

Stress on decentralisation

Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit held an introductory meeting in Muscat with governors. During the meeting, the unit outlined the main aspects of its duties and reviewed ways of enhancing cooperation and partnership with governors' offices with the aim of realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040. Emphasis was laid on the application of decentralisation as a key indicator for the development of governorates and sustainable cities. **SEE P2**

SUNRISE - 05:29 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:07 AM

DHUHR - 12:08 PM

ASR - 03:33 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:43 PM

ISHA - 08:00 PM



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief Abdullah bin Saif al Shueili

OMAN OBSERVER



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P12

'NOWINS' NO MORE AS NORRIS DELIVERS F1 NEEDED PLOT TWIST



P13

CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTES RO 3.5 BILLION TO OMAN'S GDP



P20

AI-AIDED ART, UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS AT THE HEART OF PUBLIC EXHIBIT



TASHKENT

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED



Sayyida Wafa bint Jabr bin Nasser al Busaidiyah presented her credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Uzbekistan, when she was received by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his wishes of good health and happiness to the president, and continued progress and prosperity to the friendly government and people of Uzbekistan. She expressed the keenness of His Majesty's government to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and to bolster cooperation in all fields to serve the common interests of the two countries. **SEE ALSO P2**

DEALS FOR POWER AND WATER SUPPLY

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) has secured Oman's energy and water future by signing renewed purchase agreements with four key power and desalination plants. The signing ceremony, held under the auspices of Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of the Oman Investment Authority, marks a significant step towards continued stability in the country's electricity and desalinated water supply. These agreements ensure a reliable flow of power and water by extending existing contracts with established facilities. The move comes after Nama PWP issued the 2024 Electricity and Water Procurement Tender, providing an opportunity for existing plants nearing the end of their contracts to secure renewals.

DETAILS ON P2

Oman flays Israeli war crimes

SAYYID BADR, HAMAS CHIEF DISCUSS CEASEFIRE PROPOSAL

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, discussed a ceasefire proposal during a phone call on Tuesday with Dr Ismail Haniyeh, Head of Hamas Movement's Political Bureau.

During the conversation, Dr Haniyeh affirmed the movement's acceptance of the proposal and the Palestinian side's support for the proposal in a bid to ease tensions, stop the bloodshed and mutual military operations and secure the return of displaced people to their residences.

The proposal also provides for the release of prisoners and detainees in interrelated stages, the application of binding measures and the realisation of other commitments pledged by both sides, including lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip and allowing the supply of humanitarian and relief aid to the population there.

Sayyid Badr welcomed the accord of the proposal and expressed Oman's appreciation for efforts exerted by the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Qatar in cooperation with the US administration.

For his part, Dr Ismail Haniyeh expressed his thanks and appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's support for the just Palestinian cause. He stressed the importance of continuous communication, constructive dialogue and international efforts to implement resolutions of international legitimacy.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr and Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian,



A Palestinian girl wounded in an Israeli strike is treated at a hospital as Israeli forces launch a ground and air operation in the eastern part of Rafah. — Reuters

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on a phone call, reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation and means of boosting them. They also exchanged views on regional developments.

DEEP CONCERN

The Sultanate of Oman has expressed deep concern over

Israeli forces' continued military escalation, war crimes and genocide against unarmed civilians in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Oman cautioned against the dire consequences of the military operations that the Israeli occupation forces intend to carry out by storming the city of Rafah.

"Such action portends serious catastrophic impacts that may expand the conflict and tension in the region", Oman added.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman urged the international community to immediately intervene to stop the war and terminate the ongoing Israeli violations of international law and

international humanitarian law.

Oman called upon the international community to hold Israel fully responsible for such violations, war crimes, the policy of starvation and forced expulsion of citizens. It pointed out that all these brutal actions represent "stark crimes against humanity". — ONA

SEE ALSO P6

FASCINATING BEAUTY



The photo which has won first place at a competition titled 'Musandam, Fascinating Beauty' by Abdulaziz al Shuhi.

Unified tourist visa this year, to be called GCC Grand Tours

VINOD NAIR

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The unified GCC tourist visa will be put in place by the end of this year, and it will be called GCC Grand Tours, it was revealed at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2024.

The system will allow freedom of movement for citizens and residents of six countries including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait. The visa will function as a multi-entry visa, permitting travellers to move freely among the GCC countries.

Speaking at the event, Abdullah bin Touq al Marri, UAE's Minister of Economy, said the regional tourist visas would be called GCC Grand Tours and allow tourists to spend more than 30 days in the six countries that comprise

the GCC. "This will make travel to our region more convenient and affordable for tourists."

"Once it comes into effect, it will contribute to highlighting the diverse tourism destinations in GCC countries, attracting and retaining tourists for longer periods, thus increasing the number of hotel guests and making the region one of the leading destinations for regional and international tourists alike," Al Marri said.

His speech was followed by a panel discussion between Khalid bin Jasim al Midfa, Chairman of the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority; Fahd Hamidaddin, CEO of the Saudi Tourism Authority; Azzan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism in Oman; and Sarah Buhijji, CEO of the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 37°C Min 31°C

SALALAH: Max 33°C Min 28°C

NIZWA: Max 39°C Min 28°C



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OMAN'S 1 CENTURY

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO PRESIDENT OF UZBEKISTAN

TASHKENT: Sayyida Wafa bint Jabr bin Nasser al Busaidiyah presented her credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Uzbekistan, when she was received by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

— ONA



Oman signs major power, water supply agreements

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) has secured Oman's energy and water future by signing renewed purchase agreements with four key power and desalination plants.

The signing ceremony, held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), marks a significant step towards continued stability in the country's electricity and desalinated water supply.

These agreements ensure a reliable flow of power and water by extending existing contracts with established facilities. The move comes after Nama PWP issued the 2024 Electricity and Water Procurement Tender, providing an opportunity for existing plants nearing the end of their contracts to secure renewals.



The signing ceremony, held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), marks a significant step towards continued stability in the country's electricity and desalinated water supply. — Picture by Khalifan al Ruzaiqi

The agreements collectively secure over 1,500 megawatts (MW) of electricity and 200,000 cubic metres per day of desalinated water for up to nine years. This translates to continued operation of four critical plants namely Barka 1 which is independent Water and Power Plant, Barka 2 that contributes 703 MW of electricity and 120,000 cubic metres of desalinated water per day, Al Rusail Power Plant which provides 184 MW of electricity to the national grid and

Manah Independent Power Plant (Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Co. LLC), a joint venture between Nama PWP and ACWA Power.

This strategic move by Nama PWP not only ensures immediate energy and water security but also demonstrates confidence in the capabilities of these established plants. It underscores Nama PWP's commitment to providing a stable and reliable supply for the Sultanate of Oman's growing needs.

Oman, Brazil explore enhancing tourism cooperation



The minister's visit to Oman coincides with marking the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Oman and Brazil. — ONA

MUSCAT: Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) received in his office Celso Sabino Oliveira, Minister of Tourism of the Federative Republic of Brazil and

his accompanying delegation. The minister's visit to Oman coincides with marking the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Oman and Brazil.

During the meeting, the two officials discussed means of boosting cooperation and relations in the tourism field. The meeting was attended by officials from both sides. — ONA

Human rights meetings in Geneva discuss strategic plan of Global Alliance



GENEVA: A delegation from the Omani Human Rights Commission (OHRC) on Tuesday took part in the meetings and conference of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in Geneva.

The meeting discussed the strategic plan of the Global Alliance, the challenges facing national institutions tasked with human rights and means

of enhancing cooperation between regional networks affiliated to the GANHRI.

Oman's delegation, headed by Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of the OHRC, also participated in a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions that was held on the sidelines of the GANHRI conference in Geneva.

The meeting studied the programme of the Arab Network for 2024 and reviewed the latest efforts and developments of the Palestinian cause. It expressed support for the Independent Commission for Human Rights in the State of Palestine. It also discussed means of updating the strategy of the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions for the upcoming years. — ONA

Oman Vision 2040 follow-up unit holds meeting with Governors

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During the meeting, the Unit outlined the main aspects of its duties and reviewed ways of enhancing cooperation and partnership with governors' offices with the aim of realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040. Emphasis was laid on the application of decentralisation as a key indicator for the development of governorates and sustainable cities.

The meeting was held in the presence of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. It explained the procedures undertaken by the Unit during its follow-up of the implementation of

the Vision.

The meeting included visual presentations, including one on a project titled "Institution Indices" that defines the role of each government department in meeting the targets of Oman Vision 2040.

Acting in partnership with government institutions, the Unit developed "Goal Cards" defining the main objectives of the vision and the extent to which they were met. A total of 55 goal cards were approved until the first quarter of 2024, including those pertaining to the governorates.

The meeting also touched on simplifying procedures, facilitating services and developing systems to ensure that the beneficiaries get top quality and prompt services.

— ONA



Emphasis was laid on the application of decentralisation as a key indicator for the development of governorates and sustainable cities. — ONA



Ambassador to KSA presents credentials as DCO representative

RIYADH: HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), on Tuesday presented his credentials as Oman's permanent representative to the Digital Cooperation Organisation (DCO).

The ambassador presented his credentials when he was received by Deemah al Yahya, Secretary-General of the DCO, at the organisation's headquarters in Riyadh, KSA.

The DCO is a multilateral international organisation that was established in 2020 with the aim of empowering digital prosperity for everyone through the augmentation of a comprehensive growth in digital economy.

— ONA



The DCO is a multilateral international organisation that aims to empower digital prosperity for everyone. — ONA

Sudan's Tarco Aviation to launch Muscat flights

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The Sudan-based Tarco Aviation will connect the cities of Muscat and Port Sudan with two flights per week, Oman Airports said in a statement.

Tarco also operates flights to Cairo, Dammam, Riyadh, Jeddah, Sharjah and Dubai.

Port Sudan is a city and port on the Red Sea in eastern Sudan and the capital of Red Sea State and it is Sudan's main seaport and the source of 90 per cent of the country's international trade.

Tarco Aviation is an airline based in Khartoum, Sudan, established in 2009. With over 1,200 employees and 11 aircraft, the company is one of the largest aviation companies in Sudan currently operating scheduled passenger flights, charter, and leasing.

In December last year, Badr Airlines started operations from Port Sudan International Airport, operating two weekly flights. Badr Airlines is based in Khartoum, Sudan, operating cargo and passenger air services



Tarco Aviation will connect the cities of Muscat and Port Sudan with two flights per week

for humanitarian aid missions and chartered VIP flights.

OMAN AIR INCREASES FREQUENCIES

Oman Air has increased frequencies to some destinations to meet the demand during the summer season.

The airline increased

frequencies to Dar es Salaam-Zanzibar from three to six flights per week from July 1, to Bangkok from 12 to 14 per week from July 1.

It also increased the number of its flights to Calicut from 7 to 11 per week from June 3, and increased flights to Phuket from 4 to 7 flights per week, starting

from June 17.

The number of flights to Kuala Lumpur goes up to 5 from 4 per week from July 6. The number of flights to Milan goes up to 3 to 4 per week from July 7.

The airline announced the start of its flights to Zurich from October 5 with three flights per week instead of October 27.

'BRIDGING NATIONS' READY FOR JURY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

'Bridging Nations' initiative reached the crucial part after three days of discussions, planning and work as the 17 established artists and 17 children and youths with disabilities completed their paired projects on UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The jury members now will go through the paintings and the winners will be announced at a ceremony to be held at the French Embassy today (Wednesday) afternoon.

"The experience has been mind blowing," said Madeleine ImKey, the founder of the 'Bridging Nations' and delegate of French Academy Society for Arts, Science and Lettres.

"The experience has been beyond more than I could have ever imagined. The students have been blending with the artists in such an authentic, unique and profound way that it has been a beautiful experience," she said.

The initiative marks a historic moment for the French Academy for Arts, Science and Lettres, established more than a century ago, as it ventures beyond the borders of France for the very first time.

The 34 artists worked on ideas and learnt new techniques through workshops conducted at Music Palace, Al Mouj, while bringing into form their interpretations of UN goals.

'Bridging Nations', supported by Oxy Oman, highlighted co-creativity and inclusivity. "We are immensely proud to support the 'Bridging Nations' initiative as a main sponsor, embodying our commitment to promoting art, culture and heritage in Oman. The collaboration and mentorship by artists for children with special needs has been truly inspiring. Oxy Oman is honoured to play a role in bringing visibility to a unique and impactful initiative, and we are excited to continue supporting programmes that

promote creativity and inclusion," said Steven Lauver, President and General Manager at Oxy Oman.

Ibtisam and Christie Malachias worked on the theme of equality. "We were working on reducing inequality, so we called our painting, 'Scales of Equality.' I enjoyed thoroughly working with the kids," said Ibtisam, who is a renowned ceramic artist.

Sara Aulaqi, who teamed with Shreya Rajeev Nair, said, "It was lovely and I wish to have given more time to the kids. They enjoyed expressing themselves during the workshop. We could see a glimpse of their souls. These three days have been magic and we began with an empty canvas."

Ghazaleh Beirami, artist and art researcher from Iran, who paired with Maryam al Yazidi, said she was impressed with Maryam's clear idea of what she wanted to express. "She loves purple and she wanted purple flowers. She learnt about recycling as she used paper and collected chocolate wraps from everyone. She soon came up with her favourite dress she wore when she was six years old and she took the butterflies from it and here they are on our canvas," Ghazaleh said. Maryam al Yazidi said the name of the painting is 'A story of magic world - part of a song.'

"I have been collaborating with students with special needs. It is important to teach them how to use the materials and colours especially how to mix the colours and apply it on the canvas. It has been an excellent experience because they have also been learning from the neighbourhood as there have been so many ideas buzzing around in these rooms," explained artist Sami al Siyabi, an established artist in Oman.

While the workshop was an opener for Elizabeth Davis, who worked with Abdullah al Ghafri on clean energy, it was the way to show the importance of a good heart for Shaima al Saidi who jointly worked with Ahmed al Busaidi.



Madeleine ImKey said students have been blending with the artists in such an authentic and unique way



Civil defence conference calls for strengthening capabilities

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The second Oman Civil Defence and Ambulance Conference and Exhibition concluded with recommendations aimed at strengthening the capabilities and services provided by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority.

The participants called for the strengthening of financial and human resources and the provision of modern equipment to improve the authority's response to various challenges and risks, especially in light of climate change.

In this context, the participants recommended the need for close monitoring of the entry of hazardous

materials and emphasising the safety and security of their use and storage.

They stressed the need to train adventure teams and raise awareness of the need to comply with sound procedures and safety according to the regulations governing them.

The recommendations emphasised the importance of regular maintenance of facilities and ensuring that materials and electrical connections comply with approved specifications to avoid accidents. This is in addition to the importance of teaching swimming to members of society, especially school students and members of sports clubs, by intensifying practical training programmes.

In the field of health, the



The participants called for provision of modern equipment to improve response to various challenges and risks



recommendations focused on the need to pay attention to all aspects of prevention of heart diseases and strokes, which are among the leading causes of death in the Sultanate of Oman.

They also pointed to the importance of a rapid response to reports of these cases by the ambulance service crews of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority. They emphasised the importance of training members of society on CPR skills and the use of the automated external defibrillator (AED).

In the framework of public health, the recommendations called for the development of a comprehensive health strategy compatible with Oman Vision 2040 and the Sustainable

Development Goals 2030, to achieve integration between healthcare institutions.

They also called for the coordination of joint efforts between the relevant authorities to provide ideal healthcare and achieve a comprehensive emergency services system. The recommendations stressed the importance of enacting legislation related to safety and security risk management and strengthening the human capacities working in this sector through internationally accredited training and qualification programmes, and developing academic programmes and specialisations in cooperation with higher education institutions.



NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that **Mr. Ameer Suhail, worked as General Accountant holder of Indian Passport No. U5563785.** He is not authorized to represent the **M/s. Muscat Electronics LLC and Muscat Air Conditioning and Electronics LLC** in any way.

