

HM sends greetings to President of Peru

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dina Boluarte of the Republic of Peru on her country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president and the friendly people of Peru. – ONA

SUNRISE - 05:35 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:12 AM
DHUHR - 12:18 PM
ASR - 03:41 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:57 PM
ISHA - 08:15 PM



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BRAZIL TEENAGER ENDRICK JOINS REAL MADRID



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OMAN ANNOUNCES NEW LNG TRAIN IN QALHAT COMPLEX



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BARKA FORT THROUGH A PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE



NADHIRA BECOMES FIRST ARAB TO SUMMIT G2

Nadhira al Harthy continues to make headlines for Oman. She summited Nanga Parbat (8,125 metres) on July 10 and Gasherbrum II (G2) (8,034 metres) on July 24 in Pakistan, becoming the first Arab to summit G2. **DETAILS ON P2**

Gaza civil defence: 170 killed in days-long Israeli operation



A wounded Palestinian child is carried to Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, in the aftermath of an Israeli strike in Deir Al Balah, in the central Gaza Strip, on Saturday. – Reuters

GAZA STRIP: Gaza's civil defence agency said on Saturday that Israel's military operation around Khan Yunis has killed about 170 people and wounded hundreds since it started on Monday.

"Since the beginning of the Israeli military operation in the Khan Yunis area, we are talking of approximately 170 martyrs and hundreds of wounded," agency spokesman Mahmud Basal said. He said many people had been displaced again on Saturday as the Israeli operation continued.

"The questions is where will these residents go?" Basal said. "Anyone who sees the situation in Khan Yunis will witness thousands of people spread out on the ground, on the roads, in areas that unfortunately are not suitable for living. — AFP

New tourist sites in Dhofar to underpin year-round tourism

SALALAH: Dhofar Municipality, in cooperation with government and private companies, endeavours to develop new tourist sites, improve facades and implement a number of road projects in Dhofar Governorate in coincidence with the Khareef Dhofar Season 2024.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, said: "The Khareef Dhofar Season 2023 achieved great success in terms of activating tourism and commercial activities with the number of visitors to the season reached about 1 million visitors recording an increase of 18.4 per cent compared to 2022 while the volume of spending exceeded RO 100 million."

Al Ghassani said that the current edition of Khareef Dhofar Season is expected to see an increase in visitor number

The current edition of Khareef Dhofar Season is expected to see an increase in visitor number by 10 to 15 per cent compared to the previous edition whereas spending is expected to reach RO 115 million

DR AHMED AL GHASSANI
Chairman of Dhofar Municipality

by 10 to 15 per cent compared to the previous edition whereas spending is expected to reach

RO 115 million. The new sites are undergoing renovation to function as year-round tourist attractions including Return of the Past, Ateen Square, Up Town and Rathath Boulevard. He said that there is a plan to open these sites in two phases, the first of which will operate for 6 months while the second will operate for a longer period.

Al Ghassani affirmed that the government has invested in developing Dhofar Governorate in various aspects. The development process included improving traffic flow and implementing several road projects with an allocated budget of RO 30 million for this year. This is in addition to two rainwater drainage projects and several projects for developing tourist sites, improving facades, and other development projects.

— ONA



MoH considering establishing cornea bank

YOUSSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

After the Ministry of Health, represented by the National Organ Transplant Programme and Al Nahdha Hospital, successfully performed 55 corneal transplant operations within nine months after restarting the programme in August 2023, there are plans to establish a cornea bank in Oman to prepare and store corneas locally, reducing reliance on foreign banks.

Al Nahdha Hospital is on track to achieve 100 corneal transplant operations this year, reducing waiting lists by 70 per cent. The National Organ Transplant Programme also plans to expand corneal transplant services in Oman by introducing them at Ibra Hospital and Nizwa Hospital.

Dr Haitham bin Hilal al Mahrouqi, Senior Cornea, Cataract and Vision Correction Specialist at Al Nahdha Hospital, stated that they require 80 to 100 corneas annually. "With 55 operations already completed in 9 months, we are confident in reaching the goal of 100 corneal transplant operations this year," he said. **TURN TO P2**

Paternity leave to boost childcare, integrate role of parents

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

While maternity leave represents the most prominent and important international recommendations as one of the basic rights of working women, paternity leave is equally significant as it will boost childcare and integrate role of both parents.

Oman has adopted both maternity and paternity leave

and stipulated it in the Social Protection Law in a branch concerned as it aims to provide a system to protect parents and children from health risks and also seeks to provide protection and well-being.

While female employees in the Sultanate of Oman are entitled to 98 days of maternity to cover the period before and after childbirth, the male workers are entitled to seven days of paternity leave provided that the child is born



98
DAYS OF PAID
MATERNITY LEAVE FOR
WORKING MOTHERS



7
DAYS OF PATERNITY
LEAVE FOR WORKING
FATHERS

alive and that the leave does not exceed the 98th day of the age of the child.

Abdullah al Muqaimi, who works in the private sector, said: "The leave days that are granted to the father as paid leave will help the man pay attention to the details and complete the required attention for the new baby in the family without worrying about deductions from the salary."

Arun Sanjay, an employee of a contracting company, expressed

his satisfaction with this clause since his wife is six months pregnant. He said that this leave allows him to help his wife in the first days of giving birth and also gives them time to spend more time completing all the required procedures.

Maryam al Maskari expressed her thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for this decision, which will allow her and her husband to share more responsibility.



NADHIRA BECOMES FIRST ARAB TO SUMMIT G2

MUSCAT: Nadhira al Harthy continues to make headlines for Oman. After previously summiting Everest, K2, Ama Dablam, and the Matterhorn, she has once again brought the Omani flag to new heights, twice reaching over 8,000 metres within three weeks in July. Nadhira summited Nanga Parbat (8,125 metres) on July 10 and Gasherbrum II (G2) (8,034 metres) on July 24 in Pakistan, becoming the first Arab to summit G2. Gasherbrum II is a mountain



Nadhira becomes first Arab to summit G2

in the Karakoram range of the Himalayas, located on the border between Pakistan and China. It is one of the 14 eight-thousanders, which are peaks over 8,000 metres in elevation. Summiting G2 is a significant mountaineering achievement. A civil servant and mountaineer, Nadhira was the second person from Oman and the first Omani woman to climb Mount Everest. She has also summited several other eight-thousanders, including Manaslu, K2, and Nanga Parbat.

SUMMER SCOUT CAMP FOR GUIDES, SCOUTS BEGINS

SALALAH: The 23rd Summer Scout Camp for Girl Guides and Advanced Scouts began on Friday in Jabal Ashur Plain, Dhofar Governorate, under the slogan 'Our Environment: Diversity and Sustainability'. The camp is organised by the General Directorate of Scouts and Girl Guides at the Ministry of Education and will run for 9 days. A total of 231 female guides and advanced scouts from Oman and Kuwait are participating in the camp's activities. The programme includes a variety of workshops, dialogue sessions, group, and

individual sports activities, and visits to tourist and heritage sites in Dhofar. Thuraya bint Adnan al Hataliyah, the camp's general leader, highlighted the camp's goals: "The camp aims to develop a positive attitude among the guides towards various skills and to activate the goals of the 'Oman 2040' vision for a society proud of its identity, citizenship, and culture while instilling religious values, ethics, and awareness." The camp will also feature activities that focus on the



religious, sports, social, and national development of the participants, in collaboration with relevant governmental and private bodies. — ONA

OMAN BOOSTS DISASTER PREPAREDNESS SYSTEM

SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

The Sultanate of Oman accords great attention to the emergency management system that handles any disasters and emergencies in accordance with a unified system and mechanisms to enhance and coordinate integrated efforts between the relevant authorities. The emergency management system consists of the main committee for emergency management, the national centre, sub-committees in the governorates, emergency committees in the wilayats as well as supporting sectors. Col Zayed bin Hamad al Junaibi, Head of the National Centre for Emergency Management, said in an interview with *Oman* daily: "The National Center for



The National Emergency Management Center strives to achieve the highest levels of coordination and integration between all parties

Emergency Management is the executive body of the National Committee for Emergency Management. The Centre directs, coordinates and follows up on the preparedness efforts, response and urgent rehabilitation during emergencies as well as provides requisite support and assistance to the sectors and sub-committees under the supervision of the

Inspector General of Police and Customs, Chairman of the National Committee for Emergency Management." Al Junaibi noted that the wise government pays great attention and support to the national system for emergency management which has enabled it to successfully deal with extreme weather conditions that occurred over the past years



Zayed bin Had al Junaibi

and mitigate their human and material impacts thanks to the coordination and integration between all components of the emergency management system. The National Emergency Management Committee deals with emergencies that require the unification of national capabilities especially extreme weather conditions, earthquakes, tremors,

flash floods, tsunamis, hazardous leaks and spills including chemical, radioactive, biological spills, major transportation incidents in air, sea and land, major fires, oil spills and environmental pollution, epidemics and any other incidents that impact public safety and require a major-scale response. In order to improve the quality of work and achieve rapid response and optimal handling of all sorts of occurrences, the subcommittees of the National Emergency Management Committee operate in all governorates. The supporting sectors include the Medical Response and Public Health Sector, Basic Services Sector, Relief and Shelter Sector, Hazardous Materials Sector, Search and Rescue Sector, and the Media and Public Awareness Sector all of which function in coordination with the

National Emergency Management Centre, he said. The National Emergency Management Centre strives to achieve the highest levels of coordination and integration between all parties and sectors concerned with crisis management. When any disaster looms such as a tropical storm, making its way towards Oman, the National Emergency Management Committee holds an extraordinary meeting under the chairmanship of the Inspector General of Police and Customs, Chairman of the Committee, to listen to a briefing from the specialists of the Civil Aviation Authority (National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre) on the updates based on the numerical predictions of the weather condition and its potential impacts.

Apollo Chennai with Apollo Super Speciality AI Hail introduces World Class Orthopedic Care

Muscat: Apollo Super Specialty Hospital, Al Hail, has licensed doctors from Apollo, India for elective services and orthopaedic care is being conducted in full capacity. Senior consultant surgeon for joint replacement, Dr Kosygan KP, (a British surgeon of Indian origin) Orthopaedician with more than 25 years of international experience in the field, from Apollo Hospital, Chennai, will lead the orthopedic program at Al Hail. "The intention is to bring the most advanced orthopedic care to Oman. The advanced center for orthopedics at Apollo Oman will attain support from Apollo India, said the Managing Director, VT Saileswaran. He said the hospital is also in the process of adding oncology services. "We shall be Looking at providing support to the patients who have undergone surgery by the license doctors from India. This looks at 360° care status pre-travel, post travel and on-going care," Saileswaran said. They are also looking at collaborative care between doctors at the Apollo Hospital Oman and India. "We treasure our relationship with Oman and we are very happy to have our clinical team supporting the patient community and continue our engagement," noted Jithu Jose, Vice President, International Patients Services, Apollo Hospital Chennai. In terms of the medical services, Dr Kosygan KP, Orthopaedician at Apollo Hospital, Chennai, said that with joint replacement service, balancing the knee appropriately for the patient is of most importance so they can walk without pain as well as fold the knee comfortably after the treatment - the main achievement is to relieve the patient from pain related to arthritis and other causes. "Over the years expectations have increased where people want to continue almost all of the activities they had been performing before the hip or knee replacement," Dr Kosygan said. The doctor explained that this requires the balance of the joint to be intact. "Studies have shown that well aligned joint replacements with perfectly designed implants result in good outcome in addition to pain relief. Our own experience and data from West have shown that the computer assisted navigation is one part of the joint replacements surgery where through the help of CT scan the patient's joint gets modeled and segmented. It tells us what size of implant the patient requires that is suitable for that patient's anatomy and in what alignment we should keep it so it balances well," explained Dr Kosygan.



He added, "After we open the joint, again will look into balancing the joint and ascertain what is the most optimal alignment. We use the robotics to execute the plan." He explained that in orthopedic surgeries, the doctors hold the robotic handle and execute the cutting part of the operation which is with 0.05 mm precision. What is needed for a good surgeon is to achieve consistency in accurate alignment and the right balance. The amount of bone and cartilage to be removed while fitting in the implant is minimized at the same time the amount of soft tissue releases is also minimal. He pointed out that both indirectly contributes to the lessening of the pain, pointed out the doctor. "Using technological advancements such as navigation robotics for minimizing in cutting and surgical dissection as well as good postoperative pain management in the form of nerve blocks and other medications, we have been able to reduce post operative pain. Majority of the patients, if they are well motivated, do get discharged on the second day or the third day," he explained. In addition to the surgery, one of the important factors IOC the treatment is the rehabilitation. Before discharge the patient should be able to walk across the corridor, sit on a chair folding legs, use the toilet, as well as climb up the stairs. These are the criteria for the patient to be discharged. The self motivation is important because there are patients who are discharged within 26 hours and others who might take two to three days days.

Session on AI in genetic management organised

MUSCAT: The Oman Center for Animal and Plant Genetic Resources organised a panel discussion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Genetic Resource Management, under the patronage of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The event took place on July 24, at the Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) building, with the participation of several researchers in the field. The panel was moderated by Abdullah al Baharani, an expert and media specialist in digital transformation and emerging technologies. Speakers included Dr Mounir bin Abdullah al Maawali, Head of the Genetics Department at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University; Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Abri, Associate Professor of Animal Sciences and Veterinary Medicine at the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University; and Dr Salem al Shaali, Director of Artificial Intelligence Projects at the Ministry of Transport,



Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah leading a panel discussion on AI in Genetic Resource Management

Communications and Information Technology. The main topics of the session included defining Artificial Intelligence, genomics, genetics, and hereditary diseases in humans, animals, plants, marine organisms, and microorganisms. Discussions also covered the role of Artificial Intelligence in human genome analysis and the genomes of various living organisms. Ethical and legal challenges related to genome analysis using Artificial Intelligence were addressed, along with the current status and future prospects of Artificial Intelligence in Oman. Dr Mounir al Maawali highlighted that "Artificial Intelligence can analyse human genes, predicting hereditary and malignant diseases before they manifest, marking a significant advancement in disease prevention among humans in the future." Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Yehyai, Director, Oman Center for Genetic Resources under the Ministry of Higher Education, stated that "the concept of the scientific café, which has been ongoing for ten years, and now in its eleventh year organising sessions like this, aims to target all segments of society interested in science in general, communicating with them in a simplified scientific language, as we did today in simplifying the understanding of genetics and genetic resources."

MOH CONSIDERING ESTABLISHING CORNEA BANK

FROM PAGE 1

He emphasised the importance of local services, noting that in the past, patients had to travel abroad for such procedures, leading to concerns about treatment quality and potential complications from transplanted corneas sourced internationally. Dr Qassim bin Mohammed al Jahdhami, Head of the Organ Donation Department at the National Organ Transplant Programme of the Ministry of

Health, stated that due to the reluctance of many individuals in our society to donate organs after death and the absence of a corneal bank in the Sultanate of Oman for preparing and preserving corneas, the National Programme took the initiative to engage with international corneal banks. Through these partnerships, corneas are imported at the appropriate time and provided to patients in need. Additionally, a contract was established with a company specialising in customs

clearance to ensure the safe delivery of corneas in optimal condition to Al Nahdha Hospital. He emphasised that the successful corneal transplant operations at Al Nahdha Hospital mark just the beginning of the National Organ Transplant Programme's efforts. The programme aims to expand corneal transplant services to other hospitals, such as Ibra and Nizwa hospitals, where the demand for such procedures has been identified.



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CELEBRATING ‘AL MAGHBOUR’

KHAREEF WEDDINGS: TRADITION OF COMMUNITY, COOPERATION HEIGHTENS THE JOYOUS WEDDING FESTIVITIES

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 27

The age-old tradition of ‘Al Maghbour’ is still a moving representation of community and cooperation in Dhofar Governorate. With its beautiful weather and rich scenery that heightens the joy of wedding festivities, ‘Al Maghbour’ has a special place in people’s hearts throughout the khareef season.

Known as the wedding season, it is marked by wedding tents set up in the vicinity of mosques and public places, ready to begin festivities. To pay for wedding-related expenses like the dowry, feasts and venue rentals, Al Maghbour’s financial assistance is essential.

‘Al Maghbour’ tradition is distinguished by its inclusiveness and community spirit. Contributions vary according to the groom’s social ties and community activity. Multiple scribes are frequently required to record the names of contributors, who form long lines to make their donations. The groom or his father keeps thorough



records to ensure that presents are reciprocated at future weddings.

The younger generation of Dhofar are actively participating in weddings by bringing valuable presents and cash gifts, demonstrating their strong enthusiasm in keeping this tradition alive. Female relatives are also expected to contribute gifts and money as part of the ‘Al Mussabaha’ tradition, which emphasises the celebrations’ community aspect.

The groom’s and relatives’

families also contribute cattle and feasts to these festivities, demonstrating the teamwork required for such occasions. ‘Al Maghbour’ process comprises a scribe from the groom’s family documenting the names and donations of participants in a special register.

