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IN HOME IMPROVEMENT

MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO FINLAND, SERBIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Dr Alexander Stubb on the occasion of being elected as the new president of the Republic of Finland. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Dr Alexander Stubb. His Majesty also wished him success in realising aspirations of the people of Finland, wishing the relations between the two countries further progress and prosperity. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Aleksandar Vucic of the Republic of Serbia on the occasion of his country's National Day.

HAVANA

HM'S GREETINGS TO CUBA PRESIDENT

Moosa bin Hamdan al Tai, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United States of America, on Wednesday presented his credentials to President Miguel Diaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba, as Oman's Ambassador to Cuba. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Miguel. His Majesty also wished the people of Cuba continuous prosperity. On his turn, the President of Cuba asked the ambassador to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan.

OPINION

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Badr al Abri
Lessons from Oman
on path to peace...

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Yahya Al Oufi
Reclaiming the dream
under liberty's torch

SULTAN HAITHAM CITY PHASE 1 COVERS 5 M SQ METRES

35 deals for RO 1 billion worth projects signed



Dignitaries during the signing ceremony at Royal Opera House Muscat on Wednesday. PHOTO BY HUSSEIN AL MAQBALI

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Development and partnership agreements worth over RO 1 billion, linked to the implementation of the Sultan Haitham City project, were signed on Wednesday at a ceremony held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

In all, over 35 agreements covering Phase 1 of the iconic urban housing project, spanning the 2024-2030 period, were signed with high-level officials representing various government and private sector organisations, international consultants, investors and real estate developers. The signing ceremony, held at the Royal Opera House Muscat, was also attended by a number of Royal Family members, ministers and other dignitaries.

A 4-km long street in Sultan Haitham City will be named 'Singapore Street' in implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued in the wake of his recent visit to the Republic of Singapore

Phase 1 of the Sultan Haitham City project, covering an area of over 5 million m2, will accommodate an estimated 39,000 people distributed across more than 7,000 housing units on a built-up area of over 3 million m2.

Also envisioned for development in this phase are a number of landmarks, including a central park and landscaped

wadi on an area of 1 million m2, National Centre for Women and Children's Health, a referral hospital, the Omani Council for Medical Specialties, the Higher Institute of Health Sciences, and a major college. Healthcare facilities will be established on an area of 1 million m2.

A government university planned during this phase will feature a College of Advanced Technology with a capacity to host around 1,500 students. Other facilities will include a Youth Centre (20,000 m2), rehabilitation centre for people with special needs (4,000 m2), and other complexes.

Other public facilities for development include a government school for around 6,900 students, a private international school, police station, Civil Defence Centre, National Centre for Craft and Creative Industries and four health centres.

Attracts 847 publishing houses from 34 nations

MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR
FEBRUARY 21 - MARCH 2

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

The 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair will be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from February 21 to March 2, said Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture.

The opening ceremony will be held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

During a press conference held at the Ministry of Information on Wednesday, Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy said that Al Dhahirah Governorate will be the guest of honour at the book fair this year. He added that a special pavilion and a number of programmes will be dedicated to Al Dhahirah Governorate's intellectual and cultural history.

Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, and Ahmed bin Saud al Rawahi, Director of the Muscat International Book Fair, were also present at the press conference.

Al Dhahirah Governorate will be the guest of honour at the book fair this year and a special pavilion will be dedicated for the governorate's intellectual and cultural history

SAYYID SAID BIN SULTAN AL BUSAIDY
Under-Secretary

The book fair will host a group of prominent intellectuals and media experts to enliven the cultural scene during the 11-day extravaganza.

Outlining the data of the book fair, Al Rawahi said that 847 publishing houses from 34 countries will exhibit their literary products at the book fair this year. Among these, 676 publishers will participate directly and 171 others through agents, Al Rawahi added.



Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy addressing the press conference.

3 Omani cities in Unesco's Global Network of Learning Cities

MUSCAT: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) announced the inclusion of three Omani cities into the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities. The three cities are the Wilayat of Muscat, the Wilayat of Nizwa and the Wilayat of Sur. This falls within the Ministry of Education's vision, represented by the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, to

promote Omani cities on global stage, looking at its tourism and cultural potential, to spread awareness about education for sustainable development in the local community, and to raise the Sultanate of Oman's ranking in international indicators, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

The announcement took place during a virtual ceremony organised by the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning on Wednesday, with the



This listing will raise the Sultanate of Oman's ranking in international indicators.

participation of representatives of the newly-listed cities from various countries around the world. Joining this network is an acknowledgment of the efforts undertaken by these cities to achieve the principle of lifelong learning in practice.

The Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities — established by the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning in 2012 — aims to support and improve lifelong learning practices in cities around the world. A Learning City

works to mobilise its resources in all sectors to promote comprehensive learning for all from basic to higher education, stimulates learning within families and local communities, facilitates learning for work, and expands the use of modern educational tools to promote a culture of lifelong learning. This enhances the capabilities of individuals, social cohesion and the economic and cultural growth of societies, in order to achieve sustainable development goals.



Both sides discussed areas of joint cooperation and reviewed the march of relations. – ONA

Sayyid Shihab receives UK Chief of Defence Staff

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Admiral Antony Radakin, Chief of the Defence Staff in the United Kingdom (UK) and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed areas of joint cooperation and reviewed the march of relations between Oman and the UK. They also touched on several matters of common

concern.

The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis bin Abdullah al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces. It was also attended by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Sultanate of Oman and the Defence Attaché of the British Embassy at Muscat.

Meanwhile, Admiral Antony Radakin visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). — ONA

Attracts 847 publishing houses from 34 nations

FROM PAGE 1

As many as 622,000 book titles and publications are listed on the site, said Al Rawahi, noting that about 269,000 of these appear in Arabic and 200,000 in foreign languages. The Omani collection includes about 19,000 books, of which 35,989 are new books printed in 2023 and 2024, he said.

Al Rawahi pointed out that a special section has been allocated for “children and family” events and activities, including a drama shows, workshops, a language corner, a children’s museum corner and a green corner. “Cultural cafés have also been established in a number of participating pavilions,” he said.

This year Al Dhahirah Governorate will be the ‘Guest of Honour’ at the fair, with a special pavilion planned to exhibit the intellectual and cultural history of the governorate, alongside a diverse array of programmes, activities, and cultural events throughout the fair’s duration.

Al Rawahi also highlighted that this

year’s fair will welcome a distinguished group of intellectuals and prominent media figures to engage in the cultural events unfolding during the fair days.

Al Rawahi said that the State of Palestine will be strongly present at the book fair, notably through events that focus on the Palestinian cause.

The theme of the book fair this year will be artificial intelligence (AI), said Al Rawahi, adding that many cultural events and activities will highlight AI advantages. Visitors will have access to a 3D map to navigate directly to the pavilion they seek, along with assistance from robots, as lectures introducing AI technology will be held.

Mohammed al Balushi said that media coverage accompanying the cultural scene will unfold on the sidelines of this edition’s events. He stated that there will be daily coverage of the events and activities conducted by various media outlets, along with direct coverage of several cultural events during the fair days.

35 deals for RO 1 billion worth projects signed



FROM PAGE 1

Agreements were signed with a number of international consultants for the following: Preliminary design of public school complex for District 10 (awarded to Architect Kohler); preliminary design of public school complex for Districts 6 and 9 (awarded to SOM); detailed designs of city centre for District 12 (SOM); design of the rehabilitation centre for people with special needs in District 16 (Panter Hudspeth); and design of shopping and commercial facilities in Districts 9 and 12.

REAL ESTATE

Agreements were signed with local and international real estate developers for the construction of eight residential neighbourhoods at a cost of over RO 1 billion on a total built up area of 2.3 million m2. More than 6,000 residential units will be built over a 6-year phase.

In support of SMEs, an agreement was signed with a company for the development of District 6 on a 33,000 m2 area featuring 45 residential units allocated solely for Omanis.

Agreements were also signed with the following developers: Tibiaan Properties for District 6A on 58,000 m2 featuring 116 residential units; Adrak Construction for District 12D featuring 339 residential units on 56,000 m2; Amana Real Estate for District 13A comprising 278 residential units; Rumman International for development of District 12 A, B offering 1,001 residential units; Al Ahli Real Estate for development of District 12 E, F featuring about 1,919 residential units; Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAS) for developing District 8 including 1,333 residential units; and with Al Abrar Properties for the development of District 10 comprising 1,644 residential units.

A technical cooperation agreement was signed with representatives of Audi cars in Oman for the provision of EV charging stations and discounted services for residents of Sultan Haitham City.

SINGAPORE STREET

A 4-km long street in Sultan Haitham City will be named ‘Singapore Street’ in implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued in the wake of his recent visit to the

Republic of Singapore. Singapore Street will be lined by dense trees as it passes the College of Advanced Technology and courses through the central park and wadi. It is envisaged as a thoroughfare teeming with life in the heart of the city.

STRUCTURAL PLANS

In implementation of the urban strategic projects, various agreements were signed, including 6 engineering consultancy services agreements for structural and detailed plan projects. It includes an agreement for the Omani Building Code Requirements and Requirements project signed with the International Code Council. A consulting services pact was also signed with F&M Middle East for the structural design of a future city in the Wilayat of Ibri. Similar agreements were also signed with Lea Associates South Asia for Al Rustaq, Ibn Bahla Engineering for Wilayat of Sur, Dar Al Handash Consulting along with Foresters & Partners for detailed plan of an agricultural city in the Al Najd area of Dhofar; and with another firm for the design of an agricultural city in the Wilayat of Saham.

In order to develop city centres, an agreement was signed with Zaha Hadid and CBRE for the detailed plan and engineering design of city centre project (Al Khuwair Downtown) and waterfront on an area of 3.6 million m2. Under a separate cooperation agreement with Tawoos, who mixed-use tower will be Al Khuwair Downtown on an area of 12,000 m2.

The following agreements for social housing projects were signed: 20 housing units with roads in the village of Kumzar in the Wilayat of Khasab in the Musandam Governorate; construction of 20 housing units and maintenance of 32 housing units in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands in Dhofar Governorate; and implementation of an electronic platform for housing services for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The event concluded with the announcement that an iconic suspension bridge will be built in the Central Park of Sultan Haitham City. Spanning a length of about 500 metres, it will be built in harmony with nature while offering users an unique opportunity to enjoy the striking settings of the park.

— Pictures by Hussein al Maqbali



Tender

Based On The Royal Decree of His Majesty the Sultan, May Allah Protect and Preserve Him, for the Establishment of New Industrial City in Madha and Exemplary Ready-made Factories. The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
5/2024/ PEIE/ HQ-5	Consultancy Services for Detailed Master Plan, Detailed Design for Madha Industrial City & Detailed Design and Construction Supervision for Entrepreneurship Industrial Complex	28-02-2024	25-03-2024	Consultancy Services	First and above	50

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

مدائن
madayn

@madaynoman

madayn.om



■ OMAN MEDICAL SPECIALTY BOARD
CELEBRATES GRADUATION



The Oman Medical Specialty Board on Wednesday celebrated the graduation of the fifteenth batch of doctors who completed the training in residency, which ranged from 4 to 6 academic years, and fellowship ranging from 2 to 3 years. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Oman Medical Specialty Board. – Photo by Khalfan al Ruzaiki

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Omanis, along with other GCC nationals, can now make unlimited visits to the UK over a two-year period for just £10 starting on February 22, against the previous £30 paid through the Electronic Visa Waiver scheme, according to a statement from the Embassy of Great Britain in the Sultanate of Oman.

The two-year period of the visit is subject to the validity of the visitor's passport and whichever is sooner will be taken into consideration for the duration of the journey.

This expansion of the scheme

follows the successful launch of the same for Qataris, who have been able to benefit since October 2023, with most applying using the UK ETA mobile app, along with other GCC nationals and Jordan.

The ETAs replace Electronic Visa Waivers (EVW) and remove the visa requirement for short stays to the UK for Gulf and Jordanian nationals. However, an ETA is not a visa, it is a permission to travel and it authorises an individual to travel to the UK border. On arrival, an individual will still need to obtain leave to enter in the usual way, either by seeing a Border Force Officer or using an eGate if eligible to do so.

"The ETA will improve the



experience of travelling to the UK for the thousands of visitors from the Gulf and Jordan, who represent our second largest tourism market and contribute billions to the UK economy," James Cleverly, Home Secretary, was quoted as saying.

The statement further said that the application process for an ETA is simple and fast to

complete, with the process being entirely digital via a mobile phone app. Applicants need to provide biographic and biometric details and answer questions on suitability and criminality. Once individuals have successfully applied, their ETA is digitally linked to their passport. Decisions will usually be made within three working days, however the majority are decided within hours.

Patricia Yates, CEO, VisitBritain, said that 'GREAT Britain' campaigns are underway across the region to showcase the breadth of exciting experiences and destinations to inspire travel to Britain.

MOH INAUGURATES FIRST GOVT FERTILITY CENTRE

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of Khoula Hospital, celebrated on Wednesday the inauguration of the Fertility Centre at Khoula Hospital under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

The centre is equipped with the latest lab technologies and is the first government centre in the Sultanate of Oman that provides several services to help couples overcome the problems of pregnancy and childbirth and boasts a medical team with wide experience in the field of fertility.

Dr Mona stated that the opening of the fertility centre is considered the first of its kind in the government health sector, an important and joyful event for people who face challenges in the field. "The centre provides consultation from doctors specialised in the field of fertility who will contribute to providing the treatment plan, as well as providing medical and emotional support to couples during their journey in dealing with the problem of childbearing," she said.

The Fertility Centre is a specialised centre concerned with women and family affairs, and it has become a tangible reality, with an elite medical staff that includes doctors specialised in fertility and infertility treatments, and qualified technicians with experience to provide comprehensive care.



The centre is equipped with the latest lab technologies and is the first government centre in the Sultanate of Oman that provides several services to help couples overcome the problems of pregnancy

The centre also provides fertility preservation services by preserving reproductive cells, such as eggs and sperm, for the benefit of groups suffering from diseases and disorders that affect their fertility, such as cancer patients, before starting treatment that affects fertility. It is expected to receive 1,000 cases in the first year, with the number rising to 1,500 cases in the second year.

Dr Rahma bint Hamoud al Ghabshiyah, senior consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology, specialising in delayed pregnancy and IVF techniques, said, "The opening of the Fertility Centre is considered a major achievement and a qualitative transfer in the level of health services provided by the Ministry of Health to a segment of society that suffers from delayed pregnancy and needs fertilisation services using high and specialised techniques."

She added that in order for any service to have success

and sustainability, it must be surrounded by requirements that guarantee its survival and service to the largest group or segment of society. These requirements are based on internationally known scientific foundations to ensure success, and the priority comes in the target group of women, which is the group of women who have not previously given birth.

Treatment at the centre includes women suffering from primary or secondary infertility without having healthy, living children from an existing marriage, men with diseases that prevent pregnancy, and women and men with cancerous or other diseases that could affect fertility and before the start of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

The Centre will receive cases referred from the obstetrics and gynaecology departments of all hospitals and government health complexes from all governorates, urology clinics treating male

infertility, reproductive endocrinology clinics in the Royal Hospital, Wattayah Complex, endocrine clinics, and from oncology centres to preserve fertility through freezing eggs, sperm or embryos.

In the centre's initial endeavours, a total of 576 patients were examined from October 1, 2013 until January 31, 2024 from all regions of the Sultanate.

Faten Talal Khayyat, an embryologist in the IVF laboratory, said, "We operated the laboratory for approximately three months and the laboratory was provided with the latest equipment and the highest standards of quality control in the laboratory to ensure the accuracy of the quality of work to monitor the conditions in which the embryos are implanted and returned to the uterus. The laboratory is provided with the latest Incubators to preserve embryos and the latest devices to preserve fertility."

Weather: Scattered rains continue

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, FEB 14

The latest weather analysis indicated that there are chances of rain with varying intensity that will continue to be scattered on the coastal and mountainous parts of the governorates of Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah South and parts of the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar. There are also chances of low cloud advection along parts of the coastal areas of Sea of Oman which may lead to isolated rains on Thursday.

