



Special eight-page supplement to mark HM's third Anniversary of Accession with today's edition



REIGN OF BENEVOLENCE



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

It was a Saturday morning on January 11, 2020 when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik took the oath before the Council of Oman.

In his speech, His Majesty the Sultan promised to safeguard achievements and to establish a prosperous future for youths.

“We are confident that you all perceive the volume of challenges that we have been through, that we have tackled with tact and patience, and then proceeded with the implementation of our social and economic plans and programmes, guided by Vision 2040. Our economic and fiscal performance has improved, and we started to accomplish for you and with you the march of growth and prosperity.”

During the three years of the Renewed Renaissance, the nation's financial standing has improved, which is reflected in better international credit ratings. This period also saw many initiatives to provide jobs for citizens, protect low income families and improve confidence of investors.

Gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices rose to RO 44.9 billion by the end of 2022, posting a growth rate of 32.4 per cent as against 2021 figures.

The budget posted a fiscal surplus of about RO 1.146 billion, compared to an approved deficit of about RO 1.550 billion, according to indicators of

THREE YEARS OF RENEWED RENAISSANCE

STRONGER ECONOMY

MORE JOBS FOR CITIZENS

FISCAL SURPLUS AND REDUCTION IN PUBLIC DEBT

preliminary results of the State's General Budget 2022.

In 2022, the social and economic aspects received commensurate attention that reflected a rise by about RO 958 million in net public spending.

This included setting a cap on fuel prices, an increase in allocations for Oman Housing Bank's loans, augmenting the spending for subsidising expenditures of electricity sector, the waste sector and food commodities. This is in addition to offering further support for “social security and limited income families”, raising allowances for students on scholarship abroad by 25 per cent and exempting entrepreneurs who hold Riyada card from additional emergency loans, as well as borrowers from Oman Development Bank's emergency loan portfolio.

The government of His Majesty the Sultan was able to pay off part of its public debt and manage the loan portfolio by the end of 2022. This led to reduction in public debt from RO 20.8 billion by the end of 2021 to RO 17.7 billion in 2022.

Foreign direct investments (FDI), which stood at about RO 18.14 billion until the third quarter of 2022, increased by 10.4 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2021.

These efforts also contributed to upgrading the volume of trade exchange between Oman and the countries of the world to stand at RO 30,421.4 million until September 2022, a rise of 46.18 per cent.

Following the Royal orders of His Majesty the Sultan, a total sum of RO 4 million has been allotted to provide school supplies and daily meals for school students from social insurance and low-income families. A total of 59,030 will benefit from the scheme.

Strong leadership leading us to progress

Warm felicitations to
**HIS MAJESTY
SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK**

May the Almighty protect and preserve him
on the occasion of the 3rd anniversary
of the Renewed Renaissance.



Occidental Oman is pleased to extend its sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty
Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

on the 3rd anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne.

We reaffirm our commitment to Oman under His Majesty's wise leadership as we celebrate the
Sultanate's continued prosperity.



Committed to the timeless glory of Oman

Khimji Ramdas Group extends its congratulations to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** and the people of Oman on the 3rd Anniversary of His Majesty's Accession.

We pray to the Almighty God to bless His Majesty with abundant health and to preserve the glory of Oman. We also reaffirm our commitment to follow in the footsteps of His Majesty to contribute to the sustainable development of Oman and achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

KR
کیمجی رامداس
KHIMJI RAMDAS

بنك العز الإسلامي
alizz islamic bank



The Chairman, Board of Directors and all of the employees of Alizz Islamic Bank are pleased to congratulate

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

on the 3rd Anniversary of his accession to the throne

May Allah grant His Majesty continuous prosperity



التَّحَوُّلُ، والتَّقْدِمُ، والازْدَهَارُ

TRANSFORMATION, PROGRESS AND PROSPERITY

تتشرف صحار ألuminium وجميع موظفيها بأن ترفع أسمى
آيات التهاني و التبريكات
للمقام السامي لمولانا حضرة صاحب الجلالة السلطان
هيثم بن طارق المعظم -حفظه الله و رعاه-
وللشعب العُماني الأبي بمناسبة ذكرى تولي جلالة
مقاليد الحكم في البلاد.

Sohar Aluminium and all its employees express
their heartfelt congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and to the people of Oman on the occasion of
His Majesty's Accession Day.





HM pardons prisoners

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, has issued a Royal pardon to a number of prisoners convicted of different cases. They included 121 prisoners, 57 of them are foreigners, according to an official source at the Royal Oman Police (ROP). The Royal pardon coincides with the anniversary of His Majesty the Sultan's Accession Day, in consideration of families of the prisoners. — ONA

HM issues Royal Decree

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued Royal Decree No 4/2023 endorsing the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Protocol to Amend the Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft, reading as follows: Article (1) endorses the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Protocol to Amend the Convention on Offences and

Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft, in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the official document for joining the aforementioned Protocol in accordance with its provisions. Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

Haj quota: Pre-Covid status quo to be maintained this year



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman will maintain the pre-pandemic status quo in terms of the Haj pilgrims as was decided mutually with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which had earlier curtailed the number of people who can visit the holy sites to perform the rituals in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, as many as

14,000 pilgrims will be able to perform Haj this year based on an agreement signed by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and the General Authority for Awqaf (GAA) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. "We have signed an agreement with the General Authority for Awqaf (GAA) of Saudi Arabia where we agreed to maintain the status quo of pre-Covid time and as many as 14,000 pilgrims will be

able to visit the holy sites during the Haj season 2023," Ali al Ghafri from the Haj and Umrah Department of the ministry told the Observer. In 2022, 6,428 pilgrims from Oman were allowed to perform Haj rituals through Awqaf, out of the 13,541 people who applied to perform Haj through the ministry, out of which 1,085 applicants were expatriates from different countries.

FIRST CRUISE SHIP FROM GREECE



MUSCAT: Port Sultan Qaboos on Tuesday received the Greece cruise ship "MV Elysium" of Elixir Cruises in its first visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The cruise ship will make calls at various ports in Oman before returning again to Muscat in its journey that starts on January 14 till May 5, 2023. The ship's journey route allows tourists to tour different tourism sites in Oman's governorates. — ONA

Omani students get top positions in Junior Academy challenge

MUSCAT: The Centre of Excellence for Advanced Telecommunications Technology and IoT of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation at Innovation Park Muscat announced the winning teams of "The Green Redesign: Improving Energy Efficiency in Cities Using 5G and IoT" challenge of the second cohort of the Junior Academy programme. The programme was established in a strategic partnership between Ericsson, Ministry of Finance and Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and New York Academy of Sciences. Among the 85 international participating teams of "The Green Redesign: Improving Energy Efficiency in Cities Using 5G and IoT" challenge, the first place went to 'Greetopia' by Rawnaq bint Nasser al Siyabi from Nusaiba Bint Kaab School (Girls) in Muscat Governorate. The second place went to 'Hydrogen Sustainable Cities' project by Ahd bint Abdullah al Riyami, Al Shifaa bint Abdulaziz al Kharousi, Maithaa bint Ahmed al Mayahi, Noor bint Younis al

The programme also comes in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 to shift towards a knowledge-based economy, and to provide current generations with the necessary skills to face the future

to deepening the participants' knowledge and enabling them to take the initiative to contribute to providing solutions to technical problems. The programme also comes in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 to shift towards a knowledge-based economy, and to provide current generations with the necessary skills to face the future, by refining their capabilities and empowering them with knowledge that allows them to grow as individuals in the Omani society. The Centre of Excellence for Advanced Telecommunications Technology and IoT is one of the offset projects from the Ministry of Finance currently conducted at Innovation Park Muscat as a joint partnership between Ericsson, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Omantel. The centre acts as a research centre for developing 5G use cases and IoT use cases as Proof of Concept (PoC) before deployments in commercial networks. It supports small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as start-ups moving towards next-generation network evolution by incubating their ideas and concepts into reality.



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Directorate General of Health Services

AL DHAHIRA GOVERNORATE

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health - Directorate General of Health Service AL Dhahira Governorate of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Bidding:-

Bidding Ref.	Description	Eligibility	Last Date for Collection Document	Closing Time/Day/ Date	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
1/2023	Renting and operating Cafe Truck for several health centers in Al Dhahirah Governorate.	Specialized Companies	Monday 23/Jan/2023	Before 10 am on Thursday 09/FEB/2023	R.O 25/= Per set
2/2023	Provide Beverages and Snacks machines for several health centers in Al Dhahirah Governorate.	Specialized Companies	Monday 23/Jan/2023	Before 10 am on Thursday 09/FEB/2023	R.O 25/= Per set

- The Companies should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the bidding value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to the Tender Committee in the DGHS before one day of date submission.
- Tender Documents can be purchased from the Directorate General of Health Service in AL Dhahira Governorate – Purchase & Tender Section , offers enclosed in the sealed envelope.
- The DGHS is not bound to accept the highest bid or any other bid.



Oman, Saudi Arabia review areas

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received here on Tuesday Lt Gen Fahd bin Abdullah al Mutair, Commander of Royal Land Forces in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and his delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of cooperation between Oman and Saudi Arabia. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by the Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO).

Separately, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), received Lt Gen Al Mutair.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed several military matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by several senior RAO officers and the Military Attaché of the Saudi Embassy at Muscat.

VISIT TO SAF MUSEUM

Lt Gen Al Mutair and his



delegation later visited the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Museum at Bait Al Falaj Fort.

Upon their arrival at the

Museum, they were greeted by the Head of Military Protocols at the SAF Command.

The guests toured various



sections of the museum. They also viewed a number of historic manuscripts and models. The guests were also briefed on the march of SAF's development.

At the conclusion of the visit, the Saudi Commander signed the visitor's book, expressing his delight in viewing the rich military heritage of Oman, as well as its aspects of progress and growth.

VISIT TO MSC

Lt Gen Al Mutair and his delegation also visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

Upon their arrival, the guests were greeted by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Head of the MSC.

The guest and his accompanying delegation were briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre in maintaining the safety of maritime environment. They also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies that are used in carrying out its national duties. — ONA

Foreign minister receives UN official



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Michael Lodge, Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority of the UN, here on Tuesday.

The two sides reviewed opportunities of cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the International Seabed Authority. They also touched on programmes of capacity building and skill honing in areas related to

the law of the sea and blue economy.

The two sides also underscored the importance of international cooperation to protect and sustain biological diversity for future generations.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hashel al Muselhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, and several officials from both sides.

— ONA

OCCI writes off unpaid fees of private firms

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Board of Directors has endorsed writing off outstanding fees and renewal fees of OCCI membership over the past years. This decision will take effect for four months, starting on February 1, 2023.

The OCCI board held its first meeting for this year (2023) at OCCI headquarters in Muscat under the auspices of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rowas, Chairman of the OCCI Board.

The OCCI board affirmed its keenness to make the private sector a developmental economic sector that boosts the government's approaches and enhances the role of the OCCI, to make it a key partner in domestic development.

The OCCI board discussed a number of issues related to members' affairs and incentives that enable entrepreneurs to conduct commercial activities and set up enterprises in Oman. — ONA

Agreements inked in LNG, green hydrogen fields

MUSCAT: Several agreements and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) were signed at OQ Group's headquarters on Tuesday in the field of liquefied natural gas and green hydrogen.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals signed a Letter of Intent with Oman Shell company to explore opportunities for the production of Liquefied Synthetic Gas (LSG) in the Sultanate of Oman.

LSG is produced when green hydrogen is combined with captured carbon dioxide to produce natural gas which is then liquefied. This low-carbon gas can be directly introduced to existing gas networks and infrastructure, including the liquefied natural gas stations of the Oman LNG Company, all the way to the end user.

The agreement was signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufer, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Walid Hadi, Senior Vice-President and Country Chair, Oman Shell.

Commenting on the agreement, Al Aufer said, "This agreement is evidence of our confidence in the future of the Sultanate of Oman as a multiple energy source hub, as well as the rapid development of its interest in renewable energy and green hydrogen production. The Ministry works with care to achieve optimal utilisation

This agreement is evidence of our confidence in the future of the Sultanate of Oman as a multiple energy source hub, as well as the rapid development of its interest in renewable energy and green hydrogen production

ENG SALIM BIN NASSER AL AUFI

Minister of Energy and Minerals,



of the Sultanate of Oman's natural resources, by employing capabilities and modern technologies in the fields of energy with our partners in the sector."

Additionally, Oman LNG LLC and Shell International Trading Middle East FZE announced the signing of a term sheet for the offtake of 0.8 million tonne per annum (mtpa) of Liquefied Natural Gas from Oman LNG, for ten years starting from 2025.

Such step marks another milestone in the history of Oman LNG, where it complements the company's strive to extend

its contracts Beyond 2024, with a strong interest to leverage partnership with various firms around the world.

This commitment ensures Oman LNG will maintain its strong position in the global LNG market and contribute to global energy security, delivering clean and reliable energy.

Hamed al Numani, CEO of Oman LNG, said: "We are delighted to sign this term-sheet agreement with Shell, who has been our partner in the industry for many years. This agreement leverages the opportunities

to place Oman LNG in a very competitive market, with strong partners allowing us to grow our market access."

