

Election process a milestone

Foreign media representatives who were in the Sultanate of Oman to cover the Tenth Term of the Majlis Ash'shura elections hailed the process as 'a milestone for others to replicate'. Speaking to the Observer, Timothy Constantine of the Washington Times said such a process in an Arab country is laudable and a significant step towards people's participation in national decision-making.

Digital transition and use of AI

Oman Human Rights Commission followed up the progress of elections conducted via the electronic voting app 'Antakhib.' The commission commended the advanced manner through which the elections are carried out. It took note of the ongoing digital transition, the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) and the services offered by the Ministry of Interior.

Voting turnout sees a big jump

Polling per cent in the 10th Majlis Ash'shura election touched 65.88 per cent, a huge jump from 49 per cent in 2019, on the back of smooth app-based voting on Sunday. As many as 843 candidates, among them 32 women, contested for 90 seats. The voters used Intakhib mobile app during the elections process, which began at 8 am and ended at 7 pm.

A F F I R M S K E E N N E S S A N D A T T E N T I O N A C C O R D E D B Y H M T O S H U R A M A R C H

OMANIS ELECT 90 SHURA MEMBERS

MUSCAT: Omani voters on Sunday elected 90 representatives of Majlis Ash'shura in its Tenth Term (2023-2027). No woman has made it to the country's consultative council despite women's intensive participation in the voting process.

The elected members represent 63 wilayats with two members for each wilayat whose population exceeds 30,000 (27 wilayats) and one representative for wilayats with less than 30,000 people (36 wilayats).

A total of 843 candidates stood for the elections which was held on Sunday for Omanis residing in the country via 'Intikhab' application. The number of registered voters who cast their ballots stood at 496,279, which was 65.88 per cent including 258,847 male voters, representing 52.16 per cent and 237,432 female voters, representing 47.84 per cent of the total number of 753,690 voters registered at the electoral register.

Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, affirmed the keenness and attention accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Shura march and his profound belief in citizens' participation in the nation-building process and their contribution to the legislative developments which will lead to the realisation of the objectives set for the Council of Oman.

He praised the unprecedented development and modernisation the electoral process has witnessed in the Sultanate of Oman that resulted in the simplification of the election procedures and processes.

THE MINISTER SAID IN A PRESS STATEMENT: "Last year's municipal council elections witnessed a qualitative shift that was reflected in Majlis Ash'shura. All the election process and procedures were conducted online with high accuracy via smartphone applications.

258,847 MEN
AND 237,432
WOMEN VOTED

843 CANDIDATES
STOOD FOR
ELECTIONS

496,279 CAST THEIR
BALLOTS (65.88%)

PROCESS WAS
HELD ONLINE
WITH ACCURACY

NORTH
AL BATINAH
HAS HIGHEST
VOTING RATE

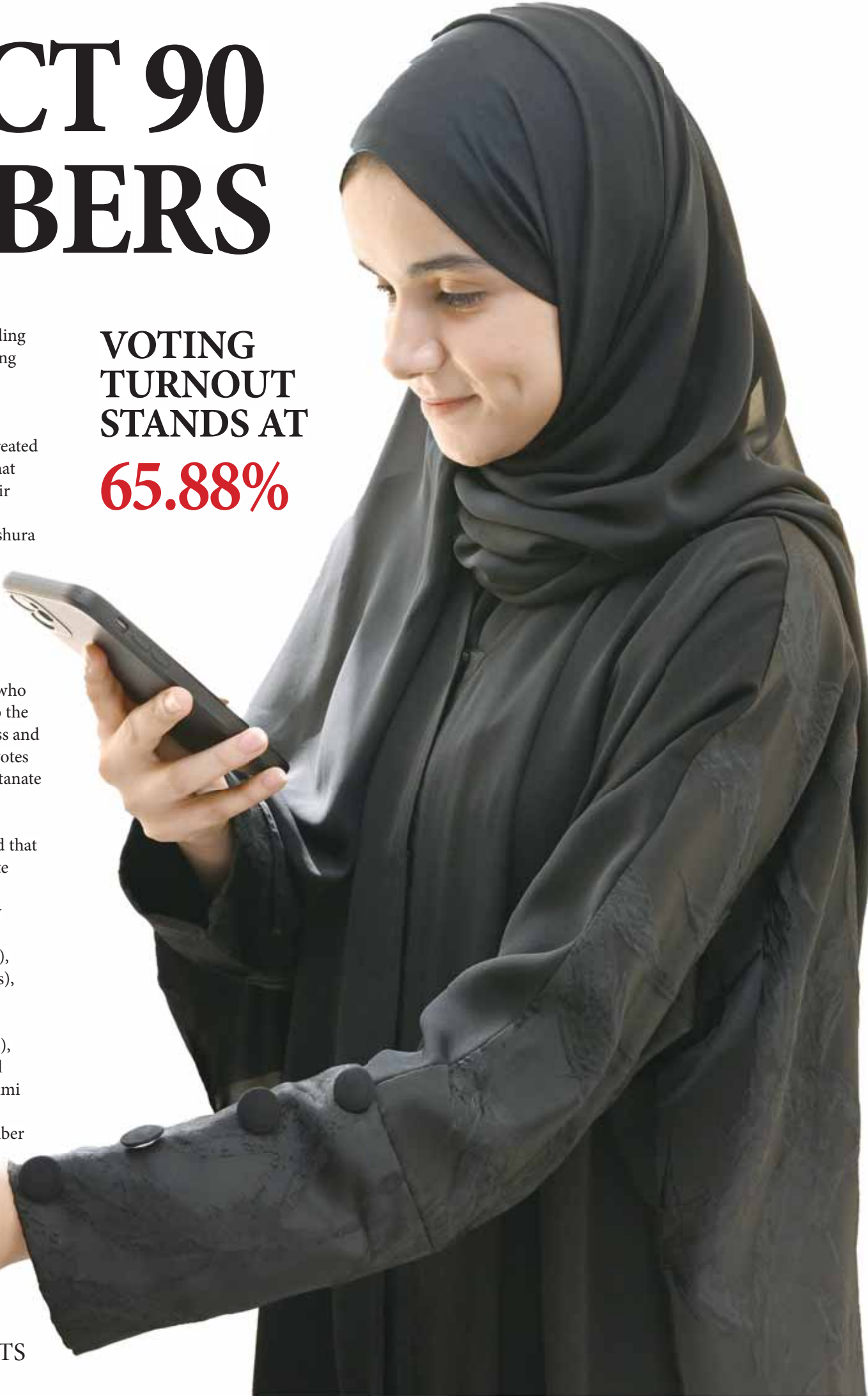
In addition, many electronic services were launched including an online forum for exchanging opinions between society members, a service dedicated for communication between candidates and voters. This created an interactive environment that enabled voters to exercise their electoral right to choose their representatives in Majlis Ash'shura with complete ease.

The minister expressed his thanks and appreciation to all public and private establishments, heads and members of the electoral committees and to everyone who contributed or participated to the success of the electoral process and to all citizens who cast their votes in the elections inside the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

The statistics provided by Intikhab application indicated that Al Batinah North Governorate registered the highest voting rate with a total of 94,809 voters, followed by Dhofar Governorate with 76,003 voters, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate (67,268 voters), Al Batinah South Governorate (59,815 voters), Muscat Governorate (51,627 voters), Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (50,851 voters), Al Sharqiyah North Governorate (45,011 voters), Al Dhahirah Governorate (16,502 voters), Al Wusta Governorate (13,234 voters), Al Buraimi Governorate (12,442 voters) and Musandam Governorate registered the lowest voter number with 8,717 voters.

VOTING
TURNOUT
STANDS AT
65.88%

496,279 CAST THEIR BALLOTS



Superior cities to enhance quality of urban life

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

The inaugural 'October Urban and the First Gulf Housing Week' conference began on Sunday with the theme 'Better City, Better Life.' Hosted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, the event was opened under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

This conference coincides with two globally significant annual events in the fields of urban planning and housing: 'October Urban' and 'Gulf Housing Week.' Together, they underscore the imperative of constructing superior cities and enhancing the quality of urban life with an unwavering commitment to sustainability. Over the course of three days, this conference seeks to accomplish a set of paramount urban planning objectives, aimed at elevating cities,



Dignitaries at the inaugural 'October Urban and the First Gulf Housing Week' conference in Muscat on Sunday.

urban existence, and the real estate sector. The core mission is to strengthen sustainable urban economies, facilitate the development of enduring educational environments, and foster ecological equilibrium.

In a press briefing, HH Sayyid Shihab stressed the significance of the conference which, he said, is the most outstanding event in the Sultanate of Oman's urban planning and housing sector. The event sees a large regional and international turnout, he said.

HH Sayyid Shihab added that an exhibition held on the sidelines of the conference showcases successful models and highlights prominent experiences in the fields of housing, urban planning and smart cities, notably the Sultan Haitham City project, which constitutes a replica for Greater Muscat.

The conference's primary focus areas encompass four key domains: housing, urban planning, the future of school buildings, and city resilience.



ELECTION 2023

WINNERS

MUSCAT

Muscat



Khalid Khalifan al Wadibi
Votes: 2013
(30.76%)

Muttrah



Hussain Mohammed al Lawati
Votes: 1611
(22.55%)



Najib Saleh al Zedjali
Votes: 1391
(19.47%)

Bausher



Mansoor Khalifa al Seyabi
Votes: 1191
(20.18%)



Ali Khalifan al Hassani
Votes: 871
(14.76%)

Al Amerat



Mohammed Ramadan al Balushi
Votes: 1799
(29.48%)



Ibrahim Khalifan al Hadi
Votes: 1492
(24.45%)

Al Seeb



Ali Mansoor al Amry
Votes: 2124
(15.10%)

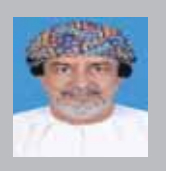


Ahmed Said al Balushi
Votes: 1758
(12.50%)

Qurayat



Juma Said al Wadibi
Votes: 2823
(23.79%)



Salim Hamoud al Ghamari
Votes: 2782
(23.44%)

DHOFAR

Salalah



Hamid Awadh Swakhroun
Votes: 12358
(34.33%)



Mohammed Hassan al Arsi
Votes: 11827
(32.85%)

Taqah



Khuwaidem Mohammed al Maashani
Votes: 3545
(47.23%)

Mirbat



Mohammed Ali al Amri
Votes: 4638
(52.02%)

Rakhout



Ahmed Bukhait al Jahfali
Votes: 2614
(51.38%)

Dhalkout



Mohammed Masoud al Obathani
Votes: 1619
(50.92%)

Al Mazyouna



Ahmed Manshir Balhaf
Votes: 1451
(35.19%)

Maqshan



Suhail Said al Shushaci
Votes: 851
(62.71%)

Sadah



Salim Ali al Mahri
Votes: 1168
(48.46%)

Thamrait



Ali Musallam Ghawas
Votes: 3054
(61.14%)

Shaleem & Al Halaniyat



Yousef Mohammed al Mahri
Votes: 1203
(52.79%)

AL BURAIMI

Al Buraimi



Hilal Rashid al Ghaithi
Votes: 2017
(19.13%)



Humaid Juma al Shamsi
Votes: 1882
(17.85%)

Al Sinainah



Hamdan Ali al Manci
Votes: 202
(65.58%)

Mahdha



Salim Ali al Kaabi
Votes: 977
(61.33%)

MUSANDAM

Khasab



Ahmed Ali al Shihi
Votes: 1492
(24.45%)

Bukha



Abdullah Ahmed al Malik
Votes: 721
(73.05%)

Dibba



Mohammed Ali al Shihi
Votes: 1177
(82.14%)

Mad'ha



Ahmed Ali al Saadi
Votes: 513
(58.36%)

AL DAKHILIYAH

Nizwa



Ahmed Nasser al Abri
Votes: 1300
(22.41%)



Ali Nasser al Harnasi
Votes: 818
(14.10%)

Bahla



Omar Ali al Junaibi
Votes: 2569
(21.02%)



Abdullh Al Waleed al Hinai
Votes: 2499
(20.44%)

Izki



Younis Ali al Mantheri
Votes: 1465
(23.40%)



Zahir Sarhan al Aamri
Votes: 1248
(19.93%)

Manah



Mohammed Salim al Sulaimani
Votes: 1620
(33.83%)

Samayil



Mohammed Khamis al Hussaini
Votes: 1069
(17.20%)



Younis Mohammed al Seyabi
Votes: 805
(12.95%)

Bidbid



Ahmed Nasser al Seyabi
Votes: 1509
(26.27%)



Talal Said Al Muharbi
Votes: 842
(14.66%)

Adam



Salim Hamad al Mahtrouqi
Votes: 1865
(38.74%)

Al Hamra



Jamal Ahmed al Abri
Votes: 1410
(42.81%)

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar



Hassan Ahmed al Nabhani
Votes: 472
(27.63%)



AL BATINAH NORTH

Suhar



Abdullah Ali al Balushi
Votes: 3643
(17.85%)



Khalid Sultan al Jabri
Votes: 3254
(15.94%)

Liwa



Ahmed Said al Sharqi
Votes: 2999
(35.13%)



Saif Khalid al Reesi
Votes: 2826
(33.10%)

Al Khabourah



Sultan Humaid al Hosani
Votes: 4542
(37.00%)



Omar Ali al Hosani
Votes: 3510
(28.59%)

Shinas



Abdullah Suroor al Kaabi
Votes: 4550
(34.11%)



Youssef Ahmed al Balushi
Votes: 4202
(31.50%)

Saham



Yahya Zayed al Abdulsalam
Votes: 5368
(22.55%)



Mohammed Ali al Balushi
Votes: 4323
(18.16%)

Al Suwaiq



Said Hamad al Saadi
Votes: 11440
(69.58%)



Hamad Khamis al Jadidi
Votes: 3481
(21.17%)

AL BATINAH SOUTH

Rustaq



Hanyar Nasser al Harrasi
Votes: 2911
(26.25%)



Khamis Hamdan Al Ghafri
Votes: 1913
(17.25%)

Barka



Yasser Ali al Mubaihi
Votes: 5882
(29.37%)



Walid Salim al Malki
Votes: 5859
(29.25%)

Musannah



Ammar Salim al Saadi
Votes: 8337
(43.15%)



Abdullah Said al Saadi
Votes: 7528
(38.97%)

Nakhal



Badr Nasser al Jabri
Votes: 1612
(41.48%)

Wadi al Maawil



Khalid Hilal al Maawili
Votes: 1249
(47.74%)

Al Awabi



Turik Mohammed al Khawusi
Votes: 997
(34.68%)

Digital poll a milestone in the history of Oman

“
This election saw unprecedented development and modernisation of the electoral process
SAYYID
HAMOUD BIN
FAISAL AL
BUSAIDY
Minister of Interior

AL SHARQIYAH NORTH

Ibra



Yahya Said al Muselhi
Votes: 1932
(25.97%)



