

UK MP defects to Labour

Conservative MP Dan Poulter has defected to the Labour Party, opposition leader Keir Starmer confirmed on Saturday, dealing another blow to embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Poulter, a former health minister, told the Observer newspaper that he was switching parties and called on Sunak to call a general election "as soon as possible". Poulter said he was motivated by the troubles facing the National Health Service (NHS). "It is abundantly clear to me that the Labour Party alone has the will and the trust to restore and reform the NHS," he told the Observer.

SUNRISE - 05:35 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:15 AM

DHUHR - 12:09 PM

ASR - 03:35 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:39 PM

ISHA - 07:54 PM



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN OBSERVER



www.omanobserver.om

editor@omanobserver.om

P11

MARQUEZ TAKES POLE FOR SPANISH MOTOGP



P13

OMAN - GCC ELECTRICITY LINKAGES TO ENABLE ENERGY TRADE



P20

THE SCENT OF PRESTIGE AND OPULENCE, OUD REMAINS A FAVOURITE AMONG OMANIS



MUSCAT

UAE CANCELLING TRAFFIC FINES

The UAE's Federal Traffic Council at the Ministry of Interior has started activating the decision to cancel traffic fines of Omani citizens between 2018 to 2023, the official statement said. The decision will benefit many citizens of the Sultanate of Oman, especially those from the neighbouring governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Buraimi and Musandam who frequently visit the UAE for business and family purposes. There have been reports of some citizens incurring fines amounting to thousands of rials spread over the years but suddenly charged early this year. **DETAILS ON P2**

JAKARTA

6.5 EARTHQUAKE HITS JAVA ISLAND

A magnitude-6.5 earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia's Java island on Saturday, the country's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency (BMKG) reported. The quake, which the United States Geological Survey recorded at a magnitude of 6.1, was felt in capital Jakarta — where people were forced to evacuate buildings — and in nearby Bandung. "I screamed to my wife and kids to tell them to get out of the house," Iman Krisnawan, a 47-year-old resident of Bandung, said. "Usually, earthquakes lasted about 5 seconds, this one lasted between 10-15 seconds."

WET SPELL LIKELY FROM THURSDAY



The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre is closely monitoring the preliminary indicators to a trough of low pressure that will probably affect the country from Thursday. The centre predicts cloud formation and precipitation in the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman gradually extending to the governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar. The centre said it will be issuing updates on the weather system. Extensive formation of local clouds occurred over Al Hajar Mountains as well as formation of thunder clouds on Saturday afternoon that brought rainfall of varying intensity across the mountains. Formation of local clouds is predicted to continue with chances of thundery showers over the next four days. Scattered rains were reported along the coastline of Dhofar Governorate on Saturday.

Sayyid Theyazin to attend WEF meeting in Saudi Arabia



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, left here on Saturday for the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to take part in the World Economic Forum's Special Meeting on Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy for Development, which will be held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on Sunday and Monday.

The meeting is the first-of-its-kind for the World Economic Forum and will bring together heads of states, senior international officials, policy-makers and experts from various international and academic organisations. During his participation, HH Sayyid Theyazin is accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Abdulsalam bin

Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. — **ONA**

Oman calls for end to Israeli aggression

WASHINGTON: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, held meetings with Kurt Campbell, US Deputy Secretary of State, alongside a number of officials from the State Department and the White House on the sidelines of the second Omani-American Strategic Dialogue in Washington.

During the meetings, they discussed bilateral relations and regional issues including the Palestinian cause.

The Omani side emphasised its position demanding an immediate cessation of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, intensifying efforts to bring in humanitarian aid and endeavouring to establish an independent Palestinian state. Meanwhile, Hamas said on Saturday that it was studying the latest Israeli counterproposal regarding a potential ceasefire in Gaza, a day after media reports said a delegation from mediator Egypt arrived in Israel in a bid to jump-start stalled negotiations.

The signs of fresh truce talks came alongside at least three Israeli air strikes during the night in Rafah, southernmost Gaza, according to an AFP correspondent.

Rafah is crowded with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by nearly seven months of war between Israel and Hamas. Strikes in Rafah and elsewhere killed more than a dozen people overnight, hospital officials said. "Today, the Hamas movement



A person looks on in Paris, France, as youth take part in the occupation of a street in front of the building of the Sciences Po University in support of Palestinians in Gaza. — **Reuters**

received the official Zionist occupation response to the movement's position, which was delivered to the Egyptian and Qatari mediators on April 13," Khalil al Hayya, deputy head of Hamas's political arm in Gaza, said in a statement. "The movement will study this proposal, and upon completion of its study, it will submit its response."

OHRC's fact-finding team to probe deaths during rain

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has formed a fact-finding team to look into the death of several people, especially of school children, in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate as the Sultanate of Oman was affected by exceptional weather conditions.

The team will submit its report within a period not exceeding one month from the date of its formation.

It may be recalled that 10 students aged between 10 and

15 years old died when their vehicle was washed away in a running wadi in the Niyabat of Samad Al Shan in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi. Four children were found alive after an extensive search operation.

The OHRC said the formation of the team is based on a number of the committee's terms of reference as per the Royal Decree No 57/2022, which is to follow up on the protection of human rights as per the Basic Law of the State.

The OHRC's jurisdiction includes monitoring violations and abuses related to human

rights, assisting in settling and resolving them, receiving complaints in the field of human rights, studying and recommending them to the competent authorities, providing advice to the relevant authorities in the state on matters related to human rights and freedoms, and contributing to the preparation of reports that address these topics.

Earlier, OHRC has issued a statement in which it called on the authorities concerned to take all necessary measures to ensure that such painful incidents are not repeated.

Hamas has previously insisted on a permanent ceasefire, something rejected by Israel.

Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been unsuccessfully trying to seal a new truce deal in Gaza ever since a one-week halt to the fighting in November saw 80 Israeli captives exchanged for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. A delegation from Egypt arrived in Israel on Friday hoping to revive the truce negotiations, Israeli and Egyptian media reported.

There has been "noticeable progress in bringing the views of the Egyptian and Israeli delegations closer", said Al Qahera News, which is linked to Egyptian state intelligence services. In early April, Hamas had said it was studying a proposal, after talks in Cairo, and Al Qahera reported progress. Days later, Israel and Hamas accused each other of undermining negotiations.

AGENDA

The war is on the agenda for an international summit in Saudi Arabia. The World Economic Forum special meeting, scheduled to begin in Riyadh on Sunday, will include a Gaza-focused session on Monday set to feature newly appointed Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly and Sigrid Kaag, the United Nations aid coordinator for the Gaza Strip. **SEE ALSO P6**

INSIDE



STATE
EXCHANGE
YOUR LAND

25,000
BENEFICIARIES
CHOOSE YOUR
LAND (2023)

P4

S P O T L I G H T



UAE cancels Omanis traffic fines

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The UAE’s Federal Traffic Council at the Ministry of Interior has started activating the decision to cancel traffic violations incurred by citizens of the Sultanate of Oman between 2018 and 2023, the official statement said. The decision will benefit many citizens of the Sultanate of Oman, especially those from the neighbouring governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Buraimi and Musandam who frequently visit the UAE for business and family purposes.

There have been reports of some citizens incurring fines amounting to thousands of rials in traffic fines spread over the years but suddenly charged early this year.

Most of these motorists are getting fine for the first time, though they have been travelling in the UAE frequently over the years.

In one case, a road user said he was fined in the UAE for traffic violations over seven years.

The UAE government announced the decision to waive all traffic violations incurred by



Traffic violations incurred by citizens of the Sultanate of Oman between 2018 and 2023 cancelled

citizens of the Sultanate of Oman from 2018 to 2023 as part of the efforts to implement and support initiatives and decisions that benefit the public and common interest and strengthen close fraternal ties.

In a statement, Brigadier

Engineer Hussein bin Ahmed al Harthy, Chairman of the Federal Traffic Council at the Ministry of Interior, praised the initiative and the keenness of the wise leadership to adopt such important decisions that reflect the positive aspects of Gulf societies, and the relations

existing between the two countries, which support positive efforts towards developing prospects for cooperation.

The statement added that the Ministries of Interior of the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman are working to activate the bilateral linkage project for traffic systems, which is a technical project that enhances the joint integrated work between the General Secretariat of the GCC.

It may be noted that the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has confirmed that there is a unified system that gathers all the fines in the GCC, which can be also accessed from the ROP application. “If you feel that this fine is not correct or you did not commit it, you either go to the ROP traffic department and lodge a complaint or you either go to the GCC country where the fine has been registered against you. The first step might take time to get a response,” according to a ROP spokesman.

“So, the first thing is, whenever someone wants to move or travel in any of the GCC countries, he needs to read the regulations and the rules of that country including the traffic rules.”



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura, headed the Omani delegation to the conference in Cairo on Saturday

Oman takes part in Arab parliament meet

CAIRO: Oman took part in the sixth conference of the Arab Parliament and Speakers of Arab Councils and Parliaments in Cairo on Saturday.

Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura, headed the Omani delegation to the conference. The conference discussed, among other topics, the safe use of artificial intelligence. Participants presented their vision, as parliamentarians, for the optimal use of artificial intelligence technologies. They discussed the challenges facing this field, in

addition to the opportunities for optimal utilisation of artificial intelligence technologies to advance development in Arab countries. The conference issued a document on ‘Arab Parliamentary Vision for Safe Employment of Artificial Intelligence.’

In his speech Al Maawali said artificial intelligence is an essential driver of economic growth and increased productivity.

He said that Majlis Ash'shura's permanent committees are looking into many challenges facing artificial intelligence.

UNDER-SECRETARY MEETS US OFFICIAL



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, held meetings with Kurt Campbell, US Deputy Secretary of State, on the sidelines of the second Omani-American Strategic Dialogue in Washington.

Hot water spring bursts into a house in Ibra

HAMAD AL RIYAMI
IBRA, APRIL 27

A hot water spring burst in the first floor of a citizen's house in the Wilayat of Ibra following the recent heavy rains that caused excessive flowing of wadis.

Jaroof al Nahdi, a resident of Saih Al Shakhabeet in the Wilayat of Ibra and owner of the affected house, said that his house is not situated close to a wadi or a water body but in a semi-mountainous terrain.

Al Nahdi was taken aback when water emerged from beneath the hall and the amount of water increased day



Jaroof al Nahdi, the owner, said that his house is not situated close to a wadi or a water body but in a semi-mountainous terrain.

by day.

“This never happened before although the area saw many incidents of heavy rain over the past years and wadis overflow in the surrounding area. My house was built in accordance to the specifications

and maps approved by the municipality. There were no signs of water during the excavation or traces of a well or an old falaj. Specialists from the municipality inspected the site before the beginning of construction and the

foundation is 1.5 metres deep. Surprisingly enough, no other house in the vicinity was similarly affected.

“At the beginning I expected that water would stop running into my house from below when rainwater stopped flowing on the wadis, however the water level began to rise to reach 1.5 metres and it was hot. For the past eight days, water continued gushing into the house. Small pumps failed to drain off the water from the house. They used a 5-horsepower pump but the water level did not decrease but rather flowed more powerfully and became hotter.”

The Omani Brazilian Investment Forum Muscat 2024 reinforces the trade relations between Oman and Brazil



Coinciding with the 50th anniversary celebration of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federative Republic of Brazil, Investors Bridge is organizing the Made in Brazil Expo and Forum Muscat 2024 an event dedicated to showcase the diverse Brazilian products and services, guiding businesses to where to look for new opportunities, innovation, and form enduring alliances. Consist of the Omani-Brazilian Investment forum accompanied by a solo country exhibition “Made in Brazil Muscat – 2024. The event is organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, Embassy of Oman in Brazil, Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the Embassy of Brazil in Muscat. To be held on the 07th – 8th May 2024 at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre – Muscat.

The Brazilian delegation is headed by the Brazilian Minister of Tourism, His Excellency Celso Sabino, who will be visiting the Sultanate with a delegation of more than 50 Brazilian companies, government entities from various sectors such as investment, logistics, tourism, technology, research and innovation, and import and export.

Made in Brazil Muscat – 2024 is the first event of its kind in Oman. In addition, Brazilian entities will have the chance to explore investment opportunities available in Oman and to learn how to benefit from the free zones in the Sultanate as a platform to Asian, East and North African countries during their field visit the on 9 May, 2024.

The event of this magnitude reinforces not only trade relations between the Brazil and Oman, but also contributes in the achievement of Oman Vision 2040 goals through economic diversification as well as promoting the Sultanate of Oman as a strategic re-export hub to Asia and Africa.

Nasser Al Azri, CEO of Vale in Oman, stated, “We are honored to sponsor the Made in Brazil Expo and Forum, as part of the celebration of the golden jubilee of the diplomatic ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Brazil. As a foreign-owned company, we serve as ambassadors, and our journey in Oman is a testament to our success and the quality of Brazilian products. This event underscores the strong partnership between our two nations and we look forward to further building this relationship and exploring new opportunities of growth and collaboration together.”

It is worth mentioning that this event is an opportunity for local and regional companies to establish business relationships with Brazilian companies, therefore we invite companies are invited to participate in B2B and B2G meetings with Brazilian companies and investors.



Fly Jinnah to start Islamabad-Muscat flights on May 10

MUSCAT: Fly Jinnah, Pakistan's low-cost carrier, will launch new non-stop flights between Islamabad and Muscat from May 10. The new route will initially start with a frequency two weekly flights connecting both cities. The Fly Jinnah's spokesperson said that following the successful launch of international flights connecting Islamabad and Lahore to Sharjah, Fly Jinnah is proud to mark another milestone with the introduction of the third international route from Islamabad to Muscat.

Earlier, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) approved Fly Jinnah to operate flights from two Pakistani airports.

Starting from May 2, the airline will operate three weekly flights between Karachi and Muscat and two weekly flights between Muscat and Islamabad. Fly Jinnah or FJ is the low-cost carrier (LCC) owned and operated jointly by Lakson Group of Pakistan and Air Arabia Group of the UAE.

Investment Opportunity Samail Industrial City



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates “Mada'yn” is pleased to announce the following investment opportunity in Samail Industrial City:

Opportunity Number	Project Name	Deadline for Documents Purchase	Field Visit Date	Proposal Submission Deadline	Fee (RO)
1/2024	Equipping, Managing, and Operating the Medical Fitness Examination Centre in Samail Industrial City	16/05/2024	19/05/2024	06/06/2024	100

Equipping and operating the medical fitness examination center aims to provide an examination service for physical fitness for expatriate workers and provide the highest levels of quality in the aspect of health benefits, which are provided to all employees who work within Samail Industrial City; in addition, the center serves local residents living near the Industrial city. The center's distinguished location enables its visitors to reach it easily due to its proximity to the gate and the highway. It is worth noting that the center extends over an area of 1100.71 square meters and includes many facilities, such as laboratories, clinics, cold rooms, X-ray rooms, and a number of other offices. The total area of land used is 3719.75 square meters.

Contact Details:
1- majid.alabrawi@madayn.om / 98813370
2- nassersaid.alrahbi@madayn.om / 71146080

madayn.om

@madaynoman





WE BUY AND SELL GOLD AND SILVER

1 grm to 1kg 24ct gold bars available
at best international rate.



PURSHOTTAM KANJI
EXCHANGE



شركة برشوتم
كانجي للمصارفة



+968 91787309 | 96892891 | 91787320
www.pkexchange.com

٢٢ & C apply

Four companies show interest in stormwater project in Muscat

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Four companies are participating in the project to resolve water stagnation in the Muscat Governorate.

The technical bid was opened on April 21, while the priced bid will be unveiled on April 27.

Muscat Municipality (MM) had floated a tender to appoint a qualified and experienced contractor to carry out design and construct drainage works to resolve flooding, stormwater drainage, and water stagnation problems in Muscat Governorate.

The project area will include the Wilayats of Al Amerat, Al Seeb, Bausher, Muscat, Muttrah, and Qurayat. The scope of work will include on-call/emergency drainage works. Upon award of the contract, a design and construct execution programme will be developed to execute the drainage



The project area will include the Wilayats of Al Amerat, Al Seeb, Bausher, Muscat, Muttrah, and Qurayat.

works for each Wilayat based on allocated budgets.

The on-call/emergency drainage works shall be executed to resolve drainage problems during rains and complaints from locals, which will be directed

by the Muscat Municipality or local municipalities and may be required to be executed on a 24x7 basis and during night hours and on weekends and holidays.

The works shall be as teams and separately for each wilayat.

The scope of the drainage works includes the construction of re-profiling of roads, stormwater drainage networks, unlined/lined ditches, pipe/box culverts, rigid pavement, slope protection, wadi channelisation, reinstatement works, and utility protection/relocation.

The contractor will be required to take into account the provisions and requirements of the contract, Oman Highway Design Standards and Standard Specifications for Roads and Bridges Construction 2017, and tender documents.

It may be noted that nearly 45 per cent of the areas in the capital are vulnerable to floods from wadis while another 20 per cent is subject to coastal floods, according to experts concerned with the Greater Muscat masterplan.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has been also working on the flood protection scheme in Muttrah.