Further, OQ and Shell International signed a Partnership Agreement for Developing Green Hydrogen in Oman after acquiring a 35 per cent shareholding interest in Green Energy Oman (GEO) project.

The project is expected to be developed in multiple phases to produce at full capacity, around 1.8 million tonnes of green hydrogen.

This agreement was signed by Najla bint Zuhair al Jamali, CEO

of Alternative Energy at OQ, and Walid Hadi, Senior Vice-President and Country Chair of Shell Oman.

On this occasion, Najla bint Zuhair al Jamali, CEO of Alternative Energy at OQ, said: "The entry of Shell to this vital project constitutes a qualitative step that will enable the consortium to benefit from their advanced global expertise in this field. This will surely contribute to achieving the desired objectives of the project. Shell is a pioneering company in the alternative energy sector and entertains great technical and practical

experience that would directly help in developing all phases of the project.

Al Jamali explained that the GEO Project is one of the best specialised projects that seek to provide the necessary green energy sources to meet the increasing global demand on carbon-free fuel.

On his turn Walid Hadi said, "We are pleased to sign these important agreements that will strengthen our partnership with the Sultanate of Oman. This will be Shell's first long-term LNG offtake from Oman and the agreement supports continued production from Oman LNG into the 2030s. We're proud of the contribution we have made to the success of the venture to date and pleased to be deepening our relationship."

He added: "With our entry to the Green Energy Oman (GEO) consortium, we are taking a further step to advance lower and zero emissions energy projects in Oman.

The project remains in its early phase, but this is a sign of the potential we see for Oman through the energy transition. We also look forward to working together with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to explore the sustainable development of the first integrated Liquefied Synthetic Gas (LSG) value chain."

— ONA



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

WEDNESDAY | JANUARY 11 | 2023

7

In brief

■ MEXICO CITY



MEXICO HOSTS BIDEN, TRUDEAU FOR 'THREE AMIGOS' SUMMIT

The leaders of the United States, Mexico and Canada are expected to set aside simmering trade tensions and pursue deeper economic integration at talks on Tuesday that will also cover security and migration. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador will host his US counterpart Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for three-way talks known as the "Three Amigos" summit. While efforts to tackle migration and drug smuggling dominated a bilateral meeting between Lopez Obrador and Biden on Monday, the focus is expected to shift to the economy when Trudeau joins them.

■ MYTILENE



LONG-DELAYED TRIAL OF MIGRANT RESCUERS RESUMES

A trial in Greece of 24 migrant rescue workers accused of espionage, including Syrian swimmer Sarah Mardini who inspired a Netflix film, resumed on Tuesday after more than a year as leading rights groups slammed the case as a masquerade. The trial began in November 2021 but was swiftly adjourned. The suspects are also being probed for human trafficking, money laundering, fraud and the unlawful use of radio frequencies. Branded as "the largest case of criminalisation of solidarity in Europe," in a European Parliament report, the trial was adjourned till Friday as one of the accused did not turn up in court and nor his lawyer.

■ LONDON



'LIKELY ONE OF THE BIGGEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR'

The memoir by Harry, the duke of Sussex, is set to become one of the biggest books of the year, according to an industry expert, as it went on sale at half-price. Philip Jones, editor of The Bookseller, told the PA news agency it is "quite normal" to have a "big hardback" that booksellers think will do well sold at half-price by major retailers. Harry's controversial autobiography Spare is being sold for £14, no the recommended retail price of £28, in bookshops such as Waterstones and WH Smith as well as online at Amazon.

France to raise retirement age to 64

PRIME MINISTER BORNE DETAILS PENSION SYSTEM

RETIREMENT AGE SET TO BE RAISED TO 64 FROM 62

UNIONS, LEFT-WING OPPOSITION REJECT THE REFORM

PARIS: The French should work two years longer before they can retire, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said, detailing an unpopular reform of the pension system that risks strikes and will test President Emmanuel Macron's ability to deliver change. The long-delayed overhaul pushes the retirement age to 64, a move opposed by four in every five citizens according to an Odoxa poll, at a time when many are already struggling with a cost-of-living crisis. "I'm well aware that changing our pension system raises questions and fears among the French," Borne said on Tuesday, adding that her government would work on convincing the French that the reform was necessary. "We offer today a project to balance our pension system, a project that is fair," she said. Overhauling the pension system was a central pillar of



Protestors hold a banner which reads 'retirement' during a demonstration against pension reform in Rennes on the day the French government unveils its pension reform. — Reuters

Macron's reformist agenda when he entered the Elysee Palace in 2017. But he shelved his first attempt in 2020 as the government battled to contain the Covid outbreak. The second attempt will not be any easier. The heads of France's leading unions will meet in the evening to discuss responding with protests and strikes. Macron and Borne will also need to get the reform adopted

in parliament, where they do not have an absolute majority. That looks less challenging than it did a few weeks ago after the government made some concessions to the conservative Les Republicains (LR) party. Even so, LR did not get all it wanted and it is not united on the issue, so every vote will count. With one of the lowest retirement ages in the industrialised world, France spends more than most other

countries on pensions at nearly 14% of economic output, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. In practice, according to the government's proposal, the age at which one can retire and get a pension in France will be raised gradually by three months per year, starting this September, reaching 63 years and 3 months in 2027 and the target age of 64 in 2030.

To receive a full pension, it will be necessary, from 2027, to have worked 43 years. "We must face reality and find solutions to preserve our social model," Borne said, stressing that France's neighbours in Europe have also increased the retirement age over the past years. Mathilde Panot, from the left-wing France Unbowed (France Insoumise) party tweeted that the plan was "archaic, unfair, brutal, cruel." — Reuters

Vatican opens probe into teen missing for 40 years

VATICAN CITY: The Vatican confirmed on Tuesday it had opened an inquiry into its most famous cold case, the disappearance of a teenager 40 years ago which sparked countless theories and a hit Netflix series. Emanuela Orlandi, the 15-year-old daughter of a Vatican employee, was last seen leaving a music class in Rome on June 22, 1983. Decades of speculation followed over what happened to her, with theories blaming everyone from mobsters, the secret services to the Freemasons and a Vatican conspiracy -- none ever proven. The Orlandi family has campaigned tirelessly for the truth, and it was their demands which in part led to the new inquiry. The Vatican's chief prosecutor, Alessandro Diddi, "has opened a

file, based in part on the basis of requests made by the family", a spokesman said on Tuesday. However, the family said they are still waiting for details on what will be the focus of the new probe. "We don't know what the Vatican will do... which papers they want to review, the papers of the investigation by the Rome prosecutors or if they have a file to share," family lawyer Laura Sgro told reporters. "The Vatican has never done anything up until now," she said, adding: "I have been asking to be heard by top figures in the Vatican for years... but unfortunately some people are already dead." One of the most widely circulated theories claimed Orlandi was snatched by mobsters to put pressure on the Vatican to recover a loan. — AFP



File photo shows the opening of the ossuary at the Teutonic Cemetery in the Vatican as part of a probe into the case of Emanuela Orlandi. — AFP

■ FOLLOW THE CODE OF THE STREET



People ride bicycles in Paris. Cyclists running red lights, scooters on the sidewalks: against dangerous behavior that has become commonplace in the streets of Paris, Mayor Anne Hidalgo announced on Tuesday, a 'code of the street' for summer 2023. — AFP

Traffic crashes cost US society \$340 b

WASHINGTON: US auto safety regulators said Tuesday in a landmark report that motor vehicle crashes, which are rising fast, cost American society \$340 billion in 2019. In a comprehensive economic impact study, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) examined the costs of a single year of crashes that killed around 36,500 people, injured 4.5 million, and damaged 23 million vehicles. The crashes directly cost taxpayers \$30 billion, and society as a whole \$340 billion, the NHTSA found. When quality-of-life valuations were included, the total cost to society ran to

\$1.37 trillion -- equivalent to 1.6% of US economic output. Distracted driving alone cost \$98 billion, while the costs of traffic congestion, including travel delays and added fuel usage, were put at \$36 billion. NHTSA last estimated the societal cost of crashes in 2010, when it put the total at \$242 billion. US traffic deaths are now rising sharply. In 2021 alone, they jumped 10.5% to 42,915, the highest number killed on American roads in a single year since 2005. Traffic deaths declined in the first nine months of 2022 by 0.2% but the fatality rate is still higher than in any pre-pandemic

year since 2007. Deputy Transportation Secretary Polly Trottenberg said Monday the agency is committed to addressing the death toll. "We want to figure out what works," Trottenberg said. "We don't want to let ourselves off the hook." The number of pedestrians killed jumped 13% in 2021 to 7,342, the most since 1981. The number of cyclists killed rose 5% to 985, the most since at least 1980, NHTSA said earlier this year. In the first six months of 2022, US pedestrian deaths rose another 2% and cyclist deaths jumped another 8%, NHTSA said Monday. — Reuters

A day of joy and pride to Omanis



Dr Musallam Al Maani

The writer is Dean, Al Zahra College for Women

Today, the Sultanate of Oman honours a dear-to-all occasion which marks His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik holding the power of the country. Omanis have the power and, at the same time, privilege to which they are justly entitled to celebrate and show merited respect to this occasion, whose worth brings a state of great gratification and glory to their country. His Majesty the Sultan rules the country with wisdom and sagaciousness. Characterised by keen and farsighted judgement, Oman has been able to handle different matters with dexterity and resourcefulness. The Sultanate's approach, under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, has been marked by

astuteness, clever discerning and hardheaded keenness and depth of perception, especially in matters dealing with economic affairs, a fact that no one refuses to admit or acknowledge. Oman is fortunate to have an energetic, powerful and a vigorous leader with foresight and good judgment. As His Majesty the Sultan has made tremendous transformations notable by reason of extreme size, power, greatness and excellence. Younger Omanis are currently enraptured with joy and filled with delight to have personal and direct cognizance of the outgrowth of the development and conspicuous changes, which are so obvious to the eye and mind of citizens, residents and

OMAN IS FORTUNATE TO HAVE AN ENERGETIC, POWERFUL AND A VIGOROUS LEADER WITH FORESIGHT AND GOOD JUDGMENT

visitors of the Sultanate. As the Irish playwright, critic and political activist, George Bernard Shaw, says, "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their

minds cannot change anything." As a person of vision with commanding authority and influence, it is beyond doubt that His Majesty the Sultan leads the Sultanate with unusual discernment and foresight. The entire world devotes its attention to the changes in the Sultanate befitting its status locally, regionally and internationally. The Sultanate of Oman with its well-established record is a long-standing country, dating from the remote past. Omanis have proven, at all times, that their courteous behaviour is marked by polished manners and respect for others. The blessing is stemmed from the brief remarks of Prophet Mohammad, Peace Be Upon

Him, made when he said that Omanis never use profane or obscene language if you ever visit their country. The Sultanate, under a leadership marked by sound judgment and prudence, has put forth, and shall continue without interruption to bear an exalting influence on the region and the world as a whole. As Omanis enjoy and take pleasure and satisfaction in the renewed renaissance, they pledge allegiance to their country with devotion and loyalty to their great leader, His Majesty the Sultan. Omanis have always taken a solemn promise of faithfulness to their leadership and shall continue to do so, affirming inviolability of this self-binding promise.

Davos expects record turnout as it resumes winter slot

MARK JOHN

A record number of business and government leaders will descend on the Swiss resort of Davos next week to pore over challenges ranging from global economic slowdown to environmental collapse as the World Economic Forum returns to its winter slot. Criticised by some as a talking shop for the jet set that merely adds to the world's carbon footprint, the forum insists it has the power to bring decision-makers together in a world facing multiple crises amid growing geopolitical mistrust. "We are all stuck in a crisis mindset," WEF executive chairman and founder Klaus Schwab told the pre-meeting news conference of a world grappling with the Ukraine war, climate change and simultaneous energy and food supply crunches. The last in-person Davos winter gathering was in 2020, just days before the Covid-19 outbreak was declared a global health emergency. The 2021 event was held virtually and last year's was shifted from January to May after a spike in infections. "Davos should help to shift that mindset," Schwab said of a week-long set of discussion panels, informal gatherings and events under the banner of "Cooperation in a Fragmented World". While the Russian delegation will be conspicuous by its absence, organisers hailed a record turnout in terms of the number and diversity of participants, with expectations of a "high-level" Chinese presence. Fifty-two heads of state and government will show up next to 56 finance ministers, 19 central bank governors, 30 trade ministers and 35 foreign ministers. Heads of the United Nations, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation will be among 39 leaders of international agencies. The upmarket ski resort will host its biggest ever business participation, with 600-plus CEOs among 1,500 business leaders that include the highest ever number of female executives. Discussions are due to focus on short-term challenges like how to avoid the risk of a global recession in 2023 and how to ensure a failing global effort to tackle climate change is not set back even further by the energy crunch exacerbated by the Ukraine war and sanctions on Russia. — AFP

Malaysia's new dawn?



Andrew Kam Jia Yi

Andrew Kam Jia Yi is a professor at the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies at the University Kebangsaan Malaysia.

