBO is committed to creating value for our corporate customers by offering them access to the latest knowledge and expert insights.

We were delighted to have Charlie Lay and other

distinguished guests with us. We believe this event is crucial for CFOs and financial leaders who need to stay informed about economic shifts and how they affect their business operations.

It's also an opportunity for networking and fostering meaningful connections. The panel discussion was particularly interesting.

The expertise and insights shared by the panellists were invaluable to our attendees as they look to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing business environment."

NBO offers customers a robust online trade portal, designed to assist clients in managing the timelines of their trade businesses.

The portal offers a comprehensive suite of digital solutions that streamline international trade processes, ensuring clients can efficiently handle their trade operations.

It is built to cater to the specific needs of businesses, providing a reliable and efficient tool to manage their import and export activities seamlessly.

The attendees had the chance to interact with industry experts, ask questions, and share experiences with their peers.

The NBO CFO event empowered businesses by providing platforms for learning and collaboration, highlighting the bank's focus on helping its customers navigate the complexities of the modern economy.

All-new Kia EV6 now in Oman

MUSCAT: Kia Oman has recently unveiled the much-anticipated and eagerly-awaited electric vehicle, the all-new EV6 all wheel drive (AWD).

According to a spokesperson from Reliable International Automotive, the distributors for Kia in Oman, "Kia's new introduction underlines Kia's leap in electric mobility solutions.

The EV6 encompasses advancements in design, features, technology and performance that is truly unparalleled.

With the introduction of the EV6 in Oman, Kia is offering enthusiasts an opportunity to explore the future of thrilling driving experiences.

Also, every buyer of EV6 will get a home charging EV unit. The EV6 is sure to create a completely new league of fans."

Designed to inspire and empower drivers around the world, the Kia EV6 is available in 'Earth' and 'GTL' grades in Oman. The EV6 embodies Kia's commitment to innovation and sustainability.

With its sleek, aerodynamic silhouette and striking details, the EV6 stands out as a true icon of modern automotive design, setting new standards for beauty and functionality in the electric vehicle market.

This compact mid-size SUV can accommodate up



to five passengers and offers sporty dynamic interiors with ventilated driver and passenger seats, ambient mood lighting, black suede seats, among other features.

At the heart of the Kia EV6 is our industry-leading Electric-Global Modular Platform (E-GMP), which provides a solid foundation for exceptional performance, efficiency, and safety.

Equipped with advanced battery technology and powerful electric motors, the EV6 delivers exhilarating acceleration, responsive handling, and a smooth, quiet ride, ensuring an unparalleled driving experience for all who step behind the wheel.

The EV6 has a powertrain warranty of 5 Years/100,000 Kms

and Anti-Perforation Warranty – 3 Years/100,000 kms.

The EV6 is a high-performance car clocking 3.5 sec 0->100*. The Kia EV6 features a 77.4 kWh battery with a 74kW front motor and a 165kW rear motor.

The dual-motor, 320-hp EV6 incorporates blacked-out exterior elements, including wheel arch mouldings, side treatments and front and rear fasciae. The EV6 can travel long distance up to 528 Kms (WLTP)*.

In addition to its impressive performance capabilities, the Kia EV6 is packed with a host of intelligent features and amenities designed to enhance convenience, comfort and connectivity on the road.

From state-of-the-art infotainment systems to advanced

BankDhofar participates in Muscat International Forum for Risk Management in Banks and Financial Institutions

MUSCAT: BankDhofar participated in the Muscat International Forum for Risk Management in Banks and Financial Institutions in its 2nd edition organised by the Union of Arab Banks in collaboration with Central Bank of Oman.

The forum discussed several topics, including Basel III endgame, how to ensure bank's viability & sustainability, credit risk/ ensuring asset quality in uncertain economic environment, digitalisation of finance and Islamic finance.

The forum aimed to facilitate the exchange of experiences and knowledge amongst the participants to enhance the culture



of modern risk management between Arab bankers, and to understand the latest regulatory requirements in this important and sensitive field amidst the geopolitical developments affecting the region and the

underlying risks. The forum witnessed the participation of around 250 participants, gathering a wide range of government entities and all major regulatory authorities including Central Bank of Oman and regional risk management heads.

Ezideen Juma al Mazroui, AGM and Deputy Chief Risk Officer at BankDhofar, said: "Our risk prevention strategies are aligned with the guidelines laid out by the Central Bank of Oman.

This forum is an opportunity for all of us to exchange ideas and share risk management best practices to reduce the better identify risks and mitigate its likelihood and impact as well as

enhance our capabilities to deal with them."

BankDhofar is one of the fastest growing banks in the region, catering to customers' needs and requirements, and setting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman through innovative products and creative solutions.

Following best international banking practices, the provision of outstanding customer experience, in addition to its commitment to community development and contribution to the growth of the national economy, has placed BankDhofar at the top of the list of best banks in the region.

Embark on a memorable journey of a lifetime with Ford Everest

MUSCAT: If you were to ask yourself what's the one thing that you cherish the most after returning from a family trip, it would undoubtedly be the innumerable memories, harmless struggles and overhaul drives.