Contributions begin at RO 10, with larger amounts reflecting the participant’s ability and proximity to the family. The concept of presents has developed over time. Traditionally, the bride was given



garments, incense and Chinese porcelain before the wedding and now gold sets are becoming the most popular gifts.

The contributions found in ‘Al Maghbour’ are very ethical and traditional, signifying respect and affection for one another. This custom guarantees that donations will be returned at subsequent weddings, exemplifying a highly valued social cohesiveness in Dhofar.

Intricate events and wedding ceremonies in Dhofar take

place in stages, starting with the engagement. The groom goes to the girl’s father with his father or a family member to make a marriage proposal.

Usually, the father of the girl asks for some time to consider, and after that time is granted, the father of the groom arranges another meeting to decide on the dowry, often called ‘Al Jihaz’. Families frequently have this amount as a well-established norm since it demonstrates respect and understanding

between them. The second stage, known as ‘Ath Thubout,’ entails the groom, his father, family and tribe elders visiting the bride’s home. Negotiations frequently follow to bring dowry down to a fair level. Once agreed upon, the wedding date is established, and the groom’s family sends the dowry, which includes the bride’s attire and all of her requirements. The bride’s mother then distributes part of the clothes to relatives to commemorate the occasion, a custom called locally as ‘Manani.’

‘Al Aqd,’ the third stage, is typically held at the bride’s house or a mosque and is attended by a large number of friends, family and acquaintances. Following the contract ceremony, guests congratulate the groom and perform a piece of ‘Al Haboot’ art to commemorate the event.

A procession of elders and officials reciting joyous poems is led by the groom, who is clad in a bisht and khanjar and carrying a sword or rifle. With hand fans and big incense burners in their hands, women accompany traditional bands.

Salalah offers a feast for the senses

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

When the Arabian Peninsula reels under intense heat, a landmass in the southern tip of Oman calls the tourists for an escapade from the sweltering days. The specialty of Dhofar Governorate is similar to the weather in South Asian countries which experience drizzles and misty weather for many months a year. Many tourists from other parts of Oman and non-GCC have begun to flow to Salalah to enjoy khareef.

Visitors to the governorate are in for a rare treat at places like Wadi Darbat, Magnetic Point, Hasik, Al Mughsail Beach, Faseeha Beach, Shath, Ain Jarzeez, Ain Razat, Jabal Samhan, besides visiting Al Baleed Archaeological Museum.

“It is a photographer’s delight,” says Aji George, a photographer who has captured the aesthetic side of the governorate, particularly Salalah for many years now. “I can’t help but capture the beauty over and again wherever I visit and it is something that I never get bored of year after year,” says George.

Since the khareef season started in Dhofar, drizzles and rains too have begun to shower in some areas to herald the arrival of the khareef season. Many places experienced light rains for several weeks. What makes the khareef season different in Salalah is that it rains in Salalah when the temperature is 50



degrees and above in the surrounding Gulf countries, let alone the Sultanate of Oman. More rains are expected in and around Salalah in the coming days as the khareef season lasts till September 21.

There are many small traders in and around Salalah who make their living during the khareef. This season is the biggest trade of the year. Many people survive on the income they get from this season throughout the year.

“We are glad that there is a strong influx of tourists from both domestic as well as international sectors and coupled with the end of the month when locals visit and do more shopping, these days are proving beneficial for

us,” Mohammed Saifudheen, a trader in Salalah, said.

During the khareef season, the local people run businesses ranging from renting out houses to selling agricultural products, home-cooked food and beverages. The festival creates many job opportunities for local businessmen and entrepreneurs. Roadside shops do a lot of business. Coconuts, papayas, bananas, and many other local crops are in high demand.

“For most of the visitors, the coconut groves and banana plantations remind them of their hometown and for them, it is a train back to their nostalgic memories and a passage down memory lane,” says Shameer Kaladi, a traveller.

Unique culinary delights

SALALAH: Restaurants and meat kiosks in Dhofar Governorate offer tourists a unique dining experience, especially during the khareef season. Among the most famous dishes is ‘Al Madhbi,’ grilled meat prepared on heated stones, served with rice or traditional bread.

As the autumn season begins, ‘Al Madhbi’ stalls proliferate in tourist areas and popular markets, offering fresh food prepared in front of visitors. These stalls are not just dining spots, but also tourist attractions that combine tradition with a unique culinary experience.

Al Madhbi is one of the famous dishes especially in Dhofar Governorate, along with many other dishes that are preferred by visitors and tourists, including Mashkak, Maqadeed, Mafoor Maghmi, Qasabiya, Maajeen, porridge, chicken dishes and fish.

Muhad bin Ahmed Jaboub, owner of Bin Sobar Restaurant, explained, “The project aims to serve all Omani meals to local residents and visitors



throughout the year. We offer a variety of meals, including Madhbi, Maqadeed, Maajeen, Mafour, and more, prepared traditionally in front of tourists.”

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Shahri, owner of Wadi Dhirut Restaurant in the Ateen area, emphasised the seasonal appeal: “Our restaurant offers many meals loved by locals and visitors, especially in the fall. We use fresh, locally sourced ingredients to create authentic dishes that enhance the tourist experience.” — ONA

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BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

Academics and psychologists are raising alarm about the dangers of violent electronic games for children and adolescents.

These games, they warn, can incite aggression and lead to severe psychological effects. This includes addiction and a tendency towards isolation from reality.

Experts emphasise the importance of parental involvement in the daily activities of their children with electronic devices to maintain physical and mental health and offer necessary protection.

Key concerns highlighted include addiction, bullying, electronic blackmail, privacy loss, and exposure to malicious programmes.

To mitigate these risks, specialists have recommended several measures. Some of them are using parental controls, installing high-quality protection programmes, setting time limits, and occasionally participating in the games to understand their content.

Dr Omar al Yahyai, a psychological counseling specialist, points out numerous health problems stemming from electronic game addiction, such as vision issues, headaches, poor concentration, and physical stress from repetitive use of hands and arms, potentially leading to conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome and tenosynovitis.

Moreover, psychological problems like Internet gaming disorder syndrome, sleep deprivation, and insomnia can arise from excessive gaming.

Educational specialists and psychologists urge parents to closely monitor their children's game

KEY CONCERNS

- 1 AGGRESSION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS
- 2 HEALTH ISSUES NAMELY VISION PROBLEMS, POOR CONCENTRATION
- 3 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
- 4 MITIGATING RISKS
- 5 SAFETY AND COMMUNICATION

choices, ensuring they select content that is safe and beneficial. Electronic games, they caution, are a double-edged sword: they can be both educational and dangerous. There is a significant risk of children falling prey to fraudsters through these games, leading to financial exploitation via deceptive advertisements and links.

Anwar bin Abdulrasool al Zedjali, Head of the Audio and Visual Works Division, Ministry of Information, notes that the proliferation of electronic games has significantly boosted the global market, particularly through mobile phones.

However, he warns that constant phone use can lead to eye strain, decreased concentration, and a lack of family interaction, resulting in psychological and familial detachment. Additionally, the ability of children and teenagers to communicate with strangers through these games poses serious risks, including blackmail.

Parents are advised to spend more time with their children, engage in their gaming activities, foster effective communication, encourage physical activity, and monitor electronic accounts. Giving children attention, security, and trust is also crucial.

Parents should not reprimand but rather encourage their children to report any instances of electronic blackmail, bullying, threats, or harassment. It is essential to use parental control programmes, befriend their children, and know their gaming companions to enhance protection from the dangers of electronic games. Reporting any abuse to the relevant security services is also strongly recommended.



Holy Quran contest winners feted

AL AWABI: A ceremony was held on Friday in the Wilayat of Al Awabi, located in the Al Batinah South Governorate, to honour the winners of the Holy Quran memorisation competition, supervised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The event was graced by Dr Shaikh Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, who delivered a lecture emphasising the importance of the Holy Quran in the life of the Islamic nation.

Dr Shaikh Kahlan urged parents to encourage their children to read and memorise the Holy Quran, highlighting its role as the foundation that elevates the nation's status and position.

After the ceremony, the winners in the various competition levels were honoured. The competition comprised of five levels: the first level involved memorisation of 10 parts, the second in 5 parts, the third in 3 parts, the fourth in 2 parts, and the fifth in 1 part.

— ONA



Dr Shaikh Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi honoured winners of Holy Quran memorisation contest

7 Muscat students for Dojo world tourney in US

MUSCAT: Seven students from Muscat are set to attend the World Tournament in the US, an event held every three years. The event attracts several participants from around the globe.

The students from the Dojo who will compete under coach Renshi G Kumar are Rashmi Singh, Kartik Sen, Gunit Chaturvedi, Jaikrish Pandiyan, Janani Pandiyan, Abdullah Mohammed Faisal, and Rudra



Student members met with Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to Oman, before they left for the Dojo World tourney in the US.

Vishal Sutar.

Coach Renshi says that they have been practicing diligently for over a year, training consistently for about 6-8 hours a day.

“Our dedication and hard work will surely pay off as we aim for the medals in the competition.” Indian Ambassador to Sultanate of Oman, Amit Narang, met the team members and wished them good luck for the event.

OMAN VISITORS PORTAL APPOINTS ANISA AL HOOTI AS NEW CEO

MUSCAT: The Oman Visitors Portal announced the appointment of Anisa al Hooti as the CEO of the portal. Anisa brings over 20 years of experience in tourism and aviation, alongside her active roles in sports, culture, and literature, reflecting her diverse skills and innovation capabilities.

Al Hooti has held numerous leadership positions, and currently serves as the Director of Travel Operations and Holidays at SABCO Group, one of the largest business conglomerates in Oman.

Additionally, she holds the position of CEO at ‘PSF’, an organisation focused on organising friendly tournaments and sports camps for Paralympic sports across various countries. Her professional journey began with German Airlines, followed by EgyptAir, and later managing roles at the main branch of Majan Travel and Tourism Agency from the Muscat Overseas Group.

She has also held several leadership positions in sports, including Chairperson of the Asian Para Sports Women's Committee, Vice-President of the Asia Oceania Wheelchair Basketball Federation, and currently serves as Deputy Asia Oceania for the Wheelchair Rugby Federation, in addition to being a commercial adviser for Sporting Work in Istanbul, Turkiye.

Hamoud bin Mohammed al Azri, Chairman of the Board



Anisa al Hooti

of Oman Visitors Portal, said: “We are delighted to welcome Al Hooti back to our leadership team. Her cumulative expertise will undoubtedly contribute to achieving the future aspirations of the portal. As CEO, she will oversee the implementation of our strategies to enhance the portal's position and promote its vision in showcasing Oman as the premier choice for tourism, while adhering to the spirit of our brand in offering exceptional experiences to the Sultanate of Oman's guests.”

Oman Visitors Portal is one of the leading electronic projects highlighting Oman as a unique tourist destination, providing rich content in both languages and vibrant interaction through social media. This portal represents a comprehensive platform for exploring Oman's natural and cultural treasures, utilising the latest technologies to facilitate visitor experiences within and outside the Sultanate of Oman. The portal management will launch the new version of the portal with its advanced features and expanded scope.

MUSCAT RESIDENT CONFERRED OUTSTANDING CITIZEN AWARD

MUSCAT: Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan conferred the coveted and prestigious ‘Outstanding Pakistani Citizen Award’ to Muscat resident Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari. The award is for showing outstanding philanthropic and social welfare services for the expatriate and Pakistani communities residing in the Sultanate of Oman, which has helped towards enhancing the bilateral relations and strengthening the social fabric of both the societies. The commendation ceremony, held in the illustrious Governor House saw the convergence of luminaries who are driving positive change in various fields from around the world. The Governor conveyed his best wishes and appreciated Bukhari's efforts, describing him as pride of Pakistan. and assured him of their support in his noble causes.



Total deposits in commercial banks rise by 7.1 pc

MUSCAT: An analysis of the activities of traditional commercial banks from May 2023 to May 2024 indicated continued credit growth in the Sultanate of Oman. The total credit balance granted by commercial banks increased by 1.3 per cent, while credit granted to the private sector grew by 1.1 per cent to reach RO 20.3 billion by the end of May 2024.

In terms of investments, traditional commercial banks' total investments in securities rose by 20.8 per cent to reach around RO 5.6 billion by the end of May. However, investment in government development



bonds decreased by 9.0 per cent compared to the same period last year, totalling RO 1.9 billion. Investments in foreign securities by commercial banks surged by 80.6 percent, reaching RO 2.2 billion by the end of May 2024.

On the liabilities side, total

deposits with conventional commercial banks increased by 7.1 per cent to reach RO 23.9 billion by the end of May. Government deposits with commercial banks declined by 3.8 per cent to RO 5.2 billion, and deposits from public sector institutions decreased by 1.5 per cent to reach RO 1.7 billion by the end of May 2024.

Conversely, private sector deposits rose significantly in May 2024, increasing by 9.9 per cent to reach RO 16.2 billion. These private sector deposits constituted 67.8 per cent of the total deposits with conventional commercial banks.

— ONA

Agricultural sector thrives in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate

IBRA: The Al Sharqiyah North Governorate has experienced significant growth in its agricultural sector over the past three years, with total agricultural production reaching 250,000 tonnes.

The area dedicated to fruit crops grew by 2.3 per cent, covering 698 acres and producing 4,238 tonnes. Typical fruit fields spanned 236 acres, while grape fields covered 17.5 acres, and fig fields encompassed 66 acres. The vegetable area saw a 25.2 per cent increase, totalling 612 acres and yielding 28,870 tonnes.

Dr Abdulaziz bin Ali al Mishekhi, Director-General, General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, reported that the area of palm crops grew by 1.3 per cent, reaching 7,841 acres with a production of 54,188 tonnes.



Al Sharqiyah North Governorate is rapidly advancing in food security

Al Sharqiyah North Governorate ranked fourth in date production among the governorates, producing 54,200 tonnes (14 per cent) with 940,490 palm trees. The governorate also ranked second in the production of Basour (Mabsali) dates, with 8,694 tonnes from 129,540 palm trees.

The governorate is rapidly

advancing in food security and agriculture's contribution to the national economy through investment opportunities and modern technologies.

Dr Al Mishekhi emphasised a 3 per cent growth in the plant sector last year, aiming for a 5 per cent growth rate. In the current year, 27 investment opportunities were



offered, with 21 in agriculture, covering more than 315 acres. This includes 10 opportunities for grape

cultivation in Ibra's ‘Al Haymah’ area and six opportunities for palm tree cultivation in the Wilayat of Bidiyah.

Four investment opportunities were offered in the Badran scheme in Al Mudhaibi, including two for legumes and two for onion cultivation using modern technologies, each covering 100 acres.

Al Mishekhi highlighted the growth in fruit crop areas and production, with typical fields covering 236 acres, grape fields reaching 17.5 acres, and fig fields covering 66 acres. The vegetable areas reached 612 acres, producing 28,870 tonnes. Palm crop areas grew to 7,841 acres, with a production of 54,188 tonnes. Al Sharqiyah North Governorate ranked fourth in date production and second in Basour production.

Modern technologies and greenhouses have boosted crop production, with 2,008 greenhouses and 21 agricultural nurseries in the governorate. Commercial fields for palm crops and fruit trees were established, and a model grape farms project was implemented in Ibra.

Farmer Hilal bin Nasser al Salmi from Ibra grows figs, grapes, mangoes, palm trees, guava, bananas, onions, and garlic. He prunes grapes in February, with harvest starting in June, depending on the type and climate. Farmer Mohammed bin Ali al Mughairy from Al Sharqiyah North Governorate reported abundant grape and fig production this year, crediting regular irrigation, pruning, fertilisation, and pest control for the successful yields.

— ONA



Strikes kill 30 in Gaza school



An injured Palestinian woman is carried to an ambulance following an Israeli strike on the Khadija school housing displaced people in Deir Al Balah. — AFP

GAZA: The health ministry in Gaza said an Israeli strike on a school killed 30 people on Saturday, after a days-long military operation further south left around 170 dead, according to emergency services.

The latest strike was at least the eighth time since July 6 a school has been hit, leaving a total of more than 100 people dead, based on figures given by the health ministry and a hospital source.

With most of the Gaza Strip's 2.4 million people displaced at least once during the war, many have sought refuge in school buildings including the one hit on Saturday.

The health ministry reported "30 martyrs and more than 100 wounded" in the strike on Khadija school in the central Deir Al Balah area.

With most of the Gaza Strip's 2.4 million people displaced at least once during the war, many have sought refuge in school buildings including the one hit on Saturday

Further south, in the Khan Yunis city area, around 170 people have been killed "and hundreds wounded" in an Israeli operation since Monday, Gaza's civil defence agency said.

It issued the toll after the military warned of new operations in the Khan Yunis area, where troops had earlier recovered the bodies of five Israelis killed during the

October 7 attack and held in Gaza since.

Egyptian state-linked media said Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators are to meet with Israeli negotiators in Rome on Sunday in the latest push for a Gaza truce, which critics of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have accused him of blocking talks.