Muscat Electronics LLC
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Tel: 22352255, Fax: 22352334

Recall

TOYOTA Land cruiser & LEXUS LX500d & LX600

RECALL DATE: 8/05/2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Land cruiser 300	December 11,2020 through January 15, 2024	9844
Lexus LX500d	July 12,2021 through January 15,2024	51
Lexus LX600	July 8,2021 through January 19,2024	2131

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

The transmission assembly in the subject vehicles uses a clutch piston to engage brake clutch discs to plates to transfer power from the engine to the wheels. There is a possibility that, due to an issue in the design of a certain brake clutch disc, when the transmission is shifted to the neutral position and pressure is removed from the clutch piston, the brake clutch discs will not immediately disengage from the plates, allowing some engine power to continue to transfer to the wheels. If this condition occurs when the vehicle is on a flat surface, and if the driver does not apply the service brake or the parking brake, it could allow a vehicle to inadvertently creep forward at a low speed (up to appx. 4 mph), which could increase the risk of a crash.

Recall Action

To reprogram the Automatic Transmission ECU.

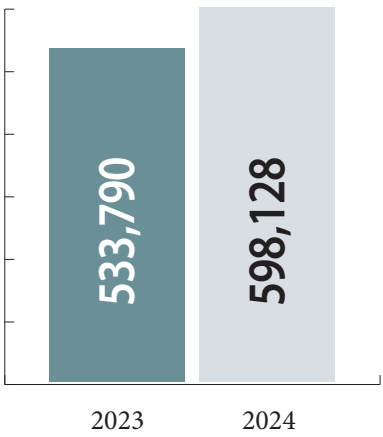
To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov>

Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC
CR 1703412
Contact details: Toll free - 80073000
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 - 17:00 hrs.

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THRIVING TOURISM SECTOR SIGNALS POSITIVE OUTLOOK

OMAN'S HOTEL
OCCUPANCY RATE
REGISTERED A
GROWTH OF 2.2 PER
CENT AS OVER
598,000
GUESTS STAYED IN
THE COUNTRY'S
3-TO-5-STAR
HOTELS TILL THE
END OF
MARCH 2024



KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Oman's hotel occupancy rate registered a growth of 2.2 per cent as over 598, 000 guests stayed in the country's 3-to-5-star hotels till the end of March 2024. By the same period, the Sultanate of Oman reported an 8.3 per cent increase in the percentage of total hotel revenues (3-5) stars until the end of March 2024 which marked an increase of 12.1 per cent to 598,128, compared to 533,790 during the corresponding period in 2023.

According to statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), revenues of 3-5-star hotels in Oman stood at RO 71,907 million at the end of March 2024, up by 8.3 per cent compared to the same period in 2023.

All these indicate that Oman has become a highly sought-after destination. Europeans topped the number of guests in hotels, with their numbers reaching 217,284 (23.9 per cent high), 189,275 Omani guests (an increase of 2.3 per cent), and 79,415 were Asian guests citizens (an increase of 21.6 per cent).

However, the guests from GCC countries fell by 2.7 per cent to 32,283, the number of African guests fell by 7.7 per cent to reach 2,735 and the number of guests from Oceanian countries fell by 31.4 per cent to 8,661 guests.

In 2023, over 2 million guests opted to experience the Sultanate of Oman's hospitality and cultural richness and at least half a dozen of global hospitality brands have entered or are entering the country, which is a promising indicator of growing interest in the country as a travel destination.

In addition, the occupancy rates in 3-5 star hotels rose from 44.1 per cent in 2022 to 48.1 per cent in 2023, marking an increasing demand for accommodations, thanks to the demand for Oman as a perfect holiday destination and far-reaching investment opportunities in the sector.

Some of the global brands, which have either had soft opening or are all set to open in Oman, are highly expected to take the travel and tourism sector of the country to greater levels. They include Mövenpick, St Regis Al Mouj Muscat, Anantara Bandar Al Khairan, Muscat, Four Seasons Resort Muscat, Mandarin Oriental Muscat, Nikki Beach Resort and Spa and Aida.

The arrival of these major hospitality players in Oman is considered to be a boost to the national drive to smart hotels and sustainable tourism and an attraction for visitors from all across the world. This can have a far-flung impact enhancing the demand for Oman as a perfect holiday destination and far-reaching investment opportunities in the sector.



Resident dentist authors book on Endodontics

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A resident dentist has paved the path for many to follow by authoring a mandate of real time experiences that can be a benchmark for young Omani dentists in the country.

Titled ‘Bioceramics in Endodontics’, the book by Dr Viresh Chopra, Assistant Professor of Adult Restorative Dentistry at the Oman Dental College has already become a name for ambitious dentists in researches and higher studies.

“This book is a practical set of articles in the emerging field of Endodontics focusing on overall makeup of dental Bioceramics and relevant clinical situations in endodontics where various forms of bioceramics have been used to treat teeth successfully,” said Dr Chopra upon his return after launching the book in the UK.

The 300-page pocket size book foreworded by Prof Nutayla bint Said al Harthiyah, the ex-Dean of Oman Dental College and Stephen Cohen, Diplomat, American Board of Endodontics, San



Dr Viresh Chopra said the book is a practical set of articles in the emerging field of Endodontics. – Picture by Rabah Zayed

Francisco, is accompanied by a companion website, www.wiley.com/go/chopra/bioceramicsinendodontics.

Dr Viresh earlier authored a book titled ‘Clinical Atlas of Retreatment in Endodontics’ which had received critical overview from various educational corners.

A collated version of real time experiences in endodontics by highly qualified authors with significant experience in the field from across the world, the book aims to shed information on various material characteristics of bioceramics that Endodontists and clinicians should be aware of how to give relief to Endodontics patients using bioceramics repair materials.

Dr Viresh, who is also the Course Lead in Endodontology said that the book is a collection of evidence-based decisions between coneless and coned obturations, and healing of periapical lesions upon a recall period of 3 to 5 years.

“Through this book, I aim to set an essential core overview of the field of bioceramics in Endodontics and related applications, and a must-have resource for dental practitioners in the Sultanate of Oman in particular and across the world in general,” said Dr Chopra who is also a PhD Researcher at Bart’s and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University in London.

SAF chief meets Pakistan’s military official

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) met in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday with Maj Gen Munir Ud Din, Director General for International Military Cooperation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and his accompanying delegation.

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

The meeting was attended by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), Brigadier Hamid bin Abdullah al Balushi, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, several senior SAF officers and the Military Attaché of Pakistan’s embassy in Muscat.

The Pakistani official also met with Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal



Army of Oman (RAO), in the presence of Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

The two sides discussed areas of military cooperation between both sides and a number of matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Air Commodore Mohammed bin Amer al Kindi, Director General of Training and Inspection, several senior RNO officers and the Military

Attaché of Pakistan’s embassy in Muscat.

Moreover, the guest was also met by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo).

The two sides exchanged views and discussed several military matters of common concern.

This meeting was attended by several senior officers of Rafo and the Military Attaché of Pakistan’s embassy in Muscat. — ONA



The meetings touched on military matters of mutual interest. – ONA



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Job location: Head Office (Al Khuwair)

Directly Reports to: CME/CEO

• Main purpose of job

- To achieve the market share, growth and profitability envisioned in the Strategic Plan of OUIIC by designing, developing and successfully executing the OUIIC’s business development and marketing initiatives.
- To develop and maintain marketing strategies to meet agreed company objectives.
- To evaluate customer research, market conditions, and competitor data and implement marketing plan alterations as needed.
- To manage and streamline the vendor’s for the various activities in marketing and alternate channels and coordinate with the Management procurement committee.
- To drive the corporate sales Agenda and acquire and develop new clients in the Mid SME and large corporate category.
- Create a sales pipeline.

• Principal responsibilities

1. Business Development:

- Responsible for the planning, directing and managing of marketing and sales plans with the objective of increasing business levels and profits of the OUIIC while adhering to risk management guidelines.
- Develop and present strategic marketing recommendations in respect to new product development, existing product enhancements, positioning, pricing, profitability, distribution channels, and marketing/advertising programs.
- Prepare annual marketing and sales plans with clear goals, objectives and tactics in support of the business plans.
- Initiate and implement business development strategies for the OUIIC by working closely with the Heads of Departments at the Head Office and branch managers, Marketing Manager/officers, direct sales representatives and sales team.
- Conduct in-depth analysis of industry competition, market share, market conditions, past performance of industry and field, operational constraints, and legal/compliance requirements.
- Conduct feasibility studies for branch expansion or relocation.
- Review the OUIIC’s current products, range of services and level of customer satisfaction vis -a- vis raised by the competition and recommend the development and introduction of new products and services and improving on customer service.
- Review the pricing strategy of the OUIIC vis-a-vis the competition and advice on appropriate strategies.
- Supervise guide, train and coach staff in the department. Set targets and review performance periodically for them.

- Evaluate and manage risks involved in all plans and activities of the department and contribute to building a compliance culture in the OUIIC.
- Establish marketing goals and measurement systems in line with the overall objectives of the OUIIC.
- Actively participate in Sales calling activities and give guidance to Branch Managers, Marketing Managers/Officers, Sales team and Direct Sales Representatives on the same.
- Develop advertising, direct marketing and other marketing programs as required by developing project-specific marketing/creative strategy documents for the effective development of these elements.
- Monitor training sessions conducted by the OUIIC for the Branch Managers, Marketing Manager /Officers, Direct Sales Representatives, Sales team and provide the necessary inputs to increase their effectiveness.
- foster and develop relationships with / Agents /customers/ clients
- Perform any other duties as may be assigned by the CME / CEO from time to time.

2. Marketing & Corporate Sales

- To oversee all marketing, advertising and promotional events and activities.
- Develop an annual marketing plan in conjunction with the business development department. This should detail the year’s activity to meet agreed OUIIC objectives.
- Responsible for the outdoor and indoor OUIIC branding including cost effective campaigns of media and other avenues of communication.
- To ensure that all marketing activity is delivered within the agreed budget and provide a cost benefit analysis on event wise.
- Coordinate and carry out market research on the Insurance’s market niche with the aim of developing new products that fit the needs of the customers.
- Carry out product evaluation on both the existing and future products and advise management on new market trends.
- To develop and implement a Branch -wide plan to push product, working with all departments for its execution.
- To Achieve marketing and sales operational objectives by contributing marketing and sales information and recommendations to strategic plans and reviews; preparing and completing action plans; implementing production, productivity, quality, and customer service standards; resolving problems; completing audits related to your department; Identifying trends; determining system improvements; implementing change.
- Develop and maintain strategic partnerships and collaborations with key industry players, insurance brokers, and distribution channels to expand the company’s reach and access to new market segments.
- Identifying and evaluating potential strategic partners (e.g. insurance brokers, digital platforms) that align with the company’s growth objectives.

- Coordinating with the partner organizations to integrate systems, processes, and marketing efforts for seamless customer experience.
- Continuously monitoring and optimizing the performance of strategic partnerships, making adjustments as needed to maximize business impact.
- Leveraging partner networks to gain insights into emerging industry trends, customer preferences, and competitive environment.
- Representing the company in industry forums, conferences, and networking events to build brand visibility and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders.

Qualification & Experience

- A University Degree with Minimum of 8 years’ experience in the local insurance in Muscat .
- 5 to 6 years in Managerial position preferably in Insurance.

Person Specifications

- Excellent verbal and written communication and presentation skills
- Marketing and business planning skills
- Strong Analytical skills and problem solving skills
- Leadership skills and People Management skills
- Risk Management Skills
- Good knowledge of Marketing analytics
- Good negotiation and interpersonal skills
- In-depth knowledge of up-coming and on-going key projects in the upstream of the Insurance sector.
- Fluent in Arabic and English

Job position: Branch Manager (Insurance)

Job location: Sur

Directly Reports to Sr. General Manager (Branches & Agents)

• Main purpose of job

Direct and oversee all operational aspects including customer service, sales, marketing, human resources and administration in accordance with the Company’s objectives.

• Principal responsibilities

- Directing and Manage and oversee the entire branch operations all operational and business aspects including, customer service, human resources, administration and sales in accordance with the company’s objectives.
- Responsible for achieving business targets for the branch through building a sustainable and productive distribution force.
- Effective management of sales managers in the office leading to creation of a cohesive business unit along with other functional representatives in the branch to create a robust and successful business unit.

- Foster and maintain relationships with clients and address their needs effectively.
- Overseeing the activities of underwriting and claims in the branch.
- Managing budgets for the branch, smooth business functioning, and successful implementation of various tactical and strategic business initiatives as other key responsibilities.
- Establishing and maintaining relationships with individual and business customers.
- Coordinating cooperation with other Branches of the Company, Banks, Corporate Customers, and Agents.
- Conduct thorough market research and analysis to identify business plans for the branch, current and prospective sales opportunities, emerging trends, competitor activities, customer preferences, financial objectives and regulatory changes.
- Prepare regular reports and presentations for senior management, highlighting key findings and recommendations for improvement.
- Stay updated on industry regulations, activities and trends to ensure distribution activities comply with legal and ethical standards.

• Qualification & Experience

- Bachelor’s degree or Diploma in insurance, business, marketing or related field preferred.

• Person Specifications

- Degree with minimum 10 years relevant experience as Branch Manager in insurance industry
- Proficiency in MS Office applications.
- Exhibits strong analytical, problem solving, organizational and project management skills.
- Must present professionalism when dealing with internal and external stakeholders.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Firm grasp of modern management skills and tactics
- Understanding of industry laws and regulations
- A drive to reach sales and service goals
- Excellent organizational and leadership skills
- Fluent in Arabic and English
- Age not exceeding 45

Candidates meeting the above requirements may sent their C.V., copies of educational qualifications, work experience and a recent photo within 15 days from the date of this announcement to:

General Manager (Admin & HR)
P.O.Box 1522, Ruwi 112, Sultante of Oman
Or Email it to: hr@omanutd.com



EU VOICES
ALARM OVER
THE MILITARY
ASSAULT
ON RAFAH

BRUSSELS: EU ministers expressed mounting alarm on Tuesday over an Israeli military assault on Rafah in the Gaza Strip, with the bloc's top diplomat warning it would cause "a lot of casualties".

Belgium's development minister, Caroline Gennez, said an Israeli offensive on Rafah would cross a "red line" and said that "sanctions... have to be on the table" in response.

Speaking hours after Israel sent tanks into Rafah, she said an attack on the city "threatens millions with famine". "It is very clear that international law is no longer respected in Gaza," she said.

Gennez also urged her European Union counterparts to unanimously agree on a decision to "stop exporting weapons to the Middle East, to Israel and the warring countries".

Germany's development minister, Jochen Flasbarth, said "the situation is dramatic and continues to worsen" in Gaza and called the humanitarian situation in the besieged Palestinian territory "appalling". But he said there would be no discussion of potential sanctions at talks.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who was chairing the meeting of development ministers, warned "there is no safe zone in Gaza" for Palestinian civilians to flee to, noting that there were "600,000 children" in the densely populated enclave. He stressed that the European Union and United States had all asked Israel to not go ahead with his threatened assault on Rafah.

"In spite of these warnings and this request, an attack was started yesterday (Monday) night," Borrell said. "I am afraid that this is going to cause again a lot of casualties, civilian casualties". The statement, without naming any countries, made "a call to help reduce the lack of protection of affected people and constraints faced by protection actors, including but not limited to breaches of International Humanitarian Law and lack of access". It expressed "deep concern that funding for protection does not match the needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises". — AFP

ISRAEL SEIZES RAFAH BORDER
CROSSING, MOUNTING WAR



Displaced Palestinians, ahead of a threatened Israeli assault, travel on their vehicles, in Khan Younis. — Reuters

RAFAH: Israeli forces seized control of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt on Tuesday and tanks pushed into the southern Gazan city of Rafah as international mediators struggled to find agreement on a ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian groups.

Palestinian movement Hamas accused Israel of trying to undermine the truce talks taking place in Cairo by mounting the offensive.

Israeli Army Radio announced its forces had taken control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing on Tuesday morning and army footage showed tanks rolling through the complex and the Israeli flag raised on the Gaza side.

Despite international appeals for Israel to hold off an assault on

Rafah, Israeli tanks and planes also attacked several areas and houses there overnight. The Gaza health ministry said Israeli strikes across the enclave had killed 54 Palestinians and wounded 96 others in the past 24 hours.

