

HM receives cable from Jordan King

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a cable of thanks from King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in response to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of the Kingdom's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, King Abdullah II expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments which reflect the depth of relations between the two countries. He also prayed to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty and to realise the Omani peoples' aspirations of further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. – ONA

SUNRISE - 05:22 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:54 AM

DHUHR - 12:14 PM

ASR - 03:32 PM

MAGHRIB - 07:02 PM

ISHA - 08:25 PM



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AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR ROSE PRODUCTION DOUBLES IN 2024

The output of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar rose season this year (2024) increased to 20 tonnes, compared to 11 tonnes produced during the corresponding season last year (2023). The augmented output, valued at RO 200,000, highlights the efforts made by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), through its business centre and incubators. Issam bin Saif al Zakwani, senior executive at ASMED business centre and incubators at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, said that rosewater is added as flavouring in food and beverages and enters in the industry of cosmetics, creams, aromatic soaps and fertilisers. – ONA

Israeli strike kills eight at Gaza aid centre



Displaced Palestinian children receive food in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday. – AFP

GAZA: Eight Palestinians were killed on Sunday in an Israeli air strike on a training college near Gaza City being used to distribute aid, Palestinian witnesses said, as Israeli tanks pushed further into the southern city of Rafah.

The strike hit part of an industrial college run by the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA now providing aid to displaced families, the witnesses said. UNRWA and the Israeli military did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

“Some people were coming to receive coupons and others had been displaced from their houses and they were sheltering here. Some were filling up water, others were receiving coupons, and suddenly we heard something falling. We ran away, those who were carrying water let it spill,” said Mohammed Tafesh, one of the witnesses.

A Reuters photographer saw a low-rise building completely demolished and bodies wrapped in blankets laid out beside the road, waiting to be taken away.

“We pulled out martyrs [from beneath the rubble], one who used to sell cold drinks and another who used to sell pastries and others who distributed or received coupons,” Tafesh said.

“There are about four or five martyrs and 10 injured. Thank God, the condition of the injured is good.”

More than eight months into Israel's war in the Hamas-administered Palestinian enclave, its advance is focused on the two areas its forces have yet to seize: Rafah on Gaza's southern tip and the area surrounding Deir Al Balah in the centre.

Meanwhile, the Israeli occupation forces bombarded a house in Sabra Neighbourhood in southern Gaza City on Sunday, and another in the central Gaza Strip, killing ten Palestinians.

Palestinian news agency (Wafa) reported local sources as saying that the Israeli warplanes carried out an air strike, which targeted a house in Sabra Neighbourhood in southern Gaza City, murdering eight civilians and injuring others.

— Agencies

80 endangered wild mammal species monitored nationwide

MUSCAT: The National Biodiversity Survey Project is one of the most important national projects undertaken by the Environment Authority with a view of improving the environmental performance ranking of the Sultanate of Oman, building a national database for wild mammal species and updating their areas of presence and the changes they have undergone.

A team from *Oman* newspaper, sister publication



of the *Observer*, in coordination with the Environment Authority, followed up the installation of a camera trap in a mountainous area in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq in Al Batinah South Governorate.

The field teams involved in the National Biodiversity Survey Project continue to carry out their tasks starting from Dhofar Governorate and then the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Al Batinah North.

Since the launch of the project in 2022, the teams have been exploring the secrets of nature and wildlife in the Sultanate of Oman.

DETAILS ON P2

YouTube most popular social media platform among children in Oman

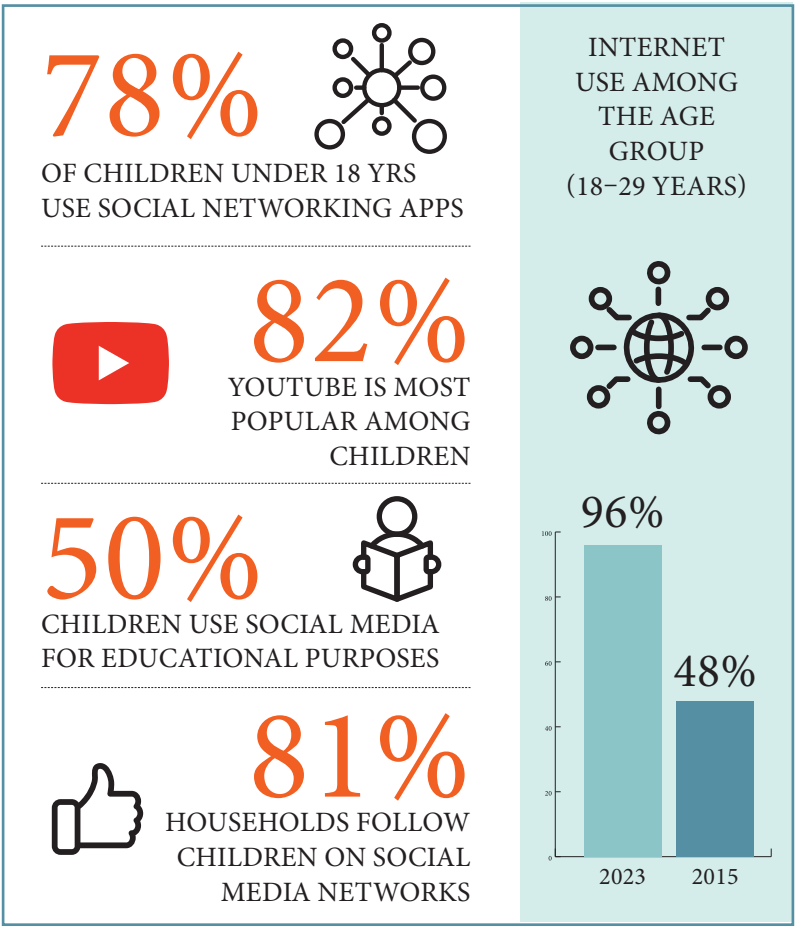
VINOD NAIR
@vinox_nair

Around 78 per cent of children under 18 years old in the Sultanate of Oman use social networking applications, according to the latest survey by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

YouTube is most popular among children (82 per cent), while 81 per cent of households follow children on social media networks. Around 50 per cent of children use social media platforms for educational purposes.

Several heads of households (52 per cent) feel that their children use social media.

Some 96 per cent of citizens used one of the social media applications in the last three months, of which 99 per cent used WhatsApp, followed by YouTube users (75 per cent),



Instagram users (69 per cent), and Facebook users (20 per cent).

Around 53 per cent of individuals believe that using social media applications has had a positive impact on their lives, compared to only 10.1 per cent who stated that it has had a negative impact.

Internet use among the age group (18–29 years) increased from just 48 per cent in 2015 to 96 per cent in 2023.

Citizens spend three and half hours daily on WhatsApp application, two and half hours on X, three hours on Instagram, and two and half hours on Youtube.

The positive effects of social media include providing useful information and knowledge, communicating with acquaintances and friends, and reviewing news and developments in events.



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OMANI HAJ MISSION RETURNS HOME



MUSCAT: The Omani Haj mission on Sunday returned home from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, after providing its services to Omani pilgrims in the Holy Lands as they performed Haj rituals. The members of the mission were received upon their arrival at Muscat International Airport by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and several officials from the ministry. This year, the Omani Haj Mission was headed by Sultan bin Said al Hinai. The mission had left Oman for Saudi Arabia on June 2, 2024. — ONA

Student company uses mesquite wood for industrial products

IBRI: A student company from ‘Abu’ Darda School’ in the Wilayat of Ibri, Al Dhahirah Governorate, managed to produce commercially viable products from mesquite trees. The company made efforts to introduce the timber as high-quality industrial products, reflecting the Education Ministry’s keenness to support student endeavours in the field of entrepreneurship. Codenamed ‘Salaba’ (solidity), the student firm extracts solid wood from mesquite tree and markets it as high-quality planks for wooden flooring. The company’s end-products are environment-friendly, pest-resistant and easy to dismantle and install. The products also serve as good insulators against heat and moisture. — ONA

Majlis Ash’shura meeting discusses draft laws, pacts

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

The Majlis Ash’shura on Sunday held its 9th regular session for the first annual convening of the 10th term under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash’shura.

Among the topics discussed were notably the draft law on electronic transactions, and the draft law regulating the transfer and transplantation of human organs and tissues. The members of the council were also briefed on the draft financial laws and the draft law on special economic zones and free zones.

Dr Talal al Muharbi, Vice President of Ash’shura Legal Affairs, reviewed the committee’s report on the draft electronic transactions law. The draft electronic transactions law was approved and referred to the Majlis to complete its legislative session.

Mansour al Hajri, Head of Ash’shura Health, reviewed the committee’s report on the draft law regulating the transfer and transplantation of human organs and tissues, while Dr Talal mentioned the legal opinion on the articles of the draft law.

The agenda also included discussing and approving the report of the relevant temporary committee on the file of job seekers, in addition to discussing the vision of the Economic and Financial Committee regarding both the draft agreement to be signed between the government and the government of the Republic of Cyprus to avoid double taxation and prevent tax evasion with regard to taxes on income.

A draft agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government



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of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding joint administrative assistance in the field of customs was also discussed.

A number of committee reports were also discussed and the expression of interest referred to by the office for study, including the report of the Health and Social Committee. The expressed regarding the services provided to children in social care homes in the Sultanate of Oman, and the report of the Economic and Financial Committee were also discussed. Concerning the work of the Omani Export Credit Guarantee Agency, in addition to the report of the Food and Water Security Committee on the expressed desire regarding the status of government companies working in the field of fisheries.

The Majlis Ash’shura will host on Monday, June 24, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and will deliver her ministry’s statement during a public session.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Ash’shura, who explained that the statement of the Minister of Higher Education, Research and

Innovation, will discuss mainly five factors, as specified earlier. These relate to the policies and programmes of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in the Sultanate of Oman, and the five-year strategies and plans.

The statement will also address legislation and laws related to higher education, including the Higher Education Law and its executive regulations.

They will also addresses the issue of developing the Unified Admission Centre, and the extent to which it meets the needs of the next stage, especially in light of the presence of outcomes for vocational and technical tracks, in addition to the issue of scholarship, recognition, and equivalency of academic qualifications.

The statement will also devote a special focus to private higher education institutions, during which it will address institutional and programme licensing policies in private institutions, the ministry’s evaluation, and the evaluation of private higher education institutions, in light of the reports of the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Education Quality Assurance.

Monitoring 80 endangered wild mammal species in Sultanate of Oman

YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

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The field teams involved in the National Biodiversity Survey Project continue to carry out their tasks

starting from Dhofar Governorate and then the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Al Batinah North.

Since the launch of the project in 2022, the teams have been exploring the secrets of nature and wildlife in the Sultanate of Oman.

Haitham bin Sulaiman al Rawahi, an environmental systems specialist and head of the National Biodiversity Survey Project’s working teams, said:

“The survey managed to record important findings at the local and international levels by monitoring a group of rare and endangered species including the Masirah gazelle for the first time using camera traps.”

“The Arabian lynx was also sighted and documented twice in Musandam Governorate after an 8-year hiatus. In addition, a group of wild animals comprising 5 to 8



Photographs by Hussain al Miqbali

species were monitored in Dhofar Governorate which represents a hotbed of biodiversity. We also monitored the Arabian tahr in Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah governorates, and are currently awaiting search results from Al Batinah North and South governorates.”

Al Rawahi pointed out that the most important challenges facing the field teams involved in the



Project are the high temperatures in summer which increases the risk of team members being exposed to sunstroke when temperatures touch 50 degrees Celsius.

In addition, tough terrain makes it difficult for the team members to carry out the survey operations because they have to walk long distances amid the rugged terrain of Al Hajar Mountains and the mountains of Dhofar Governorate.

Field work constitutes 50 per cent of the National Biodiversity Survey Project and the 50 per cent is distributed over the administrative and scientific aspects of the project, Al Rawahi said adding that which aims to achieve the strategic goals and programmes of Oman Vision 2040 as well as build a comprehensive database for biodiversity, obtain statistics on the numbers of species and determine



the priorities of conservation and protection programmes.

A total of 804 square kms have been surveyed in 9 governorates spanning an estimated area of 32,900 square kilometres at a rate of 88 field work days with 683 cameras traps installed with the participation of 181 employees from the Environment Authority. As a result, 80 species were documented so far, he said.



Activities of Summer Centres kick off in Al Batinah North

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 23

The Summer Centres activities kicked off in Al Batinah North Governorate, under the title ‘My Summer of Entrepreneurship and Creativity.’ The programme was organised by Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North in collaboration with various government, private institutions and civil society organisations.

The initiative aims to provide a diverse range of programmes meeting the needs of the youth.

Dr Abdullah bin Said al Busaidy, head of the Committee of the Summer Centres in Al Batinah North, highlighted the modern concept of this year’s edition saying “The launch of the second edition of the summer centres programmes comes with a modern concept that aligns with the job market requirements and realisation of ‘Oman Vision 2040.’ The programme runs from June 23 to July 23.

A key feature of this year’s programme is the introduction of an electronic platform for registration, making it easier for participants and parents to enrol in various programmes and workshops.

This flexible registration process ensures accessibility and convenience, allowing for broad participation across the



The summer programme includes over 166 diverse activities with 35,000 students taking part in the Governorate.

‘My Summer of Entrepreneurship and Creativity’ programmes use e-platform for registration and focuses on skills-based programmes

governorate. Dr Al Busaidy says the flexible registration process allows participants and parents to easily enrol in the various programmes and workshops through the electronic platform.

Around 33 participating entities were divided into three phases. Preparations included meetings and workshops,

defining the organisational structure, determining financial and administrative needs, proposing operational and marketing plans, and finalising the proposed programmes and activities.

The summer programme includes over 166 diverse activities, engaging more than 33 institutions and approximately 35,000 students from the governorate’s schools. These programmes cover recreational, cultural, sports, religious, economic, and social activities, to meet the needs and interests of youth of all age groups.

Another feature is the focus on new types of skills-based programmes. These include training workshops in

entrepreneurship, labour market, and trade, such as ‘21st century skills and jobs’ workshops which aims at equipping youth with modern skills needed in the job market like coding, design thinking, innovation, AI, and mobile app programming. They are designed to stimulate creative and technical thinking among participants.