Make the right decision about choosing a family car that checks all of the boxes—a Ford Everest—is exactly what you need to begin your journey with.

Let's start talking - The Ford Everest 4x4 SUV is engineered for experiences whether it is dune bashing in Wahiba Sands, climbing the steep rocky terrain of Jabal Shams or cruising down Sur's white pristine sandy beaches.

The Next-Gen Everest provides a bespoke experience matched for every kind of journey. If you're looking for a family-friendly car then this is the one for you. Rev the 2.3L EcoBoost Turbo petrol engine to take control of your



journey with an efficient 10-speed SelectShift automatic which delivers Best-in-Class 296HP power and 420Nm of torque.

The Everest is a spacious 7-seater built with capability as its core value and designed to handle

tasks impressively. Take seamless control of the car with driver-assist technologies while tackling tricky terrains.

It has centrally equipped airbags for the driver's and passenger's front & side including

curtain airbags for all three rows and cruise control integrated safety features for the travellers' peace of mind. The SUV's safety measures help mitigate accidents and minimise the risk of fatal injuries.

Moreover, the longer wheelbase design of the Everest projects a more progressive and muscular appearance, which in itself supports the daunting tasks it has been made for.

The length and height of the car make it sturdy enough to form a stronger grip on the road. To make things clearer, the front view camera located directly beneath the Ford emblem includes a wiper option. When the road becomes muddy, squirt some water to clear the camera view.

The interiors crafted at premium levels of craftsmanship radiates comfort for both the young and the old. Take a seat inside the vehicle to experience the spacious instrument panel.

The centre console features a fresh leather-trimmed e-shifter and an electric parking brake.

Place your coffee and water flask with dual cup holders plus

a dash-mounted pop-out cup holder for the front-seat occupant.

Regardless of the environment outside or the drive's duration, the interiors fitted with plush materials, premium finishes and ambient lighting lighten the inside mood.

Access to the third row is much easier thanks to second-row seats that slide further forward. Everybody gets plenty of room to get in and out. Each row features an integrated wireless charging panel for enjoying seamless connectivity.

In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to www.fordoman.com, or www.facebook.com/FordOman or www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.



Winners announced for the Oman Investment Authority Excellence Awards

MUSCAT: The Omani Investment Authority yesterday announced the winning companies in the categories of the Omani Investment Authority Excellence Award in its first edition, on the sidelines of the 8th Rabawet Forum, under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.

The OQ Group won the award in Growth and Job Creation category for achieving a high compound annual growth rate for the years 2021 to 2023, as well as the highest growth rate in export revenues among competing companies, along with its contribution to the highest percentage of Omanis' employment and training.

The Asyad Group won the award in the Partnerships for Sustainable Future category, as the private sector's participation represented the highest percentage of recorded capital expenditures for the group, in addition to its contribution in attracting external investments exceeding RO 600 million for the period from 2021 to 2023.

The Fisheries Development Oman won the award in the category of Local Added Value



Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of the Oman Investment Authority, with the representatives of the winning companies of the first Oman Investment Authority Excellence Awards.

for and Small and Medium Enterprises, due to having the highest percentage of expenditure on small and medium enterprises from total contracts and implementing a large number of research, development, and innovation projects. In the Compliance with Governance System category, the Ithca Group won the award for achieving the highest compliance rate with the governance system issued by the Authority to its subsidiaries,

while the Excellence in Financial Sustainability category was not awarded due to not meeting the award's requirements.

The first edition of the Omani Investment Authority award aimed to enhance competition and development spirit among the Authority's affiliated companies and celebrate the outstanding achievements and exceptional performance of the companies, seeking to achieve higher levels of excellence and growth for the

competencies embraced by these companies, creating sufficient space for innovation and creativity.

The evaluation process in all categories was based on clear foundations and standards formulated with the participation of companies, relying on reports issued by contributors from the companies' boards of directors, data from the companies, as well as audited data by external auditors, through the formation of an evaluation committee

comprising members from several directorates in the Authority: Economic Diversification, Investment Information Management Systems, Local Value Added, Institutional Performance and Planning, Governance, and Compliance.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said that the award came as a continuation of fruitful cooperation from the Authority's affiliated companies, culminating in efforts made by the Authority and its companies together over four years, contributing to achieving good financial and administrative performance by the companies.

He explained that the award categories were linked to economic prosperity, where the Authority sought to achieve competitiveness among companies for better performance and continuous and sustainable economic development serving the Omani society in all its spectrums, in addition to embodying the most important areas that the Authority has a great interest in, in line with national targets and priorities.

— ONA

Governorates' competitiveness index and tourism allocations unveiled

FROM PAGE 13

He voiced hope that the strategic investment programmes in the tenth five-year plan will contribute to the establishment of integrated economic clusters in 5 governorates, advance urban development, spur the growth of future smart cities and drive sustainable mobility.