In 2007, on the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's independence, Nobel laureate economist Joseph E. Stiglitz celebrated the "miracle" of the country's economic rise and creation of a vibrant multiethnic society. In the 15 years that followed, however, revelations of large-scale corruption and abuse of foreign workers damaged Malaysia's international reputation and fueled domestic political instability. But Malaysia's fortunes may be turning around. Late last year, long-time opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was sworn in as the country's new prime minister. His record of effective and corruption-free leadership offers good reason to hope that Malaysia can return to a stable development path leading to greater prosperity for more people. As deputy prime minister and finance minister in the 1990s, Anwar oversaw the double-digit GDP growth that drove Malaysia's rise as one of Southeast Asia's "Tiger Cub" economies. When the Asian financial crisis erupted, he played a central role in mitigating the contagion. And he managed all of this without a whiff of malfeasance. Anwar's record stands in stark contrast to that of Najib Razak, another finance minister who went on to lead the cabinet. Under Najib's government, Malaysia became embroiled in a multibillion-dollar corruption scandal at the state fund 1MDB, with much of the plundered funds having ended up in his own bank accounts. He is now serving a 12-year prison sentence for corruption. To be sure, Anwar was jailed for nearly a decade himself. The difference is that the charges against him were concocted to remove him from the political picture, after his relationship with Mahathir Mohamad – the prime minister when Anwar held the finance portfolio – broke down. The question now is whether the 75-year-old Anwar can bring to bear the policy savvy he has previously shown in addressing the challenges Malaysia faces today, not least sustaining the post-pandemic recovery at a time of elevated inflation and declining foreign direct investment. This will require, for starters, urgent action to strengthen Malaysia's fiscal position,



A dancer cleans up a lion mask during a lion dance practice ahead of the Lunar New Year celebration in Kuala Lumpur. – Reuters

including narrowing the budget deficit and reducing the debt burden. To this end, social spending must be reformed. Malaysia needs a stronger safety net, but funding it will require the government to reduce fiscal leakage by rationalizing subsidies and ensuring that resources and services are well targeted. The ethnocentric handouts that have historically dominated Malaysia's social budget must be replaced by need-based programs. Increased private investment will also be essential. Mending Malaysia's tarnished international image will help to restore the country's status as a competitive destination for high-value investments. Any incentives for private investment (foreign or otherwise) must therefore be accompanied by rules ensuring higher labor standards and business practices that comply with international norms. It is assumed that future inward FDI will adhere to the principles enshrined in the National Investment Aspirations framework that was adopted in April 2021. Beyond attracting more foreign investment, Anwar's government must nurture the investment capacity of Malaysian-owned companies. Malaysia's entire economy would benefit from enhanced efforts to transform indigenous firms into high-value-added global industrial champions. But upgrading local industries cannot be done in a vacuum. Cultivating partnerships with foreign investors that can provide access to

frontier knowledge, technology, and capital is also crucial. When it comes to trade, Malaysia will maintain its export-oriented regime, while pursuing pro-market reforms, such as streamlining non-tariff measures and domestic regulatory barriers, in an effort to improve transparency and eliminate cartels. Malaysia's government might also consider eliminating the "approved permits" licensing system for agricultural imports – a step that would help bring down food prices. Equally important, Anwar's government must break the "iron triangle" of bureaucrats, politicians, and manpower-industry interests that contributes to abuse, exploitation, and shortages in Malaysia's migrant labor market. The country's export sector is already suffering from an acute labor shortage. Until Malaysia secures a steady supply of workers whose rights are protected, local businesses cannot grow, and foreign investors will not return. The good news is that Anwar's ten-point election manifesto acknowledges some – though not all – of these priorities. But campaign promises often go unfulfilled, overwhelmed by the hurly-burly of politics. Overcoming the ills afflicting Malaysia's economy will depend in large part on Anwar's ability to maintain a strong and stable government – no easy feat, when the unity government comprises members of five political coalitions.

© Project Syndicate

A day of pride and dignity

It's another milestone day in the Sultanate of Oman. January 11 marks the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's ascension to the reins of power. This is the day when the people of this country welcomed the new leader and unanimously pledged loyalty and allegiance to him.

The Renaissance Day constitutes Oman's symbols of pride and dignity. The day provides moments of contemplation in the past and the future, also a time to remember the founder of modern Oman, the late Sultan Qaboos who sculpted this Arabian edifice from scratch.

The late Sultan's memory rhythms in the heart of every Omani and every resident, who incessantly pray for him in gratitude for his good deeds for the nation and its loyal people.

Their achievements made by him are stark and manifest in every sphere of life. He sowed and cultivated true faith in the people.

Although His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq took over the leadership of Oman at a time impinged by sentiments of sour sorrow for the loss of Sultan Qaboos and the catastrophic Covid-19 pandemic that befell the country, with insight and strong will, and his vigilant eye not missing any flaw, His Majesty was able to make many achievements in a short span of three years.

During the outbreak of coronavirus, it is in everybody's knowledge how His Majesty devised plans and solutions in accordance with the assessment of general health results.

Oman was in the limelight with international accolades pouring in for its success in tackling the situation and bringing solace to the citizens and residents with a great decline in mortality, infection, and hospitalisation rates

While rejuvenating the memories of a dazzling past and aspiring for a better future, Omanis are certain to realise their new dreams and renewed



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

WHILE
REVITALISING
THE MEMORIES
OF A DAZZLING
PAST AND
ASPIRING FOR A
BETTER FUTURE,
OMANIS ARE
CERTAIN TO
REALISE THEIR
NEW DREAMS
AND RENEWED
HOPES ARMED
WITH A STRONG
SPIRIT OF
PATRIOTISM AND
A SUCCESS

hopes armed with a strong spirit of patriotism and success. Since the very first day of his rule, His Majesty confirmed his sincere endeavour to set up a new phase of the renewed Renaissance that would meet the requirements of the period and fulfil the aspirations of the Omani people as well as preserve the achievements that took place over the past.

As soon as he assumed office, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed the permanent stand of the country's foreign policy, saying that it advocates peaceful co-existence among nations, good neighbourliness, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

He initiated the restructuring of the country's administrative apparatus to keep pace with the ambitious Oman Vision 2040 whose salient features were drawn out by all segments of society.

The economic recovery has been gaining traction and is projected to grow at 4.3 per cent in 2022.

The achievements are manifest in every sphere of life. He sowed and cultivated true faith in the people.

While celebrating the renewed Renaissance Day today, Omanis are determined to move to a period of transformation armed by a strong faith in their ability to give more and more to consolidate their past achievements.

So it is the time all have to derive new, strong will and firm resolve to work in full cooperation and collaboration using all the resources and energies in a manner that will facilitate all difficulties and overcome all challenges for the good of Oman and its noble people.

For me, after spending nearly two and a half decades in Oman, it is the first time that I am not physically present in the country to be part of the celebrations marking this historic day.

Yet, I cherish those memories of witnessing and writing about the country's transformation into a beacon of modernity and prosperity.

PRIDE UNFURLED



It's another milestone day in the Sultanate of Oman on January 11 when the country marks the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's ascension to the reins of power. This is the day when the people of this country welcomed the new leader and unanimously pledged loyalty and allegiance to him.

A time-tested foreign policy

KABEER YOUSUF

The Sultanate of Oman's foreign policy is based on the credo 'A friend of everyone and enemy to none' a legacy that the country has been following since time immemorial.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq had reconfirmed in his first speech after his inauguration as the Sultan of the country that he would follow the brilliant steps of the late Sultan who steadfastly and resolutely stepped into the future and to preserve the accomplishments of nation building.

His Majesty advocates that peaceful coexistence between nations and peoples, good neighbourhood, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and respect for the sovereignty of states can only bring in progress to humanity.

These principles lay the foundation for the Sultanate's foreign policy.

His Majesty's visits to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Kingdom since he assumed power were interpreted as measures to maintain peaceful and cordial relations with Oman's important partners.

To begin with, His Majesty's visit to Saudi Arabia was the first political visit by an Omani Royal to the kingdom in over a decade.

His Majesty met with the Late Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle and was honoured with a GCMG.

On September 19, 2022, he attended

HIS MAJESTY
ADVOCATES
THAT PEACEFUL
COEXISTENCE
BETWEEN NATIONS
AND PEOPLES,
GOOD
NEIGHBOURHOOD,
NON-
INTERFERENCE
IN THE INTERNAL
AFFAIRS OF OTHERS
AND RESPECT FOR
THE SOVEREIGNTY
OF STATES CAN
ONLY BRING IN
PROGRESS TO
HUMANITY

the state funeral of Elizabeth II at Westminster Abbey in London.

1) Saudi Arabia:

The royal visit of His Majesty to Saudi Arabia on July 11, 2021 is considered to be his first official foreign trip since taking on the role and his talks with the Saudi officials were focused on the situation in Yemen and economic and investment cooperation.

His Majesty was greeted by Saudi King Salman, whose meeting was said to be the first face-to-face meeting since the coronavirus pandemic began, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as reported by the Saudi media.

2) Qatar:

On November 22, 2021, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq embarked upon a two-day state visit to Qatar, in response to an invitation from Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar. The visit was considered to be in affirmation of the distinguished relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar and based on the keenness of the two countries' leaderships to enhance joint ties at all levels.

3) UK:

On December 14, 2021, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq went on a private visit to the United

Kingdom, according to the Diwan of Royal Court, which read, "His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq will go on a private visit to the United Kingdom (UK) lasting several days, with effect from Tuesday, December 14, 2021."

The aims of His Majesty's visit were to upgrade the advanced relations between Oman and the UK, to serve the two countries' joint interests and to achieve the aspirations of their peoples. The visit also touched upon regional and international topics of common concern.

His Majesty the Sultan was

accompanied by a delegation comprising the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Minister of the Royal Office, the Foreign Minister and the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UK during the visit.

4) Germany:

His Majesty paid an official visit to the Federal Republic of Germany beginning on July 13, 2022, the first trip to Berlin since he took office. His visit was within the good relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany

and for further enhancement of the fields of cooperation of common concern, which aimed at achievement of aspirations of the two countries and for review of current issues of common concern in the regional and international arena.

His visit, according to international media, comes within the key topics of energy security at a time when the country is chasing ambitious plans of reusable and sustainable energy sources and Duqm is fast progressing a new hub for green hydrogen.

5) Bahrain:

Stemming from the strong bilateral relations that bind the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Bahrain, His Majesty paid a visit to Bahrain in order to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and strong bilateral ties with the latter in October 2022.

The two-day official visit to the Kingdom, the first royal visit to Manama since he took the throne in January 2020, at the kind invitation of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, King of Bahrain, was an occasion to discuss ways to stimulate cooperation between the two countries in a manner that serves their interests and aspirations and achieves future prosperity.





25th Arabian Gulf Cup





THE GLORIOUS LEGACY OF THE PAST WITH THE PROMISE OF A BRIGHT FUTURE.

Congratulations and warm wishes to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** and the citizens of Oman on the occasion of the third Accession Day.

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

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



Where the world comes to shop, safely!



حيث يأتي العالم للتسوق، بأمان!

Kuwait revive hopes after tense win

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 10

Late substitute Ahmad al Dhefri bended it to perfection in the final moments of the match as Kuwait revived their hopes with a 1-0 win against the United Arab Emirates in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in Iraq on Tuesday.

Al Dhefri's left-footed free kick from just outside the penalty box curved into the bottom left corner of UAE net.

Al Dhefri had came in the 86th minute in place of Mubarak al Faneni in a late move by Kuwait coach Pereira Bento.

Kuwait also revived their chances of a semifinal spot with the win in their second Group B match at the Al Minaa Olympic Stadium. Kuwait had lost to Qatar 2-0 in their first match.

Kuwait have three points from two matches and are currently third on the table.

Kuwait goalkeeper Sulaiman Abdulghafoor saved a shot from UAE's Khalifa al Hammadi to keep his slate clean in the dying minute of the match.

UAE's Majid Rashid could not manage a touch to a cross by Sebastian Tagliabue, which went across the Kuwait goalmouth in the 57th minute.

In the 63rd minute, Kuwait's Faisal al Harbi's shot went high above the bar after a pass by Eid al Rashedi.

Tagliabue also shot high after receiving a pass from Caio Canedo from the right side of the box in the 76th minute.

Bader Tareq replaced Mahdi Dashti for Kuwait in the 72nd minute.

In the 66th minute, a Kuwait move ended with Mubarak al Faneni caught offside after a through ball from Eid al Rashedi.

UAE made a change in the 62nd minute with Ali Saleh coming in for Majid Rashid.

For Kuwait, Hamad al Qallaf replaced Meshari Ghanam.

In the 60th minute, UAE's Abdalla Ramadan's shot from outside the box missed to the right after an assist from Majid Rashid.

Kuwait came close in the 54th minute as Shabaib al Khaldi's left-footed shot from the centre of the box missed to the right.

Kuwait came near the UAE box earlier but could not take a shot.

In the 47th minute, Tagliabue got a yellow card for a foul on Kuwait's Sultan al Enezi.