Project to save turtles from artificial lighting

MUSCAT: The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) recently held a workshop on Masirah Island entitled 'Lighting Pollution Community Workshop.'

Building on ESO's long-term efforts to conserve the population of loggerhead sea turtles, the event focused on the essential role played by the coastal community on Masirah in mitigation of the impact of light pollution on sea turtles. They agreed to participate in a pilot project involving the refitting of homes located on turtle nesting beaches with turtle-friendly light bulbs.

Species of sea turtles found in Oman are threatened to various degrees on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and face a high risk of extinction in the wild.

Threats including extensive coastal development, light



The workshop focused on the essential role played by the coastal community on Masirah in mitigation of the impact of light pollution on sea turtles.

pollution, beach driving, bycatch, ghost fishing, plastic pollution and climate change, are putting significant pressure on the survival of sea turtles.

In recent years, a declining trend in nesting numbers of loggerhead sea turtles has been observed on Masirah Island, which is believed to have occurred within a single loggerhead generation.

Wilayat needs more infrastructure and investment in basic amenities

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Tourists flock to golden sand dunes in Bidiya

The golden sand dunes in the wilayat of Bidiya, which is about 195 km from Muscat, is one of the most beautiful tourist areas in the Sultanate of Oman. The people of the wilayat urged the authorities to add more events in the season and invest in infrastructure.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al Hajri, a citizen, said natural areas alone do not attract tourists. But events attract more tourists of all ages and tastes. For example, we see the sporting activity that is held annually in Bidiya under the auspices of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and implemented by the Bidiya

Car Club attracts tourists from Oman, GCC and other foreign tourists

Yahya bin Hamad al Hajri, a photographer, said, "Sports and entertainment activities in Bidiya have developed and increased significantly in recent times, due to the youths' enthusiasm for developing events and activities of all kinds. This has helped the local economy a lot."

Salah bin Salem al Hajri, Chairman of the Tourism Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, said: "Holding activities and events in the wilayat has many advantages. Therefore, we always strive through

the Chamber to support these activities, whether by facilitating, supporting, or implementing procedures. There is an increase in the occupancy of hotels and camps by 100 per cent. These events have also helped local businesses and craftspeople

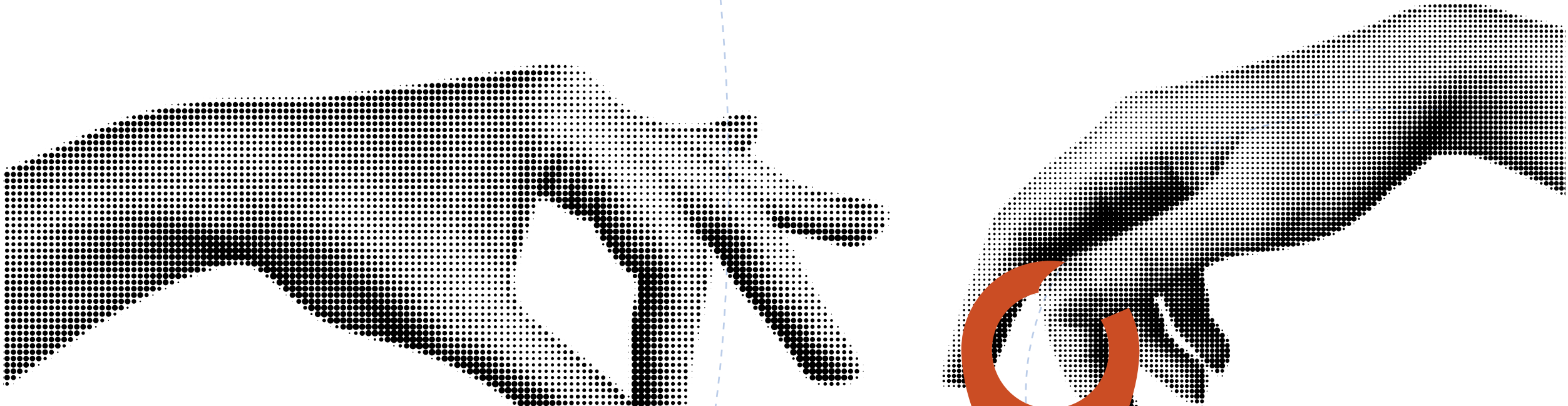
Abdullah al Hajri said: "We need more investment in the infrastructure of the wilayat. Steps must be taken to ease traffic congestion. Public restrooms, fuel stations, car repair stations are needed. Bidiya needs paved roads that connect to the sand dunes to make it easier for the visitor to access them. These facilities attract more tourists."

Khaled al Hajri said investors are hampered by

fees and taxes. "Focus must be on sustainable tourism, which contributes to improving the local economy and enhancing the preservation of the natural environment by offering unique experiences. It should also be an opportunity to generate more jobs."

Abdullah al Hajri believes that it is not easy to make this region an international tourist attraction, but it is not impossible. "The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Al Sharqiyah North Governor's Office, and the municipality, have a role in boosting tourism. They must develop its infrastructure, develop the facilities that tourists need, and then promote it in various ways through social media.





STAFF
REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning launched the ‘Exchange Your Land’ service for facilitating and automating procedures and transactions through digital transformation. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning seeks to improve its services in line with its ambitious vision of ‘sustainable urban development for prosperous communities’, and to apply the principle of digital transformation in all services, including the government land grant system.

Since the issuance of Royal Decree No (42/2021) regarding granting government land, the ministry has been keen to provide various housing options to citizens entitled for government residential plots, and to make the family a priority in these options, in fulfilment of Oman Vision 2040.

The starting point was “Choose Your Land”, which enables a citizen entitled to government residential lands to choose the appropriate plot according to interactive geographical maps showing the details of the plot within the available residential plans.

More than 25,000 beneficiaries benefited from it during 2023. This was followed by many housing options, such as “Own Your Land,” which allows the beneficiary to acquire distinctive land at a government-

subsidised price in distinctive plans and locations with integrated services through interactive geographical maps that show the location and details of the plot.

“Your Land Plans” enables the beneficiary to designate suitable land in areas where there are no available housing plans and outside the scope of urban planning, provided that it is in the village/area of permanent residence.

AVAILABLE OPTIONS

The ministry seeks to provide different options in plans and integrated residential units, such as villas, apartments, and give the beneficiaries an opportunity to live in future city projects, the first of which is Sultan Haitham City. The option of future cities was provided with facilities that enable the beneficiaries to choose what suit them from the available options. The ministry launched its new housing option, “Exchange Your Land,” which provides the opportunity for citizens who have been granted government residential land and wish to exchange it for one of the housing options offered, except “Choose Your Land,” in the area of his current work or residence, provided that he is its first owner. The ministry continues its efforts to serve citizens in order to achieve its vision of achieving sustainable urban development for prosperous communities.

EXCHANGE
YOUR LAND

MORE THAN
25,000
BENEFITED FROM
CHOOSE YOUR
LAND DURING 2023



The financial statements were approved by a resolution of the Board of Directors on 23 April 2024



UK ship sets sail to help building of aid jetty

LONDON: A UK ship to house hundreds of US army personnel building a jetty to speed up aid delivery to Gaza has set sail from Cyprus, a UK defence source said on Saturday.

Royal Navy support ship “Cardigan Bay” will help support the international effort to construct the temporary floating pier, which is set to be completed early May, according to the Pentagon.

The pier will initially facilitate the delivery of 90 truckloads of international aid a day into Gaza, rising to up to 150 truckloads once fully operational, according to US estimates.

The aid will be pre-screened in Cyprus and delivered directly to Gaza via the pier off the coast or via Ashdod Port, which Israel has said it will open.

“It is critical we establish more routes for vital humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza and the UK continues to take a leading role in the delivery of support,” UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said.

The UN insists that an increase in the flow of humanitarian aid by land is needed to help a starving population facing shortages of medical supplies.

The European Union on Friday said it was giving an extra 68 million euros to provide desperately needed aid to Palestinians in Gaza.

“In light of the continued deterioration of the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the steady rise of needs on the ground, the European Commission is stepping up its funding to support Palestinians affected by the ongoing war,” an EU statement said.

The EU said the new aid would be focused on food deliveries, clean water, sanitation and shelters, and would be channelled through local partners on the ground. — AFP



A Palestinian child stands amid the debris of a house destroyed by overnight Israeli bombardment in Rafah. — AFP

ARAB, WESTERN OFFICIALS TO MEET IN RIYADH OVER GAZA

RIYADH: Senior Western and Arab officials are expected to meet next week in Riyadh to discuss the months-long war in the Gaza Strip on the sidelines of an economic forum in Saudi Arabia, according to diplomatic sources.

Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan will meet on Monday in Riyadh with their US, German, British, French and Italian counterparts, the sources said.

The Arab officials, joined by a Palestinian Authority representative, will meet to formulate a “unified Arab stance” ahead of the Monday meeting, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

The Palestinian official will not attend the talks with the top Western diplomats, the sources added.

Egyptian Foreign Minister

Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan will meet on Monday in Riyadh with their US, German,British, French and Italian counterparts

Sameh Shoukry travelled on Saturday to Riyadh, officials at Cairo airport said.

Saudi Arabia is hosting an international economic forum in Riyadh on Sunday and Monday.

The international talks come amid fears of a planned Israeli offensive in Gaza’s Rafah city and renewed efforts to broker a captive and ceasefire deal.

A top Palestinian Hamas official said on Saturday that the group is studying an Israeli counterproposal regarding such a deal.

“Hamas will examine this proposal and submit a response,” Khalil al-Hayya, the deputy head of the group’s political arm in

Gaza, said in a statement posted on Telegram.

Negotiations aimed at releasing captives held by Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip and securing a ceasefire in the devastated Palestinian territory have been deadlocked for months.

But Israel’s preparations for a large-scale ground offensive on Rafah — the southernmost city in the Gaza Strip is reportedly putting pressure on war.

US media outlet Axios reported, citing two senior Israeli officials, that Israel had warned Egypt that this would be the “last chance” to strike a deal before its Rafah operations begin.

Axios and Israeli media reported that Hamas and Israel are at loggerheads over the scope of the deal, including how many captives could be released and how long the ceasefire would last. The Palestinian group is demanding a permanent ceasefire, which Israel rejects.

Israel’s allies and critics have for months implored Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to call off the invasion of Rafah, fearing mass civilian casualties. More than a million displaced Palestinians from other parts of the Gaza Strip have taken shelter there.

The health authority put the number of people killed in Gaza at 34,388 on Saturday, 32 more than the previous day. More than 77,400 people have been injured.

The Israeli army said on Saturday that it had carried out more airstrikes overnight against targets. — dpa

Hamas says studying new truce proposal

GAZA: Hamas said it was studying on Saturday the latest Israeli counterproposal regarding a potential ceasefire in Gaza, a day after media reports said a delegation from mediator Egypt arrived in Israel in a bid to jump-start stalled negotiations.

The signs of fresh truce talks came alongside at least three Israeli air strikes during the night in Rafah, southernmost Gaza.

Rafah is crowded with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by nearly seven months of war between Israel and the Palestinian movement Hamas. Strikes in Rafah and elsewhere killed more than a dozen people overnight, hospital officials said.

“Today, the Hamas movement received the official occupation response to the movement’s position, which was delivered to the Egyptian and Qatari mediators on April 13,” Khalil al-Hayya, deputy head of the political arm in Gaza, said in a statement. “The movement will study this proposal, and upon completion of its study, it will submit its response.”

Hamas has previously insisted on a permanent ceasefire, something rejected by Israel.

Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been unsuccessfully trying to seal a new truce deal in Gaza ever since a one-week halt to the fighting in November saw 80 Israeli captives exchanged for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

A delegation from Egypt arrived in Israel on Friday hoping to revive the truce negotiations, Israeli and Egyptian media reported.

There has been “noticeable progress in bringing the views of the Egyptian and Israeli delegations closer”, said Al-Qahera News, which is linked to Egyptian state intelligence services.

As talks drag on, dozens of people in Gaza die every day, according to figures from the health ministry in the territory. — AFP

Israeli forces kill two Palestinians near Jenin

JENIN: Israeli forces shot dead two Palestinian men at a military post near the city of Jenin in the occupied West Bank on Saturday, the army and Palestinian officials reported.

The incident occurred when several people arrived in a vehicle and fired at soldiers stationed at the Salem military post at the entrance to Jenin, the army said in a statement.

“The soldiers, who were pre-positioned due to several similar past incidents, eliminated two Palestinians,” the army said.

Palestinian authorities in Ramallah identified the two men killed at the military post as Mustafa Sultan Abed, 21, and Ahmed Muhammad Shawahna, 20.

The Palestinian news agency Wafa said Israeli forces withheld their bodies after denying medics access to them, adding two other men had been hospitalised

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said Israeli forces withheld their bodies after denying medics access to them, adding two other men had been hospitalised after being wounded.

Later on Saturday, residents of Sultan Abed’s village of Kfardan held a march paying tribute to him, a correspondent reported.

The mourners included several gunmen who fired in



Palestinian gunmen attend the funeral of Khaled Orouq, 16, who was killed in an Israeli raid, in Jenin. — Reuters file photo

the air. “I am proud of my son’s martyrdom... but the pain I feel in my heart as a father is impossible to comprehend or bear,” said Sultan Abed’s father.

Abu Nissan, a local commander of Al-Quds Brigade, the armed wing, said the Palestinians were not “shaken” by the killing. “He is not the first martyr, nor he will be the last. We all are martyrs,” he said.

Israeli forces regularly carry out raids in and around Jenin and its adjacent refugee camp, a hub of Palestinian groups.

Palestinian officials said Israeli forces killed a 16-year-old boy during a raid in the West Bank city of Ramallah early on Thursday. The West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, has

seen a surge in violence for more than a year, particularly since the Gaza war erupted on October 7.

At least 491 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces or settlers across the West Bank since October 7, according to Palestinian officials.

The Gaza Strip has been at war since Palestinian groups carried out an unprecedented attack on southern Israel on October 7.

That attack resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people, including Israelis and foreigners, according to a tally based on official Israeli figures. Israel’s retaliatory offensive on the Gaza Strip has killed at least 34,388 Palestinians, most of them women and children, according to the territory’s health ministry. — AFP



In brief

■ HELSINKI



FINNISH MP SUSPECTED OF SHOOTING FIREARM IN PUBLIC

A Finnish far-right MP is suspected of shooting a firearm outside a Helsinki restaurant. “One of our party’s MPs was... implicated in an incident in Helsinki,” Harri Vuorenmaa wrote on X. “The course of events is currently unclear. Police are investigating and we are waiting for further information,” added Vuorenmaa. Two members of parliament were on a night out in the capital when one fired a gun after leaving a restaurant. Several media said MP Timo Vornanen had been arrested on suspicion of aggravated violence and a firearm offence. — AFP

■ PHNOM PENH



20 CAMBODIAN SOLDIERS KILLED IN BASE EXPLOSION

Twenty Cambodian soldiers have been killed in an ammunition explosion at an army base in the country’s west, Prime Minister Hun Manet said on Saturday. The blast, which also wounded several soldiers, occurred on Saturday afternoon at the army base in Kampong Speu province, Hun Manet said in a statement. “I am deeply shocked to receive the news of the ammunition explosion incident,” Hun Manet said, expressing his “deepest condolences” to the families of those killed. Hun Manet said he had ordered the Minister of National Defense and the Commander-in-Chief of Royal Cambodian armed forces to urgently arrange funerals for the soldiers who died. — AFP

■ PARIS



LOUVRE SAYS MONA LISA COULD GET A ROOM OF HER OWN

The Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci, the world’s most famous portrait, could get a room of its own in the Louvre, the museum’s president said on Saturday. Such a move would give visitors, many of whom visit the Louvre for the iconic painting alone, a better experience, Laurence des Cars added. “It’s always frustrating when you don’t give visitors the best possible reception, and that is the case for the Mona Lisa,” she said. The Mona Lisa currently hangs in the Louvre’s Salle des Etats (State Room), the museum’s biggest, in a protective glass case, but Da Vinci’s masterwork is not alone there. — AFP

Russia hits Ukrainian energy sites in ‘massive’ attack



Utility workers operate next to a crater in the courtyard of a hospital in Kharkiv. — AFP

KYIV: Russia launched a “massive” missile strike at Ukraine overnight, damaging four power plants in the latest barrage targeting the country’s energy supply, officials in Kyiv said on Saturday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Kyiv’s Western partners to supply more air defence systems to protect his country’s skies, as the air force said it shot down 21 of 34 incoming missiles.

Moscow has launched some of its biggest ever strikes on Ukraine’s energy facilities in recent months, knocking out a significant chunk of production, and triggering blackouts and energy rationing across the country.

Ukraine also said it hit two oil refineries and a military air base in southern Russia its own wave of overnight drone attacks.

“Thirty-four Russian missiles overnight. We managed to shoot down some of them. But the world has every opportunity to help (us) shoot down every missile and every drone,” Zelensky said in a post on Telegram.

Energy facilities were hit in at least three regions — including Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk in the west, hundreds of kilometres

Moscow has launched some of its biggest ever strikes on Ukraine’s energy facilities in recent months, knocking out a significant chunk of production

from the front line — Energy Minister German Galushchenko said.