Three dialogue sessions were also held with a focus on prospects for sustainable development, decentralisation, digital transformation and investment in the governorates. The second session focused on community participation and successful development experiences in the governorates.

The forum was accompanied by an exhibition entitled "Governorates Development Experiences and Successful Project Models", which reviewed the trends of the Governorates Development Programme towards exploiting the competitive advantages of the governorates, the most important major strategic projects in the governorates, the progress rates of projects under implementation, and the most important future projects planned in the governorates.

In the forum, three dialogue sessions were held that dealt with the reality and prospects of local development in the Sultanate of Oman and the possibilities that enhance the strategic direction towards decentralisation.

The ministerial dialogue session, titled "Sustainable Development of the Governorates", featured Dr Said al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Dr Khalfan al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, and Dr Rula Dashti, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA.

Construction works continue on water networks project in Liwa

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services continues its construction activities in the water distribution networks project in the Wilayat of Liwa in the Al Batinah North Governorate, where the completion rate has exceeded 60 per cent and is expected to be completed in Q4 2024.

This project is one of the most prominent projects being implemented in the Governorate, ensuring sustainable development in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Ghunaimi, chief project engineer



The water networks project aims to sustain water services in Liwa.

at Nama Water Services, stated that the water networks project aims to

sustain water services and ensure the continuity of water supply to

more than 6,000 beneficiaries in the planned areas served by the project in the Wilayat.

He added that the project includes the construction of water distribution networks in 4 planned areas: 74, 111, 112, and Al Zahia.

The project will cover the construction of main and sub-water distribution lines of various sizes totalling 120 kilometres in length. Additionally, it involves installing fire hydrants used in emergency situations by the civil defence, valves to control the flow rates in the network, and valves

to control pressure levels in the network.

The total cost of the project exceeded RO 2.335 million, and the expected number of household connections is more than 2,000 connections.

The project contributes to supporting SMEs in the Wilayat of Liwa, with a total value of business awarded to them amounting to RO 300,000. It also supports the community through implementing social initiatives, and will achieve added value through the project's assets.

— ONA

Open banking set to revolutionise Oman's fintech landscape

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, MAY 22

Open banking is set to revolutionise Oman's financial technology (fintech) sector, according to Mohammed al Wahaibi, the CEO of Al Jabr Mena, a venture capital and private equity firm specialising in startup development and corporate innovation.

In an exclusive interview with *Oman Observer*, Al Wahaibi discussed the profound impact open banking can have on the fintech ecosystem, the critical role of entrepreneurs, and the strategic initiatives fintech firms are undertaking to drive innovation and economic growth.

"Open banking can significantly transform Oman's fintech ecosystem by enabling greater transparency, competition, and innovation," Al Wahaibi stated.

By opening financial data to third-party developers, financial institutions can foster the creation of new products and

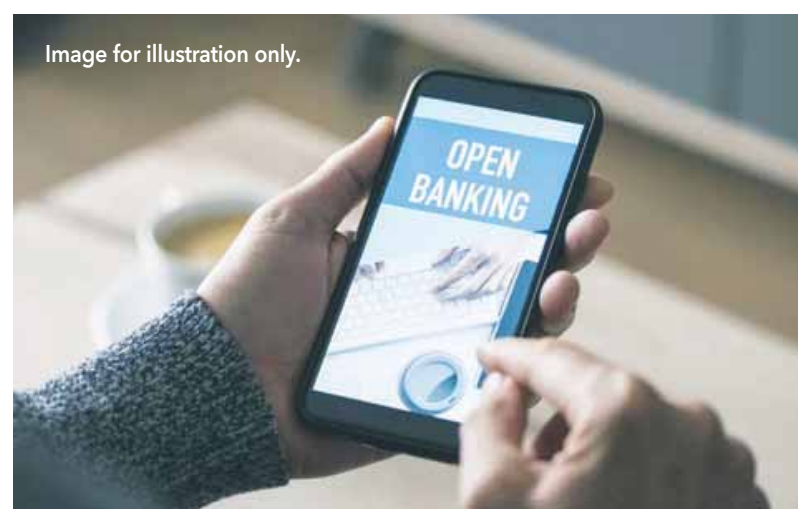
services tailored to the needs of consumers and businesses.

This will not only enhance customer experiences but also promote economic resilience by diversifying the financial sector. Entrepreneurs are at the forefront of this transformation. They bring innovative solutions that address market gaps, improve customer experiences, and enhance financial inclusion.

Leveraging open banking APIs, these entrepreneurs can develop seamless, integrated financial services that meet the evolving demands of consumers and businesses. "Entrepreneurs play a crucial role in driving the growth of Oman's financial services sector, particularly within the framework of open banking," Al Wahaibi emphasised.

Corporate leaders are pivotal in fostering a cohesive venture capital and entrepreneurial ecosystem in Oman.

"By collaborating with startups, investors, and other stakeholders, we can create a supportive environment



Open banking enables greater transparency, competition, and innovation.

that nurtures innovation and entrepreneurship," Al Wahaibi explained.

