

HM condolences to Saudi King

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Prince Badr bin Abdulmohsen al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased soul in peace in paradise and grant his family fortitude to bear the loss.

SUNRISE - 05:30 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:08 AM

DHUHR - 12:09 PM

ASR - 03:33 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:42 PM

ISHA - 07:59 PM



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SWIA TEK FINDS NADAL INSPIRATION TO WIN 'CRAZY' MADRID OPEN TITLE



P15

FSA REFORMS RAYSUT CEMENT'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS



P20

EARNING ACCLAIM IN A GCC-WIDE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION



PARIS

CHINA'S XI ARRIVES IN FRANCE FOR TALKS



Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday arrived in France on a state visit hosted by Emmanuel Macron where the French leader will seek to warn his counterpart against backing Russia in the conflict over Ukraine. Xi's arrival for the visit marking 60 years of diplomatic relations between France and China heralded the start of his first trip to Europe since 2019, which will also see him visit Serbia and Hungary. But Xi's choice of France as the sole major European power to visit indicates the relative warmth in Sino-French relations since Macron made his own state visit to China in April 2023 and acknowledges the French leader's stature as an EU powerbroker.

DETAILS ON P7

MUSANDAM CORAL REEFS PULL DIVING ENTHUSIASTS



Musandam Governorate is one of the most prominent global destinations for marine tourism as the governorate boasts a huge biological diversity and stunning natural beauty. It is visited by tourists and visitors from all over the world to see its mountainous terrain and spectacular sea water which make it an ideal environment for many types of coral reefs that attract diving enthusiasts including Pavona and Porites. – ONA

Bridging Nations launched

MUSCAT: The inaugural edition of 'Bridging Nations' was held at Kempinski with inter-culturality, inclusivity, and SDGs initiative, by HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, on Sunday morning.

The event will witness a cultural collaboration with the involvement of the venerable 109-year-old Academic Society Arts-Sciences-Lettres from France, known for promoting excellence in arts and sciences, significantly enriching the initiative.

HH Sayyid Dr Kamil in his statement said: "This partnership not only highlights the global significance of Oman's cultural scene but also showcases the transformative power of art in bridging diverse cultures and fostering inclusivity. I am particularly inspired by the innovative approach of this initiative."

DETAILS ON P3

Fak Khorba secured release of 811 prisoners

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The eleventh edition of the 'Fak Khorba', an initiative for securing those who are facing legal proceedings or detained for minor financial offences, has concluded successfully, according to the Oman Lawyers Association (OLA). Conducted during the holy month of Ramadhan, till April 10, the details of the successful culmination will be disclosed on Monday at a special event to be held under the auspices of Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaee, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Lawyers Association,

and other directors of the organisation. "We are happy to announce that we have successfully concluded the month long Fak Khorba which is in its eleventh edition now, and glad to announce that we have secured the release of many who were held for minor, unintentional financial offences and they include both citizens and expatriates in the country," said Dr Hamad al Rubaee. The details of the humanitarian programme titled 'Remove Distress', the people whose release were secured by the OLA, will be announced at the press conference on Monday. Speaking to the Observer, Dr Khamis al Abri, spokesperson of

the initiative, said that the initiative was able to secure the release of a total number of 811 prisoners who were held for several financial offences making the total number of releases to 5,000 approximately in all 10 editions. "We are able to secure the release of nearly 5,000 people including citizens and expatriates held for minor financial offences in all Fak Khorba editions. We have made sure that they met the conditions, and their release was made possible with the Royal blessings and with cooperation of institutions and individuals across the country and have helped them resume a better life after the release," he said.

ROYAL GRANT FOR 7 RESEARCH PAPERS

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Sunday announced the seven research papers winners of the Royal Grant for Strategic Research Projects for the year 2024.

The announcement was made as part of the university's celebration of the 24th Annual Day held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. Among the winners were a research titled 'Olives: An Innovation in Value-Added and Production Augmentation in the Sultanate of Oman' by Professor Dr Rashid bin Abdullah al Yahyai from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, and the research titled 'The Ecology of Parthenium Plants in the Sultanate of Oman' by Dr Mohammad Farouk from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences.

The other winning researches are: 'Removing and reducing the level of carbon dioxide by converting it into useful final products using photocatalysts and sustainable renewable solar energy in the Sultanate of Oman' by Professor Dr Renraj Selvaraj

The international conference and exhibition for scientific research and innovation accompanying University Day comes within the framework of the university's endeavour to advance scientific research and innovation

DR AMER BIN SAIF AL HINAI

Vice-President of the University

from the College of Science, and 'Technical and economic evaluation of low-energy and flexible air-conditioning systems for the construction sector in hot climates in the Sultanate of Oman' by Dr Saleh bin Nasser al Saadi from the College of Engineering. The research 'Estimation, classification, and risk assessment of microplastics in wastewater treatment plants: different technologies in the Sultanate

of Oman' conducted by Dr Zainab Yauri from the College of Engineering. The research 'Maximising the cooling efficiency of buildings in the Sultanate of Oman using effective and strategic methods to reduce the cost of energy and its sustainability in building systems', conducted by Dr Mohammad Abdulqayyum from the College of Engineering. The research titled 'Green gold: designing effective catalytic systems to convert carbon dioxide into polycarbonates or high-value organic carbonates', conducted by Dr Mohammad bin Zahir al Abri from the Nanotechnology Research Center. Speaking on the occasion, Professor Dr Amer bin Saif al Hinai, Vice-President of the University for Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research at the university, said: "The international conference and exhibition for scientific research and innovation accompanying University Day comes within the framework of the university's endeavour to advance scientific research and innovation and enhance their pivotal roles in supporting economic and digital transformation... TURN TO P2