One of the missiles landed 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the Polish-Ukrainian border, Poland’s Prime Minister Donald Tusk said.

Kyiv says Moscow is escalating attacks from the air and on land ahead of nationwide celebrations on May 9, when Russia marks victory in World War II, and while Ukraine awaits the arrival of crucial US weapons.

The DTEK power operator said equipment at four of its thermal power plants was “severely damaged” in the overnight strikes.

State electricity operator Ukrenergo said it had disconnected its main overhead power line in the west of the country as a preventative measure. — AFP

SUPPORTERS CALL ON SPANISH PRIME MINISTER TO STAY

MADRID: Thousands of Socialist Party supporters travelled from across Spain for a rally in Madrid on Saturday to call on Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to stay on, after he stunned the country this week by saying he might quit the premiership.

Sanchez said on Wednesday he would step back “for a few days” to decide whether he wants to continue leading the government after a court launched a business corruption probe into his wife’s private dealings. He said this was part of a sustained campaign of slander against him and his family by political opponents.

Sanchez denies the allegations made against his wife, Begona Gomez, and said he will announce his decision on his future on Monday.

“Prime Minister, stay, Pedro, stay. We are with you,” Maria Jesus Montero, Deputy Prime Minister and Treasury Minister, told a meeting of the federal committee of the Socialist Party

I ask all citizens not to be fooled. Spain does not have a problem, the one who has a judicial problem is Sánchez, his government, his party and his circle. Let them solve it

ALBERTO NUÑEZ FEIJOO

The leader of the opposition conservative People’s Party (PP)

at its Madrid headquarters.

Outside, euphoric supporters thronged the streets and played popular pop songs urging Sanchez to stay, with many waving flags or with their faces painted.

Some 12,500 supporters

joined the rally, according to the Spanish government.

“I hope he continues, because Spain has to continue with him. If not, it scares me. We are afraid of what could come,” Leonor Romero, 56, a councillor from Huelva, said from southern Spain.

“He must continue. I think he is not going to resign. He will leave us orphans,” Jose Luis Trigo, 74, a pensioner, said.

Opposition parties have condemned Sanchez’s move.

“I ask all citizens not to be fooled. Spain does not have a problem, the one who has a judicial problem is Sánchez, his government, his party and his circle. Let them solve it,” Alberto Nuñez Feijoo, the leader of the opposition conservative People’s Party (PP), said.

A survey found 54.1 per cent believed Sanchez’s period of reflection was a “political strategy” to gain support before the Catalan elections on May 12 and European Parliamentary elections in June. — Reuters



People gather outside Spain’s Socialist Party (PSOE) headquarters to show support for Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, in Madrid. — Reuters

Macron visit to Germany in May to focus on EU ties

BERLIN: French President Emmanuel Macron will visit Germany in May and will spend more days than planned with Chancellor Olaf Scholz, government sources said, in a sign of their ambition to bring more unity to EU relations.

Macron’s previously announced state visit from May 26-28 might be followed by another trip to Germany in June, the sources said on Saturday.

This could signal that Franco-German relations remain strong, despite reports of deep disagreement between the two leaders.

Although both leaders show support for Ukraine against the Russian war, his approaches on how to help the country differ, with Germany being more cautious about weapon deliveries or sending troops.

At an EU summit last week,



French President Emmanuel Macron speaks during a press statement with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, at the Chancellery in Berlin. — Reuters file photo

Macron and Scholz said they want to jointly implement an EU capital markets union and reduce bureaucracy in the single market.

The sources said that a new Franco-German ministerial meeting was planned in Meseberg, north of Berlin, at the

end of May, making Macron stay longer than previously planned.

Macron is under pressure domestically because his party does not have a majority in the National Assembly and polls suggest that Eurosceptic far-right and far-left parties could perform

At an EU summit, Macron and Scholz said they want to jointly implement an EU capital markets union and reduce bureaucracy in the single market.

strongly in the EU elections in early June.

Both Macron and Scholz therefore want to emphasise a clearly pro-European course.

The French president will be received by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and will give a speech on Europe in Dresden.

Macron had originally planned the state visit for July 2023 but had to cancel it at short notice due to riots in French cities.

A meeting within the framework of the so-called

Weimar Triangle, consisting of France, Germany and Poland, is being considered for June, coinciding with a UEFA Euro 2024 football match in Dortmund on June 25 between France and Poland, the sources said.

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said for the first time on Saturday that he supports a reform of the country’s constitutionally-enshrined debt brake, but does not currently see any possibility of doing it right now. Altering the rules of the debt brake, which limits public deficits to 0.35 per cent of gross domestic product, would require a two-thirds majority in the upper and lower houses of parliament.

The brake is fiercely defended by Scholz’ coalition partner Free Democrats (FDP), and earlier this week the chancellor himself had also seemed more sceptical about reform. — AFP

How climate change can affect mental health



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Last week, several parts of Oman and nearby GCC countries witnessed heavy rains and severe flooding causing deaths and destruction to properties. Eleven schoolboys lost their lives while being driven home from school in the northeastern part of Oman. This time we were shocked and surprised that there was not much warning from the metropolitan office unlike before and the public overreacted accusing the Ministry of Education of negligence and asking for resignations and trials. Such a reaction is understandable yet in my opinion was an overreaction and an attempt to find a scapegoat. Instead of pointing fingers around it would be better to think strategically on how to improve the quality of early and accurate detection of weather events and develop emergency plans. The impact of climate change has been discussed from economic and financial perspectives. In most countries people get together after extreme weather conditions, volunteer to provide food and shelter help in cleaning houses, and collect donations to replace damaged goods yet we hear

very little about psychological support or what is known as “first aid”. Even when such interventions are provided, they are often limited and delivered by inexperienced volunteers with limited training in mental health. New evidence suggests that experiencing extreme weather events such as hurricanes, wildfires, floods, or droughts can be traumatising. People experiencing the destruction of their homes and properties and displacement are more at risk of developing a variety of psychological problems such as anxiety, feelings of helplessness, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts. There is also new evidence linking the rise in temperature to an increase in aggression and criminal behaviour. I remember having a client in his 40s who was traumatised during the hurricane that affected Oman in 2007 when lost his car in the flooding. Since then, he would become extremely anxious and panicking when he sees heavy clouds stopping his family from leaving the house and would not relax until the clouds disappear. According to studies, people with underlying mental health conditions or substance use problems

AFTER EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS, VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE FOOD AND SHELTER AND COLLECT DONATIONS TO SUPPORT THOSE AFFECTED, YET WE HEAR VERY LITTLE ABOUT PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

are at higher risk for death from increased heat and humidity by 25-30 per cent compared to those without such conditions. Climate change may also affect early childhood development while air pollution and higher temperatures increase the risk of strokes and dementia among older adults. So, what can be done to reduce the psychological impact of climate change? At an international level, more strategies and action plans need to be implemented to address climate change and what can be done to prevent further damage to the ecosystem. We need more funding for research on the psychological impact of climate change and what can be done to improve the psychological resilience of people and help people recover from the trauma they experience following extreme weather events. Design culturally appropriate psycho-social interventions since people behave differently when facing atrocities. Raising public awareness about climate change would encourage everyone to do their best to prevent further damage to the environment. Training volunteers to deliver psychological first aid would reduce the impact of weather conditions on those affected.

Biden ranges far as trial keeps Trump tied up

AURÉLIA END

Meetings, interviews, fundraising events, official travel: Joe Biden tried this week to be everywhere at once while his rival Donald Trump was held up in court. It was a tactical campaign move by an 81-year-old president who faces mixed polls and nagging questions about his age. Since last Monday, Trump has been tied up in criminal court in connection with alleged hidden payments to a former porn star. And for the next several weeks, the 77-year-old former Republican president, who's been indicted in several other cases, will see his campaign disrupted while he sits in the New York courtroom. Biden's team jubilantly noted that last Wednesday, the only day Trump was not required to be in court, the real estate magnate played golf. "I haven't had a chance to watch the court proceedings," Biden chuckled on Thursday at a fundraiser at the home of actor Michael Douglas, "because I've been out campaigning." On Tuesday, Biden flew to Florida to defend abortion rights. A day later, he presented himself to construction workers as a child of the middle class. On Thursday, Biden announced heavy federal investments in semiconductors. Trump "learned the best way to get rich is inherit it," said Biden, adding: "I guess that's how you look at the world from Mar-a-Lago," the former president's vast estate in Florida. On Friday, Biden again played up the contrast in a radio interview with host Howard Stern, a regular venue for Trump before he won the presidency in 2016. Stern and Trump often delved into salacious terrain. But Friday's interview was neither abrasive nor off-color. Biden reviewed his life, the painful moments — the death of his first wife and their baby daughter, then the death of his eldest son from cancer — as well as the happy ones, such as meeting his current wife Jill. With the encouragement of a very supportive Stern, Biden took the opportunity to highlight his sense of family, his empathy and his resilience. "We have a fundamentally different value set," Biden said of Trump. However, the week was not all roses for the Democrat. On Wednesday, a Bloomberg News/ Morning Consult poll gave Trump the lead in several crucial states. On Thursday, he was hit by worse-than-expected economic statistics. And questions about Biden's age resurfaced, thanks to a change in his routine. — AFP

Globalisation: Preserving cultural identity



DR KHALFAN HAMED AL HARRASI
abusally@hotmail.com

As our world becomes more interconnected, the effects of globalisation on local cultures are vast and complex. With the expansion of multinational corporations and the emergence of social media, globalisation presents both advantages and obstacles to communities worldwide. As local customs and traditions encounter global influences, preserving cultural identity has become increasingly crucial. Globalisation has enabled unprecedented cross-border exchange of ideas, goods and people. In many instances, this proliferation of trade and technology has triggered the elimination of the insulation of local cultures, thereby exposing them to a multitude of external influences. This exposure frequently results in the convergence of traditions and the assimilation of foreign customs, potentially compromising the unique identity of local cultures and causing a noticeable impact on the cultural norms of many countries. Additionally, the rise of global brands and franchises has caused the replication of urban environments across the world, thereby reducing the uniqueness of local architecture and cuisine. Western media's widespread influence, for instance, has introduced Western norms and values, which in turn have challenged traditional beliefs and practices in many societies. As globalisation continues to present challenges, communities worldwide are taking action to protect their cultural heritage. From grassroots initiatives to government plans, various programmes have been employed to preserve cultural knowledge, traditions and values. One effective method is through the revitalisation of traditional arts and crafts. By supporting local artisans and promoting traditional craftsmanship, communities can enhance the survival of valuable knowledge passed down through generations. International organisations such as Unesco play a vital role in recognising and safeguarding cultural heritage, offering resources and expertise to communities in need. Moreover, there is an increasing focus on cultural education and awareness initiatives. By cultivating a sense of pride in one's cultural heritage from a young age, communities can encourage a feeling of belonging and

identity among future generations. Festivals and events that feature traditional music, dance and cuisine provide opportunities for communities to honour their cultural wealth while sharing it with the wider world. One example is Bhutan, a nation nestled in the Himalayas, that has taken measures to safeguard its distinct cultural identity in the face of globalisation. Through policies such as Gross National Happiness, Bhutan prioritises cultural values and traditions alongside economic progress. The government supports local artists in marketing their traditional arts and crafts, both domestically and internationally, through training programmes and cultural events. In Japan, there is a strenuous effort to preserve cultural identity by recognising and protecting traditional practices, such as tea ceremony, kimono wearing and Kabuki theatre. The Agency for

BY EMBRACING DIVERSITY AND ACTIVELY PRESERVING THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE, COMMUNITIES CAN NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITIES OF GLOBALISATION WHILE RETAINING THEIR UNIQUE IDENTITY

Cultural Affairs is one such organisation that works to protect cultural heritage through funding of cultural programmes and promotion of cultural tourism that aims at presenting authentic cultural experiences to encourage visitors to engage with local traditions. To further enhance the discussion on the impact of globalisation and efforts to preserve cultural identity, we can delve into additional aspects such as language preservation. Language is a fundamental component of cultural identity. Globalisation can lead to the dominance of certain languages, potentially endangering minority languages. Efforts to preserve linguistic diversity include language recovery programmes, bilingual education curricula, and the documentation of endangered languages. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy is a powerful tool governments and organisations can employ to foster mutual understanding and cooperation

between nations. Through cultural exchange programmes, exhibitions, and heritage preservation initiatives, diverse cultures can be celebrated and respected internationally. Still, indigenous communities may face particular challenges in preserving their cultural identity in the face of globalisation. Their struggles for self-realisation often intersect with movements to defend their land rights, traditional knowledge and cultural values. A tool that can effectively preserve cultural identity in the face of globalisation challenges is saving digitised formats of cultural customs and traditions. In today's increasingly digital world, preserving cultural heritage in digital formats is becoming more important. Digital archives, virtual museums and online platforms provide opportunities to share cultural knowledge worldwide while ensuring its long-term accessibility and preservation. Digitisation of culture could assist and empower local communities to take ownership of their cultural preservation efforts. It is imperative to empower local communities to take charge of their cultural preservation. Through community-led initiatives, participatory decision-making processes and capacity-building programmes, communities can actively protect and promote their unique traditions and customs. By delving deeper into these dimensions, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the intricacies surrounding cultural identity preservation in the face of globalisation. These intricacies highlight the significance of taking a holistic approach that tackles the various aspects of cultural identity preservation in an interconnected world. While globalisation could present challenges to local cultures, it also offers opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and collaboration. By embracing diversity and actively preserving their cultural heritage, communities can navigate the complexities of globalisation while retaining their unique identity. The world can move towards a more inclusive and culturally rich future through public engagement, government support and international cooperation.

How’s this for a teenage survival kit?

QUITE often, parents ask me, “How can I get my kids to be the best they can be? How do I get them to understand they can’t do nothing and hope to get ahead? How can I make them understand that you get nothing for nothing?” Let me share with you, some philosophical approaches to share with them. They are a mixture of carrot and stick, but cannot be denied by any level of intellect or interest, and sooner or later, must be embraced.

I’m so sorry young ‘uns, but there is no substitute for work, so wherever you are, do the work, first. If you’re looking for the easy way to get things done, you’re looking for a trick, or an illusion. The plain truth is that there is never an ‘easier’ way that doesn’t include returning to the task again later to do it again, properly! The thing is that if you are looking at ‘short cuts,’ you are not being true to yourself, not developing the knowledge, skills, and understanding that are the real you.

Respect others — their opinions and positions: One of the keys to getting their perspectives and balance right, is to take them to a place where they will respect, and accept what people say without challenging every word and every step. This is where respect comes in, and understanding that it’s not a question of deference, ‘kowtowing,’ or ‘tipping your hat’ to anyone, but accepting their knowledge and experience can go a long way towards making sure your life journey will be easier than theirs was.

This requires the younger generation to be curious, not about answers, but about processes. It requires that they ask good questions, and listen to the answers. In other words, it is learning how to learn. Albert Einstein wrote that he had no special talent, except that he was “passionately curious,” while the noted poet and philosopher, Walt Whitman once wrote that we should “be curious, not judgemental.”

These are only two wonderful



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

observations by intellectuals, but we do need to steer our young people towards empowering their own curiosity. The youth problem however, is that so often, many parents, supervisors, and even teachers just don’t want questions and curiosity, due to their own lack of expertise or knowledge, as they don’t want their own shortcomings challenged.

So, what’s the answer? Honesty! If you are posed a situation or a question that you cannot respond to... admit it! It’s not the end of the world, and in fact your honesty will almost certainly be appreciated. You will not be so intimidating in their eyes, and as I have often commented... weakness in these situations tends to be seen more as a strength, and when a little self-deprecation is involved, it can be a remarkably fulfilling for both parties involved.

They can’t be afraid of failing... at anything: Although failure hurts, it’s a bit like a kick in the seat of their pants. It hurts a wee bit, maybe their pride, but will actually be good for them, as they will rarely ever go through a day, let alone life, without some substantial reverses, and young people really do need to learn how to fail, and there is no truer adage than that ‘failure is a stepping stone to success.’

We must stop looking at failures as defeats, when they are the inspiration for resilience, the most demanding of all youth qualities, the hardest to get right, the hardest to keep ‘fronting up’ with, and the best life and workplace qualities a young person can have. Have fun — be enthusiastic — and use your imagination because our imagination is what separates us from the glories of the amazing animal kingdom, but above all, be yourself. Don’t copy, don’t cheat, don’t take shortcuts, don’t envy anyone else, just be you.

Why? Because as Oscar Wilde once said, “Be yourself, because everyone else is taken,” and let’s face it, you’d make a horrible meal of being someone else.

WE MUST STOP
LOOKING AT
FAILURES AS
DEFEATS, WHEN
THEY ARE THE
INSPIRATION
FOR RESILIENCE

EAGLE-HEADED!



A Sikh devotee with an eagle sitting on his turban takes part in a procession ahead of the birth anniversary of the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, on Saturday. — AFP

Governments must step up to prevent cervical cancer

JESSICA PETTWAY, a YouTube fashion and lifestyle influencer, died this month from cervical cancer at the age of 36. Her untimely death — and those of countless other women — probably could have been prevented, thanks to an effective vaccine for human papillomavirus (HPV), which is responsible for about 95 per cent of cervical cancers. But not nearly enough people are getting it.