This collaboration includes mentorship, investment in early-stage startups, and facilitating access to markets and resources. Such efforts are vital in bridging the gap between innovative ideas and their execution, ultimately driving economic growth and diversification.

Open banking is also seen as essential for achieving the goals

set forth in Oman Vision 2040.

This initiative aims to promote financial inclusion, develop a knowledge-based economy, and encourage the adoption of digital technologies.

"By fostering innovation and competition in the financial sector, open banking can help Oman achieve its vision of a diversified and sustainable economy," Al Wahaibi noted.

However, challenges remain. The venture capital landscape in



Mohammed al Wahaibi

Oman faces hurdles such as limited access to funding and a nascent startup ecosystem.

To overcome these, Al Wahaibi outlined several strategies like enhancing access to capital to attract more local and international investors, strengthening the startup ecosystem through incubators, accelerators, and mentorship programmes, and advocating for supportive regulatory frameworks to encourage innovation and investment.

Al Jabr Mena is committed to fostering an innovative and inclusive financial future in

Oman, the CEO said. This commitment is reflected in their initiatives, which include launching accelerator programmes for fintech startups, partnering with educational institutions to promote entrepreneurship and digital skills, investing in cutting-edge technologies and startups that drive financial inclusion, and advocating for policies that support the growth of the fintech sector.

Al Wahaibi envisions significant transformations in Oman's financial services landscape, driven by advancements in fintech and a shift towards digital transformation. "We anticipate a shift towards more customer-centric financial solutions, enhanced by artificial intelligence, blockchain, and other emerging technologies," he said.

This evolution will result in greater efficiency, accessibility, and innovation in financial services, ultimately benefiting both consumers and businesses.

OCCI's key role in unlocking jobs for nationals



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

Chambers of Commerce and Industry around the world are dedicated to facilitating the entry of commercial and industrial institutions into local and international tenders, as well as attracting foreign investments for new projects. They offer services to business owners and employees through training programmes, forums, activities, trade delegation trips abroad and participation in international exhibitions. Training institutions and their employees for various purposes, especially for new project investments and obtaining local

tenders, is a significant aspect of these activities. These issues were addressed at the first development projects forum for 2024, held recently. During the forum, the Tender Board presented numerous project opportunities with full transparency to ensure equal application opportunities. This enables institutions and companies to access essential data and information needed for bid submissions. Greater coordination with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and other relevant authorities is necessary to qualify Omanis for future project work through comprehensive training programmes. Over 300 member companies attended the forum, highlighting the interest of major companies in upcoming projects and tenders within their industries. These companies might seek external expertise if qualified Omani personnel are unavailable, necessitating collaboration between the Ministry of Labour and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide adequate training courses for national workers. The Chamber has a specialised department focused on training and qualification, conducting numerous activities through its specialised committees. The forum also identified challenges that

companies and projects may encounter, such as recruitment and training, and discussed solutions to ensure timely project completion. Major Omani companies, through their membership in the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, are interested in subcontracting some construction work to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and new market entrants. This requires informing similar to business practices in many countries. Chambers and official institutions offer numerous free facilities and services to SMEs to ensure their business sustainability, allowing their leaders to operate without difficulty. The forum aims to align with "Oman Vision 2040" by providing better opportunities for institutions and companies at competitive prices, fostering more competition and transparency among local companies of various sizes. Emphasis is placed on giving SMEs opportunities in this process. Many services are free for members, and opportunities are available to all companies, whether small or large, wishing to compete and showcase their technical and financial capabilities to fulfill the requirements of government and private sector projects.

A confident India can afford to squeeze investors



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks at the Global Fintech Fest in Mumbai. — Reuters

SHRITAMA BOSE

India's next government could raid investors. Global money managers are worrying that, if re-elected, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration will make sweeping changes to tax rules, including increasing the money it collects on capital gains from share sales. There's some merit to the idea. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman dismissed a media report along those lines this month as "pure speculation". The changes would aim to prevent the erosion of the tax base and unify treatment of different asset classes, CNBC-TV18 said. The article, citing unnamed sources, was subsequently unavailable on its website. It's a logical idea because the current rules incentivise investments in equity over debt. Listed equity investments held up to one year are considered short-term and gains are taxed at 15%. By contrast, gains on debt securities up to three years after purchase are taxed at the normal rate applicable to the investor's income, going up to 40% for foreigners. The obvious fix is to narrow the gap between the rates. New Delhi is trying to trim India's budget deficit to 4.5% of GDP by March 2026, from the current 5.8%. That makes raising taxes on equity, rather than cutting those on debt, a more

INDIA LOGGED RECORD ANNUAL PORTFOLIO INFLOWS WORTH \$40 BILLION, OPENS NEW TAB IN THE YEAR THROUGH MARCH AND PARTICIPATION IN MARKETS FROM MOM-AND-POP INVESTORS IS SURGING.

attractive option. Other benefits would include helping India to deepen its bond market. The securities regulator is keen to reduce companies' dependence on bank borrowings for financing large projects. It recently slashed the minimum ticket size on corporate bond purchases to entice more retail investors into the \$550 billion market. That is poised to take off, following the inclusion of India's sovereign bonds in global indices, so a small nudge could go a long way. Raising the tax on capital gains wouldn't be popular and is always risky for a capital scarce country like India, but stocks are booming: the benchmark Nifty 50 is up 23% in the past one year, and is trading near an all-time high. India logged record annual portfolio inflows worth \$40 billion, opens new tab in the year through March and participation in markets from mom-and-pop investors is surging. If the new government has a comfortable win, it could afford to spend some political capital to make the change. — Reuters

Dhofar: A model for sustainable tourism development in Oman



QASIM AL MAASHANI
The author is the head of Oman Observer's Business section.