The activities also include awareness workshops and exhibitions on important topics, art sessions to enhance artistic creativity, Quran memorisation programmes to instil religious and moral values, and sports training programmes under specialised coaches to develop physical skills and promote teamwork.

How to deal with short circuits at home

MUSCAT: The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has warned people of fire risks due to overuse of electronic gadgets at home, especially under extreme heat conditions.

“As temperatures rise, the electrical appliances, upholstery, and furniture at home may be affected, and this may cause accidents such as electrical short circuits or damage to some devices as a result of extreme heat and a lack of care to secure the house,” OETC said.

Some of the tips to be followed are:

Avoid using a shared electrical outlet. Only use one air conditioner.

Disconnect unused electrical devices. Charge the phone away from the bed.

Avoid leaving the exhaust fans running for long periods.

Switch off the power and gas sources and, if possible, remove any material that may catch fire to prevent the spread of fire.

Evacuate all the people from the house and assist the elderly, children, and individuals with special needs to leave quickly before the spread of fire.

Fight the fire with any firefighting equipment available, including the fire blanket.

In cases of thick smoke, use a wet towel over your mouth and nose to avoid choking.



NCSI HOLDS SURVEY ON SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT SERVICES



MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) will implement the 3rd edition of an opinion poll on beneficiaries’ satisfaction with government services starting from today, June 24. The survey will run till November 30, 2024.

The survey aims at identifying the opinions of customers with the services provided by government entities, assess the level of satisfaction with aspects related to submitting or completing the requested services, identifying

the opinion of beneficiaries of electronic services and evaluating the level of satisfaction in order to improve the quality of the provided services.

The opinion poll survey is carried out over the phone, targeting a random sample of customers of government entities during the period of the last quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024 in accordance with a set of basic criteria for evaluating government services. — ONA

Safe evacuation carried out for Ghala building blaze



Around 80 people were safely evacuated after a fire broke out in a building in the Ghala Industrial Area in the Wilayat of Bausher. The evacuated people were in good health, the authorities said.

Al Sumr tree: Sustaining life in Oman’s harsh climates

TEXT, PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The local ‘Al Sumr’ tree has multiple uses. Its shade protects the sun’s rays, and its wood used for fire wood, and from the nectar of its flowers we taste the finest natural honey.

Its status in the past was more than just a tree that summarises stories from the memory of our ancestors. The tree provides humans with food and construction tools for making homes and feeding animals.

‘Al Sumr’ (*Acacia tortilis*) is the tree of the dry and semi-arid regions. Called ‘acacia’ it is described as the ‘thorny umbrella’ tree. It is abundant in shade, dense with leaves and thorns, its

rise is horizontal, and has many branches, some of which are single, double, or three-stemmed. It is a source of livelihood for humans. Among domestic animals, the most important types of which are ‘Al Aqratah’ Earrings” and ‘Al Arbad’. The male of the Samar tree is called ‘Al Shabhanah’ which is few and rare.

‘Al Sumr’ grows on sand dunes, rocky surfaces, and in the bottom of muddy valleys. It avoids areas flooded with seasonal flood waters. It can live in harsh climatic conditions when the annual rainfall decreases to 40 millimetres. It tolerates rainfall at a rate that may reach 1,200 millimetres.

It tolerates drought and for an entire year, its veins extend 50 feet



into the sandy soil.

Its lifespan exceeds 200 years. The characteristics of the three varieties of this tree can be identified by its green leaves and the long branches of its branches.

The height of this tree is about 20 feet. The colour of its wood (outer bark) tends to yellow, and has long thorns. This tree secretes a brown sticky resin during the summer.

The length of the tree depends

on the amount of water it receives. The average height is limited to between 1 and 5 metres. It has a prominent role in the ecosystem with the green spaces and provides simple water needs.

The flowering season is a favourite time for honey collectors. The bees graze on its flowers and produce a reddish-black honey with a pleasant smell. It is locally called ‘Al Baram’ honey, meaning brown honey. It is considered one of the most expensive types of natural honey because of the nutritional value it contains, because it is extracted from the brown buds.

This type of honey is distinguished by its reddish-black colour and strong odour.

“Al Sumr’ leaves and fruits

are good food for camels and sheep during grazing. In ancient times, people used its branches to build roofs. Its firewood is also a good, low-smoking fuel, but unfortunately it is a tree threatened with extinction due to natural factors such as torrential floods and strong winds”, a specialist in Oman’s biodiversity told *Observer*.

“Interaction by members of society remains an important matter in preserving it, by avoiding logging and using available alternatives with modern means of cooking and heating to ensure the achievement of environmental sustainability, which the government seeks to restore to its previous era and to preserve the rarest plant species from extinction”, he adds.



GLOBAL RATES
INDICATE THAT
DRUG FRAUD
REPRESENTS ABOUT
10%
OF THE SIZE OF THE
DRUG MARKET IN
THE WORLD

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

Counterfeit medicines represent a significant global crisis affecting every country, including developed nations.

The World Health Organization warned two days ago of the spread of three counterfeit batches of the ‘Semaglutide’ medication used to treat Type 2 Diabetes and obesity in some countries. It also noted that these counterfeit batches had been detected in both Brazil and the United Kingdom in October 2023 and the United States in December 2023.

The pharmaceutical industry is considered one of the best-selling activities around the world. One of the main reasons for the spread of counterfeit medicines is the spread of Internet sites that sell medicines without prescriptions. This has contributed to increasing the sales of this type of medicine and the ease of access to it.

WHO further stated that patients who use these products could protect themselves from counterfeit medications and their harmful effects by taking measures such as purchasing medications with prescriptions from licenced doctors and avoiding purchasing them from unfamiliar or unreliable sources, such as those found on the Internet.

If the counterfeit medicine trade is so widespread, a logical question is: Can you as the user, spot counterfeit medicines before you take them? Detecting counterfeit medicines may not be easy for consumers.

But on the other hand, some ways may enable you to avoid buying counterfeit medicines. People should always check the packaging and expiration dates of medicines when purchasing them, and use the products according to the prescription.

Every medicine that is manufactured in a company other than its original company is counterfeit. Every medicine that does not have the name of the manufacturer and country of origin on it is counterfeit, and every medicine that does not contain the active ingredient contains ineffective

ingredients or substances other than the original active ingredient is counterfeit. Also, any expired medicine is considered counterfeit medicine, regardless of its source.

To identify the adulterated medication, one must follow the following:

Medicines, especially life-saving medicines, should not be dispensed except from a pharmacy and in the presence of a specialised pharmacist, because he is more knowledgeable about counterfeit medicines than anyone else.

If you suspect that the medicine is counterfeit, you must note if there are spelling errors, bad printing, or a change in the colours of the drug packaging or pharmaceutical form from the original medicine known to us.

CONSUMER
PROTECTION
MEASURES

 PRESCRIPTION
PURCHASES

 AVOID UNRELIABLE
SOURCES

 CHECK
PACKAGING

 LICENCED
PHARMACIES

The production and expiration dates must be compared in the numbers on the package and the numbers on the inner strip because any difference means that the medicine is counterfeit.

It is always preferable to have a trusted doctor or pharmacist to refer to if you suspect any of these cases.

Counterfeit medicines have become a global phenomenon and a cross-border trade, as counterfeit or counterfeit medicines are a threat to any health system, due to their direct and significant impact on the system and the treatment of patients.

Experts confirm that drug fraud is a global phenomenon, and global rates indicate that drug fraud represents about 10 per cent of the size of the drug market in the world.

COMBATTING COUNTERFEIT MEDICINES



People react following an Israeli strike that hit a tent camp, in Al Mawasi area in western Rafah. — Reuters

ISRAELI TANKS AT EDGE OF RAFAH REFUGE ZONE

CAIRO: Israeli tanks advanced to the edge of the Mawasi displaced persons' camp in the northwest of the southern Gaza city of Rafah on Sunday in fierce fighting with Palestinian fighters, residents said.

Images of two Israeli tanks stationed on a hilltop overlooking the coastal area went viral on social media, but reporters could not verify them.

"The fighting with the resistance has been intense. The occupation forces are overlooking the Mawasi area now, which forced families there to head for Khan Younis," said one resident, who asked not to be named, on a chat app.

More than eight months into Israel's war in the Palestinian enclave, its advance is focused on the two areas its forces have yet to

Residents said Israeli tanks had pushed deeper into western and northern Rafah in recent days, blowing up dozens of houses

seize: Rafah on Gaza's southern tip and the area surrounding Deir al Balah in the centre.

Residents said Israeli tanks had pushed deeper into western and northern Rafah in recent days, blowing up dozens of houses.

The Israeli military said it was continuing "intelligence-based, targeted operations" in the Rafah area and had located weapons stores and tunnel shafts, and killed Palestinian gunmen.

The armed wings of

Palestinian groups and movements said their fighters had attacked Israeli forces in Rafah with anti-tank rockets and mortar bombs and pre-planted explosive devices.

Elsewhere, an Israeli airstrike killed eight Palestinians in Sabra, a suburb of Gaza City in the north, and another strike killed two people in Nuseirat in central Gaza.

The military said it had struck dozens of targets throughout the Strip. On Saturday, Palestinian health officials said at least 40 Palestinians had been killed in separate Israeli strikes in some northern Gaza districts, where the Israeli army said it had attacked Hamas's military infrastructure. Hamas said the targets were the civilian population.

In Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip, health officials at Kamal Adwan Hospital said a baby had died of malnutrition, taking the number of children dead of malnutrition or dehydration since October 7 to at least 30, a number that health officials say reflects under-recording.

Israel's ground and air campaign in Gaza was triggered when Palestinian groups stormed into southern Israel on October 7, killing around 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 captives, according to Israeli tallies.

The offensive has left Gaza in ruins, killed more than 37,400 people, according to Palestinian health authorities, and left nearly the entire population homeless and destitute. — Reuters

Israeli occupation troops tie wounded Palestinian to jeep in West Bank raid

TEL AVIV: Israeli troops tied a wounded Palestinian man to a military vehicle during a raid in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, the army said on Sunday, admitting that soldiers had violated operational procedures.

Footage of the incident, which occurred on Saturday, has gone viral and shows a Jenin resident strapped horizontally to the bonnet of a military jeep as it passes through a narrow alley.

Medics identified the Palestinian as Mujahid Fayyad from the Jabriyat neighbourhood located between the town of Burqin and Jenin.

The military said the Palestinian was wounded during an "operation" launched in the area of Wadi Burqin to apprehend wanted suspects.

During an exchange of fire between troops and Palestinians, one of the suspects was wounded and apprehended, the military said in a statement.

"In violation of orders and standard operating procedures, the suspect was taken by the forces



Israeli army vehicles close off the entrance to the West Bank. — AFP

while tied on top of a vehicle," the statement said.

"The conduct of the forces in the video of the incident does not conform to the values of the IDF (military)," it added.

"The incident will be investigated and dealt with accordingly," the military said, adding that the wounded man was transferred to the Palestinian Red Crescent for treatment.

Fayyad is currently being

treated at Jenin's Ibn Sina hospital, medics at the facility said.

Jenin has long been a stronghold for Palestinian groups, and the Israeli army routinely carries out raids in the city and adjacent refugee camp.

Violence in the West Bank, which had already surged before the Gaza war broke out on October 7, has only escalated since.

At least 553 Palestinians have

At least 553 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli troops or settlers since the Gaza war broke out

been killed in the West Bank by Israeli troops or settlers since the Gaza war broke out, according to Palestinian officials.

Attacks by Palestinians have killed at least 14 Israelis in the West Bank over the same period, according to a tally of Israeli official figures.

The Gaza Strip has been gripped by more than eight months of war since October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,194 people, according to Israeli official figures.

Palestinian groups took 251 captives, 116 of whom remain in Gaza, including 41 the army says are dead.

Israel's military offensive on Gaza has since killed at least 37,551 people, also mostly civilians, according to the territory's health ministry. — AFP

Hezbollah targets barracks after commander's death

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Hezbollah group said on Sunday it had targeted two military positions in northern Israel with an armed drone in response to the killing of a commander.

Israel and the powerful Lebanese group, a Palestinian Hamas ally, have exchanged near-daily cross-border fire since the Gaza war erupted on October 7.

Hezbollah's announcement came hours after it published a video excerpt purporting to show locations in Israel along with their coordinates, amid heightening fears of an all-out conflict between the two foes.

On Saturday, the group announced the death of one of its commanders, Ayman Ghotmeh, saying he was killed "in a treacherous Zionist raid" in Khirah in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa area.

Israel later confirmed it had carried out the strike, saying Ghotmeh was responsible for supplying the Fajr Forces, the armed wing, and Hamas with weapons in the area.

Hezbollah on Sunday said its fighters launched a strike "with an attack drone" on a military leadership position in the Beit Hillel barracks "in response to the assassination carried out by the Israeli enemy in the town of Khirah". Hezbollah later said it had struck with a "squadron of assault drones" the "headquarters of the newly created 91st Division in Ayelet Hashahar" near the northern Israeli city of Safed.

— AFP



Smoke plumes rise from a fire in a field after a drone launched from southern Lebanon landed near Moshav Dishon in the Upper Galilee near the Lebanese border. — AFP

■ WITHOUT FOOD OR TOYS



A girl stands holding a child surrounded by the rubble of buildings destroyed during Israeli bombardment in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. Desperation among Gaza's 2.4 million population has increased as the fighting has raged, with warnings from humanitarian agencies that they are unable to deliver aid. — AFP



Ruto ready for ‘conversation’ with protesters in Kenya

NAIROBI: Kenya’s President William Ruto said on Sunday that he was ready for “a conversation” with thousands of “peaceful” young protesters who held nationwide demonstrations this week to oppose proposed tax increases.

Organised on social media and led largely by Gen-Z Kenyans who have livestreamed the demonstrations, the protests have caught Ruto’s government off-guard, as discontent mounts over his economic policies.

“I am very proud of our young people... they have stepped forward peacefully and I want to tell them we are going to engage them,” Ruto said in his first public comments on the protests.

“We are going to have a conversation so that together we can build a greater nation,” Ruto said during a church service in the Rift Valley town of Nyahururu.

His characterisation of the protests as “peaceful” came after rights campaigners reported two deaths following Thursday’s demonstrations in Nairobi.