In the injury time of first-half, UAE's Harib Abdalla Suhail's shot from outside the box was well guarded by the Kuwait defence.

UAE's Khalifa al Hammadi won a free kick at the Kuwait half after a foul by Kuwait's Mubarak al Faneni.

A minute earlier, UAE came close with Majid Rashid making a header from the centre of the box but was saved by Kuwait keeper Sulaiman Abdulghafoor.

In the 43rd minute, Kuwait's Shabaib al Khaldi connected a fine cross from Mubarak al Faneni with a good header from close range but was saved by UAE keeper Khalid Eisa.

In the 24th minute, Kuwait's Eid al Rashedi's strong shot missed narrowly to the right after a pass from Shabaib Al Khaldi from the right side of the box.

UAE's Abdalla Ramadan was booked earlier for a rough tackle on Kuwait's Mubarak al Faneni in the 22nd minute.

Kuwait's Ahmed al Dhefri celebrates after the match with Mohammad Bajeyah. – Reuters

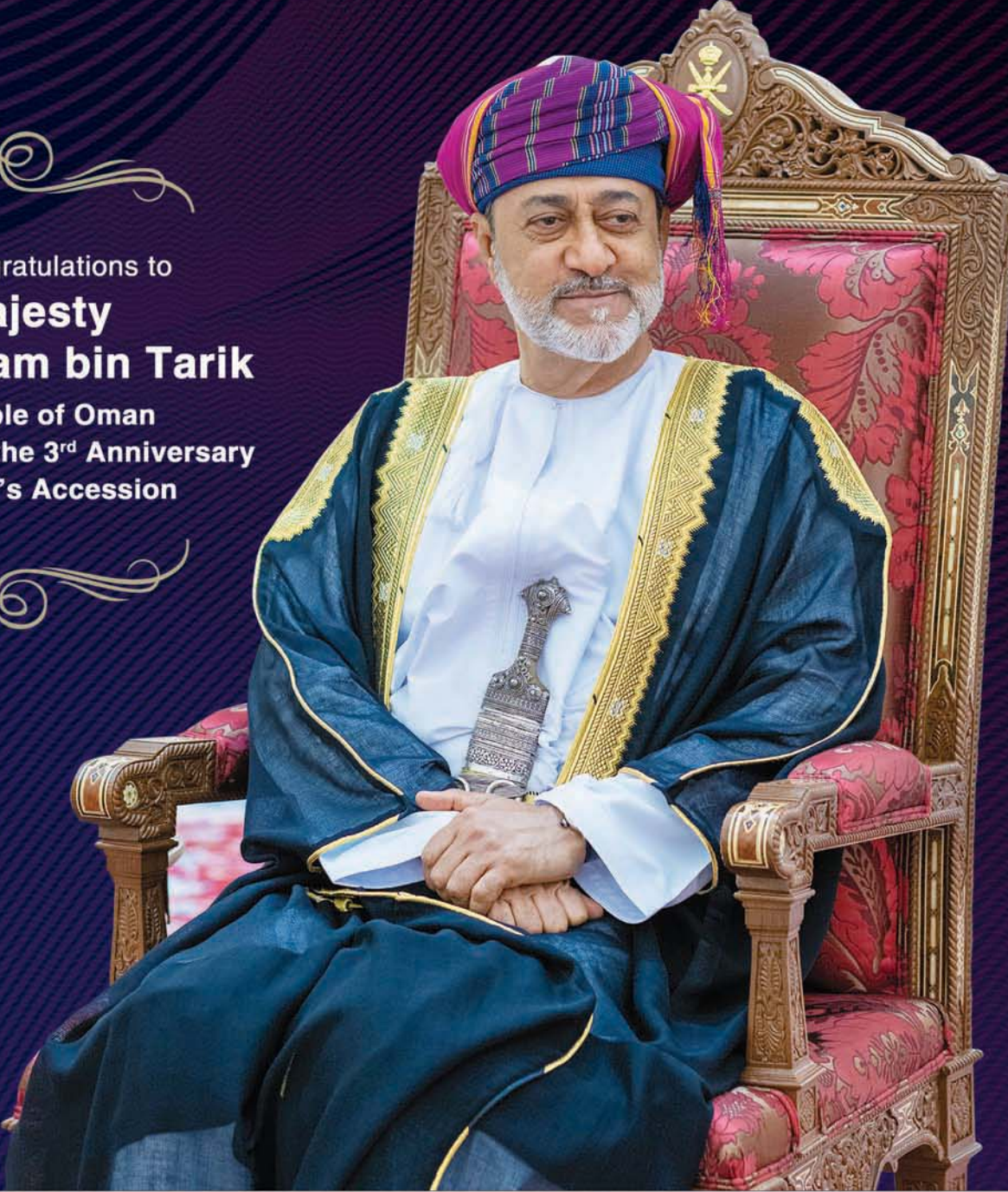


Kuwait's Ahmed al Dhefri celebrates scoring their first goal with teammates and coaching staff. – Reuters

FAN ZONE



Heartiest Congratulations to
**His Majesty
Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**
and the people of Oman
on the occasion of the 3rd Anniversary
of His Majesty's Accession



As 'builders of nations', L&T is playing a vital role in building the economy of the Sultanate of Oman. In almost every sphere of construction, across sectors that move the wheels of industry, L&T has been setting benchmarks and fuelling the nation's progress.

 **LARSEN & TOUBRO**
www.Larsentoubro.com

LARSEN & TOUBRO (OMAN) LLC LARSEN & TOUBRO ELECTROMECH LLC L&T MODULAR FABRICATION YARD LLC

BAHRAIN TOP GROUP WITH SECOND WIN

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 10

Bahrain came back to post their second straight win in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup with a 2-1 result against Qatar at the Al Minaa Olympic Stadium in Iraq on Tuesday night.

The win enabled the defending champions to top Group B with six points, while Qatar are second on three points.

Abdulla Yusuf Helal netted the winner from a penalty in the 89th minute.

Helal's cool finish sent the ball to the bottom right corner of the net past Qatar keeper Meshaal Barsham.

The penalty was awarded after a VAR check over a hand ball in the penalty area by Mohammed Waad, who was booked with a yellow card.

Bahrain goalkeeper Ebrahim Lutfallah got a yellow card towards the final moments of the match.

Waad had netted an own-goal before in the 72nd minute as it turned out to be a bad day for the Qatari midfielder.

Bahrain, who were trailing a first-half goal, found the equaliser with the goal, which came after a corner conceded by Tameem Mansour.

In 71st minute, Mohamed Adel of Bahrain sent his shot from the centre of the box too high after a good cross by Kamil al Aswad.

Qatar's Mohammed Waad tried



ABOVE: Bahrain's Yusuf Hilal scores their second goal from the penalty spot against Qatar in the Group B match of the Arabian Gulf Cup 25 at the Al Minaa Olympic Stadium in Basra, Iraq.

BELOW: Yusuf Hilal celebrates the winning goal. – Reuters



a through ball, but Ahmed Alaa was caught offside in the 69th minute.

Bahrain made a triple change in the 60th minute.

Ahmed Al Sherooqi replaced Abdulla al Khalasi, Kamil al Aswad came in for Mahdi Ali and Sayed Dhiya substituted Ali Madan.

In the 58th minute, the Bahrain keeper saved a shot from Tameem Mansour at the bottom left corner.

Ahmed Alaadin struck for Qatar in the 34th minute with a brilliant header off a corner from Mohammed Waad.

Alaadin's header from the left side of the six-yard box screamed past Bahrain goalkeeper Ebrahim Lutfallah to the top left corner of the net.

Four minutes later, Bahrain missed a chance when Mohamed Marhoon could not direct his left-footed shot towards the target after a nice cross from Abdulla Yusuf Helal.

Qatar missed an attempt closely in the 27th minute. Amro Abdelfatah Ali Surag's right-footed shot from the left side of the box missed to the right after a pass from Ahmed Alaa.

In the 14th minute, Bahrain's Abdulla Yusuf Helal hit the left post with a right-footed shot from the left side of the six-yard box.

Bahrain made a valid attempt in the seventh minute. Qatar goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham saved the shot at the bottom left corner after a nice shot from Mohammed Marhoon outside the box.



Oman D20 League 2023 begins today

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket will organise the second edition of the Oman D20 league at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds from January 11 to 24. All the matches will be played on Turf 1 with a round-robin format employed for the entire league stage.

Double-header matches will be played on weekdays with games starting at 2:30 pm and 6:30 pm and triple-header matches will be played on weekends with games starting at 10:30 am, 2:30 pm and 6:30 pm respectively.

Speaking on the commencement of the second season, Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer of Oman Cricket, said, “Oman Cricket had a phenomenal run with the first edition of the D20 League. The tournament far exceeded our expectations and now we feel very excited for the forthcoming D20 edition which I’m sure will surpass expectations even further – both from the players’ development and scouting perspective and from the team owners’ perspective. We at Oman Cricket are thrilled to experiment with various new forms of leagues and I wish everyone all the very best.”

The D20 tournament will be contested by the Premier Division sides representing the same 8 teams that took part in the D10 tournament earlier in October - namely Qurum Thunders, Amerat Royals, Azaiba XI, Bousher Busters, Khuwair Warriors, Ghubrah Giants, Darsait Titans and the defending champions Ruwi Rangers.

All the 31 games of the Oman D20 league will be broadcasted live on FanCode in India, GeoSports in Pakistan, Willow TV in US and Canada, CricLife2 and SwitchTV in Middle East and Sportseye and Crictracker via Facebook and YouTube across the world.

The entry is free for all fans at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds in Al Amerat.

FRANCE CAPTAIN LORIS ANNOUNCES INTERNATIONAL RETIREMENT

PARIS: France’s World Cup-winning goalkeeper and captain, Hugo Lloris, announced his retirement from international football aged 36 on Monday, saying he wanted to spend more time with his family.

Lloris made a record 145 appearances for France from 2008-22, captaining the team 121 times, also a record.

He made his international debut in 2008, playing at the European Championship in 2012, 2016 and 2020 as well as the 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022 World Cup tournaments.

Tottenham Hotspur keeper Lloris led France to victory in the 2018 World Cup before again leading them to the final this year in Qatar where they were beaten by Argentina.

“There comes a time when you have to know how to hand over the reins. I have always said over and over again that the French team doesn’t belong to anyone, and we all have to make sure that’s the case, me first,” he told L’Equipe in an interview.

“I think that the team is ready to go on. There is also a goalkeeper who is ready (Mike Maignan).

“I prefer to go out at my peak than wait for a downturn. There is also a family choice, I feel the need to spend more time with my wife and children.”

Along with the 2018 World Cup, Lloris also won the 2021 Nations League and guided France to the final of the 2016 European Championship.

France head coach Didier Deschamps said Lloris was retiring at his peak and despite still having a place in the national set-up but called on fans to respect his decision.

“A great servant of the French team is taking his leave and I would like to pay tribute to his exceptional career,” Deschamps said. “Beyond all the records that his talent and professionalism enabled him to break, beyond the essential role that he played in our greatest victories... Hugo is a remarkable person on a human level.

“It was a pleasure and an honour for me to be his coach.



France's Hugo Lloris walks past the World Cup trophy as he holds his silver medal after the final of Qatar World Cup 2022 in Doha on December 18. — Reuters

I wish all coaches had players like him to coach. Hugo has my respect and gratitude. I wish him happiness.”

Since 2012, Lloris has played for Premier League side Tottenham, where he is also captain. He

previously featured for Ligue 1 teams Nice and Olympique Lyonnais.

His former Spurs team-mate Gareth Bale also announced his retirement from football on Monday. — Reuters



11 teams to compete in Muscat Nights show jumping

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 10

For the first time at Qurum Natural Park, 11 teams holding the names of governorates of the Sultanate of Oman will compete in two days of show jumping championship as part of the Muscat Nights activities.

The competitions will be held during January 19-20, it was announced at a press conference on Monday.

Ahmed al Abri, Secretary of the Oman Equestrian Federation (OEF), said: “The show jumping sport is one of the ancient sports, which is an Olympic sport and has received wide attention by His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.”

Al Abri mentions this partnership between the OEF and the Oman Olympic Equestrian Centre is a continued joint cooperation between the two sides.

“Today, it was renewed by involving Muscat Municipality to come out with a competition under the name Muscat Nights show jumping championship which will be at Qurum Natural Park for the first time on the grassy ground. The place has been inspected and necessary improvements will be made to ensure the success of the event,” Al Abri said.

“We know that moving any event outside usual places will be difficult, but with solidarity, all the difficulties have been overcome, thanks to the Olympic Equestrian Centre, Muscat Municipality, and all those who contributed to the work.”

Al Abri pointed out that the Oman Olympic Committee will provide a number of mobile stables, square barriers and competition barriers. Muscat Municipality will also work to provide lighting as the competition will be in the evening to ensure the presence of the fans.

DRAW ON JAN 16

Sultan al Touqi, a representative of the Olympic Equestrian Centre, talked about the technical aspects of the competition. He said the rounds will be similar to those that existed with the addition of a category for the first time. Each team will consist of three riders.