Hopes for Gaza ceasefire appear slim

CAIRO: Prospects for a Gaza ceasefire appeared slim on Sunday as Hamas reiterated its demand for an end to the war in exchange for the freeing of captives, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flatly ruled that out. The two sides blamed each other for the impasse and the Hamas delegation said it would leave Cairo truce talks on Sunday night to consult with its leadership. In their second day of talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators, Hamas negotiators maintained their stance that any truce agreement must end the war, Palestinian officials said. The prime minister said Israel was willing to pause fighting in Gaza in order to secure the release of captives, believed to number more than 130. A Palestinian official close to the mediation effort said on Sunday: "If Netanyahu doesn't change his mind, there will be no reason to stay. They can always reconvene if that changes." SEE ALSO P6



Palestinians carry aid sacks at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing conflict in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, on Sunday. – Reuters



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Interior Minister meets governors



Sayyid Hamoud advised the governors to employ modern technology in a manner that achieves decentralisation. – ONA

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Sunday held the first meeting of the year with Governors in Muscat.

During the meeting, the minister valued efforts made by the authorities concerned in Oman's governorates. He stressed the need to activate the role of all sectors to mitigate the impacts of the adverse weather condition

that prevailed recently in some governorates of Oman. The meeting also discussed developmental aspects in the governorates. He advised the governors to employ modern

technology in a manner that achieves decentralisation, streamlines procedures and encourages the community's participation in developing institutional action. — ONA



ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE HOLDS MEETING

MUSCAT: The National Committee for Road Safety held a meeting on Sunday under the chairmanship of the Inspector General of Police, Customs and Operations. The meeting highlighted annual statistics on the levels of road safety in Oman and the efforts of traffic safety institutes in the governorates in raising the awareness of different segments of the society. Moreover, the committee reviewed various indices and results of studies related to road safety. – ONA

AL AMERAT TO GET AN INTEGRATED RESIDENTIAL TOWNSHIP

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

To boost the country's real estate, especially the residential sector as part of the urban development, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning recently unveiled an investment package valued at around RO 338.7 million to

create new townships. In one of the agreements, Al Madina Real Estate will invest around RO 53 million in developing the Al Ahed Neighborhood at Al Amerat in Muscat Governorate, which will provide 965 housing units. Speaking to the Observer, Eng Abdul Rahman Barham,

CEO of Al Madina Real Estate said: "This project will be part of the initiatives from Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to promote integrated housing complexes. This project will be developed on 450,000, a sqm plot in Al Amerat and it will be very close to Bausher." The project will offer 1065

housing units to Omanis eligible for government land plots. Instead of a land plot, they will get flats or housing units at a discount of 20 per cent from the market rate. For example, a townhouse that costs RO65,000 will be offered to Omanis for RO52,000. "The government has given

the land to the developer, who will be responsible for building the infrastructure such as roads, walkways, gardens, mosques, health clubs and commercial centers," he said. The first phase of the project will be delivered in phase one and based on the sales, the developer will start work on phases 2 and phase 3.

Arabic: التنبيه الثاني

تنبيه إلى مكاتب المراجعة وتدقيق الحسابات

تؤكد هيئة الخدمات المالية على جميع مكاتب المحاسبة والمراجعة على ضرورة تسجيل بياناتها عبر تعبئة الاستمارة الإلكترونية المرفقة من خلال مسح رمز الاستجابة السريعة، لتجنب تعليق الرخصة عن مزاولة النشاط.

ملحوظة : تم تمديد آخر موعد لتسجيل البيانات حتى ٢٣ مايو ٢٠٢٤

Second Cautioning

Attention : Accounting & Audit firms

FSA emphasizes to all accounting and audit firm to register their data by filling the attached form via the QR code to avoid suspending the activity.

Last date for registration extended to May 23 ,2024.

<https://e.fsa.gov.om/Questionnaire/Index/38>

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بيانات

هيئة الخدمات المالية
FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Arabic: Arabian Travel Market opens today

DUBAI: Arabian Travel Market (ATM), the leading global event for the travel and tourism sector, will return to the Dubai World Trade Centre this week for its 31st edition. Taking place from May 6 to 9, 2024, over 41,000 attendees are expected to visit the annual trade show, which will feature 2,300 exhibitors from 165 countries. This year, ATM is centred on the theme 'Empowering Innovation – Transforming Travel through Entrepreneurship', spotlighting the pivotal role of start-ups and entrepreneurs in shaping the sector's future. This focus will provide a platform for industry leaders and policymakers worldwide to empower the travel and tourism community to harness entrepreneurship and identify growth opportunities. — ONA

Invitation to attend the chamber's ordinary general assembly meeting

Pursuant to Article (18) of OCCI Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. (56/2022) on invitation of the assembly to ordinary meeting at least once per year,

OCCI Chairman has pleasure to invite the assembly members who paid the annual fees due for the assembly membership to attend the ordinary general meeting to be held at 5 pm, **Wednesday, 29 May 2024**, at OCCI's head office in Ruwi, to discuss the following agenda:

- 1.To discuss the annual report on OCCI's work, and the balance sheet of the last fiscal year as well as the auditor's report on the fiscal year ending 31 December 2023 and approve them.
- 2.To consider suggestions of the registered members which are presented to the board at least (15) fifteen days before its meeting.
- 3.To appoint an auditor for the new fiscal year and define his fees.