There was no immediate response to his remarks from the protesters, who have called for a national strike on June 25.

The demonstrations were mostly peaceful, but officers fired tear gas and water cannon throughout the day to disperse protesters near parliament.

A Kenya Human Rights Commission official said on Saturday that 21-year-old Evans Kiratu was “hit by a tear gas



Kenyan Police officers watch protesters as they block the street during a mass rally in Kibera, Nairobi. – AFP

canister” during the protests and died in hospital.

On Friday, a police watchdog said it was investigating allegations that a 29-year-old man was shot by officers in Nairobi after the demonstrations.

The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) said it had “documented the death... allegedly as a result of police shooting” on Thursday.

Several organisations, including Amnesty International Kenya, said that at least 200 people were injured in the protests in Nairobi, as thousands of people took to the streets across the country.

Following smaller-scale demonstrations in Nairobi on Tuesday, the cash-strapped government agreed to roll back several tax hikes laid out in a new

bill.

But Ruto’s administration still intends to increase some taxes, defending the levies as necessary for filling its coffers and cutting reliance on external borrowing.

Kenya has a vast debt mountain, and servicing costs have ballooned due to a fall in the value of the local currency over the last two years, leaving Ruto with few options. — AFP

EU seeks defence industry with Japan, South Korea

TOKYO: The European Union is seeking security and defence industry partnerships with Japan and South Korea aimed at joint development of military equipment, the Nikkei reported on Sunday, citing a senior EU commission official.

These would mark the EU’s first such security and defence-related collaboration with Asian nations, the Japanese business newspaper said in a report from Brussels that did not identify the official.

The bloc hopes to reach a ministerial-level agreement with Japan by year end, which could help the EU fund joint projects managed by Japanese and European companies, the Nikkei said.

Representatives of Japan’s foreign ministry and the South Korean and EU delegations in Tokyo were not immediately available for comment on the report on Sunday.

Japan, despite a constitution that renounces war, says it faces “the most severe and complex security environment since World War Two”. In recent years it has boosted its defence industry in its largest postwar military expansion, expressing concern about threats from Asia neighbours and North Korea.

Tokyo signed a treaty last year to establish a programme to develop an advanced fighter jet with Britain and Italy.

This month Japan started talks with the United States on forging deeper defence industry collaboration under the US-Japan Forum on Defense



European flag flies outside the European Commission headquarters in Brussels. – Reuters file photo

Industrial Cooperation, Acquisition and Sustainment, established in April by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and President Joe Biden. Japan-US discussions have so far focussed on naval repairs in Japan that could help free up US yards to build more warships, but cooperation could be extended to aircraft repairs, missile production and military supply-chain resilience.

Tokyo seeks to counter China’s increasing maritime assertiveness and has expressed concerns over any potential instability in the Taiwan strait.

It has sought deeper defence cooperation with the United States and the Philippines, and last week conducted a maritime exercise with the US, Canada and the Philippines in the South China Sea, where China’s expansive claims conflict with those of several other Asian nations. — Reuters

SEARCH AMID DEBRIS



Workers stand amid debris near a house in the hamlet of Sorte, south of Lostallo in the Moesa Region in the Swiss canton of Graubünden (Grisons) after violent downpours caused floods and landslides. Swiss authorities in the southeastern canton of Grisons said that they were searching for three people missing after heavy flooding the previous day in the region. – AFP

Drone attack damages merchant ship in Red Sea

DUBAI: A drone attack damaged a merchant ship in the Red Sea near Yemen early on Sunday morning, though no injuries were reported, according to a British maritime security agency.

Vessels in and around the Red Sea, which is vital to world trade, have come under repeated attack for months in Yemen. The Yemenis say they are acting in support of Palestinians during the war with Israel in the Gaza Strip.

The attack occurred about 120 kilometres west of the Yemeni port city of Hodeida, said the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), which is run by the Britain’s Royal Navy.

“The Master of a merchant vessel reports being hit by uncrewed aerial system (UAS), resulting in damage to the vessel. All crew members are reported safe, and the vessel is proceeding to its next port of call,” said a bulletin from the agency. “Authorities are investigating,” it added.

Later on Sunday, UKMTO said it received a distress call from a second vessel, this one off Yemen’s southeastern coast, that had “suffered flooding that cannot be contained”, without specifying what caused the incident.

“This has forced the master



A flight operating crew member signals a F/A-18E Super Hornet fighter jet on the flight deck of the USS Dwight D Eisenhower (CVN 69) aircraft carrier in Southern Red Sea. – Reuters file photo

and crew to abandon the ship. They have been recovered by an assisting ship,” UKMTO said in an incident report, adding that the flooded vessel “remains adrift”.

On Saturday, United States Central Command, which has carried out retaliatory strikes against Yemeni targets over their attacks on shipping, said it had destroyed three nautical drones belonging to the group over the previous 24 hours.

Explosions were reported near a ship east of the Yemeni port city of Aden on Friday, Britain’s maritime safety agency

UKMTO said.

The attacks have prompted reprisal strikes by US and British forces and the formation of an international coalition to protect the vital shipping lanes through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

“It was determined these systems presented an imminent threat to US, coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region,” Central Command said. It also said the rebels had launched three anti-ship missiles into the Gulf of Aden, but no injuries or significant damage were reported. — AFP



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In brief

■ MEXICO CITY



SECOND SOUTHERN MEXICO MAYOR KILLED IN A WEEK

A second southern Mexico mayor has been killed in less than a week, local authorities announced, after he went to visit an indigenous community.

The murder of Acacio Flores, who represents Malinaltepec, comes days after the killing of Salvador Villalba Flores, another mayor from Guerrero state elected in June 2 polls.

The body of Flores was discovered with a bullet wound to the back of the head in the back of a van in Malinaltepec, a human rights campaigner said.

The rights activist had been involved in negotiations to free the politician after he was detained on Thursday in an indigenous village. — AFP

■ BEIJING



LANDSLIDE KILLS EIGHT IN CHINA AFTER HEAVY RAINFALL

A landslide in a mountainous area of central China has left eight people dead, state media said, as parts of the country were placed on high alert for bad weather.

Heavy rain caused a deadly landslide in a village in Hunan province, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Four houses collapsed early on Sunday and all eight missing people “have been found with no vital signs”, the channel said.

Authorities issued several red alerts for torrential rain on Sunday. Downpours in southern and densely populated Guangdong province sparked inundations and landslides, with at least 38 people killed. — AFP

■ WARSAW



STORMS CAUSE SOME INJURIES AND DAMAGE IN POLAND

Three people were reported injured by storms in Poland over the weekend. The emergency services had been called out almost 2,200 times on Saturday to deal with flooded roads and basements, and falling trees had cut power lines.

Around 20,000 households were temporarily without power. A branch torn off a tree by the storm fell on a kayak in which two people were paddling on the Wieprz river near Zwierzyniec in south-eastern Poland. The storm blew over a number of yachts during a regatta on Lake Solina. Dozens of people had to be rescued from the water, with one taken to hospital. — dpa

Ukraine missile strikes on Crimea peninsula

MOSCOW: A Ukrainian missile attack on Sunday on a city in the Russian-annexed Crimea peninsula killed three people, including two children, and wounded over 100, officials said.

Fragments hit beachgoers in Sevastopol after at least one missile was intercepted by air defences and exploded in the air, according to officials.

Sevastopol governor Mikhail Razvozhayev wrote on Telegram that two children and one adult had died. A Russian health ministry official told RIA Novosti news agency that 124 people were injured, including 27 children.

Russia’s defence ministry said Ukraine used US-supplied weapons in the attack and accused it of using cluster munitions.

Sevastopol, a Black Sea port city and naval base on the Crimean peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014, regularly comes under fire from Ukraine but Sunday’s attack was unusually deadly.

Razvozhayev said the attack hit Uchkuyevka, an area with sandy beaches and hotels.

Videos posted on social media showed people running from the beach as explosions went off and people in swimming outfits carrying a stretcher.

A local news channel on Telegram, ChP Sevastopol, cited witnesses as saying that an elderly woman was killed as she swam in the sea.

The investigative committee, which probes major crimes, said it was opening an investigation into “a terrorist act”.

The governor said Ukraine

had launched five missiles which Russian air defences intercepted over the sea but fragments fell onto the shore area and shrapnel wounded people.

Razvozhayev said missile fragments hit beach areas in the north of the city and set fire to a house and woodland.

A Russian defence ministry statement said Ukraine committed a “terrorist attack on the civilian infrastructure of Sevastopol with US-supplied ATACMS tactical missiles loaded with cluster warheads”.

On Sunday, another Russian strike hit a house in the city, killing one and injuring five, regional governor Oleg Synegebov said. Kharkiv mayor Igor Terekhov said three people were wounded by a separate strike on a children’s educational facility.

A drone launched by Ukraine on Russia’s southern Belgorod region on Sunday killed a man, the governor said.

Three Ukrainian attack drones struck Graivoron, near the border with Ukraine, said Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov, with one hitting a car park near a multi-storey block of flats.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in a social media post urged supporter countries to help Ukraine step up attacks on Russian soil.

“We have enough determination to destroy terrorists on their territory - it is only fair — and we need the same determination from our partners. We can stop Russia,” Zelensky wrote. — AFP



Rescuers work at the site of a destroyed residential building following an aerial bomb in the centre of Kharkiv. — AFP

Germany’s Scholz receives Argentinian President Milei

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz received Argentinian President Javier Milei in Berlin on Sunday for talks after their greeting that was accompanied by a small number of protesters.

The two leaders stopped for a brief photo opportunity, shaking hands in front of the government centre.

Several dozen demonstrators protested against the controversial Milei, who describes himself as an anarcho-capitalist. They stood by the Chancellery holding posters saying, “Away with Milei.”

Milei was originally due to receive a full welcome with military honours, but this, alongside a joint press conference, was cancelled at short notice.

Instead, the two leaders were meeting for talks scheduled to last just one hour, reportedly at Milei’s request.

The meeting between the two leaders is likely to focus primarily on economic issues. Argentina has large reserves of raw materials such as lithium that are urgently needed in Germany for the energy transition. In addition, talks on a free trade agreement between the European Union and the South American economic organisation Mercosur remain deadlocked.

Milei, who was elected with more than 55 per cent of the vote in November’s presidential elections, arrived in Germany on Saturday to receive a medal from the Friedrich August von Hayek



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz receives Argentine President Javier Milei at the Chancellery in Berlin, Germany. — Reuters

Foundation in the northern port city of Hamburg.

He collected the award from the think tank — named after the Austrian pioneer of neo-liberalism — as hundreds of protesters demonstrated outside the venue against his invitation.

Around 200 supporters attended the ceremony, including notable right-wing German politicians such as Beatrix von Storch, a lawmaker from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

Only a handful of global leaders have received Milei since he took office, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Italy’s Giorgia Meloni, El Salvador’s President Nayib Bukele and Pope Francis.

Milei skipped traditional early

visits to Argentina’s neighbours Brazil and Chile due to wide ideological differences. He has visited the United States a number of times without receiving an invitation to the White House, instead meeting with Tesla chief Elon Musk and former President Donald Trump.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz urged Argentinian President Javier Milei to employ socially acceptable policies as he implements radical economic reform, Scholz’s official spokesman, Steffen Hebestreit, reported.

Scholz had stressed that social cohesion needed to be protected during the talks in Berlin on Sunday, which lasted 60 minutes as planned, Hebestreit said.

— dpa

Aide to UK minister calls Rwanda migrant plan ‘crap’

LONDON: The UK interior minister has defended a parliamentary aide who called the government plan to deport illegal migrants to Rwanda “crap”, in a leaked audio revealed by the BBC Sunday.

A controversial law by the Conservative government allowing irregular migrants arriving in the UK to be deported to Rwanda was finally passed in April, after months of parliamentary wrangling.

But in the recording James Sunderland, a parliamentary aide and Conservative party candidate, was heard saying: “the policy is crap, ok? It’s crap.”

“But it’s not about the policy. It’s about the effect of the policy”, he went on to say, speaking at a Youth Conservatives conference in April.

“There is no doubt at all that when those first flights take off it will send such a shockwave across the Channel”, Sunderland clarified.

Home Secretary James Cleverly said he was “surprised”, when asked about the audio,

before saying Sunderland was making a “counterintuitive statement to grab the attention”.

Cleverly told Sky News on Sunday that his aide Sunderland “is completely supportive of the deterrent effect”.

Sunderland told the BBC he was “disappointed” to have been recorded at a private event, and said although the policy is “not the be all and end all”, it is “part of a wider response”.

No flights deporting asylum seekers have actually taken off yet for the African country, due to lengthy legal challenges. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said the policy would only come into effect after the election, if he was re-elected.

Supporters of the Rwanda policy say it will deter tens of thousands of annual cross-Channel arrivals by small boats, and insist the policy is already having an impact.

More than 12,000 irregular migrants have crossed the Channel to Britain on small boats this year, according to government data. — AFP



Britain’s Home Secretary James Cleverly appears on the BBC’s “Sunday Morning” political television show with journalist Laura Kuenssberg. — AFP

‘Learning by Doing’ should be encouraged at home



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

As the long summer forces families to mostly stay indoors and young children are even more often seen in front of a digital screen, parents worry about their children forgetting all that has been learnt in school. This can be easily solved by implementing a ‘Learning by Doing’ philosophy for children of all ages.

First proposed by American educationist John Dewey in the 1930s, this theory was a clean strike against traditional passive learning in school. It actively propagated more participatory ways of learning — that is, the theory that children learn better and faster when they are engaged in an activity revolving around what is being learnt rather than just from a textbook.

Although this sounds like common sense today, it is amazing to see just how traditional learning in schools still is. However, homes can re-create this philosophy and ensure that children are engaged in continuous learning, even if they are not aware of it at all times.

Learning by Doing is also called experiential learning — a theory based on the fact that children learn through their own experiences, including coming up with a situation, understanding the challenges to be overcome, and possible solutions, and doing a project which may or may not work out — it is the doing that is important, not the result.

Learning by Doing is popular in the classroom today, with teachers being trained in these methods, time allows. However, how can this be transferred into a home learning context?

Many such opportunities began to be talked about during the lockdown a couple of years ago but continue to stay relevant today. Depending on the age of a child, there are many opportunities to learn just from the everyday routines of home.