The Civil Aviation Authority has advised all to take precaution during rainfall and flash flood and to check visibility and sea state before sailing and follow the issued weather bulletins and reports of the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre.

CDAA CONTINUES OPERATIONS

Search and rescue teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate continued searching for the missing person in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar on Wednesday, with the participation of a team of mobile search, including 'search dogs'.

The rains slowed down by Wednesday, but places like Sinaw continued to receive the downpour. However, the calls for help from wadis went on for one more day proving wadis were tricky still.

An accident that involved a fuel tanker falling onto its side while crossing a wadi in



Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan showed it is difficult to gauge the depth no matter how big the vehicle is. Rescue teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority were able to rescue the tanker driver.

In Al Batinah North, a woman was stranded with her vehicle in the wadi and the CDAA team also successfully got her to safety.

In Al Sharqiyah South, two vehicles were stranded in the wadi and all the 12 individuals were rescued.

Rescue teams in Al Sharqiyah North were able to rescue two people after their vehicle was stuck in a wadi in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi.

The rescue teams in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate were able to rescue three people after their vehicle was stranded in Wadi Halfin in the Wilayat of Adam.

Till Wednesday, CDAA had been dealing with 273 emergency cases, a total of 34 road accidents, responding to 127 stranded people, 36 fire cases, 50 medical cases and 17 miscellaneous incidents during the period of low pressure.

Oman, Morocco highlight ties through joint postage stamp

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Oman Post, the national operator of postal services, announced the inauguration of the joint postage stamp with the Kingdom of Morocco in celebration of the deep fraternal ties and common cultural history that link the two brotherly countries on the sidelines of the Postal Leaders Forum.

The stamp, having a unique design, embodies essential elements common to both the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Morocco, as the idea of the stamp revolved around

highlighting the first spot where the sun rises in the Arab world in the Sultanate of Oman and the last spot where the sun sets in the Kingdom of Morocco, which symbolises the breadth and unity of Arab homeland.

It contains the most prominent cultural monuments of both countries displaying the main gate of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the historic Sohar ship, the view of the sunrise in the Ras Al Hadd district, the ancient Sohar Fort, and the Royal Opera House Muscat, while on the other hand the stamp includes landmarks of the Kingdom of Morocco, the exquisite Moroccan



The stamp, having a unique design, embodies essential elements common to both the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Morocco.

architectural style.

It has Moroccan doors that indicate, in terms of the way they are built and engineered, the diversity of the Kingdom's

cultural branches, in addition to the Al Khair Mosque located in the Guerguerat region, which embodies the last point of sunset views in Morocco.



Shaikh Ibrahim bin Sultan al Hosani, Acting CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, explained that the launch of this joint commemorative stamp

embodies the deep bonds of mutual brotherhood between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Morocco and the similar and rooted heritage between them, indicating that the stamp, with its distinctive symbolism of unity of visions and mutual respect, is thus opening new paths on our common journey of progress.

Ahmed Amin Benjloun Touimi, Director-General of the Moroccan Post Group, said this collaboration is not only a postage stamp but rather a bridge linking two ancient cultures with their historical values as well as a common future vision.



DROWNING INCIDENTS ON THE RISE- WHO

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has sounded caution to all parents out there to be more watchful of their children against drowning incidents especially whenever there is adverse climatic conditions and ensuing flash floods.

In its latest statistical report, the World Health Organisation (WHO) says that globally, there are an estimated 236,000 annual drowning death cases worldwide making the third leading cause of unintentional injury death. It accounts for 7 per cent of all injury-related deaths. And in 2019, injuries accounted for almost 8 per cent of total global mortality.

According to the WHO data issued on World Drowning Day, such deaths in Oman reached 211 or 1.42 per cent of total deaths and the age adjusted death rate is 4.91 per 100,000 of population ranking Oman to be number 26 in the world as more than 500 drowning incidents were reported in Oman in 2021, a recent statistics has revealed.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a senior official from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said that the water rescue teams dealt with 521 calls of drowning accidents in 2021.

“Succeeding water levels during the rains and natural water bodies can be a dangerous spot if proper care and attention are not paid by elders when children play around them,” he said.

He said children, males and individuals with increased access to water are most at risk of drowning and global estimates might have significantly underestimated the actual public health problem related to drowning.

“Carelessness during rains, being inattentive to warning signs at spots of water tourism, near lakes, ponds, swimming pools or sea and kids being unattended at the pools are major reasons behind the incidences of drowning cases in the country,” the official added.

“
Carelessness during rains, being inattentive to warning signs at spots of water tourism, near lakes, ponds, swimming pools or sea and kids being unattended at the pools are major reasons behind the incidences of drowning cases in the country

SENIOR
OFFICIAL
CDAA

“So, swimming requires caution and should not be carried out in undesignated sites. In most cases, the victims are children as a result of negligence and lack of supervision by parents. Many of them either attempted to cross the swamps of water or were playing in the swimming pools in farms and rest houses without knowing the danger involved resulting in loss of many human lives,” he said.

The CDAA statistics show an average of 400 drowning incidents were reported in the past mostly during rains and indicates that major reasons behind drowning deaths to be crossing running wadis, swimming in undesignated areas such as dams, water channels and water-logged areas, leaving children unattended near water surfaces, and non-abidance of safety instructions.

“By law, crossing the wadis (valleys) and low-lying areas despite the warning is a punishable offence and can have serious repercussions,” he added.

Parents have been urged to be watchful of their children, especially below 12 years of age, just as they need to be vigilant about their children crossing wadis or playing in water ponds when it’s raining and flash floods are formed as many drowning incidents involving children were reported from many wilayats.

The global burden and death from drowning are found in all economies and regions, however low and middle income countries account for over 90 per cent of unintentional drowning deaths. Over half of the world’s drowning occurs in the WHO Western Pacific Region and WHO South-East Asia Region; while drowning death rates are highest in the WHO Western Pacific Region and are 27–32 times higher than those seen in the United Kingdom or Germany, respectively.

Despite limited data, several studies reveal information on the cost impact of drowning.

In the United States of America, 45 per cent of drowning deaths are among the most economically active segment of the population. Coastal drowning in the United States alone accounts for \$273 million each year in direct and indirect costs. In Australia and Canada, the total annual cost of drowning injury is \$85.5 million and \$173 million, respectively.

236,000

ANNUAL DROWNING DEATH CASES WORLDWIDE

211

DROWNING DEATH CASES IN OMAN

521

DROWNING INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED IN OMAN DURING 2021





Recall

Chevrolet Groove

Recall Date: 15 February 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Chevrolet Groove	2023	4

Recall consequence

Description of defect: The certification label located on the driver's side B-pillar contains incorrect Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) as 1260 Kg instead of 1670 Kg.

Recall Action:

Procedure: Dealers will replace the vehicle certification label on the driver's side B-pillar

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

Toll free No 80050002 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.00 PM with effect: from Date 15/02/2024



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Customer Care
80079008
80077997



Oman Trading Establishment LLC



OSHRM Awards unveiled for government, private sectors

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The 2024 OSHRM Awards were unveiled under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU.

The awards saw spirited competition among the government and private sectors, motioning progress and qualitative advancements towards excellence and innovation. The Society prioritises human resources, aiming to prepare them with modern skills to meet the demands of the evolving job market.

Dr Yasmin al Balushi from Royal Academy of Management emphasised the human-centric nature of these awards, stating that they celebrate achievements



The awards saw spirited competition among the government and private sectors, motioning progress and qualitative advancements

to advance creativity, innovation, and excellence in all fields. She underscored the priority of investing in humans.

In the government sector, the Civil Aviation Authority emerged the winner in the Human Resources Innovation category. The Work Health and Wellbeing

Award was claimed by the Social Protection Fund.

While at the private sector, Oman Air Catering clinched the Human Resources Innovation Award, with Bank Dhofar receiving the Digital Transformation Award and Oman Airports securing the

Work Health and Wellbeing Award. The Research Grant for the best idea in human resources was awarded to Dr Drichi from Muscat College.

Occidental was recognised for the Best Human Resources Management Team in Institutions, while Maryam al Araimi from Sultan Qaboos University received a motivational award for the best research idea.

Onsor Company was honoured with the Excellence in Human Resources Management Award, while the award for the best female-led institution in human resources management was not conferred. Shaikh Aiman al Hosni was named the Best CEO of Oman Airports.

On the second day of the 7th annual OSHRM Conference, twelve workshop papers and two discussion panels were presented.

Upswing in real and nominal GDP in 2022

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has released its highly anticipated Macroeconomic Stability Report for the year 2023. The move comes in line with the CBO's commitment to provide information and statistics and analyse the updated economic developments and as part of its efforts to increase transparency and public disclosure in the Omani banking sector.

The report meticulously analyses the economic landscape using the latest available data, shedding light on recent macroeconomic developments within the Sultanate of Oman while emphasising strengths, weaknesses, and potential risks.

The report highlights a notable upswing in both real and nominal GDP during 2022, primarily attributed to the surge in oil prices. This surge not only spurred growth in both oil and non-oil sectors in an unprecedented manner but also

bolstered control over public financial conditions, resulting in a surplus in the public finance balance.

Addressing challenges in formulating the financial budget for 2022, the report underscores the strategic response that fortified the government's commitment to achieving medium-term financial equilibrium. Unexpected gains from oil revenues and prudent financial management facilitated partial repayment of the public debt portfolio, leading to a reduction in indebtedness.

Furthermore, the report indicates a shift in the current account balance to a surplus in 2022, propelled by an improvement in the trade balance. Additionally, the sovereign ratings upgrade by major rating agencies throughout the year signifies a decrease in perceived systemic risks, marking a testament to the resilience and stability of Oman's economic foundations. — ONA

INVEST IN OMAN'S FUTURE

SAFE - FIXED AND ATTRACTIVE RETURNS - LIQUIDITY

Auction of RO.100 million (with Greenshoe option) 3 years @ 4.9% p.a.



Oman Development Bonds

On behalf of the Government of Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman announces an issue of Government Development Bonds to be sold by auction. The 69th Issue of Government Development Bonds will be issued on Thursday, 15/02/2024, carrying a coupon rate of 4.9% per annum for a maturity period of 3 years (maturing on 27/02/2027). These Bonds will be auctioned on Sunday, 25/02/2024. Investors may apply for these Bonds through competitive bidding only.

Security of Capital

Total security is offered as the Bonds are registered and transferable only by means of a document evidencing the transaction between a buyer and a seller through Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The Bonds are direct and unconditional obligations of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

Fixed and Attractive Returns

Interest of 4.9% per annum is payable every 6 months during throughout the tenure of the Bonds from the date of issue (Thursday, 27/2/2024). The interest will be paid semi-annually on 27th August and 27th February, every year till maturity of the Bond.

Liquidity

The Bonds can be listed and traded before maturity in MSX at the prevailing market price.

Collateral Advantage

The Bonds can be used as a collateral security to obtain loans from any licensed commercial bank.

Who Can Invest?

Resident and Non-resident Investors, such as Banks, Financial Institutions, Companies, Individuals and any other entity of any nationality.

How to buy the bonds?

Investor may obtain bonds through any licensed commercial bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman, upon the submission of eligible application form. Investor must provide the MSX Investor Code in the application.

MSX Investor Code

Anyone who does not have MSX Investor Code, can obtain it from Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. (MCD) through their website at least one day prior to submitting the application to the commercial bank. (www.mcd.gov.om)

For any enquires:

Tel: +968 24822222 | 24822297 | 24822280 | 24822235

Fax: +968 24810555

E-mail: mcd.support@mcd.gov.om

Bank Account Details

An investor must provide the same Bank Account details registered with MCD.



Opens on Thursday, February 15th, 2024 & Closes on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024.

The minimum subscription amount is RO 500 and in multiples of RO 100.

To view the 69th Issue of Government Development Bonds, please visit the following websites:

Ministry of Finance | www.mof.gov.om

Central Bank of Oman | www.cbo.gov.om

Contact the Central Bank of Oman (Monetary Operations Department) or any licensed commercial bank for details.

Tel: +968 24777145 / 24777635 / 24777837

E-mail: mod@cbo.gov.om

P.O Box 1161, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman

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جامعة صحر Sohar University



TENDER NOTICE No. 001/2024

Sohar University invites sealed tenders from specialized, experience and authorized contractors/suppliers for supply, delivery, and installation of various types of furniture and fixtures.

The tender details are as follows:

Tender Number	Description	Fee OR	Submission Date
001/2024	Renovation and Rehabilitation Works of the Sohar University Buildings	100/-	10.03.2024

The tender document can be obtained from Procurement and Contracts Department from 15/02/2024 to 22/02/2024 08:00 to 16:00 hrs at Sohar University Main campus in Sohar after payment of RO. 100.000/- (Non-refundable) at the cash counter located in the Al Khauboora Building. The receipt of payment has to be taken to the Procurement and Contracts Department to collect the Tender Document.

Tenders offers must be submitted in closed envelopes sealed, delivered at the Sohar University premises, tender number shall be written only on the envelope, no indication shall be made, and deadline for submission of offers is 10/03/2024 15:30 hours.

Tender should be addressed to PVC Administration & Finance and deposited in the tender Box at PVC, A&F Office as given below during office hours 08:00 to 15:30 Sunday to Thursday.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor - Administration and Finance Office
Sohar University
P.O Box 44, P.C. 311, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman.
Telephone: 26850100 Ext.: 421 & 289 (Procurement and Contracts Department)

Sohar University reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason

جامعة صحر Sohar University



TENDER NOTICE No. 002/2024

Sohar University invites sealed tenders from specialized, experience and authorized contractors/suppliers for supply, delivery, and installation of various types of furniture and fixtures.

The tender details are as follows:

Tender Number	Description	Fee OR	Submission Date
002/2024	Supply, Delivery, and Installation of Various Types of Furniture and Fixtures	100/-	10.03.2024

The tender document can be obtained from Procurement and Contracts Department from 15/02/2024 to 22/02/2024 08:00 to 16:00 hrs at Sohar University Main campus in Sohar after payment of RO. 100.000/- (Non-refundable) at the cash counter located in the Al Khauboora Building. The receipt of payment has to be taken to the Procurement and Contracts Department to collect the Tender Document.

Tenders offers must be submitted in closed envelopes sealed, delivered at the Sohar University premises, tender number shall be written only on the envelope, no indication shall be made, and deadline for submission of offers is 10/03/2024 15:30 hours.

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Telephone: 26850100 Ext.: 421 & 289 (Procurement and Contracts Department)

Sohar University reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason

Gaza hospitals ‘completely overwhelmed’, says WHO



People ride in a cart pulled by a tractor past the rubble of a destroyed building and a mosque minaret in Rafah. – AFP

GENEVA: The World Health Organization lamented on Wednesday that fewer than half of its requested aid-delivery missions in Gaza have been approved by Israel, stressing the need to reach and resupply devastated hospitals across the territory.

“Hospitals are completely overwhelmed and overflowing and undersupplied,” said Rik Peepkorn, the WHO’s representative for the occupied Palestinian territories.

Speaking to reporters in Geneva via video-link from Rafah in southern Gaza, he described how patients were frequently undergoing unnecessary amputations of limbs that could have been saved under ordinary circumstances.

Decrying the “shrinking humanitarian space” in the Gaza Strip, he accused Israel of obstructing aid deliveries across the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

Since November, only 40 per cent of the missions WHO had requested to deliver aid to northern Gaza had been facilitated, he said. “Since January, that figure is much lower.”

Only 45 per cent of requested missions in southern Gaza had meanwhile been made possible, he said.

“These missions have been denied, impeded or postponed,” he said, describing

Only 40 percent of the missions WHO had requested to deliver aid to northern Gaza had been facilitated. Since January, that figure is much lower.

the situation as “absurd”.

“Even when there is no ceasefire, humanitarian corridors should exist so WHO, UN and their partners can do their job.”

At least 28,576 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in Israel’s response, according to the Palestinian health ministry in Gaza.

The latest toll includes 103 people killed over the past 24 hours, a ministry statement said, while 68,291 others have been wounded across Gaza since the war erupted on October 7.

Months of bombardment and siege have deepened a humanitarian crisis, especially in southern Gaza.