On Saturday, the Israeli military ordered residents from more parts of Khan Yunis "to temporarily evacuate to the adjusted humanitarian area in Al Mawasi" — the second such change to the declared safe zone within a week. The United Nations said that by Thursday, more than 180,000 Palestinians had already fled fierce fighting there.

The evacuation orders and "intensified hostilities" have

"significantly destabilised aid operations", the UN said, reporting "dire water, hygiene and sanitation conditions" in the Palestinian territory. Khan Yunis was left devastated after heavy fighting early in the year but the military withdrew in April saying it had "concluded its mission" there.

Now it has returned in force. On Wednesday, the military said troops carried out an operation in Khan Yunis and retrieved the five bodies.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 39,258 people, according to Gaza's health ministry. Its latest toll on Saturday included 83 deaths over the previous 48 hours. In the southern city of Rafah, medics said four people were killed in an air strike on a house. — AFP

Thousands evacuate season's biggest wildfire in California

CHICO: A huge, fast-moving and rapidly growing wildfire in northern California has forced more than 4,000 people to evacuate as firefighters battle gusty winds and perilously dry conditions, authorities said on Friday.

Fueled by a crushing heatwave, the so-called Park Fire — the most intense wildfire to hit the state this summer — has rapidly devoured nearly 97,000 hectares as of Friday night and is continuing to gain strength.

"This fire has been rapidly expanding 4,000 to 5,000 acres an hour," incident commander Billy See said at a press conference on Friday.

For now it is "zero per cent" controlled, despite the efforts of about 1,700 firefighters, according to state agency Cal Fire, with hundreds of additional resources ordered en route.

A total of 4,000 people have evacuated the towns of Cohasset and Forest Ranch, plus an additional 400 from the small city of Chico.

The blaze so far has destroyed 134 structures, authorities said. Despite the structure losses,

Butte County Fire Chief Garrett Sjolund said "many more have been saved."

"It is a fire that is challenging our strategies, but we are finding opportunities to deploy our resources in successful ways," Sjolund told reporters.

The fire started on Wednesday near Chico, in Butte County, and within hours had devastated a wide area there and in neighbouring Tehama County.

In just two days, the Park Fire has already become the 20th largest fire in California history by land area.

The blaze has generated an enormous column of dense gray smoke, with gritty clouds akin to those of a violent storm now visible in nearby US states.

California is experiencing an early start to what appears to be an intense wildfire season, with 20 currently active incidents.

An additional 40 blazes are threatening communities to the north, in the states of Washington and Oregon.

A pilot of a small firefighting plane was killed while working near the Falls Fire in eastern Oregon. — AFP



Firefighters watch as flames and smoke move through a valley in the Forest Ranch area of Butte County as the Park Fire continues to burn near Chico, California. — AFP

US hails 'productive' meeting between Blinken, China FM

VIENTIANE: The United States hailed "open and productive" discussions between China's foreign minister and Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Laos on Saturday.

Blinken's stop in Laos is part of a multi-nation Asia visit aimed at reinforcing regional ties in the face of Beijing's growing assertiveness, including in the South China Sea, and its deepening ties with Moscow.

The talks on the sidelines of a foreign ministers meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) lasted for one hour and twenty minutes, according to a senior State Department official.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (R) hold a meeting on the sidelines of the 57th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane. — AFP

Shortly before the meeting Blinken hit out at Beijing's "escalatory and unlawful actions" in the South China Sea, where China and the Philippines are locked in a territorial dispute.

Beijing says the waterway almost in its entirety despite an international court ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. On Saturday, Manila said it had successfully resupplied troops on

The talks on the sidelines of a foreign ministers meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) lasted for one hour and twenty minutes

the Second Thomas Shoal — the focus of clashes in recent months — under a deal agreed with Beijing.

On Friday, Wang called on the Philippines to "honour its commitments" under the deal rather than "backtracking or

creating complications", warning Beijing would "respond resolutely" to any violation.

Blinken arrived in Laos two days after the foreign ministers of China and Russia met with the 10-nation ASEAN bloc — and each other on the sidelines of the meeting.

On Thursday, Wang met Russia Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Vientiane and discussed "building a new security architecture for Eurasia", according to Moscow's foreign ministry.

The pair also agreed to jointly "counter any attempts by extra-regional forces to interfere in Southeast Asian affairs", it said. China has a strong political

and economic partnership with Russia.

A joint communique released by ASEAN on Saturday expressed the bloc's "deep concern over the escalation of conflicts" in member-state Myanmar.

The country has been ravaged by violence since the military seized power in 2021, sparking renewed fighting with established ethnic minority armed groups and dozens of newer "People's Defence Forces".

ASEAN has spearheaded so far unsuccessful diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, with a five-point peace plan agreed between the junta and the bloc now moribund. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

PARIS

France suffers second day of sabotage train delays

Tens of thousands of rail passengers struggled through a second day of cancelled trains on Saturday as investigators tracked saboteurs who paralysed the network just ahead of the Paris Olympics opening ceremony.

The SNCF rail company chief Jean-Pierre Farandou said services would be back to normal by Monday. But 160,000 of the 800,000 people due to travel this weekend still faced cancellations.

Nearly one third of trains were cancelled in northern, western



and eastern France. About a quarter of Eurostar high speed trains between London and Paris also failed to leave. No claim of responsibility has been made for the attacks. — AFP

WASHINGTON

Trump returns to outdoor rallies with more security

Presidential candidate Donald Trump said on Saturday he will return to holding outdoor rallies with additional Secret Service protection, two weeks after he was injured in an assassination attempt at an open-air campaign event.

"I will continue to do outdoor rallies, and the Secret Service has agreed to substantially step up their operation. They are very capable of doing so," Trump said. "No one can ever be allowed to stop or impede free speech or



gathering," he added. His remarks came after the Secret Service reportedly encouraged Trump's campaign to stop scheduling outdoor events following his assassination attempt. — AFP

MOSCOW

Russia claims capture of another village in Ukraine

Russia on Saturday claimed the capture of another village in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region amid heavy fighting as Moscow's forces advance towards the city of Pokrovsk.

The defence ministry said Russian troops "liberated" the village of Lozuvatske, about 24 kilometres east of Pokrovsk and near the Russian-occupied town of Ocheretnye.

Kyiv's defence ministry said early on Saturday that Ukrainian forces had halted 37 Russian at-



tacks in the Pokrovsk area. The hardest fighting was near the village of Novooleksandrivka, it said. Russian aerial bombing of the Donetsk region hit the town of Myrnodrad. — AFP

In Sudan, military blocks aid trucks at border



Declan Walsh
The writer is a reporter covering Africa for The New York Times

As Sudan hurtles towards famine, its military is blocking the United Nations from bringing enormous amounts of food into the country through a vital border crossing, effectively cutting off aid to hundreds of thousands of starving people during the depths of a civil war.

Experts warn that Sudan, barely functioning after 15 months of fighting, could soon face one of the world's worst famines in decades. But the military's refusal to let UN aid convoys through the crossing is thwarting the kind of all-out relief effort that aid groups say is needed to prevent hundreds of thousands of deaths — as many as 2.5 million, according to one estimate — by the end of this year.

The risk is greatest in Darfur, the Spain-sized region that suffered a genocide two decades ago. Of the 14 Sudanese districts at immediate risk of famine, eight are in Darfur, right across the border that the United Nations is trying to cross. Time is running out to help them.

The closed border point, a subject of increasingly urgent appeals from American officials, is at Adré, the main crossing from Chad into Sudan. At the border, little more than a concrete bollard in a dried-out riverbed, just about everything seems to flow: refugees and traders, four-wheel motorbikes carrying animal skins, and donkey carts laden with barrels of fuel.

What is forbidden from crossing into Sudan, however, are the UN trucks filled with food that are urgently needed in Darfur, where experts say that 440,000 people are already on the brink of starvation. Refugees fleeing Darfur now say that hunger, not conflict, is the main reason they left.



A man with a whip tries to control a crowd of Sudanese refugees who were waiting to receive food at an impromptu aid distribution on the outskirts of a refugee camp in Adre, Chad. — Reuters

The Sudanese military imposed the edict at the crossing five months ago, supposedly to prohibit weapons smuggling. It seems to make little sense. Arms, cash and fighters continue to flow into Sudan elsewhere on the 870-mile border that is mostly controlled by its enemy, a heavily armed paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF.

The military doesn't even control the crossing at Adré, where RSF fighters stand 100 yards behind the border on the Sudanese side.

Even so, the UN says it must respect the order not to cross from the military, which is based in Port Sudan, 1,000 miles to the east, because it is Sudan's sovereign authority. Instead, UN trucks are forced to make an arduous 200-mile detour north to Tine, at a crossing controlled by a militia allied with Sudan's army, where they are allowed to enter Darfur.

The diversion is dangerous and expensive and takes up to five times longer than going through Adré. Only a fraction of the required aid is getting through Tine — 320 trucks of food since February, UN officials say, instead of the thousands that are needed. The Tine crossing was closed for most of this week after seasonal rains turned the border into a river.

Between February, when the Adré border crossing was shut, and June, the number of people facing emergency levels of hunger went to 7 million from 1.7 million.

As the prospect of mass starvation in Sudan draws closer, the Adré closure has become a central focus of efforts by the United States, by far the largest donor, to ramp up the emergency aid effort. "This obstruction is completely unacceptable," Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the United States ambassador to the UN, recently told reporters.

Getting aid into Darfur was difficult even before the war. Adré is roughly equidistant from the Atlantic to the west and the Red Sea to the east, about 1,100 miles as the crow flies in either direction. Roads are rutted, lined with bribe-seeking officials and prone to seasonal flooding. A truck leaving the port of Douala, on the west coast in Cameroon, takes nearly three

months to reach the Sudanese border, a UN official said.

Blame for the looming famine is hardly limited to the military. The RSF also paved its path. Since the war started in April 2023, their fighters have scattered millions from their homes, burned factories that make baby food and looted aid convoys. They continue to rampage through Sudan's breadbasket regions, which were among the most productive in Africa, causing massive food shortages.

To override the blockage at Adré, US officials including Thomas-Greenfield have called on the UN Security Council to permit UN trucks to cross at Adré without military authorisation, as what happened earlier with cross-border aid into Syria. But analysts say that Russia, which recently offered arms to Sudan's military, would be likely to veto such a resolution.

The refusal to let UN aid convoys through the crossing is thwarting the kind of all-out relief effort that aid groups say is needed to prevent hundreds of thousands of deaths

This doesn't mean you have ADHD



Christina Caron
The author is NYT reporter based in New York, where she covers mental health

The 6-year-old boy sitting across from Douglas Tynan, a child and adolescent clinical psychologist based in Delaware, clearly did not have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Tynan was sure of that. But the boy's first-grade teacher disagreed.

He could be inattentive in class, but at home his behaviour wasn't out of the ordinary for a child his age. A voracious reader, he told Tynan that he liked to bring his own books to school because the ones in class were too easy.

What his teacher had not considered was that the child was most likely academically gifted, as his mother had been as a child, Tynan said. (Studies have shown that Black children, like the boy in his office, are less likely to be identified for gifted programmes.)

Further testing revealed that Tynan was correct. The child wasn't inattentive in school because of ADHD. It was because he was bored.

ADHD is a neuro-developmental disorder that begins in childhood and typically involves inattention, disorganisation, hyperactivity and impulsivity that cause trouble in two or more settings, like at home and at school.

But those symptoms — for children and adults alike — can overlap with a

multitude of other traits and disorders. In fact, difficulty concentrating is one of the most common symptoms listed in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual, and it's associated with 17 diagnoses, according to a study published in April.

Patients need a careful evaluation to avoid either being misdiagnosed with ADHD or having a missed ADHD diagnosis. Here's a look at some common problems that can mimic ADHD.

Mental health conditions including anxiety, depression or oppositional defiant disorder can show up as ADHD-like symptoms.

Those symptoms might include a lack of focus or motivation, acting out emotionally, or difficulty planning and following through on tasks, said Max Wiznitzer, a paediatric neurologist at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland and an ADHD expert.

Heavy substance use can result in a lack of focus as well as hyperactivity, among other issues. If someone has been using drugs for years and then complains to a doctor about a decline in cognitive ability — such as difficulty paying attention, retaining information or remembering things — it is crucial to look at how long the person has had those symptoms, said Dr David W Goodman, an assistant



Many other conditions have similar symptoms to ADHD, experts say, so avoid the pull of self-diagnosis

ADHD is a neuro-developmental disorder that begins in childhood and typically involves inattention, disorganisation, hyperactivity and impulsivity that cause trouble in two or more settings

professor of psychiatry and behavioural sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

One large study found that people who typically slept between three and six hours performed worse on cognitive tests that measured the brain's ability to hold information and the length of time it took to finish a task. These impairments mimic common ADHD symptoms like mental sluggishness, forgetfulness or the habit of leaving tasks unfinished.

Anyone who owns a smartphone is continually inundated with texts, notifications and opportunities to scroll — it can feel as if our attention is constantly being diverted or that our capacity to focus has shortened. But that does not mean we all have ADHD.

Therapists and researchers who focus on the disorder say it is important to get a medical evaluation before an ADHD diagnosis because there is such a wide variety of illnesses that can create ADHD-like symptoms, such as inattention, memory problems or brain fog, which can make people feel sluggish, easily distracted and forgetful.

Some examples include brain injury, chronic conditions such as fibromyalgia or POTS, diabetes, heart problems or endocrine disorders such as hypothyroidism.

The psychology of radicalisation



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

WE often hear about violent attacks on civilians in different cities from the white American supremacy group, the Ku Klux Klan, to the recent shooting in Muscat.

I have always been interested in understanding the psychological roots behind radicalisation and how a law-abiding citizen can suddenly become a criminal killing and injuring a large number of civilians.

Radicalisation is the process of supporting or engaging in activities deemed as in violation of important social norms. This includes the killing of civilians or destruction of properties. Radicalisation can range from supporting the idea of terrorism while going about your everyday business to actually being involved in performing the attacks.

The most extremely radicalised individual is the suicide bomber who is ready to sacrifice his life for ‘the cause’. While reading about this topic I came across the following statement from a member of a radical group: “Family and relationships are forgotten in that place. There was no place for love.

That means a passion and loyalty to that group, to those in charge, to those who sacrificed their lives for the group. Then I came to a stage where I had no love for myself. I had no value for my life. I was ready to give myself fully, even to destroy myself, in order to destroy another person.”

This statement shows the psychological processes that goes inside the radicalised person’s mind that makes killing others justifiable by dehumanising and delegitimising them, so the terrorist convinces himself that killing others is justified.

Psychological theorists suggest that the main motivating force behind extremism can be multiple and complex. One of the main motivators is the individual’s need for recognition, self-esteem, achievement, meaning, competence, and control.

This is why we often find people who are subjected to feelings of injustice or oppression may seek out groups or ideologies that provide them with a sense of justice. People who feel isolated or socially disconnected may find in extremist groups a place that offers them belonging and appreciation and a strong sense of identity. Sometimes, psychological trauma or negative life experiences, such as losing

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a loved one or being exposed to violence, can make individuals more susceptible to adopting extremist ideas and behaviours.

Individuals who feel their lives lack meaning or purpose may find in extremism a way to give their lives significance and importance. Charisma can be a tool in attracting radicalised individuals when a charismatic person uses his charm and personality to deceive others convincing them of his or her extremist beliefs.

Sometimes members of the radicalised group express their love and worship of their leader and the need for his or her approval becomes the most significant motivation to commit a terrorist act. Revenge which is the desire to reciprocate harm against those who have caused harm to oneself or one’s group is another motivator for radicalisation as it restores the balance of power by giving a humiliating blow to ‘the enemy’ responsible for one’s humiliation, thus redeeming one’s lost significance.

Finally, understanding the psychology of radicalisation will help in planning and implementing strategies in dealing with extremist groups.

EU rejects new Alzheimer’s drug

JAN HENNOP

EUROPE’s medicines watchdog on Friday rejected a marketing request for a new Alzheimer’s disease treatment, saying the risks of the medicine’s side effects, including potential brain bleeding, outweighed the benefits.

The decision by the Amsterdam-based European Medicines Agency was met with dismay, but experts said effective treatment for the degenerative mental disease affecting millions in Europe alone, was getting closer.

“The CHMP recommended not granting a marketing authorisation for Leqembi, a medicine intended for the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease,” the European Medicines Agency said, referring to its committee for evaluating drugs for human use.

Leqembi, which was developed by US multinational Biogen and Japanese-based Eisai, is the brand name of an active substance called lecanemab, which is used to treat adults with mild memory and cognitive problems resulting from the early stages of the common type of dementia.

But the CHMP said “the observed effect of Leqembi on delaying cognitive decline does not counterbalance the risk of serious side events associated with the medicine.”

“The most important safety concern with Leqembi is the frequent occurrence of amyloid-related imaging abnormalities (ARIA), a side effect, seen in brain imaging, that involves swelling and potential bleedings in the brain,” the EMA said. Leqembi is a monoclonal antibody, a type of protein that clings to a substance in the brain and can delay worsening of the disease. It is given intravenously every two weeks.