Dhofar Governorate in the south of Oman is quickly becoming one of the region's leading tourist destinations. Rich in natural scenery and blessed with a distinct climate, Dhofar is an enticing escape from the usual hot summers of the Arabian Peninsula. Dhofar is seeing an increase in tourism and a notable boost to the local economy thanks to the yearly Khareef season, which brings intense monsoon rains that turn the desert into a lush paradise. What makes Dhofar so charming is how different it is from the rest of Oman. Dhofar is shrouded in a chilly mist caused by the Khareef, while the rest of the country endures searing summer heat. The typical desert landscape

THE IMPACT GOES BEYOND HEADLINE FIGURES. THE TOURISM BOOM HAS SPURRED SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN RELATED SECTORS. HOTELS, RESTAURANTS AND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES ALL EXPERIENCED A SURGE IN DEMAND, CREATING JOBS AND STIMULATING LOCAL BUSINESSES.

is replaced with lush vegetation, and the sight is further enhanced by waterfalls. During the Khareef season (June-September), Dhofar becomes a popular tourist destination due to this unusual meteorological occurrence and lively cultural festivals. The 2023 Khareef season served as a testament to Dhofar's growing tourism potential. Visitor numbers surged by 18.4% compared to 2022, reaching a record-breaking 962,000. This influx translated into a significant economic boost, with tourist spending exceeding RO 103 million, representing a 19% increase from the previous year. The impact goes beyond headline figures. The tourism boom has spurred significant growth in related sectors. Hotels, restaurants, and transportation services all experienced a surge in demand, creating jobs and stimulating local businesses. Additionally, the increased exposure has attracted foreign investment in hospitality infrastructure, leading to the development of new hotels and resorts to cater to the growing tourist influx.

Dhofar's tourism potential presents a plethora of investment opportunities. The limited hotel capacity, particularly luxury and boutique options, creates a gap in the market. Investing in expanding and diversifying accommodation options, catering to different budgets and preferences, could be highly lucrative. Furthermore, the lack of large-scale entertainment venues presents an opportunity for the development of theme parks, water parks and cultural centers. Beyond traditional tourism, Dhofar offers exciting prospects for niche segments like eco-tourism and adventure travel. The region's diverse landscapes, from the rugged mountains to the pristine coastline, hold immense potential for activities like hiking, camping and diving. Investment in developing eco-friendly infrastructure and adventure tours could attract a new breed of travelers seeking a unique and sustainable experience. The potential for Dhofar's tourism industry is apparent, but in order to assure sustainable growth, certain issues must be resolved.

The expansion of tourism must be kept up with by improvements in infrastructure, notably in the areas of waste management and transportation. To safeguard the area's pristine ecology and distinctive cultural legacy, responsible tourism practices must also be given top priority. Investing in training and upskilling the local workforce is crucial to ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed throughout the community. Developing local talent in hospitality, tour guiding, and other tourism-related professions will not only enhance the visitor experience but also create a sense of ownership and pride among the local population. The future of Dhofar's tourism sector is bright, but it requires a strategic and sustainable approach. By focusing on responsible development, diversifying offerings, and investing in infrastructure and human capital, Dhofar can solidify its position as a leading tourist destination in the region. The combination of its unique natural beauty, rich culture, and growing infrastructure makes Dhofar an oasis of opportunity for investors and stakeholders alike. With careful planning and collaborative efforts, Dhofar can ensure that its tourism boom translates into long-term economic prosperity and a thriving future for the region.



The 2023 Khareef season witnessed a record breaking 18.4% surge in visitor numbers, translating into a significant economic boost, with tourist spending exceeding RO 103 million compared to 2022.