“Their living conditions are abysmal,”

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said. “They lack the basic necessities to survive, stalked by hunger, disease and death.”

UN rights chief Volker Turk charged that Israel was committing a “war crime” with its reported destruction of buildings to create a “buffer zone” along the border inside Gaza.

Israel’s “extensive destruction of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly, amounts to a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and a war crime”, he said in a statement.

Mediators are racing to secure a pause to the fighting before Israel proceeds with a full-scale ground incursion into Rafah, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians are trapped.

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths cautioned on Tuesday that any military operation there “could lead to a slaughter”.

Peepkorn agreed, warning that “military activities in... these densely populated areas would be of course an unfathomable catastrophe”.

It “would even further expand the humanitarian disaster beyond imagination”. — AFP

Ireland, Spain urge to test Israel’s human rights

MADRID: The prime ministers of Spain and Ireland asked the European Commission on Wednesday to urgently review whether Israel is complying with its human rights obligations in Gaza.

“We are deeply concerned at the deteriorating situation in Israel and in Gaza... The expanded Israeli military operation in the Rafah area poses a grave and imminent threat that the international community must urgently confront,” the prime ministers said in a joint letter published on the Spanish government website.

“We also recall the horror of October 7, and call for the release of all captives and an immediate ceasefire that can facilitate access for urgently needed humanitarian supplies.”

The EU Commission confirmed receipt of the letter. An EU spokesperson said: “We do urge all sides when it comes to Israel to respect international law and we note that there must be respect, there must be accountability for violations of international law.”

Two weeks ago, Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said he was in talks with other EU heads of governments

to review the EU-Israel Association Agreement on the basis that Israel may be breaching the agreement’s human rights clause.

The 23-year-old agreement sets out a framework for free trade in goods, services and capital, based on “respect for human rights and democratic principles”. So far only Spain and Ireland have made public their support for a review. Varadkar said several EU states were also talking about a possible joint recognition of a Palestinian state.

Ireland has long been a champion of Palestinian rights, and ministers have repeatedly said the government is considering recognising a Palestinian state.

— Reuters



Protesters lift placards and flags of Palestine during a demonstration in Rabat in solidarity with Palestinians. – AFP file photo

Tender at
Buraimi Industrial City

مدائن
madayn

The Public Authority for Industrial Estates (MADAYN) is pleased to announce a tender in Buraimi Industrial City for investors, contractors and developers to construct and develop an integrated fuel station.

Opportunity Number	Project Name	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Fee (R.O)
1/2024	Constructing and Developing an Integrated Fuel Station	28/03/2024	02/05/2024	20

The following procedures apply:

- Tender Documents can be obtained from Madayn Support Department at Buraimi Industrial City (Tel: 25657768 / 25657764) during official working hours, against non-refundable fee as mentioned above.
- Completed bids according to the terms of the tender document shall be deposited in the Bid Box at Buraimi Industrial City administration office before 12 pm on the specified date.
- For further inquiries, please contact us at, 25657756, 25657779.

madayn.om

Inconclusive truce talks dent hopes of Palestinians

CAIRO: Palestinians jammed into their last refuge in Gaza voiced growing fear on Wednesday that Israel will soon launch a planned assault on the southern city of Rafah after truce talks in Cairo ended inconclusively.

The talks in the Egyptian capital, involving the United States, Israel, Egypt and Qatar, ended without any sign of a breakthrough and no date was announced for the next meeting.

The lack of agreement dealt a new blow to the more than one million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, where many are living in tent camps and makeshift shelters after fleeing Israeli bombardments elsewhere in Gaza.

“The news was disappointing, we hoped there could be a deal reached in Cairo. We are now counting down the days before Israel sends in tanks. We hope they don’t but who can prevent them?” Said Jaber, a Gaza businessman who is sheltering in Rafah with his family, said. “We’ve lost our homes, our jobs. Isn’t that enough?”



A displaced Palestinian woman, who fled her house due to Israeli strikes, sits by a tent as she takes shelter in a tent camp, in Rafah. – Reuters

We’ve had enough of this war, and we will need decades to rebuild Gaza and regain our lives.”

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, who was expected to hold talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday, said an Israeli army offensive on Rafah would “completely jeopardise the humanitarian situation.”

“Because the people in Rafah cannot simply vanish into thin air. They need safe places and safe

corridors to avoid being caught in the crossfire even more. They need more humanitarian aid. And they need a ceasefire,” she said.

Israeli planes and tanks pounded several areas of Khan Younis in southern Gaza, and there was heavy fighting in some parts of the city, residents said.

The health ministry in the enclave said Israeli forces were continuing to isolate the two main hospitals in Khan Younis in recent days.

— Reuters

TENDER NOTICE

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

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

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
67/2024/MAFWR/HQ-7	Rehabilitation and Maintenance works at Veterinary Clinic at Duqum, Wusta Region	Wednesday 7/2/2024	Monday 26/2/2024	Monday 18/3/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with fourth grade	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
1037/2023/MAFWR/HQ-119-Recall-1	Periodic maintenance of central air conditioners in food security departments in the governorates for a period of 36 months	Sunday 11/2/2024	Thursday 29/2/2024	Sunday 3/3/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

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

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



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THURSDAY | FEBRUARY 15 | 2024

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In brief

MELBOURNE



STORMS KNOCK OUT POWER TO 174,000 HOMES

Storms packing powerful winds toppled trees, killed one person and knocked out power to 174,000 homes and businesses in eastern Australia, officials said on Wednesday. The wild weather hit large swathes of Victoria, dumping torrents of rain and unleashing gusts of more than 150 kilometres per hour. The winds also fanned bushfires in the Grampians region west of Melbourne, burning an unknown number of homes in one small town.

At its peak, 530,000 homes and businesses lost power, the Australian Energy Market Operator said. Authorities said they were working to restore power. — AFP

PARIS



SARKOZY FOUND GUILTY OF ILLEGAL CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty on Wednesday by a Paris appeals court of illegal campaign financing over his failed 2012 re-election bid, confirming a previous ruling by a lower court.

He was sentenced to one-year year prison sentence that can be served through alternative means like wearing an electronic bracelet without going to jail. He has always denied accusations that his party worked with a public relations firm to hide the true cost of his campaign.

Sarkozy put the blame on members of his campaign team: “I didn’t choose any supplier, I didn’t sign any quotation, any invoice,” he said. — Reuters

MANILA



PHILIPPINES TO FILE CHARGES AGAINST OIL TANKER OWNERS

The Philippine government said on Wednesday it will file criminal charges against the owners of an oil tanker that sank off a central island, causing severe marine pollution. More than half of the vessel’s 800,000-litre oil cargo spilled into the sea over hundreds of kilometres off Mindoro island, famed for having some of the world’s most diverse marine life.

The company falsified documents used to register the Princess Empress, including papers relating to its construction. Regulators will also be charged, the justice department added, without naming them. — AFP

Nato chief says Europe meets spending target

BRUSSELS: Nato said on Wednesday that Europe was meeting an alliance spending target and the United States needed allies, days after former US President Donald Trump suggested that Washington might not protect countries that did not spend enough.

Nato’s European states would invest a combined total of \$380 billion in defence this year, taking their spending as a whole to an estimated 2% of GDP in 2024 compared to 1.85% in 2023, Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

Trump shocked Europeans by implying that he would encourage Russia “to do whatever the hell they want” to Nato allies that did not spend enough. The 31 allies have committed to a target of spending 2% of their output on defence but not all have done so individually.

“I expect 18 allies to spend



Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg talks during a Pre-ministerial press conference before a Defence Ministers’ meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Nato headquarters, in Brussels. — AFP

2% of their GDP on defence this year,” Stoltenberg told a news conference in Brussels, adding overall military spending was set for another record year after two years of Russia’s full-fledged war against Ukraine.

The number was higher than last year, when 11 Nato members were expected to reach the agreed

target.

Addressing journalists’ questions linked to the controversy around Trump’s comments, Stoltenberg said the United States knew how important the defence alliance is for its own security.

“The United States have never fought a war alone,” he said ahead of a Nato ministers’ meeting.

Nato’s European states would invest a combined total of \$380 billion in defence this year, taking their spending as a whole to an estimated 2% of GDP in 2024

\$95 billion military aid package for Ukraine and other allies, Nato diplomats are focused on keeping the alliance’s dominant military power invested in Nato and the protection of Europe.

In a historic first since the end of the Cold War, Berlin will meet the 2% target this year for the first time, allocating the equivalent of 71.8 billion euros for defence spending this year through regular and special budget outlays. However, the sum of its total defence spending is classified.

France, the bloc’s only nuclear power, could follow suit.

With 413 billion euros planned for the next seven years, its 2024-2030 Military Programming Law substantially increases French defence spending. The new budget was initially expected to hit 2% of GDP from 2025, although sources have said that may be brought forward. — Reuters

Ukraine’s army chief warns of ‘extremely difficult’ front line



A view shows a bridge over the Siverskyi Donets river destroyed in Bohorodychne, Donetsk region, Ukraine. — Reuters

KYIV: Ukraine’s new army chief said on Wednesday the situation on the front line was “extremely difficult” as delays to much-needed US military aid cast a shadow over how long Kyiv’s troops can hold out.

The 1,000-kilometre front line has barely moved in more than a year, with Kyiv’s forces back on the defensive after last year’s failed counter-offensive and military leaders acknowledging Russia has a manpower advantage.

The warning came even as Kyiv said it had destroyed another Russian warship in the Black Sea. It was the latest in a string of successful attacks on Russia’s naval fleet and Nato praised it a “great victory for Ukrainians.”

But, on his first visit to the frontline in eastern Ukraine since becoming Ukraine’s new commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrsky painted a bleaker picture.

“The operational environment is extremely complex and stressful,” Syrsky, who replaced the popular Valery Zaluzhny last week in a major military shake-up, said.

“The Russians continue

The warning came even as Kyiv said it had destroyed another Russian warship in the Black Sea. It was the latest in a string of successful attacks on Russia’s naval fleet

to increase their efforts and have a numerical advantage in personnel.”

Along with Defence Minister Rustem Umerov, Syrsky had visited troops fighting around the key flashpoint of Avdiivka, which Russia is mounting a major attempt to capture and has surrounded on three sides.

Ukrainian army spokesman Dmytro Lykhoviy said Wednesday Russia had 50,000 soldiers around the frontline city.

“We are doing everything possible to prevent the enemy from advancing deep into our territory,” Syrsky said in a post on social media, saying his troops were operating in “extremely difficult conditions.”

Russian military bloggers

and local officials have said Ukrainian forces appear to be conserving ammunition as supplies run low.

Ukraine relies on Western -- predominantly US -- support to fund and equip its armed forces with the shells, bullets, rockets, tanks and air defences it needs to hold off Russian attacks.

But the latest multi-billion-dollar aid package has been held up in the US Congress since last year amid political wrangling, threatening to hobble Ukraine’s defensive capacity.

The US Senate this week approved \$60 billion of funding for Ukraine, but it is unclear whether it will win support in the House of Representatives.

As Ukraine’s new Russian-born army leader warned of a strenuous situation on the battlefield, Kyiv also said a Russian strike on a hospital in the eastern town of Selydove killed three people.

A 38-year-old pregnant woman as well as another woman and her nine-year-old son were killed, Ukraine’s general prosecutor said.

A dozen others, including a six-month old baby, were wounded in the strike. — AFP

Subianto claims ‘victory for all Indonesians’ in presidential vote

JAKARTA: Former general Prabowo Subianto claimed victory in Indonesia’s presidential election on Wednesday as preliminary results put him well ahead of his two rivals to lead Southeast Asia’s biggest economy.

“All counts, all pollsters... showed figures that Prabowo-Gibran won in one round,” he told a cheering crowd at a packed arena in central Jakarta, referring to his running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka.

“This victory should be a victory for all Indonesians.”

Official results are not due until next month but at least four government-approved groups -- making projections based on official early tallying -- showed Subianto winning a clear majority in one round.

Polls have long shown the fiery defence minister to be the favourite for the presidency after he pledged to carry on the agenda of popular outgoing leader Joko Widodo.

While claiming victory, Subianto stressed “we must still wait for KPU’s official result”, referring to the election commission.

“We believe Indonesian democracy is running well.”

Subianto, who was a military chief, needs more than 50 percent of the overall vote and at least a fifth of ballots cast in over half the country’s 38 provinces to secure the presidency.

The 72-year-old Subianto --

who pushed street protests and launched legal challenges after losing the previous two elections -- thanked his supporters and called for unity.

The government-approved polling groups’ “quick counts” have also been used in previous elections by candidates to claim victory.

The general election commission verifies and approves an array of pollsters who take samples at selected voting stations after polls have closed, and are allowed to watch the count by election officials.

Analysts said the projections indicate Subianto has likely avoided a second electoral battle in June against rivals Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo.

Nearly 205 million people were eligible to vote in the fifth presidential election since the end of Suharto’s dictatorship in 1998.

A logistical feat in which more than 20,000 seats were up for grabs saw planes, helicopters, speedboats and even cows used to cart ballots around the sprawling archipelago of nearly 280 million people.

The vote across 800,000 polling stations began Wednesday morning in the restive region of Papua and ended at the other end of the country in jungle-clad Sumatra, while some stations in Jakarta stayed open late after the capital was inundated by thunderstorms. — AFP



Presidential candidate and Indonesia’s Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto (L) react to supporters after polls closed in the country’s presidential and legislative elections in Jakarta. — AFP

Lessons from Oman on path to peace...



Badr al Abri

The writer is interested in rapprochement and understanding. He is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Terrorism*

As the world marks the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) as and when Conducive to Terrorism on February 12, a day recognised by the United Nations since 2016, the world is called to reflect on the multifaceted challenges of extremism and terrorism. This day underscores a grim reality: the proliferation of extremism has not only fuelled violence but has also precipitated an unparalleled humanitarian crisis, displacing millions and destabilising entire regions.

The principles underpinning this day resonate with universal human values and the foundational teachings of diverse religions and philosophies. Yet, the noble intentions behind these commemorations often clash with the harsh realities shaped by geopolitical interests. The ongoing strife in Gaza, now in its fifth month, exemplifies this contradiction, with daily atrocities unfolding in full view of the international community, including some members of the United Nations Security Council.

Extremism's roots are complex, stemming from both internal ideological distortions and external pressures such as oppression. Misinterpretations of religious texts, whether from the Bible or the Quran, can lead to justifications for violence, overlooking the broader messages of peace and reconciliation inherent in these scriptures. For instance, verses that appear to advocate for conflict are often context-specific, addressing particular historical circumstances rather than endorsing universal aggression.

The external catalysts for extremism often involve oppression by state or global powers, as seen in the

plight of Palestinians and historical struggles in regions like Cuba, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Such oppression breeds resistance movements, some of which may adopt violent methods in their quest for survival and rights. Similarly, state tyranny within countries can fuel the rise of extremist factions, leading to internal divisions and conflicts, as witnessed in Syria, Yemen, and Sudan.

The role of international policies, particularly those of stable and prosperous nations, in fostering extremism cannot be overlooked. These policies, often driven by self-interest, contribute to extremism abroad, equating in some respects to the actions of terrorist groups. The label of "terrorism" is frequently misapplied to those resisting oppression, obscuring the legitimate struggle for freedom and human rights.

The world grapples with a litany of crises, from environmental degradation to pandemics and financial instability. Addressing these challenges necessitates a departure from expedient, self-serving policies that exacerbate global issues. The United Nations, with its noble humanitarian mission, faces a credibility crisis, undermined by the vested interests of veto-wielding nations and a failure to uphold global justice and equality.

Against this backdrop, the Sultanate of Oman offers a beacon of hope, demonstrating a viable path to combating extremism through intellectual, educational, and rhetorical engagement. Oman's approach, emphasising justice, equality, and inclusive citizenship, stands in stark contrast to the broader regional turmoil. The late Sultan Qaboos bin Said's advocacy for dynamic Islamic thinking

OMAN'S EXPERIENCE, CHARACTERISED BY TOLERANCE, INTERNAL COEXISTENCE, AND A PRINCIPLED STANCE OF NEUTRALITY IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, PROVIDES VALUABLE LESSONS IN FOSTERING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

and the adaptation of jurisprudential opinions to contemporary realities highlights the importance of evolving religious interpretations to prevent extremism. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik advocates the same principles and ideals.