A young child could easily learn by simply being asked to take out stuff from the refrigerator — numbers, colours, items, textures and even names of fruits and vegetables are all right there.

The same refrigerator has the potential to teach nutrition, texture, plant life and cooling

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IS BASED ON A THEORY THAT CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES, AND DOING A PROJECT WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT WORK OUT. IT IS THE DOING THAT IS IMPORTANT, NOT THE RESULT

temperatures to an older child.

Another fun example to introduce physics is to put coins in a paper boat to see how many coins will still make the boat stay afloat. Not only is this a fun activity, as most children love to play around water, but it is also developing multiple skills like mathematical and critical thinking. Of course, it is also teaching kids to make a paper boat.

Other simple ideas to make children learn around the house include planting a small pot to understand plant life — this can be done in the kitchen with sprouts that stay soaked for some time and burst into seeds, making microgreens that are useful to the body — a simple biology lesson.

Even a mundane activity like folding clothes can be a learning experience — teaching children of all ages about fabrics, weaving, and traditional methods of colouring and modern synthetic material. A quote attributed to Richard Branson says, “You don’t learn to walk by following rules. You learn by doing, and by falling over.” This summer seems a great opportunity to let children learn by falling and rising.

SA to dish up more zebra to boost jobs, conservation

UMBERTO BACCHI

Carcasses of impala, kudu and wildebeest hang from a slaughterhouse rail, ready to be turned into steaks, sausages and burger patties of the kind South Africa wants to see more of on the dinner table.

The abattoir in Bela Bela, north of Johannesburg, is among only a handful in the country dedicated to game meat.

Authorities say the untapped sector could create jobs and help preserve wildlife — while pleasing the palates of climate- and health-conscious meat eaters.

“We want to add a dimension into your dinner plate by giving you an organic game meat from the wild,” Khorommbi Matibe, the environment ministry’s biodiversity economy chief, said.

A top wildlife tourism destination, South Africa produces around 60,000 tonnes of game meat a year — equivalent in weight to roughly 60,000 giraffes.

But only a fraction ends up in butcheries and supermarkets. Ninety per cent is hunted and consumed informally, according to the government. Even less is exported.

In 2019, just over 3,000 tonnes of ostrich, crocodile and zebra were shipped to the European Union, China and the UAE, it said.

Authorities would like to serve up much more.

In March, they said they want to grow the sector from 4.6 billion rand (\$250 million) in 2020 to 27.6 billion rand by 2036, adopting a strategy published late last year.

With unemployment sitting at 32.9 per cent nationally, this could create jobs in rural, economically deprived areas. Matibe said there are good reasons for barbecuing more springboks.

Game animals release less methane — a greenhouse gas — than cattle, whose burps are a top source of global warming emissions from agriculture. Foraging in the wild, their meat is by definition free-range and lean.

A 2023 study by researchers at Stellenbosch University, found that zebra meat in particular was highly nutritious and very low in fat.

Eating more of it could also help conservation efforts, the government argues.

South Africa has long adopted a market-oriented approach to conservation, based on the belief that farmers have a better incentive to look after wildlife if they can profit from it.

Critics say the model exploits and commoditises animals. But it has proved largely successful.

The country’s wildlife population has grown from about 500,000 in the 1960s to more than 20 million today. About 80 per cent is in private game reserves that attract tourists and hunters. — AFP



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The fascinating, surprising world of viruses

The world is only just recovering from the scourge of the Covid pandemic caused by a highly virulent and often fatal virus.

In 1918-1919 a flu virus, the Spanish Flu, killed up to 100 million people worldwide. This was one of, if not the, deadliest viruses in recorded history.

Calling it the Spanish Flu was almost certainly a misnomer. Whilst it is true that the Spanish were the first to go public with news of a deadly flu-like illness cutting a swathe of death through people, the warring nations in the First World War were already aware of this and may even have been partly responsible for its rapid spread throughout the world.

The main combatants in World War One, Britain, France, Germany and the US, kept it secret so as not to demoralise their troops. At the height of the pandemic it was often the case that more soldiers were dying from Spanish Flu than from the enemy’s weapons.

Through lack of knowledge or through negligence — probably a bit of both — those conducting the war would often place their soldiers in great danger by barracking them or by transporting them in close proximity.

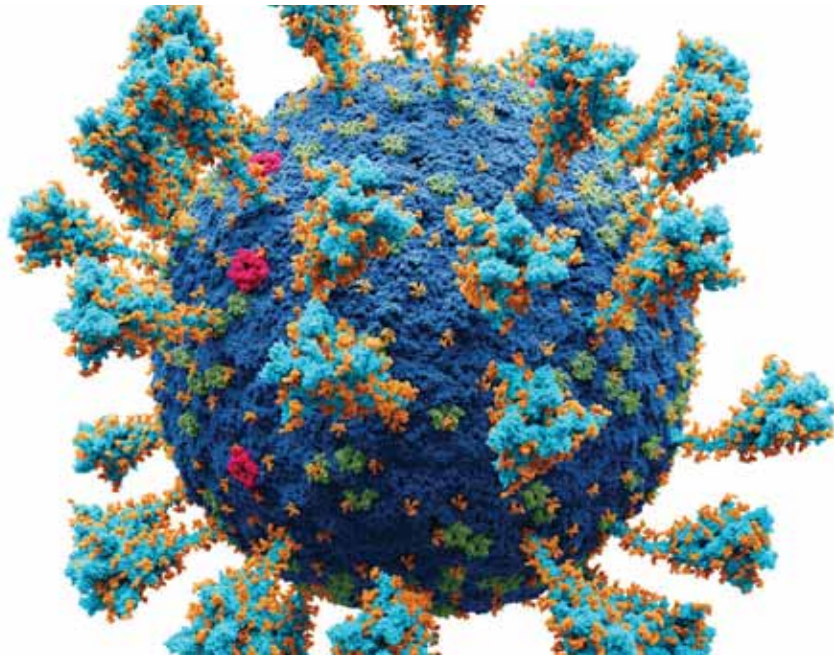
Many thousands of US troops were transported by ship to France when the US authorities were fully aware or should have been aware, of the dangers this posed.

A tragic example of this was when the *USS Leviathan* headed for France in late September 1918 with 11,000 American soldiers on board, 2,000 of whom were known to be infected.

It was reported that 70 soldiers died during the voyage, 14 more died at the French port on their arrival and hundreds more died after being admitted to hospitals in France.

Having read the above it may come as a surprise to you when I say that viruses fascinate me and can be a force for good. As a teenager Mohammed Sharif Tabeboordar was deeply upset as he watched his father’s health gradually decline after contracting Muscular Dystrophy (MD), a disease in which defective genes cause the breakdown of muscle tissue leading to distressing symptoms such as muscle pain, uncontrollable stiffness in your limbs and spasms in your legs and arms.

Depending on the type of MD it can



be fatal. Mohammed was shocked to discover that there was no cure for this debilitating disease. Having learned that just one gene was at the root of most genetic muscle diseases including MD he said, “I thought fixing it should be simple since we know what gene is defective and if we can just replace that one (defective) gene, that would be it. So why is it taking so long?”

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE VISITED THE DOCTOR HOPING TO BE PRESCRIBED ANTIBIOTICS FOR AN ILLNESS ONLY TO BE TOLD THAT IT’S A VIRUS AND ANTIBIOTICS WON’T HELP. MOREOVER, DOCTORS ARE INCREASINGLY RELUCTANT TO PRESCRIBE TOO MANY ANTIBIOTICS IN CASE THE BACTERIA CAUSING ILLNESS BECOMES IMMUNE

He eventually took a doctorate in regenerative biology and became one of the most eminent medical researches in the world who developed a gene therapy, experimenting on mice, that could correct all muscle wasting diseases.

We are used to hearing scientists talk about finding ways to combat viruses that cause us harm. Most recently the world suffered from the Covid virus.

We hear less about their colleagues

uncovering and exploiting viruses to help cure some of the most dangerous diseases known to man.

Connie Cepko, the Bullard Professor of Genetics at the Harvard Medical School, said “we love viruses for all our work” (when finding cures for diseases.) How come? Well it seems that viruses can recognise and enter certain cells in our bodies.

Medical researchers, by changing viruses, use them to carry genetic materials into the genes of these cells. The viruses are then able to replace the genes that are responsible for causing diseases.

Without viruses much of the pioneering work going into gene therapy would not be possible. Not only that but it has been discovered in mice that antibiotics can in certain circumstances damage the lining of the stomach by killing both the good and bad bacteria.

These good or friendly bacteria are often added to probiotic yoghurt and have a number of health benefits essential to keep our guts healthy. By giving mice a norovirus, a virus which causes gastroenteritis, the mice quickly recovered from the damage caused by antibiotics.

It’s at an early stage of development but scientists are hopeful that one day viruses may become a healthy substitute for antibiotics.

The use of viruses has transformed genetic therapy and scientists have only scratched the surface of viruses that can be used for the good. I will leave the last word to Mohammed Sharif who said “We can’t generalise viruses as being harmful.”

Sacred rituals performed differently

Eid Al Adha was observed by Muslims all over the world in various rituals and festivities with family, friends and neighbours. In another form of celebration, over a million of pilgrims marked this Eid differently by performing the various rituals of pilgrimage (Haj) over the past week.

They have observed Eid in different practices in Mecca and the other sacred places. Pilgrims were really distinguished and honoured to perform this pillar of Islam, which is assigned to all Muslims at least once in lifetime.

As a must-to-do religious obligation, Haj is aimed to commemorate the name of Allah in those religiously special days when pilgrims are performing the various rituals of Haj there. This has been confirmed by the verse of Quran, “You shall commemorate God for a number of days”.

In fact, Haj is an appeal from pilgrims to the Almighty Allah seeking forgiveness, mercy and acceptance as obedient worshipers. Days of Haj are very blessed and it is a good time to ask for other wishes in addition to seeking other merits. Usually, activities of Haj are being practiced collectively in crowd where all pilgrims of different backgrounds, nationalities and languages converge for the same religious cause mostly at the same time or day. They unite all the days wearing the same pieces of white clothes for men and black-coloured for women, starting from the eighth day of Dhul Hijjah, twelfth month of the Islamic Calendar. With no exception, all pilgrims came for the same reason and mission, which the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and other pilgrims came for thousands of years back.

Similar rituals that have been performed in the past centuries and are being performed today.

Although Haj is a religious mission, it mirrors a social and spiritual unity for Muslims where all individual differences are standing apart. As well, Haj brings harmony and compassion among pilgrims despite their huge



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ALTHOUGH HAJ IS A RELIGIOUS MISSION, IT MIRRORS A SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL UNITY FOR MUSLIMS WHERE ALL INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ARE STANDING APART

crowd all over the places.

The feeling of being a pilgrim is unbelievably thrilling and heartening. Pilgrims share respect, empathy and support to each and everyone as if they are one family; brothers and sisters. It is very touching indeed how they move around, performing their assigned tasks. The way the pilgrims are united and coming together is undoubtedly magnificent.

Pilgrims are sincerely worshiping the Almighty Allah in a different way unlike the usual daily prayers that are performed in Masjids five times a day. On each day they spend, they perform different tasks in which they become very serious and sincere with the prayers they chant. Although the reason behind performing some tasks the way it is done is spiritually non-obviously clear, pilgrims are obliged to follow what both Prophets, Mohammad and Ibrahim, have performed earlier during their days.

Despite Haj is the fifth essential pillar of Islam, only capable Muslims are requested to perform it at least once during their lifespan. Those who are physically or financially unable to go for Haj can do it afterward when they are ready; or else assign someone on their behalf, but with certain serious conditions.

Otherwise, many people might get an excuse, but they get deprived from the honour and big reward of going for Haj.

All Muslims who are intending to go for Haj must be hale and hearty as well as strong enough to sufficiently perform all the rituals required.

The reward granted by the Almighty Allah to all pilgrims is that all their sins, faults and wrongdoings will be forgiven and rub out once they come back home from Haj.

The Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said, “Whoever performs Haj and does not commit any obscenity or transgression shall return free from sins as he was on the day his mother gave birth to him”. He also said, “The reward of a Haj mabroor is nothing, but Paradise”.

ROBOT SHOWCASE



A humanoid robot gestures while on display during the World Intelligence Expo in Tianjin. – AFP

Can pvt hospitals increase access to health care in developing countries?

In recent years, governments in low- and middle-income countries have been experimenting with ways to alleviate the financial burden of high out-of-pocket costs for health care, which account for 40 per cent of households’ catastrophic health spending. To ensure universal access, they are gradually shifting away from public provision of health care to publicly funded insurance that covers treatment at private facilities.

India is a prime example. Since the mid-2000s, the central government and various states have introduced such insurance programmes in an effort to expand health-care access in low-income communities.

These kinds of public-private partnerships (PPPs) have long been integral to health-policy discussions in developing countries. Given that building physical infrastructure is often costly and plagued by bureaucratic delays, political favouritism, and budgetary constraints, national and subnational governments across Asia, Africa, and South America have implemented health-insurance schemes that enable low-income families to receive private care at substantially or fully subsidised prices.

The success of these programmes varies by country and depends on their design and local context.

For example, China and Vietnam are



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often cited as success stories, with nearly 100 per cent and 80 per cent of their populations, respectively, covered by some health insurance scheme as of 2016. But while out-of-pocket expenses for tertiary care in China have increased, they have decreased following the PPP programme’s expansion in Vietnam. India’s approach is similar to Vietnam’s, focusing on providing the poorest communities with free access to government-funded insurance.

Fully subsidised insurance can improve health outcomes by providing access to private facilities and freeing up space in public hospitals. Yet, despite numerous free insurance programmes and high out-of-pocket expenditures, adoption rates in India remain low. Estimates based on data from India’s National Family Health Survey show that just 41 per cent of Indian households have some form of health insurance. And even those who are covered seem to have little understanding of how these programmes work.

This underscores the importance of the unique context of developing countries, where informal risk-sharing networks traditionally help mitigate the impact of health shocks. In rural areas, households often rely on their local

communities and even join groups whose members pool money for health emergencies.

Some studies show that the presence of these informal groups can reduce the willingness to pay for formal insurance. While this suggests that informal insurance crowds out formal schemes, our research shows that informal networks might actually facilitate the widespread adoption of government-provided plans.

