

Observer

HM thanked by Kuwait Emir

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Shaikh Jaber Mubarak Al Hamad Al Mubarak al Sabah. In his cable, Shaikh Mishal expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation for His Majesty's sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace in Paradise and protect His Majesty against all harm.

SUNRISE - 05:59 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:44 AM

DHUHR - 12:01 PM

ASR - 03:24 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:57 PM

ISHA - 07:07 PM



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P13

OMAN'S MAIDEN SPACE LAUNCH LIKELY IN DECEMBER



P12

BATTLING ALCARAZ OUTLASTS SINNER TO CLAIM CHINA OPEN



P19

APPLE TV+'S GERMAN SERIES 'WHERE'S WANDA?' KEEPS IT LIGHT DESPITE DARK THEMES



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO GERMANY, IRAQ

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Steinmeier and the people of Germany. His Majesty the Sultan has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Abdul Latif Rashid of the Republic of Iraq, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Rashid and the people of Iraq.

HM CONDOLENCES TO PRESIDENT OF NEPAL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Ram Chandra Paudel of Nepal, on victims of floods and landslides resulting from the heavy rains in Nepal. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to President Ram Chandra Paudel, families of the victims and the people of Nepal, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.



RO 2.4 MILLION FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) announced the funding of 475 research proposals to the tune of RO 2.46 million. The funding benefits PhD researchers, Master's and Bachelor's researchers and students of universities and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman. The funding programme seeks to establish a motivating research environment at various academic levels. The research projects were submitted through 29 higher education institutions. **DETAILS ON P3**

Countries need to invest on youth for economic progress



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said receives heads of delegations. PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman hosted the ICESCO Education Conference which kicked-off on Wednesday under the slogan 'Beyond the Transforming Education Summit: From Commitments to Applications'.

Earlier, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received heads of delegations participating in the ICESCO Conference, which is hosted by Oman. The event, held under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, was attended by as many as 31 experts in the fields of education and artificial intelligence.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, said: "This conference comes at a time when the world is going through crises with repercussions

on educational, cultural and economic institutions. Most notably of those is the aggression and systematic destruction of the infrastructure of facilities, educational, health and scientific institutions, and heritage and cultural sites in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon."

She said that "We appreciate the organisation's dedication of the current year 2024 as the Year of Youth, which comes in the context of the global interest in youth; given their pivotal role in leading societies towards progress and development, and supporting the economy to face future challenges, praising the organisation's efforts in encouraging countries to invest in youth, and creating platforms for them to express their opinions, and increase their participation in decision-making, and providing flexible educational paths that enable the youth to invest in the opportunities and capabilities available to them."

DETAILS ON P2



'STARTUP ACCELERATOR INITIATIVE' LAUNCHED

The Programme of Omani Promising Startups (POPS) launched a 'Startup Accelerator Initiative' under the auspices of HH Sayyid Bilal bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the POPS. **DETAILS ON P2**

OMAN CONDEMNS ISRAEL'S AGGRESSION ON GAZA, LEBANON

UN CHIEF WARNS TIT-FOR-TAT MIDEAST VIOLENCE MUST STOP

MUSCAT/NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman is following up, with great concern, the developments of military escalation in the region, noting the seriousness of its repercussions and stressing the significance of adopting self-restraint as a means to spare the region and its people the risks of wars.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday, Oman condemned the brutal aggression launched by Israel on Lebanese territories and the accompanying irresponsible political assassinations that violate international norms and laws. Oman voiced its rejection of Israel's continued disregard for resolutions of international legitimacy that require Israel to withdraw completely from the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories.

"The Israeli occupation, which persisted for more than 70 years, is the main cause of continuous conflict and violence in the region," said the statement, noting that this occupation



People look at the damage in the aftermath of Israeli strikes in Chiyah, Lebanon, on Wednesday. - Reuters

"hinders all real efforts to protect the peoples' rights and aspirations for security and stability".

The Sultanate of Oman stressed the need to implement the will of the international community to grant the Palestinian people their right to self-determination and their right to establish their own independent state along the borders of June 4, 1967, with Al Quds Al Sharqiyah (East Jerusalem) as its capital. Oman described this "as a fundamental step in restoring security, stability and peace in the region".

UN Chief Antonio Guterres called for an end to the "sickening cycle of escalation"

in the Middle East, while specifically condemning Iran over its latest missile attack after facing harsh criticism from Israel. The secretary-general was speaking at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, called after Iran on Tuesday launched a massive missile barrage at Israel, which has ramped up its offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon.

"It is high time to stop the sickening cycle of escalation after escalation that is leading the people of the Middle East straight over the cliff," the UN chief said.

"This deadly cycle of tit-for-tat violence must stop."

SEE ALSO P6

Astronomers observe Comet C/2023 A3 in Oman's skies

MUSCAT: Comet C/2023 A3 (Tsuchinshan-ATLAS) has been observed by Oman Astronomical Society (OAS).

This observation comes as part of the OAS's efforts to enhance astronomical awareness and contribute to monitoring and tracking global astronomical phenomena.

Speaking about the phenomenon, astronomical observer Issam bin Ali al Salhi, a member of OAS, said: "Comet C/2023 A3 (Tsuchinshan-ATLAS) was discovered on February 22, 2023 by the



Asteroid Impact Alert System (ATLAS). It was later noted that its orbit and location

readings are consistent with earlier observations made by the Chinese Purple Mountain Observatory (Tsuchinshan) in January 2023 so it was named after both of its discoverers.

Al Salhi noted that the comet can be sighted before sunrise by using binoculars and astronomical telescopes until October 8 and it will reappear on the western horizon after sunset on October 10. After the passage of some days, the comet will rise above the horizon until it gradually disappears by the end of October. — ONA



Sayyid Fahd receives ICESCO Conference delegates



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Wednesday received heads of delegations participating in the ICESCO Conference, which is hosted

by the Sultanate of Oman. The heads of delegations expressed their sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to the leadership in Oman. They also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity.

HH Sayyid Fahd underscored the Sultanate of Oman's support for efforts exerted by the ICESCO in shouldering its responsibilities. He also lauded the organisation's role in developing research, educational

curricula, knowledge and the utilising benefits from technological advancements.

Further, the meeting also touched on the agenda of the ICESCO Conference which aim to boost cooperation among

ICESCO member states.

On their turn, the heads of delegations expressed their thanks to Oman for the conference's well-preparation.

The meeting was attended by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed

al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education; Dr Salim Al Malik, Director-General of the ICESCO; and Amna bint Salim al Balushiya, Oman's Permanent Representative to the Unesco. — ONA

Sayyid Bilarab launches startup initiative



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said at the launch of the initiative in Muscat on Wednesday



MUSCAT: The Programme of Omani Promising Startups (POPS) on Wednesday launched a "Startup Accelerator Initiative" under the auspices of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the POPS.

The initiative was launched in cooperation with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), the Industrial Innovation Academy and a number of regional and international partners. The initiative seeks to empower owners of innovative ideas, support the establishment of emerging Omani companies and link them to business and investment opportunities with the aim of supporting their expansion locally, regionally and globally.

The initiative benefits from advanced technologies in various sectors and industries through the opportunities provided by

the Accelerator. It also facilitates financing opportunities, integrated training, guidance and consultations necessary to achieve success and growth for the startups. The POPS programme focuses on activating the business accelerator through two main stages. The first is the "Idea Stage" which accommodates 20 innovative ideas from various economic sectors, with emphasis on enabling innovators and owners of pioneering ideas to develop innovative solutions in economic sectors and advanced technologies. It paves the way for entrepreneurs to transform their ideas into executable and scalable products and services.

The second stage ("pre-seed stage") targets 20 projects in vital sectors like health, tourism, real estate, food security and public services. It serves as a strategic step to enable these projects to face future challenges and achieve sustainability in local and regional markets.

The Accelerator will provide a comprehensive set of services designed to meet the needs of startups. These include the following: mentoring and guidance by a group of specialised experts and mentors; training covering all aspects of entrepreneurship; providing advanced office spaces that enhance the environment of innovation and entrepreneurship; offering investment opportunities to help companies expand regionally and internationally; and providing integrated marketing support to develop strong professional relationships through international and regional events and exhibitions.

The accelerator also provides an exceptional opportunity for incubation after graduation, establishing an ideal environment that allows startups to test and develop their ideas and transform them into practical solutions that meet market needs.

More sectors to be evaluated for foreign investments

KABEER YOUSUF
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More sectors for hundred percent investments are currently being explored and evaluated as the country is actively seeking foreign direct investment and is improving the regulatory framework to encourage such investments, according to Rashid bin Sultan al Hashmi, Senior Manager of the Future Fund Oman (FFO) investment.

The Sultanate of Oman's Foreign Capital Investment Law (FCIL) allows 100 per cent foreign ownership in most sectors and removed the minimum capital requirement as the procedures have been simplified to attract more FDI to its various sectors.

"The country is evaluating many sectors where 100 per cent foreign investments are not allowed, predominantly the oil and gas sector. We will leave it to the authorities to evaluate and identify the sectors and we believe there is much to be done in terms of diversification and future plan of Oman with regards to focusing on diversification of income sources away from the hydrocarbon sector."

He further added that those where more FDI is attracted are renewable energy, tourism, and other sectors. Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of the Future Fund Oman (FFO) event, Rashid said that the investment sector in the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed drastic simplification of procedures allowing foreign investors to invest and own 100 per cent in the businesses.

As many as 1,700 commercial and industrial activities in Oman are done through the Oman Business platform which include reducing, cancelling, and merging 836 services and exempting from the requirement of the minimum investor capital.

These procedures initiated to promote FDI include fees reductions, simplified procedures, long-term residency, exemption from corporate taxes, investment licence, freehand for foreign investors to begin businesses with a minimal amount and the like, have fetched in desired results.

Oman hosts conference of ICESCO education ministers



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, other dignitaries at the ICESCO conference in Al Bustan Palace Hotel on Wednesday.

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 2

The ICESCO Education Conference kicked-off under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on Wednesday with the slogan "Beyond the Transforming Education Summit: From Commitments to Applications", at Al Bustan Palace Hotel, in the presence of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, Dr Salim Mohammed al Malik, Director-General of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The opening ceremony of the conference began with a speech by Dr Madeeha in which she said: "This conference comes at a time when the Islamic world is going through turning points and crises that are sweeping Arab and Islamic societies and their repercussions on educational, cultural and economic institutions, especially the aggression and systematic destruction of the infrastructure of facilities, educational, health and scientific institutions, and heritage and cultural sites in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon. We affirm the Sultanate of Oman's firm position in supporting the Palestinian cause, calling on the international community to shoulder its moral and humanitarian responsibility

in finding a just solution to this issue on the basis of international legitimacy, United Nations resolutions and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to take practical steps and measures to preserve security and peace, respect human rights and peaceful coexistence among peoples in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law."

Dr Al Malik said ICESCO has mobilised its efforts for this conference for three reasons: the organisation's interest in the field of education, which is at the forefront of its activities, the challenges facing the education system in the countries of the Islamic world, and the extent of commitment to the demands of the Transforming Education Summit. He also called for the need to bring about structural change in education curricula and mechanisms for raising future generations in line with the requirements of the future.

The two-day conference aims to urge the countries of the Islamic world to fulfil their commitments towards transforming education through effective practices, develop mechanisms to disseminate and generalise best practices that have proven successful in accelerating the implementation of commitments in transforming education, exchange experiences and cooperate among them in joint work programmes and build partnerships with funding and donor agencies.



SHURA CHAIRMAN DISCUSSES RELATIONS WITH RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

MOSCOW: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, met with Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, in the capital Moscow, on Wednesday.

The two sides reviewed ways to foster bilateral cooperation in the legislative fields and through more coordination between the two councils in the coming period.

Within the framework of

his official visit to the Russian Federation, chairman of Majlis Ash'shura also met with Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the headquarters of the Russian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday.

During the meeting, they discussed level of Omani-Russian political relations and ways of bolstering multi-track relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation in



a way that meets the long-term interests of the two countries and ensures security and stability in the Middle East region.

The chairman of Majlis Ash'shura also met with Valentina Matviyenko, Speaker of the Russian Federation Council. They discussed ways of enhancing bilateral relations, exchanging legislative and parliamentary expertise as well as coordinating attitudes and policies in regional and

international parliamentary forums.

The chairman of Majlis Ash'shura also met with His Eminence Shaikh Rawi Ainuddin, Chairman of the Muftis Council of the Russian Federation. He laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the wall of the Kremlin Palace in the Alexandrovsky Gardens in the Red Square and visited the Museum of the Great Patriotic War. — ONA

Rehabilitation services for disabled discussed

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 2

The Second Forum for Private Rehabilitation Centres in Oman aims to strengthen cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development and private rehabilitation centres, focusing on exchanging expertise and best practices in rehabilitating persons with disabilities.

This initiative reflects the ministry's ongoing efforts to elevate service quality and efficiency, ensuring these centres meet the aspirations of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Private rehabilitation centres across Oman have made significant progress in recent years. However, the ministry is committed to further improving services and addressing the challenges these centres face.

Hamoud al Amri, Assistant Director of the Rehabilitation and Quality Programmes Department, highlighted the forum's role as a platform for sharing ideas to enhance the level of rehabilitation services. Building on the success of the first forum, this year's event



The Second Forum for Private Rehabilitation Centres in Oman met recently.

aims to take the development of rehabilitation services to new heights.

Statistics from the Ministry of Social Development reveal that as of this year, 62,022 persons with disabilities are registered in Oman, with 8,429 parking permits issued and 16,506 prosthetic and assistive devices provided.

The disability rate has increased by 13.5 per cent over the past two years, accounting for 1.7 per cent of the Omani population.

The forum addressed the need for continuous improvements in the quality of services provided to this community, discussing policies, licensing procedures,

and financial aspects to ensure efficient and effective care.

Currently, 39,828 individuals benefit from disability support, with 4,920 registered for benefits, representing approximately 85 per cent of those eligible.

The forum underscored the crucial role of private rehabilitation centres in achieving sustainable development for persons with disabilities.

Mohammed al Tamimi, from the Five Senses Centre in Salalah, emphasised the responsibility of Omani society, institutions and individuals in partnering with these centres to contribute to the rehabilitation process.

MoH, Unicef launch social behaviour trainer programme

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health in partnership with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) launched a 'Training of Trainers' programme in Social Behaviour Change on Early Childhood Development and Positive Parenting.

The programme aims to equip participants with the necessary skills to work as professional trainers in early childhood development. It is tailored for educators and healthcare professionals in primary healthcare centres from various health institutions across the Sultanate of Oman. Its primary objective is to equip participants with the skills needed to become professional trainers in early childhood development, enabling them to educate parents and caregivers on positive parenting techniques and guide them in promoting early childhood development.

The four-day programme focuses on several critical areas of early childhood development and positive parenting, such as fostering early learning, responsive feeding, positive discipline, and promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities. The programme also provides hands-on experience to equip participants with professional training skills. — ONA

Oman to participate in COP29 in Azerbaijan

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, OCT 2

The Sultanate of Oman is set to participate in the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) in November in Baku, Azerbaijan. With this participation, Oman will spotlight its national efforts in climate action, environmental protection, biodiversity and sustainable tourism.