Oman's experience, characterised by tolerance, internal coexistence, and a principled stance of neutrality in foreign affairs, provides valuable lessons in fostering peace and reconciliation. This approach has not only contributed to domestic stability but has also positioned Oman as a mediator and peacemaker in regional conflicts.

As we observe the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism, it is imperative to confront the underlying causes of extremism and terrorism, including tyranny, injustice, and the exploitation of human rights. The global community must commit to a more equitable world order that respects human dignity and fosters the expansion of freedoms. The experiences of nations like Oman, which have successfully navigated the challenges of extremism through a commitment to justice, peace, and inclusive governance, offer valuable insights and hope for a more peaceful and just world.

In conclusion, the fight against extremism and terrorism requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the ideological underpinnings and the external pressures that fuel these phenomena. By learning from the experiences of nations like Oman and recommitting to the principles of human dignity, justice, and equality, the international community can make significant strides towards eradicating the scourge of extremism and terrorism.

Democrats bungle Biden age concerns

JEFF MASON AND HEATHER TIMMONS

Joe Biden's advisers knew in 2020 that his age was an issue for Americans but they successfully painted him as a competent leader who would restore normalcy to the White House after Donald Trump's chaotic presidency. Now that Biden is 81, opinion polls show age is even more of a concern for voters ahead of November's election.

In office, Biden's gait has stiffened, he is slower on his feet and he regularly makes verbal mix-ups during speeches, at times confusing the names of world leaders. He has presided over a growing economy and some foreign leaders have said after meeting him that he is sharp and focused in private meetings, but the age issue is still a drag on his poll numbers.

When a special counsel last week released a report declining to charge Biden of mishandling classified information but criticising his memory, Republicans in the House of Representatives were quick to call the president, a Democrat, "certainly unfit for the Oval Office."

In contrast, some political experts say, the White House did not address the accusations quickly or directly enough, or mount a coordinated pushback, at least at first.

"What we've seen from this White House is in a lot of ways attempting to do business as usual, to overcome adversity and bad narratives by ignoring them," said Samuel Woolley, director of the University of Texas at Austin's propaganda research lab.

A new Reuters/Ipsos poll shows that 78 per cent of respondents — including 71 per cent of Democrats — think Biden is too old to work in government. While the White House has struggled in its response to those concerns, a wave of online memes, some based on manipulated images, present the image of the president as a doddering, frail old man.

Mocking Biden's age, speech patterns and missteps has become a global phenomenon during his three years in office. — **Reuters**



Rasha al Raisi
rashabooks@yahoo.com

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

What unites Arab nations? Poetry and music

When I received an e-mail from the ROH announcing an upcoming Trio Joubran's concert, I decided to book tickets and asked my best friend and concert companion Dalia if she'd like to attend.

I knew she'd say yes immediately, as we both missed one of their performances almost a decade back when a sudden hail storm hit Muscat for the first time ever. I still remember talking to her on the phone to cancel while watching my brother from the balcony trying to park our cars in precise angles to miss the hail breaking the windshields.

We never had the chance to attend their later performances and I decided that this time we won't miss it. Well, we almost did as I didn't pay attention-as many other attendees — that the performance was in the small theatre and not the main one.

We had to take the car again and succeeded in finding it — despite the lack of instructions or signs on how to reach the venue- ten minutes exactly before the show started. I wasn't prepared for the experience I was about to be immersed in and when Mahmoud Darwish's deep voice came through the speakers reciting one of his famous poems, my eyes welled up.

Mahmoud Darwish — Palestine's national poet and author of many famous poems known through the Arab world- brought a wave of profound nostalgia to times before the current technological invasion — with its continuous whirlwind of chaos and distractions — when simple things mattered; when the mind was clear and receptive to profound verses written by Darwish during his many years of incarceration in Israeli detention camps, especially his famous poem To My Mother that every Arab knows it's opening stanza by heart:



The oud trio consists of the brothers Samir, Wissam, and Adnan Joubran.

"I yearn for my mother's bread, my mother's coffee."

However, the English translation of Darwish's poems that accompanied his timeless voice was disappointing as it was either direct or redundant which killed the meaning and the spirit of the verses (I really felt sorry for the expat attendees who read the lustreless translation off the screen and wished that it was done by a proper Arabic to English poetry translator).

Nevertheless, the music played by the brothers — especially the duels — and the accompanying cello and percussions made the whole experience captivating. Sameer, the elder of the three brothers introduced himself and his two siblings as third generation of oud makers with a mother who sang Muwash'hat — an art of Arabic singing — which made it hard not to become musicians. His constant smile and sense of humour throughout the show broke the barrier that many felt when he asked us to sing along a Levant classic Hal Asmar El-Loan (this tanned skinned).

Dalia — the natural-born singer sang along comfortably while I choked over the words feeling the stress of public singing.

When the song was over, Dalia leaned towards me with a big frown whispering: "why were we singing a prison song?" What followed then was memorable.

The stage got dark and the screen at the back displayed a large moon, while lights above moved in slow motion — as if we were travelling through the stars — accompanying the sombre music of The Hanging Moon.

I open my palm to grasp the brilliance of the lights and raise my head to find the trio's ouds shining like moons. The genius performance ended with another beloved song: Mawtini (my homeland) by Palestinian poet Ibrahim Tuqan and the trio's heartfelt wishes for all of us to meet in a liberated Palestine someday.

Altogether, The Trio Joubran enchanting experience is a reminder of what unites Arab nations: poetry and music.

I’ve found my life companion...

For every action there is an opposite reaction. One is affected by another action. Life comes in pairs, each complimenting the other. So it's only natural that we seek to pair with our better half. A life partner whom we share our life with, a person whom you call best friend.

As the famous saying goes, through thick and thin till death do us part. A contract to weather any storm and stick by each other.

Yes, the first few years of marriage are the best years, the fresh paint still hasn't worn off. As time progresses we get comfortable with each other and we grow close creating a bond.

But, then we start to let our guard down and the feel of constant show of care and attention is not an everyday requirement. All these years together should be testament of our affection for each other.

Why keep showing it? You should already know, right. The answer, what you got to loss in keeping the attention and care alive.

But like everything we have to put in the work, we should never take anything for granted and be grateful for the things we care for.

Just a few weeks ago, I and my wife went out together after very long time our first date night without the kids. Went to her favourite restaurant, we sat inside, the waiter took our order and we talked and then got distracted by our phones.

But me being me, I am never one to shy away from observing people around me. I noticed that we were not the only couples having a date night, there were few who had the same plan.

But one couple got my attention. They entered the restaurant after we did. Seated just in front of us, they looked lifeless each one on their phones, as if they come alone. They



Saif Saleh al Shaibany

saifalshaibany@hotmail.com

OVER THE YEARS, WE BEGIN TO LOSE SIGHT AND START TO SEE MARRIAGE AS AN EVERYDAY ROUTINE, RATHER THAN COMPANIONSHIP.

had finished ordering but still not a word to each other. I tried to get my wife's attention, only for her to say, mind your own business. Waiting for our meal, my mind started drifting off, and I started to reflect on my own marriage.

The couple's distance hit me with some realisations, of past struggles, maintaining a healthy and interesting relationship. The worst thing in life is regret, knowing that you have failed at something or haven't taken the opportunities presented to you in making it work.

But what's worse than regret is giving up, the feel it's the end of the road and relationship has hit a wall. I know it might sound harsh, the reality is marriages can fall apart. Whatever, the outcome learning and understanding the reason why you had reached to that point, to void it again.

Now having to be blessed with a second chance, I started to wonder am I doing all as a husband, am I working hard or just taking a back seat and neglecting my marriage. I promised myself to always track myself once I think I am laid back and neglecting my responsibilities as a husband.

Learning from my past, I started taking more tangible approaches, showing both action and emotion to my wife appreciation. Looking back at the couple made me realise that if they just took five minutes of their time and focused on each other, they would have seen a different outcome.

Over the years, we begin to lose sight and start to see marriage as an everyday routine, rather than companionship. This gave me a sense of renewal that if you're happy in your marriage then work for it, like everything else in life. Nothing will fall into your lap, you must work for it.

LOVE IN THE AIR!



A couple takes a selfie picture under heart-shaped balloons displayed on Valentine's Day in downtown Moscow, Russia, on Wednesday. – AFP

A letter to America: Reclaiming the dream under liberty’s torch

The copper crown of Lady Liberty, a beacon of hope for countless generations, seems to flicker against the stark reality of a widening chasm between America's proclaimed ideals and its foreign policy, particularly towards the Palestinian people. As an Omani Arab Muslim intellectual, I stand in this shadow with a heart deeply troubled by this ever-growing disconnect.

The question, once again, echoes through the wind: "Why the animosity from Arabs and Muslims?" Some point to America's freedoms themselves, a stark contrast to their lived experiences. Others see a glaring hypocrisy in the disconnect between words and actions. Regardless of the perceived cause, the pain of Palestinians living under occupation, creates a dissonance that cannot be ignored.

America, at its best, has embodied Walt Whitman's vision: "Here at last, the common air that bathes the globe." Today, the people of the Middle East yearn for an America that reflects the spirit of Langston Hughes' verse: "Let America be America again... the land where every man is free." This America, we hope, embraces not just freedom, but also humanity, peace and the fundamental right to self-determination.

The dissonance between the ideals of the US and its policies isn't just a matter of perception; it's rooted in concrete examples of double standards and policies that



Yahya Al Oufi

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

RECOGNISING A PALESTINIAN STATE ALONGSIDE A SECURE ISRAEL COULD BE A HISTORIC TURNING POINT, PAVING THE WAY FOR A NEW ERA OF UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION

alienate, fuelling resentment and undermining the very principles America claims to uphold.

Consider the current situations in both Gaza and Ukraine. In Ukraine, we see America leading the charge in condemning civilian casualties, advocating for humanitarian assistance, and imposing harsh sanctions on Russia for its military actions. These swift and decisive responses align with the principles of protecting human rights and deterring aggression.

Yet, in Gaza, the narrative seems strikingly different. While the US urges restraint and expresses concern about civilian casualties, the unwavering support for Israel's military actions, despite the disproportionate loss of Palestinian lives, raises serious questions about its commitment to upholding these same principles universally. This disparity is further amplified by the restrictions on essential supplies entering Gaza, leaving many feeling abandoned by the international community.

Moving beyond policies that alienate and fuel resentment, acknowledging the double standards that erode trust, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to resolving the Palestinian conflict are crucial steps in bridging this chasm. Recognising a Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel could

be a historic turning point, paving the way for a new era of understanding and cooperation.

The recent escalation in Gaza serves as a stark reminder of the urgency of action. Images of children buried under rubble, families clinging to hope amidst devastation, and overwhelmed hospitals force us to confront the brutal reality that contradicts America's proclaimed ideals. While the US condemns human rights abuses elsewhere, its unwavering support for certain policies in Gaza creates a dissonance that undermines its moral authority and fuels resentment. To truly champion its founding principles on the global stage, America must demonstrate a genuine

commitment to upholding human rights for all, including Palestinians, and advocate for a just and lasting solution in Gaza, one built on peace, mutual respect and a recognition of the inherent dignity of all people.

This dissonance extends beyond Gaza. The continued dispossession of Palestinian land, the restrictions on movement and basic necessities, and the persistent denial of self-determination create a simmering sense of injustice that cannot be extinguished by military might or unilateral pronouncements. It requires a genuine commitment to international law, human rights principles and the dignity of all individuals.

But let us not dwell solely on the challenges. The American spirit, at its core, embodies hope and the belief in a better future. The countless Americans who have spoken out against injustice, championed human rights and advocated for peace offer a beacon of hope. The vibrant and diverse Muslim communities within the United States are living testaments to the power of coexistence and understanding. It is this spirit, embedded in the very fabric of the American story, that offers a path forward.

Let us move beyond the echo chamber of ideology and engage in honest dialogue. Let us listen to the stories of Palestinians, understand their aspirations, and acknowledge their pain. Let us work together, not out of obligation, but out of a shared belief in the inherent dignity of all human beings, to build a future where peace and justice prevail.

This is not just a plea for the Palestinian people, but a call for America to live up to its ideals, not only domestically, but also on the global stage. Let us reclaim the dream that shimmers under Lady Liberty's torch, not just for some, but for all. Let us build a future where the American story resonates not just as a promise whispered, but as a reality lived, a beacon of hope for the world.



A girl pushes a cart loaded with a jerrycan while walking past the rubble of a building that was destroyed during Israeli bombardment in Rafah on Wednesday. – AFP



UAE Team Emirates' British rider Adam Yates gestures as he crosses the finish line to win the fifth stage and the Tour of Oman cycling race, at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) on Thursday. – AFP

YATES

TAKES TOUR OF OMAN OVERALL TITLE

BRITISH RIDER TAMES 'GREEN MOUNTAIN' TO SECURE RED JERSEY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

World champion rider Adam Yates of UAE Team Emirates made the best of his power skills to edge Jan Hirt of Soudal Quick-Step by few seconds in a sprint showdown to claim his professional overall victory in Tour of Oman 2024 in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar by winning the fifth and last stage on Wednesday.

In an extremely close sprint, the British rider had just enough in bank to take the title honours and leader's red jersey. The modified concluding 72 km stage on Wednesday began from Samayil 'Al Fayhaa Resthouse' and finished at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar 'Green Mountain'.

Adam, who is gearing up for another challenge in UAE Tour early next week, completed the full tour within 14 hours, 22 minutes and 30 seconds while Jan Hirt of Czech Republic finished as runners-up after ending the full tour within 14 hours, 22 minutes and 49 seconds.

New Zealand rider Finn Lachlan Fox Fisher, ended in third place as he clocked 14 hours, 23 minutes and 9 seconds. UAE Team Emirates riders managed to end all the stages of the tour in the first place and followed by Soudal Quick-Step team while Intermarche-Wanty riders riders finished in third place.

"We came to Oman with high ambitions in Tour of Oman 2024 and I am happy that the team ended all the races with some wins. It was a nice week for us and we are looking for a new challenge in UAE tour next week to claim more triumphs. This race was great as we have young riders in the team and it was great for them to gain more experience," the champion said.

"I saw many nice places in Oman in my first visit to this beautiful country. I will be back again for more wins in the near future," he added.

"As a team we worked very well and implemented a good tactic. We will have few days rest ahead of another major assignment in the UAE tour," the British rider signed off.

The peloton began action from Samayil 'Al Feyhaa Resthouse' for a short stage, with a 72-km course adapted to the

exceptional weather conditions in the Sultanate of Oman. The iconic ascent up Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) looms on the horizon and it appeared attackers were eager to get there as soon as possible.

UAE TEAM EMIRATES IN CONTROL

The attacks started strongly but it took 19 kilometres of hard battle for four riders to get away. Huub Artz (Intermarche-Wanty), Lund Tobias Andresen (Team DSM-Firmenich PostNL), Tord Gudmestad (Uno-X Mobility) and Tegshbayar Batsaikhan (Roojai Insurance). Finn Fisher-Black's UAE Team Emirates drove the bunch behind the leaders.

Spanish rider Oscar Pelegri Ferrandis of Burgos-BH team managed to end all the stages of Tour of Oman 2024 with golden jersey. Kiwi youngster Finn Lachlan Fox Fisher from UAE Team Emirates took the overall general white jersey classification (Best Young Rider) and the 23-year-old also claimed the green jersey as he managed to lead the general ranking points with 24 points ahead of Luke Lamperti (Soudal Quick-Step) team.

"Great moments as finally I managed to complete all the five stages with the golden jersey. It is a good achievement to take title of this classification. Today, I tried to stay in the breakaway to keep the jersey in the front but it was not possible. Then, I tried to help my team. The Tour of Oman was a good race despite some changes in the route due to the weather conditions in Oman. The races were made shorter and safer by the organisers and we would like to thank them for this," he said.

Later, chief guest Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, handed the awards to the top winners in presence of Saif bin Sebaa al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association.



The pack rides during the fifth stage of the Tour of Oman, at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain), on Wednesday. – AFP

Ahmed al Wahaibi clinches Assarain Classic crown



Ahmed al Wahaibi with the trophy.