For example, the support of such networks can make it easier for people to travel to remote hospitals.

That said, governments must assess whether the PPP model is the best way to deliver health-care services.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that health is a public good with many positive externalities

and that in some cases, direct public provision might be the only feasible option.

Even in less extreme circumstances, it is crucial to understand whether the money spent on one type of programme could have been used more effectively elsewhere.

In an ongoing study, we examine the complex implications of the PPP model for health-care access.

In theory, if the private system is better than or as good as the public one, health outcomes might improve. But if the public system is better than its private counterpart, overall health outcomes might be adversely affected.

For example, one area where India consistently lags behind its peers is maternal and child health, partly owing to the low rate of

hospital deliveries, which in turn can be attributed to the high cost of private services and long wait times in overcrowded government facilities.

If private care were subsidised, more women might choose to deliver their babies in private hospitals instead of non-institutional settings like their homes.

We find that women often switch from public to private facilities for childbirth following the introduction of a formal health-insurance programme.

Moreover, such programmes lead to a decrease in out-of-pocket expenses, suggesting that individuals who previously paid for private care can now access it at a subsidised rate.

Households located far from hospitals, however, remain unaffected by such programmes.

Recent estimates from India’s National Health Accounts reveal two significant trends: a massive decline in government spending on tertiary health care and a sharp increase in the government’s social security expenses, including social health insurance. This reflects the country’s shift from direct public provision to the PPP model for tertiary health care.



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OMAN END CAMPAIGN AT BEACH HANDBALL WORLD CUP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

The Oman national beach handball team concluded their participation in the World Cup, which was held in the Chinese city of Pingtan, by securing 15th place after defeating the Puerto Rican team with a score of 2-0 in play-off match.

From the first minute, Oman national team took control of game and imposed its style on its opponent. Our players played with high morale and cooperated perfectly, benefiting from the experience of previous matches and the experience of prominent players Mahmood al Tharafi, Abdulhakeem al Siyaabi and Said al Hasani.

Yasser al Harthy and Mahmoud al Wahaibi shone remarkably and scored wonderful goals that shook the Puerto Rican net. The two Omani players managed to take a 14-8 lead in the middle of the first half.

The Puerto Rican team tried to resist, but they were unable to keep up with the speed and accuracy of the Oman national players. The Omani players continued their dominance until the last minutes, ending the first half with a 26-10 lead.

Oman national team entered the second half with the same determination, as the players continued to shine and the attackers' outstanding performance was evident, as

they were able to convert all scoring opportunities into goals thanks to the high focus and individual skills of the players in the offensive half. The national team took all game control, while the performance of the Puerto Rican players improved and they succeeded in reducing the difference more than once, but the lead remained by a score of 20-14.

Oman player's dominance continued in both the defensive and offensive, with the performance of the Puerto Rican players declining, to end the half with Oman winning by a score of 25-16. With this superiority, the national team achieved a victory in two rounds without a response against the Puerto Rican team.

Oman played 9 matches during the tournament, winning two and losing seven. They faced difficulties in the group stage such as Hungary and Denmark, but they managed to defeat Australia to advance to the second round. They faced other challenges in the second round against experienced teams such as Brazil, Tunisia, and Spain, and lost all of them. They lost to the Uruguayan team in an exciting match to determine the places from 9 to 16, drawing in the two halves of the match and Uruguay won it on penalties. Then they lost to the United States on penalties in the match to determine places from 13 to 16, before achieving their last victory over Puerto Rico.



OGA and R&A: Advancing golf development

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Chairman of the Oman Golf Association (OGA), and his fellow OGA Board Members recently hosted Mr Neal Graham, The R&A Development Manager for the Middle East and India, at the Oman Olympic Committee headquarters in Muscat, Oman.

Together The R&A and the United States Golf Association (USGA) govern the sport of golf worldwide. Based in St Andrews Scotland, the home of golf, The R&A engages and supports activities to ensure that golf is a thriving sport 50 years from now for all on a global scale, with 165 overseas affiliates, across 146 countries including the Sultanate of Oman, supported.

The R&A is committed to investing RO 100 million over ten years in developing golf and supports the growth of the sport internationally, including the development and management of

sustainable golf facilities.

During his visit to Oman Neal presented to the OGA Board The R&A's key development objectives which set out how to make golf more accessible, more appealing and more inclusive and to be responsible for upholding the traditions of golf while embracing change and breaking down barriers to progress. There was discussion about how this aligns with the objectives and strategy of the Oman Golf Association, and how this, in turn, supports the wider strategy of Oman Vision 2040.

The R&A's historical support of the Oman Golf Association has been instrumental in providing the opportunity for many women and girls as well as junior golfers to experience the game of golf and its many benefits for the first time.

Looking toward the future, the OGA Board were excited to discuss details of the upcoming



launch of The R&A Unleash Your Drive in schools programme in Oman, a six-week beginner golf programme for students that introduces the basics of golf as well as nine mental toughness skills which are integrated into the programme to positively impact their wellbeing.

The programme is delivered within the school grounds providing a safe environment for all.

Chairman of the Oman Golf Association, His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Kais Tarik Al Said, is quoted as saying "We extend our sincere thanks to The R&A for their ongoing support and invaluable guidance.

Golf is still in its infancy here in Oman, but we believe that this provides us with a fantastic opportunity for growth. With the support of The R&A and the Ministry of Culture, Sports

and Youth, the Oman Golf Association will continue to strive to offer the opportunity to experience golf to as many people as possible, and to provide a continuous pathway for those who excel to support their ongoing development."

Neal Graham responded by saying "It is through working closely with golfing bodies around the world, like the Oman Golf Association, that The R&A

will ensure that golf is thriving 50 years' from now. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Oman Golf Association to introduce women and junior golf initiatives in the country and their commitment to the long-term growth of the sport.

As signatories of The R&A Women in Golf Charter, it is pleasing to see them fulfilling the pledge they made to growing the sport."



Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva poses with the trophy. — AFP

Putintseva beats Tomljanovic in Birmingham tennis final

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva won her first senior grass-court singles title after defeating Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic 6-1, 7-6 (10/8) in the final of the Birmingham WTA Tour event on Sunday.

The 29-year-old's previous two WTA tour titles had come on clay courts, in Nurnberg in 2019 and Budapest in 2021.

But on Sunday she prevailed in nearly 90 minutes on court after coming from 5-3 down — and saving two set points — in the second set of the final of this warm-up event for Wimbledon.

Victory saw Putintseva become just the second unseeded Birmingham champion in the last 10 years, following Beatriz Haddad Maia's title run of 2022.

"I don't know what I'm feeling because I wasn't

expecting this at all," Putintseva said afterwards.

"It's great and it's confusing because I've always been good on clay, but now all of a sudden, I'm good on grass. I'll take that! It's great!

"It was a great game. I started so well, and then Ajla dialled up her level to the highest. She was playing really amazing, not giving me any time to think or to do something. The game was even in the end, and I was a bit more lucky."

This was Tomljanovic's first tour-level singles final in five years, with the Australian still waiting for her first title.

Even so it was a heartening week for the Australian, formerly 32 in the world rankings, after she missed most of 2023 following knee surgery and then had an operation to remove ovarian cysts. — AFP

Sinner edges Hurkacz to win first grass-court title in Halle



Sinner (R) poses with the trophy alongside Hurkacz. — Reuters

HALLE WESTFALEN, Germany: World number one Jannik Sinner won his first ever grass court tournament on Sunday beating former champion Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/2) in the Wimbledon warm-up ATP Halle tournament.

The 22-year-old Italian went to the top of the ATP rankings thanks to his semifinal run at the

French Open this month.

"It means a lot. It was a tough match against Hubi," said Sinner after playing his doubles partner.

"I knew I had to serve really well and you play only a couple of really important points throughout the whole set. So I was happy and I tried to produce in the best possible way in the important moments.

"I'm very happy about this

tournament because [winning for] the first time on a grass court, it's a good feeling."

The triumph means Sinner is the first player since Andy Murray in 2016 to win his first tournament after becoming world No.1.

The fifth-seeded Pole Hurkacz, 27, won Halle two years ago and was chasing a second title of the season after winning on clay at

Estoril in April.

There were no service breaks in the match but Sinner won 85 per cent of his service points compared to only 69 per cent for Hurkacz.

In the second-set tie-break Sinner took the early lead and never relinquished his advantage to claim a fourth title of the season as Hurkacz missed a final backhand. — AFP

Unbeaten India trump Bangladesh to close in on semis berth

NORTH SOUND, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: India inched closer to a semifinal berth in the T20 World Cup following their comprehensive 50-run victory against Bangladesh in a Super Eight Group 1 contest on Saturday.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya smashed a 27-ball fifty as India posted 196-5, their highest score in what has been a low-scoring tournament so far, at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua.

Bangladesh were never really in the chase and managed 146-8 in reply, succumbing to their second Group 1 defeat to be on the brink of elimination.

"There was a strong breeze out there so I wanted to make the most of that when I was batting and then not let them use it when I was bowling," player-of-the-match Pandya said afterwards.

"It was about being one step ahead of the batter."

India face Australia in their final Group 1 match on Monday but both would make the last four if Australia can beat Afghanistan later on Saturday.

Electing to field, Bangladesh began with spin from both ends but quickly abandoned the novelty after the first two overs yielded 23 runs and no wicket.

Shakib Al Hasan bore the brunt of the assault but redeemed himself by ending the 39-run opening stand between India skipper Rohit Sharma (23) and stalwart Virat Kohli (37).

Rohit offered a skyer to perish but Kohli smacked three sixes



India's Kuldeep Yadav bowls during the match. — AFP

before Tanzim Hasan triggered a mini-collapse in the eventful ninth over.

The pacer splattered Kohli's stumps, had his next ball hit for a six by Suryakumar Yadav, and was celebrating the wicket of India's number three batter in the following delivery.

Rishabh Pant (36) and Shivam Dube (34) overcame sluggish starts before stepping on the gas

but it was Pandya, who provided the late flourish with an unbeaten 50 off 27 balls that took India close to the 200-mark.

Pandya then returned to break the opening stand when Bangladesh began their chase.

The seamer had Litton Das caught in the deep before spinner Kuldeep Yadav claimed three quick wickets to effectively derail Bangladesh's chase. — Reuters

Richardson wins 100m at US trials to qualify for Paris Olympics

EUGENE, United States: World 100 metres champion Sha'Carri Richardson earned a chance for Olympic redemption after winning the 100m at the US athletics trials on Saturday, booking her ticket to the Paris Games.

Three years after a positive marijuana test saw her kicked off the US team for the Tokyo Olympics, Richardson captured the women's 100 final in 10.71sec with Melissa Jefferson second in 10.80 and Twanisha Terry third in 10.89.

Richardson surged to the lead in the middle of the race and crossed the finish line in this year's world-best time with a wind of 0.8m/sec at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon.

"I feel honoured," Richardson said. "I feel every chapter I've been through in my life designed and prepared me for this moment.

"I cannot wait to go to Paris and represent."

Reigning men's 100m world champion Noah Lyles began his quest for Olympic gold in the event by leading all semi-final qualifiers from men's preliminary heats in 9.92.

Richardson hopes to capture Olympic gold in the 100 final at the Stade de France on August 3. Not since Gail Devers in 1996 has an American woman been crowned an Olympic 100m champion.

The 24-year-old Texan won her preliminary heat on Friday in 10.88, leading all qualifiers



Richardson celebrates after the winning. — USA TODAY Sports

despite a slight stumble at the start, and won her Saturday semifinal in 10.86, the best time of any finalist despite a slow start.

She was behind again at the start but quickly made up the time and charged to victory.

"Definitely didn't have the best start, but had a better start than my other rounds," Richardson said. Three years ago, Richardson appeared set for the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics after winning at the US trials in 10.86.

But dreams of Olympic gold were shattered when it was revealed she had tested positive for marijuana, resulting in a one-month suspension that banned her from Tokyo.

Plans to revive her career at the 2022 World Championships failed when she bombed out of the US trials. Richardson, however, roared back into form in 2023

with a thrilling 100m triumph at the World Championships in Budapest, taking the crown in a championship record of 10.65sec.

This year, Richardson won her only prior 100 at May's Prefontaine Classic in Eugene in 10.83.

Lyles cruised to victory in the first of five 100m men's heats with Christian Coleman, the 2019 100m world champion, second in 9.99.

It's a redemption run for Lyles, who failed to qualify for the 100m final at the Tokyo Olympics and settled for bronze in a 200m final where he was a favourite.

"I felt like I just had blown a huge opportunity," Lyles said. "The more I look back at it, the more I'm like, 'Wow, if I never had that moment happen, I would have never produced what I've done up to now.'"

— AFP



France's forward Kylian Mbappe. — AFP

France need goals against Poland with or without Mbappe

DORTMUND: France will try to finally get the goals flowing against already-eliminated Poland as they seek to finish top of their Euro 2024 group on Tuesday, but questions remain about the availability of key forward Kylian Mbappe.

The striker — who broke his nose in France's opener against Austria — donned a mask to take part in a practice match on Saturday against the under-21 side of German club Paderborn in which he scored twice and set up two other goals.

France have so far failed to find the net themselves in Germany — they beat Austria in their opener courtesy of an own goal and drew 0-0 with the Netherlands — so coach Didier Deschamps will be tempted to bring Mbappe back against Poland.

Netherlands sit top of Group D, having scored more goals than the French. The group winners will face the second-placed team in Group F, a spot held now by Turkey, while the runners-up will face whoever comes second in Group E where Romania, Belgium, Slovakia and Ukraine are all on three points.

Should France finish in third place, they could face England or Spain in the last 16.

On paper, Poland look like easy opponents for France — they are the only team at Euro 2024 already certain to be heading home having lost to the Netherlands and Austria.

The Dutch face trickier opposition: in-form Austria who will be hoping for a top-two finish in the group themselves.

But Poland coach Michal Probiez has said he wants to use the France match to draw a line under his side's disappointing form and get them ready for their World Cup qualifiers.

Mbappe sat out the 0-0 draw with the Netherlands which left Deschamps ruing France's failure to turn opportunities into goals. "The only regret I have, regarding the number of chances we saw, is the fact that we didn't win," he told reporters.