Ibrahim al Ajmi, Adviser to the Chairman of the Environment Authority for Climate Affairs and Head of the Negotiating Team, underscored Oman's commitment to international climate goals, particularly in line with the Paris Agreement, aiming to enhance global climate action and sustainable development.

Oman's participation will focus on seven key areas, including achieving carbon neutrality, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, climate adaptation strategies, food security, promotion of Oman Climate Week, progress in the Global Environmental Performance Index, and advancements in energy transformation, including renewable energy and green hydrogen. Sustainable city initiatives will also be featured.

Major negotiation topics is to include global climate finance, Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, adaptation strategies, loss and damage discussions, and technology transfer.

Mohammed bin Khalfan al Shueili, Deputy Head of the Oman Pavilion



team, highlighted that Oman's involvement will further strengthen its initiatives in energy transition, biodiversity conservation, and attracting sustainable investment in clean energy and transportation.

A coordinated institutional approach will ensure a unified strategy that promotes Oman's climate accomplishments on a global stage.

For the first time, Oman will also include a youth delegation at COP29. This team will represent Omani youth in climate discussions, sharing their perspectives and proposing innovative solutions to climate challenges.

Hafez al Shukairi, a youth delegate, emphasised that their mission will focus on empowering the next generation to take proactive roles in combating climate change. During a media briefing, the Environment Authority unveiled the official logo for Oman's COP29 pavilion, symbolising the nation's dedication to a sustainable future.

This participation builds on the outcomes of COP28 in the UAE and COP27 in Egypt, with a continued emphasis on reaching a new global climate financing agreement at COP29.

Oman at Korea army defence industry expo

SEOUL: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the opening ceremony of Korea Army International Defence Industry Exhibition (KADEX 2024).

Oman's delegation was represented by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, and his accompanying military delegation. During the event, RAO Commander toured the exhibition. He was briefed on the displayed items of the Korean defence and strategic industries, artificial intelligence technologies, and some weapons and equipment industries. — ONA



RESEARCH PROJECTS TO GET OVER RO 2 MILLION

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Wednesday announced the funding of 475 research proposals to the tune of RO 2,469,776.

The funding benefits PhD researchers, Master's and Bachelor's researchers and students of universities and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman.

The funding programme seeks to establish a motivating research environment at various academic levels. The research projects were submitted through

29 higher education institutions.

The 475 projects were distributed as follows: 158 research projects were funded in the interest of academic researchers holding doctorate in 2024 (RO 20,000 set for each research project to be carried out within a maximum of two years), 145 projects were funded for holders of Bachelor's and Master's degrees (RO 3,000 each) and 172 projects were funded for other higher education students (each allocated RO 1,500 each). — ONA

MOORE STEPHENS LLC
NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF NASEEM BAHR AL ARAB INTERNATIONAL LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1564)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Naseem Bahr Al Arab International LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1313365, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Shareholders on 8 May 2024. The liquidator alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No. 41, 4th Floor, Building No. 1022, Way No. 1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099, Email: liquidation@moore-oman.com

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of NASEEM BAHR AL ARAB INTERNATIONAL LLC (Under voluntary liquidation)

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Provision of Technical Support for the School's IT Infrastructure

Hay Al-Shrooq International School (HISIS) invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for "Providing Technical Support for the IT Infrastructure" at the school located near Lulu Hypermarket, in the Wilayat of Sur, South Al-Sharqiyah Governorate.

Eligible bidders may purchase the tender documents by paying a non-refundable fee of 10 Omani Riyals. The payment should be made to the bank account details provided below. After completing the payment, please send the deposit receipt to the email address mentioned below mentioning your company name and the tender title. Upon receipt of the payment confirmation, the tender documents will be sent to your email.

Email: aalfarsi@hasis.om | santosh.ps@hasis.om

Depositing Tender fee for participation and registration will close on Tuesday, October 8, 2024.

AC Name	HAI AL SHROOQ INTERNATIONAL LLC
AC No.	0050-2004-2811
Bank Name	Sohar International
Branch	Al Qurum
Swift Code	BSHROMRXXX

Hay Al-Shrooq International School is not obligated to provide a reason for excluding any bidder and the amount for entering the tender cannot be refunded.



BALQEES AL ORAIMI

HOMework

has long been considered a cornerstone of the educational process, serving as a tool for students to review classroom material and reinforce their understanding of key concepts. However, the effectiveness of homework in boosting academic performance has been a subject of ongoing debate. While some view it as a valuable learning tool, others see it as a burden that adds stress to students and their families. This article explores both sides of the argument, shedding light on expert opinions from educators, psychologists, and parents.

For many educators, homework is more than just an assessment tool. It provides students with the opportunity to apply their classroom knowledge in real-world scenarios, deepening their understanding of the material.

Educational consultant Mohammed Rashid notes, "Homework is one of the most effective ways to foster self-learning, encouraging students to take responsibility and rely on themselves to acquire knowledge. It also stimulates critical and analytical thinking, which can be challenging to achieve solely within the confines of a classroom." Homework also strengthens the connection between students and the subjects they study. By working independently to solve problems or complete exercises, students engage more

deeply with the material, while teachers gain valuable insights into their progress and areas that may require additional attention.

On the other hand, critics argue that excessive homework can have negative consequences, particularly for younger students. The time required to complete assignments often disrupts the balance between school and personal life, leading to stress for both students and their families.

Psychologist Zainab al Ajmi points out, "The psychological pressure from too much homework can significantly impact a student's mental health. Stress and anxiety from schoolwork can harm not only their academic performance but also their overall well-being." Many families face challenges in managing their children's study schedules, particularly



In primary school, long homework assignments may not be as effective as short, engaging tasks that indirectly reinforce concepts in a fun and interactive way.

ABDUL AZIZ AL MUKHAINI
A teacher

HOW EFFECTIVE IS

HOMework

FOR CHILDREN?

not be as effective as short, engaging tasks that indirectly reinforce concepts in a fun and interactive way."

Some schools are adopting innovative approaches to homework, replacing traditional assignments with interactive and creative tasks. These include educational games, group projects, and short research tasks that encourage critical thinking and teamwork. This modern approach not only enhances learning, but also reduces the sense of pressure that traditional homework can create.

The rise of digital technology has further transformed the homework experience. Students now have access to a wealth of online resources, enabling them to explore topics more deeply and submit assignments through digital platforms. However, the increased use of technology presents new challenges, such as the potential for distraction and an over reliance on online resources.

Ultimately, while homework can play a pivotal role in improving academic performance and reinforcing subject knowledge, it must be thoughtfully designed to avoid overwhelming students and families. Policies regarding homework should be continually reviewed to ensure they foster a healthy, balanced approach to learning. Effective education goes beyond the mere transfer of information — it should nurture students' personalities, critical thinking skills and overall well-being.

when the homework involves specialised knowledge that parents may not possess.

This can strain family dynamics and create tension when parents feel unable to meet school expectations. Striking the right balance between homework volume and students' capacity to manage it is crucial to ensuring that homework remains beneficial without becoming a source of stress.

Experts suggest that reducing homework, especially for younger students, is vital. Research indicates that primary school students do not require as much homework as older students, as their development at this stage benefits more from rest and play than from long assignments.

Abdul Aziz al Mukhaini, a teacher, supports this view: "In primary school, long homework assignments may



NCO issues annual report on competitiveness of Oman

MUSCAT: The National Competitiveness Office (NCO) has issued the 2nd edition of Oman Competitiveness Annual Report 2023.

The report reviews the Sultanate of Oman's performance in the map of international indices that the office keeps monitoring to help raise public awareness about international indicators.

The report serves as a reference for government and private institutions and researchers interested in the rating of Oman, compared to other countries of the world.

The report includes 14 important international

indicators issued by global organisations and institutions that address economic, social, political and environmental aspects.

The report covers 7 main indicators already included in the 'Oman Vision 2040' document. These indicators were analysed and followed up by the relevant authorities with the aim of improving them.

The indicators deal with global competitiveness, economic freedom, global governance, corruption perceptions, environmental performance, global innovation and network readiness. This was in addition to seven other sub-



indicators in which the Sultanate of Oman's performance was analysed and referred to the relevant authorities.

The report comprised the outcome of all sub-indicators included in the versions of international reports issued in 2023.

The NCO seeks to improve the Sultanate of Oman's performance in international indices, notably those included in Oman Vision 2040 document.

Besides monitoring and analysing the Sultanate of Oman's performance in these indices, the NCO submits periodic reports on those indices to the National Competitiveness

Committee and to the parties entrusted with improving those indicators.

Working teams are formed in cooperation with the departments concerned to monitor the application of improvements and proposals made by government units. The teams study the extent to which such action would improve the competitiveness of the Sultanate of Oman in international indices.

The NCO also communicates with international organisations to correct and update the Sultanate of Oman's data shared with these organisations.

— ONA

Verdi opera to make Oman debut

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The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced the launch of its 2024/25 season with the Athena production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. Marking its Oman debut, the Verdi masterpiece will feature the National Centre for Performing Arts Beijing performing for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman.

At the media briefing held on Tuesday, the Director-General and Artistic Director of ROHM, Umberto Fanni, said, "We are proud to open the 2024/25 season with the NCPA's production of *Un Ballo in Maschera*, a first for Oman. This opera underscores our commitment to offering an ever-evolving programme for both local and international audiences."

He also talked about the importance of the cooperation between ROHM and NCPA.

The Vice-President of the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) Beijing, GUAN Jianbo, said he was happy to present China's expression of world-class productions.

Renowned director Hugo de Ana said he does not want to let all surprises out and prefers for



Umberto Fanni, Director-General and Artistic Director of ROHM, at the press conference on Tuesday

people to come and watch the show.

The opera will be staged on Thursday, October 3, and Saturday, October 5, featuring leading opera stars, with most making their debut in Muscat, including Elena Stikhina, Piotr Beczala, LIAO Changyong, Agnieszka Rehlis and Enkelada Kamani, all of whom were present at the media briefing.

Under the baton of Giampaolo Bisanti, the Orchestra Teatro Lirico di Cagliari will bring to life Verdi's exploration of love, betrayal and political intrigue.

Tenor will play the principal role of Gustav III, King of Sweden, in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and he said he is looking forward to singing the song of a king. There are some dramatic

moments. A special feature of the opening weekend, ROHM, will be the presentation of a special concert, *A Musical Night from China*, on Friday, October 4, featuring the chorus and soloists from NCPA, conducted by LÜ Jia, Artistic Director of Music and Music Director of the NCPA Orchestra.

The media briefing also highlighted the broader theme of the season: *Timeless Tales and Fabulous Journeys: An Opera Season Beyond Imagination*.

This year's programme promises world-class performances with beloved fairy tales such as Fikret Amirov's ballet, *One Thousand and One Nights*, under the direction of the prestigious Primorsky Stage of the Mariinsky Theatre in Vladivostok, along

with *Beauty & The Beast* on Ice, the family opera *Robin Hood*, and a Harry Potter movie concert. Part of the new season also includes new initiatives such as the Emerging Talents series and the upcoming Piano Duel, bringing to the stage winners of international competitions and emerging artists. In the coming months, ROHM will continue to showcase an exciting array of leading artists and performances, further solidifying its reputation as Oman's premier cultural venue.

Commenting on the opening of the season, Director-General and Artistic Director, Umberto Fanni, stated, "The season ahead will feature a dynamic blend of opera, jazz, ballet, family shows, concerts and Arab music performances, catering to a wide range of tastes. The Royal Opera House Muscat remains committed to its role in bridging cultures through the arts, welcoming performers and companies from around the world and showcasing Oman's cultural heritage on the global stage."

The Royal Opera House Muscat invites its audience to book tickets through its website, mobile app, or directly at the box office.

ODP aims to raise ICT contribution to GDP

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Oman Data Park (ODP), the first managed and Cloud Service Provider in Oman, besides cyber security, is targeting a 10-per cent contribution from information and communication technology (ICT) to GDP in accordance with Oman Vision 2040, against its current 2.5-3 per cent share, according to Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of the 4th Edition of the OERLive DX 2024 held under the auspices of Eng Bader al Maamari, Secretary-General of the OERLive DX 2024 Board, which focuses on Digital Transformation of the oil and gas, power and water sectors. Al Wahaibi said that ODP is growing 19 to 20 per cent year on year and it is expected to grow even faster, after 13 years of establishment, and is hugely contributing to the value addition to the economy.

"Today ODP is contributing at the rate of 2.5 per cent to 3 per cent to the GDP and we are targeting 10 per cent contribution of ICT towards



Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park

2040 in congruence with the Oman Vision 2040. We are moving in the right direction and we have KPIs, a roadmap and a dashboard towards the future and we are optimistic towards getting the right opportunity," the CEO said, adding that ODP as an industry has a lot to do but not as ODP.

In terms of job creation, Maqbool said young, skilled Omanis are required for ODP where they are taken, trained and retained to meet the goals and help them become better technical persons.

The 'Sahab' trainee programme comes within the framework of ODP's commitment to boost its corporate social responsibility by contributing to the professional development of the Omani workforce.

Upskilling and reskilling lifelong crucial to secure career

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Curiosity is a skill that you would want to keep throughout one's career and continuous learning is going to become critical as has been proven by the tremendous strides AI has taken in the last few years.

According to Patrick Kyllonen, a distinguished presidential appointee at ETS who is attending the conference of Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, AI can handle tasks which were considered to be only possible for humans.

"This can only mean that we are going to be required to have to reskill, upskill, to learn new skill and that is going to need orientation, curiosity, to have the attitude to be able to learn and reskill to be able to do new

ways of things," Kyllonen said speaking to *Observer*.

He has conducted innovative research on (a) higher education assessment, (b) workforce readiness, (c) international large-scale assessment (e.g., Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA), and (d) 21st century skills assessment, such as creativity, collaborative problem solving and situational interviews. According to Kyllonen, AI is already affecting the nature of the work and it is never going to be a crude technology as it is today.

"It is going to be increasingly sophisticated and enter into various aspects of our life. This is going to affect what skills are valued. One of the things we are doing at ETS is to identify exactly what the nature of the work is going to be as a result



There is a long line of research on the work of the future and one of the findings has been that the nature of the work is going to continuously change. And that is going to put pressure on all of us to keep up with it

PATRICK KYLLONEN
Education expert

of this incursion of AI into our lives. So we are looking at skills that are relatively future proof and what the machines will not be able to do and what is essentially human and that is going to be an important deterrent on what education is going to be like in the next few years," he pointed out.

In other words, education prepares people for the life of work — a life of prosperity and satisfaction. If the nature of work changes, education is going to respond to that change. Education will then focus on the skills that are going to become increasingly important in the future. The traditional professions such as medicine, engineering and computer science are all affected by AI.

"AI is going to cause a fundamental change because right now the early education

is focused on math, language, science and they are continuing to be important, but what we are experiencing is that schools teach more than math and science.

"Schools teach students how to communicate with each other, how to talk to the teacher, how to listen to the teacher, how to turn in assignments on time and schools teach students and learners how to develop love for learning and that is going to become increasingly important in the future because the rate of change is going to increase. So lifelong learning is going to be increasingly required of all of us. We can no longer count on leaving school and stay in the same career for 40 or 50 years," Kyllonen noted.