On Tuesday morning, people searched for bodies under the rubble of wrecked buildings. Raed al Derby said his wife and children had been killed. Standing in the street, anguish etched on his face, he said: "We're patient and we will remain steadfast on this land. We are waiting for liberation and this battle will be for liberation."

More than one million people have sought refuge in Rafah, living in tented camps and makeshift shelters. Many are trying to leave, heeding Israeli orders for them to evacuate, but with large areas of the coastal enclave already laid to

Despite international
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waste, they say they have nowhere safe to go to.

The Israeli military said a limited operation in Rafah was meant to kill fighters and dismantle infrastructure used by Palestinian groups, which govern Gaza.

Hamas said late on Monday it had agreed to a ceasefire proposal but Israel said the terms did not meet its demands. On Tuesday, the group said the Israel's

Rafah incursion was aimed at undermining ceasefire efforts.

Israel has for weeks threatened to mount a major incursion in Rafah, which it says harbours thousands of fighters and where potentially dozens of captives are being held.

A total of 34,789 Palestinians, most of then civilians, have been now killed in the conflict, the Gaza Health Ministry said.

The United States and other governments have been pressing Israel not to start a campaign in Rafah until it had drawn up a humanitarian plan for the Palestinians sheltering there.

As the ceasefire talks stumbled, mediator Qatar said its delegation would try to resume indirect negotiations in Cairo.

— Reuters

PALESTINIAN
AUTHORITY
CALLS ON US
TO 'INTERVENE
IMMEDIATELY'

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority called on the United States to "intervene immediately" to prevent Israel from invading Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, the official Palestinian Wafa news agency reported on Tuesday. Throughout the seven-month conflict, Rafah, the only crossing not run by Israel, has been a lifeline to the outside world for Palestinians in Gaza, allowing the delivery of aid and the evacuation of patients from a collapsed healthcare system.

Humanitarian sources said that the flow of aid through the crossing had been halted. The Palestinian-run Gaza Crossings Authority said this was a "death sentence" against the people of Gaza, particularly the ill and injured who have been able to leave the blockaded territory only through Rafah.

The United States has made its views clear to Israel on a major ground invasion of Rafah, a State Department spokesperson said on Tuesday in Washington's first response since Israeli forces seized control of the border crossing with Gaza.

"We continue to believe that a captive deal is in the best interest of the Israeli and the Palestinian people; it would bring an immediate ceasefire and allow increased humanitarian assistance into Gaza," the spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, Cairo is hosting delegations from Qatar, the United States and the Palestinian group Hamas in order to reach a comprehensive truce in Gaza.

Hamas said in a statement that Israel's incursion in Gaza's Rafah crossing aimed to undermine ceasefire efforts, after the Israeli army announced it took control of the Palestinian side of the crossing between Egypt and the strip. Palestinian group Hamas said in a statement on Monday that it had informed Qatari and Egyptian mediators the group accepted their proposal for a ceasefire. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said later the proposal fell short of Israel's demands but Israel would send a delegation to meet with negotiators to try to reach an agreement. — Reuters

UN says aid access to Gaza 'denied' by Israel

GENEVA: The United Nations said on Tuesday the Israeli authorities have denied the UN access to the now-closed Rafah crossing — the key entry point for humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA, said the inability to get fuel into the besieged Palestinian territory through the crossing risked shutting down aid operations.

The Rafah border crossing with Egypt "is currently under IDF (Israel Defence Forces) control and we have been told there will be no crossings of personnel or goods in or out for the time being", Laerke told a briefing in Geneva.

"We currently do not have any physical presence at the Rafah crossing, as our access to go to that area for coordination purposes has been denied by COGAT" he said, referring to the Israeli agency that oversees supplies into the Palestinian territories. The Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza from Israel has been closed since Sunday following rocket attacks.

"The two main arteries for getting aid into Gaza are currently choked off," said Laerke. He said that with Rafah closed on Tuesday, no fuel would come in as it is "the only entry



Displaced Palestinians arrive with their belongings on a beach, near Deir el Balah, in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

point for fuel" and without that, operations were "in jeopardy. It does shut it down if fuel does not come in.

"There's a very, very short buffer of about one day of fuel available. Primarily diesel to run trucks and to run generators". "The one-day buffer is for the entire operation in Gaza." He added: "If no fuel comes in for a prolonged period of time, it would be a very effective way of putting the humanitarian operation in its grave."

Israeli military spokesman Nadav Shoshani said that prior to the operation sending tanks into Rafah, the IDF encouraged residents to "temporarily evacuate to the expanded humanitarian area in Al Mawasi".

There, "the IDF has facilitated the building of field hospitals, tents, and an increase in water, food, and medical supplies", he added. International organisations were also encouraged to evacuate, "and have done so", he added.

James Elder, spokesman for the UN children's agency UNICEF said every warning and every story of children being killed and wounded had been ignored. As for the Rafah crossing, "it's hard to see, if that closes for an extended period, how aid agencies avert famine across the Gaza Strip", he said. — AFP



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In brief

■ GEORGE



RESCUERS SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS IN S.AFRICA BUILDING COLLAPSE

Rescuer workers said on Tuesday they had made contact with 11 people under the rubble in a race to save dozens still unaccounted for after a building collapsed in the South African city of George killing at least six. Twenty-eight people have been pulled out of the debris of the five-storey apartment block, which caved in Monday afternoon while under construction, municipal authorities said. Six of those have died, the authorities said in George, 400 kilometres east of Cape Town. “We are in contact with 11 people” trapped under rubble, Colin Deiner, head of rescue operations, told a news conference in Cape Town.

— AFP

■ LONDON



UK SAYS DEFENCE MINISTRY TARGETED IN CYBERATTACK

A senior British lawmaker said on Tuesday that there was a massive cyberattack on the names and banking details of UK armed forces personnel. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said there were indications that a “malign actor has compromised the armed forces payment network.” His comments came after MP Tobias Ellwood said a contractor’s payroll system used by the defence ministry was targeted. The leak is believed to have included a number of personal addresses of serving and former armed forces members. Cabinet minister Mel Stride said that the government was not currently pointing the finger at any. — AFP

■ TRIPOLI



ITALY PM MELONI IN LIBYA TO SIGN COOPERATION DEALS

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni began a visit to Libya on Tuesday to sign cooperation agreements, and was set to meet leaders from rival administrations in the conflict-torn country. Accompanied by a ministerial delegation, Meloni met the head of the Tripoli-based government, Abdelhamid Dbeibah, Libyan officials said. “Declarations of intent” were due to be signed on cooperation in health, education and research. It said the deals come as part of long-awaited “Mattei Plan” named after Enrico Mattei, founder of the Italian energy company Eni. — AFP

Macron hosts Xi in French mountains to talk over Ukraine, trade issues

TARBES: French President Emmanuel Macron was on Tuesday hosting Chinese leader Xi Jinping at one of his beloved childhood haunts in the Pyrenees mountains, pressing a message to Beijing not to support Russia’s war against Ukraine and to accept fairer trade.

The first day of Xi’s state visit to France, his first to Europe since 2019, saw respectful but sometimes robust exchanges between the two men during a succession of talks on Monday.

Macron, joined initially by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, urged Xi not to allow the export of any technology that could be used by Russia in its attack of Ukraine and asked Beijing to do all it could to end the war.

Xi, for his part, warned the West not to “smear” China over the conflict and also hit back at accusations that Chinese overcapacity was causing global trade imbalances.

The peaceful mountain village of Bagnere-de-Bigorre and nearby La Mongie — as well as lunch accompanied by their wives, Peng Liyuan and Brigitte Macron — will allow Xi and Macron to explore these issues in relative privacy.

While born and brought up in the north of France, the young “Manu” spent numerous winter and summer holidays with his late maternal grandparents in the area just below the Col du Tourmalet, over 2,000 metres above sea level and a legendary climb in the Tour de France.



Chinese President Xi Jinping (C) is welcomed by France's President Emmanuel Macron (R) upon his arrival at Tarbes' airport. — AFP

Macron personally welcomed Xi when he arrived at Tarbes airport in southwest France and the leaders headed to a mountain restaurant to dine on local products.

After a bilateral meeting with Xi, Macron welcomed China’s “commitments” not to supply arms to Russia, while also expressing concern over possible deliveries of dual-use technology.

He thanked Xi for backing

Macron urged Xi not to allow the export of any technology that could be used by Russia in its attacks and asked Beijing to do all it could to end the war

his idea of a truce in all conflicts including Ukraine during the

Paris Olympics this summer and pointedly added that France was not seeking “regime change” in Russia.

Xi, who is due to host Russian President Vladimir Putin in China later this month, warned against using the Ukraine crisis “to cast blame, smear a third country and incite a new Cold War”.

Both Macron and von der Leyen made trade a priority in the talks, underscoring that Europe must

defend its “strategic interests” in its economic relations with China.

Macron thanked Xi for not imposing “provisional” customs duties on French cognac amid an ongoing anti-dumping investigation.

The visit has also coincided with intensified concerns about alleged hacking attacks against lawmakers and officials in European countries including France, Germany and the UK. — AFP

PM MODI VOTES AS INDIA’S MARATHON ELECTION HEATS UP



India's PM Narendra Modi displays his inked marked finger after casting his ballot, Ahmedabad. — AFP

AHMEDABAD: Prime Minister Narendra Modi cast his ballot on Tuesday in India’s ongoing general election after giving several campaign speeches.

Turnout so far has dropped significantly compared with the last national poll in 2019, with analysts blaming widespread expectations that Modi will easily win a third term and hotter-than-average temperatures heading into the summer.

Modi walked out of a polling booth early morning in the city of Ahmedabad while holding up a finger marked with indelible ink, flanked by security personnel and cheered by supporters.

“In the grand ritual of democracy, everyone contributing their share deserves congratulations,” Modi told reporters.

“Once again, I tell Indians... to come in huge numbers to vote and celebrate the festival of democracy.”

The premier’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to win the election convincingly.

Modi remains widely popular a decade after coming to power, in large part due to his government’s positioning of the nation’s majority faith at the centre of its politic.

India’s election is conducted in seven phases over six weeks to ease the immense logistical burden of staging the democratic exercise in the world’s most populous country.

Much of southern Asia was hit by a heatwave last week that saw several constituencies vote in searing temperatures.

In the city of Mathura, a three-hour drive from New Delhi, temperatures crossed 41 degrees Celsius on polling day, and election commission figures showed turnout dropping nearly nine points to 52 per cent from five years earlier.

But India’s weather bureau

has forecast more hot spells to come in May and the election commission formed a task force last month to review the impact of heat and humidity before each round of voting.

Modi told reporters after leaving the polling station that he encouraged voters to drink “as much water as possible”. “The more water you drink, the better your health and energy levels are maintained,” he said.

Severe heat was forecast for several locations voting on Tuesday including the states of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. In Agra, where afternoon temperatures reached 42 degrees Celsius, resident Taslim Warsi said that her mother had skipped voting because “the heat is just too much”.

More than 968 million people are eligible to vote in the Indian election, with the final round of polling on June 1 and results expected three days later. — AFP

President Putin, launching fifth term, promises Russians with more power

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin vowed at a lavish inauguration on Tuesday to deliver victory to Russians, embarking on a record-breaking fifth term with more power than ever.

Putin, however, conceded that Russia was going through a “difficult” period, an apparent reference to the unprecedented sanctions packages the West has imposed on Moscow for having launched military operations in Ukraine more than two years ago. The 71-year-old Kremlin chief has ruled Russia since the turn of the century, securing a fresh six-year mandate in March after winning presidential elections devoid of all opposition.

The highly-orchestrated inauguration ceremony, which included a military procession and Orthodox prayer service, was broadcast live on major Russian television channels. Putin, who has said that his forces will be victorious in Ukraine, whatever the cost, said the country would emerge “with dignity and become even stronger”.

After standing in the rain and overseeing columns of armed guards and calvary parade in ceremonial uniform, Putin was blessed by the leader of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill.

“May God help you continue carrying out your servitude that

he himself has entrusted on you,” the Orthodox leader said. He compared Putin to medieval ruler Alexander Nevsky and wished him eternal rule. “Serving Russia is a huge honour, responsibility and sacred duty,” Putin had said in the Kremlin’s gilded Saint Andrew’s Hall.

He was greeted by applause by Russian officials and military top brass, who sang the national anthem and applauded him.

Government officials and foreign diplomats in Moscow were invited to the ceremony, including French ambassador Pierre Levy. The inauguration comes two days before Russia marks Victory Day on May 9, an event that has taken on renewed symbolism as Putin compares his offensive in Ukraine to Russia’s fight in World War II. Authorities erected barriers throughout Moscow’s city centre ahead of both events.

Putin kicks off his six-year term emboldened by advances on the battlefield in Ukraine and sustained economic growth.

His victory in March means that he is likely to become the longest-serving ruler of Russia in a century. Russia’s army held off a much-hyped Ukrainian counter-offensive last year, and it has since made gains on the front lines as Kyiv struggles with ammunition shortages. — AFP



Russia's President Vladimir Putin reviews honour guards of the Presidential regiment following his inauguration ceremony at the Kremlin. — AFP

Persistent military escalation in Gaza constitute war crimes



The continuation of the dangerous escalation in violence, the policy of collective punishment and the grave violations of international law and international humanitarian law carried out by the Israeli occupation forces in their brutal war against the Gaza Strip constitute war crimes.

On Tuesday, the Sultanate of Oman expressed deep concern over Israeli forces’ continued military escalation, war crimes and genocide against unarmed civilians in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories.

These actions of the Israeli occupation forces are crimes against humanity and are contrary to international law and international humanitarian laws and standards. The consequences of the military ground operations that the Israeli occupation army are carrying out threaten catastrophic effects on the region and the world, as well as on the chances of achieving peace and stability.

The international community has to intervene immediately to put an end to the war and to the ongoing Israeli violations in order to spare the blood of innocent people and to make sure necessary humanitarian aid is delivered to civilians as soon as possible.

Indeed, the action of Israeli occupation forces storming the city of Rafah portends serious catastrophic impacts that may expand the conflict and tension further.

The international community needs to immediately intervene to stop the war and terminate the ongoing Israeli violations of international law and international humanitarian law. Israel needs to be fully responsible for such violations, war crimes, and the policy of starvation and forced expulsion of citizens. In this regard, the international community must assume its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people, calling on it to exert efforts towards the establishment of an independent

THE
CONSEQUENCES
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OUT THREATEN
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EFFECTS ON THE
REGION AND THE
WORLD

Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital because these brutal actions represent ‘stark crimes against humanity’.

The international community needs to meet its commitments to the Palestinian people and quickly reach ‘radical solutions to achieve the people’s hopes in establishing their own independent state so that peace can prevail in not only in Palestine but also in the region and security and safety can prevail in the world. Oman’s dedication to political solutions and adherence to international law needs international intervention and such violence would never provide a solution to the Palestinian or Arab-Israeli conflicts without political dialogue and a strong commitment to peace.

An immediate ceasefire, the establishment of a monitored truce by UN observers, and the development of plans to provide humanitarian aid directly and immediately to the Gaza Strip is urgently needed.

Fame and fortune, here I come!



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The writer is a certified skills trainer and author of *The World According to Bahja*

Remember the kid in your class who used to create rhythm from whatever he/she had in hand? In my case this kid was called Abdullah. He was the school’s only drummer who sat right behind me. Abdullah was a fan of drum cadence (military style beat) and practiced it using pens and pencils on his book and desk edge. This was his favourite entertainment during classes that bored him (e.g. Arabic grammar) which wasn’t my favourite either. I kept conjuring all my will power to stay awake and focused and his constant beating wasn’t helping my holy quest.

Whenever I’d turn to him with a frown to stop, he seemed to mistake it with a phantom encouraging smile so he’d smile back, nod his head, and continue practicing. I remembered

Abdullah while watching the STOMP! Rhythm show at the Royal Opera House Muscat last Saturday. For readers who’d never heard of STOMP! it’s a theatrical group that was created in 1991 in England by Luke Cresswell and Steve McNicholas.

Other than their performances around the globe, the company also performed at the Oscars and the Emmys. The creators made shows, movies, TV series and commercials that evolved around their company and special performances. They’d came a few times here but I’d never had the chance to attend.

However, I made sure to make it this time, even though it didn’t suit my busy schedule.