Abdullah Hamad al Harthy
Votes: 1801
(24.21%)

Al Mudhaibi



Nasser Sultan al Habsi
Votes: 4490
(41.01%)



Hamdoon Hamoud al Fajari
Votes: 2853
(26.06%)

Al Qabil



Yaqoub Mohammed al Harthy
Votes: 2088
(52.59%)

Wadi Bani Khalid



Hamoud Said al Saadi
Votes: 1412
(35.99%)

Dima W'attayeen



Abdullah Mohammed al Hamhami
Votes: 1444
(25.09%)

Bidiya



Mansoor Zahir al Hajri
Votes: 3398
(47.82%)

Sinaw



Mohammed Nasser al Mahrouqi
Votes: 2285
(38.94%)

AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH

Sur



Talib Khamis al Balushi
Votes: 3643
(20.92%)



Youssef Salim al Mukhairi
Votes: 3527
(20.25%)

Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan



Sulaiman Amer al Rajhi
Votes: 4587
(35.63%)



Mohammed Amer al Madaikhi
Votes: 3491
(27.11%)

Jaalan Bani Bu Ali



Said Mohammed al Saedi
Votes: 5869
(23.47%)



Nasser Abdullah al Sunaidi
Votes: 5673
(22.68%)

Al Kamil Wa'al Wafi



Abdalaziz Rashid al Hashemi
Votes: 4359
(51.05%)

Masirah



Ghanim Said al Junaibi
Votes: 1425
(41.52%)

AL DHAHIRAH

Ibri



Humaid Ali al Nasri
Votes: 2305
(20.41%)



Abdalaziz Hamdan al Balushi
Votes: 2154
(19.07%)

Yanqul



Ali Mohammed al Alawi
Votes: 729
(26.94%)

Dhank



Hamoud Ahmed al Yahyoe
Votes: 1607
(64.20%)

AL WUSTA

Haima



Khalifa Mohammed al Harsosi
Votes: 1018
(56.27%)



Ali Salim al Wihbi
Votes: 1728
(25.81%)

Duqm



Tahir Mabkhout al Junaibi
Votes: 1714
(51.88%)

Al Jazir



Mohsin Said al Junaibi
Votes: 1363
(95.58%)

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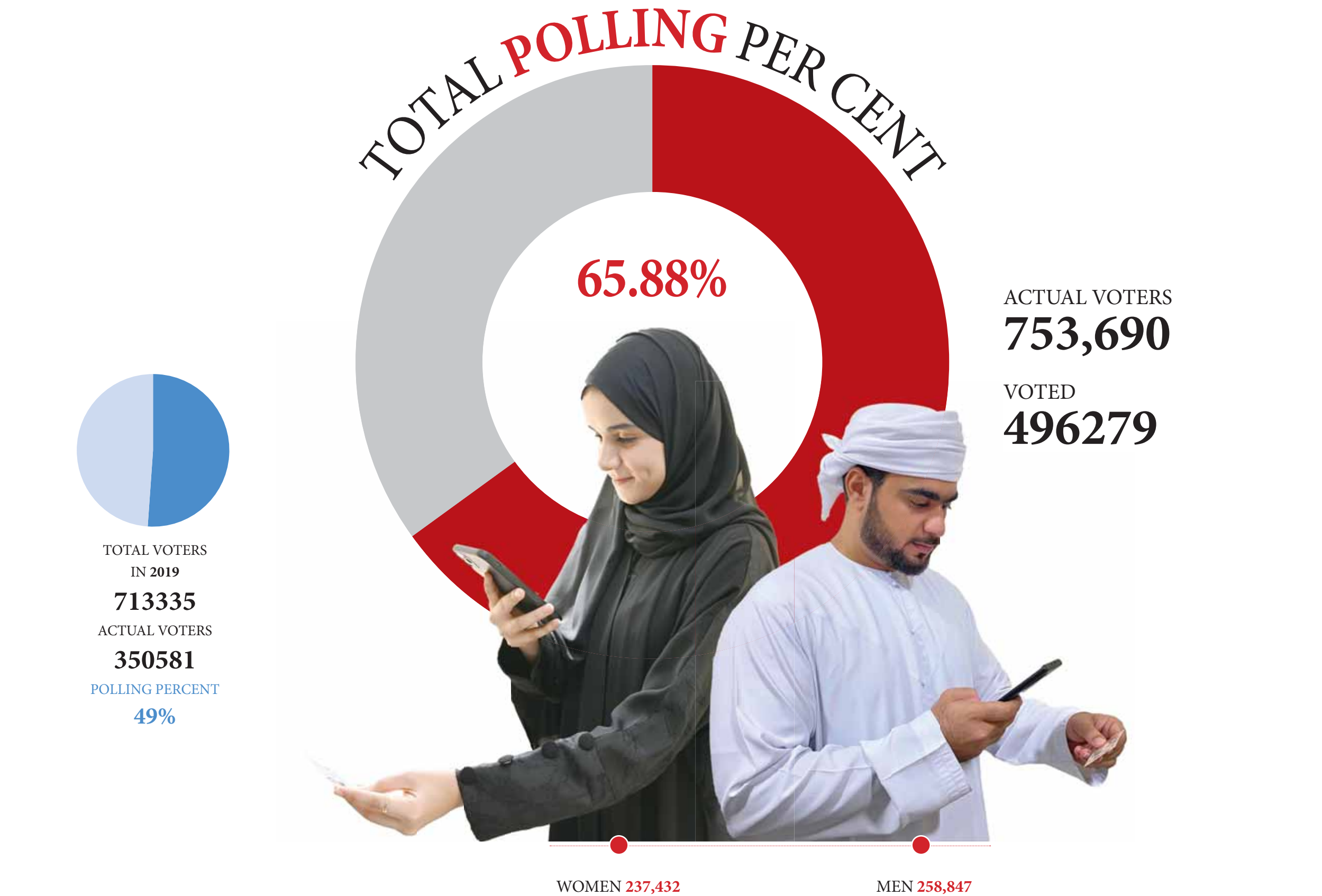
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Minister views progress of voting; values efforts by govt, private sectors

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior held a meeting at the general diwan of the Interior Ministry on Sunday with members of the Main Committee of the Majlis Ash'shura 10th term elections.

During the meeting, Sayyid Hamoud viewed progress of the voting process, which began as planned.

Sayyid Hamoud also paid a visit to the Civil Status Department at the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

They were received upon their arrival by Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs. During the visit, they viewed the process of electronic linking of the electoral register to the civil status register.

At the end of the visit, Sayyid Hamoud expressed his thanks to all personnel of ROP's Civil Status Department for their efforts.

Also, Sayyid Hamoud paid a visit to the operations chamber to oversee the elections system. They followed up the functioning of the apps hosted in Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel)'s e-cloud.

Sayyid Hamoud lauded the efforts made to provide



Sayyid Hamoud paid a visit to the Civil Status Department at the Royal Oman Police. – ONA

communications services in all villages, wilayats and governorates of Oman. The services enable citizens to electronically cast their votes, Sayyid Hamoud affirmed.

On his turn, Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Omantel said that the security systems operate with high efficiency and that no cyber-attack attempts have been reported.

Al Maamari added that the

voting process through the app is part of the digital transition taking place in the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Maamari pointed out that this drive proves that technology can be utilised in complex and sensitive operations like the electoral process, which promises to bring about fruitful outcomes. He valued the efforts made by the government and private sectors to streamline the election process.

He affirmed that new mechanisms, including artificial intelligence, have been added to augment the systems running the election process to help them accommodate activities of the largest number of voters. The step seeks to provide decision makers and members of the public with a clear and timely vision about the progress of the election process.

— ONA

Omani voters cast vote for Majlis Ash'shura using 'Intikhab' app

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

In a groundbreaking move, Omani voters utilised the 'Intikhab' application to cast their votes for the 10th term of the Majlis Ash'shura. There were 753,690 registered voters, marking a milestone as citizens actively engaged in selecting representatives via digital means.

This historical initiative saw 843 candidates, including 32 women, vying for 90 Majlis seats, utilising the user-friendly interface and top-tier security equipped "Electek" application, ensuring encrypted and verified voter data.

The Majlis Ash'shura comprises representatives from all the governorates in Oman. The election happens through direct secret balloting.

The Majlis's membership is determined by state population, allowing proportional representation, with the term lasting four years.

On election day, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, oversaw the process, acknowledging the role of technology and infrastructure in enabling a seamless voting experience.

The Ministry of Interior's commitment to digital transformation was pivotal, ensuring transparency, accuracy, and swift data flow throughout the electoral process.

Talib bin Ali al Ameri, head of the media team for the election process, shared his thoughts with the Oman Observer. He highlighted the advancements, such as features catering to individuals with visual and hearing impairments, promoting inclusivity in the electoral process.

This technological leap not only enhanced citizen engagement but also aligned with Oman's broader vision for 2040, emphasising economic, investment, and developmental goals. The success of this digital endeavour garnered praise internationally, with media coverage commending the innovation and efficiency showcased in these elections.

Media representatives



The Ministry of Interior's commitment to digital transformation was pivotal – ONA

and observers from around the world acknowledged the unprecedented success and efficiency of Oman's electoral process. They appreciated the speed, ease, and organisation of the digital voting system. The international response portrayed Oman's parliamentary system as a model of development and efficiency across various domains.

Hassan al Zaytouni from the Russia Today channel said: "I was surprised by the speed and ease of the voting technology. This experience is unique as it made it easier for Omani voters to participate in the electoral process, which was quite successful, as I saw." Editor-in-Chief of the Al Nas News, Australia website said, "Voting process was well organised, accurate, and civilised. It gives a nice impression of the Omani parliamentary experience. It demonstrates the extent of development it has reached various levels." Ahmed bin Abdullah al Maamari, director of the electoral registry project at the Ministry of Interior, highlighted the consistent updating of voter turnout indicators, showcasing substantial participation across different governorates.

Overall, using digital tools and technology not only modernised the electoral process but also exemplified Oman's commitment to inclusive, efficient, and advanced democratic practices. This historic event is a testament to the nation's dedication to progress and technological innovation in governance.

OHRC praises electoral process

MUSCAT: Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) followed up the progress of Shura Council's 10th Term Elections conducted via the electronic voting app 'Antakhib'.

A team from the commission on Sunday visited the main venue of elections at the Ministry of Interior, where it was briefed about the progress of the voting.

The commission commended the advanced manner through which the elections are carried out. It took note of the ongoing digital transition, the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) and the services offered by the Ministry of Interior.

The ministry provides indices of automated counting on Voting Day, the percentage of voting in each wilayat, age and gender groups of voters, lists of

candidates and voters, as well as the verification of the same by consulting the electoral register, the OHRC team observed.

It pointed out that these procedures facilitate the election process and encourage public participation in the elections.

In particular, the OHRC valued the disabled's access to the voting process through the speech-to-text technique that helps the blind and the sign language option for other segments of the disabled.

The OHRC affirmed that it has not received any reports of people being deprived of the rights to candidacy or voting, which constitute core rights of citizenship that are guaranteed by the Basic Law of the State, the national laws and regional and international agreements and conventions. — ONA



'Election process a milestone for others to replicate'

KABEER YOUSUF
@KABEERYOUSEF

Foreign media representatives who were in the Sultanate of Oman to cover the tenth term of the Majlis Ash'shura election hailed the process as 'a milestone for others to replicate'.

Speaking to the Observer, Timothy Constantine of the Washington Times said such a process in an Arab country is laudable and a significant step towards people's participation in national decision-making.

"The election process to Oman's Majlis Ash'shura is laudable as it tries to delve into people's choice, ensuring the equal participation of both male and female members of the society. This is a true role model for many countries in the region and elsewhere," he said.

The election evoked an excellent response, with an increasing percentage of people turning out to cast their votes.

"Oman is a highly innovative country in terms of experimenting with technology in elections, and we are keen to learn from the experience. I hope we can replicate the Oman experience back in Tanzania," Abdullah Adnan Musaya of Daily News from Tanzania said.

Hocine Abes, Senior News Producer, EBU (European Broadcasting Union) in Geneva, feels the election process has been impressive for the flawless coordination and transparency.

"I have visited many elections around the world, and I find Oman's electoral process impressive for its flawless coordination and transparent voting and post-



Foreign media representatives who were in the Sultanate of Oman to cover the tenth term of the Majlis Ash'shura elections hailed the voting process. – ONA

voting procedures," said Abes, Senior News Producer at EBU, which represents more than 70 television channels and over 2,000 radio stations around the world.

Dr Faye al Jboor, Chief Editor of Jordan News Agency, opined that the current method of election is an easier way to elect the people's representatives and

is an experimental technique that proved successful in the region.

"Electronic operations of the electoral process is a groundbreaking technology in this part of the world, and Oman has proved to be successful in implementing the people's choice effectively," said Al Jboor.

Reem Al Miqbali, TV Presenter,



Abu Dhabi TV, was happy to be in Oman to cover the elections. The country, however, has been her holiday spot for many times.

"It's nice to be a part of the Omani elections, and I feel so special because Oman has proved to be successful in using new technology to elect the candidates in a rather easier way. Reaching 50

per cent of the registered voters in the half-time of the electoral process is yet another milestone," Reem, who was in Oman with her crew, said, adding, "We can learn from the Omani experience the way the election is conducted and to improve the way of reaching out to the people which is a successful initiative."



Rain in some parts of Oman as winter troughs begin

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Many wilayats in the northern governorates of Oman received rain on Sunday, not just due to the local cloud formations of the Al Hajar Mountains.

At play is an easterly trough, according to the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office.

“The trough is a common feature during winter in Oman,” said a weather expert at Oman Met Office, indicating that the current weather condition is to last for three days until Tuesday.

“Indeed, we are in the winter pattern, so it is natural to have troughs form now in the northern part of the Sultanate of Oman. So troughs will continue to pass through, but the effects of the troughs will vary from one to the other,” noted the weather forecaster.

This also indicates the diminishing of tropical systems as the winter pattern sets on. “The chance for tropical systems that could affect Dhofar is very weak now,” he said.

Jabal Shams has gone down to 6.2 degrees Celsius, recording the lowest temperature in Oman. The highest temperature recorded was 35.6 degrees Celsius at Qarn



Many wilayats in the northern governorates of Oman received rain on Sunday

Alam.

The week began with low clouds and fog formations over the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and various parts of the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman on Sunday morning.

Later, cumulus clouds expanded over the Al Hajar Mountains, and scattered rain fell over parts of the mountainous areas of the Al Dakhiliyah and Muscat governorates, with chances of them developing and extending and thunderstorms falling later.

Close to midday, cumulus clouds formed over parts of the Al

Hajar Mountains (mountainous areas of Muscat, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah, and Al Sharqiyah North), with chances of their expansion and occasional scattered thunderstorms later.