We have to plan on mid-career changes and that is going to require lifelong learning,

which in turn is going to require curiosity and ability to learn and study new things even when you are already working on a job or already in a career.

He added that curiosity is going to be increasingly important as a way of motivating an individual to engage in lifelong learning, which is going to be a pathway to survival.

"There is a long line of research on the work of the future and one of the findings has been that the nature of the work is going to continuously change. And that is going to put pressure on all of us to keep up with it," he said.

What is required is mindset shift emphasising on lifelong learning.

Kyllonen said that this is why government, private sector partnership is important to create access to continuous upskilling and reskilling.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Census enumerators collect information during a national census in Naypyidaw. — AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA TAKES CENSUS DESPITE CONFLICT

YANGON: Census takers guarded by police and soldiers took to the streets of Myanmar on Wednesday for a national survey that anti-junta groups have urged people to boycott. The ruling junta is pressing ahead with the census even though it has lost control of large areas of the country to armed groups opposed to its rule. Bloody conflict rages across much of Myanmar but the junta says the survey is needed to update voter lists ahead of promised elections in 2025. Teams of enumerators accompanied by soldiers and armed police went door to door in Yangon to fill in the 68-question survey. The survey includes questions about family members living away from home -- which critics say is a way for the junta to identify who has joined armed groups or fled the country to avoid conscription into the army. The census also includes questions about householders' ethnicity and the language they speak at home. — AFP



Japan's Finance Minister Katsunobu Kato attends a press conference, in Tokyo. — Reuters

JAPAN SEEKS 'CONSTRUCTIVE' RELATIONS WITH CHINA

TOKYO: Japan's new Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya said on Wednesday that Tokyo wants a "stable relationship" with China based on common interests, although "what we need to assert will be asserted". "We hope to mutually work towards building a constructive and stable relationship," Iwaya said in his first press conference.

The minister said he hoped to meet his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi "as soon as possible" for "frank exchanges and dialogue", but a date had not yet been decided. "Between Japan and China, there are many outstanding issues and challenges, but at the same time there is much possibility and potential," Iwaya said.

Both are "major countries holding an important responsibility jointly for achieving peace and prosperity for this region and the entire international community". On Wednesday, Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated Ishiba, who was approved as prime minister by parliament on Tuesday after winning a ruling party leadership vote. — AFP

FOOD AID TO GAZA FALLS AS ISRAEL SETS NEW AID RULE



Palestinians gather to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza. — Reuters

GAZA: Food supplies to Gaza have fallen sharply in recent weeks because Israeli authorities have introduced a new customs rule on some humanitarian aid and are separately scaling down deliveries organised by businesses, people involved in getting goods to the war-torn territory said.

The new customs rule applies to truck convoys chartered by the United Nations to take aid from Jordan to Gaza via Israel, seven people familiar with the matter said.

Under the rule, individuals from relief organisations sending aid must complete a form providing passport details, and accept liability for any false information on a shipment, the people said.

They said relief agencies are disputing that requirement, which was announced mid-August, because they fear signing the form could expose staff to legal problems if aid fell into the hands of Hamas or other enemies of Israel.

As a result, shipments have not been getting through the Jordan route -- a key channel in Gaza supplies -- for two weeks.

The dispute has not affected shipments via Cyprus and Egypt, the sources said.

In a parallel move, Israeli authorities have restricted commercial food shipments to Gaza amid concerns that Hamas was benefiting from that trade, the people familiar with the matter and industry sources said.

UN and Israeli government data show that in September, deliveries of food and aid sank to their lowest in seven months. — Reuters

Israel beefs up forces on Lebanon border

HEZBOLLAH said its fighters were engaging Israeli forces inside Lebanon on Wednesday, reporting ground clashes for the first time since Israel began pushing into its northern neighbour in a campaign to hammer the armed group.

The Israeli military said regular infantry and armoured units were joining its ground operations in Lebanon, a day after Israel was attacked by Iran in a strike that raised fears the oil-producing Middle East could be engulfed in a wider conflict.

An Israeli team commander was killed in Lebanon, the Israeli military said. A Lebanese soldier was injured in an Israeli drone strike on southern Lebanon, the Lebanese army said in a statement.

Iran said on Wednesday the attack - its biggest assault on Israel - was over barring further provocation, but Israel and the United States promised to hit back hard.

Israel activated air defences against Iran's bombardment on Tuesday and most missiles were intercepted "by Israel and a defensive coalition led by the United States," Israeli Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said in a video on X.

The violence, meanwhile, continued on the Israeli-Lebanese border. Hezbollah said it was clashing with Israeli troops in the border town of Maroun el Ras after it had pushed back forces near another border town. The group said it had also fired rockets at military posts inside Israel.

The group's media chief Mohammad Afif said those battles were only "the first round" and that the group had enough fighters, weapons and ammunition to push



People stand amid debris in the aftermath of Israeli strikes in Chiyah, Lebanon. — Reuters

back Israel. The military has said its incursion is largely aimed at destroying tunnels and other infrastructure on the border and there were no plans for a wider operation targeting Beirut or major cities in southern Lebanon. Nevertheless, it issued new evacuation orders for around two dozen towns along the southern border, instructing inhabitants to head north of the Awali River, which flows east to west some 60 km north of the Israeli border.

Despite calls for a ceasefire from the United Nations, the United States and the European Union, fighting between Israel

and Hezbollah has continued. Israel renewed its bombardment early on Wednesday of Beirut's southern suburbs, a stronghold of the Iran-backed group, with more than a dozen air strikes against what it said were targets belonging to Hezbollah.

Nearly 1,900 people have been killed and more than 9,000 wounded in Lebanon in almost a year of cross-border fighting, with most of the deaths occurring in the past two weeks, according to Lebanese government statistics. More than a million people have been forced to flee their homes. — Reuters

PRECAUTION MEASURES

Taiwan shuts down facing Typhoon Krathon



Taiwan shut down schools and closed its financial markets on Wednesday as Typhoon Krathon pounded its south and east with torrential rains and winds ahead of its expected landfall. Krathon, packing sustained wind speeds of 162 kilometres per hour and gusts of up to 198 kph -- was 120 kilometres southwest of the major port city Kaohsiung as of 3:00 pm. — AFP

BOOSTING SERVICES

Cebu signs deal for 152 Airbus planes



Philippine budget carrier Cebu Pacific signed an agreement on Wednesday to buy up to 152 Airbus planes worth \$24 billion in a deal it described as the largest done in the country. The order calls for a minimum of 70 units of A321neo aircraft that could rise to a maximum of 102, plus 50 "purchase rights" for other planes, Cebu Pacific chief executive Michael Szucs told reporters. — AFP

TRAPPED SURVIVORS

Rescuers race to find migrants in Djibouti



Rescuers are searching for more than 100 migrants off the coast of Djibouti after smugglers forced them to jump into the sea, the UN migration agency said on Wednesday. At least 45 bodies have been recovered from Tuesday's incident, a death toll that makes 2024 the deadliest year on record for sea crossings on the migration route between East Africa and Yemen. — Reuters

FASTER PROCEDURES



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (R) and French President Emmanuel Macron shake hands as he arrives at the Chancellery in Berlin. — AFP

SCHOLZ URGES SWIFT CONCLUSION TO TRADE DEAL

FRANKFURT: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called on Wednesday for a rapid conclusion to longstanding negotiations on an EU trade deal with South America's Mercosur bloc that faces fierce French opposition. The negotiations "should now be finalised quickly" Scholz said in a speech in Berlin to Germany's BGA wholesale and foreign trade association.

Technical discussions on the free trade pact "are well advanced", he said, adding that "the vast majority of EU member states also support the agreement politically". "We need pragmatism and flexibility on all sides for the final metres of the negotiations, because the Mercosur agreement is groundbreaking for diversifying and strengthening the resilience of our economy," said Scholz, who met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Berlin on Wednesday. The 27-member European Union and Mercosur countries have been in talks for two decades on creating a free trade zone. — AFP



OVER 700,000 DISPLACED IN HAITI

People wait for a food distribution in a displaced persons camp at the Lyc Marie Jeanne in Port-au-Prince. — AFP

Ukraine probes allegations Russia killed 16 POWs

KYIV: Ukraine is probing allegations the Russian army shot dead 16 prisoners of war near the eastern city of Pokrovsk, Kyiv's prosecutor general said. Russia and Ukraine have repeatedly accused each other of killing POWs since Moscow launched its attack of Ukraine in February 2022.

"This is the largest known case of the execution of Ukrainian prisoners of war on the front line," Ukrainian prosecutor general Andriy Kostin said in a statement. Kostin said the alleged incident showed that the "killing and torture of prisoners is not an accident but a deliberate policy of the Russian military and political leadership".

The probe — into allegations of the "violation of laws and customs of war" and "premeditated murder" — was launched based on videos shared on social media that appeared to show the execution of Ukrainian soldiers, Kostin said.

Video images captured by a drone showed captured Ukrainian troops, under Russian control, coming out from a wooded area and lining up, Ukraine's prosecutors said. The Russians then "deliberately opened fire with deadly force", Kyiv said. Those still showing "signs of life" were then "finished off at close range with automatic fire".

The Ukrainian prosecutor's office said on Tuesday that "measures are currently being taken to verify the published material." The alleged incident was reported to have taken place close to the villages of Sukhiy Yar and Mykolayivka near Pokrovsk, a strategic hub that Russia is trying to capture. It is the latest allegation of POWs being killed during the conflict.

In March 2023 a video showing an imprisoned Ukrainian soldier shouting "Glory to



A woman walks past a mural depicting a soldier with the Russian flag in Simferopol, Crimea. — Reuters

Ukraine!" moments before being executed by shooting squad, went viral.

The UN has documented "numerous violations of international humanitarian law against prisoners of war, including cases of summary execution of both Russian and Ukrainian POWs", a spokeswoman for the UN Human Rights Office said last year.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's army said on Wednesday it had withdrawn from the eastern town of Vugledar, handing Russia one of its most significant territorial gains in weeks.

The fall of the coal mining town raised new questions about Ukraine's defensive positions along its southeastern front line with Russia advancing ahead of winter. Around 14,000 people lived in Vugledar before Russia attacked.

"The High Command gave permission for a manoeuvre to withdraw units from Vugledar in order to save personnel and military equipment and take up a position for further operations," Khortytsya group of troops, which operates in the area, said. — AFP

Austrian president appeals for calm coalition talks

VIENNA: Austria's president appealed to all parties in parliament on Wednesday to shun "confrontation" and seek compromises in coalition talks, after the far-right Freedom Party won Sunday's national election but fell far short of an absolute majority.

Having secured around 29 per cent of the vote, it would need a coalition partner to govern but the other parties have said they are not interested.

President Alexander Van der Bellen, who oversees the formation of governments, has told all parties to hold talks with each other, a process which should formally begin soon. "The election campaign is over.

That confrontation is over. Now compromises must be found, common answers to pressing questions," Van der Bellen said in a speech as he accepted the outgoing conservative-led government's resignation and asked it to stay on as caretaker until a new ruling coalition is formed.

He listed questions that touched on

issues such as the cost of living, climate change and healthcare but also included "How do we make a positive contribution in the European Union?" and "What image of Austria do we want to present to the world?"

Van der Bellen, a former leader of the left-wing Greens, has expressed reservations about the FPO entering government.

On Wednesday he repeated that any future government should respect fundamental values including minority rights, independent media and EU membership.

The OVP is the only party to have left the door open to a coalition with the FPO, but Nehammer has repeatedly ruled out going into government with Kickl, who has insisted he will not "vanish into thin air".

Van der Bellen made no reference to that possibility on Wednesday, saying only that he would speak to representatives of the parties "with the necessary calm and in the necessary depth".

— Reuters



Pope Francis attends the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in The Vatican. — AFP

POPE OPENS NEW DEBATES ON CHURCH FUTURE

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis launched fresh consultations on Wednesday on the future of the Roman Catholic Church. The General Assembly of the Synod, comprising 368 religious and lay people from around 100 countries, will hold closed-door debates at the Vatican until October 27. It is a personal project of the pope, 87, who will have the final say on any doctrinal changes that ensue. Launching the assembly with a mass in St Peter's Square, Francis urged participants to enter the discussions with an open mind. — AFP

Britain's Starmer in Brussels to flesh out EU 'reset' pledge

BRUSSELS: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer vowed on Wednesday to put ties with the EU on a "positive footing", as he kicked off a first visit to Brussels aimed at rebooting relations after the rancour of Brexit.

Starmer has promised a "reset" with the European Union, but since taking power in July has given few details about how to improve on the painstakingly negotiated deals governing ties since the UK quit the bloc.

"I firmly believe that the British public wants to return to pragmatic, sensible leadership when it comes to dealing with our closest neighbours, to make Brexit work," Starmer said as he headed into talks with European Com-

mission chief Ursula von der Leyen.

"We are determined to put this relationship back on a stable, positive footing that I think we all want to see."

Von der Leyen, who also met Starmer during last month's UN General Assembly, told him that "in these very uncertain times, like-minded partners like us must cooperate more closely".

"We should explore the scope for more cooperation while we focus on the full and faithful implementation of the withdrawal agreement," she said.

Starmer's visit — the first by a British prime minister to the EU headquarters since 2020 — is meant to send a clear signal that the page has turned after his Labour party ousted the Con-



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer shakes hands with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen (R) at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

servatives from power. But the British leader, who voted in the 2016 referendum to remain in the EU, has insisted that his reset will not mean reversing Brexit, which remains a politically toxic subject in the UK.

Before heading to Brussels, Starmer first held bilateral meetings with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Italian premier Giorgia Meloni — a timeline that has raised some eyebrows.

The British leader has poured cold water on the EU's big proposal so far — a youth mobility scheme for 18- to 30-year-olds.

Brexit ended the free movement

of EU citizens to live and work in Britain, and vice versa. The EU would like younger people from its member countries to be able to move freely in the UK.

But Starmer has rejected the idea over fears it looks too much like freedom of movement.

The interior ministry is resistant to anything that increases levels of legal migration.

The EU's ambassador to the UK, Pedro Serrano, played down the notion that the proposal was a stumbling block last week.

He likened it to a "gap year" that would not give EU citizens the right to work in Britain. — AFP

OPINION

Why CEOs are backing away from sustainability



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In recent years, climate change has shifted from being a peripheral concern to a central issue that demands urgent action from all sectors of society. International gatherings and climate summits have highlighted the critical need for a collective response. Investments in clean energy are reaching unprecedented levels, particularly in major economies where billions are being funnelled into renewable technologies like solar and wind power. Despite this momentum, a curious trend has emerged: many CEOs and business leaders are becoming less vocal about climate change.

This silence is puzzling, especially when the private sector plays a pivotal role in driving the transition to a sustainable future. The question arises: why are CEOs retreating from the conversation at a time when their leadership is most crucial?