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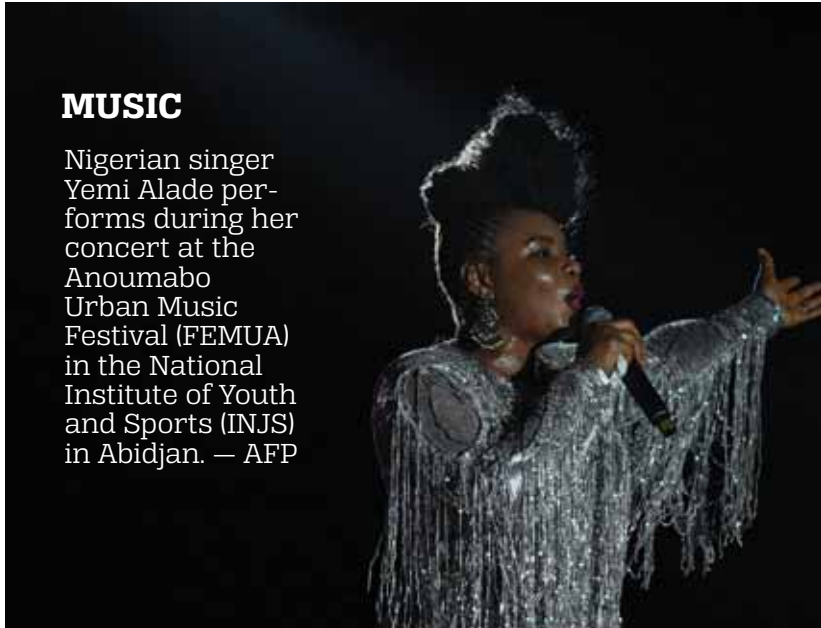
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TRAVEL

Visitors walk through the Zhaishan Tunnel which was used to conceal small naval vessels during the Chinese Civil War in Kinmen. — AFP



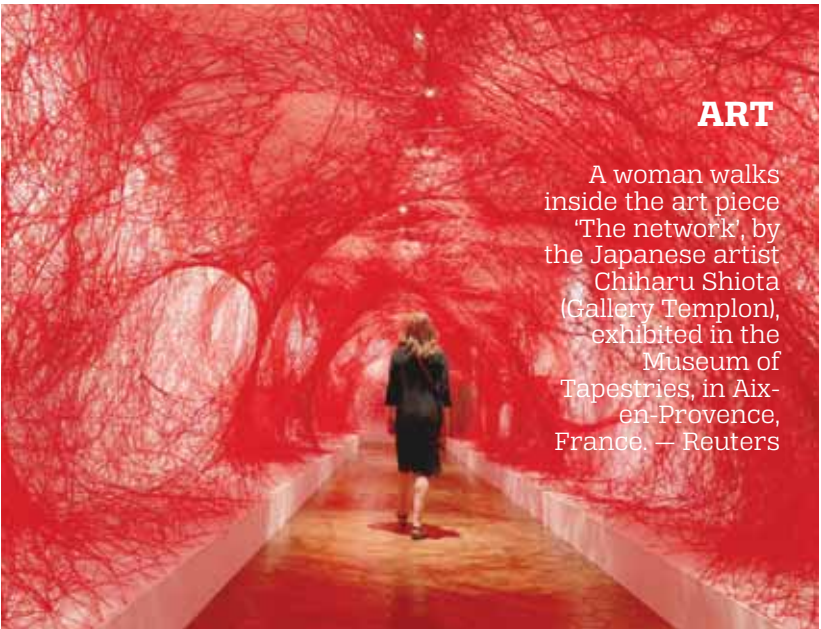
MUSIC

Nigerian singer Yemi Alade performs during her concert at the Anoumabo Urban Music Festival (FEMUA) in the National Institute of Youth and Sports (INJS) in Abidjan. — AFP



FILM FESTIVAL

Cast member Vincent Cassel attends a press conference for the film "The Shrouds" (Les linceuls) in competition at the 77th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes. — AFP



ART

A woman walks inside the art piece "The network", by the Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota (Gallery Templon), exhibited in the Museum of Tapestries, in Aix-en-Provence, France. — Reuters



FOOD

A new brand of packaged food called Vital Pursuit by Nestle for people using GLP-1 weight loss medications is seen in this undated hand-out photo. — Reuters

art & life

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DOCUMENTARY FILM 'AL MURAD' SHEDS LIGHT ON AL TABSEEL TRADITION

Documentary film 'Al Murad' illuminates Oman's Al Tabseel tradition, showcasing the arduous yet communal date harvest. Director Mohammed al Ajmi captures the essence of this cultural practice, earning international acclaim and fostering cross-cultural understanding through cinema... **P20**