The ROHM theatre was full of children of all ages that felt like being in school recess. They were accompanying their parents and calling each other across the theatre, while parents waved politely at other parents. I was sitting next to two bored teenage girls checking their phones accompanied by an overly-enthusiastic mother telling them that it was her third time watching STOMP!

The show started with eight performers who were skilled in dancing, body percussion, acrobats, rhythm creating and comedy acts. They used day-to-day objects to create rhythm such as plastic bags, match boxes, lighters, brooms, garbage cans and lids, suitcases, shopping trolleys, newspaper, drainage pipes, kitchen basins and gigantic rubber rings.

Each object had an act of its own that by the end of it I muttered while clapping: “Amazing!” The one I enjoyed most was the kitchen sink one where the performers came out with them hanging down their necks by a strong chain while being filled with water, different cutleries, and cleaning gloves in hand that they ran on the wet surface to create a squeaky sound.

All these sounds were familiar to the ear yet what made it extraordinary was the unthinkable idea of creating enjoyable rhythm and beat out of it (unless you’d attended the show before, like the lady sitting next to me. Sadly, her daughters weren’t as impressed as her and their eyes were glued to the phone throughout the show. Whatever happened to the ROHM’s ushers who used to patrol the aisles like hawks and catch the faint glow of smart phones meters away?)

The show went on for 75 minutes without a break and the performers and the audience alike showed an inexhaustible zeal, especially when requested by the performers to clap and snap their fingers to create different rhythms. I followed for a while but then lost focus as the rhythm got harder and sat their admiring the lot surrounding me with musical ears.

I enjoyed the show so much and was inspired by it that the following day and while cleaning the cats’ litter box, I discovered that I can create rhythm from the litter pebbles, the scoop, and the disposal bag.

Fame and fortune, here I come!

Robotics and their impact in daily life



DR KHALFAN
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The impact of robotics has been nothing short of revolutionary in recent years, as technological advancements have paved the way for unprecedented growth in the field. With robots taking over repetitive tasks in industries and households alike, the benefits of automation are becoming increasingly pervasive. The precision and speed with which robots carry out their tasks reduces the margin for error and boosts productivity significantly. It’s clear that embracing robotics is key to staying ahead in today’s fast-paced world.

The future of manufacturing is here, and it’s called Industry 4.0. This revolutionary trend in robotics has brought together cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and robotics to create smart factories that are more efficient, flexible, and safe. According to the International Federation of Robotics (IFR), industrial robots sales have reached an all-time high in recent years, with collaborative robots, or cobots, leading the way. These robots work hand in hand with human workers, enhancing productivity and safety on the factory floor. Companies such as ABB, Fanuc, and Universal Robots are at the forefront of this revolution, offering a wide range of robotic solutions tailored to meet the needs of different industries.

The exponential growth in robotics has allowed machines to perform tasks that were once thought to be impossible. In the automotive manufacturing industry, robots are now capable of executing intricate assembly tasks, precision welding, and quality inspection using advanced vision systems. This high level of automation not only enhances productivity but also guarantees consistent quality while reducing production costs. The utilisation of robotics in manufacturing processes is a game-changer, and it is essential for businesses to adopt this technology to remain competitive in today’s market.

The healthcare industry, for example, has witnessed a remarkable transformation with the integration of robotic technology. From surgical robots like the Da Vinci Surgical System

that perform minimally invasive surgeries with enhanced precision and control, to the use of robots in rehabilitation therapy that assist patients with mobility impairments to regain motor function and independence, the benefits are immense. Exoskeletons and robotic prosthetics have provided individuals with disabilities greater mobility, improving their quality of life. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of robots in healthcare settings, particularly for disinfection purposes. Robots equipped with UV-C lights are being utilised for disinfection in hospitals and public spaces, reducing the risk of viral transmission. The future of healthcare is here and it is driven by robotics, providing patients with safer, more efficient, and effective care.

THE PRECISION AND SPEED
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AND BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY
SIGNIFICANTLY

The transportation industry is going through a great revolution with the advent of autonomous vehicles and delivery drones. Companies like Tesla, Waymo, and Uber are investing heavily in self-driving cars to transform personal transportation and logistics. With the increasing popularity of autonomous drones, especially in urban areas where traffic congestion is a significant challenge, companies like Amazon Prime Air and Google Wing are offering faster and more efficient delivery of goods to consumers. Moreover, robotics technology has been integrated into public transportation systems, leading to the emergence of autonomous buses and trains. These self-driving vehicles have the potential to provide safe, reliable, and accessible transportation for passengers with disabilities while

also reducing traffic congestion. The introduction of self-driving vehicles and drones in the transportation industry promises to bring a new level of innovation and efficiency to meet the growing demand for transportation services.

Are you tired of mundane household tasks that take up your valuable time? Imagine having a domestic robot that could vacuum, mow the lawn, or even feed your pets. With the increasing role of robotics in our everyday lives, this is no longer just a dream. In addition to domestic robots, virtual assistants powered by AI and natural language processing are integrated into smart home devices, allowing you to control your appliances, play music, and access information using voice commands. But the advantages of robotics extend beyond just convenience. Social robots are becoming more popular as they provide companionship and assistance to the elderly and individuals with special needs. Equipped with sensors and AI algorithms, these robots can engage in conversation, remind users to take medication, and even provide emotional support. With the benefits of robotics becoming more apparent, it’s clear that they are transforming both our homes and our lives.

As technology advances, it’s crucial to consider the ethical and societal implications of robotics. Automation, job displacement, data privacy, and the growing gap between tech-savvy and non-literate populations must be addressed. The solution? Collaborative efforts between policymakers, industry stakeholders, and the public to ensure that robotics developments are guided by principles of inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. The field of robotics is evolving rapidly, with profound implications for daily life and various industries. From smart manufacturing to healthcare, transportation, and household chores, robots are revolutionising sectors, making them more efficient, safer, and improving our quality of life. As robotics continue to progress, policymakers, businesses, and society as a whole must embrace these technologies responsibly and ensure their benefits are distributed equitably. Let’s work together to make sure we’re ready for the future.

Immersed in the rain fury

The heavy downpours and flash flooding in the Gulf countries of Oman and the UAE have made news headlines as rainfall worth several years was reported in a matter of hours in the Gulf countries towards the end of April. The record-breaking rainfall once again highlights the “significant climate change test” and the “vulnerabilities of infrastructure systems” in these countries.

A new study published in *Nature* revealed that the world economy is already committed to an income reduction of 19 per cent until 2050 due to climate change. Overall, global annual damages are estimated to be \$38 trillion, with a likely range of \$19-59 trillion in 2050. According to a report in Al Jazeera quoting the World Weather Attribution (WWA), rainfall in El Nino years has become 10-40 per cent heavier in the region affected.

Experts are now calling for an urgent revision of urban development and a multifaceted approach in the plans in these countries to integrate plans for extreme weather events, which are becoming more intermittent, intense, frequent and difficult to predict.

A World Economic Forum (WEF) report last week suggested, “The flooding in the Gulf illustrated that urban engineering is failing a significant climate change test, especially in rich Gulf countries known for building skyscrapers and buildings of the future”.

Addressing the impacts of climate change on infrastructure, therefore, requires a multifaceted approach, the report points out, adding, “in hot and dry climates like those of the Arabian Gulf, rainfall is infrequent and the city’s infrastructure often fails to handle extreme weather events.”

Roads, bridges, ports and airports are increasingly exposed to more frequent and severe weather events, leading to physical damage, disruptions in supply chains and increased maintenance costs.

A report by the State of the Climate in Asia 2023 recently highlighted that Asia remained the world’s most disaster-hit region from weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2023.



Samuel Kutty
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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

AS THE WORLD GRAPPLES WITH THE EVER-INCREASING IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, THE INTERMITTENT RAINS IN THE GULF REGION, WHICH IS OTHERWISE KNOWN FOR ITS ARID CLIMATE, HAVE EMERGED AS A STARK REMINDER OF THE PLANET’S VULNERABILITY TO EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Floods and storms caused the highest number of reported casualties and economic losses, while the impact of heatwaves became more severe.

Though El Nino may have brought the recent rains in the Gulf region and the extreme humid heat prevailing in South Asia, the economic ramifications of the climate change phenomenon are far-reaching. The World Meteorological Organization, in an updated report, revealed that over two million people have been killed and the world has suffered economic damages amounting to over \$4.3 trillion in the past 100 years from extreme weather events and climate change-related catastrophes.

The report WEF emphasises that by integrating specific mitigation and adaptation measures, the Gulf countries of Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain can enhance their resilience to flooding and reduce the long-term impact of these extreme weather events on communities, infrastructure and ecosystems.

“Adaptation strategies focus on enhancing resilience and reducing vulnerability to flooding, rainstorms, while mitigation strategies aim to reduce the magnitude and impact of flooding events,” urges the report.

Accordingly, the WEF suggested to the governments in the Gulf countries to consider building climate resilience into cities by default, installing and maintaining proper drainage systems and introducing sustainable storm water management.

In addition, the report also recommended the implementation of advanced early warning systems, putting in place strict environmental regulations and assessments, and strengthening international collaboration to share knowledge and data availability in climate change mitigation.

However, the fact is that as the world grapples with the ever-increasing impacts of climate change, the intermittent rains in the Gulf region, which is otherwise known for its arid climate, have emerged as a stark reminder of the planet’s and humankind’s vulnerability to extreme weather events.

ALL IN A LINE!



■ Honour guards of the Presidential regiment march before a ceremony inaugurating Vladimir Putin as President of Russia at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, on Tuesday. – Reuters

Fertilisers will not fix Africa’s food crisis

The world is confronting an unprecedented food crisis, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia’s war on Ukraine and worsening climate conditions. But the problem is most acute in Africa, where 61 per cent of the population faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2022. And at a moment when effective solutions are urgently needed, policymakers are once again coalescing around the misguided belief that increased use of mineral and synthetic fertiliser is the key to boosting agricultural productivity and ending hunger on the continent.

This approach can be traced back to the Abuja Declaration on Fertiliser for the Africa Green Revolution that African Union leaders endorsed in 2006. The goal was to reverse the continent’s poor yields by boosting fertiliser use from eight to 50 kg per hectare within a decade. Spearheading this effort was the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), an initiative backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other major donors. Working closely with large agribusinesses like the Norwegian-based chemical company Yara, AGRA championed the idea that distributing synthetic nitrogen fertilisers would solve Africa’s agricultural challenges.

But this singular focus on synthetic fertiliser use has failed to address the complex realities of farming in Africa. A recent assessment of AGRA’s projects in Burkina Faso and Ghana



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found no evidence that providing chemical inputs and high-yield seeds resulted in increased production and higher incomes for smallholder farmers. Instead, many are now more vulnerable and indebted after coming to rely on expensive synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, the prices of which soared following Russia’s war. These farmers have become locked in a cycle of dependency, while companies like Yara reap substantial profits.

Zambia is a good example. Despite being one of the largest consumers of synthetic nitrogen fertiliser in Africa, the country has not experienced a corresponding reduction in hunger and malnutrition. The view that more fertiliser means less hunger fails to address the systemic barriers to food security, such as affordability, and exacerbates existing challenges, such as soil degradation.

Specifically, synthetic nitrogen fertilisers disrupt the delicate balance of the soil ecosystem — the very foundation of sustainable agriculture. These inputs have been shown to reduce the abundance and diversity of beneficial microorganisms, such as mycorrhizal fungi, which are essential for nutrient cycling and plant health. When these symbiotic relationships are disrupted, soil resilience and fertility decline. According to the World Bank,

Africa is already estimated to be losing around 3 per cent of GDP per year due to nutrient depletion and general soil degradation.

In addition to undermining crop productivity, and thus dealing a devastating blow to the livelihoods and food security of millions of smallholder farmers, excessive fertiliser use also has far-reaching environmental consequences. It contributes to nitrogen pollution in water bodies, causing biodiversity loss in aquatic systems and pushing the planet past safe limits for humans. Perhaps most worryingly, research indicates that the production and application of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers accounts for roughly 2 per cent of total global greenhouse-gas (GHG)



Around 61 per cent of the population in Africa faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2022.

emissions.

As a result, chemical companies like Yara are switching to “green fertilisers,” which are produced using hydrogen derived from renewable-energy sources, rather than fossil fuel-based inputs. This allows them to continue advocating for the use of synthetic fertilisers as a solution to food insecurity in Africa (and, by extension, maintaining and expanding the market for their products), even as research points to the shortcomings of such an approach.

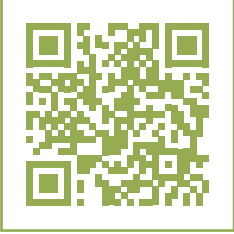
It is true that using green hydrogen to produce fertiliser can mitigate GHG emissions. But while the production process may be less carbon-intensive, it is still highly energy-intensive. And applying

fertiliser can release huge surges of nitrous oxide — a potent GHG — into the atmosphere, and can still cause soil degradation and water pollution, regardless of how it is produced. By promoting “green fertiliser” as a panacea, the industry is engaging in greenwashing — using the veneer of sustainability to protect its interests.

This week, the AU’s Africa Fertiliser and Soil Health Summit in Nairobi will address soil degradation and food insecurity. The involvement of industry giants like Yara and organisations like AGRA suggests continued adherence to a flawed model that has consistently failed to alleviate hunger and malnutrition, a concern shared by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, which represents more than 200 million stakeholders. But instead of focusing on boosting short-term soil fertility, substituting one chemical with the other, and thus endorsing the fertiliser industry’s self-serving narratives, the summit should consider longer-term goals, such as improving soil health and soil life, strengthening the resilience of farming communities and ensuring the sustainability of food systems.

Productivity can be maintained without industrial nitrogen fertilisers, as shown in long-term trials across Africa.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



SPA
CHALLENGE
NEXT
FOR
FIA WEC
PODIUM
FINISHER
AL HARTHY



BMW trio focused
on adding to sensational
Imola LMGT3 podium

Omani racer, Maxime
Martin and Valentino Rossi P4
in championship

Legendary track hosts
third race of FIA WEC season
this Saturday

Ahmad Al Harthy
aiming to continue podium
momentum at Spa

JUST a couple of weeks since a star FIA World Endurance Championship performance at Imola delivered a first LMGT3 podium for Oman's Ahmad al Harthy, the BMW racer is aiming to keep up the sparkling momentum this coming weekend as the 2024 season arrives at Spa-Francorchamps.

Not only one of Al Harthy's favourite tracks, the Ardennes venue is a circuit where the Omani has enjoyed outstanding success in the past in GT3 racing with class victory at the Total 24 Hours of Spa as well as securing numerous other podiums and wins in GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup.

Fresh from a memorable second place finish last month in Italy with team-mates Maxime Martin and Valentino Rossi, where the buzz in the Team WRT garage and the Imola grandstands was absolutely electrifying, Al Harthy is determined to keep the impetus and

challenge for more silverware at Spa.

Going in to race three of the FIA WEC season, which will take place this Saturday, May 11, the BMW M4 GT3 trio – currently fourth in the LMGT3 standings – are focusing on mounting a similarly strong bid to that delivered last time out.

As well as excellent pace and performance in race trim during the first two events of the season, Qatar and Italy, Al Harthy has also been very impressive in qualifying in his first season with BMW and will be absolutely determined to once again qualify for the all-important Hyperpole 'shoot-out'.

Although a car issue limited the Omani to a single flying lap in qualifying in Qatar during the opening event of the campaign back in March, he was still able to make it through into the Hyperpole session and at Imola he secured a season-best third on the grid in LMGT3.



Ahmad al Harthy

While confident round three of the FIA WEC season at Spa should be a positive event for Team WRT's No 46 entry, Al Harthy – who is backed by prestigious partners OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman – is well aware of the strength of opposition within LMGT3 and isn't underestimating the challenge which awaits in Belgium.

AHMAD AL HARTHY:
"Spa is such an amazing track and we've enjoyed so much success there over the years, it's almost a second home for me in my racing career. I absolutely love competing at Spa and I really am looking forward to being there for the first time with BMW and the WRT guys, I know everyone is going to do a fantastic job as always.