Not long ago, corporate leaders were eager to showcase their commitment to environmental stewardship. Companies announced ambitious climate goals, pledged to achieve Net-Zero emissions, and invested in green initiatives. This

surge in corporate climate advocacy was driven by consumer demand, investor expectations, and the recognition that sustainable practices could lead to long-term profitability. However, recent observations suggest a shift in this dynamic.

One significant reason is the evolving political climate. In some regions, environmental issues have become highly polarised. Businesses that advocate for climate action risk being caught in the crossfire of political debates, facing criticism from those who view such efforts as overreach or as aligning with a particular political ideology. This environment can make CEOs hesitant to speak openly about climate initiatives, fearing potential backlash or negative impacts on their company's reputation.

Another challenge lies in balancing immediate financial performance with long-term sustainability goals. CEOs are under constant pressure to deliver strong quarterly results. Investing in sustainable practices often requires significant upfront costs, with benefits that may not be immediately apparent on the balance sheet. This tension can lead to difficult decisions about where to allocate resources,

CEOs are under constant pressure to deliver strong quarterly results. Investing in sustainable practices often requires significant upfront costs, with benefits that may not be immediately apparent on the balance sheet.

and some leaders may choose to prioritise short-term gains over long-term environmental commitments.

Despite these challenges, the cost of silence may be greater than the perceived risks of speaking out. Climate change poses significant threats to global economies, supply chains and communities.

Moreover, stakeholders — including customers, employees and investors — are increasingly expecting companies to take a stand on environmental issues. Younger generations, in particular, prioritise sustainability when making purchasing decisions and considering employment opportunities. Silence can be interpreted as indifference, potentially eroding brand loyalty and competitive advantage. The retreat of CEOs from public discourse on climate change is a concerning trend that needs to be addressed.

While the obstacles are real, the urgency of the climate crisis demands bold action and open dialogue. Business leaders have the influence and resources to drive meaningful change. By stepping forward rather than stepping back, they can help lead the transition to a more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

SCIENTISTS FEAR RESEARCH SECTOR IS NEAR COLLAPSE

TOMAS VIOLA

Argentine biochemist Alejandro Nadra worries that President Javier Milei's budget cuts will undo his scientific quest to unravel the cause of genetic diseases that disable and kill millions. Since taking office last December, budget-slashing Milei has frozen public university and research budgets even as annual inflation stands at 236 per cent.

This meant real spending on science and technology fell 33 per cent year-on-year in August, according to the CIICTI research centre.

Nadra said he has already had to stop some of his experiments with the proteins responsible for gene mutations that cause diseases.

"We are on the verge of collapse," Nadra said from his laboratory at the University of Buenos Aires, home to three Nobel Prize laureates in science.

Along with artists, teachers, pilots, social workers and countless other professionals affected by Milei's

drive to curb flyaway inflation and public debt, scientists fear for their future in Argentina.

"People are leaving, and they aren't applying for scholarships or teaching positions anymore because they

can't make a living," said Nadra. Those who do often end up working in labs without the necessary equipment or supplies.

"If things don't change, the time is near when everything disintegrates," said Nadra.

Nadra said he has not been able to buy anything he needs for his research since last November.

"So, if I run out of supplies, I either borrow from someone who still has some, or I stop doing those experiments."

The gross monthly salary of a research assistant today at Argentina's Conicet research council is about 30 per cent less, roughly \$1,180, than a year ago, according to the RAICYT network science institutes.

Official figures released last week showed that 52.9 per cent of people live in poverty in Milei's Argentina.

Biologist Edith Kordon works at the IFIBYNE state research institute, where she investigates breast cancer. "This is the first time this has happened to me. I mean, it has always been very hard to get funding, it has always been very hard to get scholarships, but now there is this practical certainty that we have nothing... I've never had so little money to do anything," she said.

Former science minister Lino Baranao recently highlighted that even before Milei's cuts, Argentina spent about 0.31 per cent of GDP on science compared to 1.21 per cent in Brazil, 3.45 per cent in the United States and 4.9 per cent in South Korea.

—AFP

Oman Vision 2040 and its perspectives on education



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The strategic direction to achieve the vision with regard to its first priority is inclusivity to education and scientific research leading Oman to a knowledge society and a hub of human capital.

POSITIONING education as the number-one national priority edifies the mind that it can be an inclusive growth-engine for the nation! But mere prioritising doesn't serve! Rather, one has to go back to primary schooling and revamp its entire teaching-learning system with utmost selflessness and visionary resoluteness.

Today's primary kids will grow tall by 2040 to take the baton and mantle of national development and prosperity. So we need to catch them young today!

The vision of any responsible state should be ultimately attaining its people's welfare and their joy. Perceptively, the key means for achieving that vision are education and health. Therefore, the two primary responsibilities of any state are ensuring that its citizens get value-based quality education and quality public health.

My individual perspective is that these two responsibilities shouldn't ever be privatised. As you know that 'privatised' means subjecting it to 'profit motive' and once it becomes so, it can be stuffed with whatever helps sell it. Finally, it loses its purpose. That means the state fails. The citizens lose.

But the Oman Vision 2040 gives hope the other way round. I don't have an option but to highly, sagaciously, generously appreciate the architect and be optimistic about the architecture of the vision document that its national priorities begin with

education at its first position followed by health in the second position. How beautifully these are positioned! How future-oriented the positioning of these priorities is!

Now let's look at the facts that rationalise the materialisation of this plan, the Oman Vision 2040. Let's first take education as it is positioned in the first place as the most prioritised sector for achieving the Oman Vision 2040.

The strategic direction to achieve the vision with regard to its first priority is inclusivity to education and scientific research leading Oman to a knowledge society and a hub of human capital.

The quality of manpower depends on value-based quality education and is not the result of an overnight-exercise but the legacy of the sacrifice made by the previous generations. To build the base needs to go back to primary schooling to catch 'them' young to build the nation. Let's wish and work together to accomplish the vision.

The document-based performance indicators show that the global innovation index (GII) of Oman was 69 out of the 129 participating countries in 2018 and maintained the same position in 2023 out of 132 participating economies. The strategic direction for 2040 for Oman is to be one of the best global innovators placing itself in

the top 20 economies.

The position of Oman in the performance indicator of education for all development index (EDI) was 51 in 2015 and aspires to be one of the top 10 by 2040 performing the best in all its components including the total primary net enrolment ratio, adult literacy rate, gender-specific education for all index and survival rate to grade five.

Skills and global competitiveness index are concerned, Oman was placed at 36 out of the total 140 participating economies in 2018 but aspires to be one of the top 10 by 2040 by consolidating its national competitiveness.

The performance indicator of global talent competitiveness index (GTCI) of Oman shows that the nation was placed at 56th position in 2018 but dropped to 59th in 2023. It's a leap backward but can be like a phoenix again in the short run! As per the Quacquarelli Symonds ranking of world universities, Oman's Sultan Qaboos University was placed at 450th in the list of the top 500 world universities in 2018 and could rise to the 362nd position in the year 2023.

Oman sets its vision to have Sultan Qaboos University climbing its ladder to one among the top 300 by 2040.

The individual perspective is that the target set seems to be lower than Oman could really achieve as the national capacity and capability to achieve higher standards are superior as the trend analysis shows the same from 450th position in 2018 to 362nd position in 2023.

Similarly, the vision further states that the number of Omani universities that could be placed in the top 500 world universities should also be increased to four.

The sustainability of any economy depends on its quality manpower. And the quality of manpower depends on value-based quality education and is not the result of an overnight-exercise but the legacy of the sacrifice made by the previous generations.

To build the base needs to go back to primary schooling to catch 'them' young to build the nation. Let's wish and work together to accomplish the vision.

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Orientalism: A tourism and marketing tool



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recently attended the debut of a new product and service in the local market. The organisers grabbed the audience with well-thought-out content that merged artificial intelligence, human connection, and the diversity of natural colours and cultures.

As in most events, artists performed cultural traditions such as dancing and playing instruments to celebrate the occasion.

Culture has emerged as a product in both commercial and tourism campaigns. It is a major driver of economic development. These are experiences that combine beaches with historical sites, culinary and artistic attractions, and natural wonders.

I reflect on how deep cultural performances and the exhibition of traditional musical instruments have been commercialised. They are framed in a captivating way to highlight the exotic while marketing their product in an aura of rituals. It is all designed to enthrall and generate profits. We have seen this at festivals, tourism campaigns, desert camps, hotels, and various occasions where 'authentic culture' is being explored.

Besides economic and financial benefits, tourism is also an instrument of social change; it is difficult to open one's borders to the world while maintaining a conservative mindset or lifestyle. Interactions shape people.

However, leisure and scientific tourism challenge social values and cultural norms, and it may influence the social

process of acculturation. Oman is eyeing raising the number of tourists to 11 million by 2040, with fort visits, museums, arts and crafts, geosites, and architecture as key components for economic diversification. Its touristic narratives are presented as traditional and welcoming while simultaneously commodifying its heritage, culture, and natural environment.

Nearly every Omani city has its fort. They are part of Oman's ancient past, but little or no historical information is supplied at such sites.

Blessed with splendid beaches within its 3,165 km coastline, Oman is known for its seafaring traditions. Museums and galleries highlight the significance of the sea throughout Oman's 5,000-year-old history.

Natural resources, such as seas, dunes, mountains, and oases, are subject to tourism consumption. In 2023, the Daymaniyat Islands Reserve saw a 73 per cent increase in visits. Barr al Hickman's clean nature, home to various birds and fish, has made it a must-do destination for divers and tourists. Geological adventures ranging from 'gravel to sand and salt' and scenic beauty are important drivers of natural tourism.

Tourism growth frequently results in improvement and expansion. Still, it can also cause the weakening of local culture and increase levels of environmental degradation.

Culinary tours are mushrooming, and dining with a local family is a growing trend. The same may be said for for-

Blessed with splendid beaches within its 3,165 km coastline, Oman is known for its seafaring traditions. Museums and galleries highlight the significance of the sea throughout Oman's 5,000-year-old history

eign tourists staying with locals in their homes and owner-run lodgings offering special 'authentic' accommodations.

The interaction between local citizens and tourists involves the expectations of both visitors and entertainers. It is a discourse that fits both the giver and the receiver.

Omani peacefulness has become the defining feature of Oman's identity; what is at risk in the modernisation process is a new style of articulating the past and the future. Tourism adjusted for travellers alters historical perspectives. As cities' landscapes change, so do perceptions of their histories.

Within the literature review, presenting Orientalised tourism entails influencing visitors' perceptions of music, clothing, perfumes, and make-believe, such as Arabian tales based on the imagery of gardens, rugs, veiled women, princes, and princesses. 'Orientalism', a form of reflexive staged authenticity, is socially constructed to enchant visitors; the romanticised interpretation of stories about people, trade, and inhospitable terrains.

It all started with the many legends of flying carpets to Aladdin, Ali Baba, Sinbad, and the novel Arabian Nights adapted into films and musicals and incorporated into popular culture. Stories evolved into legends and myths, providing the imagination with captivating narratives; the exotic also functions as marketing tools. Despite the accelerated pace of modernisation, oldness and timelessness are powerful dynamics.

Use it or lose it... President Biden races to spend climate cash

DAVID SHERFINSKI

Fearing that Donald Trump could kill off green initiatives if he wins the US election, President Joe Biden's administration is racing to spend the tens of billions of dollars it had earmarked for climate action.

Trump, who is running against Vice President Kamala Harris to succeed Biden, has put the president's climate and energy agenda in the crosshairs on the campaign trail.

Biden is facing the prospect that a Republican-controlled Washington could roll back or curtail a signature achievement - his climate and social spending law - meaning billions in clean energy funding could hinge on who wins the November 5 election.

"The Biden-Harris administration is trying to get this money out the door and get it fully obligated," said Katie Harris with BlueGreen Alliance, a coalition of union and environmental groups. "It's quite the undertaking," she said.

As it stands, while billions in climate funding have been allocated since Biden signed the "Inflation Reduction Act" two years ago, there is still a sizable chunk on the table and precious little time to get it out.

Biden is facing the prospect that a Republican-controlled Washington could roll back or curtail a signature achievement - his climate and social spending law

BlueGreen's Harris said it would be "messy" for Republicans to roll back funding without controlling both the White House and Congress - but said Trump could certainly try to slow things down.

The original \$380 billion price tag for the clean energy provisions of the IRA now tops \$1 trillion over 10 years, according to estimates, due

in large part to the greater-than-expected popularity of tax credits for things such as wind and solar power.

The credits have helped spur more than \$200 billion in private sector investment in electric vehicles and batteries alone, said David Kieve with EDF Action, the political arm of the environmental advocacy group. "The sooner we see people showing up to work in clean energy jobs created by the Inflation Reduction Act, the harder it's going to be to get rid of any of it because people will see it working better in their communities," he said.

The Energy Department released a recent report that found clean energy jobs grew in 2023 at double the rate (4.2 per cent) of jobs in the rest of the economy (2 per cent), adding 142,000 new jobs.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

Climate change is already making us sick

In Australia, California, the Amazon, and many other places nowadays, red skies, glowing and thick with smoke and ash, have become increasingly common. Beyond destroying homes, wildlife, and ecosystems, wildfires often cause air quality to deteriorate sharply, with serious consequences for human health.

Even in normal times, 99 per cent of all people breathe air that exceeds World Health Organisation air-quality limits. But disasters such as wildfires make matters far worse: as air pollution and airborne allergens increase, so do hospital admissions for respiratory ailments, even in areas far from the blaze. Last year, during the 19 days when smoke from wildfires in Canada was wafting over the United States, emergency-room visits for asthma were 17 per cent higher than normal.

With climate change increasing the frequency and intensity of such disasters, the health impact will only grow. People suffering from respiratory illnesses, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), are at particularly high risk, owing to their susceptibility to air pollution and allergens. Rising temperatures compound the problem: one study found that COPD hospitalisations rise by 1.5 per cent for every 1°C increase above 23.2°C.

People with certain allergies are also vulnerable to respiratory issues as climate change progresses. For example, over the past 20 years, the combination of rising temperatures and increased levels of carbon dioxide in the air has caused pollen counts to increase steadily.

Already, climate change has brought an increase in new diagnoses of respiratory diseases, while exacerbating the symptoms of those who already suffer. The



Beyond destroying homes, wildlife, and ecosystems, wildfires often cause air quality to deteriorate sharply, with serious consequences for human health.



PAUL HUDSON

The writer is CEO of Sanofi

Global warming has brought an increase in new diagnoses of respiratory and immune-driven diseases, while exacerbating the symptoms of those who already suffer. The healthcare sector must urgently devise strategies for mitigating such health risks, especially among vulnerable populations

same is true for immunity-related diseases, as many of the same environmental factors that affect the respiratory system - such as higher temperatures and increased airborne allergens - put the immune system under stress.

This often results in inflammatory conditions, which contribute to more than half of all deaths globally.

Moreover, a robust body of evidence links outdoor air pollution to skin conditions, such as hyperpigmentation, atopic dermatitis, and psoriasis. The effects of climate change can also exacerbate other diseases that affect the immune system, including infectious diseases like meningitis and neglected tropical diseases. Taking cover indoors cannot keep us safe.