A recent Public Health Scotland study shows just how effective the HPV vaccine is at preventing cervical cancer. Among the 40,000 women born between 1988 and 1996 who received the vaccine before turning 14, there has not been a single case of cervical cancer. This includes women who received only one or two doses, rather than the full three-dose protocol. The implication is clear: if all eligible girls and women are vaccinated globally, we could eliminate nearly all cervical cancers.

It is not just women who benefit from the HPV vaccine. Beyond cervical cancer, the vaccine protects against cancers of the head, neck, anus, penis, vagina, and vulva. Moreover, because HPV is typically transmitted sexually, protecting boys also means protecting girls. That is why all girls and boys aged 9-14 years — and, ideally, women and men until the age of 45 — should be getting the vaccine.



IFEANYI M NSOFOR

The writer is a Senior New Voices Fellow at the Aspen Institute, is a Global Atlantic Fellow for Health Equity at George Washington University and an Innovation Fellow at PandemicTech

The good news is that HPV-vaccine programmes have been introduced in many countries across the Global North, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Moreover, the Global South is starting to catch up: last year, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Eswatini, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Togo added the HPV vaccine to their immunisation schedules. But eliminating cervical cancer will require governments everywhere to get on board.

The top priority for effective HPV-vaccination programmes is to vaccinate girls before they become sexually active — the recommended age is 9-14 years. School-based programmes are a good place to start, but in many countries, one cannot expect all — or even most — girls to be in school. Nigeria, for example, has more than 12 million out-of-school children, some 60 per cent of whom are girls. Given this, governments must work with community leaders, community-based organisations, and community health workers to take HPV vaccine to people where they live.

But ensuring that girls get vaccinated is not just a logistical challenge; there is also an important social component. A

recent Behavioral Insights Lab survey, in which I was principal investigator, showed that just 60 per cent of the male and female caregivers of girls aged 9-17 across six states in Nigeria would be willing to have these children vaccinated.

Community perceptions were a major determinant of respondents’ stances on the vaccine. Most caregivers (72 per cent) reported that they were very likely to discuss HPV vaccination with their family and friends, and those who perceived that their family and friends supported it were more likely to believe that their female child

would get vaccinated. We thus concluded that interventions that leverage positive family and peer influences and encourage discussion of HPV vaccination within caregivers’ social networks are likely to boost vaccine uptake.

Knowledge about the HPV vaccine also makes a big difference, though the type of messaging used in any educational campaign is crucial. Depending on the context, a focus on the vaccine’s general health benefits, rather than its role in preventing sexually transmitted infections, can help to reduce stigma. In our study, caregivers were 30 per cent more likely

to have their child vaccinated against HPV if they were exposed to messaging emphasising the vaccine’s positive effect on girls’ future prospects.

And, again, vaccination programmes must not neglect boys, for whom the vaccine also represents a cost-effective — and potentially life-saving — intervention. Countries where HPV vaccines are already approved for males — including Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, South Korea, Switzerland, the UK, and the US — should be leading the way. The US Centers for Disease Control recommends boys get the HPV vaccine between the ages of 11 and 12.

People who were not vaccinated in adolescence should also have access to the vaccine. In the Scotland study, women who received the three-dose protocol between the ages of 14 and 22 had significantly reduced incidence of cervical cancer compared to the unvaccinated. In fact, one can receive the HPV vaccine until age 45. (It is unclear whether the vaccine can help those older than 45 — who are likely to have been exposed to HPV already — not least because it takes a while for cervical cancer to develop.)

©Project Syndicate, 2024



Community perceptions were a major determinant of respondents’ stances on the vaccine.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



Al Harrasi claims silver in 100m at Marrakech Paralympic

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Oman's Tah al Harrasi snatched the silver medal in the 100m race on the opening day of the Paralympic Grand Prix Athletics Championships in Marrakech, Morocco. The event is held from April 26 to 29, under the supervision of the Paralympic Committee.

Al Harrasi managed to reach second place in the 100m after completing the race distance in 12.52 seconds, while Malaysian Mohamed Buzi took first place after completing the race distance in 12.65 seconds.

The national team para athletes including Taha al Harrasi and Mohammed al Mashaiki, under the supervision of coach Sonia Mustafa, were in the training preparation to take part in the long jump competitions. The participating delegation also includes physiotherapist Hani al Shamakhi and the delegation is headed by Adnan al Owaidi, a member of the Omani Paralympic Committee.

Al Owaidi, head of the delegation participating in the competitions, said that the competition is strong and the national team player's silver medal in the 100m is a good start and we look forward to the results continuing in the upcoming competitions to achieve qualifying numbers.

Al Owaidi indicated that the championship is one of the



Al Owaidi, head of the delegation participating in the competitions, said that the competition is strong and the national team player's silver medal in the 100m is a good start

major events in the calendar of the International Paralympic Committee as it is a qualifier for the next Paralympic Games in France in 2024. The players participating in this championship were chosen based on the qualifying numbers they obtained in previous competitions, adding that the championship is attended by 64 countries from around the world, with more than 400 players competing in various classifications.

Coach Sonia Mustafa indicated the readiness of the players to compete and win first place.

HUSSAIN GETS GOLD, BRONZE FOR TABLE TENNIS TEAM

OMAN'S MEDAL TALLY IS NOW 40 MEDALS AT THE FIRST GCC GAMES



WALEED AL JAHWARI
DUBAI, APRIL 27

Oman's swimmer Hussain Tarik snatched the gold medal in the 400m individual medley category and bronze medal in the 50-metre breaststroke, while Saudi's Ahmed al Muueibid won the silver and his team-mate Emad al Sibiani claimed the bronze medal in the first GCC Games in the UAE. Moreover, the national swimmer Ibrahim Saleh claimed the bronze medal in the men's 200m butterfly category.

Paddlers Taliyah al Rawahi and Salma al Nasiri claimed the bronze medal in the women's table tennis doubles category taking Oman's medal tally to 40 medals.

Omani girls defeated UAE's Hussa al Nimr and Maryam Yaqib 3-2 in the quarterfinals before losing to Bahrain in the semis. Bahraini's Fatima al Aali and Kinda Mahmoud won the gold medal after defeating the Kuwaiti pair Rayan al Eidan and Maryam al Halwaji 3-1, who won the silver medal. The bronze medal was also shared by another Bahraini pair Dana al Khayyat and Rayan Rashid.

In the men's doubles, Ali al Rawahi and Nasser al Zaabi lost to the Qatari team 2-3. Qatar team snatched the gold medal after beating Bahrain team in the final. The bronze medal was won by the UAE team.

Masoud al Shaqsi, a former international referee and board member of the Table Tennis Association, said, "The young



players get an opportunity to interact and gain experience in preparation for the upcoming competitions, and we have certainly gained players who will be the core of Oman team in the upcoming tournaments. We thank the organising committee

for the good reception and good organisation. We also thank the Oman Olympic Committee for providing the opportunity for our youngsters."

Oman national cycling team ended their participation in the Gulf Games with one medal in

the team category on the second day of the competition, which was held in Abu Dhabi.

In the individual competition, Mohammed al Fadhili and Ahmed al Ajmi finished seventh and eighth. The gold medal was won by Saudi's Hussain Jaafar, his team-mates Taha Zaki won the silver, and Obaid al Suwaidi won the bronze.

In handball, Oman lost an opportunity to claim bronze when it lost to Bahrain 24-31 on Friday at Al Bataeh Club hall in Sharjah. Omani players tried to keep up with Bahrain during the two halves of the match, but the match was in favour of experienced Bahrainis.

They defeated UAE 30-26 and Qatar 29-28 in initial matches.

Oman golf team maintained second place in the overall team standings in the competitions of the second day, which witnessed exciting competition among five Gulf teams. The UAE team is at the top of the list and the Saudi team in third place. Masoud al Barwani, said, "Oman players have succeeded in achieving good results so far. There is great hope for achieving a medal in this participation, and we hope that our players will exert more effort on the last day of the competition."

In billiards, Omani player Omar al Hamidi lost 6-7 to Abdulrahman al Mousa of Saudi Arabia in the first round, and 2-7 in the second round. Al Zubair al Balushi lost to Bahraini player Haider Marum 7-2 in both rounds.

Oman juniors compete in Asian U20 Athletics Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Oman's athletes took part in the 1st Asian U20 Athletics Championship in the UAE from April 24 to 27. Oman's delegation comprised five athletes who took part in different events. The national sprinters commenced their participation in the Asian event on the opening day.

Alaa al Zadjali finished fifth in the heats of the women's 100m in 12.97 seconds. The national sprinter Al Mulhem al Shukaili finished fourth in the heats of the men's 100m in 10.92 seconds. Alaa al Zadjali finished



sixth in the heats of the women's 200m event in 26.78 seconds. Al Mulhem al Shukaili managed to qualify to the

semifinals from the heats of the men's 200m event as he registered 22.28 second and came in the fifth place. In the



semis, he finished in eighth place after he finished the distance in a timing of 22.27 seconds.

Mansoor al Farsi took part in the 1,500-metre event and he registered a timing of 4:33:61 minutes. Shiekha al Hinai took

part in the long jump and she cleared 4.45m in the finals. Hajjan al Hajri concluded his participation in the finals of the men's hammer throw in tenth place after he cleared a distance of 56.04m.

Oman's delegation was headed by Asaad al Hosni, Secretary-General of Oman Athletics Association (OAA). The delegation featured five athletes including Al Mulhem al Shukaili, Mansoor al Farsi, Hajjan al Hajri, Alaa al Zadjali and Shiekha al Hinai, while the coaching staff included coach Hamood al Dalhami, Fahad Aqeel, Mahmood al Siyabi and Muzna al Malki.

Liverpool's slim title hopes fade further with 2-2 draw at West Ham



Liverpool's Alisson in action with West Ham United's Kurt Zouma. — Reuters

LONDON: Liverpool's slim Premier League title hopes faded further on Saturday when Michael Antonio's late header earned West Ham United a deserved point with a 2-2 draw.

Liverpool, reeling from a 2-0 loss at Everton in the Merseyside derby on Wednesday, again conceded first when Jarrod Bowen nodded home shortly before halftime, his 20th goal of the season in his 200th game for the Hammers.

The Reds levelled three minutes after the restart through Andy Robertson before the ugliest of own goals, attributed to goalkeeper Alphonse Areola, put them ahead after 65 minutes. But Antonio ensured the hosts took something from the game when he met Bowen's cross with a powerful header in the 77th minute.

Liverpool remain third on 75 points, one behind second-placed Manchester City, who have played two games fewer, and two behind first-placed Arsenal, who have a game in hand and a much-superior goal difference. West Ham stay eighth on 49 points. — Reuters



Milwaukee Bucks center Brook Lopez (11) shoots the ball while Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton (0) defends. — USA TODAY Sports

Haliburton hits winner as Pacers hold off Bucks, T'Wolves push Suns to brink

LOS ANGELES: Tyrese Haliburton's game-winning basket lifted the Indiana Pacers to a 121-118 overtime victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Friday as Minnesota put Phoenix on the verge of elimination in the NBA playoffs.

The Pacers let a 19-point lead get away, but finally thwarted the short-handed Bucks' rally to gain a 2-1 lead in their best-of-seven Eastern Conference first round series.

The Dallas Mavericks also won at home, cruising to a 101-90 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers for a 2-1 lead in their Western Conference set.

But a return to Phoenix provided no respite for Kevin Durant and the Suns, who were one defeat away from elimination after falling 126-109 to the Minnesota Timberwolves.

In Indianapolis, Haliburton delivered a triple-double of 18 points, 10 rebounds and 16 assists to help the Pacers withstand a 42-point

performance from Milwaukee forward Khris Middleton, who drilled a three-pointer to tie it with 2.3 seconds left in regulation and made another trey to knot it at 118-118 with eight seconds left in overtime.

With 1.6 seconds remaining in overtime, Haliburton took an inbound pass and split the Bucks' defence as he drove for a one-handed floater.

Fouled on the play, he made the free throw to cap the scoring. Middleton, playing through a sprained right ankle, was unable to work another three-point miracle as time expired.

"I just knew I was shooting it no matter what," Haliburton said. The Pacers escaped with the win in a game they led by 19 points in the first quarter and by 17 in the third.

With two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo still sidelined by a calf injury, the Bucks couldn't match Indiana's early pace. — AFP

Tsitsipas ousted by qualifier, Swiatek in last 16

MADRID: Stefanos Tsitsipas suffered a surprise second round exit at the hands of world number 118 Thiago Monteiro in Madrid on Saturday, while Iga Swiatek cruised into the last 16 on a rainy day at the Caja Magica.

Tsitsipas, who arrived in the Spanish capital with only one defeat on clay this term, lost 6-4, 6-4 to the Brazilian qualifier in just over 90 minutes.

The Greek world number seven had a first round bye and came into the tournament on the back of a third title triumph in Monte Carlo and a runner-up showing in Barcelona in the previous two weeks.

But the left-handed Monteiro looked more comfortable on court, benefitting from having already won three matches this week, through qualifying and the main draw.

Monteiro, 29, landed a stunning 89 per cent of his first serves in throughout the clash with Tsitsipas, who saved three match points in the last two games but yielded on the fourth, to gift his opponent a milestone victory.

"For sure this is one of the biggest wins of my career," said Monteiro, who is through to the third round at a Masters 1000 event for the first time.

"I knew it was a really tough



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas returns the ball to Brazil's Thiago Monteiro during their second round of the 2024 ATP Tour Madrid Open tournament. — AFP



Poland's Iga Swiatek returns the ball to Romania's Sorana Cirstea during their second round of the 2024 WTA Tour Madrid Open tournament. — AFP

match but I tried to believe in myself the whole time. I was feeling good on the court, I like to play on clay in altitude."

Over on Manolo Santana stadium, last year's finalist Swiatek eased past Romanian Sorana Cirstea 6-1, 6-1 to book a

Monteiro, 29, landed a stunning 89 per cent of his first serves in throughout the clash with Tsitsipas, who saved three match points in the last two games but yielded on the fourth

fourth-round meeting with home favourite Sara Sorribes Tormo or ex-world number one Victoria Azarenka.

Play started with the roof closed due to wet conditions but that had no effect on Swiatek, who leapt to a 4-0 lead inside 22 minutes.

The top seed got broken while serving for the opening set at 5-0 but that only delayed the inevitable as she struck right back to close out the set on the 40-minute mark.

The second set followed a similar pattern and Swiatek wrapped up the victory with a service winner, losing just two games in the one-hour 17-minute clash. "For sure the weather is different than last year but still I know how to play in these kind of conditions. I feel really comfortable," said Swiatek, who is seeking a third WTA 1000 crown of the season this week. — AFP

Marquez takes pole for Spanish MotoGP

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA, Spain: Six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez secured his first pole position as a Ducati-Gresini rider and 65th of his career on Saturday for the Spanish MotoGP.

The 31-year-old will also start on pole for the sprint race later Saturday with Marco Bezzecchi of Italy, on a Ducati-VR46, and fellow Spaniard and championship leader Jorge Martin (Ducati-Prima) on the front row.

"It's been a long time!" said Marquez, whose last pole position was the Portuguese MotoGP in March, 2023.

Marquez's recent campaigns have been marred by injury but he said he hoped to "finish on the



(From L) Ducati Italian rider Marco Bezzecchi, Ducati Spanish rider Marc Marquez and Ducati Spanish rider Jorge Martin pose for pictures after the qualifier session of the MotoGP Spanish Grand Prix — AFP

podium". So far this campaign Marquez, who moved from Honda to Ducati this season, has

had two podium finishes in the sprint race, in Portugal and the United States.

The Spaniard's most recent best finish in the main race dates back to finishing second in the Australian MotoGP in October, 2022.

Marquez has not won a race since securing his 59th career win at the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix in October 2021.

Two-time defending champion Francesco Bagnaia (Ducati), will start on the third row having posted the seventh fastest time — a day after the Italian had set a new record lap time.

Maverick Vinales dominated on his Aprilia at the Grand Prix of the Americas where he won the sprint race as well earlier this month but came down to earth a bit and will start from 11th spot. — AFP

Estanguet emotional as Olympic torch sets sail for France



French 19th-century three-masted barque Belem sets sails from the Piraeus port, near Athens, with the Olympic flame on board to begin its journey to France on April 27, 2024, a day after Greece handed over the torch of the 2024 Games to Paris organisers. — AFP

PIRAEUS, Greece: The Olympic flame set sail on Saturday on its voyage to France on board the Belem, the Torch Relay reaching its climax at the revolutionary Paris Games opening ceremony along the river Seine on July 26.

“The feelings are so exceptional. It’s such an emotion for me”, Tony Estanguet, Paris Olympics chief organiser, told reporters before the departure of the ship from Piraeus.

He hailed the “great coincidence” how the Belem was launched just weeks after the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896.

“These games mean a lot. It’s been a centenary since the last time we organised the Olympic games in our country,” he added.

The 19th-century three-masted boat set sail on a calm sea but under cloudy skies.

It was accompanied off the port of Piraeus by the trireme Olympias of the Greek Navy and 25 sailing boats while dozens of people watched behind railings for security reasons.