Important note:

- 1.In accordance with OCCI's law, registered members shall be represented in the general meeting as owner or authorized partner singly or authorized manager singly, in accordance with the commercial register data. Every member shall have one vote. No authorization or proxy may be granted in attendance of the assembly meeting or voting thereat.
2. Members shall note that the first meeting shall be valid if attended by at least (200) two hundred registered members. In the event this quorum is not satisfied, the second meeting shall be held within (15) days after the date of the first meeting at 5:00 pm, on 13/6/2024 at the Chamber's headquarters in Ruwi and shall be valid, regardless of the number of attendees.
- 3.The annual report on OCCI's works is available in OCCI's head office and branches.
- 4.The auditor's report on the last fiscal year shall be provided before the meeting.
- 5.Please log in for attendance of the meeting via OCCI's website: www.omanchamber.om
- 6.Registration is also available in all OCCI branches in governorates.

OCCI Chairman

Royal Grant for 7 research papers

FROM P1

... and the strategic goals associated with countries' visions to achieve important associated economic and social benefits, most notably raising global economic competitiveness and enhancing societal well-being. He added that the conference seeks to raise the university's standing in global scientific circles, in light of the Royal interest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his continuous support for education, scientific research and innovation. He stressed that Sultan Qaboos University is moving forward with confident steps and unwavering determination to advance scientific research. — ONA



OMAN CALLS FOR JOINT ACTION TO COMBAT DISCRIMINATION, HATRED

BANJUL: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs took part in tasks of the 15th Session of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit Conference held in, Banjul, the Republic of the Gambia on May 4 and 5, 2024. The summit took the slogan “Enhancing unity and solidarity through dialogue for sustainable development”.

Oman’s delegation was headed by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and

Religious Affairs.

The minister conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the conferees and his sincere wishes for the success of the summit.

Al Maamari pointed that the summit was held at a delicate moment and conditions that require member states to unite and enhance the quest for prosperity and sustainability that serve their respective peoples and the world at large.

He added that the Islamic world



Oman’s delegation at OIC Summit Conference was headed by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. – ONA

today needs to double efforts and devise effective initiatives and policies to address the common challenges.

In his speech, he laid emphasis on the importance of member states’ intensifying joint action to combat extremism, terrorism, discrimination, hatred and Islamophobia. He also underlined

the importance of promoting values of tolerance and coexistence in the world.

Al Maamari stressed that the tensions and military escalation that jeopardise the safety and stability of the region is a natural outcome of the brutal Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip.

The minister deplored the “international community failure to stop this senseless war and deter Israel from its persistent violations of international law and some countries’ use of double standards.”

In this context, Al Maamari expressed regret for the United Nations “Security Council’s failure to adopt resolutions on recognising the State of Palestine, despite global consensus on Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and right to establish their independent state.” Al Maamari said that the Sultanate of Oman always emphasises its steadfast position at international and regional meetings in supporting the Palestinian cause. — ONA

‘Bridging Nations’ initiative a beacon of positive change

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The inaugural edition of Bridging Nations was held at Kempinski with Interculturality, Inclusivity, and SDGs initiative under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers on Sunday morning.

The event sees a cultural collaboration hosted in Muscat with the involvement of the venerable 109-year-old Academic Society Arts-Sciences-Lettres from France, known for promoting excellence in the arts and sciences, significantly enriching the initiative. Together, the participants are creating paintings that draw inspiration from the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In his statement, Sayyid Dr Kamil said: “This partnership not only highlights the global significance of Oman’s cultural scene but also showcases the transformative power of art in bridging diverse cultures and fostering inclusivity. I am particularly inspired by the innovative approach of this initiative, which pairs children and



The event sees a cultural collaboration hosted in Muscat with the involvement of the venerable 109-year-old Academic Society Arts-Sciences-Lettres from France, known for promoting excellence in the arts and sciences, significantly enriching the initiative

young adults with special needs alongside seasoned Omani artists.”

He stated that as people continue to advance on the journey of artistic expression and cultural exchange, he is confident that the ‘Bridging Nations’ initiative will emerge as a beacon of the positive changes that collaborative and compassionate efforts can bring about. “Let us all continue to support and engage in such valuable initiatives, paving the way for a more inclusive and interconnected world,” Sayyid Dr Kamil stated.

The Arts-Sciences-Lettres academic society of Paris is a society of encouragement and education

for the promotion of artists, people of letters, scientists. It establishes each year an international list.

The chairman of the academic society, Fernand Girard, said, “I am delighted to welcome this year the expression of our Omani artist friends. It is a long journey of friendship that we will take together from Muscat to Paris on October 6 for the proclamation of the 109th list during the big ceremony. The world needs artists, people of letters, researchers. They give us the means to know and recognise ourselves, to transform ourselves, to include everyone according to their own talent, to universalise the

fundamentals of culture.”