MUSCAT: Ahmed Al Wahaibi of Oman overcame a stiff competition from a strong field to emerge champion at the Assarain Golf Classic. The 28th edition of the Assarain Golf Classic was held at the Ghala Golf Club on February 2 and 3 with the participation of around 135 golfers.

A delighted Ahmed said: "The Assarain Golf Classic is a fantastic tournament and it feels great to win a competition of this stature. I would like to thank my playing partners over the last few days. It was a pleasure to be in this event and again I would like to thank the sponsor Assarain Group of Companies."

Ahmed al Farsi, General Manager of Ghala Golf Club, who managed the event, said: "The atmosphere was electric from the first day. I was truly amazed by the participation and overall feel of the 2024 Assarain Golf Classic. We were oversubscribed and had to have a cut off for players as we unfortunately could not fit all of them in, but overall, it was a tremendous occasion."

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said was the guest of honour at the ceremony held on the final day that was graced by a host of dignitaries.

The Assarain Classic ended with its tradition of raffling off a Hublot watch which was won by Ahmed Al zakwani.

Commenting upon the success of the event, Ibrahim al Wahaibi, Director of Assarain Group of Companies,

said: "I would like to congratulate all the winners in the respective categories and would like to thank all the participants. With the success of the 2024 event, we are committed to making the Assarain Golf Classic Tournament bigger and better in the coming years while maintaining our strong professional standards of hosting one of the oldest golf tournaments in the Sultanate of Oman."

The Assarain Classic is also co-sponsored by Mistal and The Bodyshop.

2024 Assarain Golf Classic Results:

Men's Gross: 1. Ahmed al Wahaibi (72+74) 146 Gross, 2. Azaan al Rumhi (75+74) 149 Gross, 3. Ruwan Jayasinghe (76+80) 156 Gross, Men's Net: 1. Majid al Toki (71+69) 140 Net, 2. Ahmed Nur (72+71) 143 Net C/B, 3. Ali Hameed (74+69) 143 Net

Ladies: Gross: 1. Emma Merritt (85+91) 176 Gross, 2. Jameela Daud (96+98) 194, Net: 1. Venus Mangadlao (81+69) 150 Net, 2. Natalie Segers (81+79) 160 Net

Junior Under 18: Gross: Adam al Barwani (86+77) 163 Gross, Net: Faris al Busaidi (71+75) 146 Net

Junior Under 13: Gross: Dineth Jayasinghe (87+85) 172 Gross, Net: Taimur al Busaidi (76+72) 148 Net

Distance On Course

Features: Day 1: NTP 2nd Hole: Suhail al Riyami, NTP 5th Hole: Muhammad Kusuma, NTP 12th

Hole: Vishal Dhawan, NTP 15th Hole: Ahmed al Wahaibi, 2nd Best Shot 18th Hole: Ali Hameed, Day 2: NTP 2nd Hole: Raashid Ali, NTP 5th Hole: Ahmed al Balushi, NTP 12th

Hole: Faisal al Adawi, NTP 15th Hole: Azaan al Rumhi, 2nd Best Shot 18th Hole: Hari Sudono, Day 1 Best Net

- Amjad al Toki 68 Net, Day 2 Best Net - Masoud al Barwani 68 Net, Day 1 Best Gross - Ahmed al Wahaibi 72 Gross, Day 2 Best Gross - Azzan al Rumhi 74 Gross.

'Fanad', 'Al Shahamah' grab Al Bashayer Cups, 'Hamlool' wins rifle



WALEED AL JAHWARI
ADAM, FEB 14

'Fanad' owned by the Royal Camel Corps and 'Al Shahamah' owned by Said al Harbi claimed Al Bashayer Cups while 'Hamlool' owned by Hamed al Wahibi snatched the Al Bashayer rifle in the seventh edition of annual Al Bashayer Camel Festival on Wednesday, which will continue until February 17.

The race was held at Al Bashayer Square in the Wilayat of Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The camel festival was organised with the support of His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan. The sixth day of competitions was participated by the owners and racers from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and GCC countries.

The Tuesday competitions were allocated for the 'Yathaa' category, 4 years old, for a 6 km race competing in 15 rounds. Four main races were in the afternoon, the winners took home cars, cups, rifles and the top 10 camels claimed cash prizes. Eleven races were with



cash prizes for the top 10.

'Fanad' owned by Royal Camel Corps snatched the opening round cup and a car, coached by Hamed bin Salim al Jdeali. 'Al Shahamah' owned by Saeed bin Jaber al Harbi claimed the second Cup and a car. 'Hamlool' owned by Hamed bin Shutayet al Wahibi snatched the Al Bashayer rifle and car. 'Hamloolah' owned by Hamed bin Shutayet al Wahibi won the fourth car.

'Thann' finished first in the fifth round, owned by Sulaym bin Salim al Ghalani. 'Khaterah' was the champion in the sixth round, owned by Humaid bin Mohammed al Jenabi. 'Ghazi' snatched the seventh round honours, owned by Mahfoodh bin Khamis al Jenabi.

'Muktharah' grabbed the title of eighth round, owned by Ali bin Abdulah al Balushi. 'Al Fares' won the ninth round, owned by Ali bin Said al

Hashmi. 'Noof' finished first in the 10th round, owned by Talib bin Ali al Muharbi.

In the 11th round, 'Mayasah' was on top, owned by Khaseb bin Khalifa al Musafri from the UAE. The 12th round was won by 'Shaheen' owned by Humaid bin Said al Daree.

The 13th round was won by 'Murtheyah' owned by Awadh bin Ali al Balushi, while 'Shawaheen' owned by Mohammed al Sharqi al Wahibi topped the 14th round and the 15th and concluding race was claimed by 'Al Tayer' owned by Humaid bin Ahmed al Qanubi.

Chief guest Shaikh Hilal bin Saeed bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, honoured the third day's winners.

The fourth day's competitions on Thursday will include three rounds for 'Thanaya' category, 5 years old, for a distance of 8 km. Four races are allocated for the 'Al Hawl' category, 6 years and above. Both categories will have cash prizes for the top 10. The afternoon competitions will be for human riders, two races will be for 1,500 metres and the main race will be for 12 km. The winner will receive a SUV car and cash prizes for the top 10.

Team Land Cruiser Auto Body excels at 2024 Dakar Rally

MUSCAT: Team Land Cruiser Auto Body (TLC) has secured their 11th consecutive Production Car category victory at the 2024 Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia. These unprecedented results are thanks to the performance of Akira Miura and co-driver Mayeul Barbet, who took first place in their No 500 Land Cruiser 300 GR Sport, with Ronald Basso and Jean-Michel Polato taking second in the No 501 Land Cruiser 300 GR Sport.

The Dakar Rally, unfolding over Saudi Arabia for the fifth time, covered 7,891km from AlUla to Yanbu along the Red Sea Coast. The route included 4,727km of timed specials, guiding 778 competitors through the diverse landscapes of Saudi Arabia. The 2024 edition introduced a new stage, the '48H Chrono Stage', pushing participants' endurance to the limit across two consecutive days of driving to finish the stage.

The rally's final stage was held on a challenging 174 km loop course in Yanbu, marking the conclusion of the 15-day event. The stage, characterised by sandy terrain and hidden obstacles, demanded careful driving.

Akio Toyoda, TGR Chairman, also known as Morizo, commented: "To everyone at Team Land Cruiser Auto Body, congratulations on winning the Production Car category for the 11th consecutive year! I think car No 500 achieved victory thanks to three people: driver Akira Miura alongside two navigators, Mayuel Barbe and the late Laurent Lichtleuchter, who was always watching over them. I'm really happy that car No 500 was able to cross the finish line with the best result. Thank you for your continued support in "making-ever better Land Cruisers!"

The Land Cruiser 300, which



marked its debut participation in Dakar Rally in last year's edition with high driving performance and a one-two finish, managed to overcome previous speed-related challenges this time around with improvements in the engine air intake system, rear suspension, and enhanced tires. This allowed TLC to reaffirm its dominance in the Production Car category

and add another chapter to its illustrious legacy.

This edition of the Dakar Rally also saw Toyota take part in the Dakar Future Programme's Mission 1000. This initiative encourages automakers to develop hydrogen engines, electric or biofuel hybrids, and other cutting-edge carbon-neutral powertrain technologies. 10 vehicles were

selected to traverse a 1000 km section that allowed participants to pinpoint areas for further technical development. It also provided a unique opportunity for Toyota to put its hydrogen engine-powered HySE-X1 to the test.

The vehicle was developed by the Hydrogen Small mobility & Engine technology (HySE) research association, a collaborative effort between Toyota and four other Japanese automotive and motorcycle manufacturers. It is based on a chassis by Belgian partner Overdrive Racing, with a modified layout to accommodate a hydrogen fuel tank and fuel supply system. Its participation in Dakar Rally furthers Toyota's carbon-neutrality efforts and promotes global awareness around the potential of compact hydrogen mobility.

Over the years, Toyota has

been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nurburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars.

Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.

AL HARTHY CLAIMS PODIUM SPOT IN BRUISING ABU DHABI ALMS FINALE



Ahmad al Harthy during the race in Abu Dhabi.

- Pre-event points leader Al Harthy just misses ALMS title at Yas Marina
- Omani stars in qualifying to claim dominant double pole for Rd 4&5
- Race one damage and retirement takes LMP2 battle down to wire
- Newly built replacement car not quite at the races in Rd 5 finale

ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina Circuit brought a frustrating end to an otherwise sparkling Asian Le Mans Series campaign for Ahmad al Harthy over the weekend, February 10/11, with the Omani and 99 Racing team-mate Louis Deletraz concluding the five-round season third in the LMP2 title battle.

Going into the final event of the campaign leading the standings

by 20 points, Al Harthy got things off to a perfect start in the No 99 Oreca 07-Gibson LMP2 car by dominating qualifying, 0.8 seconds faster than anyone, securing a memorable double pole position for rounds four and five.

Race one was nothing short of luckless, with surprising lap one contact spinning Al Harthy out of the lead. Mounting a rousing recovery, more dramas then undid the Omani's stirring drive and heavy damage sustained during an incident behind the Safety Car led to a devastating retirement.

Following incredible work by 99 Racing overnight and throughout Sunday morning, and with thanks to the AF Corse team from whom a new Oreca tub was acquired, Al Harthy lined-up on pole position for round five – he and Deletraz now three points adrift in the title battle.

Even though having to serve a debatable drive-through penalty early on, ordered by officials as a result of the race-ending incident the day prior, Al Harthy performed strongly in the opening stint. In the end, though, the car couldn't deliver the performance required and Al Harthy, Deletraz and Filipe Albuquerque – standing in for the unwell Nikita Mazepin – finished in 11th position.

“What an unbelievable turn of events this weekend,” said a shocked Al Harthy, “After qualifying, where I was so happy with the car and my performance, we really were in a strong position and in the perfect place to try and maximise our potential. What happened in the two races was quite incredible, but we still end the season P3 in the championship and with a couple of wins as well.”

TOUGH CONCLUSION

Having performed so faultlessly in qualifying on Saturday morning, Al Harthy relished the opening race later in the day and the team had a genuine chance of wrapping-up the ALMS title with one round to spare. Unfortunately, this was where the weekend's fortunes changed dramatically.

Starting the four-hour encounter well, the Omani led away nicely but into Turn 12 he was tagged by the car of Salih Yoluc and pitched off track. Plummeting down the order as the entire field swept by, the 99 Racing entry rejoined stone last. Producing a superb recovery drive, Al Harthy stormed back through sensationally and was sixth in LMP2 within just 20 minutes of action.

The momentum was impacted by an unlucky penalty, but Al

Harthy was undaunted and reeled off stunning laps to climb into fourth before his first scheduled stop. Rejoining 13th in LMP2, he climbed back up to fifth with 90 minutes elapsed. Then everything went awry under a Safety Car period.

As the train headed into Turn One, a GT car braked unnecessarily heavily which caused a concertina effect and led to the No 91 Porsche spinning in avoidance, with Al Harthy unable to avoid. Causing immense damage, retirement was instantaneous.

It was soon determined the car was beyond repair at the track but, after acquiring a replacement tub from AF Corse, the 99 Racing crew worked flat-out throughout the night and during Sunday morning to get a car ready for the erstwhile leaders.

Adding salt to the wound,

though, pole-starter Al Harthy was ordered he would have to serve a stop-go penalty early in the race.

Again leading away from pole as he had the day before, the Omani put together an excellent first lap in an unfamiliar and untested car before the Safety Car was deployed due to multiple collisions.

“The guys at the team worked so, so hard this weekend and the effort everyone put in overnight on Saturday to make sure we could even get onto the grid for Sunday's race was amazing,” reflected Al Harthy, “Huge thank you to everyone and, of course, to Louis, Filipe and Nikita who have been great to work with. Abu Dhabi wasn't the weekend we wanted, to say the least, but we can still be proud of all we've achieved in the ALMS.”

Al Rawahi, Al Hmoud face first ever JWRC test in Sweden

SWEDEN: The Oman Rally Team duo of Abdullah al Rawahi and Ata al Hmoud are set to take part in this year's five-round FIA Junior World Rally Championship (JWRC) and the opening round sees them heading to Scandinavia for this weekend's world-famous Rally Sweden.

The only traditional snow rally in the WRC calendar moved north to the city of Umeå in 2022 and the crew will tackle 18 special stages in a traditional winter wonderland with snow-covered stages and the use of studded tyres a necessity.

Drivers traditionally lean their cars against the snow banks to obtain the best line through the fast-flowing forest stages. The tyres provide remarkable grip but drivers must adjust their driving style and braking points accordingly in the sub-zero temperatures.

Al Rawahi said: “Sweden is a new challenge for us, snow. We actually had a test day in Norway last week. It went really well. Obviously, it is new terrain. Our aim is to do our best in this



Abdullah al Rawahi and Ata al Hmoud are set to tackle the 2025 JWRC.

rally. There is going to be very challenging competition in the JWRC. We are aiming to finish all the rallies to gain experience. If we do an amazing result, then that is a bonus. The first year is about learning the stages and learning the car. I think we will be quite comfortable. I am very excited to be honest to be racing in the World Rally Championship. We will gain so much experience. We are ready...”

Co-driver Al-Hmoud said: “It is fantastic that Abdullah is

participating in this category. It is good for him to go outside the Middle East to compete with others and to see new stages. It is an excellent step for him. JWRC is also an excellent opportunity to compete against other young drivers with similar or even more experience.

“The most important is that everyone uses the same cars and almost the same set-ups. Everyone can improve their driving skills. The Middle East is an excellent start for him but



Al Rawahi will use an M-Sport Ford Fiesta Rally3. Last year's JWRC winner William Creighton of Ireland is pictured in Sweden.

we repeat the stages sometimes. With defined stages and the same cars will be a good thing. Driving on snow is like a dream for me to be honest. I have been in one day in Norway and it was really fantastic testing there.”

The crew finished third overall at the Qatar International Rally recently, but the snow and ice of Scandinavia will be a far cry from the deserts of northern Qatar.

Al-Hmoud added: “Several engineers and technicians in Qatar knew we were going to

Sweden and they gave us a lot of advice and comments. That really helps us. Abdullah's driving skills were excellent. The trainer in Norway was really happy with his driving. We did around 200km on the snow and we improved our times each kilometre. We are really excited to go there. We have limited access to the set-up but we are looking to have some good times...”

The JWRC has attracted 19 entries and competitors from 21 different nations. The series will

be fought out over additional events in Croatia (April 18-21), Sardinia (May 30-June 2), Finland (August 1-4) and Greece (September 5-8). Double points will be on offer at the last round in Greece for drivers who have entered at least three JWRC rounds.

The first prize is an arrive and drive package to contest four European rounds of the 2025 FIA World Rally Championship in a Ford Fiesta Rally2 car.

Two loops of three stages follow on Friday (February 16) before the day's action concludes with a second pass through the 5.16km sprint stage in Umeå. A further seven stages are planned for Saturday (February 17) with two passes through the Vännäs, Sarsjöleden and Bygdasiljum specials followed by a single run through a new stage at Umeå.