Leqembi, together with another Alzheimer’s drug called Aduhelm — also developed by Biogen and Eisai — received approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) early last year.

Both drugs were approved through an accelerated process by the FDA for drugs treating serious conditions where there is an unmet medical need. But in late January this year, Biogen pulled the controversial Aduhelm from the market, saying it was focusing on Leqembi instead. Preliminary data from a trial of Leqembi was released in September 2022 and found it slowed cognitive decline in Alzheimer’s patients by 27 per cent.

Around eight million people in the European Union live with dementia, with Alzheimer’s disease accounting for more than half of these cases, according to the Alzheimer Europe website.

Eisai, in a statement, said it was “extremely disappointed with the CHMP’s negative opinion”.

“There is a significant unmet need for new innovative treatment options that target an underlying cause of disease progression,” Eisai’s chief clinical officer Lynn Kramer said. — AFP

Kamala Harris and the audacity of desperation



Ross Douthat

The writer is a New York Times Opinion columnist

ACROSS Donald Trump’s presidency, the American establishment achieved an unprecedented level of ideological unity and conformity — first in opposition to Trump himself, and then in the embrace of progressive ideology, in the “Great Awakening” that reached a crescendo in the hotter months of 2020.

Since then we’ve watched cracks spread throughout this edifice, dividing groups and institutions that once seemed to move in lock step. These fault lines include the split between a more ideological academic culture, where wokeness seems entrenched, and corporate and media realms, where its hold has somewhat weakened. They include the divisions between donors, university administrators and activists exposed and heightened by the Hamas attacks and the Israel-Gaza war.

They include the struggle over Joe Biden’s fitness to run again, in which the liberal intelligentsia and the Democratic Party were temporarily at war, and the emergence of new right-leaning factions within the American elite.

But now, with the surge of support for Kamala Harris’s candidacy, you can sense an effort to overcome these divisions, to reassert the establishment’s anti-Trump consensus, to recover the unity of 2020 and put the full power of what Nate Silver once called the “indigo blob” at the presumptive Democratic nominee’s disposal.

This means money: a surge of tens of millions of dollars into Democratic coffers. It means star power, whether through endorsements or just associations: Olivia Rodrigo and George Clooney, Charli XCX and Beyoncé. It means soft-focus media treatments and even the updating of inconvenient language, as Axios did when it corrected a past reference to Harris as the Biden administration “border czar” amid conservative criticism of her role in immigration policy.

It means squelching any chance of an intra-Democratic conflict or a convention fight, while delivering hype from every corner, from liberals to ex-Republicans to TikTok users, in an attempt to gild the Harris candidacy



with the magic of Obamamania.

What the Kamalamentum effort shares with that 2008 phenomenon is one of Barack Obama’s favourite words: “audacity.” But not the audacity of hope this time, so much as the audacity of desperation — a sense that in this late hour the only hope for stopping Trump is to set aside all differences, bury all

FOR HARRIS HERSELF, THE QUESTION IS WHETHER SHE CAN RISE TO THE OCCASION, CONDUCT OUTREACH MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN THE CURRENT PRESIDENT HAS

doubts and present Harris to the world not as an unhappy default but as a potentially transformative candidate, the kind that any Trump opponent should have wanted all along.”

This is especially audacious because the agony that the Democrats only just escaped, the disgraceful attempt by Biden’s inner circle to prop him up through one more campaign cycle, was itself a direct response to a consensus among savvy political observers that Harris was an exceptionally poor candidate, exactly the wrong person to set against Trump, not another Obama but a liberal answer to Dan Quayle.

The speed at which this consensus shifted should not exactly be surprising; we just watched, after all, the rapid dissolution of a shared liberal reality in which Biden’s aging was at most a minor problem magnified by Fox News and Republican disinformation efforts.

Just as that consensus turned

out to be a fond delusion, perhaps the underestimation of Harris will look unmoored from reality in hindsight. Even poor Quayle might have outperformed his reputation if someone had only given him a chance.

But the basic facts that made Harris seem like a dubious choice remain. She is a politician who built her career inside a liberal state where what matters is winning over Democratic Party elites and liberal-leaning voters, not the conservative-leaning independent voters she needs to persuade now.

She flopped completely in her bid for national office in 2020 and was rescued and elevated only by the exigencies of George Floyd-era progressive politics. As vice president she has no notable successes, no impressive portfolio, and her struggles and miscues have inspired comparisons to HBO’s “Veep” for a reason.

Today she occupies an odd position as presumptive nominee, having succeeded in neither of the traditional means of ascent: She won no primaries or caucuses, and no smoke-filled room of Democratic grandees agreed on her electability.

Democrats have made their peace with her nomination, but they are making a virtue of necessity, not crowning a victor or rewarding a great success.

That necessity has brought us to a double test.

For Harris herself, the question is whether she can rise to the occasion, conduct outreach more effectively than the current president has, shed her Quaylian baggage and show skills that even her allies have worried that she lacks. — **The New York Times**

Men behaving badly: It’s just not on

IT doesn’t really matter how much we men love, treasure, or appreciate our women, does it? It doesn’t matter how much we adore them, enjoy having them around us, and how our adoration sees us put them on a pedestal. Does it? Yet... there will always be a line, a barrier, beyond which we cannot visualise a woman, which is more than a little discomfiting, really.

Do we hide behind such platitudes as, “Well, not all women want equality,” because it suits us to? And in fact, right there is another assumption that we may make to our peril.

Who said anything about equality? Most of the women I know have ambition, and have a desire to be, not just good, but the best that they are capable of being, and for many, that makes them outstanding.

Yet... there will always be that line in the sand, that glass ceiling, that niche, that place, where misogyny is sustained, as by Stephen Braithwaite, “respecting any woman who knows her place.”

Men don’t want women to have equality! Oh, they make polite noises, but they don’t want equality, and will harp endlessly, of the many ‘failings’ of women because it is in their best interests to do so.

However, what they clearly perceive as a distinctly feminine quality is emotion, and we’ve all seen it a thousand times, an eye roll, when a woman communicates from a compassionate or empathetic perspective, only to see that nuanced approach become the driver in a successful negotiation or conclusion. And we men have all dismissed such contributions as luck! Because we cannot see it in any other way!

Men dominate the boardrooms of leading governments, the military, Fortune 500 companies, media outlets, and civil administrations, while women are much more widely represented in the health sector, social services, and retail. Is that just a gender gap mishap? No way! In fact, though derived etymologically



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AN EXPLORATION OF HISTORICAL POWER DYNAMICS SHOWS HOW MEN HAVE LONG VIEWED THEMSELVES AS THE PRIMARY LEADERS, RELEGATING WOMEN TO ROLES OF NURTURING AND EDUCATION

from the Latin ‘genus,’ in reference to labelling species at birth, the Anglo-Norman ‘gendre’ offered multiple options, greater diversity, until as political scientist Julia Azari observed, the word ‘gender’ “came about in the early 1960’s to differentiate between one’s biological sex and imposed sociocultural roles.”

So where do these ‘separations’ of career and philosophy have their genesis? Is it as basic and simple as a time when the caveman came home with a dead beast over his shoulder for the woman to skin and cook?

Maybe, because ever since those days men have felt they are the ones best qualified to lead, while their — yes, they see them as their women — are left to nurture and educate. So, you see, it is not a matter of equality, but power and what’s important. Well at least, what we men see as important. Growing up in societies and environments where boys grow up with bats and balls, while girls grow up with dolls and prams will do that to you. How we navigate away from the absolute reality that men and women are not, and never can be, equal.

We are not, and never will be the same, as our physical differences and our situational responses, emotional or not, will always be different. What we do need to recognise is the complementary nature of these subliminal and distinctive responses, and how they have the potential to significantly enrich our society’s potential.

There are almost certainly, few men who actively pursue a misogynistic perspective, yet it is there all the same a wry acceptance of John Wayne who said famously, “They have the right to do what they want — as long as dinner is on the table when I get home.”

We may never will be equal, but it behoves us, unlike Wayne, to offer more than a shred of dignity to those women who seek to unleash the emotion, the compassion and empathy, that our melange of power would otherwise deny them.

MOROCCAN DRESSAGE REACTION



Noor Slaoui of Morocco riding ‘Cash In Hand’ reacts after competing equestrian event in individual dressage at Chteau de Versailles, Versailles, France, for the Paris 2024 Olympics. – Reuters

Impact of capitalism on nationalism

IN my humble understanding, it’s undeniable that capitalists dominate the modern world, both economically and politically.

Even capitalists themselves remain uncertain whether capitalism harmonises with nationalism.

While a robust economic system is essential for any state’s growth, nationalism faces significant threats under capitalism.

The capitalist system is meticulously designed to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Regardless of the arguments, this remains the reality.

Capitalists have acquired their wealth and knowledge at the expense of the poor and middle classes.

Calling them ‘bloodsuckers’ may seem harsh, but it reflects today’s reality, where the capitalists exploit the labour of the poor.

Just consider the practices of banks worldwide.

Writing about capitalism and nationalism without delving into history and academic research would be unproductive. Let us explore how literature can illuminate this discussion.

Different theorists have offered varied perspectives on nationalism.

Clifford Geertz posited that nationalism stems from ancient, deep-seated bonds of kinship, ethnicity, and shared history, viewing national identity as a natural, immutable characteristic. Conversely, modernists argue that nationalism is a product of modernity and industrial society.

Ernest Gellner theorised that the rise of the modern state and the need for a



Mohammed Anwar Al Balushi

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unified culture for economic and administrative efficiency fostered nationalism.

Yuval Noah Harari, in ‘21 Lessons for the 21st Century,’ questions why, in an era where humanity forms a single civilisation facing common challenges, Britons, Americans, Russians, and others gravitate towards nationalistic isolation.

Negri and Hardt (2000) suggest that if capital disregards national borders, this should highlight the transgressive and transnational power of migrants and the labour movement. Capital’s international operations are a response to these forces.

One significant impact of capitalism on nationalism is economic inequality. Capitalist economies often suffer from wealth and income disparities. When a large portion of the population feels left behind, social unrest can arise, fueling populist nationalism.

George Orwell, in ‘The Road to Wigan Pier,’ aptly notes, “But it is a world in which to be poor and to be sick are almost synonymous. And if it is true that a capitalist society, taken as a whole, is healthier and more productive than a feudal one, this is a long way from saying that it is healthy.”

In my view, the capitalist system is unhealthy. It is akin to a body where one part is robust and healthy, while the other part is weak and ailing. The healthy part

continually destroys the unhealthy part until it vanishes.

If a country under capitalism fails to distribute wealth and resources fairly, people will migrate elsewhere in search of basic sustenance. Would anyone leave their homeland if they could thrive there? Certainly not. This is a glaring negative impact of capitalism on nationalism.

Examining economic inequality and populist nationalism reveals that populist leaders often exploit economic grievances, blaming globalisation and foreign entities for domestic issues. This rhetoric fuels

nationalistic sentiment, positioning the nation against perceived external threats. The rise of populist nationalism in various countries is a reaction to the inequalities and insecurities created by global capitalism.

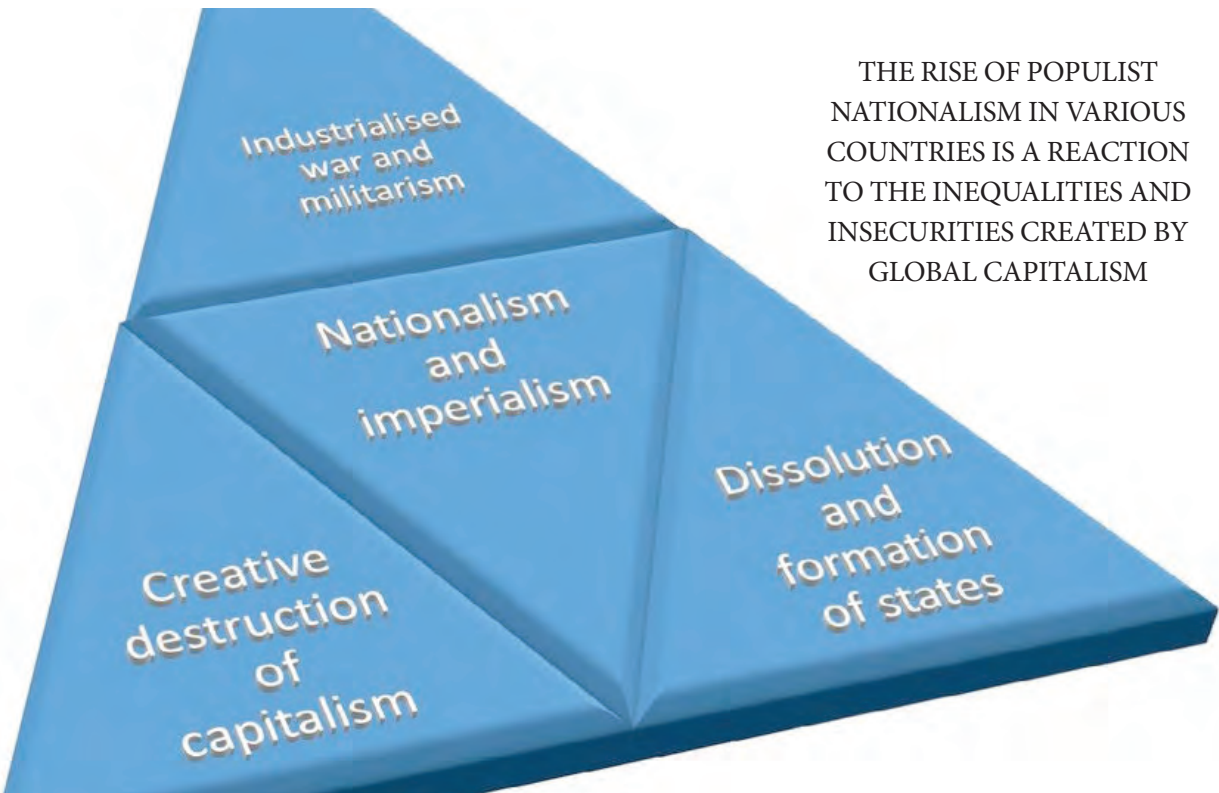
Brexit is a prime example of this dynamic.

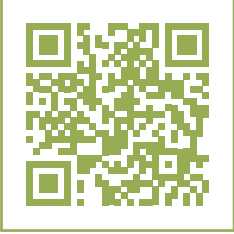
Many Brexit supporters argued that the European Union’s regulations and economic policies infringed on the United Kingdom’s sovereignty. The campaign tapped into nationalistic sentiments, emphasising the need to ‘take back control’ from global institutions

perceived as undermining national autonomy.

The impact of capitalism on nationalism is multifaceted, marked by both synergy and tension. While capitalism can drive economic growth and national pride, it can also exacerbate economic inequalities, challenge national sovereignty, and dilute cultural identities.

The interplay between capitalism and nationalism continues to shape global politics, with profound implications for social cohesion, economic policies, and international relations.





Atletico reach agreement to sign Le Normand

SPAIN: Atletico Madrid have reached an agreement with Real Sociedad for the transfer of Spain centre back Robin Le Normand, both LaLiga clubs said on Saturday.

Neither Atletico nor Sociedad disclosed the financial details, but Spanish media reported that the deal will be worth around 30 million euros (\$32.57 million) plus add-ons. The length of the 27-year-old's contract was not revealed.

"Atletico and Sociedad have reached an agreement for the transfer of Le Normand. The deal will be finalised in the coming days when the player returns from his holiday,"

Atletico said in a statement. Having started his career with Ligue 1 side Brest, the France-born player joined Sociedad in 2016. He has since made 221 appearances for Sociedad's first team and won the Copa del Rey in the 2019-20 season.

"We'll always remember his dedication and gratitude to the colours that have shaped him into the player he is today. Good luck," Sociedad said on social media platform X.

Capped 17 times, Le Normand was part of Spain's victorious 2024 European Championship team.

— Reuters

BRAZIL TEENAGER ENDRICK JOINS REAL MADRID



Brazilian forward Endrick Felipe (L) and Real Madrid President Florentino Perez. — AFP

BRAZIL: Brazilian forward Endrick shed tears of pride after signing a six-year contract with Real Madrid, days after celebrating his 18th birthday.

The LaLiga club had agreed to sign Endrick from Sao Paulo-based Palmeiras in 2022, with a view to him joining Madrid in

July 2024 after turning 18.

Spanish media reported that Endrick, who will wear Real's number 16 jersey, was signed for an initial fee of 35 million euros (\$38 million) with a further 25 million euros in possible add-ons. "This is crazy! I'm so happy, since I was a kid I have always

been a Madrid fan and now I am going to play for Madrid," Endrick said at his presentation ceremony.

"I don't have words to describe what I am feeling. I always wanted to be here. I wanted to play for Madrid. It was a dream. Today it is a reality."