Lujaina bint Mohsin Haider Darwish, special guest at the event, said, “The initiative highlighted the most related issues of our times, which are encouraging inclusivity, collaboration and building a sustainable future. It is remarkable that Oman has been chosen as the host country for the inaugural edition, as it gives an opportunity to celebrate the talent of Oman’s differently abled youth and children on an international platform.”

The 17 seasoned artists are currently going through a workshop as mentors to 17 children and youth with special needs at the Music Palace in Al Mouj. The owner of Music Palace, Sayyidah Susan al Said, said she is proud to have all the artists at the venue. “Art is the voice of all people. It is inclusivity whether it is art or music. It is celebration of people who perhaps may not be able to express it in an average way. Bringing the people on this platform is very important. And this vision of Bridging Nations is important,” she said.

A special jury will pick two gold medalists and two silver medalists and the winners will be awarded on May 8th.

Using emojis sarcastically can lead to legal trouble

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 5

Using emojis or stickers of Omani and non-Omani individuals with sarcastic expressions on social networking sites, including WhatsApp, can lead one to legal trouble with penalties that may include hefty fines or even imprisonment.

According to technology experts, using stickers may result in your account being temporarily or even permanently blocked. The problem and advantage of WhatsApp stickers is that they are free, without a filter and any user can download an app, create their stickers, and share through the app.No matter what is on the sticker, WhatsApp will allow you to use it.

Recently, ‘posters’ of Omani and non-Omani figures with sarcastic expressions have increased on social media. From a legal point of view, having stickers from pictures of people and placing them with funny phrases, without the consent of the other party is considered a violation and infringement on the private lives of individuals.

The law stipulates that

‘anyone who uses the information network or technical means shall be punished with imprisonment for not less than one year and not more than three years, and a fine of not less than RO 1,000 and not more than RO 5,000, or one of these two penalties.’

The meaning of an individual’s private life is a person’s freedom to choose his lifestyle away from interference and without others being able to see his secrets or spread these secrets without his consent.

One of the forms of violating the sanctity of an individual’s private life is publishing pictures and posters of people without their consent. These designs or pictures must not be immoral but may harm his honour. Rather, it is sufficient that they harm his reputation or make him appear in an appearance that he does not like in himself or herself.

The law confirms that preserving the sanctity of individuals’ private lives on the information network has become an important matter. Preserving the privacy of individuals and preventing abuse by any technical means, also falls under the preservation of community unity.

Muscat Masterplan has it all: Metro, Amerat tunnel, water taxi

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Greater Muscat Structure Plan (GMSP) places lots of importance on connectivity via public transportation and less dependence on private vehicles, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP).

It may be noted that the plan will enter the implementation stage (four phases) once approved by the Council of Ministers.

The proposed metro line will start from Sultan Haitham City and will have important stations at Muscat International Airport, CBD Ghala, Al Khuwair Downtown, and finally CBD Ruwi.

The Wilayat of Al Amerat, which is separated from the rest of the city by mountains, will be connected through a road tunnel in addition to the existing mountain road.

According to Ahmed al Dughaishi of GMSP, “This tunnel will change the face of Al Amerat. This will also help link the suburb



The Wilayat of Al Amerat, which is separated from the rest of the city by mountains, will be connected through a road tunnel in addition to the existing mountain road

with Ruwi through a Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS).

From Ruwi, people can go to various parts of the city, using the metro and other modes of transport. “The road tunnel project will raise the value of land in

Al Amerat with the availability of new prospects for the business and tourism sectors,” he said.

He added that the development of public transport is important to reduce dependence on private

vehicles, traffic congestion, accidents as well as carbon emissions.

Besides the Metro and BRTS, the master plan will have provisions to use an on-demand taxi, bicycle, or scooter to the nearest metro stations.

Another big change in the public transport network of the city under the new plan will be the development of water taxis, which will be a new concept for the Sultanate of Oman.

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Expression of Interest NOTICE

Salalah Free Zone announces the following Expression of Interest for shortlisting of Companies specialized in the related services.

EOI No.	Description	Last Date for Document Collection	Site Visit Date	Clarification Request Closing Date	Expression of Interest Submission Date
1	Business Opportunity in SFZ Green Field Land Development	19/05/2024	21/05/2024 09:00 am HQ Building	19/06/2024	26/06/2024

- Interested companies may obtain the Request for Expression of Interest Document from SFZ email ID **SFZ-SupplyChain@asyad.om**.
- The Expression of Interest, shall be submitted in a sealed envelope marked “Business Opportunity in SFZ Green Field Land Development”.
- The sealed envelope shall be delivered by hand to Supply Chain Department in Salalah Free Zone Company, HQ Building on the date and time specified above.
- All correspondences pertaining to the Expression of Interest enquiry must be directed to email ID **SFZ-SupplyChain@asyad.om**.



FREE AND RESPONSIBLE MEDIA

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 5

THE Sultanate of Oman is witnessing tangible positive developments in the field of press freedom, thanks to the sound vision of the wise government and its continuous efforts to strengthen a free and responsible media environment. The 2024 World Press Freedom Index, issued by Reporters Without Borders, shows remarkable progress for Oman, as it jumped from 155th place globally to 137th place. This progress reflects the efforts made to promote freedom of expression and provide a safe environment for journalists to practice their work freely and responsibly.