Indoor air pollution - which is also exacerbated by climate change - is responsible for an estimated 1.6 million deaths annually, more than half of which are children under five years old in countries that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cli-

mate change. Given the worsening climate crisis, urgent action is needed to protect human health. For starters, the health-care sector must identify key environmental risks created or exacerbated by climate change, clarify their potential health implications, and strengthen responses to - and prevention of - the relevant conditions and diseases. Healthcare pipelines must be supplemented with targeted treatments.

Any effort to deal with the health effects of climate change should make use of artificial intelligence. AI will undoubtedly play an important role in climate action: research shows that, by scaling currently proven applications and technology alone, AI could help reduce global greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions by as much as 10 per cent by 2030, equivalent to the annual emissions of the entire European Union.

AI can significantly bolster climate-related adaptation and resilience initiatives as well. On the health front, by detecting patterns of incidence of potential climate events, AI can help us to identify and prepare vulnerable populations and develop plans for responding to extreme weather events before they happen.

AI has already proven its ability to predict events like heat waves. This predictive capacity means that AI can also help to improve the efficiency of renewable-energy sources like wind and solar, optimise energy grids, and reduce downtime in energy production.

Finally, the healthcare sector should work with local and philanthropic organisations and community workers to get treatments to those who need them most. Low- and middle-income countries are disproportionately affected by climate change, owing to a range of factors.

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SPORTS

KEY TEST



RED WARRIORS GEAR UP FOR KUWAIT CLASH

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 2

The Red Warriors are getting set to take on Kuwait and Jordan in tight clashes at the third and fourth rounds of the final qualifiers for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The matches are scheduled for October 10 in Muscat and October 15 in Amman respectively. Nine days are remaining for the closest tie against Gulf team Kuwait in a home game at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The Oman national team players are undergoing their daily training sessions under the watchful eyes of experienced national coach Rasheed Jaber and his assistant coaching team including Omani coach Yaqoob al Sabahi. The selected players are busy with training sessions and on Wednesday they completed their fifth session under the supervision of the new head coach.

The technical team manager and his accompanying staff focused in different areas including the physical and stretching warm-up. Later, the head coach concentrated on positioning of the player's placement through some technical drills and tactical exercises.

Mohsin al Ghassani, who is playing for Bangkok United, and Salah al Yahyaie of Bahrain's Al Khaldiya SC, will join the team in the coming days while the rest of the players are attending all the training sessions.

On the other side, the national campaign 'We are all with you' announced the details of obtaining the free tickets for Kuwait match on October 10. The main committee of the campaign made free electronic tickets available for all governorates of Oman through the website www.afc2024oman.com.

Fans are required to enter accurate information on the website and confirm the authenticity of the provided details. Ticket collection is scheduled for October 4-5 while if tickets are not collected within the specified period, these tickets will be re-floated for others in the website.

Tickets will be required to attend the match and attendees must adhere to the regulation. VIP platform tickets will also be available for sale at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex starting from October 6-8.

Dortmund hit Celtic for 7, Arsenal blank PSG

ARSENAL

beat Paris Saint-Germain 2-0 in their heavyweight Champions League duel on Tuesday, while last season's beaten finalists Borussia Dortmund gave Celtic a brutal reality check with an emphatic 7-1 win in Germany.

Dortmund were the biggest winners on a night which also saw Barcelona, Manchester City and Inter Milan claim one-sided victories and Champions League debutants Brest won 4-0 at Red Bull Salzburg.

The clash between Arsenal and French champions PSG in London was the big game of the day as the second round of matches in the new format of European football's elite club competition got underway.

The Gunners were worthy winners with Kai Havertz heading in from a Leandro Trossard cross to open the scoring on 20 minutes and Bukayo Saka doubling their lead before half-time as his free-kick delivery from the right evaded everybody on its way in.

PSG saw Nuno Mendes strike the outside of the post from range in the first half while Joao Neves hit the woodwork after the break, but the visitors could not get back into the game.

It is a first win in the Champions League this season for Mikel Arteta's Arsenal, who drew 0-0 away to Atalanta on matchday one two weeks ago. "Really, really happy with the performance," Arteta told broadcaster Amazon Prime. "The Champions League brings different demands but I think we handled it really well."

ADEYEMI HITS HAT-TRICK

Dortmund are currently on top of the 36-team league after they followed a 3-0 win at Club Brugge in their first game by trouncing Scottish champions Celtic in Germany.

Karim Adeyemi scored a hat-trick in the first half for Dortmund, who were 5-1 ahead at half-time. Emre Can opened the scoring from the penalty spot before Daizen Maeda equalised, but Adeyemi then took centre stage.

Serhou Guirassy netted a penalty before the interval and made it 6-1 midway through the second half, with substitute Felix Nmecha wrapping up the victory late on. It is Dortmund's biggest winning margin in the Champions League alongside a 6-0 win away to Legia Warsaw in 2016.

"There's no such thing as a perfect



Arsenal's German midfielder #29 Kai Havertz headers the ball to score the opening goal during the Uefa Champions League match against Paris Saint-Germain at the Emirates Stadium in north London. — AFP

game, but it was very, very good," said Can. "This has to be the standard we aim to set."

BARCA, MAN CITY WIN

Barcelona beat Swiss champions Young Boys 5-0 to bounce back from a 2-1 loss at Monaco a fortnight ago and their first defeat of the season in La Liga last weekend at Osasuna.

Robert Lewandowski scored twice either side of goals by Raphinha and Inigo Martinez before a late Mohamed Ali Camara own-goal wrapped up the victory.

"We knew after the game against Monaco in the Champions League we had to give a quick reply in the next game, which was this one, and we did that well," Raphinha told broadcaster Movistar.

Winners of the Champions League in 2023, Pep Guardiola's City were comfortable 4-0 winners away to Slovan Bratislava in Slovakia, with Ilkay Gundogan, Phil Foden, Erling Haaland and James McAtee getting the goals.

Inter, who lost to City in the final in Istanbul two seasons ago, won by the same scoreline at home to Red Star Belgrade.

Hakan Calhanoglu set Inter on their way with a stunning early free-kick before Marko Arnautovic, Lautaro Martinez and Mehdi Taremi all netted in the second half, the latter from a penalty.

German champions Bayer Leverkusen got their second straight win in this season's competition as a Victor Boniface goal early in the second half allowed them to beat AC Milan 1-0. — AFP

Barka, Adam to host first camel race of season with 89 rounds

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, OCT 2

THE FIRST RACE of 22nd edition of the annual camel races for the 2024-2025 season will begin on Friday and will continue for three days with 89 rounds to be held in Barka and Adam fields.

The event is supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and organised by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF) in cooperation with Royal Camel Corps (RCC).

The OCRF's Board of Directors recently announced 23 local events: 13 general races, three races sponsored by Shell Oman, three races sponsored by Occidental Oman, and four events featuring camel beauty contests, milking competitions and Ardah (traditional races).

The launching race will include 46 rounds that will be held at RCC field in Barka, concurrently, 43 rounds will take place at Al Bashayer race track in the Wilayat of Adam.

Heritage

Shaikh Saeed bin Saud al Ghafili, OCRF Chairman, said: "Camel racing represents an Omani heritage that is passed through generations with support from all segments of society. Camel owners and trainers compete for various prizes, in addition to the economic benefits from buying and selling camels."



As many as 2,500 camels will compete in the first race to get the race prize, cash prize for the top 10 and chance to sell the winning camels to the GCC countries.

The first day, Friday, will witness 36 rounds divided equally between Barka and Adam, that are dedicated to 'Hagayeg' category, two years old over a distance of 3 km.

On the second day of competition's 27 rounds, 12 rounds will be held in Adam and 12 rounds in Barka for the 'Laqaya' category,

three years old over a distance of four km.

The Barka field will host three rounds for human rider's race for 2 km, which is a miniature image of the past race before using the robotic rider, as a kind of support for young people to preserve this historical sport.

The third day will witness 26 rounds divided equally between Barka and Adam, 12 rounds for 'Al Ythaa' category, four years old for 5 km, six rounds for 'Al Thanaya' cat-

egory, five years old over a distance of 6 km, eight rounds allocated for 'Al Hawl' category, above six years for 6 km.

The Oman Camel Racing Federation announced some participating conditions, which is limited to pure-bred camels owned by Omani only and strictly prohibited to stimulate with blood or use stimulating substances and electric shocks.

The participants have to pre-register online to allow the federation to transfer the prize automatically to the owner's bank account. In all rounds, the top 10 winners will receive cash awards.

Hamad bin Ali al Saadi, Secretary-General of OCRF, stated that "the federation has made many developments in the racing system in the Sultanate of Oman, where electronic pre-registration has been implemented through the serial number of the electronic chip found in each participating camel, as well as the system of delivering prize money electronically to the participants' accounts."

MANAGEMENT CRISIS



Babar Azam (L) gestures at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan on Wednesday. — AFP

PAKISTAN LEFT RUDDERLESS AS WHITE-BALL SKIPPER AZAM RESIGNS

KARACHI: Pakistan's limited-overs team was leaderless on Wednesday after captain Babar Azam resigned, compounding a management crisis experts say has badly affected the team's international performance.

Pakistani cricket is flailing in all formats after a series of stinging losses, with a revolving door of bosses and allegations that nepotism has seeped into the sport.

Azam announced his resignation on his personal social media just before midnight on Tuesday, before an official Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) statement more than 12 hours later.

Pakistan cricket has ploughed through four coaches, three board heads and four captains in the past two years, at the same time sliding down international standings.

"It's a leadership crisis," former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif said. "Pakistan cricket is in the ICU with no specialist for treatment."

Azam's resignation came hours before England touched down on Wednesday for a three-match Test series that follows Pakistan's humiliating 2-0 home series defeat to lowly ranked Bangladesh last month. It was 29-year-old Azam's second turn as captain after a flip-flop saw him resign in all three formats following Pakistan's early exit from the ODI World Cup in November.

He returned in March to captain white-ball competitions but lasted just six months, leaving Pakistan leaderless with four major series coming up and the Champions Trophy next year.

Azam was captain when Pakistan crashed out of the T20 World Cup after a bruising loss to newcomers the United States.

He said he stood down to focus on his playing role as a batsman.

"He should not have accepted captaincy again," Latif said. "Neither the team was performing nor was he scoring big," he said. "This resignation has come very late and that has not only cost him badly, but also the team."

The PCB said on Wednesday the national selection committee would begin the hunt for a successor. "He believes that dedicating himself fully to his batting will enable him to play a more decisive role in the team's success in the shorter formats," a PCB statement said.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan is considered the front-runner for the job. — AFP

Over 100 sailors set for Musannah Race Week



THE Barcelo Musannah Resort is set to welcome over 100 young sailors from eight countries for the 13th edition of Oman Sail's Musannah Race Week.

Having completed three practice days, racing gets underway on October 4, talented young sailors from Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, India, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Singapore and Thailand will compete in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6 and ILCA 7, as well as the para inclusive RS Venture Connect class.

During the event, Oman Sail coaches will hold daily community 'Try Sailing' sessions to encourage people from Al Musannah to discover the sport and experience the feeling of being on the water with a qualified instructor. The initiative aims to inspire the next generation of Omani sailors and show how accessible sailing can be with Oman Sail's Sailing School based at Barcelo Musannah Resort.

Competition at Musannah Race Week will be held over 12 races in



"The chance to introduce new sailors to the sport is also very rewarding and we hope to see some of those who sailed for the first time this week back here in the coming years

SHAIMA AL ASMI
Oman Sail official

each class, with no more than three per day. Conditions are expected to be ideal for sailing, and after several practice days for the sailors where they could get used to the water and put their training into action, expectations are high. Prizes will be awarded for the overall top three in each class, as well as the junior top three for sailors under the age of 12, and the girls top three, as well as the overall team racing competition.

Shaima al Asmi, Oman Sail's Operations Executive and Musannah Race Week Project Manager, said, "We are very excited for the races to begin. Musannah Race Week has been a firm favourite of sailors from across the region and within Oman for 12 years now and this year's edition brings a high calibre of sailors to Barcelo Musannah Resort. Of course, Musannah Race Week is about more than just who wins; it

is a chance to share experiences, learn from each other and make lifelong friends in a global sport where paths continue to cross throughout a career. The chance to introduce new sailors to the sport is also very rewarding and we hope to see some of those who sailed for the first time this week back here in the coming years."

Musannah Race Week has always been known as a festival of sailing and goes beyond racing to promote friendship, inclusion and mutual understanding. Oman Sail and the Barcelo Musannah Resort will host a BBO night for all sailors, staff and families to offer a unique opportunity to experience authentic Omani hospitality and get to know each other in the idyllic surroundings of the resort.

Musannah Race Week is supported by Barcelo Musannah Resort and Al Khoudh Water.

Southee quits as Kiwis Test captain, hands over to Latham

WELLINGTON: Tim Southee stepped down as New Zealand's Test captain on Wednesday after their 2-0 defeat to Sri Lanka and handed the reins to opening batsman Tom Latham for the India series.

Veteran pace bowler Southee has struggled for form since the home summer when he took six wickets at an average of more than 70 against a second-string South Africa and Australia.

The Sri Lanka sweep, capped by a humiliating innings and 154-run loss in Galle last week, was the Black Caps' fourth Test defeat in succession either side of the washed-out match against Afghanistan.

It left Southee with a record of six wins, six losses and two draws from his 14 Tests in charge after taking over from Kane Williamson in late-2022.

The 35-year-old said he had resolved to quit the captaincy after

a discussion with head coach Gary Stead and was hopeful of getting back to his best without the burden of leadership.

"It was my decision to move aside and it's now Tom's time to keep moving this team forward," Southee told reporters at Auckland airport after arriving home from Sri Lanka.

Asked if the captaincy was behind his decline in form, Southee said: "You look at results and it hasn't been ideal the last wee while.

"But it was a job I really enjoyed doing."

Latham, who has captained the Test side on nine previous occasions, will lead a 15-strong squad including Southee to India.

"He's obviously had a taste over a period of time as well," said Southee.

"He's a great leader amongst the guys and I wish him all the best. I'll be there to support him along the way."

Hopeful

The 35-year-old said he had resolved to quit the captaincy after a discussion with head coach Gary Stead and was hopeful of getting back to his best without the burden of leadership.



New Zealand captain Tim Southee reacts as he walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal during the third day of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Galle, Sri Lanka on September 28. New Zealand lost the series 2-0. — AFP

India, riding a record winning streak of 18 Test series on home soil after a 2-0 defeat of Bangladesh, host New Zealand in three Tests starting in Bangalore on October 16.

Since winning the inaugural World Test Championship in 2021, New Zealand have been a fading force in the sport's longest format and struggled to regenerate following the international retirements of seasoned campaigners.

Southee was New Zealand's leading bowler with eight wickets on the last tour of India in 2021 when the hosts won the two-match series 1-0.

However, his haul was dwarfed by the tallies of India's leading spinners and underlined New Zealand's dearth of quality slow bowlers.

"My record in the subcontinent's been pretty good over the years," he said. "I'd like to think that I could still contribute in that part of the world." — Reuters

Battling Alcaraz outlasts Sinner to claim China Open

WORLD NO 2 CAME BACK FROM A SET DOWN TO BEAT WORLD NO 1



BEIJING: Carlos Alcaraz roared back from a set down to beat world number one Jannik Sinner in a thriller and win his first China Open title on Wednesday.