A product of the Palmeiras academy, Endrick has scored three goals in 10 appearances for Brazil since his debut last year and is the youngest male player to score an international goal at Wembley.

He scored 21 times in 82 Palmeiras games. — Reuters

Argentina earn 3-1 win over Iraq, Spain beat Dominican Republic

PARIS: Argentina earned a 3-1 win over Iraq in Lyon and Spain outclassed the Dominican Republic 3-1 in Bordeaux in the second matchday of the men's Olympic soccer tournament on Saturday.

Argentina recovered from their chaotic opening loss to Morocco and boosted their chances of reaching the next round as they went top of Group B on goal difference.

Debutants Dominican Republic's first Olympic goal was not enough to stop the Spaniards who scored twice in the second half to clinch a quarter-final spot with their second Group C win.

Argentina opened the scoring after 14 minutes thanks to a Thiago Almada's volley after Julian Alvarez set him up but Iraq captain Aymen Hussein equalised seconds before halftime with a brilliant header.

Substitute Luciano Gondou restored Argentina's lead with

a close-range finish before a superb strike by Ezequiel Fernandez six minutes from time secured all three points for the 2004 and 2008 gold medalists.

Spain dominated from the early stages and went ahead in the 24th minute when Fermin Lopez pounced on a poor clearance by the Dominican goalkeeper to score.

Angel Montes de Oca equalised with a towering header from a corner in the 38th minute but Dominica's hopes of a shock suffered a major blow with Edison Azcona's red card for a foul on Pau Cubarsi.

Alejandro Baena restored Spain's lead when his long-range strike deflected off an opponent into the net and Miguel Gutierrez's tap-in into an empty goal sealed victory.

Hosts France, Israel, Japan and the United States are in action later on Saturday.

— Reuters



Players of Argentina celebrate — Reuters

VERSTAPPEN FASTEST, BUT LECLERC TAKES BELGIAN POLE

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, Belgium: Ferrari's Charles Leclerc took pole position at the Belgian Grand Prix on Saturday, where Red Bull's Formula One champion Max Verstappen posted the fastest time in wet conditions but is on a 10-place grid penalty for taking on a fifth engine.

Drivers' championship leader and three-times world champion Verstappen will start 11th on the grid on Sunday, after Red Bull decided to take the penalty at Spa which can be an easier track for overtaking, as he goes for a fourth straight win in Belgium.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez, under pressure of late after a run of poor performances, will be alongside Leclerc on the front row, with Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes third on the grid and McLaren's Lando Norris making up the second row.

"I definitely did not expect that this weekend, with the tricky conditions, to do something

above our expectations," Leclerc said.

"We need to focus on tomorrow and what will happen when the rain is gone. Without the rain, P5 was the position we were fighting for with the Mercedes. The rain helped us, but I'm not going to complain."

Norris is second in the championship, 76 points behind Verstappen, and will see this as another great chance to close the gap, especially in the expected drier conditions.

It turned out to be a repeat of last year's qualifying at Spa, where Verstappen was also fastest but dropped to sixth on the grid with another penalty, and Leclerc took advantage by grabbing pole position.

This time around, Verstappen set a time of one minute 53.159 seconds, which nobody could beat, but Leclerc, 0.595 seconds slower, will be the man at the front

of the grid.

McLaren's Oscar Piastri, who won his first F1 Grand Prix last weekend in Hungary, begins fifth with George Russell sixth in the Mercedes.

Leclerc's Ferrari team-mate Carlos Sainz will start seventh on the grid and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso eighth, with Alpine's Esteban Ocon ninth, and Alexander Albon of Williams 10th.

PRACTICE WASH-OUT

The rain meant the earlier final practice was more or less a wash-out, with little driving done and Aston Martin's Lance Stroll crashing early on, but qualifying began in slightly improved conditions.

Stroll's team had plenty of work to do before qualifying after they were forced to change everything except the survival cell, and he failed to make the final phase of qualifying.

Verstappen won here in 2022 from 14th on the grid, and last year from sixth, but after the impressive form of McLaren last weekend in their one-two in Hungary, and with Leclerc on pole, the championship leader has a real battle on his hands.

Leclerc has had only one other pole position this season, at Monaco, but that also gave him his only win this term and Verstappen is in real danger of failing to win for a fourth successive GP, something that has not happened since 2020.

"It was a nice qualifying, luckily the weather was okay, raining a little bit but we could still do a decent qualifying," Verstappen said.

"Tomorrow is a different day, warmer, no rain. It's all about tyre degradation. I don't know how quick we'll be, but I hope we can be in the mix."

— Reuters



Verstappen gestures after the qualifying – AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts after his win – AFP



Poland's Iga Swiatek in action . – AFP

Djokovic closes in on Nadal Olympic clash as Alcaraz, Swiatek cruise

Paris: Novak Djokovic set-up a potential Olympic Games blockbuster with Rafael Nadal on Saturday as Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Swiatek made winning returns to a rain-swept Roland Garros where they were crowned French Open champions last month.

Djokovic, chasing a first Olympic gold to add to his 24 Grand Slams, brushed aside Australia's Matthew Ebden 6-0, 6-1 in just 53 minutes under the roof of Court Philippe Chatrier.

The torrential rain which swamped the opening ceremony on Friday also brought havoc to Roland Garros where play on the outside courts, which were scheduled to host 40 matches, was delayed by six hours.

Alcaraz, fresh from defeating Djokovic in the Wimbledon final two weeks ago, eased past Hady Habib of Lebanon while Swiatek enjoyed a straight-sets win against Irina Camelia-Begu.

Nadal, who has been carrying a thigh strain, will take on Djokovic for the 60th time if he gets past Marton Fucsovics of Hungary on Sunday.

"His record at Roland Garros speaks for itself," said Djokovic of potentially facing Nadal.

"If we face each other, it's possibly going to be for the last time."

On Saturday, Djokovic was barely pushed by 36-year-old Ebden, who only made the tournament as an alternate after a series of injury pullouts.

Without a singles ranking, doubles specialist Ebden had not played a singles match for two years before he got an unexpected Olympics call.

Djokovic needed just 24 minutes to wrap up the first set and was

4-0 up in the second before the Australian won a game.

Ebden, playing to a sympathetic crowd, celebrated by pulling his shirt over his head.

But that was as good as it got for the Australian Open doubles champion, who was broken six times and hit just seven winners to the 24 of Djokovic.

"The only goal I had was not to get injured. I was never going to win. I got one game at least and I said to Novak I was sorry I couldn't give him more of a hit," said Ebden.

Alcaraz enjoyed a winning start to his Olympic Games career when he swept aside Lebanon's Hady Habib, the world number 275, in just 70 minutes winning 6-3, 6-1.

"Dream to play with Rafa" - "It was an incredible experience, the energy of the crowd was crazy," said third-ranked Alcaraz who will team up with Nadal later Saturday in the first round of the doubles.

"It's a dream for me to play with Rafa. We want to win and enjoy it" Women's world number one Swiatek battled to a 6-2, 7-5 victory over Begu as the 23-year-old Pole returned to the court where she captured a fourth French Open title last month.

"I'm happy to get through. The atmosphere was a little bit different so I was a little more nervous," she said.

"But I have the chance to work on a few things tomorrow so my level can be higher in the second round."

After two breaks in a comfortable first set, the top seed had to retrieve a break in the second set to get to 5-5 before sweeping the next two games and secured victory when Begu double-faulted.

— AFP

OMAN PACER REACH 100 ODI WICKETS WORLD

MUSCAT: Nearly three months after becoming the fastest pacer from an Associate nation to reach 100 T20I wickets, Oman's pace spearhead, Bilal Khan, has achieved another remarkable career milestone. This time, he has set a world record by becoming the fastest pacer to reach 100 One-Day International (ODI) wickets.

Bilal surpassed the previous record set by Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi by claiming his 100th wicket against Namibia during an ICC World Cricket League 2 game in Dundee, Scotland on July 24.

He reached this milestone in just 49 ODIs, dismissing Namibia's Jan Frylinck to achieve the feat. Bilal's efforts bettered Afridi's 100-wicket haul in 51 ODIs, and also surpassed Australia's Mitchell Starc (52 ODIs) and New Zealand's Shane Bond (54 ODIs).

Overall, Bilal is the third fastest to 100 ODI wickets. The overall record is held by Nepal's leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane,

who achieved the feat in just 42 ODIs, followed by Afghanistan's leg-spinner Rashid Khan, who took 100 ODI wickets in 44 games.

Speaking from Dundee after achieving the milestone, Bilal said: "First of all, I would like to thank the Almighty for all his blessings that made me achieve this mark. I would like to thank my coach Duleep Mendis, who has trusted me over the years, my bowling coach Champaka Ramanayake, OC board chairman Pankaj Khimji, OC treasurer Alkesh Joshi, and Mazhar Saleem Khan."

The 37-year-old Bilal also praised the efforts of team physio Sean Novak and assistant coach Evert Laubscher for helping him stay fit and thanked his team-mates for their support in achieving the record.

Born in Peshawar, Bilal mentioned that his elder brother, who played domestic cricket in their hometown, has been a source of inspiration and has played an

influential role in his cricketing career.

"I always wish that I am remembered as a bowler who has represented Oman at the best level. Breaking these records as an Oman bowler has been a proud moment for me. Earlier this year, I became the first Associate bowler to reach 100 T20I wickets and third overall. Now, becoming the first pacer to reach 100 ODI wickets as an Oman bowler is very satisfying. There can't be a bigger joy for me than putting Oman in the spotlight with two world-class achievements in a span of three months," he said.

Bilal also thanked former captain Zeeshan Maqsood and current team skipper Aqib Ilyas for their support.

He especially thanked his mother for her backing and blessings, saying, "Without her blessings, I wouldn't be here," and

added that his wife has been a pillar of support. "My family has stood beside me through good and bad times, and I owe it all to them."

On the latest record, Bilal recounted: "I knew going into the match that I needed two more wickets for the record. I had Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus dismissed for my 99th and then trapped Jan Frylinck leg before for my 100th wicket. It was definitely a special moment."

Besides Bilal's 100th ODI wicket, Mendis' men also secured their first win in the ongoing ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 by defeating Namibia by four wickets, earning their first full two points. Bilal ended the match with figures of 3/50.

In the four matches played, Oman has lost two — one each to Scotland and Namibia — while the opening match of the tri-series against Scotland was washed out.





Gold medallists China's Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen. – AFP



China's Fei Liwei competes in 400m freestyle. – AFP

China bags early Olympic golds as rain disrupts Games

PARIS: China grabbed the first two gold medals of the Paris Olympics on Saturday as swimming prepared to take centre stage on a rain-disrupted first full opening day of sporting action.

Asian powerhouses China, who last topped the Olympic medal table in 2008, made a flying start to their latest bid for supremacy, bagging early golds in shooting and synchronised diving.

Teenage duo Sheng Lihao and Huang Yuting won the first Chinese gold in the mixed team 10-metre air rifle event, before all-conquering divers Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen somersaulted to victory in the women's three-metre springboard final.

Australia also celebrated its first gold with cyclist Grace Brown speeding to victory in the women's individual time trial.

Those were the first golds of 13 up for grabs in Paris on Saturday as wet weather continued to cause headaches for organisers following Friday's deluge at the opening ceremony.

The men's street skateboarding competition, due to take place at the Place de la Concorde in the historic heart of Paris, was postponed until

WET WEATHER CONTINUED TO CAUSE HEADACHES FOR ORGANISERS FOLLOWING FRIDAY'S DELUGE AT THE OPENING CEREMONY

Monday due to rain overnight.

The downpours also disrupted play at the opening rounds of tennis at Roland Garros, with play on the 10 uncovered outside courts delayed.

The ceremony received broadly favourable reviews, with France's centre-right *Le Figaro* daily describing it as "full of surprises but often disjointed."

The International Olympic Committee however was forced to apologise for a gaffe during the ceremony that saw South Korea's athletes incorrectly introduced as North Korean.

Elsewhere on the sporting front, swimming was preparing for a battle royale in the pool later Saturday where the first golds will be decided.

Traditionally one of the highlights of the opening week of the games, Saturday's first wave of swimming finals will feature a blockbuster women's 400m freestyle duel pitting American great Katie Ledecky against Australia's defending champion Ariarne Titmus Ledecky, stunned by Titmus in Tokyo three years ago, laid down a psychological marker after pipping the Australian in Saturday's heats. — AFP

Omani delegation shines at Paris 2024 Olympics opening ceremony

SHOOTER SAID AL KHATRI BEGINS OFFICIAL TRAINING TODAY



ADIL AL BALUSHI
PARIS, JULY 27

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation took part in the historic opening ceremony of the 33rd Summer Olympic Games, Paris 2024, on Friday at the Seine River in the heart of the French capital city, Paris.

The four-hour spectacular event was attended by top dignitaries including French President Emmanuel Macron, numerous heads and representatives of countries presence of Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee, and a huge public audience.

Oman's Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) and head of Oman's delegation to the Paris 2024 Olympics participated in the official opening ceremony. Also present were Basil bin

Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth for Sports and Youth along with Ambassador Ahmed bin Mohammed al Orami, Oman's Ambassador to France, along with several members of the Oman Olympic Committee's Board of Directors.

Oman also made a notable appearance at the official opening ceremony through the participation of its sports delegation members who proudly wore traditional Omani dress and carried the Omani flags.

The Omani delegation shared the same boat with delegations from New Zealand, Uganda, and Pakistan.

The flag bearers were athlete Ali bin Anwar al Balushi, who is making his Olympics debut and female sprinter Mazoon al Alawi, who is participating in the Olympics for her third consecutive time, and had the honour of carrying the Omani flag during

the opening ceremony as the athletes paraded via boats.

"This is a historic moment for me to be chosen as the national delegation flag bearer. I enjoyed historic and pivotal moments in my sports career and my joy was great after qualifying directly for the Olympics but it became even more interesting when I was chosen to carry the flag of my beloved country in this high profile sporting event. I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the officials of Oman Olympic Committee for selecting me and my fellow runner Mazoon al Alawi," sprinter Ali said.

Mazoon al Alawi expressed her pride as well for raising the Omani flag during the official ceremony of Paris 2024 Olympics.

"I had participated in the Olympics twice before but this participation was different from the others as I had the honour of being one of the flag

bearers for Oman. The atmosphere at the opening ceremony was incredibly enjoyable with the rain adding extra beauty to the event. I did not expect the official opening of the Olympics to be like this as we are used to it being held in main stadiums. However, it was a fantastic move by the organisers to hold it outside the main stadium where we were on a boat," she added.

Mazoon will begin her action at 100 metres on August 2 at the France De Stadium. "I will deliver my outmost technical efforts in the forthcoming event," she added.

OPENING CEREMONY

The official opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympics featured various segments with a spectacular show. The ceremony under the rainy weather lasted for about four hours at the Seine River.

The athletes boat parade route for this Olympics differed from previous versions as it merged the athletes' entry procession with diverse artistic segments. Athletes from around the world travelled through Paris from east to west on more than 85 boats and ferries proudly raising their national flags during a six-kilometre-long boat parade.

Over 500,000 people enjoyed the ceremony live from dedicated viewing areas authorised by the organising committee as well as from balconies and apartments overlooking the river creating a truly delightful celebration.

The ceremony featured several French sports stars and legends, including French football star Zinedine Zidane, alongside other athletes such as Americans Carl Lewis and Serena Williams, Romanian Nadia Comaneci, and Spaniard Rafael Nadal.

SHOOTER SAID READY FOR TRAINING

Shooter Said al Khatri from the national shooting team begins his official training today, Sunday at the Châteauroux Shooting Center. The organising technical committee has allocated the morning period for all competitors in the Men's Trap Shooting event to practice on the main range providing a valuable opportunity for shooters to train and acclimatise to the range before the official competitions start from tomorrow, Monday and Tuesday.

The domestic shooter will begin his action at the qualifying rounds of the Men's Trap event. "I had excellent training sessions over the past few days through my early arrival to France. It was a remarkable training experience alongside other shooters from various countries. This is my debut Olympics experience and it is a significant motivation to deliver my best technical to honour my beloved country in this historic event. The presence at the shooting ranges in advance helped him greatly to the competitive atmosphere and get used to the weapons. Also, I am more adaptable to weather conditions and other natural factors. I am looking forward to registering top records," he concluded.



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Oman announces new LNG train in Qalhat complex

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 27

Based on the increasing global demand for clean energy (liquefied natural gas) and as part of the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to energy security and enhancing investment in the exploration and production of natural gas, the Sultanate of Oman announces the commencement of the construction of a new liquefied natural gas (LNG) train at the industrial complex in Qalhat, in the Wilayat of Sur, in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah.

This will be under the name of Sur LNG Company, with an annual production capacity estimated at 3.8 million metric tonnes, raising the Sultanate of Oman’s LNG production to 15.2 million metric tonnes per year.