"We come into the weekend off the back of an amazing result in Imola, it was a fantastic race and both Maxime

and Vale did a really incredible job in the car. I was so happy with my performance in the first two hours, and we were strong in qualifying and Hyperpole as well, so I really do hope we can continue that momentum, continue to push and build on the great start to the season."

Opening practice ahead of round three of the FIA WEC Season at Spa-Francorchamps will begin at 10.30 local time on May 9 with session two following at 16.30. On May 10, the third practice session will take place at 10.00 local time with qualifying beginning at 13.45. The TotalEnergies 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps will follow on May 11, with the race starting at 12.00 local time. Follow all of the action at www.fiawec.com

FIA World Endurance Championship LMGT3 Driver Standings (after Rd2)
4. Ahmad al Harthy / Maxime Martin / Valentino Rossi, 36 pts

Al Nahda, Dhofar shift gears as HM Cup showdown nears

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Salalah giants Dhofar and defending champions Al Nahda are undergoing comprehensive training sessions ahead of the 2023-2024 HM Cup final showdown at Khasab Sports Complex on Friday. The match will kick off at 7:30 pm under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, in presence of top dignitaries and officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth besides attendance of Salim bin Said al Wahaibi, Chairman of the Oman Football Association.

Al Nahda players arrived on Tuesday in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE, for a short abroad camp prior the final of the coveted cup.



The runners up of West Asian Zone AFC Cup will chase their second successive title after they had blanked Seeb 1-0 in the final in March 2023. Al Nahda, under the supervision of experienced head coach Hamed al Azani, will finalise their starting line-up after

final practice sessions.

Recently, Al Nahda ended their match in the domestic league with a 1-1 draw against Al Rustaq while they missed the chance to progress into the final of AFC Cup after they had ended the match against Lebanon's Al Ahed



2-2 in the second leg while the first leg match ended in favour of the Lebanese side by 1-0.

Al Azani is experienced enough to deal with the final and he has the key players who can be depended upon in this crucial match including: goalkeeper

Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ahmed al Kaabi, Nasser al Shamali, Harib al Saadi, Salah al Yahyaee, Antres G, Walter Bwalya among the rest.

On the other side, 10-time winners Dhofar will eye the record by reaching to the 11th title. Dhofar players would like to

rekindle their memories as HM Cup champions as the last title won by the team was in 2020-2021 season.

Dhofar is one of the leading experienced domestic clubs in the final as they have the experience on how to end the thrilling final match. Despite the negative results of Dhofar in the local league as they suffered defeats recently against Al Nasr, Ibri and Oman Clubs, they will look to this event as a good chance for the team to end their season with a title. They are positioned currently in the 10th place with 20 points in Omantel League. Dhofar have many former national football team players including Qasim Said, Abdulsalam Amer, Mazin al Kasbi, Abdullah Noun besides other new youth faces in the squad.



Bangladesh's Mohammad Saifuddin celebrates after taking the wicket of Zimbabwe's Craig Ervine during the third Twenty20 in Chittagong. — AFP

Bangladesh seal T20 series with 9-run win

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh: Bangladesh survived a late onslaught from Faraz Akram to beat Zimbabwe by nine runs in the third Twenty20 international and seal the five-match series 3-0 in Chittagong on Tuesday. Playing his first match in the series, Faraz hit an unbeaten 34 off 19 balls, a record for any Zimbabwean batting at number 10, but the visitors still finished short at 156-9.

Faraz and Wellington Masakadza put on 54 for the ninth wicket to lift the side from 91-8. The visitors needed 21 runs from the final over but Mohammad Saifuddin bowled Masakadza in the first ball to put Bangladesh back on top. Saifuddin, who made 3-42, held his nerve to concede only three runs from the last three balls.

Towhid Hridoy earlier scored his maiden Twenty20 international with 57 off 38

balls, helping the hosts recover from a sluggish start after they were put in to bat first.

Jaker Ali provided Towhid ample support with 44 off 34 balls as the pair shared 87 for the fourth wicket. "Today the wicket was a bit slow. That's why we took time, I told my partner to do the same, after we are set we will execute," said player of the match Towhid Hridoy.

Blessing Muzarabani claimed 3-14 for Zimbabwe, his career best figure, but his teammates struggled to contain the innings.

Sikandar said in the post-match presentation that "the top five including myself have to raise our hands for the failure". "Bangladesh have shown us that one guy can get set and the others can bat around him. This target was chasable," the skipper added.

The final two matches of the series will be played in Dhaka on Friday and Sunday. — AFP

Suryakumar hits ton as Mumbai dent SRH's play-off push

MUMBAI: Suryakumar Yadav hit an unbeaten 102 to lead Mumbai Indians to a crushing seven-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Monday as teams jostle for a play-off berth in the IPL.

Chasing 174 for victory, Mumbai slipped to 31-3 before Suryakumar put on an unbeaten stand of 143 with Tilak Varma to achieve the target with 16 balls to spare at their home Wankhede Stadium.

Suryakumar hit the winning six, which also raised his second IPL ton in 51 balls and comes as a welcome sign for India ahead of the T20 World Cup in June in the West Indies and the United States.

"SKY was unbelievable," skipper Hardik Pandya said of his player of the match.

"More than him getting runs, him putting so much pressure on bowlers that even other batters get loose balls. He breaks you. Lucky to have him in my team."

However the win for five-time winners Mumbai, placed ninth in the 10-team table, could be late in a tournament fast moving towards its business end.

Hyderabad, led by Pat Cummins, stay fourth in the table but their fifth loss and a big one could hurt their play-off chances.

Hyderabad need to win two of their remaining three matches to make the play-offs as they remain locked at 12 points with third-placed Chennai Super Kings and Lucknow Super Giants at fifth.

The top four teams will make the play-offs with the final on May 26 in Chennai.

Hyderabad, who have posted record IPL totals of 277 and 287 this season, next host Lucknow and Cummins said, "We like playing at home, done well there so far. Looking forward to what's ahead of us. Hopefully a few more fireworks."

Former champions Hyderabad



posted 173-8 courtesy of Travis Head's 48 and an unbeaten 17-ball 35 by lower-order batter Cummins after being invited to bat first.

The left-handed Head gave the team a brisk start with his 30-ball knock before his departure in the 11th over and Hyderabad lost their way with regular wickets.

Pandya and spinner Piyush Chawla took three wickets each to rattle the opposition middle and lower-order as Hyderabad slipped to 136-8 in 17 overs.

But number nine Cummins had other ideas as the Australian Test and ODI captain hit back in

the final three overs and put on an unbeaten stand of 37 off 19 balls with Sanvir Singh.

The batting effort inspired the team and fast bowlers came roaring to reduce Mumbai to 31-3 including the key wicket of Rohit Sharma, out caught behind for four off Cummins.

Suryakumar soon took charge with his attacking batting as he raised his 50 in 30 balls and hammered the opposition bowling with 12 fours and six sixes. The left-handed Varma made 37 and enjoyed Suryakumar's blitz from the other end. — AFP

ORSC chairman attends AGM meetings of BWF, Badminton Asia



DR ABDULRAHIM BIN MUSALLAM AL DROUSHI

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Dr Abdulrahim bin Musallam al Droushi, Chairman of Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC), took part in the General Assembly meetings of the Badminton World Federation (BWF) and Badminton Asia in Chengdu, China, recently.

These meetings included badminton forum which discussed several topics contributing to the development of the sport at the local and international levels. During this period, Chengdu, China was the host city for the most powerful international badminton tournaments namely: the Thomas Cup and the Uber Cup.

Badminton Asia's General Assembly had a large attendance of its members. On the sidelines, Dr Abdulrahim discussed in a special meetings with the Development and Competitions Committees of the Badminton Asia's a number of upcoming tournaments in the committee's calendar for this year and the following years.

Moreover, they discussed the possibility of implementing and hosting tournaments at the regional level. They also discussed several projects that the committee aims to implement in the Sultanate of Oman to achieve a set of goals related to community sports and the support provided by the Asia Badminton in developing the game, such as hosting regional tournaments, increasing club participation in local tournaments, and advancing the implementation of badminton initiatives.

"This visit has opened up wide horizons for us to implement additional projects that enhance the committee's performance in developing the game in the Sultanate of Oman. The ORSC has presented the best practices in globally developing participation levels, particularly in our community projects and projects directed towards schools," the chief of ORSC said.

Oman Hockey Association to launch schools tournament

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) held a meeting with the heads of private and international schools in Muscat to discuss holding hockey tournaments in January, between private schools for Under-10 boys and girls.

This initiative comes after the success of hosting FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024, at Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat in January, where Oman national team (men) won the bronze medal for the first time in the history.

The hosting of the world cup event confirms the interest of the Sultanate of Oman in hockey, which was represented by the establishment of a great stadium with international standards and foundations. It also highlighted Oman Hockey on the global map. With the same passion, the Oman Hockey Association



(OHA) seeks to continue progress by promoting the game among juniors and young in the schools. The OHA stressed that hockey is not just a sport, but it is also a great way for school students to develop important life skills such as teamwork, discipline and flexibility.

The meeting discussed the agenda for organising school

tournaments, determined participation conditions, discussed appropriate age groups and competitions format, in addition to presenting school ideas and perceptions.

The meeting was attended by members of the Board of Directors of the OHA and directors and representatives of the schools, which are the



French International School, Muscat International School, Pakistan School Muscat, Indian School Darsait, Indian School Al Ghubrah, Indian School Al Seeb, Sri Lankan School, Beaconhouse Private School, Al Sahwa Schools, Indian School Muscat, Indian School Bausher, Indian School Al Maabelah, Bangladesh School, Sultan Private School and

Al Raneem Private School.

Regarding the OHA vision in activating hockey activity in private schools, Madyen bin Ahmed Bait Habtha, Vice-Chairman of OHA, said, "The OHA aims to spread the game among private schools on a wider scale and provide opportunities for school students to compete in championships, and this

initiative complements the role of hockey athlete preparation centres in finding talents in the game."

"We are looking forward to launching hockey centres for male and female students in the private schools, some schools have expressed their real desire and have confirmed that they will harness external training expertise to train students," he added.

"In return, Oman Hockey will provide technical and administrative support to school teams by organising training courses, supervision and follow-up, as well as organising special competitions and providing some basic requirements, stadiums and referees. The actual work will begin after all schools agree on the age groups, providing coaches, allocating specific hours for training at Oman hockey fields in Al Amerat."

‘NOWINS’ NO MORE AS NORRIS DELIVERS F1 NEEDED PLOT TWIST

A hand holding a small, detailed model of a Formula 1 car, positioned in the bottom right corner of the image. The car is white with blue and red accents, and the hand is holding it from the side, showing its profile.

MIAMI GARDENS, United States: Formula One has built much of its recent success in the United States on the Netflix reality doc series 'Drive to Survive' but with Max Verstappen utterly dominating there was an acute need for a plot twist. That arrived in Miami on Sunday, when Lando Norris, the 24-year-old McLaren driver, pulled off a surprise win over the Dutchman.

Verstappen has won four of the six races so far this season and it would be unwise for anyone to see Norris's win as the sign of an imminent change in fortunes for the three-times world champion, but to maintain interest, F1 needed some rotation on the top of the podium. It was certainly a feel-good story, Norris came into Miami having had a record 15 podium finishes without a win — with eight of those second-place finishes.

Near-misses, such as at Sochi in 2021 when he led late but paid the price for failing to switch tyres in time during heavy rain, led to some taunting of Norris including the online nickname 'Lando NoWins'. While he was all smiles after his victory, he was not going to miss the chance for a defiant reply to his critics. "I am happy to put that to bed and prove a lot of these people wrong," he told

his post-race press conference. “I love it to go on Instagram and like all the comments from people abusing me, I freaking love it, makes me smile more than anything, especially ‘Lando NoWins’, that’s become the thing,” he added. “For me to prove those people wrong and prove (to) the people who didn’t think I could go out and do it, it’s going to be an even bigger smile on my face today, so I thank all of them,” he said.

McLaren had been without a Grand Prix win since Monza in 2021 and team principal Andrea Stella said they had finally given Norris the chance to win. "The victory for Lando, he deserved it so much and we always said as soon as we give him the right material he's going to make it and he made it. "I know what kind of work is behind it, it's so deserved for the McLaren team, I hope everyone enjoys this moment," he said.

Norris insisted that he had always had faith in his ability to win a Grand Prix and asked if it was a weight of his shoulders to finally clinch one, couldn't deny the reality. "As much as I want to say no, it's a yes! To get that first victory is always incredible. I've of course had my moments where I've been close, and I've never been able to convert it into the win," he said.

"But I wasn't worried. As much as a lot of people doubted that I was going to be able to put it together and win a race, I wasn't worried."

Norris said he was able to find time to savour the moment when he finally broke through. "I dream of these days sometimes. You never know when they're going to come towards you, but today was that day. "As much as my mind was going crazy, I was thinking a lot of things, I was also quiet. It's just a bit lonely out there at times and it's nice to reflect on everything you've done to get to this point," he said.

Reflecting over it, his thoughts were soon on how to celebrate his win in Miami. "I'm not gonna sleep," he grinned. "I'm going all the way!" — **AFP**

McLaren's Lando Norris celebrates winning the Miami Grand Prix on the podium with the trophy. — Reuters







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Oman delegation discusses investment opportunities in China



Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb
Deputy Chairman of OPAZ

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), led by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Authority, met yesterday in the Chinese capital, Beijing, with a number of Chinese businessmen from various companies operating in green industries, iron, modern information technology and chemicals, as part of the Authority's efforts to attract quality investments and localise them.

During the meetings, opportunities for investment in special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities in the Sultanate of Oman were reviewed, as well as the available infrastructure and incentives provided to investors.

The meetings were attended by Nasser bin Mohammed al Busaidi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the People's Republic of China.

The Authority's delegation also participated in the Omani-Chinese Investment Forum organised by the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the People's Republic of China to introduce the investment environment in Oman, which included visits to a number of specialised Chinese companies and factories and learning about their experiences in the targeted fields.

Construction activity contributes RO 3.5 billion to Oman's GDP

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Economy has highlighted the significant contribution of the construction sector to the country's economic growth. In 2023, the sector recorded a value of RO 3.5 billion, indicating its importance in driving the Gross Domestic Product of Oman. The Ministry emphasised that the construction sector is a key player in supporting non-oil economic activities, accounting for 12.8 per cent of the total non-oil economic activities volume in 2023.

The total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices of Oman in 2023 amounted to about RO 38.3 billion. The construction sector accounted for 9.1 per cent of the total GDP at constant prices and 6.6 per cent of the GDP at current prices, which stood at RO 41.8 billion.

According to the Ministry, the construction sector is one of the largest sectors in terms of its contribution to the non-oil GDP, playing a pivotal role in diversifying the economy and reducing dependency on oil revenues.

The growth of the construction sector has been supported by government spending on infrastructure projects, including airports, roads, and ports, which have aimed at enhancing the country's overall infrastructure and fostering sustainable economic growth.

One of the noteworthy aspects of the construction sector is its impact on employment. It is the largest source of job opportunities in the private sector, with over 49,000 Omanis employed in



The construction sector plays a pivotal role in diversifying the economy and reducing dependency on oil revenues.

construction activities by the end of November 2023. This highlights the sector's importance in providing livelihoods and supporting the workforce in Oman.

Government investments in infrastructure projects have been instrumental in boosting the growth of the construction sector. Projects such as airports, roads, and ports have not only contributed to the sector's expansion but have also served the broader goal of enhancing the country's infrastructure.

These investments have been part of Oman's broader economic diversification plans aimed at reducing dependency on oil revenues and fostering sustainable economic growth. Furthermore, the Ministry of Economy pointed out that the recent growth in the construction sector has not only contributed to

GDP expansion but has also been a significant driver of job creation in Oman.

With over 49,000 Omanis employed in construction activities by the end of November 2023, the sector has emerged as the largest source of employment opportunities in the private sector, underscoring its role in supporting the local workforce.

Government initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the construction sector have been lauded by the Ministry.

These initiatives include expanding the utilisation of local content, restructuring the Tender Board, launching electronic tendering platforms, and developing a unified government contract system.

Such efforts have been instrumental in streamlining processes, optimising government

spending, and accelerating project implementation in the construction sector.