“We came here so that the children understand that the Olympic ideal was born in Greece. I’m really moved,” Giorgos Kontopoulos, who watched the ship starting its voyage with his two children, told AFP.

On Sunday, the ship will pass from the Corinth Canal — a feat of 19th century engineering constructed with the contribution of French banks and engineers.

‘MORE RESPONSIBLE GAMES’

The Belem is set to reach Marseille — where a Greek colony was founded in around 600 BCE — on May 8.

Over 1,000 vessels will accompany its approach to the harbour, local officials have said.

French swimmer Florent Manaudou will be the first torch bearer in Marseille. His sister Laure was the second torch bearer in ancient Olympia, where the flame was lit on April 16.

Ten thousand torchbearers will then carry the flame across

64 French territories.

It will travel through more than 450 towns and cities, and dozens of tourist attractions during its 12,000-kilometre (7,500-mile) journey through mainland France and overseas French territories in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific.

It will then reach Paris and be the centre piece of the hugely imaginative and new approach to the Games opening ceremony.

Instead of the traditional approach of parading through the athletics stadium at the start of the Games, teams are set to sail down the Seine on a flotilla of boats in front of up to 500,000 spectators, including people watching from nearby buildings.

The torch harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games. The tradition was revived in 1936 for the Berlin Games.

Greece on Friday had handed over the Olympic flame of the 2024 Games, at a ceremony, to Estanguet.

Hellenic Olympic Committee chairman Spyros Capralos handed the torch to Estanguet at the Panathenaic Stadium, where the Olympics were held in 1896.

Estanguet said the goal for Paris was to organise “spectacular but also more responsible Games, which will contribute towards a more inclusive society.”

Organisers want to ensure “the biggest event in the world plays an accelerating role in addressing the crucial questions of our time,” said Estanguet, a member of France’s Athens 2004 Olympics team who won gold in the slalom canoe event.

A duo of French champions, Beijing 2022 ice dance gold medallist Gabriella Papadakis and former swimmer Beatrice Hess, one of the most successful Paralympians in history, carried the flame during the final relay leg into the Panathenaic Stadium.

Nana Mouskouri, the 89-year-old Greek singer with a worldwide following, sang the French and Greek anthems at the ceremony.

— AFP



President of the Paris 2024 Olympics Tony Estanguet carries the Olympic flame on board barque Belem to begin the flame’s journey to France. — AFP



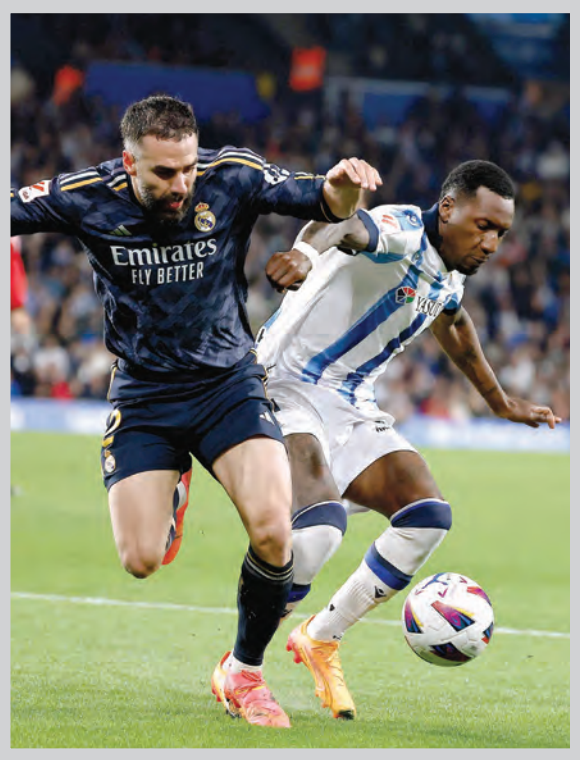
REAL EDGE CLOSER TO TITLE WITH GRITTY WIN AT SOCIEDAD

MADRID: Arda Gueler scored to earn a second-string Real Madrid side a 1-0 win at Real Sociedad on Friday, moving the LaLiga leaders a step closer to a record-extending 36th Spanish title.

With five games remaining, Real climbed to 84 points and extended their lead to 14 points over second-placed Barcelona, who have a game in hand and host Valencia on Monday.

Real manager Carlo Ancelotti made nine changes to the team who beat Barca 3-2 on Sunday, resting key players like Jude Bellingham and Toni Kroos ahead of their Champions League semi-final against Bayern Munich and his side did just enough to secure the three points.

“It was clear that everyone thought we were coming here for a walk,” Ancelotti told reporters. “The only ones who didn’t think so were the players. They had commitment and attitude. They had the desire and enthusiasm to keep winning.”



Six-placed Real Sociedad, fighting for a Europa League spot, dominated possession under pouring rain in northern Spain and had a few good chances saved by Real keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga.

The visitors made the most of the only chance they had in the first half, when 19-year-old Turkish midfielder Gueler, making his first start for Real after signing from Fenerbahce, turned home Dani Carvajal’s cross in the 29th minute.

Three minutes later Takefusa Kubo thought he had scored the equaliser with a tidy finish from close range, but the referee ruled the goal out after spotting a foul in the build-up following a VAR check.

The hosts pushed for an equaliser after the break but had another goal ruled out, a strike from Mikel Merino who was offside, and a shot from the edge of the box by Benat Turrientes was saved by the inspired Arrizabalaga.

Real Madrid almost ended up extending their lead later on, with Alex Remiro making a brilliant reflex save to deny Eduardo Camavinga’s strike from close range.

“We have a spectacular squad. They have this attitude that they feel like they have to win every game. There are four points left to clinch the LaLiga title and we are very close,” Ancelotti said. — Reuters





Follow us on
omanobserver.om/business

Terms & conditions apply



Build a brighter future for your Children

Visit your nearest BankDhofar branch





bankdhofar

2479 1111 www.bankdhofar.com



Oman commits to sustainable energy transformation in oil and gas

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

“Oman has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to developing the oil and gas industry in a safe and sustainable manner, prioritising environmental protection as an integral component of our operations,” said Dr Saleh al Anboori, the Director General of Exploration and Production of Oil and Gas at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, highlighting the nation’s proactive approach to balancing industrial growth with environmental responsibility.

In a recent interview with ‘Wealth’ newsletter of the Ministry, Dr Al Anboori shed light on Oman’s unwavering commitment to environmental protection and sustainability in the oil and gas industry.

Since its inception in the oil and gas sector, Oman has prioritised environmental protection and sustainability, making them integral components of its operations.

Dr Al Anboori highlighted the comprehensive environmental legislations and sustainable



Our ambitious goal to achieve Net-Zero emissions by 2050 is not simply a promise but a testament to Oman’s dedication to global goals for reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change.

DR SALEH AL ANBOORI
*Director General
Exploration and production
of oil and gas*

initiatives implemented by Oman to preserve the environment while developing the oil and gas industry in a safe and sustainable manner.

One of the remarkable achievements of Oman is its commitment to achieve Net-Zero

emissions by 2050, in alignment with global goals to combat climate change. Oman has entered into strategic agreements specialising in clean energy and has been actively implementing new projects and modern technologies to reduce environmental impacts.

Dr Al Anboori expressed, “Our ambitious goal to achieve Net-Zero emissions by 2050 is not simply a promise but a testament to Oman’s dedication to global goals for reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change.

Through strategic agreements and technological advancements, we are actively working towards a cleaner and more sustainable energy future.”

He emphasised the goals set for the Net-Zero strategy in the oil and gas industry, including a target to reduce carbon emissions by 7 per cent by 2030 compared to the 2021 baseline.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is working tirelessly to achieve these goals, promote investment in clean energy projects, and encourage the adoption of modern technologies for sustainable energy production.

Highlighting Oman’s participation in international initiatives, Dr Al Anboori mentioned the signing of agreements such as the World Bank’s “Zero Routine Flaring by 2030” initiative and the Global Methane Pledge to reduce methane emissions by at least 30 per cent by 2030. Oman’s collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme demonstrates its commitment to these initiatives.

In addition to international efforts, Oman is implementing domestic measures in cooperation with companies in the oil and gas industry. Clean energy projects, energy efficiency improvement initiatives, electrification of oil fields projects, and Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS) projects are among the key initiatives being pursued to reduce environmental impacts.

He also highlighted the Blue Hydrogen Project Feasibility Study in Duqm in cooperation with Shell and the afforestation of oil fields as innovative projects aimed at reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainability in the industry.

MSX transactions rise to RO 36.9 million last week

MUSCAT: The trading value on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose last week to RO 36.9 million, compared to about RO 19.4 million in the previous week, benefiting from investors’ interest in the shares of a number of leading companies listed in the banking and communications sectors, in addition to the rise in trading in the bond and sukuk market.

Statistical data issued by MSX indicated an increase in trading in Omantel shares, which witnessed trades worth RO 6.8 million, representing 18.4 per cent of the total trading value.

Bank Muscat witnessed trades worth RO 6.2 million, and Al Nahda Services ranked third with trades at RO 4 million. Sohar International Bank came in fourth place with RO 3.5 million, while Ooredoo ranked fifth with trades amounting to RO 2.5 million.

The five companies accounted for about 63 per cent of the total trading value witnessed by the stock exchange last week.

The increase in demand for the shares of these companies came as local investment companies and funds tended to strengthen their portfolios, focusing on the shares of a number of leading companies after the



The increase in demand for the shares came as local investment companies and funds tended to strengthen their portfolios.

appearance of the financial results for the first quarter, which showed growth in profits and improvement in performance.

Purchases by local investment institutions and funds during the past week accounted for about 77 per cent of the total trading value, compared to sales of 75.8 per cent of the total trading.

Local individual investors also showed interest in purchasing during the past week amid positive expectations for the performance of most public joint-stock companies listed on the stock exchange.

The main index rose 3 points after three weeks of rise and closed at 4,713 points, while the financial sector index recorded a decline of 78.8 points, affected by the decline in bank stocks and a number of investment companies.

— ONA

Oman – GCC electricity linkages to enable energy trade

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Strengthening interconnectivity between Oman and the GCC grid is enabling seamless electricity trades – imports and exports – aimed at helping GCC member states address any domestic power supply shortfalls, particularly during the summer season.

This is evident from media reports that Kuwait’s Ministry of Electricity is currently evaluating a proposal from Oman to supply 350 megawatts (MW) of power during the upcoming summer.

With peak demand expected to exceed 17,700 MW and a potential shortfall of 500 MW, the Ministry is exploring import options. Additional proposals from other Gulf states are anticipated to bridge the entire summer gap, the reports noted.

Electricity imports will inevitably be handled through the GCC interconnection network, which fosters regional cooperation and grid stability, particularly during high demand periods.

Meanwhile, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) interconnection project is making strides.



Power interconnections between the Gulf states help member countries address supply contingencies.

The recently inaugurated grid between Saudi Arabia and Iraq marks the beginning of a 1,000 MW electricity network.

Spanning over 1,050 km from Kuwait to Oman, this project is expected to deliver annual technical and economic benefits, including cost savings of \$200-300 million annually, for the GCC nations.

Initially, it will provide 500 MW to Iraq, with a projected completion within 24 months. Oman is also bolstering linkages to address any energy shortfalls.

A new interconnection with Saudi Arabia’s grid has the potential to increase imports from 400 MW to 1,600 MW.

This will enhance stability in electricity supply, particularly during emergencies.

This is the second such interconnection for Oman, following the existing link with the UAE.

Planning for a direct interconnection between Oman and Saudi Arabia, via a 400 kV DC link spanning roughly 700km, is underway.

This project, along with existing interconnections and Oman’s North-South Interconnect project (Rabt), aims to integrate regional power systems, improve reliability, and expand access to stable and affordable electricity across the GCC.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**UPDATING SUPPLIERS & CONTRACTORS DATA IN
'VENDOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF NAMA GROUP'**

Nama Group would like to draw the attention of all contractors and suppliers dealing with the Group to update their data in the I-Supplier Registration System (www.nama.om). Kindly diligently respond to any notifications and emails you receive in this regard.

Please be informed that starting from **July 1, 2024**, suppliers and contractors who have not completed their profile data will not be allowed to participate in tenders. In addition, the Group companies will not be able to complete financial procedures of suppliers from issuing purchase orders (PO) and pay dues.

For further clarifications and inquiries, please contact the Procurement Departments of the respective Group subsidiary or via the following email:
siham.alamri@holding.nama.om

Thank you for your cooperation.



TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS

OQ showcases its innovations, energy mix and plans to build a sustainable future at OPES 2024

MUSCAT: OQ, the global integrated energy company, represented by its Exploration and Production arm, OQEP, showcased its innovations, energy mix and plans to build a sustainable future. OQ participated in Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES), the prestigious event that embraces the entire oil, gas, and energy industry, as a principal sponsor.

OPES 2024 had together more than 200 expert speakers to shed light on global initiatives that will impact the oil and gas industry. Participants from over 24 countries and more than 900 delegates attended the conference and exhibition. The event was held under the auspices of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

After the inauguration, the OQ booth was visited by the Guest of Honour, Eng Salim bin Nasser



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, visited the booth of OQ at the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show.

al Auqi, the Minister of Energy and Minerals, as well as by a number of delegates and visitors, where the group highlighted its outstanding achievements and

its road-map for a sustainable future which manifested in three clear pathways to reduce carbon footprint and to diversify revenue by promoting energy efficiency,

clean energy, and low carbon molecules.

OQEP also demonstrated how its initiatives are designed to help Oman build a hydrogen-

centric economy, in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the national agenda to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Commenting on OQ participation, Ahmed al Azkawi, Chief Executive Upstream of OQEP, said: "As a meeting place for energy companies and expertise from around the globe, OPES presents us with an opportunity to project OQ as an integrated energy group focused on building a clean and sustainable future.

In our participation, we have gone beyond production and revenues, highlighting the need to engage all stakeholders towards building a sustainable future in line with Oman Vision 2040 and carbon neutrality 2050 objectives. OQ is leaving no stone unturned to apply best industry practices in order to reduce carbon emissions produced by its existing and

future projects. We are pleased to report that we have been able to reduce these emissions to as low as 6 kg CO₂ e/boe in some of our facilities.

Moreover, we recently made the final investment decision for Marsa LNG project that will achieve less than 3 kg of carbon dioxide for every oil equivalent barrel which is one of the lowest GHG intensity plants in the world".

"As part of our sustainability efforts, OQ introduced digital platforms to measure, monitor, and control our emissions.

Through our OPES participation, OQ highlighted the importance of maximising the value of current resources and oil and gas reserves as the company strives to build a cleaner and sustainable future," Al Azkawi concluded.

Sohar International introduces Samsung Wallet

MUSCAT: Affirming its position as a leading digital bank in Oman, Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman partners up with Samsung to proudly introduce Samsung Wallet.

This mobile payment solution empowers Sohar International and Sohar Islamic customers to perform secure and contactless payments using their Samsung phones or watches seamlessly via POS machines as well as use their Samsung Wallet account to conduct online payments with ease and convenience.

"As we unveil our partnership with Samsung Wallet with the launch of Samsung Wallet, we mark a significant milestone in the evolution of digital banking in Oman," stated Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International.

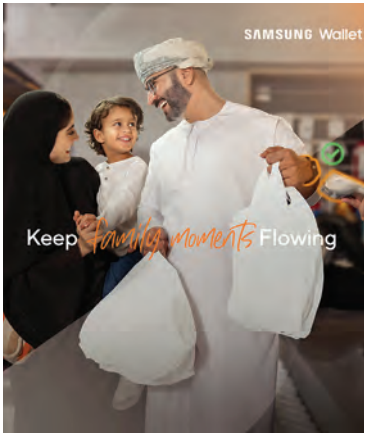
"This collaboration epitomises our commitment to harnessing cutting-edge technology, enhancing security, and providing innovative payment solutions to our customers.

Introducing Samsung Wallet to our suite of digital solutions underscores our dedication to setting the standard for digital excellence in our nation."

The bank encourages customers to take full advantage of linking their Sohar International and Sohar Islamic cards to Samsung Wallet for a streamlined payment process across multiple devices.

To get started, customers can download the Samsung Wallet App from the Galaxy Store, log in with their Samsung account, and set up their PIN and fingerprint for security. After these steps, they simply select 'add card' to scan or manually input their Sohar International or Sohar Islamic credit or debit card number.

Commenting on the partnership, Sajeel Bashiruddin, Chief Digital Officer at Sohar International, said: "Today marks a pivotal moment in our commitment to enhancing



customer experiences.

With the introduction of Samsung Wallet, Sohar International is spearheading a new era of seamless and secure digital transactions, empowering individuals to navigate their financial journeys with confidence and convenience.

This strategic move underscores our dedication to delivering cutting-edge financial solutions that anticipate and meet the needs of our customers. By embracing our partnership with Samsung Wallet, we are not just adapting to change – we're shaping the future of banking experiences."

"Our partnership with Sohar International is a critical step for us as we continue expanding our next-generation payment solutions to consumers in the region.

Samsung Wallet not only offers user-friendly features but also prioritises the security of customers' personal and financial information. With the help of Samsung Knox, consumers can have peace of mind through advanced security measures such as monitoring and preventing unauthorised access or tampering of the device.