Some of the wadis recorded heavy water flow with strong currents, as seen in Qurayat and Al Rustaq. In Rustaq, motorists chose to park on the road shoulders as the rains got heavier. As horizontal visibility was low, the drivers had to use lights during the afternoon rains.

“On Sunday, places that got most of the rain are the mountainous areas of Al Batinah

South, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North,” said the weather forecaster.

On Monday, advection of medium and high clouds is forecast over most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman with chances of convective clouds development and isolated rain, occasionally thundershowers over the Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas towards the afternoon and evening. There are also chances of low clouds or fog patches at late night to early morning along parts of the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman and Arabian Sea.

Rustaq Fort damaged

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has revealed the partial collapse due to rains of one of the towers of Al Rustaq Fort, which has been undergoing restoration and maintenance work.

The ministry confirmed through its social media platform that restoration and maintenance work is continuing in accordance with established practices.

The ministry has been carrying out maintenance work since 2021, and the scope of the work includes restoring the damaged areas, such as cracks in the external and internal walls, ceilings, floors, and electrical works.

The Al Rustaq Fort maintenance project comes within the framework of the efforts made by the ministry to preserve archaeological and historical monuments in the various governorates.

Al Rustaq Fort is located on the slopes of a mountain in the Al Batinah South Governorate. The



Al Rustaq Fort is located on the slopes of a mountain in the Al Batinah South Governorate

fort consists of two main floors in addition to the ground floor, featuring residences, weapon storage rooms, reception rooms, gates, a mosque, prisons, wells, and other facilities.

Some towers were constructed in the years 1477 and 1906. The first one is the Red Tower, which stands at a height of over 16 metres and has a diameter of nine and a half metres.

The second tower is the Wind Tower, built at a height of 12 metres and has a diameter of 12 metres.

Vintage car rally ends



Passing through many heritage and tourist sites, the rally covered 1,400km in three days between October 23 and 25

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 29

The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) and the Sabq Old Cars Endurance Organisation, sponsored by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, organised a classic car rally in several governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The rally started in Al Buraimi Governorate and passed through the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North and South, Muscat, Al Batinah South and ending in Al Batinah North.

Passing through many

heritage and tourist sites, the rally covered 1,400km in three days between October 23 and 25.

With the participation of 47 classic and old cars, this rally includes vehicles over 50 years old.

Sulaiman bin Abdullah bin Ali al Rawahi, Director-General of the Oman Automobile Association, confirmed that the Association is interested in hosting these events in cooperation with its partners to promote tourism. Before arriving in the Sultanate of Oman, the rally started in Jordan and passed through Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Municipal Council okays trade in residential areas

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 29

During its seventh meeting of this year, the Muscat Governorate’s Municipal Council, under the leadership of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, ratified the Council’s recommendation on the draft decision regulating the use of residential buildings for commercial purposes.

The decision aims to address the issue of commercial activities in residential buildings, considering activities that contribute to the development of the business environment.

The decision included having approved streets in which commercial activities will be allowed to be carried out within the residential buildings and specifying the activities permitted, such as streets kindergartens and

nurseries, special centres for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (specialised centres), private schools (till first grade), Holy Quran schools, women’s beauty salons, general and speciality medicine clinics, and retail sale of readymade clothing (women’s clothing boutique).

The meeting also reviewed the recommendations of the Development Committee regarding projects in the Muscat Governorate, implemented by the Muscat Municipality, aimed at creating modern walkways that are compatible with the nature of the neighbourhoods and equipped with the necessary facilities.

The Municipal Council has been making plans to regulate the use of residential buildings for commercial purposes with the competent authorities, including on November 18 Street in the Wilayat of Bausher.



The decision aims to address commercial activities in residential buildings

New licenses granted to operate taxis from hotels, malls

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, OCT 29

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has granted licenses to a few app-based companies to manage taxi services at commercial centres, hotels, and Port Sultan Qaboos.

Marhaba and Oman Taxi will operate from hotels, Hala, Oman Taxi, Otaxi, Hala, Tasleem will operate from malls while Marhaba will operate from Port Sultan Qaboos.

The Ministry recently implemented the decision to include taxi owners at airports

to operate under two app-based operators as part of the efforts in the first phase of its initiative to improve the public transportation system.

The ministry stated the second phase will cover tourist complexes, hotels, commercial centres, and ports beginning from November 1.

The third phase will cover white and orange street taxis from January 1, which are currently mandated to operate as per a mobile-based meter called Aber. MoTCIT recently issued new rules for practicing taxi activity, based on the Land Transport Law issued by Royal Decree 10/2016, which also covers the age of taxis.

Marhaba and Oman Taxi will operate from hotels, Hala, OmanTaxi, Otaxi, Hala, Tasleem will operate from malls while Marahaba will operate from Port Sultan Qaboos

The Ministry stipulated that to practice taxi activity, a light driving license must be 3 years old from the date of issuance, and the operator’s monthly salary must not exceed RO 600 if an employee is in the private sector. The age

must not be less than 21 years and not more than 60 years. One-year extensions can be given based on a medical report from accredited health institutions indicating his ability to drive a taxi.

It is also required that the age of the taxi vehicle must not exceed 7 years from the date of the year of manufacture to carry out operations at airports, ports, and hotels while the age of the taxi vehicles should not exceed 10 years from the date of the year of manufacture to practice the activity in the public places and commercial centres. The Ministry stressed the need for everyone to reconcile their situation before September 1, 2024.



Taxi vehicles should not exceed 10 years from the date of the year of manufacture to practice the activity in the public places and commercial centres



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Gaza

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7



Women carry children as others check the damage in the aftermath of Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza. — AFP

UN chief warns Gaza growing more desperate ‘by the hour’

KATHMANDU: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday warned the situation in Gaza is declining rapidly as he repeated desperate appeals for a ceasefire to end the “nightmare” of bloodshed.

“The situation in Gaza is growing more desperate by the hour. I regret that instead of a critically needed humanitarian pause, supported by the international community, Israel has intensified its military operations,” Guterres said on a visit to Nepal’s capital Kathmandu.

“The number of civilians who have been killed and injured is totally unacceptable.”

After weeks of heavy bombardment of Gaza, which the Palestinian health ministry said has claimed over 8,000 lives, the Israeli army said “stage two” of the war started with ground incursions since late on Friday.

Panic and fear have surged inside Gaza, where over one million people are displaced, and where communications went dark for days after Israel cut internet lines, although connectivity had gradually returned early on Sunday.

“The world is witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe taking



An Emergency worker and a Palestinian man check the damage at the site of Israeli strikes on houses, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

place before our eyes,” Guterres added.

“More than two million people, with nowhere safe to go, are being denied the essentials for life — food, water, shelter and medical care — while being subjected to relentless bombardment. I urge all those with responsibility to step back from the brink.”

The UN’s top diplomat arrived in Nepal on a four-day visit following talks in Qatar.

“I reiterate my appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire,

the unconditional release of all hostages and the delivery of sustained humanitarian relief at a scale that meets the needs of the people of Gaza, he said.

“We must join forces to end this nightmare for the people of Gaza, Israel and all those affected around the world, including here in Nepal.” The UN General Assembly called by a large majority for an “immediate humanitarian truce” in Gaza.

The non-binding resolution received 120 votes in favour, 14

against and 45 abstentions from UN members.

The White House said the United States backs pauses in hostilities to allow aid to get into Gaza.

“We would support humanitarian pauses for stuff getting in, as well as for people getting out, and that includes pushing for fuel to get in and for the restoration of electrical power,” National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

— AFP

BOMBARDED GAZANS LOOK FOR LOVED ONES AS BLACKOUT EASES

GAZA: Gazans searched for loved ones and heard news of family members killed as communications gradually returned to the enclave on Sunday after a total blackout as Israel’s troops and armour pushed into the enclave.

The fighting intensified on Friday night as Israeli forces waged ground operations in Gaza in what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described as the second phase of the war.

Shaban Ahmed, a public servant who works as an engineer and has five children, described the Israeli attacks as “doomsday”.

“This morning, Sunday, I discovered that my cousin has been killed in an air strike on their house on Friday,” Ahmed said, who stayed in Gaza City despite an Israeli warning to evacuate south.

“We only knew today. Israel cut us off from the world in order to wipe us out, but we are hearing the sounds of explosions and we are proud the resistance fighters have stopped them at meters distance.”

Palestinians were struggling to find loved ones in the bloody chaos as the growing humanitarian crisis squeezed Gaza. One woman looking for one of her sons stood over rubble in Gaza City and cried



A Palestinian carries a child casualty near the site of Israeli strikes on houses, in Gaza City. — Reuters

out: “I don’t know where he is.”

In another part of Gaza, people looked for survivors after Israeli air strikes in the Al-Nasir neighbourhood. People pulled a body from the rubble as smoke billowed. A woman screamed. Others carried the injured.

Many people have been glued to rusty radios for news, which had become the only means to get information on the heaviest Israeli air strikes ever on narrow Gaza, one of the most densely populated spots in the world, with the internet and phones down. — Reuters

WHO concerned by report of evacuation warning to al-Quds hospital

GENEVA: The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Sunday that reports the Palestinian Red Crescent had received warnings from Israeli authorities to immediately evacuate al-Quds hospital in the Gaza Strip were “deeply concerning”.

“The Palestinian Red Crescent report of evacuation threats to Al-Quds hospital in Gaza is deeply concerning,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on social media platform X.

“We reiterate — it’s impossible to evacuate hospitals full of patients without endangering their lives.” Meanwhile, Pope Francis on Sunday called for a ceasefire in the Mideast war and renewed an appeal for the release of hostages.



Palestinian nurse arrives to attend to a little girl with a head wound at the Nasser hospital following Israeli bombardment of Khan Yunis. — AFP

“Let no-one abandon the possibility of stopping the weapons,” he said at his weekly blessing in St Peter’s Square.

— Reuters

SUNAK AND MACRON STRESS NEED FOR URGENT AID IN GAZA

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday underlined the importance of shipping urgent humanitarian support into war-torn Gaza, the UK government said.

They spoke by telephone following the expansion of Israel’s military operation and expressed “their shared concern at the risk of escalation in the wider region”, said a Downing Street spokesperson.

The health ministry in the Gaza Strip says more than 8,000 Palestinians have been killed — half of them children — by Israel’s relentless retaliatory



Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

bombardments.

“The leaders stressed the importance of getting urgent humanitarian support into Gaza,” said the readout of the conversation between Sunak and Macron. — AFP

Red Cross warns of ‘intolerable’ suffering in Gaza

GAZA: Israel intensified its attacks on Gaza on Sunday, calling for civilians to flee south where it vowed aid would increase, as the Red Cross warned of “intolerable” suffering.

The United Nations warned thousands more civilians could die in Gaza as Israel declared the war had entered a “second stage”, stepping up its ground operations inside the territory.

Relentless Israeli strikes on Gaza have killed more than 8,000 people, half of them children, the health ministry in the territory said.

Mirjana Spoljaric, president of the International Committee

of the Red Cross, voiced shock at the “intolerable level of human suffering”, urging all sides to de-escalate the conflict.

“This is a catastrophic failing that the world must not tolerate.”

Thousands of buildings have been flattened in the 2.4 million people city, with more than half the population displaced as Israel imposed a total siege.

Israeli fighter jets dropped leaflets over Gaza City on Saturday, warning residents that the area was now a “battlefield”, that shelters in northern Gaza were not safe, and they should “evacuate immediately”.

The army delivered similar



Palestinian women and children sit along the sea front in Deir el-Balah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

warnings earlier in its campaign, but many who fled south have returned home after failing to find refuge from Israeli bombing.

Authorities reported on Sunday a “large number” of people killed

overnight in strikes on two refugee camps in northern Gaza.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk has warned of “the possibly catastrophic consequences of large-scale ground operations in

Gaza”, saying “thousands more civilians” could die.

A UN peacekeeper was injured on Saturday by shelling in south Lebanon, the mission’s spokesman said, hours after reporting a hit at its headquarters as Israel-Lebanon border skirmishes intensify.

All communications and phone networks were cut across Gaza late on Friday, sparking alarm as the Palestinian Red Crescent warned emergency calls were not getting through.

Human Rights Watch also cautioned the blackout could provide “cover for mass atrocities”.

But on Sunday morning, global network monitor Netblocks

said connectivity in Gaza was being restored, and Palestinian telecoms provider Jawwal said communication services were gradually resuming.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has demanded a “pause of hostilities” to allow aid into Gaza, while the UN General Assembly has called for an “immediate humanitarian truce”.

Israel’s military campaign has displaced more than 1.4 million people inside Gaza, according to the UN, while supplies of food, water and power to the crowded territory have all but halted and fuel deliveries have been completely cut off. — AFP

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In every way possible, art is a symbol of hope, but also a way to comment on our present world and

Banksy, the famous artist who is only known by this pseudonym, is known for crisp and sharp drawings, most of which criticise consumerism and other topical events.

To be successful, art must say something to its audience, or show us new ways of looking at old realities. When all the sound and fury dies down, it is to art and artists that we turn to understand our complex world.

Cho said last year's deadly disaster should not stop young people from going out and enjoying themselves. — **AFP**

The writer is a foreign correspondent focused on the war in Ukraine and the global politics

A soldier in camouflage gear is seated on a military vehicle, operating a mounted machine gun. The vehicle is olive green and has a spare tire mounted on the back. The background shows a line of green trees under a clear blue sky.

On Thursday, the administration announced another \$150 million in military aid for Ukraine, a package of weapons that included additional munitions for three kinds of air defence systems — including Sidewinder

— *The New York Times*

Youth empower decision-making process

Youth are the backbone of a nation-building process, standing as the future leaders and nation's heroes. If nations have genuine confidence in youth, they will direct all their energy and talents in developing their countries and serving its citizens. That is why countries, which efficiently utilise their youth in the right direction are more developed while the ones which don't realise the real value of its youth stay behind.

In this regard, if youth are not given the opportunity to play essential role in the nation-building movement, they might turn into a burden, perhaps a lost treasure to the whole nation. Youth's contribution and support to different government authorities and policy-makers could be very fruitful. Instead, this is a very rewarding and healthy practice for governments to involve youth in the decision-making process. All that youth need is the trust and chance to prove themselves!

In a particular situation, youth decisions and experiences are more useful and practical as well as more worthy than the ample expertise of elders. Sometimes, youth are more creative and workaholic even. In some government bodies youth can be involved to help in the process of reviewing, setting up and implementing policies and procedures, especially on issues concerning youth. Consulting youth to identify the demands and issues of their concern is definitely of great support to offer them with essential needs and services.

Consequently, youth will turn out to be valuable assets to the country when they are involved and empowered. Today, most of the youth own theories and experience together, which is of high importance of course. On the local front, Omani youth are given enough opportunities, so that they can contribute in sharing their talents and expertise in building the nation. Always having youth onboard is an advantage and a rewarding experience.