Action concludes on Sunday (February 18) morning with two passes through the 25.50km Västervik stage and a second run through the 10.08km Umeå special that acts as the event's Power Stage finale.



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Aluminium recycling can unlock major economic opportunities in Oman



Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO - Sohar Aluminium.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Oman's first Aluminium Recycling forum was held on February 14, at JW Marriott Hotel, Muscat, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority.

The forum, hosted by Sohar Aluminium and endorsed by the Environment Authority, brought together key industry stakeholders in the country in an effort to examine the latest trends, challenges and business opportunities in aluminium recycling.

Speaking at the event, Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO - Sohar Aluminium, highlighted the significance of the forum, "This forum took shape based on the idea to bring together leaders from the aluminium industry in Oman along with the Environment Authority, Waste Management representatives, recyclers, academia, and other key stakeholders to discuss the opportunities which aluminium recycling presents and ways in which these can be utilised to everyone's benefit."

He added, "Aluminium is inherently circular. It was circular long before we started talking about 'being circular. Globally, more than 30 million tonnes of aluminium scrap are recycled every year, ensuring its status as one of the most recycled materials on the planet.

Process improvements and break through innovations are increasing the availability of scrap, making recycling easier and more viable. It is time that we in Oman make the most of this opportunity that has environmental and economic benefits.

According to the CEO, aluminium scrap recycling, can offer several environmental and

economic benefits including the conservation of natural resources, energy savings, reduced greenhouse emissions, and economic opportunities.

He shared that the production of recycled aluminium uses 95% less energy than producing aluminium from raw materials, and generates 97 per cent less greenhouse emissions.

Additionally, he highlighted some of main economic opportunities that can be created from the industry. "Recycling aluminium scrap creates economic opportunities.

The recycling industry generates jobs in collection, sorting, processing, and manufacturing, and contributing to local economies. Additionally, it can also benefit businesses by reducing production costs and reliance on raw materials," he stated.

The Director of the Environment Department in Al Batinah North Governorate, Nizar bin Salim al Araiimi, emphasised the potential economic benefits of recycling in his keynote address.

"Adopting a circular economy directly contributes to creating new job opportunities in various recycling sectors and enabling the private sector," he said.

"Transitioning to a circular economy is a top priority both nationally and internationally, aiming to reduce waste, energy consumption, and raw material usage.

Oman's Vision 2040 focuses on activating this type of economy in the near future to preserve resource value, maximise added value to the national economy, create job opportunities, address health and environmental issues, reduce pollution, and promote effective utilisation of natural resources in support of the national economy."

TURN TO PAGE 15

RO 177 million worth of projects inaugurated at Duqm SEZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 14

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) celebrated the inauguration of the marine fishing port, the Freight Services and Customs Terminal, and the main roads No. 1 and 5 at Duqm Port. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, in the presence of a number of public and private sectors officials.

In opening remarks, Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, acting CEO of SEZAD, said: "With the completion of the Marine Fishing Port, the Shipping and Customs Services Station, and the main highways at Duqm Port, the primary and fundamental infrastructure system in SEZAD is completed.

He explained that the total cost of the three new projects amounted to about RO 177 million."

"SEZAD represents a model of economic integration," Akaak continued, "as it includes several economic and service development zones: a fishing port, a multipurpose port, a dry dock for ship repair and development, multiuse areas for tourism, industry, and logistics,



Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, leading other dignitaries at the opening of three projects at Duqm SEZ.

and a modern residential city. All of these are served by a road transport network that connects Duqm to the various zones in Oman."

Fisheries hub

The Duqm Fisheries Port - the largest commercial fishing port in Oman - covers 7.5 square kilometres and is built to accommodate the largest

international commercial fishing vessels.

Dredged to a depth of 10 meters, itt is made up of two 3.3 km long breakwaters and 1.3 km of permanent berths. Six floating berths and a dedicated quay for Coast Guard police boats have been made available at well. Fishery factories, fish sales outlets, artisanal and commercial

fishing vessel servicing areas, and a fisherman's training centre are all housed within SEZAD's fishing port.

To facilitate fish transport vehicles, a network of paved roads has also been built. Both the fish and food industries complex and the fishing port span 7.8 and 7.5 km2, respectively.

TURN TO P16

Transformation plan helps Oman Air cut losses by 25% in 2023

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

National carrier Oman Air achieved a significant 25% reduction in losses during 2023, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, and Chairman of Oman Air, announced here on Wednesday.

In a media briefing, Al Maawali presented the latest developments in Oman Air's transformation plan, emphasising substantial revenue growth and improved financial performance.

He attributed these accomplishments to the comprehensive four-year transformation plan, guided by a new board of directors featuring senior international aviation consultants with local expertise.

Over the past six months, the focus has been on key elements of the transformation plan, the



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali presented the latest developments in Oman Air's transformation plan.

Minister said.

In the commercial sector, adjustments were made to address imbalances between capacity and demand in the company's network of destinations.

This led to decisions to "right-size" the fleet, including temporary suspensions of four destinations - Islamabad, Lahore, Colombo, and Chittagong. Simultaneously, a new destination, Sialkot in Punjab, Pakistan, was introduced.

Additionally, seasonal flights to Zurich and Malé during

winter and to Trabzon during summer were implemented. These strategic changes, while enhancing the network and fleet, also necessitate decisions on streamlining executive and administrative aspects to align with the new organisational structure, he said.

During the briefing, Al Maawali also highlighted that these measures are part of a broader organisational restructuring process, aiming to evaluate and realign current capabilities with

evolving market requirements.

This involves preparing qualified personnel for leadership roles within Oman Air, the aviation system, or other government and private entities in Oman. Expressing gratitude to the Oman Air Board of Directors, the Transformation Office, employees, and all contributors, the Minister acknowledged their significant role in the success of national efforts to enhance and sustain financial gains.

Initiated in August 2023, Oman Air's comprehensive restructuring programme centres around four main pillars: financial sustainability, corporate governance, business aspects, and human capital.

Oman Air actively pursues these strategic initiatives to position itself competitively in the global travel market while adapting to technological advancements and operational innovations, Al Maawali added.

Mazoon Dairy, Majaan Traders to expand export footprint in Tanzania and Zanzibar

MUSCAT: Mazoon Dairy, Oman's flagship dairy company, and Majaan Traders, a prominent business entity in the Republic of Tanzania, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to explore exciting possibilities for business collaboration in the distribution and co-packing of dairy and juice products in Tanzania and Zanzibar.

This significant milestone was celebrated at a signing ceremony held in the presence of Omani Ambassador in Tanzania, Saud bin Hilal al Shithani.

The collaboration marks a strategic move by Mazoon Dairy to expand its market presence and contribute to the economic growth of the Sultanate of Oman.

The partnership also underscores the commitment to fostering strong bilateral ties between Oman and Africa, and specifically the Republic of Tanzania.

It reflects the shared vision of Mazoon Dairy and Majaan Traders to capitalise on emerging

opportunities in new markets while strengthening the long-standing friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tanzania.

Al Shithani expressed his pleasure to attend the event stating that "I am delighted to witness this collaboration between Mazoon Dairy and Majaan Traders, which exemplifies the excellent relations between Oman and Tanzania.

This partnership not only signifies the mutual interests in enhancing economic ties but also contributes to the broader goal of promoting trade exchange between Oman and Africa.

I extend my congratulations to both entities and look forward to the positive impact of this collaboration."

Salma al Hashmi, Mazoon Dairy's Board Director, commented on the new venture, stating, "This MOU marks a significant milestone for Mazoon Dairy as we lay the foundation for our export initiatives.

We are profoundly thankful



The signing ceremony was held in the presence of Omani Ambassador in Tanzania, Saud bin Hilal al Shithani.

to Saud Bin Hilal Al Shithani for his pivotal support, which has not only fostered our entry into the African market but has also been instrumental in a key balance of import and export in the dairy

sector.

This is just the beginning of Mazoon Dairy's journey towards increasing our international footprint and creating brand awareness in new markets. We

are eager to see Mazoon Dairy products being welcomed into homes in Tanzania and Zanzibar, and we look forward to exploring other key export markets in the future."

Bank Muscat recognised as best financing institution by North Batinah Award for Entrepreneurship

MUSCAT: In recognition of its pioneering and remarkable role in supporting the SME sector, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has recently been bestowed the North Batinah Award for Entrepreneurship in the award's 2023 first edition.

The bank has won the award for the categories "The Best Financing Service Provider" and "The Best Banking Institution from the Public Perspective" during a monumental award ceremony organised by Al Batinah North Governor's Office in Suhar.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri , the Minister of Economy, in the presence of a number of executives and officials from various institutions as well as a vast audience of attendees.

During the event, Ibrahim



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, the Minister of Economy.

bin Khamis al Balushi, Senior Assistant General Manager, SMEs, Bank Muscat, received the award trophy on behalf of the Bank.

In essence, Bank Muscat's recognition with the NBA in both categories came based on the public views and reviews set

forth by the award evaluation committee.

Speaking on this remarkable milestone, Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi, Senior Assistant General Manager, SMEs, Bank Muscat, stated: "I would like to express my happiness and extreme pride in the Bank's success of winning the North Batinah Award in two categories.

The first version of the North Batinah Award for Entrepreneurship can be said to be a representation of the progress and development seen in the SME sector in Al Batinah North.

Therefore, this recognition signifies a testament of the Bank's contribution to the entire sector in the country through the wide range of banking services and facilities offered to the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The Bank is constantly

committed to financial inclusion and the development of the SMEs and entrepreneurs, aiming to go beyond banking and become a major driver of sustainable growth in the country.

In line with Oman vision 2040, the SME sector is a wide field where potential opportunities can be utilised to foster a market of economic competitiveness.

Hence, the Bank will uphold its commitment to being a contributory and supportive partner for the success of various businesses and economic sectors."

Ibrahim al Balushi added: "The event also constitutes an instrumental initiative to recognise the roles and achievements of many other institutions and corporates that have contributed to the growth of commercial sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

Liva Insurance gold sponsor for Oman Ominvest Masters 2024

MUSCAT: Driven by its commitments to actively contribute to the nation's socio-economic development, Liva Insurance has proudly announced its sponsorship for the highly anticipated Oman Ominvest Masters 2024 event as a gold sponsor.

Organised by Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), the event is an ideal opportunity to promote the Sultanate of Oman as an international sporting destination on the global map.

The premier golf tournament is scheduled to be held from 16th to 17th of February at LA VIE Club, which is a brand new mixed-use development project located in the heart of Muscat.

The club has 18-hole golf courses, and this tournament marks its first major competition.

The event aims to attract golfing amateurs from across the GCC with a unique opportunity to compete for a coveted spot in the International Series that will be held at Al Mouj Golf Club from February 21 to 24.

Liva's sponsorship of this eminent event is a testament to its commitment to attracting the best of the international arena and providing it in the Sultanate of Oman.

The company has lent its support to several initiatives aimed at reinforcing Oman's position on the world map through sponsorship and financial backing.

These efforts are indicative of its unwavering dedication to the country's progress and development.

Speaking about this sponsorship, Hanaa al Hinai, CEO of Liva Insurance Oman commented: "Stemming from our firm belief in the importance of enriching the local communities, we proactively endeavour to support initiatives and activities that serve the national agenda of the country.

‘Happy Life Geely Drive’ test drive event held in Suhar

MUSCAT: On February 2, the highly anticipated Geely test drive event "Happy Life Geely Drive" took place at Lulu Hypermarket in Suhar, creating excitement amongst the audience.

The event featured a grand display of all the Geely car models, aiming to showcase the brand's elegance, innovation, and superior performance.

The event, organised with utmost care, aimed to engage the audience further by offering various interactive activities.

Face painting and henna artists were available throughout the event, providing attendees with captivating designs and transforming their experience into an immersive one.

With an overwhelming response from the attendees, Geely test drive event "Happy Life Geely

Drive" in Suhar was undoubtedly one of the great events. The event left the audience fascinated by the cutting-edge features and sleek designs of the Geely car models, and captivated by the smooth execution of the event itself.

Building on this success, Geely is thrilled to announce the continuation of the roadshow in various locations across Oman.

The next event will be held at Lulu Hypermarket in Sur, Oman on February 15 and 16.

Attendees will once again have the opportunity to explore Geely's impressive car lineup and experience the brand's commitment to excellence firsthand.

As the roadshow progresses, Geely will be making stops at Lulu Hypermarket in Nizwa, Oman on February 22 and 23, at Barka

on February 29 and March 1 at Grand Centre Mall, and finally, in Salalah, on March 7 - 8 at Lulu Hypermarket.

The roadshow events in each location will start from 5 pm onwards, allowing attendees to indulge in a remarkable automotive experience.

Geely understands the importance of connecting with the local community and is committed to bringing its exceptional car models directly to the people.

The roadshow events are a testament to this dedication, offering Oman residents the chance to explore the advanced features, luxurious interiors, and advanced technology that Geely has to offer.

Geely invites all car enthusiasts and residents of Oman to attend



these upcoming events and witness the epitome of automotive brilliance.

Make sure to mark your calendars for the Geely test drive event "Happy Life Geely Drive"

happening near you and get ready to embark on an unforgettable journey with Geely.



Musandam Power taps Dolphin Network to offset gas supply shortfalls

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, FEB 14

Musandam Power, which owns and operates the sole gas-fired Independent Power Project in Musandam Governorate, says it can now fall back on gas supply from the regional Dolphin network whenever supplies from the nearby Musandam Gas Plant runs short.

This backup arrangement, reached with Dolphin Gas following the intervention of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, has helped Musandam Power to ease its dependence on expensive and emission-intensive diesel to power its plant, according to a top official of the Omani power generator.

"Gas available from the Musandam Gas Plant (MGP) is not fully sufficient to cater to Musandam IPP requirements," said Mohammed al Ruwaidhi, Chairman – Musandam Power.

"The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, through OQ, arranged to supply Dolphin Gas to compensate for the gas shortage from MGP.

"Due to this additional gas availability, dependency on diesel



Musandam Power Plant co-located with the Musandam Gas Plant in the Wilayat of Bukha.

is significantly reduced and the plant in future months is expected to continue to operate mostly on gas fuel," he stated in the company's newly published Annual Report for 2023.

Publicly traded Musandam Power — majority-owned by Oman's integrated energy group OQ — operates a 120 MW capacity power plant at Tibat in the Wilayat of Bukha. Natural gas as feedstock for the plant is supplied by the Musandam Gas Plant, also owned by OQ Group.

The power plant's dual fuel

capability, however, enables Musandam Power to also operate on diesel in the event of gas supply contingencies.

Welcoming the Ministry's intervention in facilitating the Dolphin fallback arrangement, the Chairman added: "In 2024, the company is optimistic about the challenges related to natural gas availability, a significant contrast from the issues faced up until 2022. Collaborative efforts with the government, which have proven effective, contributed to a more stable situation."

Those "issues" stem from insufficient gas supplies from the Musandam Gas Plant, the result of declining reservoirs in the offshore fields of Block 8 operated by a subsidiary of OQ Upstream.

To "counteract" the gas shortage from the Musandam Gas Plant, the Ministry – through OQ – arranged for Dolphin Gas supply in November 2022, said Al Ruwaidhi.

"This strategic initiative not only addressed the immediate challenge, but also resulted in a notable reduction in diesel dependency. During the year 2023, the plant predominantly operated with 94 per cent on gas fuel, with only 6 per cent utilising diesel.

"The company expects this positive trend to persist in 2024, despite occasional reliance on diesel prompted by inconsistent gas supply, the company maintains a high level of confidence in the plant's reliability," he added.

Under a 25-year gas sales agreement signed in 2005, the multinational Dolphin Energy network supplies 200 million standard cubic feet (MMscfd) of Qatari natural gas to Oman via a subsea pipeline.

Aluminium recycling can unlock major economic opportunities in Oman



Nizar bin Salem al Arai, Director of the Environment Department at the Environment Authority in Al Batinah North Governorate.

FROM PAGE 13

According to Marlen Bertram, Director of Scenarios and Forecast at the International Aluminium Institute, one-third of global aluminium production is the result recycling aluminium scraps.