This is expected to contribute to



This will be under the name of Sur LNG Company, with an annual production capacity estimated at 3.8 million metric tonnes.

enhancing the annual production of LNG and its derivatives and enable optimal utilisation of

available reserves. The government will proceed with completing the preliminary

engineering design study for the new LNG train project. This step is expected to pave the way



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi
Minister of Energy and Minerals

for making the final investment decision for the project.

Commenting on this decision, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said: “The plan to launch a new train is a pivotal addition to the strategy pursued by the Sultanate of Oman to sustain its position as an important supplier and a main, safe, and reliable source of energy globally. We are working to support the available

infrastructure and resources to respond to the increasing demand for clean energy sources and contribute to diversifying the sources of support for the national economy and ensuring its sustainability in the long-term.”

The new train will be established at the existing Qalhat LNG complex next to the current trains, allowing the government to improve operational efficiency and maximise the use of existing infrastructure. The project is expected to be completed and operational by 2029, which will enhance meeting the growing demand for LNG in the global market.

LNG revenues are considered a significant contributor to Oman’s national income, and both the Oman LNG Company and Qalhat LNG Company have achieved high reputation and reliability in the global energy market.

Dry port, logistics to be factored into new Ibri Structure Plan

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 27

Leading international urban planning and architectural design firm Broadway Malayan has announced it has been commissioned by Omani authorities to develop a structure plan for the city of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The Ibri Structure Plan – part of a series of urban development strategies initiated by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning – is being developed by a multi-disciplinary team with representatives from a number of Omani and international firms with expertise spanning all facets of the urban development space.

Represented on the team are F&M Middle East Engineering Consultancy; Cundall – a leading provider of sustainable engineering and design solutions for the built environment; Pegasys Consulting – specialists in the development of climate-resilient cities; Policy Analytics Lab – a policy think-tank; Systematica – a transport planning and mobility engineering consultancy;

Oman Think Urban – people-centred design and planning specialists; Chronicle Heritage – a global cultural resource and heritage management consultancy; Green Mawared – a provider of sustainable agriculture, climate smart natural production and digital agriculture solution; and construction consultancy firm DG Jones and Partners, among other.

“The Bedouin oasis settlement sits at the confluence of desert trading routes, boasting extensive palm groves and a historic Souq. The plan aims to transform a collection of fortified villages into a smart, resilient, and sustainable urban settlement, enhancing its cultural offerings and highlighting its unique landscape character,” said Broadway Malayan in a post.

Importantly, the Ibri Structure Plan will incorporate investment initiatives that leverage the city’s proximity to Oman’s border with



Ibri’s strategic location will be leveraged to develop a dry port, as well as logistics and manufacturing capacity.

Saudi Arabia. They include plans for a Dry Port, warehousing and logistics infrastructure, and manufacturing clusters as well.

Broadway Malayan explained: “This regional hub of the Al Dhahirah Governorate will leverage its location on the newly opened highway and border crossing, fostering new commercial links with rapidly expanding Saudi Arabia. The plan aims to accommodate a dry port, logistics, value-added industries and commerce.”

Significantly, Ibri is among 14 Omani cities that have been identified by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for development on the basis of Structure Plans that capitalise on their unique geographical, natural, strategic and resource-based characteristics.

The list also includes Suhar, Salalah and Nizwa – as part of Greater City developments, as well as Haima, Al Rustaq, Sur, Al Buraimi, Ibri, Al Mudhaibi, Sinaw, Saham, Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq.

The capital city Muscat is the subject of a detailed and comprehensive Greater City development, elements of which are already in various stages of implementation.

Future Cities identified for implementation include Sultan Haitham City and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the first phase, and Khor Jarma in the Wilayat of Sur and the Agricultural City in Najd in Dhofar Governorate – both under developmental planning presently.

6,986 residential units signed in the first year of Sultan Haitham City

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 27

In a remarkable first year since its inception, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has laid a robust foundation for Sultan Haitham City, Muscat’s premier urban development.

Launched on May 31, 2023, at the Al Barakah Palace in Muscat, the project has seen a series of substantial agreements that collectively account for the development of 6,986 residential units.

These agreements signify a strategic commitment to urban growth and innovation, underscoring the city’s vision for a sustainable and vibrant future. One of the flagship agreements was signed with Al Siyabi International Group for the development of Neighbourhood 10 (Hay Al Wafa).

This ambitious project involves an investment of RO 208 million to construct 1,644 residential units over a sprawling 770,137 square metres (sqm) of land, with a built-up area of 415,860 sqm.

During the first year, 513 units were already sold and 78% sales were achieved for the first and second phases of the Hay Al Wafa within a 3-month span, marking a significant milestone in Sultan Haitham City’s development journey.

Another notable agreement was inked with Dream Villa Development for Neighbourhood 6B. This project, with an investment of RO 6.6 million,



An artist’s rendition of the Sultan Haitham City, for illustration only.

will feature 47 residential units across 33,579 sqm of land and a built-up area of 20,005 sqm.

Impressively, within just one month of the sales launch, 10 residential units have already been sold, reflecting the high demand and confidence in the project.

Rumman International is set to develop Neighbourhood 12 B&A, involving a substantial investment of RO 204.9 million.

This development will include 1,001 residential units spread over 378,307 sqm of land, with a built-up area of 409,794 sqm. This agreement underscores the scale and ambition of Sultan Haitham City’s residential offerings.

In a significant boost to the city’s housing capacity, ASAAS will develop Neighbourhood 8 with an investment of RO 184.2 million.

This project will encompass 1,333 residential units, covering

a land area of 451,963 sqm and a built-up area of 368,449 sqm. This development is poised to enhance the urban landscape significantly.

Sarooj Construction has been entrusted with the development of Neighbourhood A13, with an investment of RO 31.6 million.

This project will consist of 287 residential units, spanning a land area of 86,053 sqm and a built-up area of 63,192 sqm.

This agreement further diversifies the housing options within Sultan Haitham City.

Adrak Developers LLC will undertake the development of Neighbourhood 12D, with an investment of RO 38.7 million. This project will feature 339 residential units on a 56,166 sqm plot, with a built-up area of 77,559 sqm.

This development is expected to contribute significantly to the city’s residential landscape.

In a move that highlights

the scale of Sultan Haitham City’s vision, Al Ahly Sabbour Developments will develop Neighbourhoods 12C, 12E, and 12F with a total investment of RO 439 million.

This expansive project will comprise 2,219 residential units, spanning a land area of 420,864 sqm and a built-up area of 879,247 sqm.

Lastly, the development of Neighbourhood 6A by Tibiaan involves an investment of RO 13.4 million. This project will feature 116 residential units across a 58,181 square meter plot, with a built-up area of 31,543 sqm.

This agreement reflects the diverse range of residential projects within the city.

For the first phase (2024-2030), Sultan Haitham City aims to cover a land area of 7,045,455 sqm, housing a population of 50,091 within 9,924 housing units and a building area of 3,510,571 sqm.

The overall plan for Sultan Haitham City encompasses a land area of 14,800,000 sqm, with a 20,000 residential units, and total residence capacity of 106,463 and extensive landscaping covering 2,900,000 sqm, including a 1,640,000 sqm central park and wadi.

In its inaugural year, Sultan Haitham City has set a precedent for urban development, marked by strategic investments and expansive residential projects that promise to transform Muscat’s urban landscape.

BYD makes impressive mark in 2024 World Car Awards

MUSCAT: Earlier this year, at the Geneva Motor Show the World Car Awards announced the top three finalists for 2024.

BYD's models, the BYD Seal and the BYD Dolphin , excelled among a host of competitors, securing spots in the top three for the “World Car of the Year” and “World Urban Car” categories, respectively, and progressing to the final round of the competition.

BYD makes history as the first and only Chinese carmaker to be short-listed in the top three for the “World Car of the Year” category.

Regarded as the top three automotive accolades globally, the “World Car Awards,” “European Car of the Year,” and “North American Car of the Year” are highly esteemed.

Dubbed the “Oscars of the automotive world”, the “World Car Awards” is particularly celebrated for its emphasis on international models, positioning it as a highly anticipated event within

the global automotive industry. BYD's exceptional performance highlights its status as a global leader in the New Energy Vehicle space.

These two models, with their distinctive design, cutting-edge technology, and robust safety features, captured the interest of over 100 automotive media experts from 29 countries.

In 2023, the BYD Seal and BYD Dolphin achieved five-star ratings in Euro NCAP and ANCAP tests. Notably, BYD Seal was also nominated for the final European Car of the Year 2024.

As a frontrunner in the new energy vehicle sector, BYD achieved a milestone with over 3 million new energy vehicle sales in 2023, securing the top spot in global sales, for the second year in a row and breaking into the top ten global automotive brands.

So far, BYD's new energy vehicles have a substantial presence across over 70 countries



and regions on six continents, encompassing more than 400 cities.

In 2023, BYD emerged as a frontrunner in new energy vehicle sales across various international

markets, including Thailand, Singapore, Colombia, and Brazil, garnering extensive consumer acclaim and preference.

Aligning with the World Car Awards' mission to foster continual innovation in the automotive sector, BYD is committed to building a comprehensive zero-emission new energy solution through technological innovations.

It aims to enhance consumer travel experiences, spearhead the new energy vehicle industry's growth and actively contribute to the automotive industry's transformation and progress.

Looking ahead, BYD will steadfastly pursue its vision to “Cool the Earth by 1°C,” continually driving the industry's green and low-carbon transformation and global sustainable development.

In Oman BYD range of electrifying vehicles will soon be distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

Bank Muscat Oman Air Visa Platinum credit card gateway to rewarding travel experience

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to provide distinctive services to its customers using Bank Muscat Oman Air Visa Platinum credit card offer, which aim to provide a unique banking experience during travel and summer holiday season, through a range of exclusive benefits and rewards.

This card brings together the best of banking convenience and lifestyle privileges tailored for travellers. Customers can still benefit from the 10% cashback on air ticket fares purchased using the Bank Muscat Oman Air Visa Platinum credit card for round trips to Salalah. The offer is valid until August 1 for travel period until August 31.

The credit card provides many benefits and rewards when shopping, dining,



and purchasing necessities and leisure amenities. The card also supports secure electronic payment for purchases locally and internationally.

Cardholders have the chance to earn 2 Sindbad miles for every 1 Rial Omani spent, welcome bonus Sinbad miles within 30 days of the first usage of the card, fast track to Silver

tier upon completion of 2 return trips within 6 months of getting the card.

Customers will also be able to benefit from free travel insurance covering personal accident insurance, loss of baggage and funds, travel cancellation, baggage delay, personal liability and legal expenses, a convenient payment plan, free access to 25 airport lounges around the world and a free shuttle service to and from Muscat and Salalah airports.

Cardholders can also benefit from easy instalment plans to purchase products and pay later with zero-interest, no additional fees and an interest-free period of up to 52 days on all purchases.

For more information about Bank Muscat Oman Air Platinum Credit Card, please visit: <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/bm-cards/Pages/Oman-Air-Visa-Credit-Card.aspx>.

Bank Nizwa organises workshop on Waqf at College of Shari’a Sciences



MUSCAT: Emphasising the role of endowments as a pillar of sustainable development, Bank Nizwa the leading and most-trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, organised Sairafah programme on endowments titled ‘Sharia Standard on Endowments issued by the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI)’.

The programme was held in cooperation with Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the Centre for Continuing Education and Community Service at the College of Sharia Sciences. Presenting the session, Dr Muhammad Sweileh, Senior Manager — Sharia Audit for Corporates at Bank Nizwa, highlighted the Sharia principles for endowments, endowments’ types and investment in endowments.

The event witnessed active participation from a number of endowment institutions across the country.

Commenting on this initiative, Khaled al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer at Bank Nizwa, said, “As the leading Islamic bank, the concept of Waqf is deeply ingrained in our values and we seek to contribute to strengthening the Waqf sector.

Our Waqf workshop is a testament to our commitment to enhancing the role of these entities, providing them with diverse expertise in Sharia-compliant investment solutions, risk management, and other important areas.

This approach not only enhances their operational effectiveness and strategic impact but also promotes greater transparency.

Furthermore, we emphasise the importance of community

engagement, fostering a culture of collaboration and inclusivity. By equipping these entities with the necessary knowledge and tools they need, we help them to optimise their resources and achieve their goals.”

He added, “We believe that the principles of Waqf institutions can be a powerful catalyst for social development and economic empowerment. By harnessing the potential of Waqf, we aspire to drive sustainable progress and create a lasting impact on society.”

It is worth noting that earlier this year, Bank Nizwa launched the Sairafah programme in collaboration with the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI).

This program targets professionals in the Islamic finance sector through a series of training sessions on AAOIFI Sharia standards. Participants receive certificates accredited by Bank Nizwa and AAOIFI, further enhancing their achievements.

The programme is meticulously designed to meet the needs of various segments of professionals, including students specialising in Islamic banking, bank employees, and staff working in financial institutions.

Renowned for its forward-looking approach, Bank Nizwa has consistently extended its expertise in Islamic finance to support Waqf entities, helping them build capacity and develop innovative solutions to maximise the impact of endowment funds.

Beyond advancing Islamic finance in the country, the bank is dedicated to empowering the local community and contributing to the holistic socio-economic development of the nation.

Vodafone Oman customers set to catch every moment of the 2024 khareef season

MUSCAT: It's the season, and Vodafone Oman has lined up unforgettable experiences to ensure customers enjoy khareef to the fullest with its “Catch the Moment” campaign. From immersive pop-ups and store activation to fun-filled bus rides, exclusive adventures and promotions, the digital operator promises this to be the most epic khareef yet.

“We are excited to launch our 2024 khareef season campaign, which will include a variety of activities that have been designed to engage, entertain and inspire people of all ages. This year, we're pushing boundaries to deliver a series of unforgettable experiences that promise to engage our customers on a deeper level and create lasting memories,” said Osama al Saifi, Vodafone Oman's Brand Manager.

“Beyond bringing joy, we aim to build on last year's partnerships, ensuring that SMEs and businesses in Dhofar continue to thrive and grow. Working together, we aim to create a supportive ecosystem



that encourages creativity and resilience contributing to the long-term prosperity of the Governorate.”

Together with its partners, Vodafone will bring the spirit of khareef to life through curated content, activities, and competitions. In partnership with Mwasalat,

Vodafone will be transforming the bus journeys for the travellers southbound offering unforgettable experiences filled with entertainment, Wi-Fi, and interactive games. Once in Salalah, customers will have much to see and do with

Vodafone starting with the Bus of Wonders tours. Carefully mapping out some of Dhofar's best kept secrets, visitors will have the opportunity to tour, explore and discover places, foods and cultures of Dhofar.

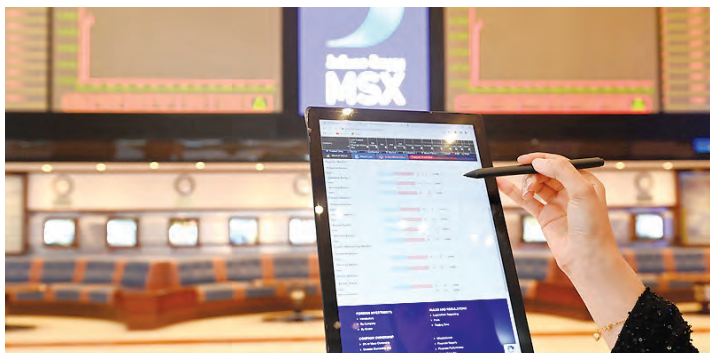
Seats on the Big Bus are available for booking through the Vodafone website and are exclusive to customers and a guest.

Vodafone's commitment to enabling more growth and development is evident in the diverse opportunities it is creating within the season's activities. Continuing its partnership with the Youth

Centre for the second consecutive year, the two like-minded organisations have planned a full calendar of summer programmes designed to empower youth across Dhofar. Additionally, a hackathon is planned to encourage creativity and problem-solving among future leaders. Leveraging Vodafone's digital prowess, an immersive pop-up store is set to take centre stage at this season's events in Al Haffa. The purpose-designed store is inviting visitors to enjoy a variety of transformational experiences that are guaranteed to engage them from the moment they step foot into to the Vodafone world.

Exciting activations are also planned at key locations including Wadi Darbat, Al Dahariz, Ittin, Al Haffa, Mughsail, Ain Jarzeez, Taqah, and Sahalnut in addition to Salalah Garden's Mall. With walk shows, kids' entertainment, competitions, and giveaways, Vodafone is set to make the season even more enjoyable.

MSX sees decline amidst anticipation for new incentives



The main index of the MSX fell by 40 points, closing at 4,656 points, marking a second consecutive week of decline.

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) experienced a collective decline last week, with stock prices dropping and the number of executed transactions decreasing. Investors are eagerly awaiting new incentives or disclosures to support daily trading activities.

The main index of the MSX fell by 40 points, closing at 4,656 points, marking a second consecutive week of decline.

The financial sector index recorded the most substantial drop, losing 92 points. The industrial sector index fell by approximately 16 points, the services sector index declined to 1,818 points (a decrease of 7 points), and the Sharia index fell by 6 points.