The draw for the championship riders will be held on January 16 at the OEF headquarters in presence of show jumping judges at 10.30 am. The teams under the name of the governorates will be formed during the draw.

The first day’s (January 19) competitions will include the round of Al Rayyan Stables League for Future Knights (minor category 12-17 years) and the run of Al Rayyan Stables League for Future Knights (the grand category 18-21 years).

Al Touqi said that riders and horses classified from the beginning of the season at heights of 90, 100, 110 and 120 cm can participate in this round for the governorates.

On the second day (January 20), Al Touqi explained that there are four categories for the Al Rayyan Stables League round for the future riders (the youngest category 12-17 years old) (100-110 cm), (the senior category 18-21 years old) (110-120 cm). The small category has a height of 110 cm, the medium category has a height of 120 cm, and the large category has a height of 130 cm, all with cash awards. The horse classification system will be applied so that each horse participates in the category in which it is classified from the beginning of the season while allowing promotion to the top in the event that it finishes two rounds at its current level with a number not exceeding 16 penalty points.

The third day of the championship will be held at the show jumping field at Al Rahba Farm on January 27. There will be eight categories, namely the 70 cm category, 90 cm category and 100 cm category, all with financial prizes.

Abdullah al Zubair to make return at Oman International Rally

MUSCAT: Omani racer Abdullah al Zubair will return to rally action by taking part in the Oman International Rally 2023 from January 26 to 28.

Once again, Abdullah will be back behind Subaru Impreza wheel this year for the Oman International Rally, which will be the opening round of the Middle East Rally Championship (Merc).

The Omani driver will join a competitive field from Middle East and elsewhere in his home circuit.

The rally will be conducted from January 26 to 28 in Muscat Governorate and will be organised by the Oman

Automobile Association.

Al Zubair, who has not participated any activity in motor sport since he won the second place in Jordan

National Rally in March 2020 with his Navigator Emad Juma, has stated that he was happy to join the local and international drivers in this top event.

Al Zubair said: “I am delighted and very happy in fact to be behind steering wheel of car race again. It is great to return back to my favourite sport. It has been more than three years since I attended the last rally in Jordan. I would like to thank and appreciate the great support

and the sponsorship of ARA Petroleum for my participation in the Oman International Rally and hope that I can do well in this three-day race and wish everyone safe driving and successful results.”

“The Oman International Rally is always known as the most difficult rally in the Middle East. Therefore, it is not easy to compete with some famous drivers who are always in this field every season, but I will try my best and hope to reach to the final stage and get good result,” he added.

He wished the event success with good participation of drivers.



business

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
4,875.731



CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$ 76.21
Brent Crude \$ 79.56
Light Crude \$ 74.73



Follow us on
omanobserver.om/business



Pledging To Wise Leadership

Congratulations to
**His Majesty Sultan
Haitham bin Tarik** on the
occasion of the anniversary
of His Majesty’s accession.
We renew our pledge of
loyalty to work for growth and
prosperity under his visionary
leadership.

Bank Muscat. Better Everyday.



Realising Aspirations of a Nation

Warm Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
on the 3rd year of visionary leadership that has propelled our Nation towards prosperity.

دليل للنفط ش.م.م.
DALEEL PETROLEUM L.L.C.

OQ Group receives first crude shipment at Ras Markaz Terminal

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 10

OQ, a global integrated energy group, announced that it has successfully received the first shipment of crude oil at Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage and Export Terminal, which is being carried out by its subsidiary Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO).

This comes as part of the efforts exerted by OQ to take advantage of Oman's strategic location by finding alternatives to storing crude oil outside the Strait of Hormuz and then exporting it to regional and international markets. This provides oil exporters with an opportunity for finding alternative clients.



Additionally, this project will meet the demands of the projects that are being implemented in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

On this occasion, Hilal bin Ali al Kharusi, CEO of Commercial and Downstream Sector at OQ and Chairman of the OTTCO Board of Directors, said: "Our

success in receiving the first shipment of crude oil at Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage and Export Terminal opens up wider horizons for moving forward towards executing other phases of this strategic project, which is considered the biggest of its kind in the Middle East region."

Al Kharusi added: "Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage and Export Terminal, which was established according to highest international standards with investments from the Omani government, is considered one of the biggest investment projects in the Sultanate. OQ Group has made great efforts to carry out this project as part of its strategy aimed at strengthening the investment sectors."

Oman pledges space mission continuity following satellite launch setback

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 10

Oman's first satellite 'Aman' failed to launch yesterday due to a technical issue. The cube satellite was scheduled to launch from spaceport Cornwall in the UK as part of a Virgin Orbit mission. According to the company, the launching rocket's system experienced a malfunction during the firing of the rocket's second stage engine.

Chief Executive Officer of Virgin Orbit, Dan Hart, stated the following regarding the mission's failure, "While we are very proud of the many things that we successfully achieved as part of this mission, we are mindful that we failed to provide our customers with the launch service they deserve."

"The first-time nature of this mission added layers of complexity that our team professionally managed through; however, in the end a technical failure appears to have prevented us from delivering the final orbit. We will work tirelessly to understand the nature of the failure, make corrective actions, and return to orbit as soon as we have completed a full investigation and mission assurance process," he added.

Satellite Aman was previously integrated into launching rocket LauncherOne, which was meant to be deployed through an air carrier in a process



known as air-launching. However, the company behind the Satellite, Oman's Emerging Technology Company (ETCO), labelled the failure as a possible risk in the space industry.

"The mission is fully insured, and we have activated the response plan to ensure the continuity of the mission's operations and our services in the space sector," shared the company in a statement online.

The nanosatellite, known as a cube satellite or a CubeSat, was meant to launch into low earth orbit. While images and data collected would be transmuted to ETCO's ground station in Oman.

The satellite was a result of a collaboration between Oman's ETCO, data analysis and solutions provider TUATARA, and nanosatellite manufacturer SatRevolution. It is unknown when the satellite will re-launch.

Ladies Banking Services
A Banking world tailor-made for you

- Priority to serve in select branches
- Customized debit card with a host of benefits
- Customized Visa Classic credit cards with exclusive offers and benefits
- Children's Long Term Deposit Education Plan linked to your account
- Attractive car insurance rates

For more information:
<https://bit.ly/BankdhofarEng>



Ladies Banking Services



the best bank for you | 24791111 | www.bankdhofar.com

Celebrating Progressive Leadership

Our warmest felicitations to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

And the people of Oman on the
Anniversary of assuming leadership.

Oman has a bright and prosperous future under Him.
May Allah protect and take care of Him.



محسن حيدر درويش ش.م.م.

MOHSIN HAIDER DARWISH L.L.C.

WJ Towell Group Company



- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

شوبين جفت Shoppinggift

GET FREE SHOPPING VOUCHER with every purchase of TallyPrime single user

Contact: Guruprasad +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@asiasolutions.net
<https://www.asiasolutions.net>

ASIA SOLUTIONS
TALLY GOLD PARTNER
TALLY FOR VAT

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 11, 2023 JUMADA AL THANIA 18, 1444 AH

Observer Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

سماء الخضراء للتجارة SAMÁ AL KHADRA TRADING

SERVICES:

PIPING SYSTEMS VALVES
DRAINS INTERCEPTORS

Tel: 24501568, 24502479 • Fax: 24503566
Email: sales@samaalkhadra.com
Website: www.samaalkhadratradingco.com

URGENT HIRING FOR WATER QUALITY EQUIPMENT TECHNICIANS

- ◆ More than 2-year work experience in same field Oman/GCC
- ◆ Driving License Oman

Suitable candidate can send CV to: recruitment74@gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN male graduate Executive Secretary/ Stenography/ Oman DL and Muscat experience available. Contact: 79256679.

GENERAL manager with 16+ years experience in Oman, MBA — BE, seeks suitable placement. Contact: 94008034.

SIT. WANTED

QUANTITY SURVEYOR / CIVIL ENGINEER Sri Lankan, B.Eng in Civil, Diploma in QS with 6 years experience. Contact: 77102656. Email: nafamohamed24@gmail.com

PMP. Indian male Civil Eng. Around 10 years experience in construction projects. Softwares: Primavera P6, MS Office, ERP, having Oman driving licence. Ready to join, email: engineer4planning@gmail.com, Call: 78002582.

PAKISTANI, with light licence. Tel: 99891540.

PLANNING engineer, INDIAN female (M Tech Civil Structural Engineering) having 7 years experience as Quantity Surveyor cum Quality Control Engineer, looking for suitable position. Contact: 96154505.

26 YEARS old, merchandiser/ helper with Omani driving licence, English speaking, can join immediately, please contact: 99766761.

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?

Advertise with us.

Contact us on: **99639264**

FOR RENT

FLAT for rent

- 1) Darsait, near Indian School Two bedroom flat, bath attached, hall, kitchen and guest toilet. One bedroom flat, hall, kitchen and toilet.
- 2) Al Khuwair, near Rawasco: One bedroom, bath, kitchen, AC, curtains.
- 3) Al Ghubrah near Mars Hypermarket, two bedroom flat with attached bath, hall, kitchen and guest toilet. One bedroom flat with attached bath, hall, kitchen and guest toilet.
- 4) Al Ghubrah near Indian School. Two bedroom flat with attached bath, hall, kitchen and guest toilet. All flats provided with air conditioners. Contact GSM: 91473374, 97886085.

Flats 2bhk and 1 bhk in Mumtaz. Contact 99341138 and 90991079.

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

SPACIOUS 3 bedrooms flat, behind Honda Showroom, Al Wattayah, Muscat. Contact: 92269972, only WhatsApp. RO 200, negotiable.

SERVICES

Autocad/revit arch MEP, part/full- time. Contact WhatsApp: 97103168.

BUILDING of 1.500 sqm 3 stories, accommodation, store and office at Misfa. ☎99432177, 99010964.

AUDIT, ACCOUNTING, VAT, TAXATION

Contact: **97239696 95355638**

Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit
Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Sur

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

OMAN OBSERVER

Now get news on the go

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,

WhatsApp <your name> to **96473232**

www.omanobserver.com

RENT A CAR

Buttercup Rent A Car
AMAZING OFFERS

- Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
- Rent for one month and get 5 days free.

All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts.

☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS

Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/ monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.



For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suham Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020 DHUL QAADA 18, 1441 AH

OMAN OBSERVER DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUELI VOL. 39 NO. 239 | PAGES 16

Be Careful. Be Responsible! #Living_with_Covid19

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

NEW YORK: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen.

In a virtual video call to countries lacking the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed to establish peace and security in Yemen.

"The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said.

Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world." He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability. — OANA

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al-Habshi (pictured), Chairman of the Supreme Court Saeed Khalifa bin Said bin Khalifa al-Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Shauk Al-Mukhtar bin Abdullah bin Issa al-Harthi, took the oath of office at Al-Buraydah Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month.

CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are filling our ears.

A drive around the downtown Ruwi and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder.

While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not.

"In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves," said Samuel Kutty, a social commentator.

He said that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19.

While expressing his ire, Hamud said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer.

TURN TO P4

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behavior of other people as well," said Hamud al-Wahabi, who stopped his car to



@omanobserver
www.omanobserver.om

Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik
And the People of Oman
On the 3rd Anniversary of the Accession Day



LEADING THE NATION TO GREATER HEIGHTS



SAUD BAHWAN Group

Oman under the wise and visionary leadership and guidance of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik**, is making rapid progress on all fronts.

Saud Bahwan Group is wholly committed to His Majesty's vision. Saud Bahwan Group is continuously playing a responsible role towards fulfilling national objectives.

On this special occasion, Saud Bahwan Group salutes the vision of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik** and congratulates the people of Oman.



Dahal confirmed as Prime Minister for third time

KATHMANDU: Nepal’s Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as Prachanda, was confirmed as the country’s prime minister for a third time on Tuesday, winning almost unanimous backing from legislators even though November’s election returned a hung parliament.

Dahal, who still goes by his nom de guerre Prachanda, meaning “fierce”, secured 268 ballots in a vote of confidence in the 275-member parliament.

Nevertheless, his seven-party coalition may find it hard to govern as many of the allies have conflicting interests on looming issues including problems of secularism, the shape of the federal government and the distribution of citizenship ID cards.

The new administration also faces mounting economic challenges including high inflation; a decline in foreign exchange reserves as the price of food and energy imports soars; and a low tax base that limits state spending on critical infrastructure.

Nepal has had 11 governments since 2008 and the instability has undermined business and investment. — Reuters

NATO, EU vow more support for Ukraine to defend itself

BRUSSELS: NATO and the EU vowed on Tuesday to bolster their backing for Ukraine to fight off Russia’s invasion and ramp up cooperation between Europe and the US-led alliance.

Longstanding designs by NATO and EU to forge greater cooperation have gained impetus from the West’s support of Ukraine.

“We must continue to strengthen the partnership between NATO and the European Union. And we must further strengthen our support to Ukraine,” NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said after signing a joint declaration with the EU’s top officials.

Countries in NATO and the EU -- which share 21 members -- have funnelled billions of dollars of arms to Kyiv that have helped it push back Moscow’s forces.