THE OPERA

Cairo Opera closes ROHM 2023/24 season with Scheherazade

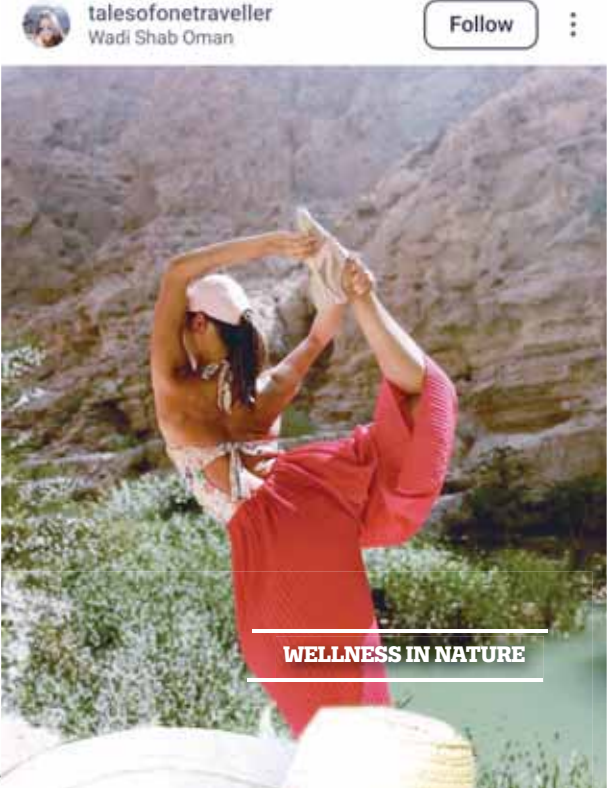
THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE Muscat is thrilled to announce the grand finale of its 2023/24 season with a spectacular performance by the Cairo Opera. On May 23-24, the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts will host a mesmerising production of Scheherazade, directed by the acclaimed Walid Aouni. Experience the enchanting world of

1001 nights through the dazzling theatrical dance of Scheherazade, brought to life by the Cairo Opera's Modern Dance Company. This innovative production masterfully blends traditional and modern choreography, set to the timeless music of Rimsky-Korsakov's famous piece. ThecaptivatingtaleofScheherazade,



the clever and enchanting new wife of the King, unfolds over 1001 nights. To avoid execution, she weaves a series of brilliant stories, each one leaving the King eagerly awaiting the next instalment and thus securing another day of life. This production reimagines the classic narrative with stunning choreography and vibrant costumes, creating an unforgettable experience. Book your tickets for final performance of the season and witness the fusion of theatre and dance in a performance that celebrates one of the most famous stories in Arab history. For reservations and more information, visit the ROHM website, app, or contact the opera house's box office.

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FEAR BREWS IN TURKIYE'S LANDSLIDE-PLAGUED TEA HILLS

EVERY TIME IT RAINS heavily in Turkiye's spectacular Black Sea tea growing region — where it rains a lot — Zikrullah Komurcu starts to worry.

Last August he was almost swept away by a mudslide when a tea garden above his home in the village of Abdullahhoca began to slide down the mountain during a downpour.

The house above his was destroyed with part of the field ending up in his kitchen.

"It's a miracle that no one was killed," Komurcu told AFP, an electricity pylon still perched dangerously over his mud-splattered home.

The tea-growing province of Rize in Turkiye's northeast has been repeatedly hit by major landslides over the last 50 years. Nearly twice as wet as Ireland, with 2.2 metres (86 inches) of annual rainfall, the Turkish disaster agency AFAD said last year alone there were 355 serious landslides there affecting homes.

And it is going to get worse, experts warn, with climate change making the Black Sea warmer and rainstorms even more violent, putting still more pressure on the soil.

- DANGEROUS MONOCULTURE -

Hakan Yanbay, of the province's chamber of geological engineers, said the "uncontrolled" construction of roads cut into the sides of mountains to link its scattered villages has exacerbated the problem.

They undermine the stability of the soil of the mountainous region, 80 per cent of which is made up of steep hillsides.

Yanbay blames the spread of tea plantations over the last century for much of the soil erosion. Long encouraged by the state, they now take up a staggering 90 per cent of the region's agricultural land.

While no one has died in a landslide in Rize in nearly three years, three

workers were swept away in one in neighbouring Trabzon province in March — 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Abdullahhoca.

But painful memories of other disasters that have claimed 130 lives in Rize since the 1960s are never far from the surface.

"We are going to prevent the floods and landslides that we have been experiencing in the Black Sea region for years," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan — whose family comes from Rize — vowed in April.

After six villagers were killed in floods and mudslides in 2021, Erdogan called for a ban on "five- to 10-storey buildings being put up on hillsides".

The president was scathing about the damage being done. "Look at what

nitrogen fertilisers are doing to the tea gardens," he said on a visit to Rize after that disaster. "They turning the soil into mud," he added.

- 'MAN-MADE DISASTERS' -

But three years later "no serious measures have been taken", insisted Tahsin Ocakli, the only opposition MP in the province dominated by Erdogan's AK party.

Ocakli, who has demanded a parliamentary inquiry, said that "these events, which are now happening several times a year, are no longer natural catastrophes but man-made disasters."

The Rize chamber of agriculture raised the alert about discounted nitrogen fertilisers being sold in February, warning they were likely to further undermine the soil.

But experts say the real problem is the tea plants themselves whose roots are not deep enough to stabilise the ground.

They recommended planting trees like poplars and eucalyptus whose deeper roots absorb more water.

To try to reduce the risks, the authorities have begun building drainage channels and retaining walls below some tea gardens.

A concrete barrier has been built to protect the home of Zikrullah Komurcu's nephew, who lives near him in Abdullahhoca.

Komurcu and his wife Medine are waiting for a similar one to shield them.

"Every time it rains we wonder if there will be another landslide," Medine said. "I don't sleep anymore — we're afraid." — AFP

LIFESTYLE

Erpenbeck first German writer to win International Booker Prize

JENNY ERPENBECK HAS become the first German writer to win the International Booker Prize.