The market value of securities listed on the MSX last week saw a loss of RO 50.7 million, decreasing to RO 24.434 billion by the end of the week's trading.

Although the number of executed transactions dropped to 2,778 from 3,144 the previous week, the trading value rose to RO 14.7 million from RO 8.8 million.

This increase was driven by heightened trading in the shares of ahlbank, Bank Muscat, and Abraj Energy Services, which together

accounted for more than 53 per cent of the total trading value. ahlbank's shares saw trading worth RO 2.9 million, representing 19.6 per cent of the total trading value.

Bank Muscat's shares traded at RO 2.5 million, while Abraj's shares accounted for 16.8 per cent of the total trading value, with trading worth RO 2.488 million.

Last week, the prices of 16 securities rose, while 37 securities saw declines, and 22 securities remained stable.

Salalah Mills shares increased by 9.9 per cent, closing at 531 baisas, and Oman Mills shares increased by 7.7 per cent to close at 527 baisas.

On the losing side, Oman Fisheries shares dropped by 11.1 per cent to close at 40 baisas.

Oman Qatar Insurance shares fell by 9 per cent to close at 170 baisas, and Oman Packaging shares also fell by 9 per cent to close at 200 baisas.

In corporate news, the Oman Real Estate Fund announced that its board of directors decided in its meeting on July 25 to distribute interim cash dividends of 1.4 baisas per unit to all unit holders, with the due date set for August 8.

— ONA

Al Mazunah Free Zone: A key gateway for Gulf-Yemen trade

MUSCAT: Al Mazunah Free Zone, the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, an affiliate with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), serves as a major Gulf gateway for transit trade to Yemen and from there to East African countries.

It is located in the far southwest of Oman on the land border with the Republic of Yemen.

Eng Ahmed bin Khamis al Kasbi, Director-General of Al Mazunah Free Zone, highlighted that the zone, which spans 15 million square metres, was established to enhance trade between Oman and Yemen.

He emphasised that the zone is attracting significant interest from investors, particularly Yemeni businessmen.

Al Kasbi revealed that investments in the first half of this year exceeded RO 5 million bringing the total investment in the zone to RO 140 million, with 185 lease contracts across various sectors, including 102 operational projects.

The zone management aims to attract industrial sector investments to ensure sustainable investment activity. The unique feature of Al Mazunah Free Zone is its approved dry port, where all port operations such as handling, export and import are conducted.

During the first half of



Investments in H1 2024 exceeded RO 5 million bringing the total investment in the zone to RO 140 million.

2024, the zone received goods weighing over 100,000 tonnes, with commercial movement and goods transfer through the zone increasing from 33,000 tonnes in 2014 to 220,000 tonnes by the end of 2023.

Al Kasbi explained that the zone offers numerous incentives and advantages specific to free zones.

These include a 30-year income tax exemption, no requirement for income declarations, easy trading and transferring of foreign currencies, exemption from the Commercial Agencies Law and customs duties, the ability to import all goods permitted in Oman, 100 per cent project capital ownership for investors, a reduced Omanisation rate of 20 per cent, adoption of Yemeni customs data for imported goods, and the issuance of certificates of origin.

Additionally, the zone grants

factories a national certificate of origin, facilitates residence and visa issuance for non-Omani investors, allows the establishment of representative offices within Omani customs territory, and provides a single joint market for diversified Omani and Yemeni goods at reasonable prices.

Yemeni workers can also work in the zone without a work visa or entry visa.

Al Kasbi noted that RO 5 million was invested in infrastructure projects, including the completion of road networks, sewage and rainwater drainage channels, and a security fence meeting the latest standards.

The zone continues to offer numerous investment opportunities for the private sector, including establishing, operating and managing a water desalination plant and refrigerated warehouses.



Eng Ahmed bin Khamis al Kasbi
Director-General of Al Mazunah Free Zone

The general plan for the region is divided into industrial activities, public services, warehouses and commercial and service sites.

All necessary services are provided to investors through the "Masar" Centre or one-stop shop.

Investors also benefit from the electronic Eltizam system for managing operations, with about 16,500 transactions conducted in the first half of this year. This system won second place in the Best Practices Award in the Logistics Sector organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

An electronic system to manage entry and exit, operated by a private company, is also in place. Al Kasbi concluded by noting the completion of the services building in the zone at a cost of RO 3 million. The building is now ready to accommodate requests from service companies in customs clearance, exchange, handling and free trade sectors.

Total credit granted by banks in Oman reaches RO 31.1 bn

MUSCAT: The total credit balance granted by the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman saw a 3.2-per cent increase, reaching approximately RO 31.1 billion by the end of May 2024.

Credit extended to the private sector grew by 3.1 per cent by the end of May, reaching RO 26.1 billion. Data from the Central Bank of Oman indicated that non-financial companies accounted for the largest share of the credit



balance at 45.4 per cent by the end of May, followed by the individual sector at 45.3 per cent.

The remaining percentage was distributed among the financial companies sector at 5.7 per cent and other sectors at 3.6 per cent. Total deposits in the banking sector grew by 9.2 per cent, amounting to approximately RO 30 billion by the end of May 2024.

Within this total, private sector deposits increased by 14 per cent,

reaching RO 20.4 billion.

Regarding the distribution of the total deposit base for the private sector, the data showed that the individual sector held the largest share at 50.4 per cent, followed by the non-financial corporate sector and the financial corporate sector with shares of 29.4 per cent and 17.4 per cent respectively.

The remaining 2.8 per cent was distributed among other sectors.

— ONA

US defends law forcing sale of TikTok application

SAN FRANCISCO: TikTok's collection of user data makes it a national security threat, the US Justice Department said on Friday in response to a civil suit by the Chinese-owned firm aimed at preventing the forced sale of the app.

TikTok's suit in a Washington federal court argues that a law, which forces the video platform to be sold next year or face a US ban, violates First Amendment rights of free speech.

The US response counters that the law addresses national security concerns, not speech, and that TikTok's Chinese parent company ByteDance is not able to claim First Amendment rights in the United States.

"Given TikTok's broad reach within the United States, the capacity for China to use TikTok's features to achieve its overarching objective to undermine American interests creates a national-security threat of immense depth and scale," the Justice Department wrote in its filing.

It details concerns that ByteDance could, and would, comply with Chinese government

demands for data about US users or yield to pressure to censor or promote content on the platform, senior justice department officials said in a briefing.

TikTok gives Beijing the "means to undermine US national security" by collecting vast amounts of sensitive data from US users, and by utilising a proprietary algorithm to control which videos users see, the DOJ filing said.

"That algorithm can be manually manipulated, and its location in China would permit the Chinese government to covertly control the algorithm — and thus secretly shape the content that American users receive," it added.

TikTok responded to the DOJ filing on Saturday, saying "the Constitution is on our side."

"The TikTok ban would silence 170 million Americans' voices, violating the First Amendment," the company said in a statement on social media platform X, referring to the app's users in the United States.

"As we've said before, the government has never put forth



US flag is placed on a TikTok logo in this illustration from a file picture. — Reuters

proof of its claims, including when Congress passed this unconstitutional law."

The DOJ filing argues that the law's focus on foreign ownership of TikTok takes it out of the realm of the First Amendment.

US intelligence agencies are concerned that China can "weaponise" mobile apps, justice department officials said.

"It's clear that the Chinese government has for years been pursuing large, structured datasets of Americans through all sorts

of manner, including malicious cyber activity; including efforts to buy that data from data brokers and others, and including efforts to build sophisticated AI models that can utilise that data," a senior justice department official said.

According to the DOJ filing, the national security threat "posed by TikTok is real, as evidenced by the public record and confirmed by classified information supplied by the intelligence community."

TikTok has said the demanded divestiture is "simply not possible"

— and not on the timeline required.

The bill signed by President Joe Biden early this year set a mid-January 2025 deadline for TikTok to find a non-Chinese buyer or face a US ban.

The White House can extend the deadline by 90 days.

"For the first time in history, Congress has enacted a law that subjects a single, named speech platform to a permanent, nationwide ban, and bars every American from participating in a unique online community with more than one billion people worldwide," said the suit by TikTok and ByteDance.

ByteDance has said it has no plans to sell TikTok, leaving the lawsuit, which will likely go to the US Supreme Court, as its only option to avoid a ban.

"There is no question: the Act will force a shutdown of TikTok by January 19, 2025," the lawsuit said, "silencing (those) who use the platform to communicate in ways that cannot be replicated elsewhere."

TikTok first found itself in the crosshairs of former president

Donald Trump's administration, which tried unsuccessfully to ban it.

That effort got bogged down in the courts when a federal judge temporarily blocked Trump's attempt, saying the reasons for banning the app were likely overstated and that free speech rights were in jeopardy.

The new effort signed by Biden was designed to overcome the same legal headaches, and some experts believe the US Supreme Court could be open to allowing national security considerations to outweigh free speech protection.

"We view the statute as a game changer from the arguments that were in play back in 2020," a senior justice department official said.

There are serious doubts that any buyer could emerge to purchase TikTok even if ByteDance would agree to the request.

Big tech's usual suspects, such as Facebook parent Meta or YouTube's Google, will likely be barred from snapping up TikTok over antitrust concerns, and others could not afford one of the world's most successful apps. — AFP

Rollercoaster in crypto as regulators take a closer look

Last week was a whirlwind for the cryptocurrency industry, with significant developments in regulation, adoption, and market volatility.

In Singapore, a terrorism threat assessment highlighted the continued reliance of terrorist groups on cash, despite some increased use of cryptocurrency, prompting the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) to raise the risk level for crypto exchange platforms and digital payment token service providers.

Meanwhile, the Financial Stability Board (FSB) issued a warning about the potential risks of stablecoin adoption in emerging markets and developing economies, citing concerns about financial instability, macro-financial risks, and regulatory challenges.

The report identifies several key concerns related to stablecoin adoption in developing nations, including threats to financial integrity, increased potential for



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AS THE CRYPTO INDUSTRY GRAPPLES WITH REGULATORY CHALLENGES AND STRIVES FOR MAINSTREAM ADOPTION, TRADITIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS ARE INCREASINGLY VENTURING INTO THE DIGITAL ASSET SPACE.

illicit finance, data privacy issues, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and the need for enhanced consumer and investor protections.

Despite these risks, the demand for stablecoins in these regions remains strong due to their potential to address financial inclusion challenges and provide a hedge against local currency instability.

To mitigate the risks, the FSB recommends that policymakers and regulators establish robust regulatory frameworks, enhance cross-border regulatory cooperation, and build local capacity to manage and supervise stablecoin activities.

In the United Kingdom, Coinbase's subsidiary, CB Payments Ltd. (CBPL), has been fined \$4.5 million by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) for breaching a voluntary agreement related to customer onboarding.

This action, marking the first enforcement action under the Electronic Money Regulations 2011, raises concerns about potential money laundering risks

and signals increased scrutiny for crypto exchanges in the region.

While regulatory concerns loom large over the crypto industry, Coinbase is also taking steps to promote onchain payments.

The exchange has recently launched a new feature that allows users to seamlessly transfer USDT on the Tron network to Coinbase Wallet, where it is automatically converted to USDC on the Base network, free of charge.

This move aims to simplify the process of utilising stablecoins for transactions, especially in light of Coinbase's broader efforts to encourage onchain payments.

As the crypto industry grapples with regulatory challenges and strives for mainstream adoption, traditional financial institutions are increasingly venturing into the digital asset space.

A prime example of this trend is the collaboration between Franklin Templeton, a major asset management firm, and Japan's SBI Holdings.

The two companies are joining forces to launch a new crypto

entity this year, with plans to introduce Bitcoin and Ethereum ETFs to the Japanese market.

This move shows a growing recognition of the potential of digital assets among traditional financial players and could pave the way for further integration of cryptocurrencies into mainstream investment portfolios.

The growing interest in digital assets is not limited to traditional financial players. Stablecoins, particularly Tether's USDT, are also experiencing significant traction.

Recent data reveals that USDT is leading Ethereum volume with a daily volume of \$31.5 billion, surpassing the combined volume of the top 10 other ERC-20 tokens.

Furthermore, Tether has issued \$1 billion in new USDT tokens on the Tron blockchain, contributing to the overall growth of the stablecoin market cap.

However, the broader cryptocurrency market has faced some turbulence in recent days.

The launch of nine spot Ethereum exchange-traded funds (ETFs) on Tuesday, initially hailed as a crypto milestone, has not prevented Bitcoin and Ether prices from falling.

Market analysts attribute this drop to several factors, including a downturn in the tech industry, a "sell the news" phenomenon following the ETF launch, and the resumption of Mt. Gox repayments, which has introduced a large amount of Bitcoin back into the market.

Despite the shocking market dip, the cryptocurrency market has shown signs of resilience, bouncing back with a relief rally as I am writing this article.

Ethereum (ETH) and Bitcoin (BTC) have both experienced notable gains, with other major cryptocurrencies like Solana (SOL) and Polkadot (DOT) also seeing positive movement.

However, Ethereum spot ETFs, which saw significant inflows on their first day of trading, have experienced outflows in subsequent days, particularly the Grayscale Ethereum Trust (ETHE).

India's Union Budget 2024 highlights



DR MYTHLI KOLLURU

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Nirmala Sitharaman, the Indian Finance Minister, recently released the Union Budget 2024. The budget's central themes are job creation and skill development.

The finance minister is known for her focus on inclusive growth, tax reforms, and investments in vital sectors.

Nirmala Sitharaman, in her 7th consecutive 86-minute budget speech, explicitly stated that their focus is on employment, skilling, MSMEs, and the middle class.

The union budget plans to spend \$24 billion on job creation, education, and skilling.

The budget provisions ensure that the farmers' livelihood is supported and improved.

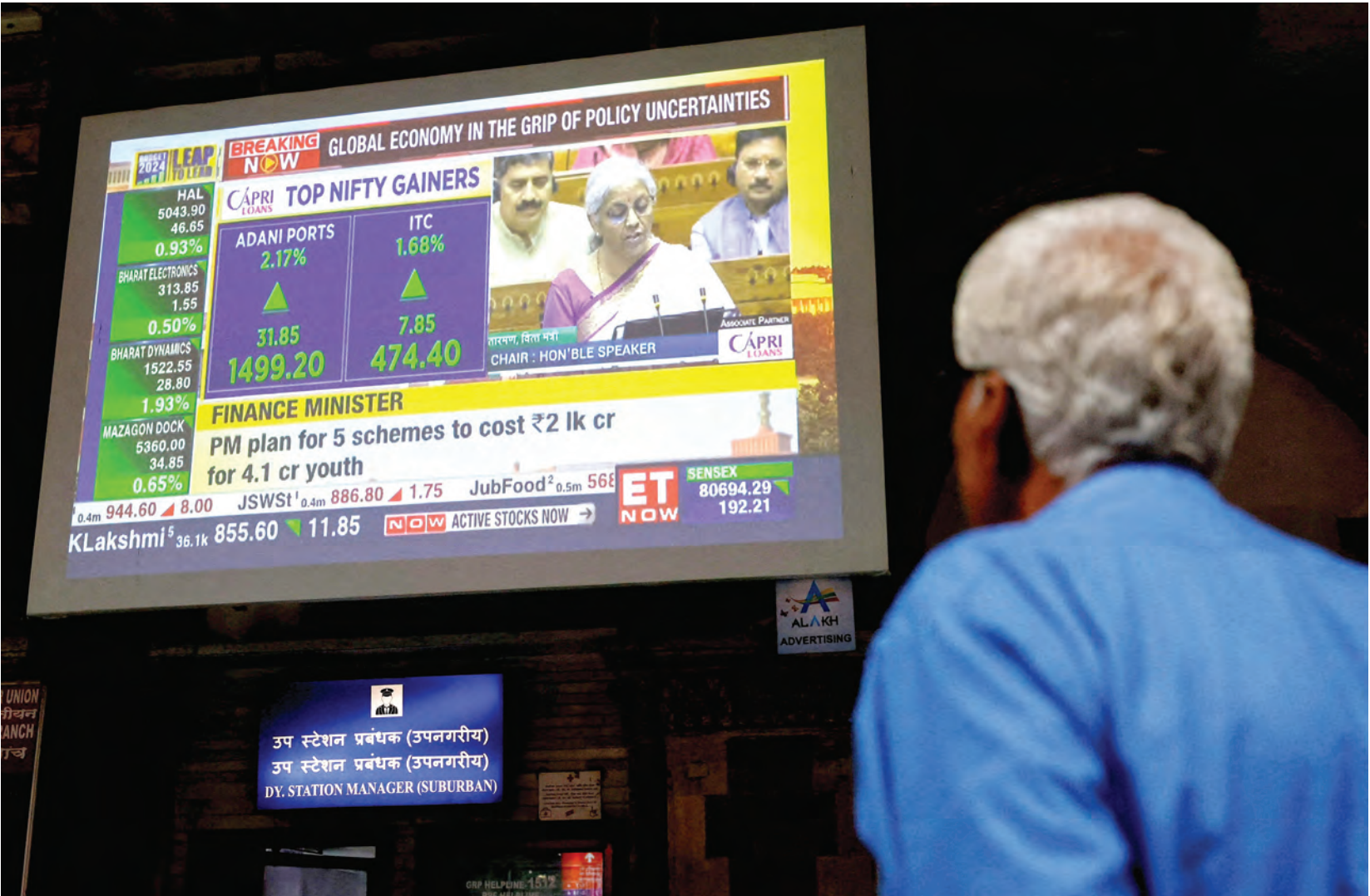
The budget aims to sustain India's economic growth by focusing on employment, infrastructure, and manufacturing, which is crucial for maintaining India's status as one of the fastest-growing major economies.