The Ministry expected that construction activity prospects would remain favourable for growth as economic diversification efforts progress and the implementation of the 2040 urban strategy advances.

This strategy paves the way for the development of modern and future cities, including the Sultan Haitham City project, which is the flagship of future cities in Oman.

Agreements totalling over RO 1 billion have been signed with developers from inside and outside Oman to develop residential neighbourhoods in the first phase of the city. The urban strategy includes structural plans for Greater Muscat and 14 other cities, including 3 major cities: Greater Sohar, Greater Salalah and Greater Nizwa. — ONA

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WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS:



Salalah Port gears up for new role as Oman's hydrogen export hub

MUSCAT: Last week's award of two new green hydrogen blocks in Dhofar Governorate, to a pair of international consortiums, has fired up...

Oman Observer launches The Business Review newsletter

MUSCAT: *Oman Observer* unveiled its latest offering on Tuesday - The Business Review, a cutting-edge newsletter designed to deliver unparalleled insights into Oman's thriving markets.

This innovative platform is dedicated to providing exclusive news and expert analysis directly from Oman's dynamic markets, including the oil and gas sector, emerging energy developments, economic progress, banking innovations, aviation advancements, real estate trends and more.

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Oman's first solar thermal water project set for launch

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Omani upstream energy firm ARA Petroleum is preparing to commission one of the world's first solar thermal powered, zero emission desalination plants in the Sultanate of Oman – a groundbreaking facility designed to transform highly saline produced water into drinking water.

Muscat-based ARA has tapped Austrian solar tech startup Heliomis to set up the plant at its Qarat Al Milh site – a 5,700 sq km small oilfields cluster in Dhofar, carved out from majority state-owned PDO's Block 6 license.

The plant utilises Vienna-based Heliomis' proprietary, low-cost solar thermal technology to

produce up to 140 cubic metres of drinking water per day from 'produced water' – naturally occurring water that flows from wells during hydrocarbon production. Often contaminated with hydrocarbons, this produced water also contains high levels of dissolved mineral salts.

Following an agreement signed by the two companies in November 2022, Heliomis has since completed the deployment of a forward osmosis (FO) water desalination with a direct-osmosis zero liquid discharge (ZLD) unit to extract potable water from the produced water generated within ARA's Qarat Al Milh concession.

Both companies showcased this first-of-its-kind project at the recently concluded Oman Petroleum and Energy Services



Inflatable tubes and mirror films at the heart of Heliomis' solar thermal powered water desalination plant set up at Qarat Al Milh (Credit: Heliomis)

(OPES) show held in Muscat.

Commenting on its participation in the OPES show, Heliomis noted in a post: "(ARA Petroleum's) support allows us to showcase our recently installed solar field at the Qarat al Milh oilfield firsthand. Our

groundbreaking technology has the potential to significantly decarbonise industry. Furthermore, we're honoured to have our technology featured on the Technology Innovation Portal of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO)."

Heliomis says its solar thermal technology for water desalination is a cost-advantageous and low-carbon alternative to fossil-fuel powered desalination that is often undertaken at the coast, with the potable water then trucked or pumped over long distances to end-users in remote locations.

The solution is particularly targeted at oilfield companies operating in far-flung parts of the country, but with access to brackish groundwater. At the Qarat Al Milh plant, produced water with a salinity of over 100,000 ppm (three times higher than seawater) is transformed into drinking water, it points out.

According to Heliomis, renewable energy for the project is generated by inflatable tubes and mirror films that collect and concentrate sunlight to provide

clean industrial process heat in the hard-to-decarbonise mid-temperature range of 90°C to 400°C.

"The technology gives major cost advantages in manufacturing, shipping/logistics, installation, cleaning, maintenance, and freshwater usage compared to conventional parabolic troughs that employ bent glass mirrors.

In the context of the oil and gas industry, it can be used amongst others to power refineries and gas scrubbing facilities, to generate steam for enhanced oil recovery (EOR), or to desalinate produced water as in the present case," the company stated.

The project, now substantially in place at Qarat Al Milh, is slated for commissioning in the coming weeks.

Tethys Oil finalises field development plan for Block 56

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Tethys Oil, a Swedish energy firm, has finalised its Field Development Plan (FDP) for Block 56 in Oman, paving the way for commercial production opportunities. The Block 56 FDP is one of several highlights of Tethys Oil's Q1 performance, positioning the company for continued growth in the oil and gas sector.

Additionally, preparations for the Kunooz-1 exploration well in Fahd, Block 58, have been completed, with drilling scheduled to begin in mid-June.

The identification of six prospects in South Lahan on Block 58 has further demonstrated Tethys Oil's focus on exploration and resource development.

Magnus Nordin, the



The identification of six prospects in South Lahan on Block 58 has further demonstrated Tethys Oil's focus on exploration and resource development. (Image for illustration only).

Managing Director of Tethys Oil, emphasised the importance of these achievements by stating, "We're approaching several important milestones in our portfolio. Block 56 has taken large steps towards commerciality with

the successful results from the Menna-1 well drilled earlier this year..."

This reflects the company's strategic focus on driving commercial production and maximising the potential of its

exploration assets.

Furthermore, strategic initiatives such as entering the second exploration phase on Block 49 and conducting a strategic review with advisors from Jefferies Financial Group

Inc showcased Tethys Oil's commitment to portfolio optimisation and growth opportunities.

The signing of a Heads of Agreement with Sonatrach in Algeria highlighted the company's expansion plans into new markets.

From a financial perspective, Tethys Oil reported revenue and other income of \$30.1 million, with a strong EBITDA of \$13.0 million in the first quarter.

Despite investments in oil and gas properties amounting to \$17.0 million, the company maintained a positive cash flow from operations and emphasised its long-term growth potential.

In the face of challenges in Blocks 3&4, Tethys Oil acknowledged the need to high-grade opportunities and allocate resources effectively. Nordin mentioned, "Our guidance for

2024 included lower production and less free cash flow than previous years from Blocks 3&4...

Tethys is in a position to high-grade the now multiple opportunities available to us and put greater emphasis on how we allocate our resources."

This signifies the company's proactive approach towards addressing operational challenges and capitalising on emerging opportunities.

Tethys Oil's operational performance and strategic advancements in Q1 2024 underscored its commitment to sustainable growth, operational excellence, and value creation in the oil and gas sector.

Through a balanced approach to production and exploration activities, the company continues to position itself as a key player in the industry, driving innovation and efficiency in its operations.

Carbon6 to empower young people with SLY camp

MUSCAT: Carbon6 is proud to announce its upcoming event focused on fostering sustainability awareness and action among young people, the Sustainable Leadership for Youth (SLY) camp. This dynamic initiative aims to immerse participants in key areas such as innovation and technology, circular economy and environment, and sustainable tourism and hospitality.

SLY camp is not just a summer camp; it is a transformative platform designed to empower the next generation of leaders committed to sustainability.

Through interactive workshops, engaging activities, and hands-on experiences, the camp equips young participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to address pressing environmental and societal challenges.

One of the key success pillars of the SLY camp is its strategic partnerships with industry leaders who are equally committed to sustainability and youth development.

Omran, a leading player in the industry, has joined as a platinum partner, bringing significant expertise and resources to the table. With Omran's CEO, Hashil al Mahrouqi, as the Guest of Honour for the final day event, on May 11, the camp is set to inspire and engage young minds with his visionary leadership.

In addition, be'ah has come on board as a golden partner, contributing valuable insights and initiatives related to environmental conservation and sustainable practices.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth has also recognised the importance of the SLY camp's



objectives and has pledged its strategic support, showcasing governmental endorsement for youth empowerment and sustainable development initiatives.

Carbon6 is leading the organisational efforts for the SLY camp, ensuring its success in achieving its goals of fostering sustainability leadership among youth. The venue for this transformative event is the Crown Plaza Hotel OCEC, providing an ideal setting for collaboration, learning, and inspiration.

The SLY camp represents a unique opportunity for young individuals to become catalysts for change, driving positive impact in their communities and beyond. By nurturing their leadership potential and fostering a strong sense of environmental stewardship, the camp is laying the foundation for a more sustainable and inclusive future.

OUIC wins top insurance brand award

MUSCAT: Oman United Insurance Company SAOG (OUIC) proudly emerged as the top insurance brand at the prestigious Top Omani Brands Awards ceremony recently held at the Sheraton Hotel.

The highly anticipated annual corporate event serves as a beacon of recognition, while celebrating the resilience, innovation and excellence of Oman's most impactful brands. Sayyid Nasser bin Salim al Busaidy, Chief Management Executive of OUIC, dedicated the accolade to the company's highly motivated, professional and results-oriented team.

Their collective determination to exceed expectations and uphold the highest standards of professionalism and service helped clinch the award in the company's favour.

N Sivakumar, Deputy CEO, accompanied by Sanjay Jha, General Manager, received the honour at the award ceremony. With a commitment to delivering unparalleled service



and comprehensive insurance solutions, Oman United Insurance has established itself as a trusted leader in the insurance industry.

This accolade reaffirms the company's dedication to excellence in service delivery and its unwavering focus on meeting the evolving needs of its customers.

Being recognised as the Top Insurance brand underscores the company's relentless pursuit of quality, integrity and customer satisfaction.

As Oman's premier insurance

provider, Oman United Insurance Company continues to set benchmarks for excellence, driving innovation and shaping the future of the insurance landscape in the Sultanate of Oman.

As Oman United Insurance Company SAOG basks in the glow of this prestigious accolade, it remains committed to its mission of protecting and empowering individuals, businesses and communities across the Sultanate of Oman, cementing its legacy as a true champion of the insurance industry.

NBO and Royal Oman Police unite to combat financial fraud

MUSCAT: In its ongoing commitment to serve the community, National Bank of Oman (NBO) collaborated with the Royal Oman Police and recently organised a workshop series on 'Financial Crimes'.

These workshops enhanced awareness among the public and furnished vital information to combat financial fraud and crime within society, underscoring NBO's commitment to promoting financial literacy and security within the community.

"Safeguarding our community against financial crimes is a collective responsibility," said Sulaiman bin Said al Lamki, General Manager and Chief Risk Officer, at NBO. "We are delighted to reaffirm our partnership with the Royal Oman Police for the 'Financial Crimes' workshop series.

Through these workshops, we



aim to empower individuals with the knowledge and awareness needed to mitigate risks and protect themselves from falling victim to fraudsters and criminals.

These workshops play a pivotal role in teaching best practices, empowering individuals with essential understanding, and enhancing security measures to combat financial fraud effectively."

The workshop series, hosted at the NBO Head Office, attracted a diverse audience comprising students, bankers, and members of the public eager to acquire the essential tools to identify and prevent financial scams, frauds, and blackmail attempts.

These series follow the successful completion of similar workshops at several institutions

such as Sultan Qaboos University and A'Sharqiyah University in 2023.

Financial crimes pose significant threats to individuals, businesses, and the economy at large.

The workshops played a crucial role in educating participants on identifying various financial fraud schemes, understanding cybersecurity threats, and implementing best practices to safeguard personal and financial information.

By collaborating with the Royal Oman Police, NBO aims to strengthen the collective resilience against financial crimes and create a safer financial environment for all. Comprehensive details on NBO's accounts, products, and exclusive offers are accessible at www.nbo.om, directly through the NBO Call Centre at 24770000, or via the user-friendly NBO app.

Parents can now remotely manage kids' finances with OAB's children's accounts

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB), a prominent financial institution in Oman, has introduced a new feature to make financial management for families easier.

With the advanced mobile banking (MB) and internet banking (IB) platforms provided by OAB, parents can now open and manage their children's accounts entirely online. This convenient and secure solution eliminates the need for parents to visit the bank, saving them valuable time and effort.

OAB's Children's Accounts offer two options for parents to choose from, depending on their child's financial journey. The first option is the Child Savings Account, which comes with real-time transaction tracking and a complimentary debit card (subject to eligibility).

This account is designed to help parents guide their children in making everyday purchases and responsible spending decisions.

The second option is the Child Fixed Deposit Account, which encourages long-term saving habits with competitive interest rates. This account is ideal for future educational goals or dream vacations.

OAB offers more than just financial management options. It provides parents with tools and resources to help their children develop good financial habits from an early age. With the help



of the easy-to-use MB and IB platforms, parents can keep track of their child's spending activity, encourage saving habits, and even discuss financial concepts using real-time account activity.

To improve the experience, every child's account comes with a complimentary debit card. OAB prioritises transparency by offering a straightforward fee structure that eliminates maintenance charges for these accounts.

Oman Arab Bank's commitment to innovation and customer-centric services is reflected in this initiative, reinforcing its position as a leader in Oman's banking sector.

The Children's Accounts not only simplify parental financial oversight but also engage the younger generation in a fundamental understanding of money management.

For more information on the Children's Accounts and how to access them through the mobile and internet banking platforms, visit any OAB branch or call their Call Centre 'Fil-Khidma'.



Eco-Innovate Oman returns to empower green start-ups

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

In cheery news for Oman's eco-conscious entrepreneurs, the leading business accelerator programme, Eco-Innovate Oman (EIO), is now back for its third edition. Launched in 2020 by be'ah, the national waste management company, EIO aims to bridge the gap between innovative ideas and sustainable business realities for Omani start-ups.

This programme is a one-stop-shop for aspiring 'ecopreneurs'. EIO offers a comprehensive package, starting with a two-week intensive boot camp where participants receive group training on essential business skills.

This is followed by a crucial three-month mentorship phase, where seasoned coaches provide one-on-one guidance to refine strategies, build financial acumen and hone communication skills.

Furthermore, EIO equips participants with the knowledge and tools to secure funding through investor-pitching workshops.

The programme targets innovators with a clear vision: to develop and launch eco-friendly products or services. It empowers those who have taken the initial plunge to explore the creation of a prototype and conduct market research.

There are a few eligibility requirements. Omani ownership must be at least 51 per cent, and businesses must have a Commercial Registration (CR) to be considered for funding at the programme's culmination.

Dedication is key — at least one founder needs to be fully committed to the venture, and a minimum team size of two founders is required. Finally, strong communication skills in both



Speakers share their insights during the launch of the 3rd edition of Eco-Innovate Oman.

Arabic and English are essential for navigating EIO's international network of partners.

William R Crew, founder and CEO, Inspired Solutions, commented to the Observer: "So, today we saw some great examples of how we accelerate small businesses in Oman whose prototypes are nearing completion."

With regards to the commercialisation of waste streams, for instance, one entrepreneur is turning paper into products that are then sold on the market. We saw an example of paper recycling being used to make egg crates — these crates can hold the eggs for transport or storage. She sells these crates to local egg producers.

"Another entrepreneur is using certain types of waste to make a type of oil-based mud that's used in the petrochemical industry. Essentially, they're replacing petrochemicals with a much more environmentally friendly organic compound.

"So all of our products are green or eco-conscious, as we say, all in the sustainability space, meaning we have to use our resources wisely. This ensures those resources are still available in the future," he added.

Investment forum marks 50 years of Oman-Brazil diplomatic ties

NASRULAH AL AMI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The Omani-Brazilian Investment Forum was launched at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre here on Tuesday, May 7, 2024, commemorating half a century of diplomatic ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federative Republic of Brazil.

The two-day forum has been organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in collaboration with Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Yesterday's opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. Attendees also included Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Celso Sabino de Oliveira, Brazil's Tourism Minister, and Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI.

Pankaj Khimji, the Foreign Trade and International Cooperation adviser at MoCIIP, highlighted the forum's significance in strengthening bilateral relations and achieving Oman's carbon neutrality goal by 2050.

Similarly, Brazilian Minister Celso Sabino de Oliveira emphasised the importance



Dignitaries at the opening of the Oman-Brazil Investment Forum.

of genuine partnerships and collaboration between Oman and Brazil in various economic domains.

Minister Oliveira underscored the significance of the event as a platform for fostering bilateral cooperation between Oman and Brazil. In his address, he highlighted the geopolitical importance of both nations, with Oman serving as a gateway to Asia and Africa, and Brazil positioned as a key entry point to South America.

He drew attention to Brazil's global engagements, including its leadership role in the G20 and hosting COP30. These initiatives, he noted, demonstrate Brazil's commitment to international cooperation and environmental sustainability, paving the way for collaborative efforts with Oman.