In a step that reflects the Omani government's commitment to strengthening press freedom and journalists' rights, Abdullah bin Hamad al Harthy, Chairman of the Information, Tourism and Culture Committee in the Majlis Ash'shura, confirmed that the Majlis has reached points that have been adopted to protect journalists and media professionals in the country. "In line with the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Majlis Ash'shura has been working on several initiatives to enhance the role of the media and protect the rights of journalists," he said.

He explained that the Majlis agreed to cancel the decisions that harm journalists and media professionals, pointing to the importance of protecting freedom of expression and ensuring that they can practice their professions freely and easily. He added that the efforts are focused on cancelling any legislation that hinders the work of journalists and considers it an infringement on their basic rights.

NEW DRAFT MEDIA LAW: Mohammed bin Said al Bulushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, also stressed the importance of the new draft Media Law, pointing out that it comes after years of laws that regulated media work, such as the Press and Publications Law, the Copyright Law, and the Private Radio and Television Establishments Law. He added that there are developments in the media field, whether in terms of media tools or methods of practicing media work, which led to the need for a new law that regulates media work, contributes to the development of media in the Sultanate of Oman, and serves journalists, media professionals, media institutions, and all those working in the media field in its traditional and modern forms.

On the basics of preparing the draft law, he pointed out that it was in light of Article (35) of the Basic Law of the State, which guarantees freedom of opinion and expression by word, writing, and all

other means of expression, in addition to Article No (37) which includes freedom of the press, printing, and publishing with the conditions and conditions specified by law.

He stressed that the draft law seeks to consolidate the principles enshrined in the Basic Law of the State by guaranteeing freedom of opinion and expression through all traditional or modern means, in addition to setting the necessary controls to regulate them. He said that the draft law seeks to consolidate the principles enshrined in the Basic Law of the State by guaranteeing freedom of opinion and expression through all traditional or modern means on the one hand and finding the necessary controls to regulate them.

Electronic journalism in Oman has also witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, thanks to technological development and the increasing spread of the Internet in society. This has contributed to the diversification of information sources and provided a wider space for freedom of expression

SUPPORT: The Omani government is working to strengthen communication and open dialogue with journalists, through regular meetings and initiatives aimed at exchanging ideas and discussing issues of common interest.

The government pays great attention to supporting and training journalists, through specialised programmes aimed at developing their skills and raising their professional efficiency. The Ministry of Information, in cooperation with universities and training institutions, offers several training programmes for journalists in various fields, such as editing, investigative journalism and digital media. Khalfan al Tauqi, Omani journalist and media consultant, said, "It is a good sign that Oman is moving forward in all international indicators. This means His Majesty Sultan Haitham is taking good care of media and press freedom. And we are optimistic about coming days. We have very good space to write and to raise our concerns under very good guidelines. I think we are on the right track and we see much better coming days."

"And I believe that we should take care of these indicators. But at the same time, we have to have our understanding of our culture and our sensitivity in number of issues. But mostly, we always had space to talk and to write and to communicate with the government. This communication is always there. But we should also clarify to these international organisations about our culture and also to tell them what is possible. I believe this indicator can be raised to much better position because I believe that we can talk about anything, about any policies and there has always been a dialogue between government and community," he added.

REMARKABLE
PROGRESS FOR OMAN,
AS IT JUMPED FROM
155TH
PLACE GLOBALLY TO
137TH
PLACE



Linking theoretical knowledge and practical opportunities

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 5

Creative Industries Forum, organised by the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, kicked off on Sunday at Bait Al Zubair Museum under the patronage of His Highness Dr Adham bin Turki al Said.

The two-day forum, which will conclude today (Monday), aims at strengthening and building Omani capabilities in the cultural and creative industries, and contributing to the industry sector.

Dr Fatima al Amriyah, Dean of the College of Creative Industries, said, “Organising such forum for creative industries aims to encourage cooperation and exchange of ideas between professionals and students to develop industries and enhance their role in the economy and society. The forum comes as a bridge linking theoretical knowledge and practical opportunities in the world. This initiative is a testament to our commitment to nurturing the next generation of creative professionals and ensuring that their talents are recognised, celebrated, and integrated into society.

The forum hosts a number



The forum hosts a number of college graduates and entrepreneurs in the field of creative industries to showcase their success stories

of college graduates and entrepreneurs in the field of creative industries to showcase their success stories to motivate students to continue education and self-development by exploring global trends in creative societies, and to create channels for acquaintance and mingling between college students and employees in the various specialities.

“The Sultanate of Oman is clearly interested in culture and creativity, which has emerged in allocating an integrated axis to the

creative and cultural industries as one of the axes of the cultural strategy 2021-2040 emanating from the priority of citizenship, identity, heritage and culture in the Oman Vision 2040,” Dr Fatima said.

Work is still under way to measure the economic dimension of these industries and the extent of their contribution to the local product and understanding the reality of the creative industries, their challenges, and opportunities for development and investment economically and socially.

The university seeks to contribute to building these national capabilities in the cultural and creative industries in order to achieve its role as one of the most important tributaries of higher education in Oman.

It also seeks to offer pioneering programmes in various fields of creative industries, such as photography, design, journalism, digital media and advertising to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for the global knowledge economy based on creativity.