Thanks to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for sparing no effort to support, involve and empower youth



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OMANI YOUTH ARE GIVEN ENOUGH OPPORTUNITIES, SO THAT THEY CAN CONTRIBUTE IN BUILDING THE NATION

in various spheres of life. The youth centres, creative and insightful initiatives and campaigns that are dedicated to youth are making a big change indeed to attract and empower youth talents. Moreover, constant support and attention are seriously accorded to youth and young talents development by different government bodies.

Omani youth always enjoyed special attention from His Majesty who believes in youth as the wealth of the nation and the real treasure that should be always honed. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik addressed in his first speech: "Youth are the wealth of a nation, its inexhaustible resource and the arms that build it. They are its present and future. We will always listen to them and sense their needs, interests and aspirations, which will definitely be accorded the attention that they deserve".

Thank you Your Majesty for the Royal confidence and strong belief in youth.

Accordingly, youth, as an important segment of society, should always be given a key role on certain occasions, like those social activities and events organised to reinvigorate the culture and traditions of their society. Through this, youth will be encouraged to bring their best and play their essential part in serving the community. Another area of youth strength, which could be highlighted and well-invested is sports activities; it is their cup of tea and they shall be leading when organising such recreational and athletics events.

On top of this, youth rights and responsibilities should be clearly identified in any field they are involved or anticipated to take part. At this point, youth will definitely get the feeling of belonging and self-importance. Hence, it will be obviously reflected in their productivity in whatever they do, so they become more devoted and loyal. Perhaps, there should be a group of youth experts to support the government and private bodies in decision-making; likewise could be consulted in certain cases. This will really urge youth to shoulder the responsibility with the authorities concerned in the country.

HARVESTING TIME



This aerial photo shows combines harvesting rice in Huaian, in China's eastern Jiangsu province, on Sunday. – AFP

Getting to global climate solidarity

The world is barrelling down a perilous path. Or, as United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres put it, "We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator." But global warming is not just another political issue: reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions is an existential imperative that must not be ignored.

The urgency of this crisis cannot be overstated. As countries confront the devastating consequences of climate change, it is crucial to act on the basis of the scientific consensus: limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels – the target set by the 2015 Paris climate agreement – requires halting new fossil-fuel investments.

But emissions are not being reduced at the speed and scale necessary to limit warming, as recent events, including the UN General Assembly and Climate Week NYC, have highlighted. Despite global leaders' frequent pledges of solidarity in support of climate action, a business-as-usual approach prevails in many countries. The United States, for example, has greenlit the Willow oil project in Alaska, while Brazil is flirting with oil exploration near the mouth of the Amazon River. The allure of short-term profits evidently outweighs policymakers' fear of irreversible planetary costs.

Ironically, many of the countries that are most vulnerable to – and least responsible for – global warming are



Saber Hossain Chowdhury,
a Bangladeshi member of Parliament, is Special Envoy to the Prime Minister for Climate Change



Hassan Damluji,
a Co-Founder of Global Nation, is a senior adviser to the World Health Organization and a visiting senior fellow at the London School of Economics

doing more than their fair share to achieve the 1.5°C target. This year, in a historic referendum, the people of Ecuador voted to halt oil drilling in Yasuni National Park, which is part of the Amazon rainforest. In 2018, Belize became the first country to ban offshore oil exploration.

This disconnect is reflected in the Global Solidarity Report 2023, published by Global Nation with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Global Citizen, Glocalities, and Goals House. Analysing the strength and resilience of the international community, the report paints a sobering picture. Most worryingly, a new scale to measure global solidarity shows that the world is in the "danger zone," scoring 39 points (with 100 representing the highest level of shared purpose). While solidarity among the global public is more widespread than many assume, the institutional response has so far failed to match the gravity of the moment.

Consider the United Kingdom. Approximately 46 per cent of UK respondents agreed that the country "should leave oil and gas reserves in the ground," while only 17 per cent disagreed. Yet the UK government recently approved the exploration of a massive new oilfield in the North Sea. Such a counterproductive decision so soon after the UK

rallied world leaders behind the Glasgow Climate Pact at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) underscores the ever-growing trust deficit between governments and their own citizens, as well as among countries.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh, despite accounting for only 0.46 per cent of current global emissions, has taken significant steps to move away from fossil fuels. The government decided to scrap plans for ten coal-fired power plants that had attracted \$12 billion in foreign investment. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has emerged as a beacon of inspiration, urging her citizens to become leaders in and champions of global climate action, rather than passive victims of the crisis.

Moreover, most of the nine countries currently considered "almost sufficient" in meeting

the 1.5°C target (according to the Climate Action Tracker) are in the developing world. Costa Rica, which produces most of its electricity from renewable sources, falls into this category. Innovative policies and financing models have enabled the government to protect the country's forests and biodiversity.

Similarly, The Gambia has defied the odds in reaching "almost sufficient" status. For a short period in 2021, it was the only country compliant with the Paris climate agreement. Despite facing droughts and food insecurity in recent years, the Gambian government has set out an ambitious strategy to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, by creating climate-resilient food systems, preserving biodiversity, investing in human capital, shifting to a low-emissions

economy, and managing its coastal zones.

Sticking to the targets set out in the Paris climate agreement is not a far-fetched dream; as the example of Bangladesh and other developing countries shows, it demands leadership and moral investment. Notably, almost two-thirds of respondents surveyed in the Global Solidarity Report concur that international bodies should have the authority to enforce agreements related to certain pressing challenges, including environmental pollution.

The trust gap is the decisive obstacle to global solidarity. When pledges are repeatedly not honoured, suspicion grows, undermining the effectiveness of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. There is no solidarity without trust, and no multilateralism without solidarity.

Climate change is an emergency that requires an aggressive response. The international community must act quickly to keep fossil fuels in the ground, incentivise net-zero emissions, foster innovation, and achieve a just transition. But doing so requires embracing our collective moral responsibility, rather than allowing the temptation of political and financial gain to lead us into the abyss.

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The urgency of this crisis cannot be overstated.

sport

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Sayyid Munthir bin Saif al Busaidy (L) presented a souvenir to Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi (R).



Sayyid Munthir bin Saif al Busaidy (L), Dr. Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi (R)



The horse 'Fatenah' crossed finish line

Royal Cavalry wins Bordeaux-Le Puscet race

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

The horse 'Fatenah' owned by Royal Cavalry snatched the first place in the Eighth-round competition, which was called Prix Jean Laborde. The race was allocated for Purebred Arabian Horses over a distance of 1,400 metres, at Bordeaux-Le Puscet track in

France on Sunday. 'Fatenah' led by the jockey Michael Forrest and the supervision by Senchaz. The second place was achieved by 'Adelbar' owned by Jules Aoki, led by the jockey Thomas Demolet and supervision by Valentin Segui. The third place claimed by 'Madarasah' owned by Khalifa Rabeh al Shammari, led by the jockey Jean Bernard and under supervision of Golemen.

On the other hand, Sayyid Munthir bin Saif bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation, received Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman, at the headquarters of the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation on Sunday. During the meeting, they exchanged

about supporting in equestrian sports in general, which contributes to develop the equestrian race locally and internationally. They activated Oman, Bahrain partnerships in various equestrian competitions and provide the best services to advance equestrian sports. Where also discussed future plans for developing equestrian sports in order to serve this ancient sport, advance it, and place it in

proper position. The two sides reviewed aspects of joint cooperation in all equestrian sports, whether endurance, show jumping, tent pegging, horse literature, and horse beauty. In conclusion, Sayyid Munthir bin Saif al Busaidy presented a souvenir to Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi for his interest and support the equestrian sports.



Archive photo, Omani player of 2019 IODA

Optimist team to take part in 2023 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian

MUSCAT: Nine talented young sailors from Oman Sail's Optimist team will travel to Abu Dhabi to represent Oman at the 2023 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship. Racing begins on October 31, through until the final day on November 4, and brings together 161 young sailors from 28 nations for the event, which is also part of the 50th anniversary celebrations for the Optimist class. Representing Oman will be Saoud al Shaqsi, Tameem al Balushi, Firas al Nabhani, Hasan al Wahaibi and Abdulrahman al Hadi. Harib al Busaidy and Habib al Husaini will compete in the Under-12 category, and Hadeel al Mushaifri and Tarteel al Hasani will race in the Optimist Girls competition. The team will be led by Mohsin al Busaidy and coached by Sultan al Zadjali, and assistants Suhail al Mayahi and Ibrahim al Fedhaili. Huda al Ghailani will travel with the team to support in a team management role. Additionally, Abdulaziz bin Salim al Shidi has been nominated by the Organising Committee to act as a race officer for the event, with Ali bin Salim al Harbi and Aabid bin Yaqoob al Balushi assist-



Optimist team in the MRW prizegivin 2023

ing as mark layers during racing. Mohsin al Busaidy, Team Leader and Head of Performance at Oman Sail, said, "This is an important step in the development of our sailing team. The 2023 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship offers a chance for our young sailors to test themselves against their peers from across the continent and put into practice the techniques we have been prioritising in training. We expect a strong fleet and a high level of competition on the water, but we are confident of performing well." Sultan al Zadjali, Head Coach of the Optimist team, added, "Participation in recent regattas, including

Musannah Race Week, have helped prepare the team for higher levels of competition and given them vital exposure to competitive environments. Representing the nation is always a proud moment for any sailor and we have all been working hard to give the team the best possible chance to sail well and, hopefully, earn honours for Oman Sail and for our nation." The 2023 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship is organised by the Abu Dhabi Marine Sports Club and the UAE Sailing & Rowing Federation under the authority of the International Optimist Dinghy Association (IODA).

Messi eyes an eighth Ballon d’Or



Lionel Messi looks on.
— Reuters

PARIS: Lionel Messi is the favourite to win the eighth Ballon d’Or of his remarkable career when this year’s ceremony to crown the planet’s best footballer takes place in Paris on Monday, while Spain’s World Cup-winning star Aitana Bonmati is tipped to take the women’s prize.

The prestigious award has been dominated over the last 15 years by Messi and his old adversary Cristiano Ronaldo, who have won it 12 times between them.

Only two other players have won the Ballon d’Or since Ronaldo claimed his first in 2008 -- Luka Modric won it in 2018 and Karim Benzema was crowned last year following a brilliant season with Real Madrid.

Messi is set to benefit from a recent change which means the award is now based on a player’s record over the last season, rather than over the course of the calendar year.

Last season saw Messi lead Argentina to glory at the World Cup in Qatar, where he scored seven times and was named the tournament’s best player.

It was the crowning moment of his astonishing career, and is likely to mean Messi sees off the considerable competition elsewhere among the 30 nominees.

Most notably, there are seven members of the Manchester City team that won the English Premier League, FA Cup and UEFA Champions League under Pep Guardiola.

The obvious candidate among them is Erling Haaland, who scored 52 goals in 53 games and has already won the UEFA Player of the Year award for last season.

“I always said that the Ballon d’Or should be in two sections, one for Messi, and after that look for the other one,” Guardiola said recently.

“Haaland should win. We won the treble and he scored, I don’t know, 50 million goals.

“But of course if you tell me the worst season of Messi, it would be the best season for the rest of the players.

“Both deserve it, so what can I say? Selfishly I would say I want it to be Erling because he helped us to achieve what we achieved. I would love it.”

- The case for Mbappe? -

Messi’s season at club level with Paris Saint-Germain was underwhelming, even if he won Ligue 1 alongside Kylian Mbappe and Neymar.

He scored 21 goals for the French club, but was clearly never happy in Paris and was even jeered by his own supporters at times, before moving to Inter Miami in Major League Soccer earlier this year.

There is at least a case to say this should be Mbappe’s time.

He was clearly PSG’s most important player last season, scoring 41 goals, and was also the World Cup’s top scorer with eight goals after

his incredible hat-trick in that epic final.

The French lobby is strong in favour of Mbappe, 24, winning a prize organised in France and handed over in Paris.

As an example, the manager of leading French club Lens, Franck Haise, last week did not hesitate when asked who he would vote for.

“Another Frenchman, Kylian Mbappe,” he said. “Because he had such a complete season and he is an exceptional player. Even if I think it will be won by a player who won the World Cup, which I would not find jarring.”

Alas, the prize is voted for by a jury of one journalist per country from the top 100 nations in Fifa’s ranking.

Alba Redondo, Salma Paralluelo and full-back Olga Carmona, who scored the winner in the final, are all shortlisted, but Bonmati appears untouchable.

The 25-year-old Barcelona midfielder lit up the tournament with her talent having already starred for her club as they won the Champions League.

So impressive has she been that Guardiola has likened her to another Barcelona great, Andres Iniesta.

Ordinarily, the likes of World Cup top scorer Hinata Miyazawa of Japan, or Australia’s Sam Kerr, would be credible contenders, but Bonmati’s success appears nailed on. — AFP

Seeb remain on top, Suhar, Ibri win

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

League leader, Seeb took the advantage of Al Nahdha’s draw against Al Rustaq in the ninth week of Omantel league to extend their strength in the top of league’s outstanding table.

Seeb thrashed Bahla 3-0, while Al Nahdha held to a 1-1 draw against Al Rustaq. Seeb’s crucial win over Bahla 3-0 on Saturday, Muscat-based team credit to 23 points while the seventh loss increased Bahla’s struggling in the bottom at 12th position with four points only.

Abdulaziz al Maqbali put Seeb ahead by header after perfect cross ball from Ali al Maqbali in the 30th minute. Then, Omar al Fazari doubled Seeb’s lead after he entered the box and shot a long ball across the goalie in the 45th minute. Omar al Fazari confirmed Seeb’s triumph as he netted the third goal in the 80th minute.

Al Rustaq hold the current runners up Al Nahdha to a 1-1 draw at Al Rustaq Sports



Seeb club Vs Bahla club at Sultan Qaboos sport complex

Complex. The hosts registered the lead by a goal through Kabieji from penalty shot out while Hamood al Saadi equalised in the 45th minute. The draw kept Al Buraimi representative team in the second place with

19 points while Al Rustaq positioned in the ninth position with eight points.

Suhar jumped to be inch closer to the top two teams in the league order as they recorded a thrilling 2-1 win over Al Shabab

at Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The win took northern Batinah team to the 18th points in the third place while Al Shabab remained at their previous nine points in the ninth place. Frank William registered the winner for Suhar in style in the dying minutes while the opening goal for visitors scored by Danieal Etor and Al Shahab’s equaliser netted by Emerson in style.

Ibri continued showing their top performance as they outclassed Sur 1-0 in a thrilling encounter. At Ibri Sports Complex, Junior delivered a crucial victory for his team as he netted the winner for his team. The victory took Ibri to 12 points in the fifth place while Sur stayed in the following position with ten points.

The league will stop for almost one month period as the HM Cup matches will be held in the coming few days and the national team will begin their preparations for the joint qualifiers of Fifa World Cup and AFC Asian Cup Championship in November.