Moreover, Oliveira pointed out the shared focus areas

between Oman and Brazil, such as tourism promotion, clean energy adoption and logistics enhancement.

He emphasised the mutual benefits that could arise from collaboration in these sectors. Lastly, he acknowledged the diplomatic milestone represented by the event coinciding with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Oman and Brazil.

He highlighted the importance of this occasion in deepening bilateral ties and fostering economic development between the two nations.

Reflecting on the occasion, Talal bin Sulaiman al Rahbi, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to Brazil, praised the initiative and expressed hope for the "Made in Brazil" exhibition to become an annual event. He reiterated the commitment to organising

a similar forum in Brazil to showcase Omani products and attract investments.

Additionally, Shaikh Rashid bin Amer al Masalhi, First Deputy Chairman of OCCI's Board of Directors, lauded the Chamber's efforts in facilitating the forum.

He underscored the chamber's commitment to supporting private sector growth and enhancing economic relations between the two nations.

The forum also featured a multi-sectoral exhibition dedicated to Brazilian products and services, providing an opportunity to explore market potential and foster bilateral trade relations. Through bilateral meetings and networking sessions, Omani and Brazilian businesses aimed to capitalise on the available opportunities and establish fruitful partnerships.

Creative industries: An untapped, but promising, economic sector in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The economic value of creative industries, while accounting for a 3.1-per cent share of global GDP in 2022, is yet to be ascertained in the Sultanate of Oman — a shortcoming that the newly launched Oman Creative Industries Roadmap will seek to address.

According to Sulaiman al Rawahi, Head of Communications and Public Relations, Oman Creative Industries Roadmap — unveiled recently at a forum held under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth — serves as the first research and evidence-based guideline to creative industries in Oman.

"The roadmap is based on international experiences and scientific evidence to define and understand the reality and challenges of these creative industries. It also offers indicators and outcomes that assist decision-makers and policymakers in the cultural and creative sector in Oman to develop strategic plans and initiatives," he said.

According to the report, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has defined creative industries as: "Cycles of creation, production, and distribution of goods and services that rely on creativity and intellectual capital as their primary inputs and encompass a range of knowledge-



Omani folk dances represent a key part of the country's creative economy.

based activities, which produce tangible and intangible goods or services with creative content, economic value and market objectives."

The roadmap represents the findings of a two-year-long research project, encompassing details relating to more than 1,000 professions within the creative sector, including 483 creative and cultural activities and 411 creative goods. More than 200 participants also participated in individual surveys and creativity laboratories as part of the initiative.

Additionally, the project features interviews with 30

local industry experts and includes the findings of six case studies conducted locally. It also incorporates analysis from 20 international cases and observations of seven major international organisations, notably the UNESCO, UNCTAD and the British Council.

Importantly, the underlying structure of the project is the UNESCO framework for cultural statistics, which was selected due to its global use and its comprehensive analysis of inputs and outputs of the cultural and creative productive cycle.

According to Al Rawahi, key

insights from the report indicate that performing arts represented the highest sector within the creative industry in Oman (12 per cent), followed by digital arts (9.6 per cent), while television and broadcast and culinary arts represented the lowest, at 0.6 per cent and 1.2 per cent respectively.

Significantly, 53.6 per cent of creators reported working in the field full-time, while 46.4 per cent of participants reported working part-time.

However, 65.7 per cent of creators shared that they can't achieve financial independence from creative work, which the report

attributed to irregular income from creative work. As a result, 57.2 per cent of participating creators reported turning to freelancing work to obtain additional income.

According to the survey, a majority of creators reported an income of less than RO 250 per month (27.1 per cent), while 22.9 per cent reported an income ranging from RO 501-1000 per month, followed by 18.1 per cent monthly income of more than RO 1,000 per month.

A further 16.3 per cent of creators shared that their income depends on the type of job, while 15.7 per cent reported an income ranging from RO 250-500 per month.

Monthly incomes can fluctuate based on the individual's influence, creative experience, geographic location (Muscat Governorate representing the largest creative cluster in the country), reputation within social network markets, and whether the individual works independently or within a larger institution, the report noted.

Furthermore, 52 per cent of creators cited financial assistance as the most important support required by creators in the future.

Regarding funding, a majority of respondents (48.7 per cent) indicated that they were self-funded, while 20.1 per cent relied on investment capital.

This was followed by 16.9 per cent who relied on public funding, 13.0 per cent who depended on crowdfunding, and 12.3 per cent who relied on bank loans.

Hotel revenues in Oman reach RO 71.907m

MUSCAT: Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed an increase in the revenues of 3-5 star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of March 2024 by 8.3 per cent to reach RO 71.907 million, compared to RO 66.395 million by end of March 2023.

The statistics pointed out that this increase is attributed to a 12.1-per cent increase in the total number of hotel guests, reaching 598,128 guests by the end of March 2024, compared to 533,790 guests at the end of March 2023, while the occupancy rate increased by 2.2 per cent.

The statistics indicated an increase in the number of Omani guests by 2.3 per cent to reach 189,275, while the number of Gulf guests decreased by 2.7 per cent, recording 32,283, and the number of European guests increased by 23.9 per cent to reach 217,284.

The number of guests from the Americas was 19,521, with an increase of 13.4 per cent, while the number of guests from the African continent was 2,735, with a decrease of 7.7 per cent.

Meanwhile, the number of Asian guests increased by 21.6 per cent, reaching 79,415 and from Oceania, 8,661 guests.

— ONA

UK can lead world in fintech with highest standards



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The fintech landscape has not only transformed over the last few years, but the industry has also transformed the whole of the UK's financial and professional services sector, of which it is now an integral part.

However, with Fintech

evolving so rapidly, UK cannot only rely on its past successes. This is why the Innovate Finance Global Summit hosted by the City Corporation last month came at a crucial time.

As the most globally connected financial centre in the world, the UK is in a position to benefit from fintech successes in those markets with which it has strong links.

The Lord Mayor of the City of London Corporation, Michael Mainelli visited India earlier this year, which has become the world leader in instant payments due to the success of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

Other markets are taking full advantage of this and signing up to UPI in their payments system. People in the UK need to do the same if they are not to be left behind. They need to implement

the Future of Payments Review and bring it up to ISO 20022, the global payments messaging standard, so UK fintechs can transact with counterparts in India and other markets.

At the same time, the debilitating spread of international fraud creates a duty for the fintech centre to do more to tackle this growing menace. Consumers are facing industrial level fraudsters and cybercriminals. They need to be protected by an industrial response.

The City of London Corporation and partner organisations are encouraging a greater role for tech companies, to protect individuals at source and make the best use of their innovative capabilities to harness technology for good. Industry must provide the first line of

defence against fraud, through better collaboration and data-sharing at a business-to-business level.

In a challenging global environment for investment, the UK remains the largest hub for fintech investment outside the US, with four unicorns created in 2023 – two of which were AI firms: Quantexa and generative AI firm Synthesia. This demonstrates how the rise of AI will drive further and faster change in fintech.

The UK is in a strong position to benefit and currently receives around half of all of Europe's investment into AI. It is essential that AI is developed and deployed in ways that benefit society, while minimising potential harm.

The Lord Mayor's Ethical AI Initiative promotes the use of the ISO standard on AI

management systems by firms, and other courses for AI builders and AI deployers. More than 4,000 participants from 300 organisations across 45 countries have taken part.

The UK has also brought together leaders from the global testing, inspection and certification sector to develop the Walbrook AI Accord, to harmonise the global infrastructure for AI assurance standards.

Being home to three of the world's most intensive and high-profile science/tech research clusters – Cambridge, London and Oxford – means that the UK's academic institutions have spawned world-leading tech and fintech firms. Mainelli said, his mayoral theme, Connect to Prosper, highlights the importance of these strengths to

London's financial district and the City of London's role as the world's 'coffee house'.

As people reflect on the successes of the past ten years, they need to learn from the experiences so that in future they can be just as bold in embracing innovation, ensuring they are out in front rather than being left behind by competitors.

Regulators and the government will need to ensure that there are no barriers to competition, take part in the latest global successes and align with the highest international standards.

As Mainelli points out, the UK's fintech sector needs to work with the global fintech community to fight fraud and protect its customers in order for UK to be able to lead the next generation of fintech.

What is behind gold's ascending uptrend?

MOHAMED HASHAD

Gold prices have recently surged to historical levels, mainly capitalising on several factors that have come to the forefront, including its prestigious status as a trusted haven. In this article, we'll delve into these elements and explore their impact on the precious metal's bullish trajectory.

The Federal Reserve's decisions, including interest rate adjustments and asset repurchasing policies, play a pivotal role in influencing the gold market.

Notably, the recent statements by Fed Chair Jerome Powell have further fuelled the upward trend in gold prices. The interplay between monetary policy and gold remains a critical factor.

The Federal Reserve's recent statement highlighted its dual mandate; namely, price stability and maximum employment.

Powell's assessment of risks associated with these mandates over the past year suggests a more balanced outlook. Economic growth is described as robust. Additionally, the Federal Reserve plans to slow down the pace of bond sales starting in June.

Chairman Powell dismissed the possibility of an imminent interest rate hike, emphasising the need for compelling evidence that their policy isn't already sufficiently restrictive.

He also hinted at potential economic pathways that could allow for rate reductions, rather than increases. These statements have resonated positively in the markets, benefiting gold and other risk-linked assets.

"I think we need convincing evidence that our policy is not strict enough, and I do not think we have such evidence", Powell added.

"I believe that there are economic paths through which we can reduce interest rates," ruling out that the American economy is close to a stage of stagflation. He also stressed that "tight monetary policy is doing what it should do", Powell continued.

These statements were a source of relief to the markets

and continue to provide the markets with a dose of optimism that pushes the US dollar down in favour of gold, US stocks and other risk-linked assets.

Gold has been taking advantage of the weakness of the US dollar since the beginning of daily trading on Monday to achieve more gains after the US currency lost much of its value against major currencies due to the deterioration of US employment data issued last Friday.

Spot gold contracts rose to \$2,333 per ounce, compared to the previous daily close, which recorded \$2,308 per ounce. The precious metal fell to its lowest level on the first trading day of the new week at \$2,308, compared to the lowest level of \$2,341.

The US dollar has continued to decline since the beginning of Monday's trading, affected by employment data that showed last Friday a decline in both job growth and wage growth in the United States.

The dollar index, which measures the performance of the US currency against a basket of major currencies, fell to 105.00 points compared to the last daily close, which recorded 105.03 points.

The index rose to its highest level on the current trading day at 105.20 points, compared to the lowest level, which recorded 104.87 points.

The NFP data indicated a rise of 175,000 jobs last April, compared to the previous reading, which recorded 315,000 jobs, which was higher than market expectations, which indicated a rise to 243,000 jobs.

Wage growth in the United States declined, which is constant in the annual reading of the average hourly earnings index, which recorded 3.9 per cent last April, compared to the previous reading, which recorded 4.1 per cent, which was less than expectations that indicated 4.00 per cent.

The US unemployment rate rose to 3.9 per cent last April compared to the previous reading of 3.8 per cent, indicating levels higher than market expectations of 3.8 per cent. *(The author is the Chief Market Strategist at investment firm Noor Capital.)*



STANLEY REED

The author reports on energy, the environment and the Middle East from London. He has been a journalist for more than four decades.

Two European energy giants, TotalEnergies of France and Shell of Britain, are considering moving their stock listings to New York, as pressure mounts for them to improve their valuations, which lag their US counterparts.

Shifting their listings to the United States would be a blow to European exchanges, where they are among the largest listed companies.

In the past, it would have been almost unthinkable for TotalEnergies, one of France's most prominent companies, to consider moving its primary share listing from Paris. But the company's CEO, Patrick Pouyanné, discussed considering such a shift to analysts recently.

"There was a discussion with the board," Pouyanné said on a recent call to discuss earnings. "We all agreed that we have to seriously look at it."

Shell, Europe's largest energy company, has said it might consider a similar move. But a shift is not currently on the table, said Wael Sawan, CEO of the company, which recently moved its headquarters from The Hague in the Netherlands to London, where it is the largest listed company by market value.

Any move would reflect the almost irresistible lure of the United States as a centre of energy production and innovation as well as investment.

The United States has become the world's leading oil producer and exporter of liquefied



A Shell chemical and refining complex is pictured in Deer Park, Texas. – The New York Times

natural gas. Europe's petroleum production, by contrast, is in decline, and many European governments are sceptical about the oil and gas industry, which remains crucial to global energy supplies despite concerns over climate change.

The Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act may also confer an advantage to the United States in cleaner energy technologies including hydrogen and electric vehicles.

A key factor making these companies restless is the large differential in the valuation that investors are willing to pay for the energy giants based in the United States compared with their European counterparts.

The two largest US energy companies, Exxon Mobil and Chevron, enjoy share price to earnings ratios, a valuation metric, that are at least a third higher than those of European rivals, according to a recent study by Giacomo Romeo, an analyst at the investment bank Jefferies. The debate over listing in New York is "becoming a key topic" among investors, he said in a note to clients.

A lower stock valuation not only is ego-deflating for executives, but it also puts these companies at a disadvantage in using their shares to participate in a wave of industry consolidation.

Exxon Mobil, for instance, recently bought Pioneer Natural Resources, a major shale drilling company, for \$60 billion, while Chevron reached a deal to pay \$53 billion for Hess, though legal issues over Guyana are complicating the sale. Their European peers have largely been left on the sidelines.

The European companies have come to view steps such as listings in the United States as a potential way to bolster their valuation and close the gap with rivals.

Pouyanné, for instance, said the number of North American shareholders in TotalEnergies was growing, but large investors faced hurdles in putting money into the French company's shares, including time differences with the European markets and fluctuating foreign-exchange rates.

But any move could face pushback. France Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire has vowed to fight a move by TotalEnergies. "I'm here to make sure that doesn't happen," he said.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of TotalEnergies to France. The company is a key domestic energy supplier and a major overseas investor, and it is leading France's transition to lower carbon energy through investments in solar and

wind power and other cleaner technologies.

A move by Shell seems more logical in some respects. It is one of the largest foreign investors in the United States, with more capital there than in any other country.

Shell has suffered a series of setbacks in Europe in recent years, including a court ruling that said it needed to speed up its climate change efforts. There are also questions about whether the London Stock Exchange, which has lost favour since Brexit, is the right place for a large company like Shell, which has a market value of about \$232 billion.

How effective a move to the United States would be in closing the valuation gap is also open to question.

Romeo said that shifting primary listings alone might not be enough to eliminate the differential, adding that companies might also need to move their headquarters to be included in US index funds, something Pouyanné has said he would not do.