The United States, Germany and France have announced they will now also supply Ukraine with armoured fighting vehicles -- but Kyiv has pleaded for modern heavy tanks to be sent as well.

“I think that Ukraine should get all the necessary military equipment they need and they can handle to defend the homeland,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

“This means of course, advanced air defence systems, but also other types of advanced military equipment, as long as it is necessary to defend Ukraine”

Stoltenberg said Kyiv’s Western backers will meet next week with Ukraine’s defence minister “to discuss exactly what types of weapons are needed and how can allies provide those weapons”.



Ukrainians return to their shelters after gathering water, as Russia’s attack on Ukraine continues, in Siversk. -- Reuters

“This is not only about adding more systems, more platforms, more weapons, but also ensuring that the platforms, the weapons we have already provided, are working as they should,” he said.

Moscow’s attack on Ukraine has upended the European security order and spurred calls for the EU and NATO to work more closely together to protect the continent.

NATO REMAINS THE FOUNDATION

The two organisations agreed that NATO, backed by the military might of the United States, remains the bedrock for Europe’s security despite attempts by the EU to boost its role in defence.

“Our declaration makes clear that NATO remains the foundation of collective defence and remains essential for Euro-Atlantic security,” Stoltenberg said.

“It also recognises the value of a more capable European defence that contributes positively to our security and is complementary to and interoperable with NATO.”

European Council President Charles Michel agreed that NATO remained fundamental to defending the EU, but insisted a push spearheaded by France for greater European “strategic autonomy” was not dead.

“Making Europe stronger makes NATO stronger, because strong allies make strong alliances,”

Michel said.

The efforts to expand the EU’s role in defence have sparked warnings it could overlap with NATO and worries from eastern European members who do not want to water down Washington’s position as their major security guarantor.

NATO and the EU have for years been talking about improving their coordination and Tuesday’s joint declaration was the third cooperation pledge agreed since 2016.

The latest version had originally been envisioned to come out in 2021, but was redrafted after the start of the Kremlin’s assault on Ukraine in February. — AFP

Magnitude 7.6 quake rattles Indonesia

JAKARTA: A 7.6-magnitude earthquake hit deep under the ocean off Indonesia and East Timor early on Tuesday, injuring at least one person after rattling nearby islands, damaging homes and forcing residents to flee in panic.

The epicentre of the quake was 427 kilometres south of the Indonesian island of Ambon at a depth of 95 kilometres, the US Geological Survey reported.

Indonesia’s Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) said the tremor was felt on the eastern islands of Timor, the Maluku archipelago and Papua. It reported some aftershocks at a magnitude of 5.5.

“I was in bed, then I felt a little shake. I woke up and found out that many of my friends felt it too,” Hamdi, an Indonesian in Ambon, said.

The country’s disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) said at least 15 homes and two schools had been damaged in the Tanimbar Islands.

The strongest jolt was felt in Saumlaki, the archipelago’s biggest town with a population of 8,000 people, it said.

“For casualties, the local disaster agency reported one person was injured. The jolt was felt strongly (in Tanimbar) between three to five seconds,” BNPB spokesperson Abdul Muhari said in a statement Tuesday.

“People were panicking and fled their homes.”

Pictures shared by the agency showed damage to homes in several villages in Southwest Maluku Regency. — AFP

WHO backs mask wearing on long flights

LONDON: Countries should consider recommending passengers wear masks on long-haul flights to counter the latest Omicron subvariant of Covid-19 given its rapid spread in the United States, World Health Organization (WHO) officials said on Tuesday.

In Europe, the XBB.1.5 subvariant is being detected in small but growing numbers, WHO/Europe officials said at a press briefing.

Passengers should be advised to wear masks in high-risk settings such as long-haul flights, said the WHO’s senior emergency officer for Europe, Catherine

Smallwood, adding: “this should be a recommendation issued to passengers arriving from anywhere where there is widespread Covid-19 transmission”.

XBB.1.5 - the most transmissible Omicron subvariant that has been detected so far - accounted for 27.6% of Covid-19 cases in the United States for the week ending Jan. 7, US health officials have said.

It remains unclear if XBB.1.5 will cause its own wave of infections around the world. Current vaccines continue to protect against severe symptoms, hospitalisation and death, experts



Passengers should be advised to wear masks in high-risk settings such as long-haul flights, WHO’s senior emergency officer for Europe said. -- Reuters

say.

“Countries need to look at the evidence base for pre-departure testing”, Smallwood added,

saying it was crucial not to focus exclusively on one particular geographic area.

If action is considered, she said, “our opinion is that travel measures should be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner”.

That did not mean the agency recommended testing for passengers coming from the United States at this stage, she added.

Measures that can be taken include genomic surveillance, and targeting passengers arriving from other countries as long as it does not divert resources away from domestic surveillance systems. Others include wastewater

monitoring systems around points of entry, such as airports.

XBB.1.5 is yet another descendant of Omicron, the most contagious - and now globally dominant - variant of the virus that causes Covid-19. It is an offshoot of XBB, first detected in October, which is itself a recombinant of two other Omicron subvariants.

Concerns about XBB.1.5 fuelling a fresh spate of cases in the United States and beyond are on the rise at the same time as a surge of Covid cases in China, after the country pivoted away from its signature “zero Covid” policy last month. — Reuters

MANILA

11 killed in Philippine storms

At least 11 people have died in storms across the Philippines in the past week, with more heavy rain expected in already sodden regions of the disaster-prone country, authorities said on Tuesday.

Bad weather has plagued the country’s southern and central islands since the Christmas weekend when downpours triggered flooding and landslides that left 52 people dead and forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.



Since January 3, back-to-back storms have killed 11 people as floodwaters swept through houses, cut roads and swamped crops, the civil defence office said.

RIYADH

Saudi Arabia lifts limits on Haj pilgrimage

Saudi Arabia is lifting restrictions imposed on the Muslim Haj pilgrimage this year, after the coronavirus pandemic forced a downsizing of the annual event for three years.

In 2019, the last year before the pandemic struck, some 2.6 million people performed the Haj. The kingdom allowed only limited numbers from its residents in 2020 and 2021 before it welcomed back one million foreign pilgrims in 2022.

The Ministry of Haj and



Umrah said in a tweet that the kingdom, home to Islam’s holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, will impose no restrictions, including age limits, for this season.

LUCKNOW

India to demolish buildings in sinking Himalayan town

India will demolish some buildings in a northern Himalayan town near its border with China after evacuating families in the past few days, an official said on Tuesday, as hundreds of homes have developed cracks in an area thronged by pilgrims.

Experts and residents have long warned that large-scale construction in and around the town of Joshimath, including work for power projects by companies such as state-run NTPC, could



lead to land subsidence.

Nearly 700 houses in the town in the state of Uttarakhand have developed cracks and some 400 people have been moved to safer locations, authorities say.

Warm felicitations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the people of Oman
on the occasion of the 3rd Anniversary of
His Majesty's Accession.



شركة ظفار لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.ع
Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

Last 8 years warmest on record globally

PARIS: The last eight years were the warmest on record even with the cooling influence of a La Nina weather pattern since 2020, the European Union's climate monitoring service said on Tuesday.

Average temperatures across 2022 — which saw a cascade of unprecedented natural disasters made more likely and deadly by climate change — make it the fifth warmest year since records began in the 19th century, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service.

Pakistan and northern India were scorched by a two-month spring heatwave with sustained temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), followed in Pakistan by flooding that covered a third of the country.

France, Britain, Spain and Italy set new average temperature records for 2022, with Europe as a whole enduring its second hottest year ever, Copernicus said in an annual report.

Heatwaves across the continent were compounded by severe drought conditions.

European temperatures have increased by more than twice the global average over the past 30 years, with the region showing the highest rate of increase of any



Commercial traffic along rivers in Europe and China — as in this photo of the Yangtze River — were disrupted by drought in 2022. — AFP

Pakistan and northern India were scorched by a two-month spring heatwave with sustained temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius, followed in Pakistan by flooding that covered a third of the country.

continent on the globe. "2022 was yet another year of climate extremes across Europe and

globally," said deputy head of the Copernicus climate change service Samantha Burgess in a statement.

"These events highlight that we are already experiencing the devastating consequences of our warming world."

Large swathes of the Middle East, China, central Asia and northern Africa also saw unprecedented warmth averaged across the whole of 2022.

China and western Europe reported negative impacts on agriculture, river transport and energy management related to weather conditions. — AFP

Accession Day Anniversary

On this glorious occasion,
we extend our congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik
and the people of Oman, wishing them
further progress, prosperity and glory.





We extend our warmest and heartfelt congratulations to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik**, may Allah protect him, on the occasion of the Accession Anniversary of **His Majesty**. We are inspired by the leadership to continue the growth and development of our beautiful country.



3 GLORIOUS YEARS OF OMAN



VISION FOR PEACE WITH ALL

SAMUEL KUTTY

TRUTH, justice, cooperation, peace, security and the like have made the Sultanate of Oman a reliable partner for nations at the regional and international levels.

Under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman's status among entities that are active in resolving regional crises and the country's presence at international events is a direct outcome of the soundness of its foreign policy foundations.

The vision of His Majesty is based on Oman's maintaining positive cooperation with all countries in various spheres and in a manner that promotes mutual interests. The results of the vision are manifest in his recent visits to different countries, including those in Europe and the Gulf, and vice versa visits by heads of a number of countries to Oman.

Oman's foreign policy is based on a firm conviction that confronting the challenging problems of the time can only succeed by adhering to a vision shaped by tolerance.

"We, in the Sultanate of Oman, are part of this interconnected world with which we share common interests and destiny. We are pleased with what pleases the world and regret what is harmful to it," Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy told the 76th session of the United Nations in New York.

Therefore, Oman strives with all its energies and capabilities to contribute to the advancement of peace at all regional and international levels.

"We are committed to our position of clarity, frankness and objectivity. We are also firm in our adherence to our values and principles. We uphold a balanced and constructive approach in dealing with all issues," he said.

Oman's foreign policy advocates good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for international laws and charters, support for cooperation among countries and the enhancement of opportunities for internal dialogue.

"We believe in the need to resolve differences in a spirit of harmony and tolerance that has always been the mainstay of the country's human civilisation. Harmony and tolerance lead to better and more lasting results than could be achieved by conflict and strife," the Foreign Minister emphasised.

When it comes to the neighbours, the concept of neighbour extends beyond immediately adjacent countries, the policy ensures that the relations with them are characterised by friendship, mutual respect, non-interference and understanding.

Oman's neighbours include fellow members of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council, with whom Oman has developed extensive economic and security collaboration, contributing substantially to mutual security during a period of uncertain regional stability. For Oman, the concept of neighbour extends beyond immediately adjacent countries, to embrace other important partners whose proximity and significance qualify them as neighbouring states.

Oman believes that establishing and maintaining peace in the world is necessary for the good of people and that this stance can be maintained only if it is based on firm rules of justice and solid foundations of cooperation and harmony among all nations with the aim of engaging positively with countries of the world for a promising future for mankind.

"The Sultanate of Oman pursues a well-established policy which is based on a deep and steadfast vision and a legacy drawn from its cultural heritage and history," asserted Dr Mohamed al Hassan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations.

Therefore, he said while addressing the 77th session of the UN, Oman affirms the fundamentals of its foreign policy, in siding with truth and justice, strengthening positive cooperation and the bonds of friendship and contributing to the consolidation of international peace and security.

Oman practices diplomacy that encourages all parties to give room to the language of tolerance and dialogue while exerting every possible effort to defuse tension, with wisdom, good advice and responsible cooperation.



We are committed to our position of clarity, frankness and objectivity. We are also firm in our adherence to our values and principles

SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDY

Foreign Minister



Visits have helped enhanced cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and brotherly and friendly countries, witnessed the signing of cooperation agreements in the economic and investment domains, and the opening of new horizons for economic cooperation and trade exchange with countries of the world.

Royal visits unlock new trade and investment opportunities

QASIM AL MAASHANI

Since his accession to the throne in January 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has made royal visits to friendly foreign capitals one of the hallmarks of his eventful reign aptly dubbed 'The Renewed Renaissance'.

At the same time, His Majesty played

royal host to visiting royal dignitaries and heads-of-state – visits that have not only helped reinforce warm, cordial, diplomatic ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the countries in question, but crucially, have also opened up immense opportunities for reciprocal investment, trade and economic cooperation.

The Observer looks back on some of His Majesty's hugely successful foreign

tours, as well as the reciprocal visits made by his counterparts to Oman, and the economic opportunities they have unlocked in their wake:

These outbound and inbound visits have helped enhanced cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and brotherly and friendly countries, witnessed the signing of cooperation agreements in the economic and

investment domains, and the opening of new horizons for economic cooperation and trade exchange with countries of the world.

WITNESSED VISITS

During 2022, the Sultanate of Oman witnessed visits by official delegations from 7 countries, namely the Kingdom of Belgium, the Islamic Republic of

Iran, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Zanzibar. Official visits involving the Federal Republic of Germany and the Kingdom of Bahrain resulted in the signing of 47 memoranda of understanding, 14 executive programmes and 12 cooperation agreements in various fields.