Philippines Embassy, Burjeel Hospital sign MoU

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 5

Philippines Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman Raul S Hernandez formalised a partnership through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Burjeel Hospital in Al Khuwair. This collaboration underscores the embassy’s shared commitment in establishing a mutually beneficial environment where the health and well-being of every Filipino take precedence.

With a distinguished history and a widespread presence across Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and India, Burjeel Hospital is poised to provide exceptional healthcare to the Filipino community. The presence of over 40 Filipino healthcare professionals within Burjeel Hospital ensures a standard of professionalism that



Raul S Hernandez, Philippines Ambassador to Oman, and Dr (Major) Pankaj Chawla, Regional Director of Burjeel Holdings Oman, sign the MoU.

instills confidence to those seeking medical treatment or consultation.

In his speech, Ambassador Hernandez said, “I am optimistic about the possibilities this partnership brings. Together, we have the power to positively

impact communities. Let us be the catalysts for a healthier and happier future, planting the seeds for lasting change.”

The Ambassador extended his gratitude to the operations manager for providing him and the embassy

staff with a comprehensive tour of the hospital facilities and services. “This partnership heralds a new era of accessible quality healthcare for Filipinos in the Sultanate of Oman,” Ambassador Hernandez added.

■ RAO’S CROSS-COUNTRY COMPETITION CONCLUDES



MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) organised the final rounds of its cross-country competition that saw the participation of 15 teams representing RAO’s brigades and other divisions. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman. At the outset of the ceremony, the RAO Commander listened to a briefing on the stages of the competition. Then, he gave the signal to start the competition. The contestants showed a high level of readiness and physical fitness. The RAO band presented musical performances that entertained the audience and triggered enthusiasm among the competitors. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the chief guest distributed cups, shields and prizes to top winners. The event was attended by senior officers and other personnel of the Royal Army of Oman. – **ONA**

SQU seeks to transform scientific research into economic returns



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

Sultan Qaboos University celebrated its twenty-fourth annual day under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit with an exhibition that aims to display the results of scientific research carried out by university researchers. The exhibition consists of several corners the main one being the Deanship of Scientific Research, the Research Projects Corner which contains nine research projects, a mural that includes the achievements of the year 2023 for scientific research, and the Glorious Researcher Corner in the field of research. Oman Vision 2040 prioritised education, scientific research and innovation to advance national capabilities by focusing on providing diverse and sustainable funding sources that enhance and strengthen the bonds of true partnership between academic and research institutions and private sector institutions. Sultan Qaboos University has paid attention to scientific research as in the field of financing research and the number of projects has reached 293 beneficiaries at a cost of more than RO3.5 million for the value of funding and 378 international conferences in which university researchers participated. While 207 scientific papers were published in seven fields affiliated with the university, 988 scientific papers were published, 72 per cent of which were in first- and second-level journals indexed in the Scopus database, in addition to 8 research chairs run by the university. Sultan Qaboos University continues its commitment to supporting researchers and enhancing their participation in local and international conferences by providing material and logistical resources. These participations are a vital opportunity to build a network of relationships and enhance international cooperation in various fields of research and development.

Dakhiliyah to implement projects worth over RO 5m

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MAY 5

Al Dakhiliyah will implement developmental and service projects worth over RO 5 million as part of the Governorates Development Programme. Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, signed many agreements to implement these projects which include building 58 km of roads covering Nizwa, Bahla, Adam, and Al Hamra; repositioning of parking and entrances leading to the Nizwa market to alleviate traffic congestion; and facelift of Hassas Park in Samayil, Al Aqil Park in

Izki, Al Hadeetha Park in Adam, and Al Khotom Park in Manah. It also includes maintenance of water supply in Manah market, and the establishment of a modern irrigation system for trees and plants at the entrance of Manah to promote environmental sustainability.

The Governor of Al Dakhiliyah also signed consultancy agreements to establish a park in Al Saih Al Ahmar in Bidbid, development of Falaj Al Khatmain in Birkat Al Mouz, and the construction of mosques and rubberised play area in Adam Public Park. He also signed for projects involving the installation of street lights



Many agreements to implement these projects which include building 58 km of roads covering Nizwa, Bahla, Adam, and Al Hamra; repositioning of parking and entrances leading to the Nizwa market to alleviate traffic congestion were signed.

in the road leading to Jabal Shams in Al Hamra, Falajeen, Al Maghbariyah in Samayil, Adam Public Park and Al Warith Mosque and the Haribah area in Nizwa.

Street lights will also be set up at Al Shubbak Road in Izki. The contract also includes installing of energy-efficient streetlights in various wilayats in the governorate. Shaikh Hilal al



Hajri said: “These projects serve the community and citizens.” Sulaiman bin Hamad al Sunaidy, Director-General of Al Dakhiliyah Municipality, said, “These agreements will

improve roads, provide more street lights and public parks. Consultancy studies for several vital projects will enhance the efficiency of public services in the governorate.”



Warring parties entrench positions at Gaza talks

GAZA: Talks to reach a Gaza truce were expected to resume on Sunday after officials from the Palestinian movement, Hamas, and Israel publicly disagreed over demands to end their seven-month war.

While mediation took place in Egypt, the head of the UN's World Food Programme said "there is famine" in northern Gaza, and appealed for a ceasefire.

The war's impact has been increasingly felt around the world as pro-Palestinian university students from Australia to Mexico and Europe follow the example of protest encampments set up in the United States.