The four-time Grand Slam champion from Spain edged a captivating final 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) for his fourth ATP crown of the year and 16th overall.

Alcaraz, who is set to return to number two in the world behind Sinner, was 3-0 down in the final-set tie break only to fight back and win in three hours, 21 minutes. The dramatic triumph ended Sinner's run of 14 victories in a row and saw him deposed as the Beijing champion after an almighty fight.

"What can I say about the year you're having, it's unbelievable," Alcaraz told Sinner at the victory presentation.

"I respect you a lot as a player, but even more as a person."

US Open champion Sinner has been playing in Beijing under fresh scrutiny.

The Italian has admitted to sleepless nights over his doping case, which was reignited at the weekend when the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) said it had appealed the decision to clear him.

In front of a packed house in the Chinese capital, the early exchanges were nervy with both players under immediate pressure on their service games.

Sinner, 23, was the first to blink, with second-seeded Alcaraz breaking for a 3-1 lead and celebrating with a fist pump.

The Spaniard held easily for 4-1 and had his opponent uncharacteristically rattled.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz and runner-up Italy's Jannik Sinner pose with their trophies after the final match. — Reuters

Alcaraz, 21, served for the set but US Open champion Sinner grabbed the break back when he needed it most.

Sinner then saved set point on his own serve to force the tie break, and saved another in the tie break before taking the set at his first opportunity when Alcaraz fired long.

It was the first set Alcaraz had dropped all week. The second set was just as tight.

Both players saw chances come and go but they went with serve until Alcaraz broke for 5-4, before holding with ease to send the final into a third set. The decider again went to a tie-break, where Alcaraz finally prevailed on his first match point. "It was a great battle again," said Sinner.

RUTHLESS SABALENKA

In the women's draw, top seed Aryna Sabalenka won her 15th match in a row to power into the quarterfinals with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over Madison Keys.

The US Open champion will face Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic.

World number two Sabalenka has won more matches on tour this season than anyone else and extended her red-hot streak with a fairly routine victory over the 24th-ranked American.

Sabalenka is on a collision course in the semifinals with China's Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen, who faces 43rd-ranked Amanda Anisimova in the last 16. — AFP

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INFRA ALIGNMENT

AL DHAHIRAH INKS PACTS TO BOOST MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT



Artist's rendering of a viewing platform to be developed in Al Dhahirah Governorate

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 2

RECENT agreements signed in Al Dhahirah Governorate to implement various service and development projects across all wilayats of the governorate are part of efforts to enhance the municipal sector, according to Eng Nasser bin Ali al Siyabi, Director-General of Al Dhahirah Municipality.

Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, signed the agreements for various service and development projects worth RO 12.5 million to be implemented across all wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate.

In an exclusive statement to the Observer, Al Siyabi explained that these agreements aim to boost municipal services and infrastructure in alignment with the development priorities of Al Dhahirah Governorate and Oman Vision 2040.

He added that the agreements included the signing of the Yanqul and Dhank viewing platform projects, which will directly contribute to increasing local tourism activity in both wilayats due to the various recreational and leisure facilities they offer for all segments of society.

These projects also serve as ideal locations for hosting events and festivals of various types. Moreover, such tourism projects help create job opportunities for the local community through the presence of commercial activities such as cafes, restaurants and start-ups in the entertainment sector, as well as supporting productive families.

Future Fund Oman unveils projects worth RO 832m

OASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 2

FUTURE Fund Oman (FFO), the newest investment fund of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), has rolled out an initial package of projects for implementation as collaborative initiatives involving international investors and local companies.

Of a total investment value of RO 832 million, foreign investors are committed to contributing around RO 609 million, while the FFO has pledged to pitch in the remaining RO 220 million. As many as 1,600 direct employment opportunities will be created as a result of these investments.

Announcing this inaugural batch of approved projects at a briefing here on Wednesday, October 2, 2024, Mulham al Jarf, Deputy President for Investments at Oman Investment Authority, said the initiatives cover 10 key sectors within Oman.

Major projects operate in technology, industry and manufacturing, tourism, green energy and electric vehicles, while SMEs and start-up projects focus on food, health, technology, financial technology and e-commerce.

Al Jarf emphasised that these projects mirror OIA's commitment to fulfilling the strategic objectives of Future Fund Oman.

These objectives revolve around stimulating growth in the local economy, boosting targeted economic sectors, fostering collaboration with the private sector, attracting foreign investments, and creating opportunities for local employment and business growth



MULHAM AL JARF

OIA Deputy President - Investments



Foreign investors are committed to contributing around RO 609 million, while the FFO has pledged to pitch in the remaining RO 220 million. As many as 1,600 direct employment opportunities will be created as a result of these investments.

for SMEs and start-ups.

He further noted that these are only the first group of projects approved since FFO's establishment on January 17, 2024. The Fund has received substantial interest from local and foreign investors, with over 212 applications submitted. Al Jarf added that OIA has implemented a meticulous process to ensure sound investment decisions.

Under the direct local projects mandate, FFO has approved three key projects including United Solar's manufacturing facility in Sohar Freezone. This will be one of the world's largest facilities and a first in the Middle East's polysilicon industry.

Its annual capacity reaches 100,000 tonnes of polysilicon, a key component in downstream renewable energy sectors such as the solar panels industry.

The IDG Oman Investment Fund, in partnership with the Chinese IDG Capital Fund, leverages its diversified investment expertise to drive progress in ICT, renewable energy and electric vehicles in Oman.

Additionally, a strategic investment initiative is being pursued in collaboration with an international capital fund, focusing on sectors such as ICT, energy, tourism, and agriculture. The aim is to stimulate investment in the Omani market by partnering with leading enterprises from China.

FFO has also approved a number of SMEs and start-up projects, which will be managed in partnerships with fund managers such as Tanmia, ITHCA, Omantel and Cyfr Capital. The IO Kitchen project, a cutting-edge cloud kitchen featuring over 30 virtual brands,

redefines the food experience and delivery scene by integrating state-of-the-art technologies.

Similarly, the Bima project has pioneered online insurance brokerage services in Oman, while the Qpay project stands as the first licensed Omani entity to offer the 'buy now, pay later' service within the local market.

Leveraging artificial intelligence, the BcLear Aligner project is reshaping traditional dental braces, while the Nashid project introduces secure and accessible digital identity solutions for all, integrating blockchain and AI verification processes.

The Antom digital financial platform employs API management technologies to empower Oman's financial institutions and fintech companies.

Further fortifying Oman's financial and tech sectors are projects such as Al Modawi, a specialised medical tourism platform enabling users to locate credible healthcare providers and arrange comprehensive medical tourism experiences.

The Fascano project provides intelligent sourcing solutions for the food, hospitality and event industries, bridging the gap between MENA regional merchants and their customers.

Edfa Pay transforms mobile phones into secure payment devices for commercial transactions, while Zumr utilises algorithms to modernise traditional saving associations, ensuring a secure and easily accessible financial solution.

The Monak electronic portal caters to foreign workers by offering financial services and simplifying registration processes for employers and recruitment agencies.

Oman's maiden space launch likely in December

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 2

THE first launch of a space rocket from Oman's Etlaq spaceport in Duqm is expected to take place this December, according to Dr Saud al Shueili, Director-General and Head of the National Space Programme at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Speaking to the Middle East Space Monitor, the director-general shared the following remarks, "The aim for Etlaq is to have its first launch by the end of this year, in December.

"Oman's geographical location, being close to the equator, gives it a distinct advantage. Launching from near the equator means satellites can reach orbit more efficiently, requiring less fuel and ultimately reducing launch costs. This makes



The spaceport is the first of its kind in the MENA region.

Oman a highly attractive option for satellite launches." Additionally, he emphasised the economic potential of the spaceport.

"While Etlaq is currently focused on launching small sound rockets, we see this as just the beginning. Over time, this project has the potential to grow into a full-fledged

spaceport. As more companies realise the economic benefits of launching from Oman — such as lower costs and the security offered by our political neutrality — they may choose Oman over other locations for their launches. Our neutrality ensures that no foreign entity can interfere with or control their assets."

First announced in 2023, the Etlaq Spaceport is led by Omani space company National Aerospace Services Company (Nascom). The project is expected to be the first spaceport in the MENA region.

The spaceport will provide rocket and satellite launch services for research and commercial purposes and rocket assembly and testing facilities. Furthermore, it will include multiple research and development centres. The project is one of Oman's most notable private initiatives in the space sector.

Observer **BUSINESS REVIEW**

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ADVERTORIALS

GEOTECHNICAL INNOVATION CONFERENCE SET ON OCTOBER 30-31



MUSCAT: As the UAE's construction industry approaches a staggering value of \$640 billion, and the broader GCC region sees projects worth over \$2.7 trillion, the need for advanced geotechnical solutions has never been greater. In response to these demands, Dubai will host the International Geotechnical Innovation Conference (IGIC) on October 30-31, 2024, at the Le Méridien Dubai Hotel and Conference Centre.

Building on the success of its inaugural edition in Saudi Arabia in May 2024, IGIC UAE is set to address the unique geotechnical challenges faced by the region, including arid desert soils, high salinity, expansive clays, extreme heat and seismic risks.

The conference will bring together project owners, contractors, consultants and experts to explore innovative solutions that are critical to advancing the sector.

Fugro, a global leader in geo-data services, has been named the Official Geotechnical Partner of the event. Sessions will cover a wide range of topics,

Highlights

Building on the success of its inaugural edition in Saudi Arabia in May 2024, IGIC UAE is set to address the unique geotechnical challenges faced by the region, including arid desert soils, high salinity, expansive clays, extreme heat and seismic risks.

including advanced ground engineering, pile design optimisation, and sustainable construction techniques.

With a focus on green and resilient infrastructure, the conference will also tackle the impact of changing climate patterns on construction.

Speakers at the event include prominent figures such as: Prof Dr -Ing Rolf Katzenbach, Technical University of Darmstadt; Prof Dr Lyesse Lalaoui, École

Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL); Prof Dr Rod Eddies, Fugro; Dr Ala Sainak, Geotechnical Lead at ADNOC (PMC SNC-Lavalin); Imraan Motara, Head of Ground Engineering at WSP.

In addition to the conference, an international exhibition will feature the latest geotechnical technologies, from ground improvement solutions to remote sensing tools. Exhibitors include industry leaders such as Fugro, Expander Body International, Beijing Hengxiang Hongye, and Bauer Maschinen GmbH.

On the second day, attendees can join an exclusive workshop led by Prof. Dr Lyesse Lalaoui, focusing on the emerging field of "Energy Geotechnics and Infrastructure."

IGIC UAE provides a valuable platform for networking with key players in underground infrastructure and deep foundation construction, offering insights into cutting-edge innovations and best practices. For more details and registration, visit [www.igicuae.com](#).

OQEP IPO roadshows set to boost national investment

OMAN'S OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) recently organised two IPO roadshows in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), held in the wilayats of Sur and Al Buraimi.

This IPO is the largest in the history of Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 2024, targeting the exploration and production sector to broaden ownership in government assets and attract national and foreign investments.

Eng Ahmed al azkawi, CEO of OQEP, emphasised the IPO's strategic importance in driving economic diversification and providing investment opportunities for citizens. Al Azkawi highlighted that this offering, with 2 billion shares, is substantially larger than previous IPOs, such as Abraj Energy Services and OQGN.

Notably, 40 per cent of the shares are allocated to individual investors, with a 10 per cent discount to encourage



citizen participation.

Eng Mahmoud al Hashimi, OQEP's Chief Operating Officer, provided insights into the company's production growth, from 18,000 barrels of oil equivalent in 2009 to 250,000 barrels in 2024.

This dramatic increase reflects operational excellence in Block 60, where production has surged from 5,000 barrels in 2019 to 62,000 barrels per day.

Chief Financial Officer Jaber

al Numani highlighted OQEP's solid financial performance, noting a 32 per cent return on investment over recent years.

Plans include distributing RO 230 million in profits over the next two years, providing a strong incentive for potential investors.

In Al Buraimi, Hilal al Ghaiti, member of the Majlis Ashshura representing the wilayat Al Buraimi and Zagher bin Mohammed al Kaabi, Chairman of the Board of Di-

rectors of OCCI's branch in Al Buraimi, and business leaders joined the roadshow, where presentations emphasised the IPO's broad reach across individual and institutional investors.

Said al Hashmi, OQEP's CEO of HR, Technology, and Work Culture, highlighted the IPO's significance in expanding ownership opportunities for Oman's citizens and businesses, further strengthening the national economy.

FORD HOSTS NEW 2024 F-150 LARIAT AND OMAN RAPTOR CLUB

MUSCAT: The spirit of adventure and the power of performance recently converged at Arabian Car Marketing Company's Ford showroom in Al Wattayah, as the stage was set for the grand unveiling of the New Ford F-150 Lariat.

This exclusive event not only introduced the latest marvel in Ford's lineup but also celebrated the launch of the new official logo for the Oman Raptor Club, heralding a new era for Ford Raptor enthusiasts across Oman.

The electrifying atmosphere of the event reflected a celebration of performance, precision, passion and strength. Attendees were treated to a stunning display of Ford Raptors, each uniquely customised to mirror the distinctive style and personality of its owner.

The evening was filled with engaging conversations, where guests exchanged insights on the Raptor's formi-



dable strengths, power, performance and voyages.

Tips on vehicle modifications, maintenance and potential upgrades further enriched the experience, offering Raptor owners valuable advice on enhancing their vehicles' capabilities.

A representative from the Ford Raptor community expressed their gratitude, saying, "This event has provided us with a unique opportunity to

connect with fellow Ford fans and owners who share our deep passion for power, performance and adventure. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Ford Motor Co. and Arabian Car Marketing Company team for their unwavering support in bringing this event to life."

Alongside the introduction of the Oman Raptor Club logo, the Ford showroom proudly showcased the new Ford F-150 Lariat.

This remarkable truck is a testament to Ford's enduring commitment to innovation and performance. Designed to set new benchmarks in the truck segment, the F-150 Lariat combines cutting-edge technology, superior craftsmanship and rugged capability in a way that only Ford trucks can deliver.

Commenting on the launch, a representative from Arabian Car Marketing Company said, "The F-150 series has long been one of the most popular and preferred vehicles in its segment. Built tough and packed with advanced features, these trucks empower their owners to tackle even the most challenging trails with ease.

The introduction of the F-150 Lariat takes this legacy to new heights. We are confident that the F-150 Lariat will prove to be the perfect companion for both work and adventure.

Global Money Exchange opens new kiosk cum open lounge at Muscat Airport

MUSCAT: Global Money Exchange Company (GMEC), the leading money exchange house in Oman, has opened a new open lounge cum kiosk at the Muscat International Airport. The kiosk is a very spacious one and is situated in the arrival area between Gates B and C.

The kiosk cum open lounge was dedicated to the passengers and visiting general public at a grand function held at the airport by Shaikh Samer bin Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nabhani, Chief Commercial Officer of Oman Airports in the presence of officials of Oman Airports, Global Money Exchange, staff of other establishments in the airport, and well-wishers.