BELGIUM

In February, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, and Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine d'Udekem d'Acoz, Queen of the Belgians, who arrived on a 3-day visit, the highlight of which was the opening of the Port of Duqm. The latter is managed and operated through Port of Duqm Company, which is an equally joint venture company between the Omani government represented by Asyad Group with a 50 per cent stake, and a Belgian alliance between the Port of Antwerp and DEME Group jointly known as the Port of Antwerp consortium with 50 per cent.



TANZANIA

A month later, His Majesty the Sultan received Samia Suluhu, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, at the Al Alam Palace. Ten memorandums of understanding were signed between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Republic of Tanzania in a number of fields, including 8 MoUs related to the economic field, including energy, oil services, airport management, tourism and natural resources, industry and trade, promotion and investment, and food investment, live animals and meat. An MoU was also signed in the field of higher education and training, while another related to museum management.

Among the most prominent investments of Oman in the Republic of Tanzania is the investment of the Oman Investment Authority, which has a 100 per cent interest in a multi-purpose port, a deep commercial fishing port in Tanzanian / Zanzibar waters, and a fish farm in Zanzibar, among other infrastructure.

IRAN

In May, His Majesty the Sultan received President Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, at the Al Alam Palace. A number of agreements and memorandums of understanding were signed to frame cooperation in the fields of investment, sports, agricultural, fisheries, animal wealth, maritime transport, ports, the logistics sector, and oil and gas.



EGYPT

Also in June, His Majesty the Sultan received President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt. During the meeting, six MoUs were signed in the field of promoting competition, combating monopolistic practices, establishing and managing industrial zones, promoting investment, developing exports, mutual recognition of seafarers' qualification certificates, and environmental protection. Three executive programmes in the fields of youth and sports, work and training, higher education, scientific research and innovation were also signed. And also signing two cooperation agreements in the field of maritime transport and ports, and an agreement between Sultan Qaboos University and the National Institute for Astronomical and Geophysical Research.



JORDAN

Last October, His Majesty the Sultan received His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. During the meeting, 7 MoUs were signed, including: industrial cooperation, labour, protection of competition and prevention of monopoly, mining, exchange of information, supervision of the insurance sector, consumer protection, historical documentation, and management of documents and archives. Two executive programmes were also signed, which included: tourism cooperation for the years "2023-2026," and higher education, scientific research and innovation for the years "2023-2026."



UAE

In a highlight for bilateral ties, Shaikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates visited Oman in September. During the meeting, 12 MoUs were signed, which included the exchange of information related to money laundering and terrorist financing crimes, and a memorandum between the Muscat Stock Exchange and the Abu Dhabi Stock Exchange, and transportation and communications. And logistics, and a memorandum between the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company and the Abu Dhabi Securities Market Company, news and information exchange, communications and information technology, higher education, scientific research, innovation, vocational training, agricultural, animal and fisheries, food safety, maritime transport, industry, energy, culture and youth. Also, 4 cooperation agreements were signed between Oman Rail and the Etihad Rail, and in the field of dual listing operations of securities between the Muscat Stock Exchange Company and the Abu Dhabi Securities Company, and between the Muscat Clearing Company and the Abu Dhabi Securities Market, and a cooperation agreement for the trading of brokerage companies remotely.

ZANZIBAR

On October 12, 2022, His Majesty the Sultan received Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar, at Al Barakah Palace. During the meeting, 3 MoUs were signed in cloud data, digital empowerment, higher education, scientific research, innovation and vocational training, in addition to the signing of an executive programme in historical documentation and document and archive management.



GERMANY

Last July, His Majesty the Sultan travelled to the Federal Republic of Germany on an official visit that lasted three days.

BAHRAIN

During a visit to the brotherly Kingdom of Bahrain, His Majesty the Sultan's delegation witnessed the signing of 6 cooperation agreements, which included: maritime transport and ports, security, the establishment of an Omani-Bahraini investment holding company, cloud computing, sea and air freight services, and studies and research. In addition, 8 executive programmes were signed in bilateral relations and common interest, agriculture, livestock and fisheries, tourism, young national cadres, education and education, environmental protection, heritage and culture, and remote trading of brokerage companies through the electronic trading system.



Empowering the youth

ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

Over the years, Omani youth have been always involved in nation building and highlighting concerns of the youth. A special attention to Omani youth has been focused by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in his speeches and stressing that the care goes on.

His Majesty pointed out, “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.”

His Majesty’s well-admired attention signifies his strong belief and confidence in the power of youth to shoulder the responsibility along with the government during the renewed renaissance.

Acting upon His Majesty’s concentration on youth, the government has placed its honest confidence, so they could devote their energy and talents in developing their country and serving the nation overall. Even prior ascension to throne, His Majesty has believed in youth as a cornerstone and backbone of the nation. Thus, he worked closely with Oman’s youth in developing the country’s Vision 2040.

In return, Omani youth have proven their capability to play a key role in shaping the nation’s future. The government attracted youth to take part in the planning and development phases for Oman Vision 2040. Involving over one-third of the participants as youth indicates the government’s keenness to include the next generation in planning the growth of Oman.

In forming the Vision, youth marked

THE BRIGHT
MINDS AND
ASPIRATIONS OF
OMANI YOUTH
ARE A SOURCE
OF CONTINUOUS
PRIDE IN THE
JOURNEY OF
OMAN VISION
2040

an essential and active partner, reflecting the significance of their participation in achieving the vision. Youth were given the biggest share in building the vision and sharing their concerns and future demands. They were given the opportunity to contribute in the decision-making process while drawing the country’s new vision.

Oman Vision 2040 aims at building a clear roadmap for the country’s development over the years. Hence, the role played by youth, alongside with public and private sectors, mirrors the importance of developing the skills and knowledge of youth as well as empower them to be the change-makers and future leaders.

The bright minds and aspirations of Omani youth are a source of continuous pride in the journey of Oman Vision 2040. At certain situations, youth practices and principles become more useful and practical. Consequently, to give back to the national support and empowerment to youth, thousands of national, regional and international achievements have been recorded by youth, making Oman proud.

Many records worldwide have witnessed the distinction and excellence of Omani youth in different fields, thanks to the government’s constant empowerment. As a matter of fact, nothing of greatness can ever be achieved by any country without giving importance to youth.

Youth bring an amazing power, mirroring not only the hope of future, but the actual strength of the nation as well. Youth can create a difference only when they are empowered.

This not only results in a better economy of the country, but also a habit and a sense of responsibility in youth to deliver more. Having them on onboard is always an advantage and a rewarding experience.



Laying foundation to knowledge-based society

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

[@AfrahAlbalushia](#)

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s idea of education is reflected in Oman Vision 2040 document, which focuses on developing the different levels of the educational system and improving educational outcomes has become necessary to build Omanis’ confidence in their identity and commitment to their social values.

This is attainable through increasing the quality of basic and higher education and developing scientific and educational curricula, so that graduates are acquainted with competitive qualifications and employability skills to enter the local and international labour market. Such graduates will have an adequate level of productivity and competitiveness to build a knowledge-based economy, enhance job security in the private sector and foster a participatory relation between the private and the public sectors.

In addition to this, a developed educational system also entails the development of educational institutions, faculty and staff, the application of international standards for accreditation, the use of modern teaching and learning techniques, and the dissemination thereof as national

Increasing the
quality of basic and
higher education
and developing
scientific and
educational
curricula, so that
graduates are
acquainted with
competitive
qualifications and
employability skills
to enter the local
and international
labour market



culture.

A leap is required in quality and quantity in the domain of scientific research and development, through the provision of diverse and sustainable sources of funding to support applied scientific researches to promote innovation in various fields and strengthen partnership between the academic and research institutions on the one hand and the private sector on the other.

The various stakeholders need to join forces to promote

the role of citizens and society in advancing economic development. This necessitates the establishment of a stimulating educational and vocational training system to afford individuals high-level skills to enter the labour market, raise their productivity and improve the efficiency of the economy in general. Values of competition and qualification should prompt individuals to seek high-ranking jobs based entirely on merit. This implies adherence to institutional values and a performance-based

qualification system.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in his first speech on January 11, 2020, noted that, Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said “established stable and permanent structures for education at all levels and generations flowed from it, imbibed knowledge and experience.”

In another speech, His Majesty the Sultan, said, “We will provide it with all means of empowerment as the basis through which our children will be able to contribute

to building the requirements of the next stage.”

To further HM’s vision, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has worked to provide technical and vocational training to meet the demands of the labour market and encourage on-the-job training. This is in addition to setting a national plan for scientific research, defining its priorities in the light of the requirements of the economic and social development plan. It has supported innovations and research projects, organised international conferences and allotted funds for research programmes.

Royal Decree No 98/2020 merged the Scientific Research Council into the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, which is an embodiment of the keenness on the importance of scientific research and innovation.

Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the MoHERI, praised the successes achieved by public and private universities in innovative projects, stressing that the government harnessed all its energies and capabilities to advance scientific research through a wide range of projects and programmes.



KEY CABINET DECISIONS

DECEMBER 30, 2021

● DIRECTIVES
TO ACHIEVE THE TARGETS OF VISION 2040

MARCH 3, 2021

● HM GAVE DIRECTIVES
TO SET UP COMPANY FOR GREEN HYDROGEN,
CLEAN ENERGY

MAY 31, 2021

● HM ANNOUNCES
THE END OF THE MISSION OF SUPREME
COMMITTEE ON COVID
● PROVIDES RO70 MILLION
TO HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

OCTOBER 11, 2021

● NEW LABOUR LAW WILL BE ISSUED SHORTLY
● DIRECTIVES TO SET UP OMAN SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE
● NEW GOVERNORATES SYSTEM TO BOOST POWERS OF
GOVERNORS

NOVEMBER 17 , 2021

● DIRECTIVES TO LAUNCH THE NATIONAL FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY AND
FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR THREE FROM JANUARY 2023
● THE PROMOTION OF 2012 GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES OF CIVIL SERVICE



JANUARY 11



OMAN MAKES HISTORY WITH APP POLLS

OMAN made history when it successfully held fully digital municipal elections where nearly 40 per cent of the Omani voters cast their votes through smartphone app Intekhab to elect 126 council members representing 63 wilayats.

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) said 288,469 citizens voted in the election.

“The number of voters voting in the elections for members of municipal councils for the third term reached 288,469 voters or 39.42%,” MoI said in a statement. Dhofar topped the list of polling with 60,679 out of 84,818 voters casting their votes. The digital voting and counting saved time, effort and money apart from simplifying procedures for voters, candidates and the committees supervising the elections.

The paperless election Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's keenness on upgrading the councils' legislations to empower them to realise more partnership with the government in municipal affairs, notably by boosting the overall development

march and the growth of governorates—so that the councils could serve as channels of national action aimed to accomplish the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The government has embarked on the modernisation of elections in line with this vision and its approaches for digital transition.

Zero-paper Municipal Council elections drew appreciation from voters, electoral officers and other stakeholders.

Apps were deployed in line with the government's digital transformation programme under Oman Vision 2040, which promises upgraded information and communication technology in the country. The whole process, starting from registration in the electoral register, candidacy, voting and results followed a zero-paper policy.

Intakhib and Intekhab apps were designed by an Omani team from the Ministry of Interior. This proved the technical prowess of Omanis in keeping pace with the digital transformation that Oman is witnessing.



ACCESSION DAY

KNOWING THE PULSE OF PEOPLE

JANUARY 4, 2022

● HIS MAJESTY MEETS
SHAIKHS OF AL DAKHILIYAH AND AL WUSTA

JANUARY 9, 2022

● HIS MAJESTY MEETS
SHAIKHS OF SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE

JANUARY 10, 2022

● HIS MAJESTY MEETS
SHAIKHS OF NORTH AL SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE

JANUARY 12, 2022

● HIS MAJESTY MEETS THE GOVERNORATES
OF MUSCAT, SOUTH AL BATINAH AND MUSANDAM

MARCH 23 , 2022

● HIS MAJESTY MEETS SHEIKHS
OF NORTH AL BATINAH, AL DHAHIRAH AND AL BURAIMI

DECEMBER 19 , 2022

● HM THE SULTAN GIVES AUDIENCE
TO THE CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE STATE COUNCIL

DECEMBER 21 , 2022

● HM THE SULTAN GIVES AUDIENCE
TO THE CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF MAJLIS ASH'SHURA

ACHIEVING CARBON NEUTRALITY BY 2050

HIBBA AL KINDI

IN October 2022, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik approved Oman's plan for achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, adding the country to the coalition of more than 70 countries that have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions in 27 years.

Simultaneously, His Majesty approved the establishment of Oman Centre for Sustainability, an independent government entity tasked with the supervision and execution of the national net-zero transition strategy.

"Its primary task is to ensure the implementation of the Net-Zero national plan in line with the follow-up methodology to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040," says Eng Faiza al Harthy, Head of Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Priority Support at Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, in a media briefing.

According to Al Harthy, the Centre, will contain four main divisions namely Think-tank, Advisory and Follow-up Support Centre, Business Environment Centre, Centre for Technological Advancement, In-

novation & Scientific Research, and lastly Net-Zero Socioeconomic Centre.