Gaza's bloodiest-ever war began following October 7 attack on Israel that resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, according to Israeli official figures.

Vowing to destroy the Palestinian groups, Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,654 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the territory's health ministry.

Negotiators have proposed a 40-day pause in the fighting and an exchange of captives for Palestinian prisoners, according to details released by Britain.

It would be the first such truce since a week-long ceasefire saw 105 captives released last November in exchange for Palestinians held by Israel.

Qatari, Egyptian and US mediators met a Hamas delegation in Cairo and a senior source close to the negotiations said that there would be "a new round" of talks.

After "no developments" in the first round, a senior Hamas official



separately insisted late Saturday that the group would "not agree under any circumstances" to a truce that did not explicitly include a complete end to the war, including Israel's withdrawal from Gaza.

The official condemned Israeli efforts to secure a captive-release deal "without linking it to ending the aggression on Gaza".

He accused Israel's Prime

Negotiators have proposed a 40-day pause in the fighting and an exchange of captives for Palestinian prisoners, the first truce since November

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of "personally hindering" truce efforts due to "personal interests".

A source with knowledge

of the negotiations had said Israel's proposal contained "real concessions" including a period of "sustainable calm", but the source

said Israel's withdrawal from Gaza remained a likely point of contention.

The Israeli official on Saturday, however, said that in Tel Aviv that Israel has not agreed to any guarantees that the war will end.

Previous negotiations stalled in part due to Hamas's demand for a lasting ceasefire and Netanyahu's vows to crush the group's remaining

fighters in the far-southern city of Rafah, where half of Gaza's population is sheltering.

Israel has yet to send a delegation to Cairo. The Israeli official said it would do so only if there were "positive movement" on the proposed framework. "Tough and long negotiations are expected for an actual deal," the official added.

— AFP

STUDENT PROTESTS AGAINST ISRAEL'S OFFENSIVE SPREAD

BEIRUT: A local official and state media in Lebanon said an Israeli strike on a southern village on Sunday killed several people from the same family, with Hezbollah announcing rocket fire in retaliation.

Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group have exchanged regular cross-border fire since Palestinian militant group Hamas's unprecedented October attack on southern Israel sparked the war in Gaza.

Fighting has intensified in recent weeks, with Israel striking deeper into Lebanese territory, while Hezbollah has stepped up its missile and drone attacks on military positions in northern Israel.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said the strike in Mais al-Jabal killed "four people from a single family", updating an earlier reported toll of three dead in the raid it said was carried out by Israeli aircraft.

It identified them as a man, a woman and their children aged 12 and 21, and said two other people were wounded.

A Lebanese security source, requesting anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media, confirmed the strike killed "four civilians".

Mais al-Jabal municipality chief Abdelmoneim Shukair had earlier said that three people were killed, saying they were a couple and their son.

Groups in a statement said they fired "dozens of Katyusha



Pro-Palestinian students and activists protest at an encampment on the campus of McGill University, Canada. — AFP

Pro-Palestinian protests have rocked US campuses for weeks, spreading to countries including France and Australia

and Falaq rockets" at Kiryat Shmona in northern Israel "in response to the horrific crime that the Israeli enemy

committed in Mais al-Jabal".

They have repeatedly declared that only a ceasefire in Gaza will put an end to its attacks on Israel, which it says are in support of Gazans.

The Lebanese groups had on Saturday evening said it fired on military positions in northern Israel.

The Lebanese movement has repeatedly declared that only a ceasefire in Gaza will put an end to its attacks on Israel.

The latest violence came as a Palestinian delegation met with

mediators in Egypt for talks on a possible truce deal in the Gaza war.

Both the United States and France have made diplomatic efforts to calm tensions on the Lebanese-Israeli border.

In Lebanon, at least 389 people have been killed in nearly seven months of cross-border violence, mostly fighters but also more than 70 civilians. The toll includes at least 11 Palestinian fighters. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced on both sides. — AFP

Israeli strike kills 4 civilians in Lebanon

PARIS: Student protests against the Israeli military assault on Gaza have spread to several countries. Demonstrators have gathered on at least 40 US university campuses since April 17, often erecting tent camps to protest against the soaring death toll in the Gaza Strip. Nearly 2,000 people have been detained, according to US media, in demonstrations reminiscent of protests.

Pro-Palestinian protests have rocked US campuses for weeks, spreading to countries including France and Australia. The US actions appeared to ease Friday after clashes with police, mass arrests and a stern White House directive to restore order.

In recent days, police have forcibly dismantled several student sit-ins, including one at New York University at the request of its administrators.

Demonstrators barricaded inside Columbia University, the epicentre in New York of the student protests, complained of police brutality when officers cleared the faculty.

At the University of California, Los Angeles, hundreds of police emptied a camp, tearing down barriers and detaining more than 200 protesters.

Meanwhile, police forcibly evacuated protesters from a pro-Gaza sit-in at Sciences Po in Paris, the country's top political science school. Officials said 91

people were arrested.

Sciences Po interim administrator Jean Basseres rejected a student demand to examine the institution's links with Israeli universities.

Outside the nearby Sorbonne University, the Union of Jewish Students in France set up a "dialogue table" on Friday.

In Germany, a number of demonstrators were "forcibly" removed after refusing to decamp to another location, police said.

Berlin mayor Kai Wegner criticised the protest, saying on X that the city didn't want to see events like those in the United States or France.