The last time the two countries met, France cruised past Poland in a last-16 match at the World Cup in Qatar in 2022 with Mbappe scoring twice in a 3-1 win.

The game at the Dortmund BVB Stadion may mark the end of the international career of Poland goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny who has said his time with the national team is coming to a close. — Reuters



MARTINEZ HAPPY WITH PORTUGAL'S PROGRESS, READY FOR EURO 2024 KNOCK-OUTS

DORTMUND, Germany: Portugal manager Roberto Martinez was pleased by how dominant his side were in their 3-0 win over Turkey on Saturday and said that he is confident they are ready for the Euro 2024 round of 16 after securing qualification as Group F winners.

Despite facing criticism following a last gasp fight back win against Czech Republic, Martinez said he didn't think his team had had a bad performance in their opener, considering it was a similar display to the latest game with the result being determined by the circumstances.

Portugal had to dig deep to beat the Czechs 2-1 with a stoppage-time winner, which raised questions about Martinez's side who arrived in Germany among the favourites.

"I think our game was on the same level as the first one what is very important for us, to maintain a good level. The difference is that we managed to score early and that allowed us to play more calm and relaxed," Martinez told a press conference.

"After we scored the first goal it changed what Turkey needed to do, it is important to start well. We were focused on defence and controlled the game better, it was so meaningful to keep them from scoring."

After abandoning the system used in the opener of deploying three central defenders and reverting to a back four, Martinez said that he will remain flexible and keep his rivals guessing.

"It's important to balance our abundance of individual talent and the best way to do it is being tactically flexible," Martinez said. "To have that flexibility in a national team is difficult so I think it's great that we have players talented enough to play different roles according to the situation and the rival."

As the victory secured Portugal's progress to the knockout rounds, Martinez said that he will rotate his squad in their last group stage game on Wednesday against Georgia.

"Securing first place is good because there are a lot of players in the dressing room who deserve to play and we need to give them opportunities to show what they've got and create a competitive environment in the team during the tournament," Martinez said.

"I was very happy with the attitude and them showing that we're growing game by game. It's good to see progress and a good level of play in two consecutive matches and I feel that we are ready for the knock-outs."

— Reuters



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Oman’s GDP reaches RO 10.4 billion in Q1 2024

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

Oman's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices reached RO 10.4 billion in value during Q1 2024, showing both promising growth in non-petroleum sectors and a decline in oil-related activities, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The report highlighted a 3.8-per cent decrease in the added value of oil activities compared to the same period in 2023.

The petroleum sector, comprising both crude oil and natural gas, saw a notable decline: total petroleum activities fell in value from RO 3,660.5 million in Q1 2023 to RO 3,520.5 million in Q1 2024, a decrease of 3.8 per cent.

Crude oil experienced a 4.4-per cent drop, from RO 3,135.5 million to RO 2,996.0 million,



The manufacturing sector grew 7.9 per cent in the first quarter.

while natural gas marginally decreased by 0.1 per cent, from RO 525.0 million to RO 524.4 million.

Conversely, non-petroleum activities exhibited robust growth, increasing by 3.9 per cent from

RO 6,920.0 million in Q1 2023 to RO 7,188.5 million in Q1 2024.

Key sectors contributing to this growth include agriculture and fishing, which rose by 3.2 per cent, driven by a 5.5-per cent increase in agriculture.

Industrial activities increased by 5.5 per cent, with manufacturing leading the charge at a 7.9-per cent increase, notably, refined petroleum products saw a significant 53.6 per cent surge. Service activities grew by 3.3

per cent, supported by a 5.9-per cent rise in wholesale and retail trade and a 5.4-per cent growth in transportation and storage.

The construction sector also saw growth of 2.6 per cent, reaching RO 662.4 million, while public administration and defence increased by 6.6 per cent to RO 1,018.2 million.

Education and health sectors notched up gains of 6.1 per cent and 4.7 per cent respectively.

However, some sectors faced downturns, with accommodation and food services plunging by 16.3 per cent, information and communications dropping by 9.9 per cent, and financial and insurance activities slightly declining by 2.1 per cent.

Overall, the GDP at producers' prices grew by 1.3 per cent, from RO 10,330.1 million in Q1 2023 to RO 10,460.5 million in Q1 2024.

This comprehensive analysis by the NCSI underscores the

dynamic shifts within Oman's economy, reflecting both challenges in the oil sector and encouraging growth in diverse non-petroleum industries.

In 2023, Oman's GDP at current prices increased by 7.4 per cent at the end of Q1 2023, according to the preliminary data issued by the NCSI. The NCSI report revealed that Oman's GDP at current prices stood at RO 10.4 billion (\$27 billion) in Q1 2023, up from RO 9.7 billion (\$25.1 billion) in the corresponding of the previous year.

In terms of constant prices, Oman's GDP was valued at RO 9.5 billion in the first quarter of 2024.

The report also indicated a 2.4-per cent decrease in the added value of oil activities during this period compared to the first quarter of 2023, highlighting the ongoing challenges in the oil sector amidst fluctuating global oil prices.

Barka Water and Power commences early power at full plant capacity of Barka 1 IWPP



Barka Water and Power confirmed that it met the early power conditions and notified PWP of the plant's readiness for full dispatch capacity of 412 MW.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

Publicly-traded company Barka Water and Power, owner and operator of Barka 1 Independent Water and Power Project (IWPP), announced the commencement of early power generation at full plant capacity. This milestone was communicated to the Financial Services Authority, the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), and the investors' community on Sunday.

The achievement follows the company's earlier disclosure dated on April 24, 2024, which detailed the receipt of a letter of award from Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) for a new Power and Water Purchase Agreement (PWPA).

Barka Water and Power confirmed that it met the early power conditions and notified PWP of the plant's readiness for full dispatch capacity of 412 MW on June 13, 2024. This development is poised to significantly bolster the region's power supply, addressing increasing energy demands and supporting economic growth.

The awarded PWPA outlines a comprehensive agreement that includes an eight-year and nine-month term for the power plant operations, which commenced on June 1, 2024.

Additionally, the agreement encompasses a multi-stage flash evaporator (MSFE) water

plant that will begin operations on September 1, 2024, initially contracted for three years with an extension option at PWP's discretion for a further term of three years and an additional term of two years and nine months, totalling eight years and nine months.

Earlier, Barka Water and Power announced that the total estimated value of the PWPA, inclusive of the power plant and MSFE water plant over the specified period, is approximately \$356 million, contingent on the MSFE's contracted period.

The company accepted the award on April 24, 2024 and has since been collaborating with PWP to finalise and approve the PWPA and other associated project agreements.

The commencement of early power at full plant capacity marks a critical step forward for Barka Water and Power. This achievement not only demonstrates the company's operational readiness and capability, but also underscores its commitment to fulfilling contractual obligations and contributing to the region's infrastructural development.

The successful initiation of full capacity operations is expected to enhance investor confidence and solidify Barka Water and Power's position as a leading player in the energy sector.

Omani green steel project secures offtake pledges covering 100% of capacity

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

High-level executives of Vulcan Green Steel, a first-of-its-kind green-hydrogen ready steel complex under construction at Duqm Special Economic Zone, say the landmark project has garnered provisional offtake commitments exceeding its capacity of 6 million tonnes per annum (MTPA).

The announcement bolsters the Sultanate of Oman's bid to position itself as a regional hub for investments in hard-to-abate industries, notably steel, aluminium and cement, powered by zero-carbon green hydrogen as a fuel source.

As many as eight international consortiums have signed project agreements with the Omani government committing to produce in excess of 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen per annum — a proportion of which is proposed to be utilised domestically to power these export-oriented, hard-to-abate industries.

“Our greenfield steel complex in Duqm (GCC) continues its progress and will have 6 MTPA green steel capacity benefitting from Oman's exceptional solar and wind resources,” said Arnaud Gueren del, Vice-President – Vulcan Green Steel.

“Welcomed in Europe, this exceptional and ambitious project has generated about 6.2 MTPA as



Vulcan Green Steel's Arnaud Gueren del (centre) with his European colleagues.

AS MANY AS EIGHT INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUMS HAVE SIGNED PROJECT AGREEMENTS WITH THE OMANI GOVERNMENT COMMITTING TO PRODUCE IN EXCESS OF 1 MILLION TONNES OF GREEN HYDROGEN PER ANNUM

Memorandum of Understanding with leaders of different steel user segments within the last fiscal year,” the Turin (Italy) based executive, who oversees Vulcan's European operations, added in a recent post.

The Duqm green steel project, backed by Indian power and steel conglomerate Jindal Group, is being developed with an

investment of around \$3 billion.

The project will initially be powered by natural gas but later transition to green hydrogen to produce low carbon steel suited for the automobile, wind turbine and consumer durable goods manufacturing industries in Europe and Japan.

Among the prestigious European players that have committed to offtaking low-carbon steel from Oman is Volkswagen AG.

The German automaker announced recently that it has signed an MoU with Vulcan Green Steel covering the offtake of around 300,000 tonnes per annum of steel for its European operations.

Just earlier, Czech-based Vitkovice Steel revealed that it had signed an agreement to procure around 1 million tonnes of low-carbon steel from the Duqm plant to supply the European market with “quality sheets, sheet plates and billets from ecological steel”.

First production of green steel from the Duqm plant is slated during 2027.

Furthermore, to capitalise on the anticipated availability of green hydrogen by around 2030, the Port of Duqm along with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) have earmarked prime land for investments that are expected to materialise in and around the SEZ.

OETC, GCCIA host Cybersecurity Workshop 2024

MUSCAT: As part of its efforts and commitment to keep pace with all updates and relevant developments in the sector, and to enhance communication and exchange of experiences and knowledge, alongside the development of various fields by collaborating with experts and specialists in the electricity sector; the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) recently in collaboration with the GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) hosted the Cybersecurity Workshop 2024, which lasted for two days.

The workshop aimed to exchange expertise and discuss developments in cybersecurity incidents and digital forensics in the operational technology environment, as well as to discuss advanced technologies to improve the substations' security.

This workshop comes as part of OETC's endeavours to enhance the field of cybersecurity,



in addition to its commitment to ensure the security of the company's assets, data, and employees, sharing expertise and knowledge, and developing skills and capabilities in this area among various institutions within the sector at the national, regional, and international levels.

The workshop included several topics presented by experts and specialists in the field from OETC, GCCIA, and the Oman National Computer Emergency Readiness

Team. Discussions focused on the OETC's approach to improving security measures for SCADA and control systems, cybersecurity developments targeting the infrastructure of power stations, incident response and recovery at

power stations, the importance of security drills, and more.

Regarding cooperation with various related entities, Eng Sultan al Rawahi, General Manager of Load Dispatch Center and Oman's representative in the Operational Committee in GCCIA, pointed at OETC's ongoing and existing efforts and its commitment to continuous engagement with various institutions and sectors to enhance the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of the company's employees in various fields.

Al Rawahi added: "We prioritise the development of employees, improving their capabilities, and supporting them through various initiatives, activities, and projects. In this context, we enhance our communication with experts and host specialists from various fields and sectors at both local and international levels to provide a suitable platform for exchanging experiences and developing capabilities. Additionally, we

aim to improve the level of performance, quality of work, and the operational technology environment in OETC specifically and in the sector generally, to meet higher levels of aspirations and targets".

It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across the Sultanate of Oman's network.

The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centres in the governorates.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or the south.

Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

BankDhofar empowers women with dedicated ladies banking



MUSCAT: BankDhofar, one of the leading banks in the Sultanate of Oman, reaffirms its commitment to financial inclusion and women's empowerment with the Ladies Banking. This comprehensive suite of banking products and services caters specifically to the needs of female customers, providing them with the tools and resources to manage their finances confidently and achieve their financial goals.

Ladies Banking by BankDhofar offers a convenient and secure banking experience. Women can enjoy easy and secure banking as they can manage finances from anywhere, anytime through ATMs, Internet banking, and the user-friendly mobile app, designed to help women save more and spend on favourable terms. The Ladies banking offers a stylish debit card with unique benefits.

The customers will also gain access to exclusive offers on credit cards, including rewards, discounts at partner merchants, and exciting privileges that enhance their lifestyle.

Customers can open the ladies account via our "Intilaqa" App or can visit one of the bank's more than 120 branches conveniently located throughout the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

In addition to the Ladies account, BankDhofar offers various savings accounts such as; Children, Youth, Minor, High Yield and Recurring Deposit savings accounts.

BankDhofar recognises the significant role women play in Oman's economy and society. Ladies Banking reflects the bank's dedication to supporting women on their financial journeys by providing them with the resources and guidance they need to achieve financial independence and success.

BankDhofar has recently expanded its branches network in different locations in all governorates of Oman to reach a wider range of customers and provide them with the banking services they need.

Royal Oman Police, Bank Muscat continue implementing anti-fraud awareness initiative

MUSCAT: Royal Oman Police and Bank Muscat have announced recently the continuation of the annual anti-fraud awareness initiative aimed to raising awareness against various fraud methods in order to reduce the financial and psychological consequences that they cause.

This year, the initiative sheds light on serious topics including raising awareness against fake jobs opportunities.

Safeguarding the financial well-being is of extreme importance.

In an age where job seekers actively explore job opportunities online, fraudulent job offers are on the rise.

To avoid falling victim to fraudulent activities, there are a number of precautionary steps that need to be taken: avoid responding to messages from suspicious or unknown senders; avoid transferring funds to unknown personnel or accounts; be wary of job offers that require upfront fees or personal information; be careful of urgent requests, intimidation and threats; and most



importantly, block and report the sender on WhatsApp if found suspicious.

The awareness initiative will continue throughout the year using various media channels including Oman TV, radio, print, online media, and social media; aiming to help the public recognise fraud and avoid falling prey to it.

It is essential to never share personal details with anyone, including those claiming to be employees or officials in certain institutions as this is a vital first step to defend oneself against criminal activities.

The public can easily contact the Royal Oman Police hotline at 80077444 to report fraud or for any fraud-related queries.

Ahlibank organises visit to social welfare home

MUSCAT: As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, ahlibank represented by the "ahlicares" team has conducted a visit to the Social Welfare Home for the elderly, participating in a day of community service and engagement with the senior residents of the home, with the aim of providing an avenue for meaningful participation and making a positive difference in the lives of the residents.