The budget emphasises fiscal consolidation, revising the fiscal deficit target to 5.8% of GDP for FY24, with aims to reduce it to 5.1% in FY25 and 4.5% by 2025-26 to ensure long-term economic stability and boost investor confidence.

Some of the key highlights of

the budget are:

- The budget proposes a strategic reduction in the corporate tax rate for foreign companies from 40% to 35%. This move, in line with the government's vision for enhancing global competitiveness and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), is a critical factor in India's economic growth and job creation.
- The budget's decision to maintain the income tax slabs for individual taxpayers is a clear signal of the government's focus on the corporate sector, which is responsible for increasing corporate activity and job creation, rather than the middle class.
- The standard deduction will increase from INR (Indian Rupee) 50,000 to INR 75,000, a significant boost for salaried employees under the new tax regime.
- This substantial increase not only enhances financial security for individuals but also fosters optimism about their future, potentially boosting consumer spending and stimulating economic activity.
- The abolition of the angel tax for all classes of investors is a significant step towards promoting startups and investments.
- This move is expected to stimulate economic growth and foster hope for the development of startups and investments in India.
- INR 2 lakh crore package to facilitate employment and skilling opportunities for 4.1 crore youth over five years. This decision reflects a proactive approach to addressing the unemployment issue.
- INR 1.52 lakh crore for agriculture and allied sectors and INR 2.66 lakh crore for rural development, including infrastructure projects and housing.
- Railways has a budget of INR 2.4 lakh crores, and defence has the largest share of the budget with INR 6.2 lakh crores. The investment will contribute to



A man watches a screen displaying India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's budget speech at a railway station in Mumbai. – Reuters

THE BUDGET AIMS TO SUSTAIN INDIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH BY FOCUSING ON EMPLOYMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND MANUFACTURING, WHICH IS CRUCIAL FOR MAINTAINING INDIA'S STATUS AS ONE OF THE FASTEST-GROWING MAJOR ECONOMIES.

developing border infrastructure, a strategic asset for the country.

- The budget includes developing 12 industrial parks and establishing a INR 1,000 crore venture capital fund to promote the space sector.
- Over INR 3 lakh crore was allocated for welfare schemes benefiting women and girls, and the Mudra loan limit was substantially increased from INR 10 lakh to INR 20 lakh.
- Capital gain taxes will be increased on short-term and long-term investments in stocks, land, and property.
- Citizens will now have to pay more tax on profits from these instruments.
- The budget focuses on job creation, a significant challenge facing the country. In her speech,

the Finance Minister stated that the government will spend INR 2 lakh crores on job creation for three initiatives.

- The first initiative is a paid internship. In this initiative, the top 500 companies will be encouraged to recruit trainees and pay them INR 5000 monthly, and they will also pay them a one-time assistance amount of INR 6000. The companies will fund this project from their CSR budget. The Government of India states that 100 million youth will benefit from this programme.
- The second initiative is a skilling programme, in which the government offers loans to the youth for upskilling. Candidates can get a loan from the government up to INR 7.5

lakhs.

- The third initiative is a direct benefit transfer for those newly entering the workforce in the formal sectors. A sum of 15,000 or one month's salary, whichever is higher, will be deposited in their pension account.
- Around 2 million new job entrants can benefit from this scheme.
- Loans of up to INR 10 lakhs for over 100,000 students in domestic institutions have been announced for higher education.
- The budget introduces significant changes in customs duties and taxation, 25 critical minerals, crucial for chip and electronics manufacturing, are now exempt from customs duties.
- Import taxes on gold, silver, mobile phones, and chargers have been reduced.
- The Finance Minister has called for a comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act.

These measures aim to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce consumer costs.

However, the financial markets did not receive the announcement of changes to the capital gains tax well, with both the Sensex and Nifty indices closing in negative territory.

The 2024 Union Budget aims to foster inclusive growth, attract FDI, and enhance welfare.

However, the budget's success hinges on effectively translating policy into tangible outcomes. External pressure on commodity prices will challenge the stability of the inflation rate.

The lack of changes in the middle-class personal income slabs means the overall tax burden for the taxpayer is the same, and it might further increase income inequality.

India's 2024 budget presents a mix of continuity and reform, and its success depends on India's ability to navigate both domestic and global economic challenges.

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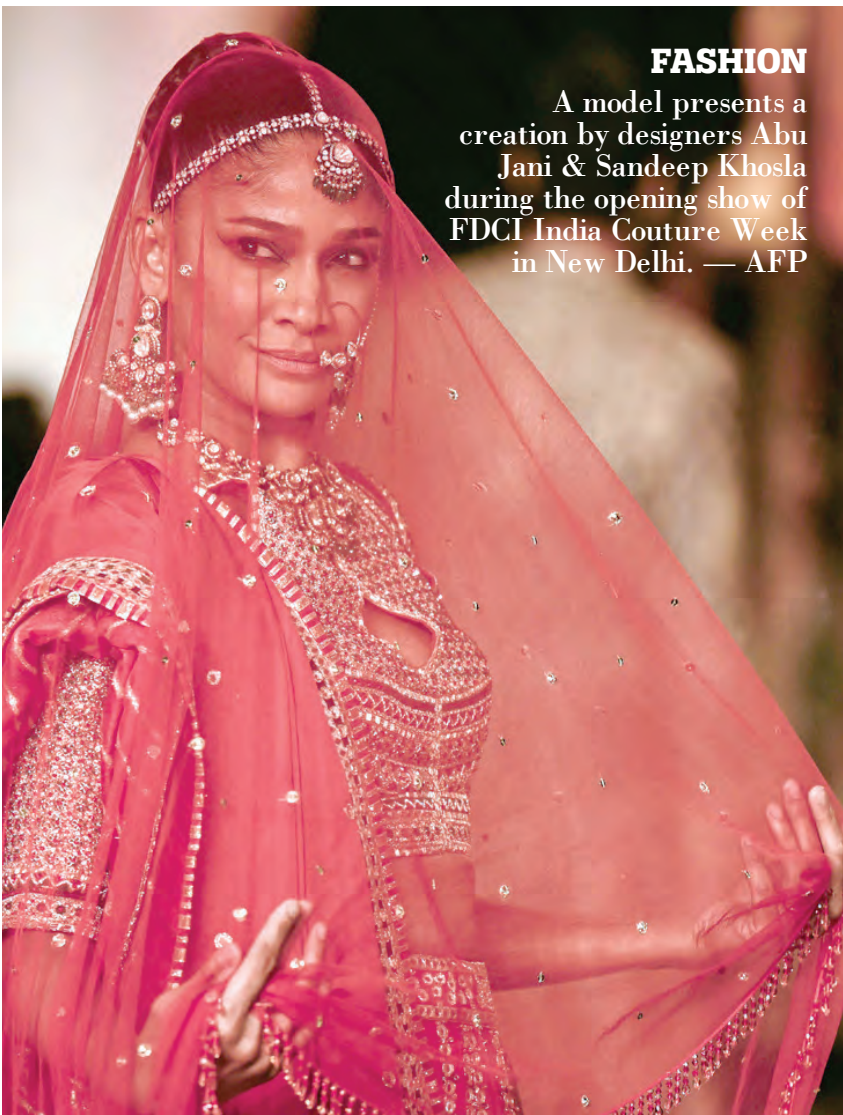
ENVIRONMENT

A volunteer releases a baby Loggerhead sea turtle into the sea at Puerto Banus beach in Marbella. — AFP



FOOD

Mother and baby goats eating brush and grass vegetation to prevent the spread of potential wildfires on the land of the indigenous San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, in San Bernardino, California. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by designers Abu Jani & Sandeep Khosla during the opening show of FDCI India Couture Week in New Delhi. — AFP



OPERA

Lebanese-Russian soprano Anna El-Khashem (Zerlina) and Italian baritone Davide Luciano (Don Giovanni) perform on stage during a rehearsal of “Don Giovanni” opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Nigerian singer, songwriter, actress and activist Yemi Alade, poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

art & life

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NEW DRUG THAT ACHIEVES AMAZING RESULTS IN TREATING DIABETES DEVELOPED

A team of American scientists has achieved great progress in treating diabetes, by developing a new drug that enhances insulin-producing cells by 700 per cent.

During a study conducted by scientists from Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan and the Clinical Research Center, tests of the drug on mice with diabetes showed a significant increase in insulin-producing cells by 700 per cent over the course of only three months, which effectively reversed the disease.

Scientists have proven the existence of new hope through a treatment that combines two drugs. The first is harmine, which is a natural molecule found in some plants, and works to inhibit an enzyme called DYRK1A found in beta cells, and the second is a GLP1 receptor agonist.

They found that this therapeutic combination works in vivo promoted significant increases in human beta cell mass transplanted into mice with type 1 and type 2 diabetes, insulin-producing cells grew within the body within just three months, and remission was maintained even after treatment was discontinued.

The study showed that the observed effects were due to changes in beta cell proliferation, function, and longevity.

Katherine Czarneski, lead author of the study, explained that beta cells in the pancreas perform the important function of producing insulin in response to blood sugar levels, but the hallmark of diabetes is that these cells are either destroyed or cannot produce enough insulin.

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Maestro accused of striking singer won't return to his ensembles

JOHN ELIOT GARDINER, an eminent conductor who was accused of striking a singer in France last year, will not be returning to three renowned period ensembles he founded, the board overseeing them announced on Wednesday.

Gardiner, 81, who is one of the world's most celebrated conductors, will no longer lead the three groups: the Monteverdi Choir, the English Baroque Soloists and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique.

The board of the Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras, the non-profit that oversees all three ensembles, said on Wednesday that it had decided that Gardiner, who had been on leave since the incident in France last summer, "will not be returning to the organisation."

"The MCO takes seriously its obligations to protect victims of abuse and assault and preventing any recurrence remains a priority for the organisation," the group said in a statement.

Gardiner sought to frame the decision as his own, saying in a later statement on Wednesday that it came after "a great deal of soul-searching since the deeply

regrettable incident" in France.

He drew widespread criticism after he was accused of striking the singer, William Thomas, a rising bass from England, on the face last summer after a performance of the first two acts of Berlioz's opera "Les Troyens" at the Festival Berlioz in La Côte-Saint-André. Gardiner was apparently upset that Thomas had headed the wrong way off the podium at the concert, people at the festival said at the time.

After the incident, Gardiner abruptly returned to London to see his doctor and withdrew from performances. He expressed regret, saying he had lost his temper but that "physical violence is never acceptable." He also apologised to Thomas.

Since the altercation, Gardiner, a major figure in the period-instrument movement, has largely retreated from public view, stepping back from his day-to-day duties with the Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras, where he had served as artistic director. Gardiner founded the Monteverdi Choir in 1964 for a performance of Monteverdi's

"Vespers of 1610" at Cambridge University when he was a student. He went on to found the English Baroque Soloists in 1978 and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique in 1989.

On Wednesday, Gardiner said he had been undergoing therapy and counselling, and that he had "apologised repeatedly and unreservedly for losing control in such an inappropriate fashion."

He declined to be interviewed. Gardiner conducted at the coronation of King Charles III of Britain and has performed on leading stages around the world, released many acclaimed recordings and written a book about Johann Sebastian Bach, "Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven."

The Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras had seemed to be working towards a solution that would allow Gardiner to return to the podium.

The organisation announced in February that Gardiner would extend his time away, adding, "it is our shared aim that he will be in a position to return to conduct the Monteverdi Choir and



Orchestras later in the year."

On Wednesday, the group said that it had considered "the possibility of a rehabilitation process," but it did not provide details.

The group praised Gardiner's "extraordinary musical influence over the past 60 years" and said it was "proud to have enabled and promoted his long and illustrious career, alongside that of many other musicians."

No successor to Gardiner was named. Guy Bellamy, a spokesperson for the Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras, said that "an announcement on future plans and appointments will follow in the coming weeks."

After a long absence, Gardiner returned to the stage this month, conducting the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France at a festival in Montpellier, France. He said in

his statement on Wednesday that he had no intention of retiring.

"For the avoidance of doubt, I am not in any sense ready to retire," he said. "I will be focusing on a rich variety of other activities, including guest conducting, recording, writing, creative and education projects (to which I am deeply committed) as part of a lighter, lower-pressure schedule." — **NYT**

CHINESE SCIENTISTS DISCOVER WATER MOLECULES IN MOON SAMPLE

A TEAM OF CHINESE scientists has identified in a lunar sample retrieved by Chang'e-5 a kind of mineral enriched with water in its molecular structure.

An increasing body of evidence has pointed to the existence of water or water ice on the moon's surface, but it is more likely to be in the form of hydroxyl groups. Scientists led by those from the Institute of Physics under the Chinese Academy of Sciences have discovered a hydrated mineral that contains up to six molecules of crystalline water.

According to a study published recently in the journal



Nature Astronomy, water molecules weigh as much as about 41 per cent of the total mass.

The researchers said this discovery signifies the first direct detection of molecular water within the lunar regolith, shedding light on an actual form of water molecules and ammonium on the moon's surface.

The mineral's structure and composition bear a striking resemblance to a mineral found near volcanoes on Earth. At the same time, terrestrial contamination or rocket exhaust has been ruled out as the origin of this hydrate, according to the study.

This finding has unveiled a potential form in which water molecules may exist on the lunar surface: hydrated salts. Unlike volatile water ice, these hydrates are very stable in high-latitude regions of the moon, even in sunlit areas.

The researchers said this discovery opens up new possibilities for the future development and utilisation of lunar water resources.

Utilising in-situ resources on the moon will lay a foundation for establishing a long-term lunar station. China aims to build the basic model of an international lunar research station by 2035. — **ONA**



BARKA FORT THROUGH A PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE



BY ZUWAINA AL SULAIMANI

Barka Fort, one of the most renowned forts in Oman, graces the picturesque coastline of Barka. As a historical landmark, it has captivated the hearts of tourists and photographers alike, symbolising both beauty and strategic significance.

Historians believe the fort was constructed during the Yaruba dynasty (1646-1741), while others claim it was built under Imam Ahmad bin Said's reign (1749-1783). Regardless of its exact origins, Barka Fort played a crucial role in Oman's defence due to its strategic coastal location.

The fort's architecture seamlessly blends defence and residence, reflecting both fortifications and remarkable living spaces. Its massive structure includes four defensive towers, two of which have collapsed. Tall, solid walls once served as an impressive defence against invaders. Inside, the fort boasts a mix of defensive and residential areas designed to support its residents during both peace and conflict.

Visitors enter through a carved wooden gate leading to 'Al-Sabah' or the guards' corridor, which then leads to a high open courtyard. The courtyard walls feature beautifully carved wooden windows. Barka Fort comprises defensive towers, guard rooms, military ammunition stores, a mosque, and living facilities, including four internal wells. The first floor houses the Majlis, a spacious reception hall where people once waited to meet the judge or imam. The Imam's suite includes a dining room and two connected rooms, used as a bedroom and reception area, overlooking the sea and beach.



PHOTOS BY MAHMOOD AL RIYAMI

The fort's artillery is not its only impressive feature. The wide staircase in the inner courtyard forms a striking horizontal structure balanced by the magnificent arches of the mosque's portico. Traditional openings in the walls frame the large octagonal tower, providing a full view of the fort's symmetrical and creative architecture.

Omani photographer Mahmood al Riyami has captured the beauty of Barka Fort through his lens, driven by his passion for photographing historical and natural places. "Choosing the right angles and lighting is crucial," Al Riyami notes.

"I aim to highlight the fort's grandeur and the intricate details that tell its story." Despite challenges like the constant movement of vehicles and people, his patience allows him to capture stunning images that showcase the fort's detailed architecture.

Al Riyami's portfolio also includes Nizwa Fort, the village of Sayma, and the green landscapes of Salalah. His work is a visual journey through Oman's diverse landscapes and people.

"Each location has its unique charm and story," he says. "Whether it's the architectural beauty of the forts or the stunning natural scenery, Oman offers never-ending artistry." Equipped with a professional camera and zoom lens, Al Riyami adapts to various weather conditions, advising aspiring photographers on the importance of having the right equipment.

More than just an artistic pursuit, Al Riyami's photography is a mission to preserve and celebrate Oman's heritage. "Through my lens, I hope to showcase the beauty and history of Oman," he says. His work encourages young photographers to explore this field and contribute to preserving Oman's rich culture and tradition.