Oman cricket target T20 World Cup spot

MUSCAT: The Oman National Cricket team are setting their sights on securing a spot in the ICC T20 World Cup for the third time. They are vying for one of two coveted positions in the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier Final 2023 in Nepal from October 30 to November 5. Oman enter the eight-nation tournament with high morale, having recently won a five-match T20 series 4-1 against Afghanistan A in Muscat. Bolstered by the resounding series victory against a formidable opponent, Duleep Mendis, the national team’s head coach, expresses optimism about leading the team to their third T20 World Cup appearance.

“We had a very successful series against Afghanistan A, with our players delivering strong all-around performances against a formidable adversary. In Nepal, we anticipate a tough challenge and are eagerly looking forward to a strong performance, aiming to qualify for the 2024 T20 World Cup for the third time.” “Our players have prior experience playing in Nepal, and although the conditions will be cooler, we are heading to Kathmandu couple of days earlier to acclimatise. We experimented with different combinations and fine-tuned our winning formula against Afghanistan A. We are hopeful of performing well and securing a spot in the 2024 T20 World Cup.”

Oman are in excellent form, having also clinched the Gulf Cricket T20I Tournament last month by defeating the UAE in the final.

For head coach Mendis, if Oman make it to the T20 World Cup 2024, it would be the third time he has led the Men in Red to the continental showpiece, having secured qualification in 2016 and 2021.

The ICC Men’s T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier Final 2023 will feature hosts Nepal, along with Bahrain, Hong Kong China, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Singapore, and the UAE. The eight teams are divided into two groups of four for the Asia Qualifier Final.

The top two teams from each group will secure a place in the high stakes semi-finals on November 3, with the winning teams earning a ticket to the USA and West Indies for the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2024. These two qualifiers will meet in a final on November 5 for the chance to win the tournament. Group A includes Oman, hosts Nepal, Singapore, and Malaysia, while Group B consists of the UAE, Bahrain, Hong Kong, and Kuwait.

Experienced Zeeshan Maqsood, who led Oman during their

previous ICC T20 World Cup appearance in 2021, will captain the squad, with Aqib Ilyas serving as the vice-captain.

The 15-member squad comprises two new faces, Pratik Athawale and Siddharth Bukkapatnam, while notable omission is opening batter Jatinder Singh, sidelined due to a calf injury.

Athawale is a wicketkeeper-batter who performed well in the recently concluded Oman D20 Championship, and Bukkapatnam is an off-spinner. Speaking ahead of the team’s departure to Nepal on Thursday, skipper Maqsood said, “We have been consistent in T20s since our T20 World Cup debut in 2016. We also competed and co-hosted the 2021 World Cup with the UAE. We missed out in the last edition in 2022, and now we are in the Asia Qualifier final. We are confident about making it to the 2024 World Cup.”

Maqsood further noted, “Our preparation for the Asia Qualifier final has been perfect. We’ve been focusing on T20 cricket for the past 7-8 weeks, starting with our domestic T20 league and then winning the inaugural Gulf T20I Championship 2023 in Qatar. We had a successful outing against Afghanistan A, which featured six to seven players from their national side.”

The long-serving skipper said, “Qualifying for the 2024 T20 World Cup will be a dream come true. We’ve also participated in the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifiers 2023 in Zimbabwe in June-July and made it to the Super Six round. I thank the Oman Cricket board, its chairman H E Pankaj Khimji, and the support staff for their strong support.”

Nepal enters the Asia Qualifier Final as the highest-ranked team, holding the 16th place in the ICC Men’s T20I Rankings. However, the competition is intense, with the UAE (17), Oman (20), Hong Kong, China (21), Malaysia (25), Kuwait (27), Bahrain (28), and Singapore (36) all closely ranked.

T20WC format and qualification:

A total of 20 teams will compete for the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2024, with the top two teams at the Asia Qualifier Final in Nepal securing their spots. The United States and West Indies will participate as hosts. Australia, England, India, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, and Sri Lanka are already part of the tournament due to their top-eight finish in the 2022 edition. Bangladesh and Afghanistan qualified based on their position in the ICC Men’s T20I Team Rankings at the end of the previous T20 World Cup.



Oman National Cricket team



Mohammed Shami celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Moeen Ali – Reuters

SHAMI STARS AS INDIA HAMMER WOEFUL ENGLAND



Mohammed Shami celebrates with Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja after taking the wicket of Adil Rashid. – Reuters

LUCKNOW India: Mohammed Shami led an inspired bowling display as India hammered England by 100 runs on Sunday to stay unbeaten in the World Cup and all but push the defending champions out of the semi-final race.

Chasing a tricky 230 for victory in Lucknow, England collapsed to 129 all out in 34.5 overs to suffer their fifth defeat in six matches and leave their title defence at the mercy of a mathematical miracle.

The hosts have six wins in as many games and are virtually assured of a semi-final place.

Skipper Rohit Sharma led the charge with 87 as India posted 229-9, a total that looked below par but proved enough for a struggling England side on a sluggish pitch.

Shami returned figures of 4-22 while fellow quick Jasprit Bumrah took three wickets to wrap up the match as fireworks lit up the sky.

England had a disastrous start and fell to 52-5 after Bumrah took wickets on successive ball to be on a hat-trick and Shami joined forces to grab two more.

Bumrah sent back Dawid Malan, for 16, and Joe Root, for nought, but Jonny Bairstow played out the hat-trick ball.

England soon lost Ben Stokes, bowled by Shami, to raise India's hopes of defending the total he then brought the house down when he bowled Bairstow for 14 as 46,000 fans, largely all Indian in blue jerseys, roared.

Wickets kept tumbling and skipper Jos Buttler was bowled by Kuldeep for 10, and Shami sent

Moeen Ali packing for 15 and the end was near.

Earlier England left-arm quick David Willey returned figures of 3-45, including the prized wicket of Virat Kohli for a nine-ball duck, after they elected to bowl.

The unbeaten hosts lost three early wickets, including two to Chris Woakes, to slip to 40-3 before Rohit steadied the innings and built a 91-run stand with KL Rahul, who made 39.

Rohit survived a reprieve on 33 when he was given out lbw but the opener reviewed the decision in his favour with tracking showing the ball would have missed the leg stump.

Rohit reached his second fifty of the tournament — he also hit a century against Afghanistan — to the noisy delight of the nearly-packed 50,000-seater stadium.

The captain and Rahul, who was returning to his IPL home ground where he suffered a serious injury earlier this year, kept the score ticking before Willey broke the stand with Rahul's wicket.

Rohit kept up the fight but fell to leg-spinner Adil Rashid after he holed out to deep mid-wicket where Liam Livingstone took a low catch.

Kohli, who endured his 16th duck in ODIs, remains one century away from equalling all-time great Sachin Tendulkar's record of 49 hundreds in the 50-over format.

Suryakumar Yadav made a fighting 49 before becoming Willey's third wicket but the tail played out the full 50 overs.

— AFP



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Annual household food consumption at RO 2.7 billion



The activities of the Food Security Laboratory 2023 began on Sunday. – ONA

MUSCAT: A ceremony was held here on Sunday to launch the activities of the Food Security Laboratory 2023. It was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

The lab was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the National Programme for Investment and Export Development 'Nazdaher' and the National Employment Programme (NEP).

As part of the laboratory, Yousef Mohammed al Riyami, Director General of National Statistics, gave a visual presentation in which he said that food sector indicators in the Sultanate of Oman show that the total annual household food consumption stood at RO 2.7 billion, of which 25 per cent is spent on food. He added that the food processing

sector supplies the gross domestic product (GDP) with about RO 1.2 billion, the equivalent of 4.5 per cent of the sector's volume.

Al Riyami pointed out that the value of total imports of 2022 stood at RO 14.8 billion, of which imports of food commodities constituted 14.8 per cent, while exports of food commodities stood at RO 1 billion.

Another visual display was presented by Dr Masoud Sulaiman al Azri, Director General of Planning at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. He said that the food security lab complements the ministry's efforts to develop the food security sector in Oman.

Earlier, the ministry organised the 2021 edition of the food security lab, as well as the food security problem shooting clinics in 2022 and the National Symposium on Food Security, which was held in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, in the same year. — ONA

Oman overcomes challenges for sustainable ESG finance

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 29

In a bid to shape a brighter future for Islamic finance and achieve its net-zero goals by 2050, the Sultanate of Oman is making significant strides in embracing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) and Sustainable and Responsible Investment (SRI) finance.

During the IFN Oman Forum 2023, ESG and SRI finance emerged as a prominent theme, highlighting the potential for these practices to transform Oman's financial landscape. As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, Oman has committed to combatting climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

To fulfil this commitment, the country's Capital Market Authority (CMA) has drafted a regulatory framework for ESG, sustainable bonds, and Sukuk, awaiting feedback from relevant ministries.

The proposed framework aims to support blue financing, with a focus on developing Oman's aquaculture industry, as well as leveraging the potential of Waqf, particularly Sukuk Waqf.

The CMA aims to introduce this framework before the year-end, demonstrating Oman's commitment towards sustainable finance. While regulations play a crucial role, experts have identified two major hurdles — cost and time-to-market. Oman's price-sensitive market poses a challenge for implementing green or energy projects.



The Capital Market Authority headquarters is seen in this illustration photo.

Talha Ahmed Khan, the country manager and head of the global investment unit at Pak Oman Investment Company, highlighted the capital cost as a major hurdle.

However, he emphasised the need for a longer-term mindset, where the benefits and returns on these investments would outweigh the initial expenditure. In the long run, the projected internal return rate of 21 per cent after 15 years showcases the potential for sustainable projects to become financially viable.

Time efficiency also remains a concern. Issuing conventional financial products typically takes between two to three months, assuming a ready template is available. However, introducing new issuances could extend the timeline to three to six months. Green financing initiatives, aimed

at promoting sustainable projects, often face an additional six-month delay.

These challenges underscore the need for streamlined processes and frameworks to accelerate the adoption of ESG finance in Oman. Despite the hurdles, experts remain optimistic about the potential impact of Islamic ESG financing on Oman's development.

Mohamad Noranuar Sajari, Head of Shariah Structuring at Bank Nizwa, stressed that although the journey ahead may be long, it is already in motion.

He acknowledges that substantial results may take up to a decade to materialise, but the path towards sustainability has been set. Oman's commitment to ESG finance is a testament to its determination to create a sustainable and prosperous future.

By embracing ESG finance,

Oman aims to align its financial sector with international sustainability standards and attract socially responsible investors.

The introduction of a robust regulatory framework will provide a solid foundation for sustainable finance activities and foster confidence among investors and market participants.

This proactive approach towards ESG finance places Oman on the global map of sustainable development. The country has made significant strides in its journey towards a more sustainable and responsible financial sector. While challenges related to cost and time-to-market persist, the commitment to long-term benefits and the establishment of a comprehensive regulatory framework signal Oman's dedication to overcoming these obstacles.

Oman, Saudi delegations review investment opportunities

RIYADH: Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and his delegation met here on Sunday with Nabil Khojah, Secretary General of Economic Cities and Special Zones Authority of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The meeting comes within the framework of OPAZ delegation's visit to Saudi Arabia.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed means of enhancing cooperation between economic zones and free zones of the two countries. They also highlighted prominent investment opportunities in target sectors, as well as the incentives



Oman and Saudi delegations held talks on investments on Sunday. - ONA

that are proposed for the Integrated Economic Zone in Al Dhahirah.

The two sides also reviewed investment opportunities that are available in the fields of renewables, petrochemicals, fish-

eries, pharmaceuticals, medical supplies and services in the oil and gas sector.

The meeting was attended by HH Sayyid Faisal Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia, and several officials from both sides.

During a visit to Oman last year, Saudi Minister of Commerce, Dr Majid Abdullah al Qasabi, expressed that the establishment of the zone will inevitably boost economic and trade ties between the two nations.

The volume of trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia reached RO 2.7 billion in 2022, representing an unprecedented 123 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

The Omani team will also meet with a number of investors and companies interested in expanding their presence in Oman's economic zones.

INVITATION TO TENDER		SOHAR ALUMINIUM
Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:		
Tender No. : 2023-ENG-SOW-0053		
Tender Title : Interlock paving and Lining at SAMY		
Scope : Sohar Aluminium Co. LLC (SA) manufactures and produces liquid and solid metals. SA requires contractors for interlock paving, lining and other civil works at SA metal yard (SAMY). Detailed scope of work to be shared to contractors expressing their interest to participate in this tender.		
Document Issue Date	: 8 November 2023	Last Date For Applying
Tender No. : 2023-ENG-SOW-0047		
Tender Title : Preheat Screw Rotor & Trough Replacement		
Scope : Paste Plant Pre-heater installed in SA facility requires replacement of the specialised Screws and Trough. Contractor shall complete all engineering, design, documentation, procurement, fabrication, supply, construction, installation, shop testing, pre-operational testing, on-site system testing, commissioning and performance testing as per the scope requirement. Detailed scope of work to be shared to contractors expressing their interest to participate in this tender.		
Document Issue Date	: 8 November 2023	Last Date For Applying
Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com For list of active tenders visit: https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing		

National Finance’s corporate fixed deposits: A compelling business investment

MUSCAT: Keeping pace with the dynamic currents of the financial sector, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, is focused on offering corporates with comprehensive financial instruments that can help propel growth.

The company’s Corporate Fixed Deposits offering is one such appealing investment opportunity for businesses that promises high returns and flexible tenures.

In a time of market fluctuations, National Finance’s Corporate Fixed Deposits are a safe and rewarding investment opportunity designed to cater to the financial needs of businesses of all sizes.

The company offers a lucrative proposition for businesses who prioritise guaranteed returns, with attractive interest rates.

According to its latest financial statements as of June 30, 2023, National Finance stands out with an impressive regulatory capital of RO 100.59 million and asset under management portfolio encompassing RO 494.88 million, setting a benchmark among Finance and Leasing Companies (FLCs). As the leading finance company with a market share of 46%, National Finance unequivocally establishes itself as a paragon of credibility and dependability among financial service providers.

“Corporate Fixed Deposits have demonstrated their value by offering stability and reliability to businesses seeking consistent and predictable returns, all while preserving their capital and liquidity,” Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, commented on



Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance

the offering.

He added, “We welcome businesses to invest their corporate funds with National Finance as our Corporate Fixed Deposits offer outstanding value and allow for safe investment portfolio diversification.

Corporates have the option to choose a minimum tenure starting at just 3 months, to a maximum of 60 months, enabling them to tailor their investments to specific financial objectives — whether for short-term liquidity or long-term financial planning

At National Finance we understand that businesses require financial solutions that offer the perfect blend of flexibility, profitability, and these are all guaranteed with this proposition.”

A trusted partner for growth, National Finance’s Corporate

Fixed Deposits offer a level of flexibility that makes this proposition all the more attractive to business entities.

Corporates have the option to choose a minimum tenure starting at just 3 months, to a maximum of 60 months, enabling them to tailor their investments to specific financial objectives — whether for short-term liquidity or long-term financial planning.