The kiosk will operate 24x7, offering a wide range of currency exchange services to travellers and visitors coming to receive them.

The kiosk will operate 24x7, offering a wide range of currency exchange services to travellers and visitors coming to receive them.



The travellers and those coming to receive them can freely access the spacious lounge functioning throughout the day.

Flight information display of the airport is available close to the lounge and GMEC's staffs will also be available round the clock, should

they need any information on emergencies.

The company has a total of 5 outlets in the Muscat Airports in addition to the visa services in the arrival area. Global Money Exchange operates at all the international airports in the Sultanate of Oman. It

has the largest network in the country with remittance arrangements across the world.

The Company also deals in all major currencies of the world at very competitive rates. This service is offered 24x7 at our Muscat and Salalah International Airports. For the convenience of the travellers, an "online order facility" for foreign currency is available for quick and faster delivery.

Top officials of Oman Airports and Global Money Exchange Company were present in the dedication ceremony held at the arrival area of the airport.

The new kiosk is yet another milestone in the company's mission to provide world-class remittance and currency exchange services, emerging as a lead in the Sultanate of Oman's financial services industry.

THE ECONOMIC POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Opportunities and challenges

In today's digital age, social media has become a cornerstone of modern communication and marketing, with social media influencers at the forefront of this transformation. What initially began as a platform for sharing meaningful and engaging content has now evolved into a multi-billion-dollar industry.

However, with this rapid evolution comes the question: what economic impact will this phenomenon have, and is there a sustainable future for influencer marketing?

The initial rise of influencers was tied to their ability to create high-quality content that resonated with audiences. Their growing popularity presented an attractive opportunity for companies seeking new platforms for advertising and promotion. Yet, over time, the focus has shifted from quality content to quick follower acquisition, often at the expense of meaningful engagement.

This shift raises critical concerns about the long-term viability of this model, especially as the influencer market becomes saturated, and consumer trust in influencers begins to wane.

From an economic perspective, social media influencers have undoubtedly created new avenues for growth and marketing innovation. Brands increasingly rely on influencers to reach niche audiences more effectively and cost-efficiently than through traditional marketing channels.

Influencer marketing campaigns boast strong returns on investment (ROI), as they allow for direct consumer engagement and influence immediate purchasing decisions.

In 2023, the global influencer marketing industry was valued at over \$21 billion, with projections suggesting it will grow to \$24 billion by the end of 2024.

This reflects the ever-growing significance of influencers in marketing strategies worldwide.

However, with this rapid growth comes inherent risks. The heavy reliance on individuals who may not hold genuine influence or produce valuable content leaves the industry vulnerable to volatility.

The rise of micro-influencers and nano-influencers—who often have smaller but highly engaged followings—has somewhat mitigated this risk. Brands now prefer these influencers for their authentic engagement, over macro-influencers or celebrities who come with hefty price tags but less targeted reach.

Yet, the risk remains: influencer fame is often fleeting, and scandals or shifting trends can lead to sudden loss of influence, wasting marketing budgets and damaging brand reputations.

One of the major challenges confronting the influencer economy is the need for increased regulation. In several countries, governments have begun implementing legal frameworks to regulate the industry, requiring influenc-



OASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of Oman Observer's Business section



In 2023, the global influencer marketing industry was valued at over \$21 billion, with projections suggesting it will grow to \$24 billion by the end of 2024.

ers to obtain licences or register with regulatory bodies to ensure transparency in advertising.

In the UK, for example, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) mandates that influencers clearly disclose paid partnerships and sponsorships. While these regulations aim to build trust and protect consumers, the influencer market remains under-regulated in many regions, making it susceptible to unethical practices, false claims, and authenticity concerns.

Economically, the influencer industry holds vast potential if properly managed and regulated. With the increasing professionalisation of influencer marketing, new jobs are emerging in areas such as digital content creation, marketing strategy, and talent management.

Moreover, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionising the industry.

A recent report indicated that 63% of brands plan to incorporate

AI into their influencer marketing efforts, with 55% using AI specifically for identifying suitable influencers.

This could streamline campaigns, enhance targeting precision, and maximise ROI, pushing the industry further into the mainstream economy.

Additionally, there is a notable rise in budget allocation towards influencer marketing. In 2024, 60% of brands who budget for influencer marketing plan to increase their spending, with nearly a quarter intending to devote over 40% of their total marketing budget to influencer campaigns.

This reflects growing confidence in the influencer model, particularly when working with smaller influencers. A recent survey showed that 44% of brands prefer nano-influencers and 26% favour micro-influencers, emphasising cost-effectiveness and deeper audience engagement. Only 17% work with macro-

influencers, and just 13% with celebrities, indicating a clear shift towards authenticity over reach.

In terms of platforms, TikTok has emerged as the dominant force in influencer marketing, with 69% of brands using it for their campaigns.

This puts TikTok well ahead of other platforms like Instagram (47%), YouTube (33%), and Facebook (28%), solidifying its status as the preferred channel for influencer-driven content. The platform's short, engaging video format has proven to be highly effective for brands aiming to capture audience attention and drive user-generated content (UGC).

In fact, creating UGC has become the primary objective of influencer campaigns for 56% of brands, with generating direct sales taking a backseat at just 23%.

Despite the growing success of influencer marketing, its future sustainability will depend on the industry's ability to adapt to rapid technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, and increasing demands for transparency and authenticity.

Influencers who fail to evolve with these trends risk losing relevance, while those who maintain genuine connections with their followers will continue to thrive in this evolving landscape.

In conclusion, while social media influencers have undoubtedly become powerful drivers of economic growth and marketing innovation, the industry's long-term sustainability will depend on a delicate balance of regulation, ethical practices, and maintaining consumer trust.

As the market matures, will influencer marketing continue to expand as a vital component of the digital economy, or will it reach a saturation point? Only time will tell, but for now, influencers remain a crucial force shaping the future of marketing.

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OPINION

Ratings upgrade underscores positive outlook of Omani economy



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

THE economic situation and purchasing power in the country are improving, according to experts and traders involved in import, export, wholesale, and retail operations. The government, on its part, continues to reduce public debt and address unemployment by creating more job opportunities for citizens across various economic sectors.

These efforts are gradually contributing to the recovery of commercial and economic activities in the country.

With Oman's long-term commitment to paying down its global debt, the country's credit rating is also gradually improving.

Recently, the credit rating agency Standard & Poor's upgraded the country's rating from BB+ to BBB- with a stable outlook, citing improvements in financial performance.

The investment environment is also improving and economic sectors are experiencing growth after a decline that lasted for seven years, beginning in 2017.

Credit ratings, or creditworthiness, are evaluated by specialised agencies, institu-

tions, and organisations that assess the ability of countries and institutions to borrow and repay their debts.

Consistent debt repayment and fulfilment of financial obligations build confidence among rating agencies in the borrowing and debt management capabilities of governments and companies.

A country's ability to meet loan instalments and interest payments demonstrates its solvency or creditworthiness, which is reflected in its credit rating.

Oman has been working towards this for several years by reducing public debt and its associated costs, particularly through timely interest payments.

These efforts help Oman attract more foreign investment in the near future, especially as the government plans to launch large industrial projects, making it easier to secure financing. The government is also working to improve other key indicators, such as GDP growth and citizens' per capita income.

It aims to improve the balance of payments, control inflation, and enhance the

annual financial budget by generating more revenue through new economic sectors, while also improving the business environment, reducing bureaucracy, and enacting legislation to attract investment.

The recent BBB- rating awarded to Oman is the first of Standard & Poor's investment-grade ratings, indicating a safe investment environment in the country.

This follows a period of challenges due to falling global oil prices and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which negatively affected Oman's economy and financial conditions.

The report highlights that Oman is seriously committed to improving public finances through development initiatives, financial and economic measures, and government restructuring.

These efforts have helped restore the financial balance between revenues and public spending.

The government is also strongly committed to reducing public debt, improving the governance of state-owned enterprises, and lowering their debt levels.

Highlights

The investment environment is also improving and economic sectors are experiencing growth after a decline that lasted for seven years, beginning in 2017.

A 'HEART' IS NEEDED TO NURTURE PEOPLE AND CULTURE



SALIM BIN SAID AL RIYAMI

The author, with over 20 years of experience as an HR practitioner and executive in the private sector, is currently an Executive Business Developer at Nama Holding.

WE ALL know that the heart of the human being is the number one operator for the body to function and work.

I am not here to give you a science or a biology lecture, but since I am talking about the 'HEART', employers, leaders and executives should have a heart to nurture people and culture at work! People-first should be the number one philosophy for any organisation that wants to have a sustainable business and workforce.

As usual, being a person who loves acronyms, 'HEART' here does not refer to the main organ inside our body but refers to being:

Humble: As a leader, being humble is not about low self-esteem; it is about giving autonomy and ownership to others. This is the idea of 'servant leadership.' I wish many of our leaders had the humility and courage

Highlights

People-first should be the number one philosophy for any organisation that wants to have a sustainable business and workforce.

to accept learning and benefiting from their co-workers and subordinates!

Empathetic: Empathy builds trust and loyalty. Leaders should not only listen to their employees, but they should also understand, comprehend, and reflect on the situations of their employees to try solving their problems.

Adaptable: As a leader, you need to be adaptable and flexible to your team, hence guiding them to develop critical thinking skills against different challenges.

Acknowledge your team diversification for better communication.

Remarkable: To be a remarkable leader, you need to lead by example, hence fostering truly engaged employees. Continuously mentoring and coaching your team, as well as treating them with respect, are essential traits for a remarkable leader.

Transparent: Leaders should have an open-door philosophy. Enhance constructive feedback; communicate clearly and honestly to gain your team's trust and loyalty.

My dear reader, as you can see from the above, 'HEART' is very essential for leaders and executives to nurture their people and culture. Companies should believe in their people as the number one asset for their business operation.

Think about your heart and lead people in the right manner.

Sustainability and SMEs: A partnership for growth



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The author is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor.



Oman's commitment to sustainability is not just rhetoric - it's backed by ambitious targets and concrete action

AS OMAN embarks on its journey towards Oman Vision 2040, we stand at the cusp of a transformative era. Our nation's future hinges on two powerful forces: sustainability and the vibrant small and medium enterprise (SME) sector. This partnership holds the key to unlocking unprecedented opportunities for innovation, job creation and sustainable growth.

Oman's commitment to sustainability is not just rhetoric - it's backed by ambitious targets and concrete action. We aim to generate 30% of our electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and produce 8.5 million tonnes of green hydrogen annually by 2050. These goals are reshaping our economic landscape, creating fertile ground for innovative SMEs to thrive.

With over 100,000 registered SMEs, experiencing a remarkable 20.3% growth in the past year, and contributing 50% to our industrial GDP, the SME sector is a powerhouse of economic activity. Furthermore, these enterprises are responsible for a staggering 60-70% of private-sector employment.

Complementing this, our energy sector has already demonstrated its commitment to a greener future by achieving a 30% reduction in CO2 emissions. These figures underscore the immense potential when we combine our sustainability ambitions with the dynamism of our SME sector. It's a partnership that can drive innovation, create new industries, and generate thousands of green jobs.

The global shift towards sustainability is creating a wealth of opportunities for Omani SMEs. The demand for eco-friendly products and services is rising rapidly, opening up new markets and possibilities.

- **RENEWABLE ENERGY:** Oman's abundant solar and wind resources, coupled with the government's target of 30% renewable energy by 2030, offer immense potential for SMEs specialising in renewable energy technologies. The burgeoning green hydrogen sector, with Oman aiming to produce a substantial 1 million tonnes annually by 2030, presents further opportunities for innovative startups.
- **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM:** Oman's breathtaking natural beauty and rich cultural heritage are a magnet for eco-conscious travellers. SMEs can tap into this growing market by offering unique, low-impact tourism experiences that showcase Oman's natural wonders while preserving its delicate ecosystems.
- **WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING:** As Oman moves towards a circular economy, there's a growing need for innovative recycling technologies, upcycling businesses, and waste-to-energy solutions. SMEs can play a crucial role in reducing waste and maximising resource efficiency.
- **GREEN BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION:** The construction sector is ripe for a green transformation. SMEs can lead the way by offering sustainable building materials, energy-efficient designs, and smart home technologies that reduce environmental impact and promote energy savings.
- **SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES:** Water scarcity is a pressing challenge in Oman. SMEs can develop and implement innovative solutions such as drought-resistant crops, efficient irrigation systems, and sustainable fishing practices to ensure food security and protect our natural resources.
- **GREEN TECHNOLOGY:** From devel-

oping apps that promote sustainable living to creating cutting-edge environmental technologies, the possibilities are endless for tech-savvy entrepreneurs.

The Omani government is actively fostering a fertile ecosystem for sustainable SMEs to flourish.

Initiatives such as the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), which is creating opportunities in waste management and recycling, and the Authority for SME Development (Riyada), which offers training, funding, and support with a focus on sustainable sectors are testament to this commitment.

Furthermore, the Oman Technology Fund is actively investing in innovative startups, including those in the cleantech space, while the new Sustainable Finance Framework will channel more funding towards green projects. These initiatives are laying the groundwork for a thriving landscape of sustainable SMEs in Oman.

However, to fully unlock their potential, further action is needed to address challenges such as access to finance, technical expertise, and regulatory navigation.

To harness the full power of sustainable SMEs, we need a collaborative approach:

1. GREEN FINANCING REVOLUTION: Develop innovative financial products tailored for sustainable SMEs. Green bonds, sustainability-linked loans, and dedicated venture capital funds can provide the capital needed for growth.

2. SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE: Invest in comprehensive training programmes to equip entrepreneurs with sustainability skills and knowledge. Partner with universities to develop curricula that blend business acumen with environmental expertise.

3. INNOVATION HUBS: Create dedicated incubators and accelerators for green startups. These hubs can provide mentorship, resources, and networking opportunities to nurture the next generation of sustainable businesses.

4. STREAMLINED REGULATIONS: Simplify processes for green businesses while maintaining high standards. A "green fast track" for approvals and licences can help sustainable SMEs get off the ground quickly.

5. COLLABORATIVE ECOSYSTEMS: Foster partnerships between SMEs, large corporations, and research institutions. These collaborations can drive innovation, share resources, and create integrated sustainable solutions.

6. CONSUMER AWARENESS: Launch nationwide campaigns to educate consumers about the importance of supporting sustainable local businesses. Create a "green seal" certification to help consumers identify eco-friendly products and services.