This collaboration demonstrates our unwavering commitment to innovation and customer-centric values, as we work towards creating a more vibrant digital landscape for all," said Fadi Abu Shamat, Head of the Mobile eXperience Division at Samsung Gulf Electronics.

NBO introduces Samsung Wallet in Oman

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to digital advancement, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) and NBO Muzn Islamic Banking have introduced Samsung Wallet, an innovative digital payment solution, for all their customers to elevate their digital banking journey.

In collaboration with Samsung Gulf Electronics, this initiative redefines the payment experience by providing customers with an innovative platform that not only facilitates seamless mobile payment services but also enables users to conduct secure, contactless transactions across a diverse array of online, on-site, and in-store outlets worldwide.

Beginning on April 28, 2024, all NBO and Muzn customers will have the opportunity to activate Samsung Wallet through the Samsung Pay app.

Tariq Atiq, General Manager

– Chief Retail & Digital Banking Officer at NBO, expressed enthusiasm about this new launch, stating, "In line with the country's vision and NBO's strategy to digitise products and services, we are excited to introduce Samsung Wallet to our valued customers.

With this cutting-edge digital payment solution, our customers can enjoy smooth and secure transactions using their Samsung devices, which are quick and contactless, adding convenience to their daily lives.

This launch reaffirms NBO's position as a leader in digital banking innovation, and we are confident that Samsung Wallet will greatly benefit our customers by providing them with an intuitive and efficient payment method. We aim to provide exceptional services that meet our customers' needs seamlessly."

Fadi Abu Shamat, Head of the



Mobile eXperience Division at Samsung Gulf Electronics, said, "Fostering a dynamic leap in our next-gen payment solutions, our collaboration with NBO marks a pivotal stride for Samsung Wallet in Oman.

Our commitment to innovation and customer-centric values is underscored as we empower users with intuitive features while safeguarding their personal and financial data through Samsung Knox. This venture exemplifies our dedication to crafting a vibrant digital landscape for all."

Samsung Wallet enables customers to instantly add their debit, credit, and prepaid cards from NBO or Muzn to the Samsung Wallet application by following a few simple steps.

Whether customers are making purchases locally or internationally, they can complete transactions securely with just one click, ensuring a hassle-free payment experience.

Customers can authenticate each transaction using facial or fingerprint recognition, a PIN code, or a One-Time Password. Upon utilising this service, every user will receive a distinct PIN, encrypted and securely stored in a certified chip that is compliant with industry standards.

This approach ensures the safe storage of payment information on the device, offering users a dependable and secure method to store card numbers.

Chery takes centre stage at 2024 Beijing Intl Automotive Exhibition

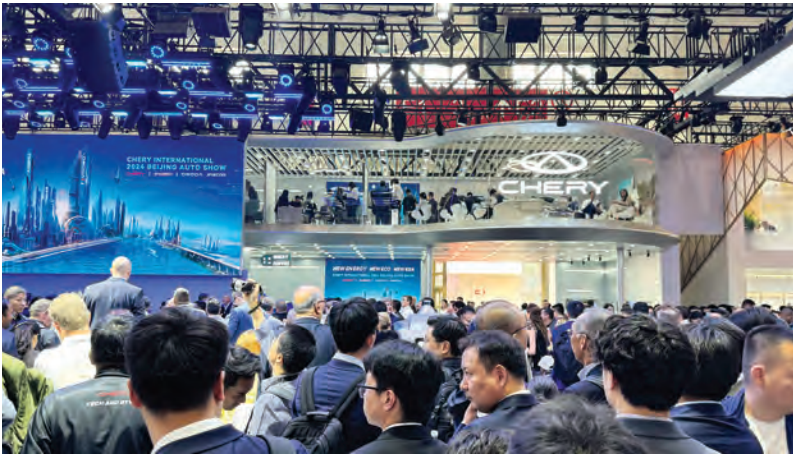
MIDHUN RAJ
BEIJING, APRIL 27

After a hiatus of four years, the 2024 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition roared back to life, captivating global attention as it commenced in Beijing on Thursday.

Showcasing the latest in automotive innovation, the event underscores China's dominance in the electric vehicle (EV) market and its unwavering commitment to automotive excellence.

With 117 auto models making their global debut, including 30 from international brands, this year's exhibition promises a glimpse into the future of the automotive industry. Notably, 278 new energy vehicles (NEVs) are set to be unveiled, surpassing last year's count by seven, according to organisers.

The resurgence of the exhibition comes amidst a significant milestone in China's automotive landscape, with NEVs accounting for over 50 per cent of car sales in early



April, as per data from auto associations.

This surge in NEV sales has been fuelled by a competitive pricing landscape, prompting automakers to introduce newer, more affordable models and enticing promotions.

In the midst of this electrifying atmosphere, Chery Automobile, a leading Chinese automaker, stole the spotlight with its captivating showcase of the Tiggo family.

Under the theme "New Energy, New Eco, New Era," Chery unveiled its latest advancements in the field of new energy vehicles.

The highlight of Chery's showcase was the global premiere of the Tiggo 9 PHEV, positioned as the flagship model in the Tiggo family. With a design inspired by the concepts of "Conquer" and "Guard," the Tiggo 9 PHEV embodies a blend of distinctive aesthetics and cutting-edge technology.

The Tiggo's journey began in 2005 with the introduction of its first SUV, the Tiggo NCV.

Over the past two decades, the Tiggo Series has garnered global acclaim for its quality, performance, and stylish design.

At the exhibition, Zhu Shaodong, CEO of CHERY

International BG, reflected on the brand's evolution and emphasised its commitment to innovation.

Equipped with a 2.0T high-performance engine and an 8-speed automatic transmission, the Tiggo 9 PHEV delivers a maximum power of 175 kW and peak torque of 385 Nm.

Its exterior, characterised by an octagonal grille and dynamic body lines, exudes a sense of power and exploration, while the interior offers a warm, secure, and tech-savvy space for passengers.

"The Tiggo 9 PHEV is yet another outstanding creation from Chery in new energy fields. It not only elevates design aesthetics but, crucially, addresses key concerns like range and efficiency for users.

This model sets a new standard for PHEV models, thanks to its advanced power technology and precise understanding of user needs," an auto expert said.

In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.



Sino-Indian JV to set up \$23m project in Ladayn Polymer Park

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Ladayn Polymer Park, an exclusive plastics manufacturing hub located in Suhar Industrial City, has snagged an important international investor that will set up operations at the cluster established just downstream of Liwa Plastics, the source of polymer feedstock.

According to a post of OQ Group, which has set up Ladayn in partnership with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), the investor is Multibond LLC, a joint venture between Chinese investors (88 per cent) and Indian players (12 per cent).

Multibond plans to invest \$23 million in a facility at Ladayn to supply raw materials.

The collaboration will support the creation of the first company in Oman and the Middle East specialising in the production of a niche range of polymer based materials, including: Hot-Melt Polymer Compounds and Film as bonding film for composite sheet lamination; Integrated Fireproof A2/A1 Class cladding produced from local raw material; Fire Resistance Polymer Compound; Protective plastic film; and other polymer composites.

The announcement came during OQ's participation in CHINAPLAS 2024, billed as



Liwa Plastics, the source of polymer as feedstock for Ladayn's investments.

the world's leading technology-oriented plastics and rubber trade fair, which concluded in the Chinese city of Shanghai on Friday.

Multibond is the latest in a series of prestigious investors that have flocked to the Ladayn cluster since it was launched just over a year ago.

Just last December, OQ — the parent company of Liwa Plastics — signed agreements with a total of nine local and international manufacturers that pledged investments of around \$88 million in the park.

Signing agreements were: Mohammad Riaz Sons Plastic

Company for the production of sustainable food packaging components with an investment of \$35 million; Napco for a \$15 million packaging bags and plastic compounds unit; MAK Germany for a specialised plastics compound plant worth \$11 million; Madayn Plastic Company SPC for a plastics unit worth \$8 million; and other units support innovative 3D manufacturing, the production of plastic waste containers and pallets, plastics recycling, wood plastic composites, and colour masterbatch production.

Covering an area of around 1 million m2, Ladayn is dedicated

to the manufacture of semi-finished and finished high value-added plastic products targeted at the healthcare, food packaging, construction and agriculture sectors.

Designed keeping in mind sustainability goals, the park's operators have pledged to ensure that 30% of Ladayn's power requirements will come from green energy, mainly solar.

An attractive feature of the park is its 'Plug-and-Play' design, making it seamless and convenient for local and international investors to set up their plastics-based industries with minimal start-up costs.

Young Omani becomes first GCC national to win WTO Accessions Internship

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

In a significant development, a young Omani has become the first GCC national to be accepted into the Accessions Internship Programme of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Muhanna al Lawati (pictured), who is currently in the final year of his master's programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute (Switzerland), is among just four candidates selected from around the world to be part of the 2024 cohort.

The 10-month WTO Accessions Internship Programme is remarkable for its direct engagement with the processes and challenges of WTO accession. It offers the opportunity to work with acceding governments at different stages of the process, including understanding the comprehensive negotiations, legal commitments, and economic reforms that WTO accession requires.

Muhanna completed his bachelor's at the University of



Toronto, where he specialised in the history, political economy, and international relations of the Middle East. He is currently researching state-building in the Gulf as part of his master's programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland.

His interest in the World WTO Accessions Internship Programme is driven by a desire to understand firsthand the processes involved in a nation's accession to the WTO, particularly as completed by the Sultanate of Oman under Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement.

This programme offers a direct avenue to study how countries like Oman navigated the accession process before its membership in 2000 and aligned their trade practices with WTO rules and standards.

Oman's total credit balance reaches RO 30.6 bn



MUSCAT: The total credit balance granted by the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of February 2024 increased by 2.7% to reach RO 30.6 billion.

Regarding credit granted to the private sector, it recorded a growth of 3.9% to reach RO 25.8 billion by the end of last February.

Data from the Central Bank of Oman indicated that non-financial companies have the largest share of credit granted to the private sector, reaching 45.7% by the end of last February, followed by the individual sector at 45.3%.

The remaining percentage was distributed among the financial sector at 5.3% and other sectors at 3.7%. Total deposits in the banking sector increased by 13.3% to reach RO 30.1 billion by the end of last February.

Within this total, private sector deposits in the banking system witnessed an increase of 14.8% to reach RO 20.1 billion.

The individual sector had the largest share at 48.4%, followed by non-financial companies and financial companies sectors with shares of 32.3% and 16.5% respectively. — **ONA**

Nama Water Services conducts pilot project for decentralised treatment unit accreditation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 27

Nama Water Services, in partnership with Fuji Clean Company and Green Technology Company, embarked on a groundbreaking initiative focused on the accreditation testing of domestic sewage treatment units.

This collaboration aimed to introduce a decentralised sewage system using mini-grids and stations equipped with advanced tertiary treatment technology in the Sultanate of Oman.

The signed agreement established a pilot project for the accreditation testing of select sewage treatment units. The primary objective of this project was to verify the performance of these units and ensure that the treated water adhered to the stringent effluent quality standards set by the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Ibrahim bin Mohammed al Harthy, Chief Planning and Asset Management Officer at Nama Water Services, highlighted that this agreement aligned with Nama Water Services' "Home Sewage Units Project," which aimed to establish decentralised wastewater treatment systems.

These systems, comprising mini-grids or stations serving multiple homes or remote areas, utilised advanced tertiary treatment processes. This initiative not only expanded sewage services but also supported Nama Water Services' strategic plans for network growth in both urban and rural areas.

The challenge of wastewater treatment in geographically difficult areas was addressed through the utilisation of cutting-edge technology to efficiently treat



Eng Ibrahim bin Mohammed al Harthy
Chief Planning and Asset Management Officer

wastewater in locations where conventional sewer network construction was impractical.

Under this agreement, a pilot project aimed to evaluate the performance of decentralised wastewater treatment technology through a rigorous accreditation process. This project utilised contact filtration technology provided by Fuji Clean, a renowned Japanese company.

The comprehensive testing encompassed all technical aspects to ensure that the treated effluent met the established quality standards of the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Said bin Humaid al Asmi, Senior Research and Development Engineer at Nama Water Services, explained that a pilot-scale decentralised wastewater treatment station would be deployed to simulate real-world conditions.

This station, utilising Fixed-bed bioreactor technology developed by Fuji Clean, had a capacity of five cubic metres. The main objective of this project was to assess the compliance of the treated effluent



The objective was to assess the compliance of the treated effluent with Omani regulations and Nama Water Services' standards

with Omani regulations and Nama Water Services' standards for high-quality wastewater treatment. A thorough evaluation, including quality testing of the system components and materials, reviews of the asset lifecycle, and considerations of geographical and climatic conditions, was conducted to ensure adherence to industry standards.

The implementation of the pilot project was scheduled to commence in April 2024 at the Al Ansab facility.

The trial period, spanning from 3 to 6 months, allowed for comprehensive testing and evaluation of the technology.

The successful completion of this project would qualify Fuji Clean Company to participate in future tenders issued by Nama Water Services Company, ultimately aiming to improve sewage treatment quality and reduce operational costs.

Nama Water Services' commitment to rigorous testing procedures ensured the quality of project equipment and the safety of

its installation.

The team engaged with Fuji Clean engineers to discuss the technical aspects of the wastewater treatment technology, exploring its successful implementation in various countries. The pilot project served to confirm the suitability of this technology for use in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Buthaina bint Mahfoudh al Wahaibiyah, Head of the Research, Studies, and Innovation Department at Nama Water Services, emphasised the environmental and economic advantages of this project in wastewater management strategies.

By focusing on decentralised treatment systems, operational simplicity, cost-efficiency, adaptable treatment options, reduced sludge generation, and local reuse of treated water were highlighted as key benefits. This strategy aligned with sustainable development principles, promoting economic efficiency, environmental protection, and energy conservation.

Import price index in Oman stabilises in Q4 2023

MUSCAT: The general record of import prices in the Sultanate of Oman at the end of Q4 2023 stabilised compared to the same quarter of 2022.

Statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the prices of various manufactured goods rose by the end of Q4 2023 by 12.6 per cent, machinery and transportation equipment by 6.5 per cent, raw materials unfit for consumption excluding fuel by 4.5 per cent, and beverages and tobacco by 2.8 per cent.

On the other hand, the prices of mineral fuels and lubricants and related materials decreased by 8.6 per cent, primarily manufactured and classified goods by 5.7 per cent, chemicals and related materials by 3.3 per cent, and food and live animals by 1.8 per cent.

Compared to Q3 2023, the general import price index rose by 4.6 per cent, with various manufactured goods increasing by 19.3 per cent, machinery and transportation equipment by 16 per cent, beverages and tobacco by 9.4 per cent, and primarily manufactured and classified goods by 1.8 per cent.

Meanwhile, the import price index for raw materials unfit for consumption excluding fuel decreased by 12.8 per cent, mineral fuels and lubricants and related materials by 2.6 per cent, and food and live animals by 0.6 per cent. — **ONA**

Transforming identity, communication and global business with AI



STEFANO VIRGILLI

The author is a member of the International Press Association

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from a curiosity out of science fiction into a driving force of innovation across multiple industries. From verifying our identities to crafting realistic virtual representations of ourselves, AI is rapidly changing how we interact with the digital

world and each other. One project that embodies both the promise and the challenges of AI is Worldcoin. Its unique iris-scanning technology aims to create a global identity network, offering a decentralised and privacy-focused alternative to traditional means of identification. The company's potential partnerships with giants like PayPal and OpenAI, the creators of ChatGPT, signal the increasing recognition of AI as a key player in finance and technology.

However, Worldcoin faces hurdles. Regulatory scrutiny, data privacy concerns, and questions about equitable access to this technology makes its widespread adoption quite challenging.

The company will need to address these issues transparently to build trust and gain mainstream acceptance.

The push towards hyper-

realistic AI is perhaps most evident in the development of AI-powered avatars. Companies like Synthesia, backed by tech heavyweight Nvidia, are making astonishing progress with its "Expressive Avatars."

These avatars can convey very realistic emotions, responding to text prompts in a way that mimics genuine human expression. This technology has the potential to transform how we communicate in the digital world.

Imagine business presentations delivered by engaging AI avatars, customer service interactions handled by empathetic virtual representatives, or even personalised educational experiences.

Though still in its early stages, Synthesia's work (serving over 55,000 enterprises including industry leaders like Zoom, Xerox, Microsoft, and

Reuters) demonstrates the rapid advancement of AI's ability to understand and replicate the complexities of human interaction.

The recent earnings reports released by Microsoft and Google make it very clear that the impact of AI on the tech industry is just at the beginning. Microsoft's Azure cloud platform, with its robust AI services, experienced a 31% growth, fuelled by businesses seeking to take advantage of AI.

Azure's generative AI services attracted 53,000 customers, a third of which were new to the platform.

Similarly, Google is investing heavily in AI research and development, integrating it across its vast product suite. AI enhancements to its search engine, advertising platforms, and other services are driving increased revenue and profits for

the company, with quarterly sales reaching \$80.5 billion and profits surging 36% to \$23.7 billion.