During their visit, the ahlicares team delivered essential care items to the elderly, supplying basic necessities and medical equipment which would enhance the home's services and the quality of life of its residents.

Additionally, the team engaged in a dedicated socialisation day, where they interacted with the elderly through various activities, games, storytelling sessions, and lunch with the aim of spreading joy and happiness among them.

Jumana al Hashmi, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at ahlibank, stated, "At ahlibank, we are



committed to making a positive difference in the communities we serve, including the elderly.

As part of our social responsibility initiatives and in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, we aim to offer moral support to society, promote humanitarian values, and provide top-notch banking services.

This visit provided us with the chance to engage with the elderly residents of the home, enhancing their quality of life while spreading joy and happiness.

Through such endeavours, we

inspire our employees to pursue meaningful goals, encouraging volunteerism and contributing to the creation of a more inclusive society."

The bank's visit to the Social Welfare Home reflects our endeavours towards instilling the values of participation and giving among members of society.

This outreach effort enabled the bank to connect with diverse segments of the community, further strengthening its role as a key partner in driving economic and social progress in the country.

MC20 Icona & MC20 Leggenda: Two special series to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the timeless MC12

MUSCAT: Maserati's racing vocation brings to life the MC20 Icona and MC20 Leggenda, two special series to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Trident's return to competition — in 2004, after 37 years away from the scene — with the iconic and victorious MC12.

MC12, first launched in a road version and destined to leave its mark on the track by becoming a benchmark in GT championships, inspired the Maserati MC20 super sports car.

The 100% Made in Italy halo car marked the beginning of a new era for Maserati in 2020, as the first model equipped with the innovative V6 Nettuno engine.

The two MC20 special series — in a limited edition of 20 units each — feature special liveries and exclusive content inspired by the MC12 Stradale and MC12 GT1 Vitaphone respectively.

The Maserati MC20 Icona's livery brings to fans' minds one of the most iconic Maseratis ever: the colours are the same as its 2004 predecessor MC12 Stradale, in turn a tribute to the style of the Maserati Trofeo Light when it ran in the 24 Hours of Daytona, which was the first car to be inspired by the Maserati Birdcage Type 61, produced between 1959 and 1961.

Several features from the Fuoriserie personalisation programme are included in the MC20 Icona Bianco Audace Matte and Blu Stradale livery: special and exclusive details, for a refined customisation.

The Maserati Fuoriserie logo in Bianco Audace stands out on the side of the livery, in the lower part near the rear wheels, with the Italian flag logo positioned on the door under the MC20 lettering.



In the middle of the chrome-plated wheels, with the specific Trident design, the hubcaps are silver with the Trident logo in contrasting blue.

The brake callipers are also painted blue, the mirrors come with an auto-dimming feature

and the engine cover is made of carbon fibre.

The history of the MC20 Leggenda also lies in its very name; it sports a livery in Nero Essenza and Digital Mint Matte to take up the unmistakable colours of the award-winning MC12 GT1

under the Vitaphone Racing team: a car that accomplished the feat of bringing home the record of three victories and two placings as runner-up in the 24 Hours of Spa.

The Fuoriserie features of the MC20 Leggenda include trident wheels in Nero Lucido with Nero Opaco and Trident Digital Mint hubcaps; the Trident logo in yellow on the grille, doors and C-pillar; finally, brake callipers painted black.

The Fuoriserie package for the two special series is completed with racing interiors: lightweight 4-way monocoque racing seats — the central section in Nero/Blu on a silver background for Icona, or in Nero on a silver background for Leggenda — and Trident embroidery on the headrest together with the words "Icona" or "Leggenda", depending on the model.



Oman's producer price index decreases by 1.7 per cent in Q1



MUSCAT: The producer price index in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a decrease of 1.7 per cent in Q1 2024, compared to the same period in 2023, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The prices of the mining and quarrying group decreased by 1.4 per cent, as the prices of crude oil and natural gas products decreased by 1.5 per cent, stone and sand products by 1.4 per cent, while the prices of metal ore products increased by 16.4 per cent.

The prices of the manufacturing industries group also decreased by 2.6 per cent, as most of the sub-group prices decreased by varying percentages, most notably the prices of the transportable goods group by 4.6 per cent and the metal products, machinery and equipment group by 0.2 per cent, while food products, beverages and textiles increased by 0.1 per cent.

The prices of the water production group increased by 5.6 per cent and the electric energy group by 0.5 per cent. — **ONA**

Oman's first equity crowdfunding campaign raises \$50K

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 23

Oman's first equity crowdfunding campaign, launched by Omani fintech company Mamun, raised an amount of \$50,000 for local freelancing platform Zameeli earlier this year.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Founder and CEO of Zameeli, Tariq al Habsi, underscored the significance of the campaign. "It is a milestone for Zameeli to be the first Omani company to utilise equity crowdfunding for fundraising.

"This achievement underscores the potential of our platform and reflects the confidence investors have in our mission to empower local freelancers."

According to Al Habsi, the company chose equity crowdfunding in line with its values of inclusivity and transparency.

"Equity crowdfunding was chosen by Zameeli as our fundraising method due to its potential to democratise investment and involve a broader



Zameeli is the leading local freelancing platform in Oman.

community of stakeholders in our journey. We believe this approach aligns with our values of inclusivity and transparency."

The funds will be significant in further fueling the company's growth, said Al Habsi. "The funds raised through equity crowdfunding will be instrumental in fueling Zameeli's growth and performance.

"We plan to allocate resources towards platform enhancements, marketing efforts, and expanding our reach to further empower Omani freelancers and businesses alike."

Founded in 2021, the

platform serves as a bridge connecting Omani freelancers with individuals and businesses seeking their services.

"Through our platform, freelancers gain access to a diverse pool of projects, secure payment mechanisms, and opportunities for skill development and networking," the CEO said.

The platform currently boasts a deck of 1,369 registered and 3,368 Omani freelancers, offering a variety of services related to content creation, such as marketing and modeling, amongst other fields.

Mohammed al Tamami, Co-

Founder and Chief Operational Officer of Mamun, commented: "Zameeli's equity crowdfunding campaign via Mamun exemplifies our commitment to bolstering the local freelancer economy and pioneering tech innovation, fostering a community where trust-based investments can thrive and reshape Oman's investment landscape."

In remarks to the *Observer*, Al Tamami described Zameeli as a key ticket in Oman's freelancing economy, as it has created thousands of working hours for Omani freelancers.

Additionally, he unveiled that the Zameeli's sales and job creation matched what was achieved in two quarters last year indicating significant growth.

Furthermore, crowdfunding is driving a cultural change in Oman, as opposed to depending on venture capitalists to support businesses, he pointed out.

As of last March, the company successfully funded eleven businesses, resulting in significant returns for investors, he added.

Oman celebrates International Seafarers' Day

MUSCAT: Today, June 24, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology celebrates International Seafarers' Day under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence.

In addition to the ministry's speech, the ceremony includes a review of the achievements in the maritime sector in the Sultanate of Oman in integration with all relevant institutions, in addition to holding an accompanying exhibition for the participating entities, holding dialogue and discussion sessions, reviewing specialised working papers, and honouring the sponsors and



distinguished workers in the maritime sector.

This annual celebration comes as an appreciation by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for the active maritime history of the Sultanate of Oman and an

affirmation of the glorious role of sailors working in this sector.

It also comes from the ministry's belief of the vital and important role of maritime affairs and to enhance its vital economic role and stimulate its contribution to the local product, in addition to

ensuring the continuation of the employment movement.

The International Maritime Organization has approved the annual celebration of World Seafarers' Day to highlight the desired role of this important sector.

EU and China open talks over electric car tariffs

BRUSSELS: EU and China trade chiefs held "candid and constructive" talks on Saturday over plans from Brussels to ramp up tariffs on Chinese electric cars, and the two sides will hold further consultations, the EU said.

The European Union warned this month that it would slap additional tariffs of up to 38 per cent on Chinese electric car imports from July after an anti-subsidy probe, in a move that risks provoking a bitter trade war.

An EU spokesman said European trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis and China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao "had a candid and constructive call on Saturday on the EU's anti-subsidy investigation into battery electric vehicles produced in China".

"The EU side emphasised that any negotiated outcome to its investigation must be effective in addressing the injurious subsidisation," spokesman Olof Gill said. "The two sides will continue to engage at all levels in the coming weeks."

China's commerce ministry wrote on X that the two sides "agreed to start consultations" during the call. Brussels angered Beijing by launching the investigation last year in a bid to defend European manufacturers in the face of a surge of cheaper Chinese imports.

The European Commission has now proposed a provisional hike of tariffs on Chinese manufacturers: 17.4 per cent for market major BYD, 20 per cent for Geely and 38.1 per cent for SAIC. — **AFP**

US closer to curbing investments in China's AI, tech sector

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday issued draft rules for banning or requiring notification of certain investments in artificial intelligence and other technology sectors in China that could threaten US national security.

The US Treasury Department published the proposed rules and a raft of exceptions after an initial comment period following an executive order signed by President Joe Biden last August.

The rules put the onus on US individuals and companies to determine which transactions will be restricted or banned. Biden's executive order, which directed regulation of certain US investments in semiconductors and microelectronics, quantum computing and artificial intelligence, is part of a broader push to prevent US know-how from helping the Chinese to develop sophisticated technology and dominate global markets.

The US is on track to implement regulations by the end of the year

as anticipated. Public comments on the proposed rules will be accepted until August 4.

"This proposed rule advances our national security by preventing the many benefits certain US investments provide — beyond just capital — from supporting the development of sensitive technologies in countries that may use them to threaten our national security," said Treasury Assistant Secretary for Investment Security Paul Rosen.

Treasury said the new rules were intended to implement "a narrow and targeted national security programme" focused on certain outbound investments in countries of concern.

Treasury had mapped out the contours of the proposed rules in August. The Treasury Department on Friday included additional exceptions, such as for transactions deemed to be in the US national interest.

The proposed rules would ban transactions in AI for certain end uses, and involving systems



Illustration picture of Chinese and US flags with semiconductor chips. — **Reuters**

trained in using a specified quantity of computing power, but would also require notification of transactions related to the development of AI systems or semiconductors not otherwise prohibited.

Other exceptions would apply to publicly traded securities, such as index funds or mutual funds; certain limited partnership

investments; buyouts of country-of-concern ownership; transactions between a US parent company and a majority-controlled subsidiary; binding commitments that pre-date the order; and certain syndicated debt financings.

Certain third-country transactions determined to be addressing national security

concerns, or in which the third country adequately addressed the national security concerns, could also be exempted, Treasury said.

The order focuses initially on China, Macau and Hong Kong, but US officials have said it could be widened later. Former Treasury official Laura Black, a lawyer at Akin Gump in Washington, said Treasury was attempting to define the scope of the rule as narrowly as possible, but it would require increased vigilance by companies seeking to invest in China.

"US investors will need to engage in more extensive due diligence when making investments in China or investments involving Chinese companies that operate in the covered sectors," she said.

Black said Treasury's proposed rules were keeping US-managed private equity and venture capital funds in the cross-hairs, as well as some US limited partners' investments in foreign managed funds and convertible debt.

Certain Chinese subsidiaries

and parents will be covered under the rule, which would also prohibit some investments by US companies in third countries, she added.

Besides equity investments, joint ventures and greenfield projects, default debt also could be captured when it becomes equity.

The regulations track restrictions on exporting certain technology to China, such as those barring shipment of certain advanced semiconductors.

The goal is to prevent US funds from helping China develop its own capabilities in those areas to modernise its military. Those who violate the rules could be subject to both criminal and civil penalties, and investments could be unwound.

Treasury said it had engaged with US allies and partners about the goals of the investment restrictions, and noted that the European Commission begun to consider whether and how to address outbound investment risks. — **Reuters**

A warning from history about large-cap stock booms

Fifty years ago, the US stock market was in turmoil. Between January 1973 and September 1974, the S&P 500 Index fell by nearly 50 per cent. With the benefit of hindsight, this decline was the second leg of a bear market which commenced in late 1968. However, stocks had rallied from the summer of 1970, led by a small group of large, high-quality companies, before suffering a more severe collapse. Today, as the US equity market rests on the continued success of a handful of giants, this earlier period appears particularly instructive.

The short-lived boom of the early 1970s started with the demise of highly speculative stocks in the late 1960s. After inflation picked up and interest rates climbed, technology, computer-leasing and other small-cap growth companies dropped out of fashion. Once inflation peaked in 1970, the market rallied. This time, however, investors



EDWARD CHANCELLOR

The writer is a British financial historian, finance journalist, and former hedge fund investment strategist and a former investment banker.