MULTIPLE PAYOUT

Customers can also choose from multiple payout frequencies, including on maturity, quarterly, semi-annually, annually, or at maturity.

The Corporate Fixed Deposits can be initiated with just RO 5,000 and are accessible to various types of organisations, including SAOG, SAOC, LLC, Partnership, Government entities, Pension

Funds, and Trusts.

In addition, the multifaceted nature of the deposits extends beyond investments; they can also serve as valuable collateral, thereby boosting financial security.

A hassle-free application process is assured as part of National Finance’s customer services ethos, and underscores the company’s commitment to making financing accessible to all.

Owing to the company’s strong market reputation as the leading finance company in the country, and transparent processes, National Finance’s Corporate Fixed Deposits make for safe investments.

National Finance remains committed to empowering corporate entities, large and small, to not only enhance and expand their savings but also to thrive within the dynamic and ever-evolving business realm.

Kia K5 now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Own a Kia K5 and get service up to 5 years / 50,000 kms (Whichever is earlier), 1 year comprehensive insurance and attractive instalments. (Conditions apply. Please visit any Kia showroom for details).

The K5 with its attractive style and impressive design highlights the K5’s angular design language and the brand’s new chapter in boldness and passion.

Adding to this is the K5’s low-slung and fastback silhouette from the side, highlighted by a chrome garnish that spans the roofline and wraps around the rear glass.

The K5 has a number of exterior design features that include LED headlamps, LED daytime running lights, LED front fog lamps, LED rear fog lamps, LED rear combination lamps, 18” alloy wheels, solar glass, panoramic sunroof and dual LED headlamps.

Powering the K5 is a powerful 2.5L GDI engine that offers 191 HP and 25.1 KG.M. torque. This is paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission.

The 2.0L K5 is paired to a 6-speed automatic transmission offering 150 HP and 19.6 KG.M. torque.

In the K5 a range of features enhance every experience.



They include drive mode select, auto cruise control, power driver seat, auto AC, power passenger seat, navigation with 10.25” display, premium music system, red leather seats, ventilated front seats, paddle shifter, aluminium pedals, mood lamp, android auto & car play and more.

The K5’s Interior is enhanced with a newly designed infotainment display that seamlessly stretches into the instrument panel, creating a futuristic, three-dimensional layout and driver-centric space.

Creating an inviting and comfortable interior are a range of features that include tinted glass, tilt & telescopic steering, radio with USB, audio remote control, driver’s seat height adjuster, rear AC vents, leather AT knob and

more. For making every drive a delight, the K5 is equipped with a range of advanced safety features.

The features include driver and front passenger airbags, side and curtain airbags, electro chromic inside mirror, blind spot collision warning (BCW), blind spot view monitor (BVM), around view monitor (AVM), anti-lock braking system (ABS), electronic stability programme (ESP), tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS), front and rear parking assist system and electric parking brake (EPB) with auto hold and more.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Genetco launches new line up for TCL air conditioners in Oman

MUSCAT: Recently, Genetco launches new line up for TCL commercial air conditioners in the Sultanate of Oman. During the event, Dr Muthanna al Durrah, (Genetco Acting CEO & Advisor to the Board of Directors) welcomed the audience including ministries personnel, corporate representatives, consultants and contractors. Murthadha Hassan Ali, Chairman- Genetco gave an introduction of Genetco.

The TCL team, headed by Frankie Liang, Sales Director of TCL HVAC, gave a very professional presentation of the various commercial AC products, including light commercial air conditioner and wide range of VRF lineup. Its VRF is ranging from 8kw -28kw for mini VRF, 8HP to 36HP for modular VRF, and 38HP to 45HP for individual type VR, with full range of indoor units, can cater different type of demands.

TCL Technology & TCL industry are Fortune 500 companies with revenues of \$39.8 billion (2022). TCL commercial air conditioner intelligent manufacturing industrial park integrates the new generation of information technology, Internet of things, big data, cloud computing, etc.

As a big country brand, TCL air conditioner takes ‘let more people enjoy healthy air easily’ as its mission. TCL air conditioning commercial business centre focuses on



Guests and attendees are pictured during the event.

building smart and healthy living environment and smart energy-saving building environment, creating healthy and comfortable quality life for users.

In terms of creating intelligent and healthy living environment, to meet the different needs of users, small multi-connection products can be customised, and realise the functions of home appliances interconnection, indoor units ultra-quiet, fresh air system. TCL addresses the various needs for an intelligent and healthy living environment.

General Electric & Trading Company LLC (Genetco) with over 50 years’ experience in Oman market, is committed to delivering quality products and

services. Genetco has gained significant reputation and market share in electronics & home appliances, office automation, facility management services & engineering services (MEP, HVAC, Commercial Kitchen & Laundry, Cold Chain Division) and provide highest quality throughout all business activities and delivering the products and services in time.

It maintains highest customer service and satisfaction, and continuous improvement of its quality management system.

Genetco’s quality management system is ISO 9001:2015 certified and Occupational Health & Safety Management System ISO 45001:2018 by TUV SUD Management Service.

Experience JAC S3’s high-end features at friendly price point

MUSCAT: In Oman’s dynamic automobile sector, few brands have managed to establish a reputation as formidable as JAC Motors. With a legacy rooted in innovation, quality, and affordability, JAC Motors has emerged as a trusted choice for many Omani families and professionals.

Among its diverse range of vehicles, the JAC S3 compact SUV stands out, reflecting the brand’s commitment to delivering value-packed offerings.

Power and performance: 1.6L engine VVT Under the hood of the JAC S3 lies its beating heart — a robust 1.6L engine with VVT. This engine

is not just about raw power; it is about delivering a smooth, responsive, and fuel-efficient driving experience.

Whether you’re navigating the bustling streets of Muscat or exploring the serene landscapes of Salalah, the JAC S3 ensures a drive that’s both thrilling and efficient.

Elevate your journeys: Power sunroof The power sunroof is more than just a feature; it is a gateway to the world outside.

As you drive through the picturesque landscapes of Oman, the sunroof offers an immersive experience, allowing you to feel the breeze, soak in the sun, and gaze at

the starlit skies during nocturnal adventures.

Adventure ready: Roof rack Oman is a land of diverse terrains and endless adventures. Whether you are heading to the majestic dunes of the Rimal Al Sharqiya or the rugged mountains of Jabal Shams, the JAC S3’s roof rack ensures you can carry all your essentials with ease. It is not just about utility; it’s about making every journey memorable.

Seamless access: Smart key In today’s fast-paced world, convenience is paramount. The smart key system of the JAC S3 epitomises this philosophy. With it, accessing your vehicle becomes

an effortless affair, eliminating the need to fumble with keys, especially during those busy mornings.

Drive with comfort: Electric mirror adjust Driving is not just about reaching a destination; it is about the journey. The electric mirror adjust feature ensures that you have optimal visibility at all times, adjusting to different driving conditions and ensuring safety.

Control at your fingertips: Multifunction steering wheel Modern drivers demand control and convenience. The multifunction steering wheel of the JAC S3 offers just that.





Jatropha crop key to biofuel production in Oman: SQU study

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, OCT 29

A study undertaken by scientists of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has concluded that the oil-rich seed of the Jatropha plant, if farmed extensively in the Sultanate of Oman, can support the large-scale production of low-carbon biofuels.

An overview of the feasibility of Jatropha cultivation in Oman, as a source of feedstock for biofuels production and eventual processing into Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) for the aviation sector, was presented recently at a forum hosted by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in Muscat.

"The Jatropha Curcas is an excellent biofuel crop that has many other advantages over existing (food) crops," according to Dr Ahmed al Busaidy of SQU's College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences.

"The hardy Jatropha is resistant to drought and pests, and produces seeds containing up to 40 per cent oil. When the seeds are crushed and processed, the resulting oil can be used in a



The seeds of the Jatropha plant can be a rich source of oil for large-scale biofuel production.

standard diesel engine, while the residue can also be processed into biomass to power electricity plants."

Speaking at the 'Sustainable Aviation Fuel' forum, Dr Al Busaidy, who led the study on the viability of the crop's cultivation in Oman, said the plant can yield as much as 2,000 barrels of oil per square mile of farmed land.

In addition, Jatropha farming can earn carbon credits because of the plant's ability to absorb large amounts of planet-warming CO2

from the atmosphere.

According to the scientist, environmental and soil conditions are optimal for large-scale Jatropha farming in Oman.

Transplanted during the cool winter months, the climate-resilient crop can survive the hot and arid conditions of summer. Its minimal water needs can be met from treated effluent supplied by state-owned Nama Water, he said.

In his address, the scientist also underlined the importance of Jatropha as a sustainable

alternative to food-based resources, notably corn, oilseeds like canola and sunflower, and sugarcane, which are currently being used in some parts of the world for biofuel production.

This diversion of food resources for biofuels has the potential to impact global food supply and exacerbate hunger, he warned.

Significantly, the cultivation of Jatropha in Oman was successfully trialled by SQU students with seeds procured from India, said Dr Al Busaidy.

The plants grew well and yielded healthy seeds, proving the overall suitability of Omani conditions for the large-scale cultivation of the crop in Oman.

Oman has ambitions to catalyse the growth of a biofuels industry in line with country's broader transition to a low-carbon energy future.

Besides serving as an alternative to fossil fuels in transportation and rural power generation, biofuels can also be upgraded into green aviation fuels to support the decarbonisation of Oman's aviation sector – a move being keen explored by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Oman exports over 230 million oil barrels



Employees are seen at an oil processing plant in Oman

MUSCAT: The total amount of the Sultanate of Oman's oil exports until the end of September 2023 reached to about 230.292 million barrels, calculating the average price at \$79.9/barrel. Oil exports constituted 80.2 per cent of the total oil production with 287.037 million barrels.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the total production of crude oil decreased by 3.3 per cent to reach 223.555 million barrels, while the total production of oil condensates increased by 8.1 per cent, recording 63.482 million barrels.

The average daily oil production reached 1,051,400 barrels until end of September 2023.

China topped the countries importing oil from the Sultanate of Oman, with total exports reaching 210.172 million barrels, followed by Japan with 7.384 million barrels,

then the Republic of Korea with 2.851 million barrels, and India with 2.716 million barrels. Exports to other countries amounted to 7.168 million barrels.

On the other hand, the total domestic production and import of natural gas amounted to 40.589 billion cubic metres as of end September, an increase of 3.6 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, with 39.174 billion cubic metres.

Statistics showed that industrial projects accounted for 58.5 per cent of natural gas uses in Oman until end of September, amounting to about 23.777 billion cubic metres.

The total use of natural gas for: oil fields amounted to 10.089 billion cubic metres, power generation stations amounted to 6.526 billion cubic metres, and industrial areas reached 197.100 million cubic metres. — **ONA**

IMF mission's visit begins on Wednesday

MUSCAT: The visit of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Article IV consultation is set to take place on November 1-15, 2023, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman through the Central Bank of Oman and the Ministry of Finance.

These meetings are a continuation of the IMF team's preparatory visit that was held on June 6-14, 2023.

This visit aims to discuss the latest macroeconomic developments and prospects, in addition to a number of topics related to fiscal and monetary policies, and government measures taken to mitigate the economic and financial repercussions at the regional and global levels.

Furthermore, the visit focuses on monitoring potential risks that could threaten financial stability.

During this visit, the Fund's experts will hold meetings with a number of officials from the Central Bank of Oman, the Ministry



A woman walks past the IMF logo at its headquarters in Washington. — **Reuters**

This visit aims to discuss the latest macroeconomic developments and prospects

of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, and several public authorities and other government entities, in addition to some civil society institutions, and private sector. During these meetings, the IMF will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the economic and financial situation in the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

US Fed likely to pause again with rates at 22-year high

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve will likely announce it is holding interest rates at a 22-year high on Wednesday, as it looks to tackle inflation without damaging the resilient US economy.

Analysts and traders parsing recent Fed speeches overwhelmingly expect the US central bank to hold rates steady for the second meeting in a row as it looks to return inflation to its long-term target of two per cent.

"Fed commentary has all but confirmed that the Fed will stay on hold in November," Bank of America economists wrote in a recent note to clients.

Interest rate hikes slow down inflation by raising the cost of borrowing from the bank, which dampens economic activity and weakens the labor market.

Since peaking at more than seven per cent in June last year, inflation as measured by the Fed's favored yardstick has fallen by more than half -- though it remains stuck firmly above three per cent.



The US Federal Reserve is widely expected to prolong its recent pause in interest rate hikes. — **AFP photo**

Futures traders assign a probability of 99.9 per cent that the Fed will vote to hold rates steady in November, according to CME Group data.

In a surprising development for many analysts, the Fed's aggressive interest rate policy has not pushed the world's largest economy into a recession, and it looks unlikely to do so in the coming months.

In fact, resilient consumer spending fueled higher-than-

expected annualized growth of 4.9 per cent in the third quarter, building on positive growth in the first half of the year.

At the same time, hiring has picked up and unemployment remains close to historic lows.

"I always say it is a mistake to bet against the American people," President Joe Biden said in a statement on Thursday, shortly after the latest GDP figures were released.

"I never believed we would need a recession to bring inflation down -- and today we saw again that the American economy continues to grow even as inflation has come down," he added.

Another factor weighing on the Fed as it mulls whether to hold its key short-term lending rate steady has been the recent surge in yields on longer-term government bonds.

Whereas the Fed's key short-term rate mainly affects the borrowing rates offered by banks, Treasury yields determine "everything from mortgage rates to corporate and municipal bond yields," KPMG Chief Economist Diane Swonk wrote in a recent note to clients.

"It has already added an Arctic blast to the mortgage winter, which has frozen current owners in place and locked first-time buyers out of the housing market," she said.

"Many within the Fed believe that the rise in yields we have seen are equivalent to an additional rate hike," she added. — **AFP**

Omani bio-pharma firm forges alliance with German supplier

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, OCT 29

In a boost for Oman's biopharmaceutical industry, Opal Bio Pharma (OBP), based in Oman, has entered into a strategic collaboration with Sartorius, the well-known German pharmaceutical equipment leader.

The official announcement of this partnership took place at the recently concluded Convention

on Pharmaceutical Ingredients (CPHI) event in Barcelona.

The new alliance is set to bolster OBP's capacity to produce cutting-edge biological products, with a specific emphasis on essential therapeutic fields, including vaccines, oncology, immunology, and gene therapy.

Through this strategic collaboration, OBP is poised to incorporate leading European technologies into its operations,



Opal Bio Pharma and Sartorius representatives pose for a photo during the signing ceremony.

ensuring that their products meet the exact quality standards established by the European Medicines Agency.

Notably, OBP's Phase 2 production boasts an investment of over \$1 million with this collaboration covering a substantial portion of the equipment and technology essential for this phase.