In her keynote address, she shared that the Middle East has experienced notable growth in primary aluminium production over the last ten years, however scrap recycling is still at its infancy. This can be due to the export of scrap materials, as well as the composition of scrap aluminium in the region, which is mostly post-consumer scrap that has reached the end of its life cycle and is often mixed with other alloy elements. Consequently, investment is required in better sorting technologies, she noted.

Similarly, Karima al Raisi, acting Senior Manager of Material Recovery at Oman Environment Services Holding (be'ah), shared that the restriction of aluminium export is one of the key enablers of enhancing the local aluminium recycling industry.

During her presentation, she explained that the ban of exporting scrap aluminium is necessary to achieve enough feedstock at local facilities. This in turn would reduce reliance on the import of scrap aluminium.

She added that other enablers of the industry will include the creation of a digitised online platform for the buying, selling and transporting of aluminium scrap and digital monitoring.

According to the International Aluminium Institute, the GCC currently produces 11 tonnes of green house emissions for every tonne of aluminium production. The adoption of aluminium recycling can drop this figure to 0.6 tonnes of CO₂e, representing a 95-per cent reduction.

RO 177 million worth of projects inaugurated at Duqm SEZ



The Duqm Fisheries Port is the largest commercial fishing port in Oman.

FROM PAGE 13

Both are important regional economic drivers that will help draw both domestic and foreign companies with a focus on fishing and related industries.

Environmentally friendly green energy initiatives are something that the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) is also looking to accommodate at the Duqm fishing port.

The Duqm Fisheries Port will host commercial facilities for Marsa Al Duqm Investment Company, which is a consortium led by a number of Oman Investment Authority companies, represented by Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), Asyad Ports, Al Wusta Fisheries Industries Company and Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj).

The consortium also includes the French Port of Loriente, which is one of the largest fishing ports in Europe.

Cargo and Customs Services Terminal

The Customs Services Terminal is one of several projects undertaken as part of the third package of works at the Port of Duqm. It consists of buildings designated for the Port of Duqm Company.

The station consists of a one-

stop-shop building, buildings for truck registration, transit permits, and those designated for the Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Besides hosting a medical clinic affiliated with the Ministry of Health, the station also has customs gates for the movement of vehicles into and out of the port, management of the import and export procedures, and utility facilities such power plants, sewage stations, and firefighting water tanks.

New main roads at Duqm Port

Billed as vital projects, roads 1 and 2 connect the Port of Duqm area with the refinery, city centre and other strategic projects implemented in the Heavy and Medium Industries Zones.

Road 1 connects the port and the Dry Dock with National Road 32, which facilitates access to the port projects for those coming from the centre of Duqm and from the Governorate of Muscat via the Muscat–Sinaw– Duqm road.

Thus, the road is the third thoroughfare leading to the Port of Duqm and the dry dock, while road 5 stretches from the existing crossroads connecting both roads 1 and 6 and ends at the Duqm Port Bulk Liquid Berth.

Oman Post hosts strategic workshop to drive e-commerce

MUSCAT: In a significant step towards enhancing e-commerce in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Oman Post, the national postal operator, hosted a workshop on activating the express delivery initiative for e-commerce clients of the postal operators in the GCC.

This event represented a concerted effort to tackle the logistical challenges confronting the rapidly expanding

e-commerce sector in the region.

The workshop gathered postal operators from across the GCC to consider cooperative strategies for improving e-commerce logistics and enhancing and speeding up delivery services throughout the region. Aimed at providing a consistent and reliable delivery experience, this concept seeks to meet the growing demands of the e-commerce sector.

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, FEB 14

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Air, during a media meeting on Wednesday, emphasised the fair deployment of required human resources based on approved structural vacancies.

The surplus workforce will be accommodated in the talent pool at the company, where their capabilities and skills will be developed to enable them to take on new roles within Oman Air, the aviation system, and other government and private entities in the Sultanate of Oman to benefit from their services and expertise.

He stated that an announcement will soon be made about the appointment of a new CEO with over 30 years of experience in international aviation and comprehensive corporate transformation programmes.

Concurrently, a comprehensive assessment of remaining executive and



All employees will have a fair opportunity to apply for vacancies in the new organisational structure in Oman Air.

administrative positions is being conducted, ensuring that all employees have a fair opportunity to apply for vacancies in the new organisational structure.

Al Maawali stressed that the company places great importance on Omani cadres, having signed employment contracts for 21 Omani pilots out of 34 indirectly contracted pilots.

He confirmed that the company is working to directly attract more travellers to Muscat in collaboration with

the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. An agreement was signed with a global company to attract 30,000 tourists to the Sultanate of Oman by 2024.

These important measures are part of a broader organisational restructuring process aimed at assessing current capabilities and aligning them with the requirements of the stage and the market. This necessitates the preparation of qualified personnel to lead this strategic transformation to compete in

the global travel market and deal with its variables.

Moreover, the Minister added that Oman Air is seeking to develop its digital operations as one of the projects it is working on through updating its digital platforms, website, and improving the user experience by introducing modern features that keep pace with technological developments and innovation for reservations, payment options, virtual reality, navigation system, and other services.

Is human trafficking a form of slavery?

Numerous sources highlight human trafficking as a contemporary manifestation of slavery, involving the illicit transportation of individuals. Global estimates suggest that approximately 800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders yearly, originating from East Asian and African nations to Western countries, America, the Gulf region, and beyond. Many are subjected to exploitation through prostitution, forced labour, domestic servitude, and other means.

Notably, statistics indicate that 71% of those enslaved are



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

women and girls. Perpetrators employ methods of oppression, fear, violence, and intimidation against victims and their families, rendering human trafficking the third most profitable criminal enterprise globally, trailing only drug and weapons trafficking.

The United Nations approximates that one million individuals are trafficked globally, with between 20,000 and 50,000 trafficked to the United States annually, a significant destination for sex trafficking victims.

Recognising the gravity of this issue, numerous nations, including the Sultanate of Oman, are actively engaged in efforts to raise awareness and prevent

inadvertent involvement, thereby averting legal repercussions.

Various authorities, such as the Foreign Ministry, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the General Union of Workers of Oman, the Public Prosecution, human rights organisations, and other concerned entities, coordinate informative sessions and seminars on human trafficking, its modalities, and strategies for combating it.

The Sultanate of Oman, through its National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, endeavours to devise action plans and conduct educational and training initiatives to bolster the capacity of law enforcement personnel. It diligently monitors

domestic and international developments related to human trafficking and imposes penalties on offenders pursuant to the Anti-Human Trafficking Law of 2008, encompassing imprisonment or financial sanctions as appropriate.

Human traffickers employ various methods, exploiting modern communication channels, employment agencies, media platforms, and local networks to ensnare victims.

Profits from such operations are distributed among intermediaries, transportation and employment agencies, and other accomplices involved in facilitating illicit activities, visa issuance, and travel logistics.

Victims are often supplied

with fraudulent documentation and coerced into the sex trade, vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, sometimes to settle incurred immigration debts.

Globalisation serves as a catalyst for this issue, as it fosters the movement of migrants into lucrative labour markets, enabling criminal organisations to expand their operations and establish transnational networks. Consequently, individuals, regardless of age or gender, are ensnared into sexual servitude.

The scourge of human trafficking exacts economic, social, and psychological tolls, necessitating concerted efforts from society and institutions to combat it effectively.

Noteworthy advancement in Sultanate of Oman’s entrepreneurial landscape



SALIM AL RIYAMI
salimnasser841@gmail.com

The author is a guest contributor

A MILESTONE
ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH
STRATEGIC
COLLABORATION
BETWEEN
THE SME DEVELOPMENT
AUTHORITY
AND
NIZWA UNIVERSITY

The Global Entrepreneurship Report for 2023/2024 witnessed the participation of 49 national teams from different countries. This significant event took place in Casablanca, Morocco, on February 13, 2024.

The Entrepreneurship Observatory, established in 1999 through a collaborative research effort between Babson College and London Business School, stands as a premier global entity dedicated to the detailed measurement and monitoring of entrepreneurial activities worldwide.

The Sultanate of Oman marked its presence in this esteemed organisation through representation by the SME Development Authority, in partnership with Nizwa University.

This collaboration underscores Oman’s commitment to fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurial success.

A noteworthy advancement in Oman’s entrepreneurial landscape is evident from the Global Observatory’s findings.

Oman’s index in the national framework for entrepreneurship saw an increase from 4.2 in 2022 to 5.4 in 2023, elevating its ranking from 38th to 11th among the 49 participating countries.

This improvement reflects a broader enhancement across various national indicators.

Specifically, entrepreneurial education at primary and secondary levels improved from 3.1 in 2022 to 5 in 2023.

Similarly, the research and development index rose from 3 to 4.7 within the same period, alongside significant advancements in financing, support programmes, and government policy indicators.

Oman has also been recognised for its notable progress in

establishing new and advanced enterprises.

Indicators reveal that two out of three individuals perceive promising opportunities for initiating their ventures, while seven out of ten believe they possess the requisite skills and capabilities to embark on their entrepreneurial journey.

Moreover, the data indicates a gender-balanced entrepreneurial spirit, with three men for every two women embarking on new projects.

This trend highlights the government’s effective strategies in promoting entrepreneurship among both men and women.

However, the year also saw a slight decline in advanced-stage projects, with a decrease to a rate of 3.2%, contrasted with a rise in the number of new startups to 10.6%.

The Ministry of Labour’s wage support programme has contributed to a positive shift, promising an increase in job creation by SMEs enterprises, with an expectation of at least six jobs per enterprise over the next five years.

Innovation remains a pivotal focus, with three out of five entrepreneurs planning to integrate more digital technology within the next six months.

According to the 2023/2024 data from the Global Entrepreneurship Observatory, Oman achieved first place in entrepreneurial intentions for starting a business within the next six months.

This achievement is attributed to an enhanced cultural and educational awareness, supported by governmental policies emphasising the critical role of the entrepreneurship sector in job creation.

Additionally, Oman secured the sixteenth position in ease of starting a business on a global scale, competing with 49 countries.

US markets grapple with mysterious contradictions



FRANCESCO GUERRERA

The author is global economics editor for Breakingviews, based in London.



A trader works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange as a screen shows Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell, in New York City. — Reuters

Something is amiss in American financial markets. US stocks hit new highs last week, propelled in part by the belief the country will vanquish inflation and avoid a recession.

At the same time, though, derivatives traders are betting that the Federal Reserve will slash interest rates. That will not happen unless the central bank is seriously worried about growth. One of the two camps is destined to be wrong.

The S&P 500 Index has started 2024 with a bang, notching up new records and closing above the symbolic 5,000 mark for the first time last week. The US equity benchmark’s 5.4% advance since New Year’s Day means it has already surpassed the year-end forecasts by strategists at banks such as Morgan Stanley, JPMorgan, and Société Générale.

And this comes after US stocks crushed most other asset classes in 2023, with total returns of more than 26%.

Sceptics may grumble that this stunning ascent has been largely down to just seven technology giants – Meta Platforms, Amazon, Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Tesla and Nvidia.

The “Magnificent Seven” last year returned 76% as investors bet that they would be the main beneficiaries of a boom in artificial intelligence. The other 493 members of the S&P 500 returned just 14%, according

to Goldman Sachs analysts. So far this year, the seven are up 8%, versus 3% for the rest. But that’s all right for investors in the index funds that dominate US equities.

Besides, the S&P 500 now collectively trades at around 20 times its components’ expected earnings for 2024. That compares to an average multiple of around 16 over the past decade.

The question is whether economic fundamentals, developments in monetary policy and companies’ future earnings justify such a rally. And here’s where different markets have widely diverging views.

Investors betting on interest rates have a bleaker view of the economic trajectory. They think the Fed will cut borrowing costs aggressively by the end of the year.

Derivatives prices collected by LSEG imply an 80% probability that the Fed will lower rates four times by December, and a near-50% chance it will cut five times. Looking further out, derivatives markets are pricing in nearly 175 basis points of rate cuts between May this year and June 2025.

Since 1955, a monetary policy easing of that magnitude has only ever occurred because of a recession, according to Jim Reid at Deutsche Bank. The exception came in 1984-1985 when Fed Chair Paul Volcker reversed previous

steep rate hikes as inflation eased. This gloomy outlook is entirely missing from equity markets. In fact, Wall Street analysts forecast that earnings per share at S&P 500 companies will grow 10% this year and 13% in 2025.

Economic data also point to a “soft landing”, with inflation abating and the economy avoiding a contraction. GDP is on track to rise at an annual rate of 3.4% in the first quarter of the year, according to the Atlanta Fed, while unemployment has been below 4% for two years – the longest such stretch in more than half a century.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell will not be easing monetary policy so quickly if the economy remains resilient, not least because every Fed decision until November’s US presidential election will come under heavy scrutiny from both Democrats and Republicans. Powell recently stressed the Fed would be “prudent” in lowering rates even though inflation is converging towards its 2% target.

How to explain the discrepancy? One possibility is a glitch in the Fed funds futures market, which anticipate the central bank’s moves.

The contracts, traded on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, are used by banks and companies to hedge

interest rate risk and by speculators to bet on rate movements. As such, they are an expression of market participants’ views, not a perfect crystal ball.

Torsten Slok, chief economist at Apollo Global Management, has noted, that derivatives tend to overestimate the central bank’s willingness to cut when rates are high, and vice-versa.

And a 2002 study by the Atlanta Fed found that, before interest rates came down in 1990-1991, these markets had expected much deeper cuts than actually happened.

Even so, other asset classes also seem to be pricing in higher borrowing costs. Yields on 2-year US Treasury bonds have risen from 4.19% on Feb 1 to 4.49% on Feb 12, as strong data and Powell’s cautious words convinced traders that rates would remain high.

That matters for the equity market because bonds compete with shares for investors’ affections.

High stock valuations and rising yields have pushed the equity risk premium – the excess return that stock market investors expect over risk-free US government debt – to its lowest level since at least 2006, according to Michael Hunstad, deputy chief investment officer at Northern Trust Asset Management. — Reuters

Oman Post signs MoU with Palestine Post



MUSCAT: Oman Post, the national postal operator, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Palestine Post. The agreement was inked during the 1st Arab Postal Leaders Forum, an event that brought together leaders from the postal sector across the Arab world, fostering discussions and partnerships that are expected to shape the future of postal services

in the region. The MoU was signed by Sayyid Nasr al Busaidy, Vice-President of Postal Services, Retail and Customer Experience at Oman Post and Moath Daraghme, GD of Palestinian Post and focuses on fostering collaboration in postal and financial services, joint stamp issuance, e-commerce and the exchange of experiences in the postal services field.

ONEIC secures major contracts for Dhofar's power grid

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 14

Local engineering firm Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) has clinched two major contracts totalling RO 41.963 million. Disclosed to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), these contracts involve the construction of 132kv/33kv electricity transmission lines in Dhofar Governorate, with completion expected within 18 months.

The project entails constructing 132kv/33kv transmission lines that will interconnect with the existing 132kv infrastructure within Dhofar Governorate.

This significant endeavour aligns with the region's rapid economic growth, driven by investments in tourism, infrastructure, and renewable



Grid operator OETC has awarded a pair of contracts to ONEIC.

energy. The new lines will ensure a steady and dependable supply of electricity, supporting Dhofar's ongoing development

and prosperity. The contracts, awarded by Oman Electricity Transmission Company SAOC (OETC), a

member of the Nama Group, reinforce ONEIC's standing in Oman's power infrastructure development.

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A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

28 YEARS Experience in Oman in sales, marketing and management, Indian with DL and release. Looking for a good job change. Contact: 78501743.

HOTELS/ Resorts/ Restaurants operations/ F&B manager with 25+ years professional experience in Oman with valid driving licence. Contact: 98113944.

M.COM graduate with Oman driving licence, residing in Muscat with 1 year and 4 months work experience as Media Finance Executive in India, seeking for Accounts Assistant or other related eligible jobs. Contact: 71755901, E-mail: krishnamahesh02@gmail.com

PART time accountant 22 years in Muscat. Please contact: 78293476

INDIAN male 6 years experience in accounts/ automobile/admin. Seeking for suitable opening in any field, currently in Oman. Contact: 78988055/ 92850930, email: ullasmon8@gmail.com

ACCOUNTANT, Bcom, 7 years exp, Male/ Indian. Looking for suitable job, holding valid GCC driving license, plz contact: 77530633. Email: sayedazeem723@gmail.com

ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AMENDMENT TO THE LEGAL FORM

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

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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Golden Jewel Trading Contracting(SPC)**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1301346**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO **10,000,000** to **10,000,000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.