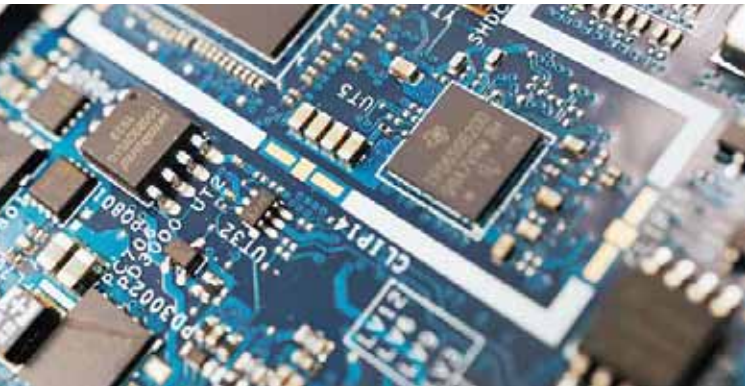
were more cautious. They still wanted exposure to growth but congregated in higher quality, large-cap stocks of companies with proven track records. Contemporary commentators dubbed the small number of favoured names as “vestal virgins”, “sacred cows” and “religion stocks”. Posterity knows them as the Nifty Fifty. Different Wall Street firms disagreed about the group’s exact membership. But it included technology firms like Eastman Kodak, Polaroid and Xerox, consumer goods companies such as Avon Products, drugmakers Johnson & Johnson and Merck, and other established businesses, such as fast-food chain McDonald’s. What these companies had in common was their ability to deliver above-average growth in sales and earnings. According to the investor Jeremy Grantham, who observed the boom from a small-cap value investment firm in Boston, the Nifty Fifty had produced abnormally few disappointments

in prior years. The investment world at the time was undergoing a profound change. Private investors no longer dominated the stock market. By 1972, institutional managers held around 45 per cent of the shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Bank trust departments, of which the largest was Morgan Guaranty, controlled the United States’ rapidly growing pensions pot. Their managers favoured the liquidity provided by the largest stocks. They regarded the Nifty Fifty as “one decision” stocks: the visibility of future earnings was seen as so assured that, once purchased, they need never sell the shares. No price was too high for proven growth stocks. As money flowed from small investors into institutional funds, a remarkable two-tier market opened. By early 1973, the median stock on the NYSE was trading at a multiple of 11.5 times earnings, while the average price-earnings ratio for Kidder Peabody’s list of

the top 50 stocks stood at heady 48. An institutional investor told the *New York Times* that “too many analysts spend too much time worrying about these multiples and not enough time examining the uniqueness of the company... we’re talking about companies where the ability to create and innovate is of a more permanent nature... Go with the best.” The rising concentration of the market in a mere handful of stocks prompted a Senate investigation. The head of trust operations at First National City Bank (which later became Citibank) assured the Committee that in placing “our primary investment emphasis on large, growing, advanced technology or consumer-oriented companies in the so-called ‘top tier’” his firm was exercising its best judgement in line with its fiduciary responsibilities to clients. Barton Biggs, who joined Morgan Stanley in mid-1973, recalled that these top-tier stocks kept grinding higher even as the rest of the market faltered.

“As the year progressed, the Nifty Fifty got narrower and narrower, and by the late summer, only a small number of the biggest and best were holding up.” The selloff started with an oil embargo on the United States by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The following year Franklin National Bank collapsed, and President Nixon resigned in the wake of the Watergate scandal. Rising inflation brought tighter monetary policy. In the sharp recession that followed, the US unemployment rate hit 9 per cent. In the stock market selloff, the Nifty Fifty underperformed, declining by 60 per cent according to Ned Davis Research. As one commentator famously put it, they were taken out and shot one by one. Shares in Polaroid and Avon, which suffered specific problems, fell respectively by 90 per cent and 86 per cent from their peaks. But most of the other growth stocks cratered without any serious earnings disappointments. — Reuters

Tiny Singapore’s chip hub retains a big punch



Semiconductor chips are seen on a circuit board of a computer in this illustration picture. – Reuters

ROBYN MAK AND ANSHUMAN DAGA

Tiny Singapore is punching above its weight in global chipmaking. NXP Semiconductors and Vanguard International Semiconductor Corporation unveiled plans this month to build a \$7.8-billion factory in the city-state. It follows fresh investments from GlobalFoundries, Micron Technology and others showcasing Singapore’s expertise in the industry. Retaining that edge will soon get trickier. While Taiwan dominates high-end chip-manufacturing, Singapore has carved out a slice of the global tech supply chain making low-end chips vital to electric cars, smartphones and more. Its highly-productive workforce, well-developed research and manufacturing infrastructure, and sophisticated logistics have helped boost semiconductor manufacturing to 7 per cent of GDP. The government also supports the industry through friendly policies and tax breaks. Today, Singapore accounts for just over a tenth of global chip output and a fifth of semiconductor-equipment production; the city has emerged as the largest production hub outside the United States for US-based firms including Applied Materials and Micron. That makes Singapore a

logical choice for NXP and Vanguard’s joint venture. The new factory will produce 130 nanometre to 40 nm chips using technology TSMC developed some two decades ago. It’s a commoditised market where profit margins and returns are generally low. But Singapore isn’t a cheap place to make stuff. The all-in cost of manufacturing goods exported to the United States, including labour costs and fuel and electricity prices, is the highest in Southeast Asia and nearly 15 per cent more than Malaysia. Malaysia’s growing ambitions therefore pose a threat. It is a vital semiconductor hub for packaging, assembling and testing, and is eyeing opportunities in manufacturing, design and advanced packaging as global firms diversify Asian supply chains from China and Taiwan. The country boasts 450 times more land than Singapore and has scored some early wins: Germany’s Infineon Technologies said last year it would invest 5 billion euros (\$5.4 billion) to “significantly expand” its existing plant; Nvidia supplier Kinsus Interconnect Technology is, according, opens new tab to the Financial Times, mulling building a factory in Penang. Countries around the world are racing to build up their chipmaking capabilities. As rivals press their advantage, Singapore could soon be vulnerable. — Reuters

The global implications of EU tariffs on Chinese EVs



SHANG-JIN WEI

The author is a former chief economist at the Asian Development Bank

On June 12, the European Union announced new provisional levies on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs), with the tariff level to be based on estimates of how much state support an EV exporter receives. The new tariffs follow from a months-long investigation into China’s use of financial subsidies, and they will be imposed on top of the 10-per cent tariff that the EU already has in place. They are “provisional” because they might be revised downward if Chinese producers can offer evidence that the support they receive is less than estimated. Separately, if the EU can reach an agreement with China to reduce the volume of Chinese EV exports to Europe, the new tariffs may not be implemented. The new tariffs reflect the EU’s upper-bound estimate of the total subsidy per vehicle that Chinese producers receive from all levels of government throughout their supply chains. The investigators sent requests for cooperation to all Chinese EV producers, and selected three from among those who complied: BYD, Geely and SAIC. They then pored over those companies’ records and interviewed company insiders and industry experts. Concluding that the rates of subsidies are 17.4 per cent at BYD, 20 per cent at Geely,



Chinese EV brands face steep ramp-up in Europe. – Reuters

and 38.1 per cent at SAIC, the investigators set tariffs on each company accordingly. All other EV producers who agreed to cooperate with investigators will face a tariff of 21 per cent (the weighted average of the three), while producers who have not pledged cooperation will be subject to a 38.1-per cent tariff. The EU’s findings provide insight into the true nature of the United States’ 100-per cent “anti-subsidy” tariff on Chinese EVs. The US tariff, announced last month (with no serious investigation), is so much higher than any reasonable estimate of Chinese subsidies that its protectionist intent is obvious. Even before President Joe Biden’s administration imposed the 100 per cent levy on Chinese EVs, US tariffs on Chinese imports — erected under Donald Trump, but carried over by Biden — were already at levels similar to the infamous US Smoot-Hawley tariffs of the 1930s. In 2020, a World Trade Organization panel (consisting of experts from countries other than the US and China) ruled that these tariffs are inconsistent

with US legal obligations at the WTO. But both the Trump and Biden administrations have chosen to ignore WTO rules. Most governments have said nothing publicly about the US policy, partly because the tariffs have raised the relative competitiveness of their own products in the same market (by dint of reducing Chinese producers’ competitiveness). Following the Trump tariffs, direct US imports from China declined precipitously, while imports from Mexico, India, Vietnam, and many other countries increased. Some commentators seem to believe that since China’s cost advantage is so large, a 30-per cent tariff is not enough to curtail Chinese EV exports. But this assumption is mistaken for at least two reasons. First, because different markets have different standards for safety and other matters, auto producers often must adjust car designs accordingly, and this reduces the number of sales per model in a given market. For example, Chinese

standards emphasise the safety of pedestrians and others outside a vehicle in the event of a collision, whereas the US standard emphasises the safety of the driver and others inside the car. Second, any given model needs to reach a certain threshold of sales volume to be profitable. Thus, any tariff that can reduce the expected quantity of sales sufficiently could remove the incentive for exporting to that foreign market altogether. Some Chinese EV producers might consider locating production in the US, which could be good for US job creation and tax revenues. But since the US government review of inbound foreign investment is perceived to be anti-China by Chinese firms, many producers may simply give up on the US market entirely. The primary victims of the US tariffs — besides Chinese exporters and American consumers — are producers from smaller countries that now face an elevated risk of larger countries imposing protectionist measures with seeming impunity. © Project Syndicate, 2024



SCREENING

US actress Laverne Cox attends the New York special screening of the documentary film 'I Am: Celine Dion' at Alice Tully Hall in New York City. — AFP



US actress Sharon Stone attends the Los Angeles premiere of Focus Features' 'The Bike Riders' at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP



ROCK FESTIVAL

US Ryan Monroe of US rock band Band of Horses performs on stage during a concert in the Azkena Rock Festival in the northern Spanish Basque city of Vitoria. — AFP



HEALTH

People take part in the 'Yoga ao Sol Nascir' (Yoga at Sunrise) event at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



NATURE

A man rows a boat at the Qionghai National Tourism Resort in Xichang, in China southwestern Sichuan province. — AFP

art & life

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SIBIU INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

Al Din theatre festival presents in Romania

A group of 'Al Din for Culture and Art' members participate in Sibiu International Performing Arts Market within Sibiu International Theatre Festival which will be held from June 24 to 30... **P20**



فرقة مسرح الثقافة والفن
Aldin Theatre for Culture & Art
سلطنة عمان



Manchester Airport faces 'widespread disruption' after power cut

A "significant" number of flights at the UK's third-busiest airport were being delayed or cancelled on Sunday after a major power cut, the airport operator said. The Manchester Airports Group, which also operates London Stansted and the East Midlands airports, said Manchester Airport had been "affected by a major power cut in the area earlier this morning."

"This has caused widespread disruption," the group said on social media.

Power has now been restored at the international airport in the north of England, but passengers due to travel from Terminals One and Two were told to "not come to the airport until further notice" as flights were being cancelled.

Passengers for Terminal Three were told to come to the airport as



normal but warned they "could be affected by delays".

Some flyers took to X, formerly known as Twitter, to describe the "chaos", with one passenger saying there was "baggage thrown on any carousel" and another saying they were "stuck on the plane".

Airline easyJet, which operates flights from Terminal One, warned of "very long queues" for security, and disruption to check-in luggage, meaning passengers can only board flights with cabin bags.

The UK's travel industry has been hit by disruptions in the last few years, including technical problems and industrial action affecting rail and air passengers.

Last month, a nationwide outage of immigration e-gates caused long delays for thousands of passengers.

In August last year, the country faced its worst air traffic control disruption in almost ten years due to a technical fault. — AFP



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Salalah, Oman



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Paris fashionistas says au revoir to design legend Dries Van Noten



FASHION GREAT DRIES Van Noten made an emotional farewell at Paris Fashion Week on Saturday as he headed into retirement at just 66.

"I don't know how I'm feeling yet. It was very intense, I'm really very happy," he said backstage immediately after the show.

Hundreds came to a hangar in northern Paris to bid adieu to the "Flemish master".

With designers such as Giorgio Armani and the late Karl Lagerfeld determined to work well into their 80s, Van Noten's decision to hang up his needles earlier this year came as a shock.

While not a household name, he is beloved in fashion circles for a 40-year career in which he combined audacity, sophistication and poetry.

His signature looks — popular with both genders — were all in the show: impeccably cut suits, innovative materials, cleverly clashing colours — all of it finding the meeting point between slouchy comfort and elegant tailoring.

"It was never going to be a best-of," Van Noten said.

"It was really the idea to do new materials: wadding of recycled cashmere, transparent recycled polyester and those classic English wools.

"The clashes of all those things were really important to me. I hope they worked."

His staff will take over collections starting with the womenswear show in September, with the only condition that they remain in Antwerp, away from the Paris fashion hubbub.

The Puig Group, which acquired a majority stake in the label in 2018, agreed.

Van Noten told The New York Times last week it was time to give up the "addiction" of fashion. "Everything's too intense. I can't come down any-

more," he said.

HERMES AND LOEWE

Earlier on Saturday, there was a surprising lack of leather at Hermes and a restrained but celeb-packed Loewe show.

Hermes, known worldwide for its homemade leather bags and accessories, presented a show full of cotton and linen whites and blues for its spring-summer 2025 collection.

It was a collection "grazed by a gentle breeze... Clothing casts reflections into the transparency of water," designer Veronique Nichanian said in her press release.

Sandals and a sleeveless bomber-style jacket were among the few signs of leather among the docker hats, trench coats and drawstring trousers.

Meanwhile, Loewe, the rising Spanish star in the LVMH conglomerate, put on a minimalist show — "the radical act of restraint", as Northern Irish creative director JW Anderson put it.

On the front row were Spanish film-maker Pedro Almodovar, US actor Jeff Goldblum and singer of the moment Sabrina Carpenter.

The minimalism still carried the sort of strange and ornate touches that Anderson loves, such as long exotic or golden feathers swooping down from headbands and weird angular collars jutting out from T-shirts.

The brand's signature cargo pants came with an Ottoman harem twist.

"I don't think they were clothes for me, but I loved it," Almodovar said afterwards.

"Coming here is like going to a show, to the cinema, to the opera, to the theatre: each character has to be dressed in a certain way, a lot of emotion is created that way," he added.

— AFP



Al Din theatre festival presents in Romania

STAFF REPORTER

A group of “Al Din for Culture and Art” members participate in Sibiu International Performing Arts Market within Sibiu International Theatre Festival which will be held from June 24 to 30 under the slogan of this year “Friendship”, as its goal is to promote its activities around the world and transfer the success of Al Din Theatre Festival.

The main aim of this participation is to introduce Al Din Theatre Festival and its success outside Oman. The presentation will include Al Din's achievements since its establishment and its vision which they try to achieve in the coming years. Also, introducing the role of Omani theatre in promoting the tourism in Oman, or within Al Din Theatre Festival which gather theatre groups from around the world in one place under the slogan “Gathering the world in Oman”.

To be mentioned, Sibiu International Performing Arts Market is a chance for artists, actors and interested people to gather and promote their art projects. It includes 830 events this year and around 5,000 artists will participate from around 82 countries.

Salim al Rawahi, Mahmoud al Makhroomi and Walid al Hadhrami, Al Din Board members, will participate in the arts market which is a platform for dialogue for youth artists and theatre art groups from around the world. The festival's main committee chooses the world's biggest art festivals to participate in this activity.

About their participation, Walid al Hadhrami, Head of investment promotion in Al Din, said: “We consider this participation as an important event to be added for Al Din achievements history. Sibiu International Theatre Festival is the third biggest theatre festival in Europe and it's our pleasure to participate because we gain big benefits from it and we hope that we present Oman culture and theatre in an honourable way.”