Saad bin Moosa al Junaibi, Chairman of OBP, stated,

"Equipped with European technology, Opal is now ideally positioned to serve the entire MENA region. Our partnership with Sartorius represents a significant stride toward our mission of providing timely and cost-effective access to essential medications for the Arab society."

This partnership affirms OBP's commitment to offering world-class medical solutions to the broader MENA region.

The convergence of natural language and coding



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

The landscape of both storytelling and programming has witnessed transformative changes over the past few decades, roughly starting in the mid 90s and accelerating in the first decade of the 2000.

As they evolved in their individual streams, an unexpected intersection began to surface, leading to an intriguing convergence of their methodologies and audiences.

A glimpse into the past
Dial back to the 1980s, a period defined by its distinctive culture and practices. In the sphere of software development, programming languages were cryptic and inaccessible. Codes appeared like an undecipherable script to anyone outside the programming community. The sheer complexity and

specificity of these languages built a wall between coders and non-coders. In a parallel world, literature from the same era had its characteristics. Stories were often characterised by verbose and intricate descriptions, allowing readers to dive deep into the environment, characters, and emotions. These detailed narratives, while beautiful, required patience and immersion.

The shift in cinematic storytelling
Fast forward to today, and the realms of cinematography and TV series production underscore the shift in storytelling preferences. Gone are the days when audiences would be excited about a four-hour epic masterpiece. Today's viewers prefer their narratives in bite-sized chunks, allowing for digestibility that suits the modern, fast-paced lifestyle.

The 'Netflix effect' perfectly embodies this transformation since its pivoting to the streaming service as opposed to the legacy DVD rental. By breaking down extensive narratives into episodic content, it now caters to the contemporary audience's desire for shorter, more focused storytelling. It's not about reducing the quality or depth but about delivering it in a format that resonates with today's consumer. Interestingly, this approach mirrors the principles of modular programming and the evolution of natural language coding.

Programming meets narration
Software development, much like modern storytelling, has become modular. Programmers build individual components separately, each with its defined function and description. These modular

elements are then assembled to create a more extensive application, making the process efficient and manageable. This mirrors the episodic breakdown we see in modern series. Moreover, the advancement of programming languages, integrated with natural language processing, has made code more readable and intuitive. Python, for instance, often touts its near-English syntax. Such developments make it feasible for someone with minimal programming knowledge to grasp, or at least guess, the essence of a code segment.

The intersecting path
The most profound intersection, however, is the process. Whether you're drafting a storyline for a series or designing a software application, the process involves:
1. Conceptualisation:

Identifying the core idea or functionality.
2. Breaking down: Dividing the main idea into smaller, more manageable chunks or modules.
3. Detailing: Defining and describing each chunk or module.
4. Assembling: Combining all the parts to create a cohesive whole. This similarity in approach makes the realms of storytelling and coding more intertwined than ever before. The convergence of natural language and coding signifies more than just the evolution of two separate domains. It represents the universal human desire for simplicity, efficiency, and accessibility. As coding becomes more like storytelling, and as narratives adopt the modularity of programming, we're witnessing a fascinating merger of art and science, intuition and logic, and creativity and functionality.

Investors on edge as Middle East conflict intensifies

LEWIS KRAUSKOPF

Investors are watching for signs that the conflict in the Middle East maybe escalate over the weekend, potentially ratcheting up volatility as investors await a Federal Reserve meeting and key US data in the week ahead.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that Israeli forces had unleashed the second phase of the Gaza war as they pressed ground operations against Hamas.

Investors have grown more worried about a widening conflict in recent days after the US dispatched more military assets to the Middle East while Israel attacked targets in Gaza and Hamas supporters in Lebanon and Syria.

"The situation in Israel is ... causing a lot of anxiety," said Randy Frederick, managing director of trading and derivatives for Charles Schwab.

On Friday, Brent futures settled up 2.9% at \$90.48 a barrel on concerns the conflict could disrupt crude supplies.

Spot gold, a popular safe haven for nervous investors, vaulted over \$2,000 for the first time since mid-May.

In a note on Friday, analysts at Capital Economics said the oil market's response to the conflict was "muted" so far.

"That said, any sign that the other countries in the region are becoming more involved in the conflict would cause oil prices to rise sharply," they wrote.

If an escalation of the conflict causes the US to increase war-related spending that raises the deficit, Treasury yields could rise beyond the 16-year highs they already have hit, said Peter Cardillo, chief market economist at Spartan Capital Securities.

Some investors also expect a widening conflict could prompt safe-haven buying of Treasuries.

This could moderate the surge in yields, which move inversely to prices, and this in turn could ease pressure on stocks and other assets.

The S&P 500 has fallen more than 10% since late July, when it reached its high for 2023, though the index is up over 7% year-to-date.

"So far, US government bonds have not been performing their usual safe-haven function," UBS Global Wealth Management said in a note.

"However, an escalation of the conflict would likely shift attention away from monetary policy concerns and boost safe-haven demand for Treasuries."

Both gold and oil can also provide hedges against near-term volatility, they said.

The Cboe Volatility Index has climbed in the wake of the conflict and rose on Friday, approaching seven-month highs. — Reuters



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant

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Digital marketing tactics for startups



As-Salaam-Alaikum!
Embarking on the digital journey for your startup isn't just about strategies; it's about creating a symphony of engagement, resonance, and impact in the vast digital landscape.

Imagine your startup not just existing online but thriving, capturing attention, and leaving a lasting imprint. That's the magic of mastering digital marketing tactics tailored for startups.

1. Crafting compelling narratives (Content is king): In the kingdom of digital, content wears the crown. But not just any content — it's the compelling, story-driven content that resonates with your audience.

Every blog post, social media update, or video should be a narrative that captivates, educates, and sparks curiosity.

2. Social media (Your dynamic playground): Social media isn't just a platform; it's your startup's dynamic playground.

From Facebook to Instagram, find where your audience plays, and engage authentically. It's not just about posting; it's about building a community, fostering conversations, and making your brand a part of their daily digital experience.

3. SEO (Elevate your visibility): In the vast ocean of the Internet, being discoverable is your startup's beacon. Strategic Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the lighthouse. Optimise your website, create quality content, and build those vital backlinks. SEO ensures that when people are searching, they find you.

4. Email marketing (A direct connection): Amidst the noise, email marketing remains a direct line to your audience.

Build and nurture your email list, and then utilise it to provide personalised updates, exclusive promotions, and content that adds value directly to their inbox.

5. Paid advertising precision: Paid advertising is your ticket to an extended reach. Whether it's Google Ads or social media campaigns, target with precision.

Reach the right audience with the right message at the right time. It's about making every penny invested count.

6. Analytics (Your north star): The beauty of the digital realm lies in its measurability. Analytics tools are your North Star. Dive into the data, understand your audience's behaviour, and let the numbers guide your strategy. It's a constant cycle of improvement.

7. Influencer magic: In a world where recommendations matter, influencers are the magicians. Partner with influencers relevant to your industry.

Their authentic endorsements can introduce your brand to a wider audience, creating trust and credibility.

The excitement doesn't end here (Teaser for the next chapter)
Now that your startup is shining in the digital galaxy, what's the next mission?

It's time to explore the universe of leadership. In the upcoming article, "Leadership Skills for Startup Founders," we're not just talking about leading; we're talking about trailblazing. Get ready for insights, strategies, and a roadmap to become the leader your startup needs.

So, as you fine-tune your digital orchestra, remember this: every click, like, or share is a note in your startup's digital symphony. It's not just about

marketing; it's about orchestrating an experience that resonates and leaves your audience eagerly anticipating the next movement.

In the grand saga of startups, digital marketing is the epicentre, and your startup is the protagonist. Stay tuned for the leadership journey that awaits, and may your digital endeavours be as thrilling as the plot twists in your favourite novel.

As you dive deeper into the realms of leadership, envision not just leading but pioneering, shaping the narrative of your startup's success.

Your leadership is not just a role; it's the force that propels your startup into uncharted territories, where innovation meets impact. Get ready to discover the leadership strategies that will not only steer your startup but elevate it to new heights.

As we unravel the essence of leadership, prepare to embark on a transformative journey, where every insight becomes a compass guiding your startup to unprecedented success.

The next chapter, 'Leadership skills for startup founders,' is not just a guide; it's your passport to leadership excellence.

Stay tuned for a revelation of leadership principles, strategies, and real-world insights that will redefine the way you navigate the entrepreneurial landscape.

In the grand tapestry of startup success, leadership is the thread that weaves dreams into reality.

Don't just lead; lead with purpose, passion, and an unwavering commitment to turning your startup's vision into a triumphant reality.

As the curtain rises on the leadership stage, are you ready to take the spotlight? The journey to leadership excellence awaits.

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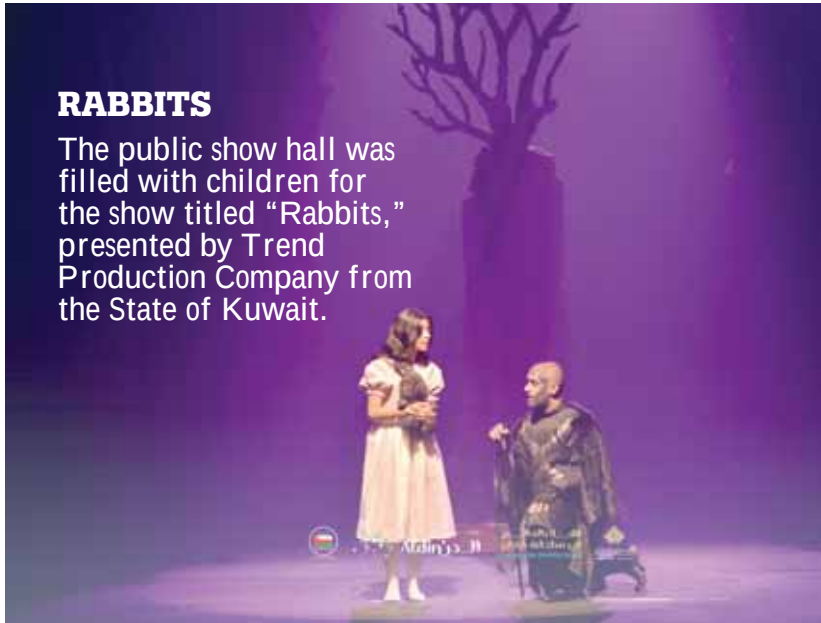
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CELEBRITIES
Children taking photos with their favourite celebrities.



RABBITS
The public show hall was filled with children for the show titled "Rabbits," presented by Trend Production Company from the State of Kuwait.



PAIN
A snapshot that expresses the pain and suffering that this girl experienced in the story of the show titled "Croaking," presented by the Syrian Republic at Al Din International Festival.



YOUTH
A picture of a street theatre performance titled "For Whom?" Presented by the German University in the Sultanate of Oman.



FUN
A girl enjoys the microphone by imitating broadcasters while they are doing interviews.

art & life

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An odyssey of empowering elegance through fashion

BY SIHAM AL SAIDI

In the dynamic realm of fashion, some stories transcend the pursuit of style, evolving into narratives of empowerment, creativity, and unwavering determination. Hala Khamees, a Jordanian-born designer residing in Oman, is a pioneer who has embarked on a mission to celebrate the beauty of modest clothing, particularly for veiled women in the Sultanate of Oman. At the age of 29, Hala's odyssey through the world of fashion is a testament to her unrelenting passion, resilience, and commitment to empowering veiled women with a touch of elegance.

Hala's affection for design was sparked during her formative years when she accompanied her grandmother to the local tailor, where she witnessed the magical transformation of fabrics into exquisitely embroidered garments. The seeds of creativity were sown early in her life.

In 2018, Hala decided to transform her passion into a tangible reality. Her distinctiveness was marked by an unwavering determination to redefine women's fashion in Oman, the Gulf, and Arabian countries. She plunged headfirst into the fashion world, with a particular focus on creating elegant attire for veiled women, actively participating in various fashion shows



in Oman. This journey was not without its share of challenges, but Hala was resolute in her determination to transform the fashion landscape. She embarked on a quest for knowledge, participating in a series of training courses and workshops. Her clear objective was to support Omani women and inspire young girls to venture into the world of design and entrepreneurship. Hala wasn't just creating fashion; she was cultivating a community of empow-

ered women. She mentored young girls from all corners of Oman who shared her passion for designing and fashion, motivating them, imparting her knowledge, and guiding them towards making their distinctive mark in Omani fashion.



What sets Hala apart in the fashion industry is her unwavering commitment to providing veiled women with clothing that not only aligns with their values but also celebrates their unique identity. Her designs are a harmonious fusion of Islamic



and Arabic aesthetics infused with a contemporary twist. They exude the vibrancy and energy of life, encapsulating the essence of individuality. Each piece in her collection speaks a language of confidence and style.

As Hala's designs found their way into the hearts and wardrobes of veiled women across Oman, it became evident that she was filling a void in the fashion landscape. Her brand, aptly named "Treasure," has emerged as a sanctuary for veiled women seeking distinctive, elegant, and stylish clothing. With an impeccable eye for detail and a profound understanding of her craft, Hala Khamees has become a beacon of hope for those women who choose to wear the hijab.

"Treasure" is not just a fashion brand; it's a movement. It represents the aspirations of a community of women who want to express their faith and identity through fashion. Hala's designs are more than mere garments; they are a reflection of society's values and an embodiment of one's personality. They seamlessly combine elegance with the desires of Omani women.

In Oman, the resonance of veiled elegance began with Hala, but her success story doesn't end there. She has her sights set on the global stage. Her dream is to expand "Treasure" beyond the borders of the Sultanate and establish it as the

foremost brand for veiled women's fashion globally. With a vision of creating a comprehensive manufacturing facility, she aspires to make "Treasure" a staple in the wardrobes of veiled women worldwide.

What truly touches Hala's spirit is the happiness and transformation she brings to the lives of women and girls who embrace the hijab. When they receive her designs, it's a moment of celebration and self-assuredness, shared not only by the wearers but also by their families. "Treasure" has become an integral part of this transformation.

In Oman, Hala Khamees is a driving force for the evolution of the fashion industry for veiled women. She is a mentor, a guiding light, and a passionate advocate for young and ambitious girls who aspire to leave their mark in the world of design. Her message to them is clear: the world of fashion is a canvas, and every woman can paint her story with grace and style.

In the ever-evolving world of fashion, where trends come and go, Hala Khamees is crafting a legacy. She is not just a designer; she is a force for change, a source of empowerment, and a creator of elegance. Her journey, much like her designs, is a masterpiece in the making that showcases her unique vision and unwavering dedication to empowering veiled women through fashion.