Erpenbeck, who began as an opera director in the 1990s, received this year's prize for the English translation of her novel "Kairos" about the end of the Cold War in Germany, and will split the £50,000 (\$64,000) prize money equally with translator Michael

Hofmann.

Hofmann, a German-born poet and essayist who grew up in the United Kingdom, was announced at London's Tate Modern on Tuesday as the first male translator to win.

Speaking at the museum, Erpenbeck said she was "really surprised" and "very honoured."

She also said that she won with the help of "people who supported me" such as Hofmann.

Erpenbeck, born in East Berlin in 1967, had previously featured on the long list for "Go, Went, Gone."

Canadian writer and broadcaster Eleanor Wachtel, chairwoman of the 2024 judges, called Kairos "both beautiful and uncomfortable, personal and political."

"Erpenbeck invites you to make the connection between these generation-defining political developments and a devastating, even brutal love affair, questioning the nature of destiny and agency," Wachtel added.



"Like the GDR (German Democratic Republic), it starts with optimism and trust, then unravels."

She also said: "In luminous prose, Jenny Erpenbeck exposes the complexity of a relationship between a young student and a much older writer, tracking the daily tensions and reversals that mark their intimacy, staying close to the apartments, cafes, and city streets, workplaces and foods of East Berlin."

"It starts with love and passion, but it's at least as much about power, art and culture."

"The self-absorption of the lovers, their descent into a destructive vortex, remains connected to the larger history of East Germany during this period, often meeting history at odd angles."

Last year's winner, "Time Shelter" by Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov, was set during and after the fall of Soviet influence on Eastern Europe. — PA Media/dpa



DOCUMENTARY FILM ‘AL MURAD’ SHEDS LIGHT ON AL TABSEEL TRADITION

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

Important cultural practices in Oman and the broader Middle East often remain enigmatic to the global community, obscured by various factors including limited exposure, stereotypes and geopolitical tensions. These practices, deeply rooted in tradition and heritage, hold profound importance yet are frequently overlooked on the world stage.

While language barriers and geopolitical complexities pose challenges to understanding, the power of cinema becomes an important tool for cultural enlightenment. Film-makers play a pivotal role in unravelling the secrets of Middle Eastern culture, capturing its essence and showcasing it to a global audience.

Among the many cultural practices in Oman, activities related to the dates season are starting to generate a better understanding these days. Al Tabseel is still very present, especially in Manah, Bahla and Bidiyah among other wilayats across the Sultanate. This is because this tradition does not only hold an economic value, but is a celebration of social value as it brings people together, reinforces teamwork and supports the preservation of Omani traditions.

When documentary film director Mohammed al Ajmi decided to preserve the Al Tabseel season in film, his goal was not only to showcase it in a beautiful cinematic approach, but to make sure that the global audience would be able to appreciate this time-honoured tradition.

Already aware of the beauty of this tradition, Mohammed wanted to showcase the complexities of the season showcasing not just the dedication and resilience of the Omani farmers, and the challenges they have to face, but also how such activity is being passed down to the younger generation.

Al Ajmi would later title the film Al Murad, an Arabic-Omani rope that refers to the rope used during the harvest season.

To harvest the dates, men from different villages would have to climb the date palms sometimes around 8 metres tall. To secure and keep the climbers safe, they would be tying a rope around their hips which allows

them to stay secure and not fall.

The Murad not only secures the climbers. People also use the same rope to slowly drop the qafeer or the basket filled with harvested dates to the ground.

During the making of the film, Al Ajmi and his team had to ask for the schedule of the harvest and had to come early so they would catch the farmers at the right time.

Mohammed shared that seeing the process allowed him to have an even deeper appreciation for the process, as it's not easy and requires proper technical skills to ensure the harvest.

"We tried to capture the rawness of this experience in the film. But for us, the main takeaway we home viewers will have is how the Al Tabseel season is complex, but underneath this layer, it creates core memories for the families.

"The film shows the happiness of the children who enjoy their holidays around the farms and surrounding green trees," he shared.

"It was a true labour of love. It took us 3 months to complete the film and we were working with 13 people who wanted to see it succeed. We were astonished by the outcome," he said.

The film has won three awards so far, which include the Ain Platform Judges' Award at the second Al Sharqiyah International Film Festival, the Best Film Award by Audience Vote at the Al Sharqiyah Film Festival, and the Best Screenplay Award at the Sahara Film Festival.

"The film has received great reviews from the audience. At the beginning of each screening, there's always been a buzz and appreciation for the work," Al Ajmi said.

"My hope is for the film to reach an even wider audience and that it will become available on many different platforms at festivals inside and outside of Oman," he said.

In a world increasingly interconnected yet often divided, cultural exchange becomes imperative. Films act as catalysts for this exchange, transcending borders and inviting audiences on a journey of discovery. By spotlighting the cultural richness of Oman and the Middle East, film-makers sow the seeds of appreciation, paving the way for greater global harmony and understanding.