The four main hubs will aim to support the nation's net-zero goals through a variety of methods.

The Think-tank, Advisory and Follow-up Support Centre will develop policies, legislation, and regulations to support net-zero emissions , in addition to monitoring and following progress across sectors.

While the Business Environment Centre will focus on sustainable financial initiatives. The Centre for Technological Advancement, Innovation & Scientific Research will be tasked with promoting and expanding scientific research.

Finally, the Net-Zero Socioeconomic Centre, will run programmes to raise awareness and educate the public about sustainable living and energy efficiency.

The Centre will be supported by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Environment Authority and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Additionally, the Centre will be responsible for developing investment plans and a financing plan alongside the Ministry of Finance.





Landmark policies help underpin Oman's fiscal stability

CONRAD PRABHU

For a sense of the momentous fiscal and economic turnaround that has already occurred in the Sultanate of Oman during the brief reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, look no further than the succession of outlook upgrades and revisions announced by the world's leading credit rating agencies. Issued over the course of 2022, the upgrades offer a robust affirmation of the transformation that the nation's economy has undergone in a matter of just 24 months or thereabouts.

S&P Global, Moody's and Fitch – representing the Top 3 international ratings agencies – have upgraded Oman's credit rating in 2022 and revised their outlook upward as a result of fiscal consolidation and prudent measures taken by the Omani government.

The most recent of the upgrade came last November, when S&P Global Ratings revised up Oman's credit rating from "BB-" to "BB" with a stable outlook. The agency cited indicated significant improvements in Oman's fiscal performance and balance of payments positions. It noted in particular efforts by the Omani authorities to reduce public debt benefiting from additional revenue, citing economic growth will be supported by higher hydrocarbon production and a pickup in investments. Real GDP, as a result, is projected to grow by nearly 4 per cent in 2022, while the non-oil sector set to become the main growth catalyst in the coming years, S&P stated.

The latest upgrade came on the heels of S&P Global's announcement in April last year, effectively bumping up Oman's credit ratings from 'B+' to 'BB-' with a stable outlook. In

By sustaining the nation's ability to meet its financial obligations, there is a firm belief it will lead to expansion in economic stimulus policies and development of social protection system to cater to the welfare of citizens

October, Moody's had revised Oman's outlook from 'stable' to 'positive' and affirmed its rating at 'Ba3'. The agency pointed to an estimated real GDP growth of 4.5 per cent in 2022 from 3 per cent in 2021.

Most notably, all three ratings agencies have voiced optimism that the Sultanate of Oman is anticipated to further improve its credit ratings and outlook as fiscal consolidation initiatives launched by His Majesty's government continue to make headway in their implementation.

Laying the groundwork for these reforms was the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP), which was introduced in mid-2020. It has since given rise to a number of equally landmark programmes designed to bolster fiscal efficiency, while stimulating economic growth.

A centrepiece initiative is the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development, which seeks to ensure that the financial sector is a key enabler for investment and economic growth. It builds on the erstwhile National Programme for Fiscal Balance, which was designed to achieve reduction in public debt and improvement in credit rating.

By sustaining the nation's ability to meet its financial obligations, there is a firm belief it will lead to expansion in economic stimulus policies and development of social protection system to cater to the welfare of citizens.

At the same time, government ministries and public sector entities are mandated to review their spending strategies so as not to burden the treasury, while maintaining quality of services nevertheless.

As a result of these ground-breaking

policies, the government was rewarded with a budgetary surplus of around RO 1.150 billion for the first time in nearly a decade, thanks also in part to buoyant energy export revenues.

At the same time, the government utilised higher earnings from energy exports to reduce its public debt, which was since declined from RO 20.8 billion at the end of 2021 to RO 17.7 billion at the end of 2022 – a move that has helped stimulate economic recovery and enhance social spending.

Effectively, the public debt to GDP has slumped from 70 per cent in 2020 to 43 per cent by the end of 2022.

In parallel with these efforts, Oman's economy has also been growing at a heartening pace. By the end of Q3 2022, Oman's GDP rose by 33 per cent at current prices, registering RO 32 billion in value, compared with RO 24.24 billion over the same period in 2021. Further, the GDP at the current prices, is projected to RO 44.9 billion in 2022, mainly on account of higher oil prices.

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Finance – the main orchestrator of these fiscal policies on behalf of the Omani government – announced that it expects the national economy to grow by 5.5 per cent during 2023 on account of an increase in hydrocarbon production. Hydrocarbon GDP is projected to grow by 10.1 per cent and non-hydrocarbon GDP is expected to grow by 2.9 per cent.

Last year, the government ushered in a flurry of new programmes and initiatives to help embed fiscal discipline and sustainability goals in the public financial system. Notable is Maliyah, a modern IT system for managing Oman's public finances. It will be used for planning, implementing, controlling and

reporting on the State's General Budget, as well help manage the state's public finance in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Also currently under implementation is a Debt Management System (DMS), which seeks to promote effective and proactive management of public debt by recording, reporting and analysing debt portfolios, and provide tools to organise and track debts, prioritise payments, and develop a plan to repay debts in a timely and effective manner.

Several initiatives to advance strategic national objectives have been rolled out as well. They include the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Development Financial Sector, which aims to develop the financial sector and enhance the role of the capital market to achieve integration between financial, monetary and economic policies.

Likewise, the National Programme for Economic Diversification (Tanwea'a) aims to address the economic challenges being faced by the diversification-oriented sectors.

It also seeks to identify solutions to accelerate achieving the objectives outlined by the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan.

Also significant is the National Programme for Investment and Exports Development (Nazdaher), which seeks to consolidate Government efforts to attract private investments. It focuses on promoting and enabling the role of the private sector in leading economic development through creating an attractive investment environment.

Finally, the Ministry of Labour has initiated the National Employment Programme (Tashgheel) to help jobseekers to identify sustainable employment solutions, as well as create job opportunities for nationals.



Implementing long-term security strategies

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Supreme Commander, honoured the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences with a visit on January 5, 2022 and presided over the Royal Oman Police (ROP) Annual Day celebrations as an affirmation of the continued Royal attention and support from the Supreme Commander with the aim of upgrading police work to maintain security and stability and serve the nation and the people. The ROP is undertaking multiple significant roles in coordination with various departments of the state under the renewed Renaissance led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Supreme Commander, in continuation to efforts

being exerted to realise Oman Vision 2040 towards a modern institutional performance and the provision of quality services.

The ROP provides security coverage at all locations through the police geographical commands and police stations distributed across the Sultanate of Oman. In addition, ROP provides passport, traffic and civil status services at the service centres in the wilayats.

The special task force police are well-trained units that are ready to handle any emergencies and provide support to the other police formations.

The ROP geographical commands and affiliated centres endeavour to protect

lives and properties and preserve order and security. They attempt to prevent crimes and solve committed ones, launch investigations and collect evidence, provide police services with the support of the Special Task Police Force, Oil and Gas Installations Security and the Coast Guard Police.

The development and construction system and the activation of the modern customs and security procedures have contributed to stimulating economic and tourist activities.

The ROP has introduced high accuracy security surveillance systems and advanced search devices to improve the customs clearance process. This is in

addition to the many reinforcements that were introduced to customs clearance to ensure smooth entry of individuals and goods thereby supporting the tourism industry.

The unified security system for managing land, air and sea ports has been designed to comply with the common work environment of the formations specialised in port management. The system is operated by a qualified staff equipped with all the technical implements and are capable of implementing safe control over people and goods flowing through the ports of the Sultanate of Oman.

In order to keep pace with the rapid

development and steady growth of the customs sector, and with the aim of facilitating and improving the procedures followed in the security checks and customs inspections, the Royal Oman Police is striving to raise the security performance in the customs field and secure entry into the Sultanate of Oman through its various ports.

This is part of the long-term security strategies implemented through the security system for the management of land, air and sea ports. The security system operates through smart surveillance devices that are capable of identifying passenger and vehicle data before reaching the identity verification point.

Smarter with Smart Cities

SAMUEL KUTTY

The Sultanate of Oman is poised for a bright future guided by Vision 2040, which sets different goals for promoting the country's position in various sectors under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

One of the ambitious goals in Vision 2040 is the development of smart cities, alongside proposals for national gateway cities and regional hubs to achieve balanced and sustainable growth.

The Vision 2040 strategy has made it clear that Smart Cities are a national ambition, a source of growth, jobs, and a tool to diversify its economy away from oil exports. As such, the agenda includes "Smart, sustainable and vibrant cities and a vital countryside with a viable architecture that ensures high quality of life, work and leisure" as one of its six objectives.

As a result, the government has been deploying a number of pilots and tools to support the development of the Smart City sector throughout the country. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has already kicked off an ambitious initiative to support the development of 'Smart Cities' in three major locations -- Suhar, Nizwa and Salalah.

The initiative, known as the landmark Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS) and is part of the Oman Vision 2040, sets out a broad framework for urban growth over the next two decades. It also seeks to ensure that key national cities remain competitive with the UN Goals for Sustainable Development 2030.

Smart City Platform is a knowledge-sharing consortium to drive smart city initiatives in Oman. The objective of the platform is to provide a knowledge-sharing, collaborative and networking environment between smart city stakeholders. The platform shall facilitate and enable smart city innovations through funding research and carrying out



innovation competitions.

The smart cities will be designed and built to sustain a high quality of life, work and leisure and will feature diversified and easily accessible modes of transport integrated with targeted urban planning and sustainable world-class infrastructure.

The 2017 launch of the Smart City Platform underscored the importance of this sector for the country. It has developed to become a hub for knowledge sharing, solution enablement and capacity building.

While the proposed smart cities in Suhar, Nizwa and Salalah are essentially national initiatives, a number of pilot and small-scale smart city initiatives have been launched in the Sultanate of Oman.

This includes Petroleum Development Oman, which signed an agreement with an Omani company specialising in the Internet of Things in 2021, to pilot Smart Cities in the Ras Al Hamra residential and leisure community. This initiative aims to reduce the impact on the environment and improve the quality of life of the people.

Tilal Al Irfan, constituting the first phase of Madinat Al Irfan — the Sultanate of Oman's City of the Future in Muscat Governorate — is proposed to be the country's first truly smart city. Promoted by Majid Al Futtaim Communities, Tilal Al Irfan is envisioned as a thriving commercial and residential destination that will accommodate as many as 50,000 residents living in 11,000 contemporary homes and apartments.

SERVICES AND AMENITIES

Services and amenities include a business park, education facilities, healthcare and community recreation centres, a central market town square, and an entertainment and hospitality precinct.

Oman's Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has already introduced its Industrial Innovation Academy to promote a diversified and sustainable economy based on technology, knowledge and innovation.

On top of providing a framework for innovation and business initiatives to thrive, the government has also been leading several Smart City hackathons aimed at fostering the youth, entrepreneurs and businesses to generate applications and proof of concepts leveraging data in key areas of growth in line with the Vision 2040.

The digital transformation of key public services is also a priority with plans to bring more than 80 per cent of these services online in the next few years. It may be noted that the global pandemic has accelerated the pace of technology adoption and acted as a smart city booster for both the public and private sectors.



SMART CITY PLATFORM HAS DEVELOPED TO BECOME A HUB FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING, SOLUTION ENABLEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING



FOCUS ON ISSUES THAT MATTER TO PEOPLE

In the last past 12 months, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq addressed the nation once directly on January 11, while on four occasions

he addressed the state while presiding over the Council of Ministers. In his speeches, His Majesty the Sultan touched on aspects that

matter in the daily lives of citizens and residents, which include addressing climate change concerns, unemployment, and foreign policies.



ROADMAP FOR VISION 2040

We are confident that you all perceive the volume of challenges that we have been through, that we have tackled with tact and patience, and then proceeded with the implementation of our social and economic plans and programs, guided by Vision 2040.



JOB CREATION

"We are impressed by the achievements made in the field of recruitment during this year, which saw the employment of a good number of Omani jobseekers, despite the difficulty of this stage. We look forward with hope, combined with determination, that all sectors of the State and the private sector will play the role expected of them in promoting employment.



INVESTMENT

Local investment constitutes one of the basic pillars of diversification of the national income. After we have launched a set of national programmes and furnished proper suitable grounds, we hereby urge all to invest funds locally. We have lucrative investment opportunities at hand in all fields, and we look forward to seeing our country a destination for pioneering investments.



ENGAGING WITH THE YOUTH

We have placed youth at the forefront of our government's concerns and have followed up the efforts made to engage youth in the nation-building process. We will ensure that this partnership is more comprehensive and more effective.



EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

Based on our keenness to provide maximum levels of protection and care for citizens and residents, we, hereby, direct the government to speed up the rate of support and development of the early warning system and to endorse the best urban planning schemes to curb the impact of such climatic conditions.



GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Over the next stage of the Renewed Renaissance, we will take action to transform government performance from the level of emergency solutions to a more sustainable level having a set of lasting and comprehensive solutions that place economic growth, fiscal sustainability, and social welfare at the forefront of its priorities.