Sawan has said he thinks Shell shares are cheaper than they should be. Yet he is focusing on efforts to bolster the shares through better financial performance and higher rewards for investors. If that effort does not pay off, Shell might look at a move. — The New York Times

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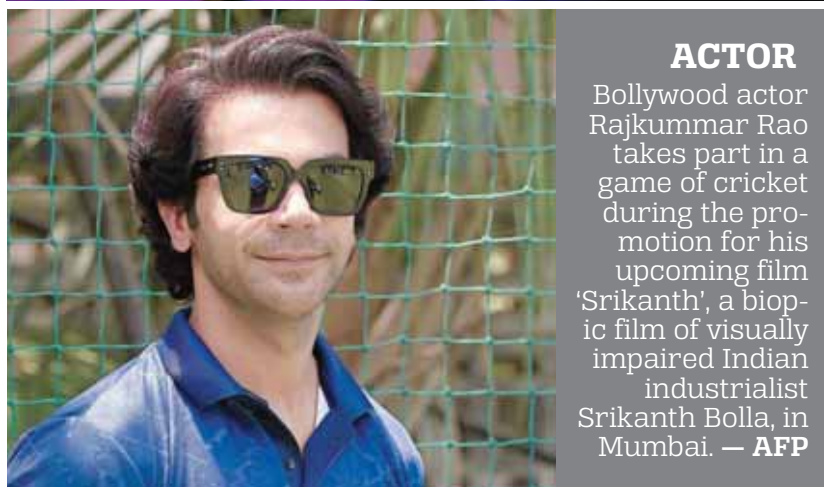
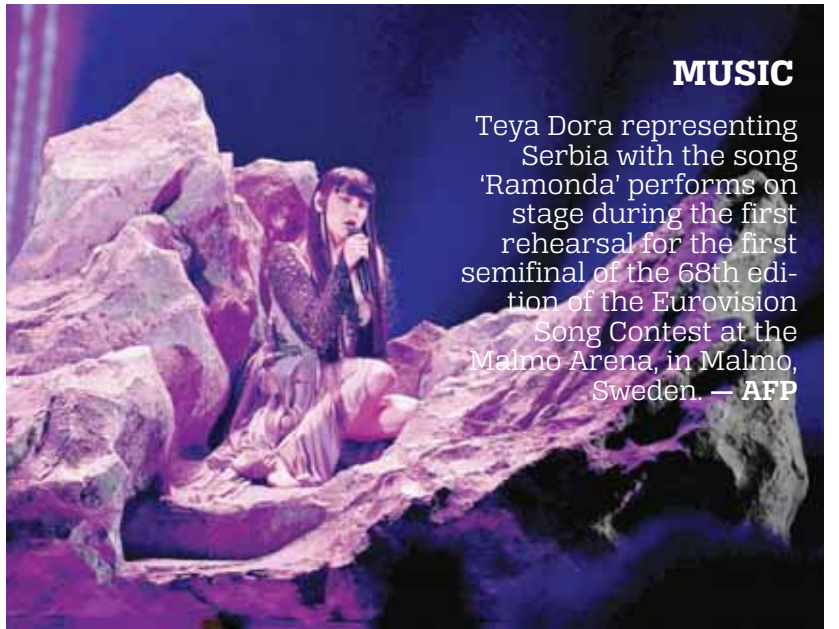
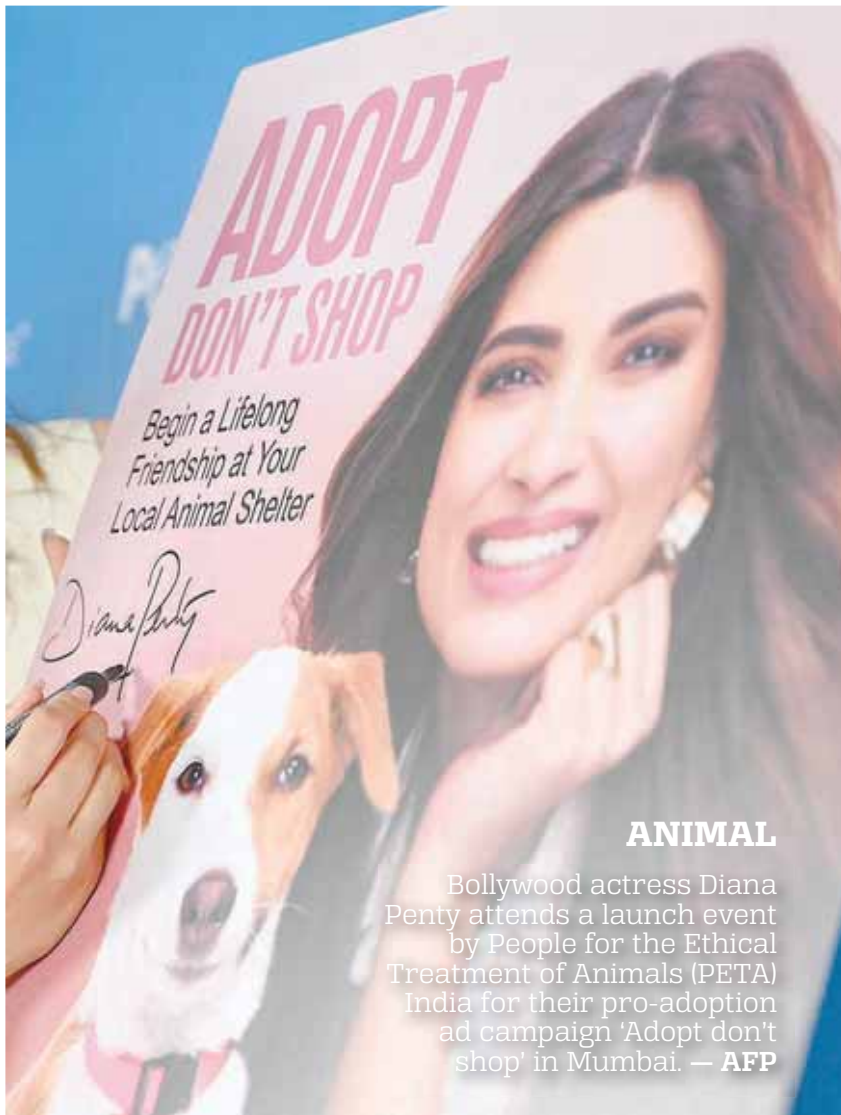
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THE OPERA

Royal Opera House Muscat Initiates Further Collaboration with La Fenice

THE ROYAL OPERA House Muscat endeavours to enrich the global cultural landscape through creative collaboration and fruitful exchange with other leading cultural institutions. To further this aim, HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat for the Council of Ministers and Member of the Board of Directors of the Royal Opera House Muscat, recently visited Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Italy.

In the company of HH Sayyid Nazar bin Al Julanda al Said, Ambassador of Oman to Italy, HH

Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said met in Venice with Fortunato Ortoimbina, General Manager and Artistic Director of La Fenice, to enhance collaborative ties and explore possibilities for developing specific projects. During the meeting, HH Sayyid Dr Kamil set out the current objectives of the Royal Opera House Muscat in the context of the institution's overall vision. Ortoimbina took special interest in the Royal Opera House Muscat's innovative marketing initiatives, especially the creation of new scents by the renowned perfumer Roja Dove that are redolent of important



operas in the performance history of the Royal Opera House Muscat, such as *Lakmé* and *Turandot*.

New audience development strategies especially designed to engage youth including targeted community and educational outreach programmes were of mutual interest for collaboration. The two opera houses also shared innovative best practices in the technical domain such as cutting-edge stage technologies. Building on the previous Teatro La Fenice tour in Oman of *L'Elisir d'Amore* in 2016, the discussion included a focus on future possibilities such as the Royal Opera House Muscat hosting another opera title or an orchestra and chorus concert from Teatro La Fenice in the 2025-26 season.

The visit featured a tour of La Fenice, about which HH Sayyid Dr Kamil remarked, "Expressing the grandeur of the palatial architecture of Venice, La Fenice is among the world's most famous and magnificent opera

houses. Dating from 1792, a sense of timeless beauty and splendour pervades the interior with its intricately artistry and gilded adornment. This wonderful tour set the stage for collaborative discussion and exciting plans for the future. On behalf of the Royal Opera House Muscat, I would like to express my grateful thanks for this wonderful opportunity to further ties between our two opera houses."

Fortunato Ortombina expressed similar sentiments: "The Royal Opera House Muscat has firmly established its status as a premier venue internationally. We take immense pride in the success achieved with our collaborative productions in the past. It is truly gratifying to access insights from HH Sayyid Dr Kamil regarding the innovative strategies and initiatives of the Royal Opera House Muscat in recent years. We hope that the collaboration between our two institutions continues in the years to come."

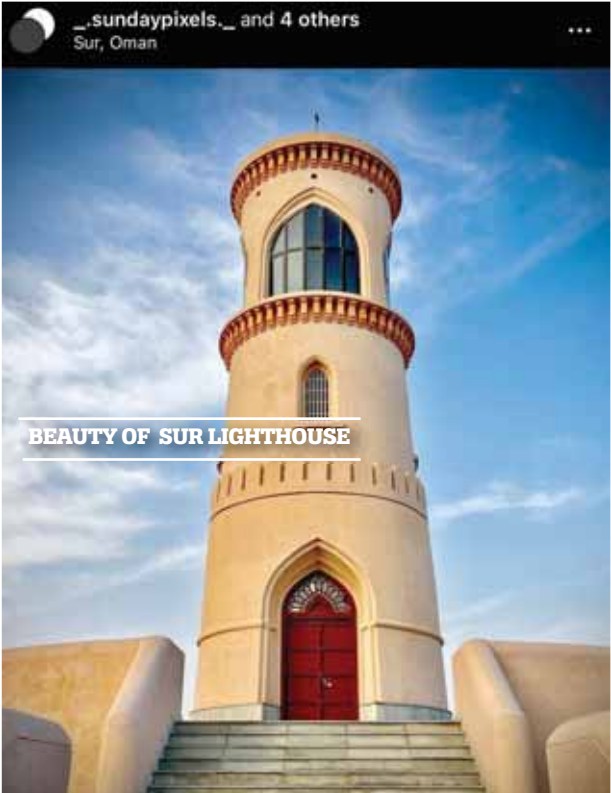


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SPANISH BEAUTY GROUP PUIG MAKES MARKET DEBUT

SHARES IN Spanish fashion and beauty group Puig, owner of the iconic Nina Ricci, Paco Rabanne and Jean-Paul Gaultier labels, closed on Friday at its issue price on its trading debut in one of Europe's largest initial public offerings of the year.

For the family-owned Puig Group, which has expanded rapidly into luxury goods, going public is a big step in its 110-year history which will allow it to compete with the giants of the sector such as Estee Lauder, Hermes, Kering and LVMH.

The move "marks the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in our company's long and proud history," chairman

and CEO Marc Puig said in a statement.

"We will continue to build our portfolio of own brands with a focus on extending our leadership in prestige products and niche fragrances, while investing in our core markets and support our expansion in high-potential geographies," he added.

The Barcelona-based group, which specialises in perfumes and cosmetics, entered the market on Friday with an opening guidance price of 24.50 euros (about \$26) per share, the top of its announced range.

The price gave the group an estimated market capitalisation of nearly 14 billion euros,

which allows it to enter Madrid's Ibex 35 exchange, home to Spain's 35 largest companies.

The stock rose by over 4.0 per cent at one point before ending the day unchanged at its issue price.

Founded in Barcelona in 1914 by businessman Antonio Puig Castello, the group has grown over the years to become a heavyweight in the cosmetics, fragrance and fashion industries, bolstering its stance in recent years with a string of prestigious acquisitions.

Among its brands are Paco Rabanne, Nina Ricci, Charlotte Tilbury, Carolina Herrera and Dries Van Noten. It also holds a majority stake in the Jean Paul Gaultier label and has licensing agreements with Prada, Christian Louboutin and Comme des Garçons.

Analysts said it was Spain's biggest IPO this year and one of the largest in Europe.

CONTROLLING INTEREST

The flotation will take place in stages, the first of which raised 1.25 billion euros as planned through newly issued shares.

It would then make a "larger secondary offering" of existing shares held by its holding company Exea to raise nearly 1.36 billion euros.

That could then be complemented with the sale of shares reserved for specific investors for another 390 million euros, which would allow the group to raise a total of around three billion euros.

Despite the move, the Puig family said it would retain a controlling interest in the company with 71.7 per cent of the shares, along with "the vast majority of voting rights" —



92.5 per cent — within the board of directors.

GREATER FINANCIAL CLOUT

Puig raised the idea of an IPO in an interview with the *Financial Times* in October 2023, in which he said being accountable to the market would bring "a discipline" that would head off any issues when passing the baton from one generation to the next.

"Sometimes family businesses can lose their position in the market. They can start to die slowly and nobody inside the company is aware of it," he told the paper. "If you're accountable (to investors), those things can be noticed."

Javier Cabrera, analyst at stockbroker XTB, said the IPO would allow the group to build "greater financial clout" by taking advantage of "the positive stock market dynamics" in the luxury goods and fashion sector.

Luxury goods are enjoying a buoyant moment with sector heavyweights posting record sales in 2023, despite a slowdown following two years of double-digit growth.

Last year, Puig posted sales of 4.3 billion euros, a 19 per cent increase on 2022, logging net profits of 465 million euros, up 16 per cent year-on-year.

And that growth could gather pace thanks to Puig's strategy of acquisitions, which in recent years has led to "a high level of growth" and "a good diversification of revenues, both geographically and in terms of business lines", Cabrera said.

He also pointed to the group's strong showing in China, a major consumer of luxury goods. — **AFP**

MUSIC

BRIAN MAY, JEAN-MICHEL JARRE TEAM UP FOR FREE SLOVAK CONCERT

ELECTRONIC MUSIC pioneer Jean-Michel Jarre and Queen guitarist and astrophysicist Brian May will perform a free concert this weekend in Bratislava, the opening event of a festival of science and the arts.

Set against the backdrop of a UFO-shaped bridge over the Danube River in the Slovak capital, the "Bridge from the Future" show will kick off the Starmus Festival that runs from May 12 to 17.

The concert will "set the tone for the spirit of this conference, aimed towards addressing our planet's current problems", said May, a founding partner of Starmus.

Jarre told AFP that the festival would bring together "brilliant minds" to "share

their knowledge and vision".

British primatologist Jane Goodall, of "Gorillas in the Mist" fame, will be one of the speakers on the festival's theme, "The Future of Our Home Planet", along with Nobel laureates, astronauts, scientists and musicians.

There will be lectures and discussions on topics including AI, the environment, cybersecurity and space.

"I will always contribute where I can in pursuing progress in the fields of education, science and culture," said Jarre, a goodwill ambassador for UNESCO for more than three decades.

"That is my mission as an active citizen of our planet and Starmus Earth in Slovakia is all about that." — **AFP**





AI-AIDED ART, UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS AT THE HEART OF PUBLIC EXHIBIT

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI
@RUQAYA.ALKINDI

If you can visit Al Mouj Muscat before the 11th of this month between 8-12 am, be sure to explore the diverse artistic creations, including drawings, photography and sculptures. Students have employed various techniques, including artificial intelligence and multimedia, in creating their artworks.

The "Identities" exhibition at Al Mouj Muscat showcased nearly ninety artworks created by students in grades one to seven from Sarh Al Jaameah Private School, which is affiliated with Sultan Qaboos University. Organised in collaboration with the Al Mouj Artist Group, this exhibition celebrates creativity, sparks imagination and nurtures a sense of community among students. It highlights their diverse talents and individual perspectives, aiming to cultivate an appreciation for art.

"The title 'Identities' was chosen for our student art exhibition to reflect the rich diversity of identities within our school community. Through our artworks, we aim to showcase the multifaceted nature of identity, encompassing cultural, personal and social dimensions. Each piece represents a unique perspective, allowing us to celebrate the richness and complexity of our collective identities," explained Sara al Harrasi, the art teacher and co-organiser of the exhibition.

As Sara affirmed, each piece in this exhibition "offers a unique perspective on identity, contributing to a rich tapestry of narratives that illuminate the complexities and diversity of both individual and communal identities."

One particularly noteworthy project from grade 5 students, titled 'We Are Covered with Stories,' presents a collection of collage artwork featuring portraits layered with vintage novel pages. This symbolism reflects the depth and richness of human experiences and the narratives that shape our identities. The project underscores the notion that just as the portraits are adorned with stories, so too are we as individuals.

Another remarkable artwork comes from grade 7 students, who depicted jewellery designs blending traditional and contemporary elements. Through juxtaposing various jewellery pieces against backgrounds enhanced with coffee stains, watercolours and charcoal, students delved into the intricate details of Omani culture while experimenting with diverse artistic techniques. These drawings not only capture the



elegance of Omani jewellery, but also signify the interplay between identity and heritage.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to leave its mark on the artistic scene in Oman, albeit gradually. Sara noted, "While AI tools offer new avenues for creativity and expression, their impact is still in its early stages. However, in the long run, AI holds the potential to significantly shape and enrich Oman's artistic landscape, equipping artists with innovative tools to expand the horizons of their craft and engage audiences in novel ways."

The exhibition received widespread acclaim, with many attendees expressing pride in their children's artworks. Fatima Obeidat, the ICT teacher, remarked, "It was fascinating to witness how AI, one of the most advanced technologies, was employed to capture the essence of Omani culture from our students' perspectives. Their integration of the new to showcase the old bodes well for Oman's future, safeguarding its identity."

The opening ceremony, held under the auspices of Areej Mohsen Haider Darwish, Chairperson of the ACERE cluster of Mohsin Haider Darwish, was attended by various dignitaries and social figures, as well as numerous Omani artists. Areej admired the diversity of artworks, each telling a unique story.