CULTURE

A traditional Gilles carnivalist holds an orange during the carnival in the streets of Binche. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

A man holds a tray of offerings to pray to find love on Valentine's Day at Ha Pagoda in Hanoi. — AFP

CULTURE

A performer prepares to go on stage at the Longtan lake temple fair on the fifth day of the Lunar New Year of the Dragon in Beijing. — AFP

FILM

Japanese actor Hiroeyuki Sanada attends the red carpet event for FX's "Shogun" at the Academy theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP

MUSIC

French rapper and dancer Gedeon Mundele Ngolo aka Franglish poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

art & life

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Interior design sensation shares trends to watch out for in home improvement

Interior design not only enhances aesthetics, but also functionality and comfort. Interior design sensation Kate Kerdi shares her favourite trends in 2024 and some insights as to why you should look out for them... **P20**



ART

London exhibition celebrates 'unknown artist' Yoko Ono

SHE IS THE WORLD'S MOST famous unknown artist — everyone knows her name, but no one knows what she does, John Lennon once said of the perceived disregard for his wife Yoko Ono, who turns 91 on Sunday.

From Thursday, Ono's impact on conceptual art will be on display in a retrospective exhibition at the Tate Modern in London.



The "Music of the Mind" show, which runs until September 1, explores the multi-disciplinary works of a woman more famed for being the murdered Beatle's wife than a conceptual art icon.

"This exhibition is a true celebration of

Yoko as an artist," one of the exhibition's curators, Andrew de Brun, said.

"Indeed, John Lennon was a very important collaborator for her, but we are very happy to be able to showcase her art."

- TWO HUNDRED WORKS -

Spanning seven decades, the exhibition presents a detailed exploration of Ono's artistic legacy through 200 pieces, including installations, objects, videos, photographs, sculptures and documents detailing her performances and musical compositions.

"We recognise the importance of Yoko Ono in contemporary art and culture," de Brun said of the retrospective, which the curators say is the most extensive ever done in Britain about Ono.

"By displaying some of her works, we help to showcase the significant place she occupies." We are pleased to present her work to new generations of visitors.. showing her activism, her campaigns for peace," the curator added.

Since her initial exhibitions in New York

during the 1950s, Ono has been a proponent of conceptualism — an art movement that posits the concept or idea behind an artwork is more important than the physical piece.

The exhibition examines some of the artist's most controversial works or performances, such as the video of "Cut Piece", a work she first presented in Japan and then in 1965 at Carnegie Recital Hall in New York. The exhibition appears as a vindication of the artist's epic journey, after decades of being blamed by some for the breakup of The Beatles in 1970.

- MEETING JOHN LENNON -

Ono's conceptual art installations at London's Indica Gallery in 1967 captivated Lennon.

On that occasion, a work called "Ceiling Painting" invited visitors to climb a ladder and view through a magnifying glass the word "yes" that appeared on the ceiling.

Lennon climbed the ladder and was amazed by the work, which is now being exhibited in London.

"When Hammer A Nail painting was exhibited at Indica Gallery, a person came to me and asked if it was alright to hammer a nail in the painting," Ono recalled in her text "Some Notes on the Lisson Gallery Show". "I said it was alright if he pays five shillings."

"Instead of paying five shillings, he asked if it was alright for him to hammer an imaginary nail in. That was John Lennon."

Ono and Lennon married in 1969 and remained together until his murder in New York in 1980 at the age of 40.

In their 13 years together, the couple released six albums and created experimental music recordings, short films, performances and installations.

With Lennon, the Tokyo-born artist achieved acclaim in music, a topic that the London exhibition also explores.

The couple's 1980 release "Double Fantasy", recorded before Lennon's death, won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year. "When I hear music, my body just starts to move," Ono said in an interview in 2013.

"That's just me. That's just my body. And I was like that as a child, too." — AFP

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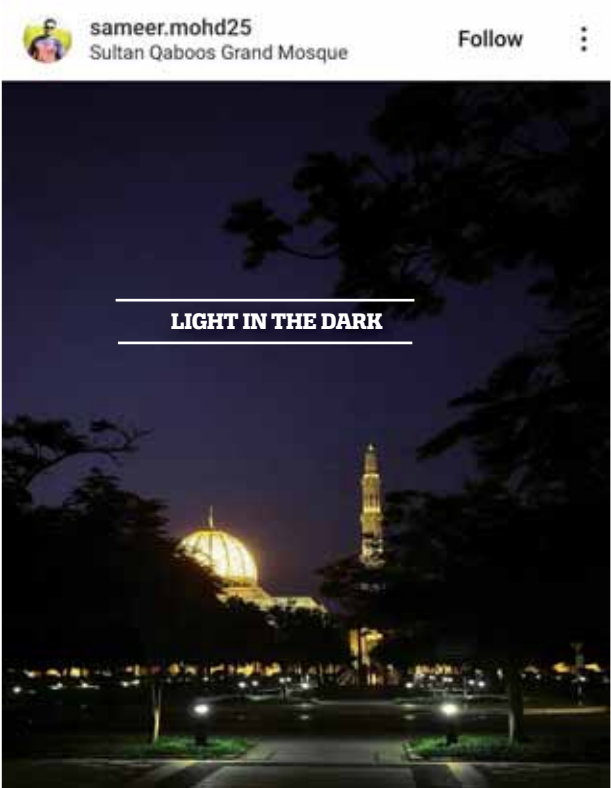
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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Art Dubai unveils 17th edition highlighting the transformative power of art

ART DUBAI, A PREMIER global art fair, is set to unveil its 17th edition at Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai, from 1 to 3 March, with previews scheduled for 28 and 29 February. The event promises a captivating array of programmes and partnerships, showcasing the transformative power of art and reinforcing its pivotal role in our ever-changing world.

Highlights of the upcoming edition include a series of newly commissioned performances focusing on themes of healing, hope, and the resilience of art during challenging times. Additionally, the conference and talks programme, which has been expanded to encompass an international scope, promises insightful discussions and thought-provoking sessions.

One of the flagship events, the Global Art Forum, curated by Commissioner Shumon Basar and Curator Nadine El-Khoury, will explore the intricate relationship between extreme weather and societal change, offering unique perspectives from renowned artists, architects, academics, and thinkers.

Furthermore, Art Dubai 2024 will introduce the inaugural 3-day Art Dubai Digital Summit, aimed at

shaping Dubai's digital art ecosystem with input from local and international experts. This initiative underscores the fair's commitment to innovation and its role in driving cultural evolution.

The A.R.M. Holding Children's Programme, now in its fourth edition, will kick off at the fair before expanding to over 100 schools and engaging more than 15,000 students across the UAE. This ambitious initiative, led by Goa-based artist Sahil Naik, aims to inspire creativity and environmental consciousness among the younger generation.

In addition to these programmes, Art Dubai 2024 will feature a diverse lineup of collaborations with local and international partners, reaffirming its status as a nexus for creative communities from the Global South. With over 120 presentations from 60 cities and 40 countries across four sections, including Contemporary, Bawwaba, Art Dubai Modern, and Art Dubai Digital, the fair promises an immersive and enriching experience for visitors.

Art Dubai has always been at the forefront of fostering innovative cultural programming, with a focus on education and digital technologies. These initiatives, developed in

collaboration with institutional and commercial partners, play a vital role in shaping Dubai's cultural landscape and addressing contemporary issues.

Beyond the fairgrounds, Art Dubai Week will see a vibrant array

for artists from diverse backgrounds to showcase their work." Benedetta Ghione, Executive Director of Art Dubai, echoed these sentiments, highlighting the fair's role in nurturing the next generation of cultural leaders. "Our year-



of exhibitions and events hosted across the UAE, highlighting the region's dynamic cultural scene. From gallery openings to museum showcases and independent art spaces, the weeklong extravaganza offers something for every art enthusiast.

Pablo del Val, Artistic Director of Art Dubai, emphasised the fair's commitment to fostering cultural exchange and supporting emerging talent. "Art Dubai has a responsibility to be more than just a commercial platform," he stated. "Our programs reflect the multicultural fabric of Dubai, providing opportunities

round initiatives create significant opportunities for individuals to build careers in the creative industries," she remarked, underscoring Art Dubai's commitment to driving cultural innovation.

Art Dubai is held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, in partnership with A.R.M. Holding. The fair is sponsored by Swiss Wealth Management Group Julius Baer and features exclusive partnerships with Piaget, HUNA, and the Dubai Culture & Arts Authority.



The first dinosaur was named 200 years ago. We know so much more now

ON FEB. 20, 1824, English naturalist and theologian William Buckland addressed the Geological Society of London, describing an enormous jaw and limb bones unearthed in a slate quarry in the village of Stonesfield near Oxford.

Buckland recognised that these fossils belonged to a huge bygone reptile, and gave it a formal scientific name: *Megalosaurus*, meaning "great lizard." With that, the first dinosaur was officially recognised, though the actual word dinosaur would not be coined until the 1840s.

"It was the beginning of our fascination with dinosaurs," University of Edinburgh paleontologist Steve Brusatte said. "His announcement opened the flood gates and started a fossil rush, and people went out looking for other giant bones in England and beyond."

In the intervening 200 years, dinosaur science has flourished, providing insight into what these creatures looked like, how they lived, how they evolved and what doomed them. Dinosaurs trod the planet from about 231 million years ago to 66 million years ago during the Mesozoic Era. Their bird descendants remain with us today.

"Our understanding of dinosaurs has changed significantly since the 19th century," said paleontologist Emma Nicholls of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, home to the *Megalosaurus* fossils Buckland studied.

"Buckland and other gentlemen naturalists of the early 19th century would be stunned at how much we now know about dinosaurs," Brusatte added.

Megalosaurus is a case in point. Buckland thought it was a lizard about 66 feet (20 meters) long, walked on four legs and could live on land or in the water. Scientists now know it was not quadrupedal and not a lizard, but belonged to the theropod group comprising meat-eating dinosaurs such as *Tyrannosaurus* and *Spinosaurus* and was about 30 feet (9 meters) long.

"It scampered around on its hind legs, chasing down its prey, using its clawed hands and toothy jaws to subdue its victims," Brusatte said.

Buckland, like others at the time, did not grasp how long ago dinosaurs lived, believing Earth to be

only a few thousand years old. Scientists now know Earth is about 4.5 billion years old. *Megalosaurus* lived about 165 million years ago.

"It took several decades for geologists to understand that the Earth was truly old, and that life has evolved over vast stretches of time. Dinosaurs and the other fossils being discovered were a huge impetus in this bombshell change in people's understanding of their place in the world," Brusatte said.

DINOSAURIA

English naturalist Richard Owen recognised that fossils found in southern England of *Megalosaurus* and two other large land-dwelling reptiles, *Iguanodon* and *Hylaeosaurus*, formed a common group, calling them "Dinosauria" in an 1841 lecture and a publication the following year.

The subsequent discovery of *Hadrosaurus* and *Dryptosaurus* fossils in the US state of New Jersey showed that at least some dinosaurs were bipedal, changing the perception that they had resembled reptilian rhinoceroses. Beginning around the 1870s, the first complete large dinosaur skeletons - first in the American West, then in Belgium and elsewhere - demonstrated the distinctive anatomy and diversity of dinosaurs.

In the 1960s, the identification of the smallest meat-eating dinosaur *Deinonychus* shook up dinosaur science, helping inaugurate a research period called the "Dinosaur Renaissance." It showed that dinosaurs could be small and agile. Some were remarkably similar anatomically to early birds like *Archaeopteryx*, confirming how birds evolved from small, feathered dinosaurs. It also prompted a debate over whether dinosaurs were warm-blooded like birds, contradicting the long-standing conception of them as slow, lumbering and cold-blooded.

"In the decades following that, there was increasing work on dinosaur growth, on the use of CT scans, on analytical methods for reconstruction of evolutionary relationships and of biomechanical function, all helping to create a more dynamic and biological view of dinosaurs as living things," said University of Maryland paleontologist Thomas Holtz. — Reuters

Interior design sensation shares trends to watch out for in home improvement



BY YERU EBUEN

Interior designing and decorating are vital aspects of lifestyle, providing aesthetic appeal, functionality and comfort. They enable personal expression, promote emotional well-being and facilitate social interactions. Thoughtfully designed interiors contribute to efficiency and productivity in commercial settings while reflecting cultural identity and creating a sense of place. Whether at home or in public spaces, interior design enhances the quality of life by optimising usability, promoting relaxation and fostering positive experiences. Ultimately, it plays a crucial role in shaping environments that cater to individual needs, preferences and aspirations, enriching the overall living experience for occupants.

As of late, do-it-yourself (DIY) interior designing and decorating have been emerging as a trend, with homeowners thinking they can save more by doing it themselves. While it definitely works for some, such cannot be said for many others who, instead of actually saving, after making tons of mistakes, only come to realise that they've actually wasted more materials, money and time.

In Oman, Katerina Kerdi, popularly known as Kate Kerdi, is becoming a fast-rising name when it comes to creativity in home improvements. The genius behind Kate Kerdi Interiors and Kate Kerdi Home is her burning passion that has propelled her forward. From her humble beginnings as a self-taught interior designer, she managed to transform herself, emerging as the go-to for luxurious and elegant touches.

As of 2024, she has amassed nearly 250,000 followers across her social media platforms, sharing some of her go-to tricks in decorating spaces. What endears her to her audience are the snippets showing the funny challenges she faces as an interior decorator. Kate's Instagram and TikTok accounts, while filled with helpful tips and recommendations, also encourage everyone to get their hands dirty and share snippets of wisdom, especially on when to call for expert assistance. Summarising her message, she recommends to homeowners to get expert assistance to ensure optimal outcomes, tailored solutions, and polished interiors, saving time and money while mitigating risks. Part of her narrative also includes the idea that seeking professional guidance allows homeowners to achieve their design goals effectively and efficiently, enhancing the overall quality and value of their living spaces.

The Oman Daily Observer reached out to Kate to share her insights on the biggest trends she sees happening in 2024.

TOP INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS FOR 2024

BY KATE KERDI

The interior design world will certainly embrace character, a connection to nature, and sustainable practices this year. Below are my favourite interior design trends for 2024:

TEXTURED WALLS

Textured walls in interior design have been a popular trend for adding depth, character and visual interest to a space. Various techniques, like textured paint, wallpapers, plaster, stone, wood, or even fabric, can be used to create these textures, offering a unique aesthetic appeal to rooms.

QUIET LUXURY

In 2024, 'Quiet Luxury' will be the hot trend in interior design. Innovation and timeless elegance will merge, resulting in spaces that inspire and elevate everyday living. There will be a combination of sustainable materials, discreetly integrated smart technology, and a revival of classic design elements.

BOUCLÉ IS STAYING

Since as far back in furniture design history as 1948, when architect and designer Eero Saarinen upholstered his iconic Womb chair in bouclé, the nubby-textured fabric has proven its staying power.

WALLPAPER IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

I love wallpaper, and I am definitely happy about this comeback. This time, it will mostly be used in spaces that are often overlooked.

ALTERNATIVE SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

Sustainability has transcended trendiness to become a wider goal for the design industry in an effort to significantly reduce negative environmental impacts, while also enhancing the well-being and spaces of those who embrace it.

SCULPTURAL ART

Wall-mounted sculptures offer so much depth and dimension and are such a great way to add interest to the space.

BOLD HUES

Neutrals and toned-down, calming spaces had their moment, but it's probably the time for a dose of colour with bolder hues. Deep bold hues can have a significant impact on interior spaces. They can add drama, create a sense of coziness and infuse personality into a room.

STATEMENT TILES

Statement tiles in the bathroom create visual interest and contribute to a distinctive bathroom aesthetic. They can serve as a focal point, adding personality and style to the space.

To check out what Kate is all about, you can follow her on Instagram @katekerdiinteriors or visit her website www.katekerdi.com.