The AI landscape is not only transforming how we interact but also how companies and even nations collaborate. The recent merger between Bayanat AI PLC and AI Yah Satellite Communications Company P.J.S.C. exemplifies this trend.

This consolidation, forming the new entity SPACE42, aims to create an AI-powered space technology leader based in the Middle East with a global reach.

By combining Bayanat's geospatial AI expertise with Yahsat's satellite communications capabilities, SPACE42 is positioned to offer innovative space-based services with far-reaching societal and economic impact.

With a combined revenue of AED 2.8 billion and a net income of AED 639 million, SPACE42 is

set to become a major player in the global space industry.

This merger highlights the UAE's commitment to innovation and leadership in both the AI and space sectors, aligning with the goals of the National Space Strategy 2030 and the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031.

The AI revolution is still unfolding, and it's clear that this technology has the potential to change virtually every aspect of our lives.

As AI systems become more sophisticated, they raise important questions around job displacement, the spread of misinformation, and societal dependence on algorithms.

It's critical that the development of AI is accompanied by thoughtful discussions about ethics, regulations, and ensuring its benefits are widely shared.

Exxon and gas markets tell different stories

ROBERT CYRAN

Exxon Mobil boss Darren Woods made a bold statement, opens new tab on Friday. Fossil fuels, he argues, are not in decline. Among the reasons: the size of global energy demand, economic growth and population expansion.

The \$8.2 billion of quarterly earnings produced by the \$465 billion oil major Woods runs, and rival Chevron's earnings of \$5.5 billion show that these firms are indeed embedded deeply in the world economy.

But low natural gas prices tell a different story about the industry's future.

While Exxon gushed profit in the first quarter, its earnings still shrank 28% from the same quarter a year ago; Chevron's fell 16%. One problem was the abundance of natural gas, which depressed prices.

Both companies are big in the Permian Basin of Texas and New Mexico, where oil pumping releases gas as a byproduct in a ratio that is rising over time.

In addition, regulatory fines and curbs over "flaring," the process whereby gas is burned off, is increasing the amount of the stuff sent to market.

This abundance is overwhelming pipelines, which carry the fuel to market. Local prices even turned negative earlier in April, as some producers

paid to have gas taken off their hands.

A new pipeline, scheduled to enter service shortly, should alleviate this problem.

But it won't stop the problem of continued planetary warming. The last two winters were relatively mild across much of the northern hemisphere, and since natural gas is used for heating, demand was lower than expected, pushing downwards on prices.

It's reasonable to assume that will continue. And the rise of innovations like electric-powered heat pumps to replace fossil fuels will be increasingly favoured by lawmakers.

The apparent paradox makes sense.

Even the promise of massive exports of liquefied natural gas may disappoint expectations. Morgan Stanley said recently it expects LNG production will cause oversupply in the gas market to reach multi-decade highs over the coming years.

That suggests that two things could be true: Woods can be right that fossil fuels will still be in demand for a long time at a greater level than many expected, and that the profitability of fossil fuel producers can nonetheless remain under pressure.

With Exxon's stock only trading at 13 times estimated earnings over the next year, according to LSEG data, investors are siding with low prices.

— Reuters

The geopolitics of Africa's debt crisis



ANNE O. KRUEGER

The author is Senior Research Professor of International Economics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and Senior Fellow at the Center for International Development at Stanford University.

The United States has a population of roughly 330 million, while all Nato countries combined have about 975 million. Adding Nato's major Asian-Pacific partners – Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand – brings the total to 1.3 billion.

By contrast, Russia and China together have a population of about 1.6 billion people. The rest of the world, including India and much of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, is home to 5.3 billion people.

Despite representing less than 15% of the world's population, Nnato countries account for about 31% of world GDP.

Over time, however, the rest of the world's share of the global economy is expected to increase, and its geopolitical allegiance should not be taken for granted.

Africa, in particular, is expected to become a major contributor to global growth over the coming century.

But first, the continent must overcome several daunting challenges. While its population is projected to grow from 1.4 billion today to 3.3 billion by 2075, economic growth has been sluggish, and many African countries are currently experiencing or at high risk of debt crises.

Without robust growth, migration pressures are likely to increase, exacerbating political instability and leading to



HEIGHTENED GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS UNDERSCORE THE URGENT NEED FOR WESTERN COUNTRIES TO HELP AFRICAN COUNTRIES TACKLE THE ONGOING DEBT CRISIS. WITHOUT WESTERN SUPPORT, POVERTY, HUNGER, AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY COULD INTENSIFY ACROSS THE CONTINENT, INCREASING THE ALLURE OF RUSSIAN AND CHINESE OVERTURES.

widespread state failure.

Conversely, if African countries manage to overcome their current challenges, their growing geopolitical importance could pose a significant threat to Western interests, especially as China and Russia expand their economic footprint across the continent.

To be sure, the challenges vary from country to country. Despite its vast oil reserves, Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous country, has a poverty rate of 38.9%.

Following its second currency devaluation in eight months, and with inflation reaching 31.7% in February, a cost-of-living crisis has driven many multinational companies to exit the country.

South Africa, for its part, continues to suffer from an acute energy crisis, with rolling nationwide blackouts.

The unemployment rate increased to 34.7% in 2023, while annual GDP growth slowed to 0.1%.

Egypt's growth has also slowed sharply, with inflation running at 36% amid a protracted foreign-currency crisis exacerbated by the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and a subsequent drop in Suez Canal revenues.

A recent \$8 billion loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund and a \$35 billion investment deal with the United Arab Emirates could help stabilise the Egyptian economy.

But with its population growing by 1.4% annually, Egypt's projected 2.8% growth rate for 2024, even if met, is unlikely to be enough to reduce the country's 60% poverty rate.

Meanwhile, Sub-Saharan Africa's debt crisis shows no signs of abating. In December, Ethiopia became the third African country to default since 2020.

Zambia, which defaulted on its external debt more than three years ago, reached a restructuring deal with private bondholders only recently, having secured an agreement with its official creditors in June 2023.

Ghana, which defaulted on its external debt in December 2022 amid soaring inflation and a rapid depreciation of its currency, has yet to reach a similar agreement with its private bondholders after the IMF rejected its proposed restructuring pla.

Zimbabwe, grappling with runaway inflation triggered by unsustainable government spending, has recently introduced

its third currency in a decade and is now seeking an IMF loan.

Several factors are driving Africa's ongoing debt crisis: unsustainable debt due to underlying fiscal weaknesses, borrowing for unjustifiable and potentially reckless infrastructure investments, excessive regulation that impedes economic growth, and political pressure for increased social transfers.

The proliferation of civil conflicts is compounding these problems.

Ethiopia, for example, experienced rapid growth for more than a decade before its civil war erupted in 2020, forcing the country to seek support from the IMF.

Similarly, the ongoing civil war in Sudan has resulted in massive migration and warnings of impending famine.

To mitigate the debt crisis and resume imports of essential goods, policymakers must implement targeted reforms, supported by strategic debt restructuring and short-term financing.

Otherwise, excessive spending will persist, and economic prospects will remain bleak. But the resources and attention African countries currently require far exceed what the IMF and other international institutions can provide, and the mounting discontent over the continent's lack of economic progress is exacerbating political instability.

©Project Syndicate, 2024

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

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

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

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

URGENT HIRING

LEADING LAB CHEMICAL/CONSUMABLE/EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION COMPANY IN OMAN
URGENT HIRING
TECHNICAL SUPPORT ENGINEER

- More than 2-year work experience in Oman/GCC
- Degree of bachelor of Mechanical Engineering
- Driving license in Oman preferred.

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

Auditors & Accountants

• Audit & Accounting • CFO Services • Secondment
• VAT & Tax Return Filing • VAT Refund Assistance

Contact: 92182750 • Email: contact@umpauditors.com

UMP
UNITED MUAWA PROJECTS

ROYAL CARGO

ALL OVER INDIA
INDONESIA ▶ NEPAL
AIR EXPORT (Port to Port)
SEA EXPORT (Container Booking)

SERVICES BY AIR & SEA

FOR MORE INFORMATION JUST DIAL
CUSTOMER CARE **93213207**

PICK UP FREE ANYWHERE IN MUSCAT **93213206**

Exciting Opportunities
Al Baraka Group Oman

OPEN POSITION :

- General Manager**
(10-15 years experience in large retail or wholesale business)
- Operation Manager - Supermarket**
(7-9 years experience in large retail business)
- Junior Executive (HR & Admin)**
(3-5 years experience in hypermarket & hotel, hospitality)
- Store Manager**
(4-6 years experience in supermarket's & hypermarket's)
- Junior Accountant - Supermarket**
(2-3 years experience accounts payable and receivable, Reconciling sales transactions, Helping with month-end closing procedures, Supporting inventory management)
- Data Entry Staff**
(3 Years Experience candidates with experience in supermarket data entry roles. Highlight the importance of accuracy, speed, and familiarity with supermarket inventory systems)
- Salesman Electronics & Home Appliance**
(Electronics & Home appliance 3 years experience)
- Salesman Garments**
(Readymade garments 3 years experience)
- Salesman Supermarket's**
(Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) supermarket 3 years experience)
- Travel Consultant**
(5-6 years experience in travels agency)

WE ARE HIRING
JOIN OUR TEAM
APPLY NOW

If you're interested in joining our team, please send your CV to in our HR department.

SEND YOUR CV
hr.albarakagroupintl@gmail.com
CV must be in MS Word of PDF format. Please mention the post in the subject line

SIT. WANTED

B. COM. 35 years of experience in accounts, sales coordinator, admin, HR, personal assistant, document controller with Oman D/L, looking for a job. Contact: 92558734

INDIAN male 14 years experience light/heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman. Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

Part time/full time Accountant 20 years experience in Muscat. Please contact: 78293476

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

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

INDIAN Male B.Com, 35 years experience in Office Management, Accounts, Executive assistant, Admin & HR with D/L (Oman) seeking suitable job. Contact: 92558734

INDIAN with DL & NOC, Expert in Industrial Sales & Agricultural Marketing looking for a good break — 78501743

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving License. Contact: 78002582, email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

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

IRAN lady Bachelor degree in law, looking for a suitable job with experience in law office and food distribution company. Currently in Oman, having Investor Visa and Oman driving licence. Contact: +96879242477 Email: shirintaaji@gmail.com

ACCOUNTANT & sales Executive, Indian male, 31 years, BA English, specialised in Accounting, 2 years experience in India & 6 years experience in Oman. Seeking position in Accounts/Sales fields (has Oman licence). Mob: 78805951. Gmail: akhilgopinath2017@gmail.com

WE ARE HIRING

Exciting Opportunities Al Baraka Group Oman

- Operations Manager**
(5-7 years experience in hotel & hospitality)
- Front Office (Receptionist)**
(3-5 years experience in hotel & hospitality)
- Housekeeping**
(3-5 years experience in hotel & hospitality)
- Sales and Marketing Executive**
(Hotel & Hospitality Industry)
(3-5 years in Look for candidates with a solid background in marketing, preferably within the hospitality industry)
- Executive Chef**
(12-15 years experience in hotel & hospitality)
- Commis Chef (Arabian Recipes)**
(5-7 years experience in hotel & hospitality)
- Commis Chef (Asian Recipes)**
(5-7 years experience in hotel & hospitality)
- F & B Manager**
(5-7 years experience in hotel & hospitality)
- Barista**
(3-5 years experience in renowned restaurant & cafe)

OPEN POSITION :

If you're interested in joining our team, please send your CV to in our HR department.

SEND YOUR CV
hr.albarakagroupintl@gmail.com
CV must be in MS Word of PDF format. Please mention the post in the subject line

SALE

Fabricated Sandwich Panel
Cabin Size- 12m X 59.8 with AC

Location: Al Khoudh, Muscat : 99871989
The offers should be emailed to: oman@strabag.com and submitted in close envelope to:
STRABAG OMAN LLC
Way 5007, Building 700A, P.O. Box 444, Muscat, P.C 100
Attn of: The Managing Director - Commercial

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

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

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

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

SIT. VACANCY

JOB VACANCY FOR EXPATRIATE

Yard Foreman

Requirement:
* Diploma/ Degree.
* Oil & gas drilling material
* Experience not less than 3 years
Apply online at: reeman@halcompanies.com

BACHELOR degree in mechanical or electrical engineering ASNT level 2 (NDT), ASNT level 3 (NDT) additional advantage. LEEA foundation, LEEA lifting accessories diploma (LAC). Contact: pipe2566@yahoo.com

FOR RENT

400M RENTAL space Ghubra 18 Nov Street second line suitable for all commercial use. Tel: 92408308

3BKH- Ghubra 18 Nov Street. Tel: 92408308

IN Ruwi, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, hall, kitchen, with car parking, RO 150 monthly only. Tel: 94402003.

WAREHOUSE / workshop 2,600 sq metres for rent in Misfa near Oman Cement Factory including accommodation contact: GSM 98286899, email: sales@jetsoman.com

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?

Advertise with us.

Contact us on: 99639264

For Sale

A fully equipped work shop with equipment for maintaining vehicles and heavy equipment is for sale at Misfah Industrial area. Workshop standardized with OPAL requirement

Contact phone number: 9358 7527

Driving School

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

Contact No: 99074072

SIT. VACANCY

Looking for a candidate having minimum 5 years of Oman experience in accounts and administration. Knowledge of Oracle/ Tally accounting & inventory package is must preferable experienced in Trading of Building Materials, Tools etc e-mail CV to jobvacancyoman2023@gmail.com

BUSINESS Assistant, Remote Job, Requirement: Omani, retired, Bachelor in Business. Responsibilities: Business consultancy and ISO related work. Contact: 96999086 info@smartejadah.com

OMAN DAILY
Observer

FREE* CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

* NOW FREE CLASSIFIED IN OMAN DAILY OBSERVER ON THE ABOVE CATEGORIES ONLY

Send your advertisement (Only one per coupon & no photocopies), either by mail or in person, with your local identity.

Mailing Address: OBSERVER CLASSIFIEDS SECTION, P.O. Box 974, Muscat, P.C. 100
Location: OEPPA HEAD OFFICE, Medinat Al Alam, Near Ministry of Information ☎ 24604477 Extn. 2101, 2001
& OEPPA Ruwi Office, Next to Dhofar Bldg, Behind Ruwi Police Station ☎ 24785668

To advertise in Information Ministry channels



To contact

71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdihar_info izdihar.info

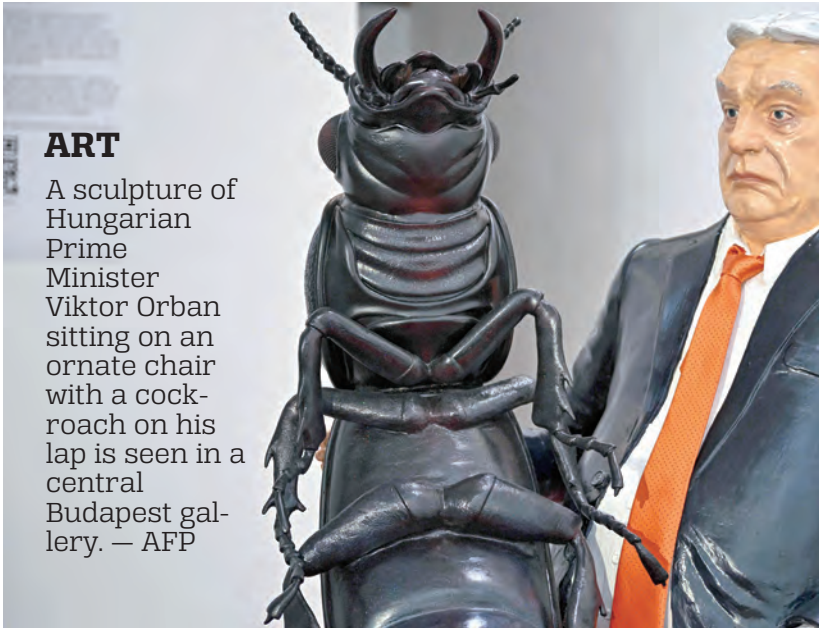
اردھار izdihar





EXHIBITS

A blooming Schunkeara "Pink Leopard" variety of orchid is displayed inside the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory during a press preview of "The Orchid Show: Florals in Fashion." — Reuters



ART

A sculpture of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban sitting on an ornate chair with a cockroach on his lap is seen in a central Budapest gallery. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

Bollywood actor Aamir Khan attends a news conference after an event to launch him as a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Goodwill Ambassador for south Asia, in Kathmandu. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by designer Nadege Vanhee-Cybulski as part of her Fall-Winter 2024/2025 Women's ready-to-wear collection show for fashion house Hermès during Paris Fashion Week in Paris, France. — Reuters



LIFESTYLE

A man uses a mobile phone to click pictures during sunset at the Vidhana Soudha, in Bengaluru. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | APRIL 28, 2024 | SHAWWAL 19, 1445 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



THE SCENT OF PRESTIGE AND OPULENCE, OUD REMAINS A FAVOURITE AMONG OMANIS

Oud has been an important part of Omani and Arab culture symbolising status and tradition. A young Omani entrepreneur shares his journey from personal appreciation to business venture reflecting along the way on the growing demand for high-quality oud...P20

FASHION

Things You Need to Know About the 2024 Met Gala

FIRST THINGS FIRST: What is the Met Gala? Officially, it's the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute benefit, a black-tie extravaganza held the first Monday in May to raise money for the museum's fashion wing, the only curatorial department at the Met that has to pay for itself. Unofficially, it's the party of the year, the Oscars of the East Coast and "an ATM for the Met" (the last according to publicist Paul Wilmot). Consider that last year's event raised almost \$22 million, while the Met's Art & Artists Gala raised \$4.4 million.