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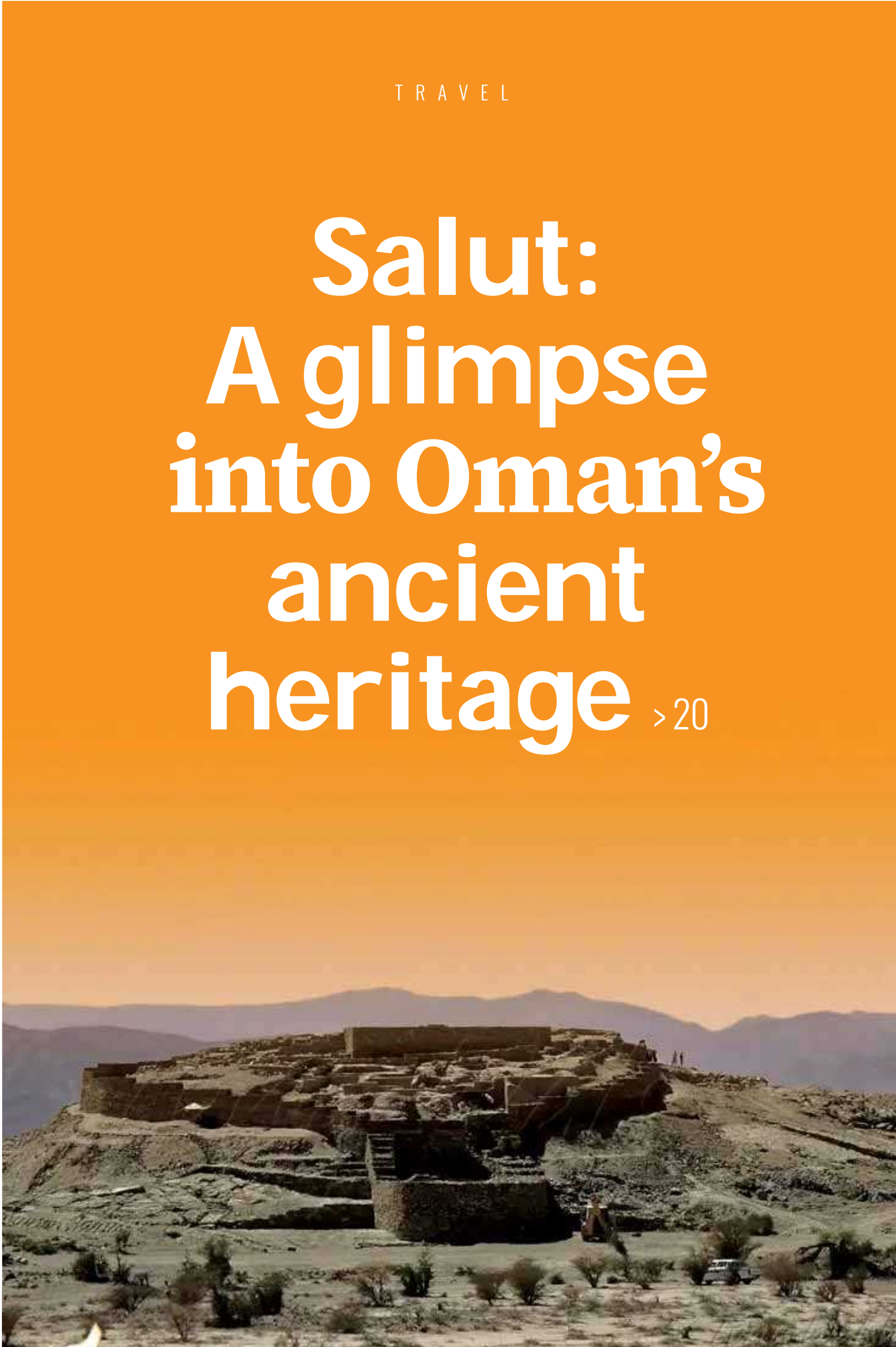
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OMAN OBSERVER

ART/LIFE

TRAVEL

Salut: A glimpse into Oman's ancient heritage >20



CHANGINGWORLD

*The power of words:
The capacity to
impact society*



BY SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
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Shaddad is a seasoned Omani journalist and currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors.

Words hold immense power; they can inspire, provoke thought, and even incite action, hence the power of words has the capacity to impact society when used correctly.

This concept is vividly illustrated through the works and lives of influential figures such as Shashi Tharoor,

an Indian politician, author and former diplomat, who has long been recognised for his eloquence and extensive vocabulary.

Just a few days ago, I got hold of Tharoor's new book, fresh from India, gifted by my colleague and friend. I learnt that his love for the language was nurtured from a young age by his father, who engaged him in word games and encouraged his writing pursuits.

Tharoor's literary journey began with fiction but transitioned predominantly to non-fiction as he navigated the demands of his political career.

Flipping the first few pages of the book, I came to understand that the importance of exposure to diverse linguistic styles underscores the role that literature plays in shaping one's worldview.

As an advocate for social justice, I would say that the use of language as a tool makes one more active in spreading awareness on any topic through words.

This is evident when, through my writings, I often focus on pressing issues within society, including the plight of marginalised communities.

Through my eloquent prose and compelling arguments, I seek to raise awareness about any issues of concern and inspire action among readers. For this, I leave the readers to judge the impact of my writings.

However, what I want to say is that words can serve as catalysts for change. By articulating the struggles faced by various groups, we foster empathy among audiences who may be unaware or indifferent to these issues.

We have to have a proper approach that demonstrates how language can bridge gaps between different cultures and perspectives.

As writers, we have to exemplify how powerful words can shape narratives around identity, culture, and politics.

While Tharoor's writings delve into India's historical context and contemporary challenges with a nuanced perspective, his contributions remind us that language is not merely a means of communication; it is also a powerful instrument for advocacy.

Whether through storytelling or persuasive rhetoric, the author harnesses the potential of words to influence thought processes and encourage societal reflection.

To sum it all up, I would say the power of words cannot be overstated. Figures like Shashi Tharoor illustrate how language can be wielded effectively to educate, inspire change and foster understanding among diverse populations.

His commitment to using words thoughtfully serves as a reminder that each individual has the capacity to impact society through their own linguistic choices.

INDUSTRY HIGHLIGHTS

CULTURE

Ethiopian Orthodox faithful hold candles during the Meskel festival celebration to commemorate the discovery of the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. —Reuters



ENTERTAINMENT

Actor and director Johnny Depp visits a child at a hospital dressed as his character Jack Sparrow, from "The Pirates of the Caribbean" film franchise, in San Sebastian, Spain. —Reuters



MUSIC

South African Jazz singer, Tutu Puoane performs during the 25th Standard Bank Joy of Jazz Festival taking place at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa. —AFP

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Apple TV+'s German series 'Where's Wanda?' Keeps it light despite dark themes



Apple TV+'s first German-language series, "Where's Wanda?", is about a family's desperate search for their missing teenage daughter but despite its dark subject matter, it aims to make audiences laugh.

It does so through a colourful cast of characters and situations verging on the absurd.

"That was the basic concept of the series, that we have a very difficult topic, the disappearance of Wanda. And yet, of course, we still try to deal with it with funny situations or funny people," Axel Stein, who stars as Dedo Klatt, father of the missing Wanda, said.

He thanked Apple TV+ for trusting in the series.

Dedo, his wife Carlotta, played by Heike Makatsch, and teenage son Ole, portrayed by newcomer Leo Simon, go to great lengths to spy on neighbours' homes with surveillance cameras bought off the dark web in their search for Wanda, played by Lea Drinda, after she goes missing during a

town festival.

In the process, they discover the secrets - some of them criminal - of the people of Sundersheim, the Klatts' fictional German town. There is a pinch of the eeriness of the American TV series "Twin Peaks".

"Especially in a place that presents particularly well-kept lawns and particularly uniform houses and particularly pretty facades to the outside world, there must be something behind it that perhaps undermines this picture," said Makatsch, who appeared in the romantic comedy "Love Actually".

Apple made the foray into streaming in November 2019. It has an estimated 25 million subscribers and content has included the comedy series "Ted Lasso" and films such as "CODA" and "Killers of the Flower Moon."

The first two episodes of "Where's Wanda" will debut on Apple TV+ on October 2 with new episodes released weekly through November 13. — Reuters

Feathers fly at Chanel's Paris fashion return



CHANEL RETURNED to the Grand Palais — scene of the late Karl Lagerfeld's most legendary triumphs — for the first time in four years on Tuesday with a birdcage-themed Paris Fashion Week show that recalled the label's past glories.

The famed French house turned the newly refurbished Belle Epoque edifice into a giant aviary, with a white birdcage at its centre to show off a collection festooned with plumes and feathers.

Only a day earlier British designer Stella McCartney had lamented the "billions of birds killed for the fashion industry" after the animal rights campaigner's own bird-themed Paris show.

But there were plumes aplenty at Chanel — a favourite of its founder Gabrielle Chanel — as it celebrated her fascination with birds and flight.

The cage in the centre of the glass and steel nave was also a knowing nod to Chanel's iconic bird on a swing advert from 1992 starring French singer Vanessa Paradis and her black tail feathers.

Elvis Presley's granddaughter Riley Keough took Paradis's place on the swing to sing this time.

With the main entrance of the Grand Palais now bearing Gabrielle Chanel's name as a part of a 30-million-euro (\$33-million) deal to stage its shows at the Paris landmark, the brand wanted to plant a flag during uncertain times.

NO RUSH FOR NEW DESIGNER

Without a creative director since June after Virginie Viard — who took over from Lagerfeld after his death in 2019 — bowed out, Chanel's studio designed the spring summer collection, riffing on some of the label's standards, from its trademark tweeds to lacy flapper dresses and flying jackets.

Chanel's more austere convent-

inspired black and white ensembles were lifted by slashed skirts and sleeves. But it was the feathers that stood out, used in ruff-like collars on crocheted bombers and on 1920s-style gowns inspired by the glamour of French writer Colette's forays into musical hall and cabaret.

Chanel chief Bruno Pavlovsky said that the French company would not be rushed into finding a replacement for Viard, who was Lagerfeld's right-hand woman for decades.

With the big luxury Paris houses seeing profits fall as Chinese buyers button their purses, he said it was "the time for us to bounce back. Virginie did a great job over the last five years — indeed these last 30 years when she was at Karl's side.

"We are just at the end of a cycle and the brand must start a new one," Pavlovsky said before the show.

"You should not have a knife at our throat" if you are going to make "the right choices", he insisted, saying there would likely to be an announcement by the end of the year.

"The strength of the brand is that it can take its time because we have (studio) teams who are super solid.

All that gives us strength at a time when we could have been disturbed or weakened — but we are not," Pavlovsky added. — AFP



Salut: A glimpse into Oman's ancient heritage

By 2015, after a decade of intensive excavation, restoration, and research, Salut's ancient monumentality had been restored, making it a prominent landmark once more. The site is surrounded by an archaeological landscape rich with Bronze Age towers, Iron Age settlements, and relics from early Islamic periods, all carefully preserved and studied.

BY YERU EBUEN

OMAN HAS long been a pivotal crossroads in the history of the Arabian Peninsula. From its Bronze Age settlements to the significant trade routes it established, Oman's historical importance is evident in its rich archaeological sites. Among these, the ancient oasis of Salut stands out as a testament to Oman's enduring legacy, offering valuable insights into the region's development over thousands of years. As



RESTORING SALUT'S LEGACY

Restoring the site has been an essential part of IMTO's work. The walls of Salut, made of fragile mudbrick, have been carefully plastered to preserve their structure, while collapsed stone structures, including the Bronze Age tower, have been rebuilt. These restoration efforts ensure that visitors can appreciate the grandeur of Salut while preserving its historical integrity.

In addition to the physical restorations, the virtual museum serves as a platform for sharing the ongoing discoveries at Salut. It offers a catalogue of significant finds, showcasing objects from the Bronze Age and Iron Age, such as pottery, bronze objects, and terracotta figurines.

THE BROADER IMPACT OF SALUT'S DISCOVERIES

Salut's archaeological importance cannot be overstated. As one of the most significant Iron Age sites in Southeast Arabia, it continues to shed light on the region's history and its role in the broader ancient world.

The site, along with its surrounding settlements and agricultural systems, offers a unique perspective on early life in Oman, particularly regarding the management of water resources and community organisation.

The Virtual Museum of Salut is a gateway for those eager to learn more about Oman's past. As research continues, both the physical and virtual reconstructions of Salut will offer valuable contributions to understanding the region's history, ensuring that future generations can appreciate the deep cultural heritage of this remarkable land. To learn more about Salut, visit <http://www.salut-virtual-museum.org/>.

excavations and research continue, the Virtual Museum of Salut, led by Alessandra Avanzini, is poised to provide a window into the past, captivating the interest of history enthusiasts worldwide.

THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM OF SALUT

The Virtual Museum of Salut marks a significant step in the broader effort to raise awareness of Oman's ancient history and archaeological significance. This project, part of a larger initiative, aims to eventually cover other major sites in Oman, including Khor Rori, an ancient port vital to Indian Ocean trade. Developed by the Italian Mission to Oman (IMTO), the museum is designed to be an intuitive and engaging tool that highlights Salut's historical and cultural importance.

The museum provides a comprehensive look at Salut, showcasing artefacts and findings that span thousands of years, from the Bronze and Iron Ages to the Medieval period. Through a combination of displays, films, and scholarly resources, it invites visitors to delve into Oman's past, offering both educational content and visual representations of life in ancient Oman.

FROM DISCOVERY TO RESTORATION

The first encounter with the site of Salut was both unassuming and promising. When the IMTO team first visited the area in 2004, they were greeted by a barren, rounded hill with little visible evidence of its ancient grandeur. Yet,

even in its modest state, the hill's massive presence hinted at its past significance, sparking the team's determination to uncover its secrets.

Initial surveys focused not only on the main site but also on the surrounding plains and hills, revealing smaller settlements that underscored Salut's importance to a large community. This work was built on early surveys conducted in the 1970s by Harvard University, the British Archaeological Expedition, and the University of Birmingham. Over the years, these efforts led to the discovery of a network of smaller settlements surrounding Salut, each contributing to the understanding of the area's historical significance.

By 2015, after a decade of intensive excavation, restoration and research, Salut's ancient monumentality had been restored, making it a prominent landmark once more. The site is surrounded by an archaeological landscape rich with Bronze Age towers, Iron Age settlements, and relics from early Islamic periods, all carefully preserved and studied.

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SALUT

Salut is not only an archaeological site but also a place of legend and lore in Omani tradition. One of the most famous legends associated with the site involves the mythical King Solomon, who is said to have visited the Salut Plain during his travels. According to the story, Solomon commanded the

Jinn to dig the aflāj, Oman's ancient water channels, to bring fertility to the land.

Centuries later, Salut became the battleground for one of the most significant events in Omani history—the Battle of Salut. Fought between the Arabic tribe of Azd, led by Malik bin Fahm, and the Persian army, this battle is celebrated for marking the end of Persian rule and the dawn of Islam in the region.

A DECADE OF DISCOVERY

The IMTO's excavation efforts at Salut have been meticulous and comprehensive. Starting in 2004, under the direction of Alessandra Avanzini, the team conducted systematic research that revealed the site's layers of history, from the Iron Age to its use during the Islamic period. These discoveries confirmed Salut's importance not only for Oman but also for the broader historical narrative of Eastern Arabia.

The excavation campaigns conducted twice annually have brought to light a wealth of artefacts and evidence that have helped reconstruct the cultural and environmental context of Salut. From pottery and soft stone vessels to ritual objects and seals, the finds have provided critical insights into the lives of Salut's ancient inhabitants. A particular focus has been placed on the site's sophisticated water management system, which was crucial for agricultural sustainability.