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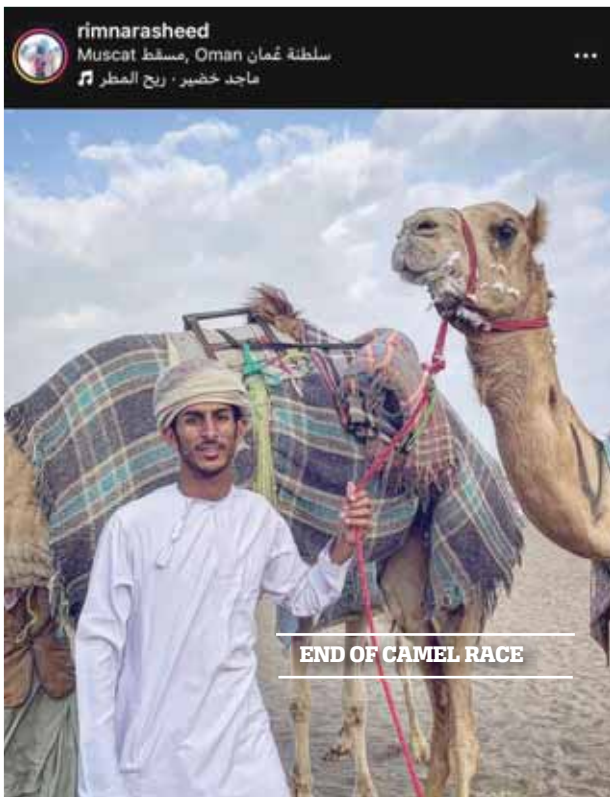
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Empowering Omani students to combat climate change through art

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

IN A GRAND SHOWCASE of artistic talent, students from the Sultanate of Oman made their mark at the Annual Student Art Show (ASAS) held in Dubai on October 7 and 8. The event, themed 'We Can Change Climate Change,' united young artists aged 5 to 25 with the aim of raising awareness about the pressing issue of climate change and motivating youth to take action.

ASAS featured approximately 35 artworks from Oman, with 25 originating from the Care & Special Education (CSE) category, along with contributions from the Indian School Muscat and individual participants. The event unfolded at the academic and artistic setting of De Montfort University, Dubai, presenting ASAS as a unique initiative merging art, culture, and environmental awareness.

This year's ASAS marked a departure from its previous UAE-centric focus, expanding its reach to collaborate with both emerging and established artists from the Middle East and beyond. This move amplified the resonance of the sustainability and climate change messages through the creative expressions of the students.

The event included masterclasses and 40 workshops that provided students with in-depth knowledge and hands-on experience in sustainable art and materials. Workshops covered a wide array of themes, from

robotics and AI to photography, tote bag painting, 3D modelling, and clay painting, all emphasising the use of sustainable materials, recycling, and upcycling.

The chosen theme, 'We Can Change Climate Change,' was a follow-up to the previous ASAS edition, which



revolved around the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr Hafsa Banu, a practicing dentist and an art mentor, emphasised the unique opportunity for Omani students to participate in this global youth event. Over 700 students from 50 different nationalities highlighted their artworks, guided by approximately 35 Global Mentors, 15 Youth Ambassadors, and over 50 Youth Volunteers.

Haniya Eira Khan and Yusra Adil Shaik, students from Oman, acquired profound insights into the world of



sustainable art through their enthusiastic participation in various masterclasses and workshops.

Haniya's artwork depicted the devastating impact of climate change on our planet, from environmental pollution to forest wildfires, melting glaciers, and the displacement of polar bears and marine life. Yusra's piece illustrated the consequences of global warming, highlighting the destruc-



tion of vibrant forests, bird fatalities, and the pollution of air and water.

Participating students, including Isabelle Eapen, Devan Patel, Aditi Bhindi, Hannah Paul, Amna Shanawaz, and others, displayed their talent and unwavering commitment to the cause. Notably, special needs children contributed to the event by sharing videos of their artworks and their creative processes.



Dr Hafsa, a renowned expert in the fields of nails and strings, has been a driving force behind advocating for sustainability and climate change research within schools and among students. Her innovative approach has not only empowered students to broaden their creative horizons but has also inspired them to integrate their newfound knowledge into their artistic endeavours.

Through ASAS and similar initiatives, students can comprehend the importance of sustainability, paving the way for positive changes in their lives and contributing to the preservation of our planet for future generations.

The ASAS competition produced two global winners from Oman, Vaibhavi Singh, and Jeffin Anthony, both belonging to the CSE group. Their achievement is a source of immense pride and inspiration.

Shiba Khan and Farah Khan, Founders of Funun Arts, expressed their belief that ASAS, has not only inspired but also empowered youth to take meaningful action against climate change using their boundless creativity.

The ASAS event commenced with a grand inauguration, graced by esteemed guests and dignitaries. Distinguished attendees included Suhail Mohd Al Zarooni, Chairman of Al Zarooni Foundation, Khalil Abdul Wahid, Director of Art and Literature Dubai Culture, and notable figures from the UAE. The guest of honour from Oman, Mohammed bin Issa al Rawahi added prestige to the event.

ARTWORK

'Venus of the Rags' to rise from ashes in Italy's Naples

A GIANT OPEN-AIR ART installation by Italian contemporary artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, destroyed in an arson attack in July in Naples, will be given new life in the city, local authorities said on Friday.

The new version of the "Venus of the Rags" will be unveiled in January and set up again in Piazza del Municipio, a monumental square in the heart of the southern Italian city, for four months.

It will absorb what was left from the fire of the original artwork, art critic Vincenzo Trione explained, "to show

that it is possible to rise from the ashes, not only metaphorically".

The new version will be made of fire-proof material.

"Replacing it is not only about aesthetics but is also a political gesture that shows that we will not stop," Naples Mayor Gaetano Manfredi told a news conference.

The piece of art was a 10 metre-tall (32.81 ft) sculpture of the goddess of love, beauty and fertility, turned backwards and facing into a pile of rags.

The original "Venus of the Rags" was created in 1967 and various versions are on



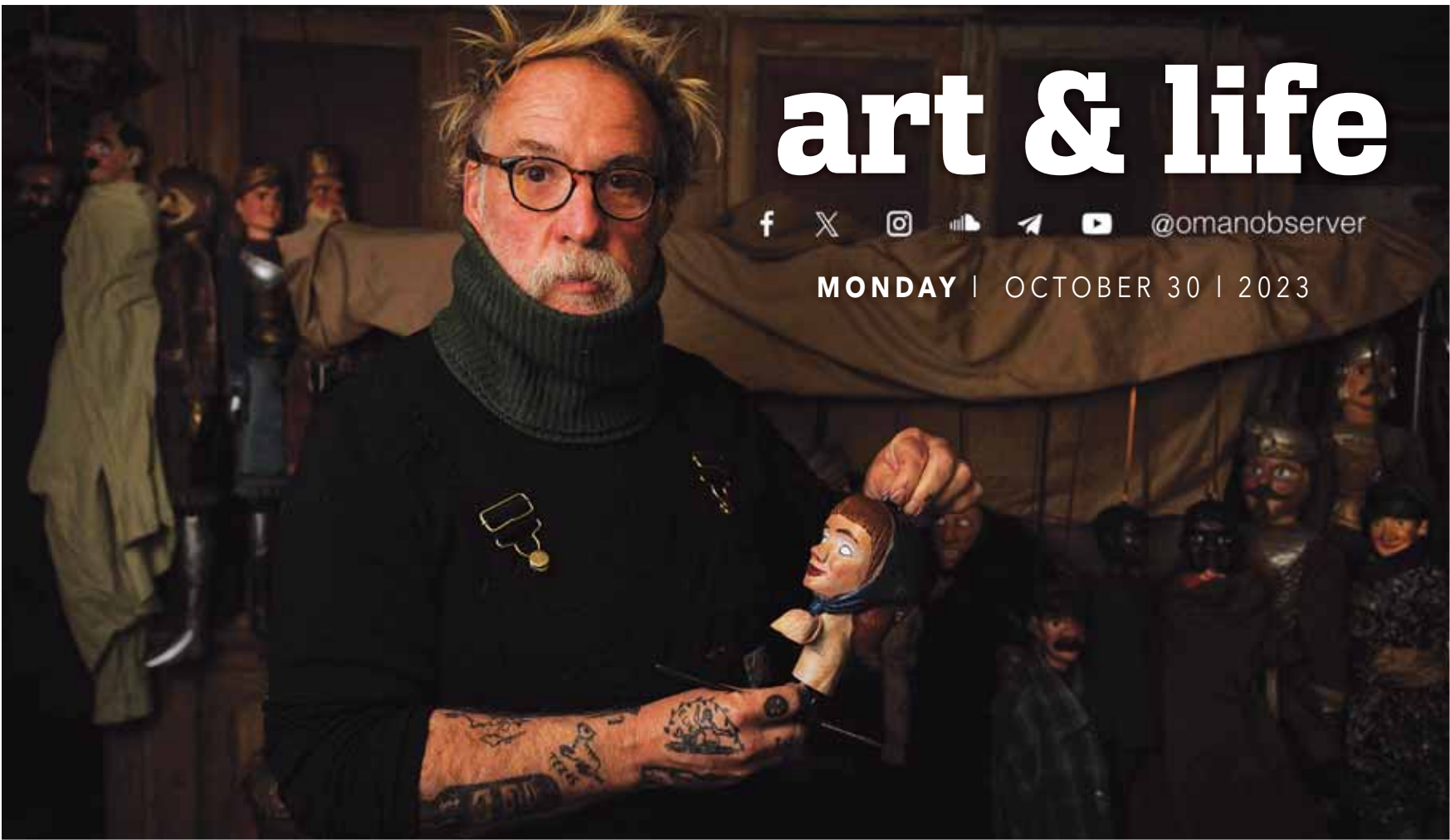
display in museums across Europe, including the Tate Gallery in Liverpool, northern England.

"It's an extraordinary occasion for me. I would have never thought in 1967 that I would find myself once again immersed in this piece of art," Pistoletto said, adding that "we must now heal (Venus)".

The installation is meant to convey the juxtaposition between eternal beauty, represented by Venus, and modern society's social degradation and consumerism.

Pistoletto, 90, will entirely finance the new artwork, which will be permanently donated to Naples.

The money raised through a crowd-funding effort launched after the fire will be used to finance projects by non-profit organisations supporting people with disabilities and female prisoners. — Reuters



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PUPPETRY

From movies to marionettes: an actor swims against the tide



AWARD-WINNING BELGIAN film actor Bouli Lanners tenderly applies the final brushstrokes to a traditional wooden puppet he is working on in the cellar of his home in Liege.

Following a feted four-decade career — which saw him claim best supporting actor at the French equivalent of the Oscars this year — the moustachioed star, 58, is increasingly turning from the silver screen to puppetry.

After inheriting last year a collection from his father-in-law, whose family had run one of Liege's famed puppet troupes, he is now looking to set up his own theatre in his backyard with his wife.

"A puppet hanging in a library is a dead puppet, you have to give it life, make it play," he said.

"Our goal is to transmit theatre."

In an age of computer-enhanced superhero blockbusters and streaming services, the couple might seem to be swimming against the tide.

But Lanners is convinced there is still room for the slower form of entertainment that has always had a special place in this working-class town of 200,000 in eastern Belgium.



"Until the 1920s, there were 62 theatres in Liege," Lanners said.

"Cinema killed off puppetry somewhat, but today there are still six fixed and three travelling theatres."

"Puppetry is still very present in the DNA of the people of Liege, and it's the children who come to see it, not the older generations."

WE DON'T NEED MUCH

Another part of the motivation for Lanners, a committed environmentalist, is to get away from what he sees as the unsustainable energy consumption of film sets.

"The wood for the puppets



is basswood, and we don't need much," he says.

"We buy the props at flea markets. We paint the sets ourselves on bed sheets."

Lanners and his wife hope to stage two performances each week from January in their 30-seater theatre.

Their troupe consists of an impressive series of around 160 characters and animals



including donkeys, snakes and dragons, which they will manipulate at arm's length behind the stage.

That is no mean feat, given that some of the puppets can weigh over 10 kilogrammes (20 pounds) and stand 80 centimetres (30 inches) tall.

Lanners is still not turning his back entirely on cinema — but reckons he will cut his output down to one film a year.

"I feel less and less comfortable with my place in this industry," he said.

"I want to change my life, and my ideals too." — AFP

AL DIN THEATRE FESTIVAL



Cal Smith

Al-Din Theatre Festival October 2023

IN 2013- 2019 I lived and worked here in Muscat as a Drama and theatre teacher. During those years I got to know Al-Din a little bit.

Now I am back in the UK, I was honoured to hear that they remembered me and asked me to come back to be part of the jury for the children's theatre during the theatre festival. I couldn't wait to come back and was delighted to receive the invitation.

I have not been disappointed. Al-Din have done a fine job in the organisation of this festival of theatre. The idea was to bring the world together through the arts, and I believe they have done this very well, with many countries represented including Spain, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Syria along with speakers from Oman, UAE, Russia and UK.

The festival is made up of many components, including workshops where the actors can gather new ideas on ways to develop their character, how to use their voice, design costumes and work with children.

I think that this aspect of the festival is wonderful because the participants are able to share good practise and see how other countries/cultures work on these aspects of theatre preparation.

There are also panels discussing the various issues surrounding street theatre and how different countries value and represent this art form in various ways. What I have enjoyed about these discussions is that there are different ideas and opinions regarding what should/could be displayed. It has been a great topic for enjoyable, friendly debate over this last week.

Of course, a theatre festival would not be aptly named if it did not include theatre shows and performances. Each day there have been three performances - children's theatre, street theatre and adult theatre. The various participating countries have contributed to at least one or more of these sections.

Street theatre is a relatively new concept to Oman, so I have really enjoyed watching them explore with this newfound form of theatrical expression. Music, movement and acting entwined in a visual display close up and personal with the audience.

The children's theatre element, for me has been the most entertaining. Here we have seen actors and actresses dress up in colourful costumes, playing whimsical characters, delivering lines of comedy in a fun and light-hearted fashion, whilst also telling an important story that teaches the children a moral lesson.

Through the adult theatre performances, we have seen a lot of raw emotion from the acting troupes. The tales have been hard-hitting and filled with sadness and the hardships of life. Yet each performance has been thoroughly unique. I have enjoyed seeing the creativity of the set designs, costume changes and use of lighting to create mood, atmosphere or change the setting completely.

As much as we are enjoying the theatrical festivities, there has never been a dull moment during the day times either. Al-Din have been extremely gracious hosts. Not only have they provided luxurious accommodation and delicious meals for us at the Muscat Grand Millennium Hotel, but they have also organised some excellent visits to cultural heritage sites in Oman such as The Royal Opera House, The Oman Through the Ages Museum in Nizwa and Nizwa Souq.

What a wonderful way to bring the people of the world together through art, in the most beautiful and hospitable of countries, Oman.

Well, done Al-Din, for a fourth, very successful theatre festival. I am already looking forward to the next one.

Cal Smith, a drama teacher for children aged 4-14, ran a theatre academy in Muscat and now teaches in the UK, emphasising the role of drama in education.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT Smith.cal1981@gmail.com