How is that possible? What is the secret sauce? Two words: Anna Wintour. Wintour, the global editorial director of Condé Nast and the editor-in-chief of its marquee fashion magazine, Vogue, has been the gala's chief mastermind since 1999 after first signing on in 1995, and has transformed the event from a run-of-the-mill charity gala into a mega-showcase for Vogue's view of the world — the ultimate celebrity-power cocktail of famous names from fashion, film, tech, politics, sports and, increasingly, social media. Every brand scratches every other brand's back. We think of it as the Fashion X Games or the All-Star Game of Entrances.

WHEN IS IT? The big day is Monday, May 6. In theory, the timed arrivals — each guest is allotted a slot — start at 5:30 pm, usually with the evening's hosts, and end around 8 pm. But you try telling Rihanna when to show up. (Last year she came so late, other guests had already begun to leave.)

IS THERE A THEME? The party signals the opening of the Costume Institute's annual blockbuster show, and the benefit is usually themed to the exhibition. Last year, that was easy —

Karl Lagerfeld, the designer of Chanel, Fendi and his own brand, was both subject and dress code. But this year the show is called "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion," and it is a lot more convoluted. It will be built around not fairy tales or Disney, but rather treasures in the museum's fashion collection so old and delicate that they cannot be displayed on mannequins. Instead, the exhibit will involve AI and 3D recreations of the work, as well as sound and, um... smell. But that's not all. The idea of decaying dresses — in total, the show will include about 250 pieces from four centuries — led Andrew Bolton, the Costume Institute's curator in charge, to think about the ephemerality of nature, which led to gardens... which ultimately led to the party's dress code.

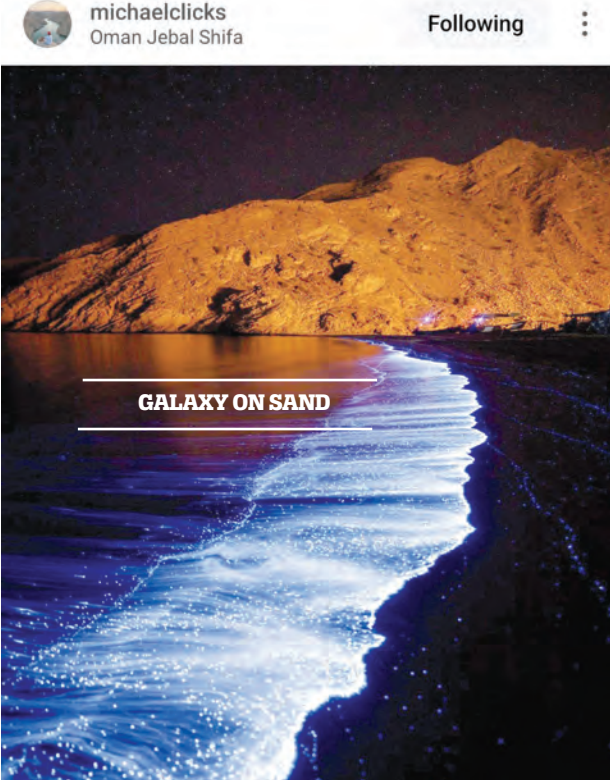
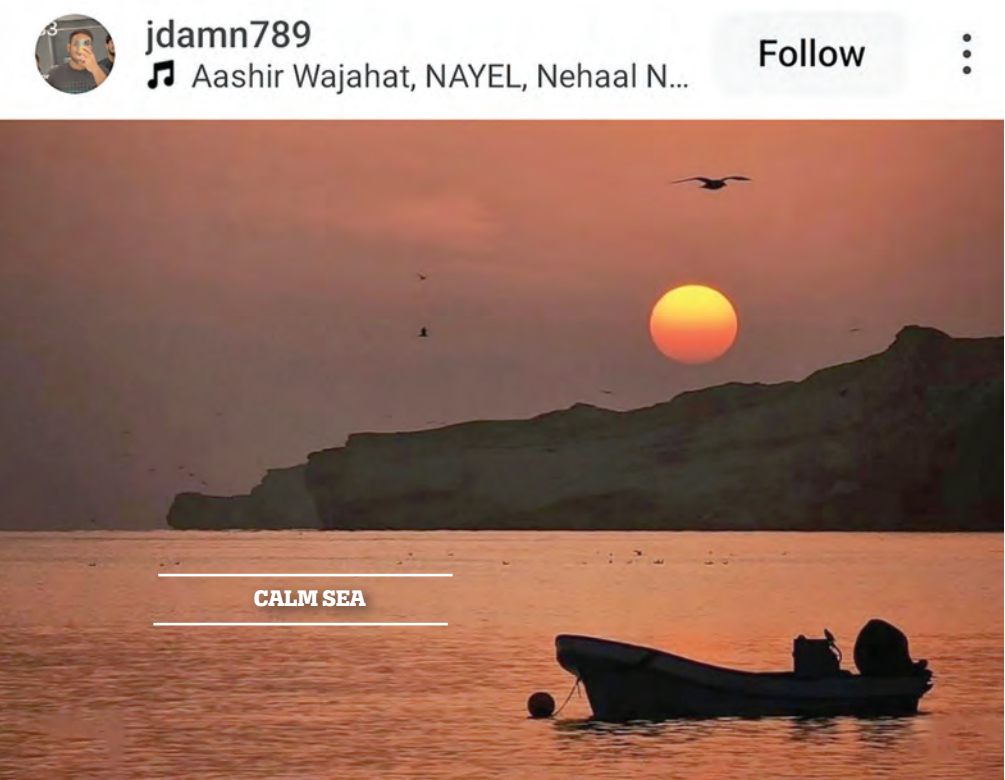
OK, WHAT IS THE DRESS CODE? It's as potentially confusing as the exhibit.



Guests have been instructed to dress for "The Garden of Time," so named after a 1962 short story by J.G. Ballard about an aristocratic couple living in a walled estate with a magical garden while an encroaching mob threatens to end their peaceful existence. To keep the crowd at bay, the husband tries to turn back time by breaking off flower after flower, until there are no more blooms left. The mob arrives and ransacks the estate, and the two aristocrats turn to stone. Just what comes to mind when you think "fashion," right? How this parable will be expressed in

fabulousness has left many scratching their heads, but for anyone in doubt, roses are the most likely default. Also corsets, drapery and — hopefully — a great vintage gown or two, given his recent popularity, the smart money is on old Galliano resurfacing. Still, there may be some surprises. Last year, Jared Leto came dressed as Lagerfeld's cat, Choupette, in full kitty glory. (After weeks of speculation, the look's inspiration ultimately did not attend.) Given that Loewe is one of the sponsors of the evening and exhibit, you can expect a lot of Jonathan Anderson creations. He did once make a coat that sprouted real grass. That would look terrific as a formal sheath, don't you think? **WHO ARE THE HOSTS?** Joining Wintour as the 2024 gala's co-chairs are Jennifer Lopez, Zendaya, Chris Hemsworth and Bad Bunny, while the honorary chairs are Anderson of Loewe and Shou Chew, the CEO of TikTok. (TikTok is sponsoring alongside Loewe and Condé Nast, though given what is currently happening in Washington with that social media company, whether he shows up at all is a question.) Like the party itself, the combination of hosts is all about the mix: music, film, fashion and social media. — NYT

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



NORWAY
WOMEN BRING
SEAWEED TO
CULINARY
HEIGHTS IN
EUROPE

IN THE GLACIAL WATERS of the Lofoten archipelago in Norway's far north, Angelita Eriksen uses a knife to cut a handful of seaweed that will soon end up in a fancy European eatery.

"We have the cleanest and clearest waters in the world. We're very lucky that we have this really important resource growing right outside our doorstep," Eriksen said in a cabin on the shores of the northern Atlantic Ocean where the seaweed is laid out to dry.

"We want to show that to the world."

The daughter of a Norwegian fisherman, Eriksen joined forces with New Zealand-born Tamara Singer, whose Japanese mother served seaweed with almost every meal, to start the company Lofoten Seaweed — specialising in harvesting and preparing seaweed for the food industry.

With the help of six others, they

hand-pick 11 tonnes of seaweed a year, the snow-capped mountains plummeting into the sea behind them in a dramatic tableau.

It's a demanding and "physical job", said Eriksen.

The peak season runs from late April until June, but "we harvest the dulse, the nori and the sea truffle in the winter and fall".

"It can be quite cold, as we can stay out for about an hour along the shore", with lower legs and hands submerged in the chilly water.

By "late May, I'm actually sweating in my suit".

One time, she said, "I took my glove off and the steam was just rising up".

"It's physically hard but at the same time it's very meditative, or therapeutic in a way, to harvest," she says.

DELICATE



Truffle seaweed, winged kelp, nori, dulse, sugar kelp, oarweed kelp: the pair focus on about 10 types of seaweed, long eaten in Japan and increasingly popular in Europe for their nutritional qualities.

The seaweed is sold locally or shipped to gourmet restaurants in Norway and the rest of Europe.

The two women organise workshops to teach chefs about the different varieties and the qualities of each type.

"Seaweeds are like vegetables, they have their own texture, taste and colours," says Singer.

She said it was a "huge surprise" how many European chefs had little or no knowledge of the different flavours and ways of preparing seaweed.

The duo have worked with Japanese chefs "who know exactly what to do, you don't have to tell them anything".

"It's just so natural for them. It's like giving a piece of fish to a North Norwegian," says Singer.

Some 20 kilometres (12 miles) away, chef Josh Wing has been serving the pair's products in his high-end restaurant Hattvika Lodge for about five years.

He is well versed and does not need to take part in their workshops anymore.

Wing is particularly fond of the dulse, a "very delicate purple seaweed", which he serves with local fish dishes or bread.

It "can provide a physical texture in a dish that you can't get from other products", he says.

To ensure that their business is sustainable, Eriksen and Singer have mapped and dated their harvest sites, as well as the volumes of each species,



for the past four years.

"Our results show that the regrowth in recently-harvested patches is actually faster than anticipated, almost as if a harvest actually stimulates growth," says Singer. — AFP

ART

Klimt's
'Portrait of
Miss Lieser'
fetches \$32
million at
auction

GUSTAV KLIMT'S "PORTRAIT of Miss Lieser", a painting of a young woman left unfinished when the Austrian artist died, sold at auction on Wednesday for 30 million euros (\$32 million) despite open questions about its subject and previous ownership.

The work was long thought to have been lost when in fact it was hanging in a private villa near Vienna for decades, according to

the auction house Im Kinsky that put it on display in January before putting it under the hammer. Im Kinsky had estimated its value at 30 million to 50 million euros.

It shows its likely teenage subject in a turquoise dress draped in a flowing floral gown against a red background, her alabaster skin and piercing, pale brown eyes contrasting with her dark, curly hair.

Despite depicting her so clearly, it remains unclear who "Fraulein Lieser" actually was. The brothers Adolf and Justus Lieser were wealthy industrialists in the Austro-Hungarian empire, having built their wealth on jute and hemp, making twine and rope.

Henriette Amalie Lieser-Landau, nicknamed "Lilly", was married to Justus until their divorce in 1905 and became a well-known patron of the arts. It is possible she commissioned the painting of one of her daughters, or Adolf Lieser could have done so with his daughter Margarethe as the subject.

"According to the latest provenance research, Klimt's model was possibly not Margarethe Constance Lieser, Lilly Lieser's niece, but one of her two daughters (with Justus), either Helene, the older one, born in 1898, or her sister Annie, who was three years younger," the auction house said on



its website.

What happened to the painting after Klimt's death in 1918, when it would have been in his studio, remains unclear, particularly what happened after Nazi Germany annexed Austria in 1938 and the country's Jews were persecuted, expropriated and sent to concentration camps.

Margarethe left Austria for Hungary and then Britain but the auction house says the painting verifiably never left Austria. Lilly Lieser stayed in Vienna until she was deported in 1942 and then killed in Auschwitz the following year.

Her daughters returned to Vienna after World War Two to reclaim her assets but the painting was not mentioned in any documents, Im Kinsky said.

"It was these many ambiguities and historical gaps that prompted the current owners to contact the legal successors of the Lieser family and to agree on a 'fair and just solution' with them all in 2023," Im Kinsky said, without identifying the current owners.

"It has been agreed not to disclose the contents of the said agreement; however, it can be stated that all conceivable claims of all parties involved will be settled and fulfilled through the auctioning of the artwork," it said.—Reuters



OMANI SOCIETY REGARDS OUD AS MORE THAN A FRAGRANCE; IT'S A SYMBOL OF STATUS AND RESPECT, OFTEN EXCHANGED AS A GIFT DURING SIGNIFICANT EVENTS. FOR THOSE INTRIGUED BY ITS MYSTIQUE, TRYING OUD OFFERS A SENSORY JOURNEY INTO A WORLD OF RICH TRADITIONS AND AROMATIC WONDERS

THE SCENT OF PRESTIGE AND OPULENCE, OUD REMAINS A FAVOURITE AMONG OMANIS

BY MOHAMMED AL DIGHAISHI

Oud has been used for centuries in the Middle East – its distinctive scent is deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the region, associated with luxury, tradition, and spirituality.

Wearing oud perfume or burning oud incense denotes status and wealth, ingraining it as a symbol of opulence in the region. Beyond its aesthetic allure, oud holds medicinal properties, often utilised in traditional healing practices for its purported antimicrobial qualities and calming effects in aromatherapy.

Osama bin Youssef al Balushi is a young Omani entrepreneur who specialises in selling this prized essence in Oman.

"I've always been a fan of oud. I'd been using it personally as a fragrance, and everyone around me had always been impressed by its smell," Al Balushi shared.

On a trip to Thailand with his father, Al Balushi

market. There are Indian, Cambodian, Thai, Indonesian, and Filipino types, and usually, the scarcity of some types and their age is what determines the difference in their prices. For example, Indian and Cambodian types are considered expensive, so the customers for these types are usually from the wealthy class," Al Balushi explained.

The most popular product purchased in Oman is the tarad because it has a calm and unobtrusive smell, merchants describe it as having a sweet smell and it has a fairly low price that everyone can afford.

"Al-Sioufi oil has also been growing in popularity, not just in Oman but in the Gulf in general. The best-selling type I know of is Al-Barashin," he shared.

"Demand for oud also depends on the season. We noticed that there's usually more demand during the winter season, as a lot of customers feel that the smell coordinates with the season well. For us, the month of Ramadhan is the best. We often record high sales compared to previous



said that he discovered many different shops selling oud with good quality but usually at a very cheap price compared to those found and sold in Oman.

"I started out buying a fairly large and varied quantity from that trip. Impressed by the quality, I then sold them to friends and family members, many of whom were impressed by the smell. The number of customers purchasing increased, and I eventually ran out, and that's when it occurred to me that there is a market in Oman for good quality products. That was how the business began," Osama said.

Oud are not produced in Oman primarily because the materials used are not available in the country. Derived from the resinous heartwood of agarwood trees primarily found in Asia, oud production involves a meticulous process.

The production process involves several steps. Agarwood trees are carefully selected and harvested, usually by making incisions in the trunk or branches to extract the resinous wood. The harvested trees are infected with the mould that triggers the production of agarwood. This process can take several years, during which the resin accumulates within the wood, imparting its characteristic aroma. Once the agarwood has matured, it is carefully extracted from the tree. This can be a delicate process, as the resinous wood is often embedded deep within the tree's core. The extracted agarwood is then subjected to a distillation process to extract the oud oil. This can be done using steam distillation or hydrodistilled methods. The extracted oud oil is often aged for several months or even years to allow its aroma to mature and deepen. It may also be blended with other essential oils to enhance its fragrance profile. The final oud oil is typically sold in the form of pure oil, oud-based perfumes, or incense sticks.

"There are many different types of ouds in the

years and this year in particular has been a good year," Al Balushi shared.

Said al Fari shared that he loves the scent of oud and always uses it as a fragrance.

"Oud has a rich, complex, and distinctive aroma. It offers a sophisticated and captivating aroma that sets it apart from more common perfume ingredients. When you use it on key points like your hand or neck, it usually lasts and gives



out a calming smell," Al Fari said.

"For me and my family, we prefer using the Indian-oud because they have these classic scents that Arabs love. We usually have our preferred shops and even go to farms directly to buy the oil from the producers," he added.

Al Balushi believes that, with its echoing significance in Omani culture, oud will continue its popularity as a scent. Omani society regards oud as more than a fragrance; it's a symbol of status and respect, often exchanged as a gift during significant events. For those intrigued by its mystique, trying oud offers a sensory journey into a world of rich traditions and aromatic wonders, transcending borders to connect with a global community enamoured by its exotic charm.