Students have also protested against the war in Gaza in several Canadian cities, including Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver.

Hundreds of demonstrators have joined the first and largest camp, at Montreal's McGill University, in the face of threats of a police clearance.

In Mexico Pro-ceasefire demonstrators have been camped for 10 days on a green lawn in front of the university. They want it to cut ties with Israeli institutions and reject funding from arms companies.

Students at Trinity College Dublin university began a sit-in on Friday, describing the protest as a "solidarity encampment with Palestine".

— AFP



Debris are scattered around buildings damaged by an Israeli strike in the southern Lebanese border village of Mays Al-Jabal. — AFP



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In brief

■ DHAKA



BANGLADESH REOPENS SCHOOLS AS SEARING TEMPERATURES DROP

Schools in Bangladesh reopened on Sunday and classes were continuing over the weekend after a searing heatwave a week ago that suspended lessons as the country baked in temperatures that surged to well over 40 degrees Centigrade.

Bangladesh has wavered over reopening schools for some 33 million students amid pressure to prepare pupils for exams, even as the worst heatwave in seven decades sent temperatures as high as 43.8 C last week.

Many people have died across the region, and experts warned the heat could exacerbate inequalities, widen a learning gap between developing and developed nations in the tropics. Parents have welcomed the decision. — Reuters

■ LOME



TOGO RULING PARTY WINS VOTE IN BOOST FOR GNASSINGBE

President Faure Gnassingbe Togo's ruling party won a crushing majority in legislative elections, authorities said, allowing the longtime leader to extend his rule under a contested constitutional reform.

Gnassingbe's Union for the Republic party (UNIR) won 108 of 113 seats in the vote held last Monday, according to provisional results announced by the national electoral commission late on Saturday. Under the new constitution approved in April, Gnassingbe will be able to take a new post as president of the council of ministers, a role similar to prime minister, that is automatically assumed by the leader of the majority party in parliament. — AFP

■ NAIROBI



DEATH TOLL FROM KENYA CATASTROPHIC FLOODS RISES TO 228

The number of people killed by flooding and other impacts of the heavy rains battering Kenya has risen to 228, the interior ministry said.

The torrential rains that have caused widespread flooding and landslides across the country in recent weeks are forecast to worsen in May.

The ministry said further flooding was "expected in low lying areas, riparian areas and urban areas while landslides/mudslides may occur in areas with steep slopes, escarpments and ravines."

The deluges have destroyed homes, roads, bridges and other infrastructure. — Reuters

Russia says forces seized village in eastern Ukraine

MOSCOW: Russia said on Sunday its armed forces had seized the village of Ocheretyne in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, the latest in a string of small territorial gains for Moscow.

After capturing the nearby industrial hub of Avdiivka in February, Russia has pressed its manpower and weapons advantage on the battlefield, advancing several kilometres deeper into Ukraine in places.

The defence ministry said Russian troops had "completely liberated the village of Ocheretyne in the Donetsk People's Republic". Ocheretyne is around 15 kilometres northwest of Avdiivka.

Ukraine's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said last week that Kyiv had pulled back from three villages in the eastern Donetsk region and was building a new line of fortifications.

Kyiv has struggled amid delays to vital Western weapons supplies in recent months and hopes the arrival of US arms will help it stabilise the front lines.

Meanwhile, a Russian rocket

After capturing the nearby industrial hub of Avdiivka in February, Russia has pressed its manpower and weapons advantage on the battlefield

strike on Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region killed two people and drone and bomb attacks on the northeastern city of Kharkiv injured at least a dozen, officials said on Sunday. The strikes came as Orthodox Christians in Ukraine and Russia celebrated Easter, and as Moscow said its forces had captured another village on the battlefield.

"In Pokrovsk, rocket attacks killed two people and damaged a house," Vadim Filashkin, Ukraine's governor of the Donetsk region, said in a post on Telegram.

Pokrovsk is around 60 kilometres northwest of Donetsk

city, the Russian-held capital of the region which Moscow claims to have annexed.

Regional Governor Oleg Synegubov said Russia had used a guided aerial bomb in the strike. A separate overnight drone attack on the city also injured six, including a child born in 2015, Synegubov said earlier. Ukraine's air force said Russia fired 24 drones at its territory overnight, 23 of which were shot down.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky published a video message on Sunday from Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral in the centre of the capital.

Wearing a traditional Ukrainian vyshyvanka shirt, instead of his typical army-style clothes, he said: "We believe that God has a chevron with the Ukrainian flag on his shoulder. Therefore, with such an ally, life will definitely defeat death."

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin did not explicitly mention the war — that Russia calls a "special military operation" — in his Easter message. — AFP



Local residents walk near an apartment building damaged by a Russian air strike, in Kharkiv. — Reuters

China's Xi arrives in France for state visit



China's President Xi Jinping is welcomed by French PM Gabriel Attal, at Orly airport, south of Paris. — Reuters

PARIS: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday arrived in France on a state visit hosted by Emmanuel Macron where the French leader will seek to push his counterpart on issues ranging from Ukraine to trade.

Xi's arrival for the visit marking 60 years of diplomatic relations between France and China was the start of his first trip to Europe since 2019 which will also see him visit Serbia and Hungary.

But Xi's choice of France as the sole major European power to visit indicates the relative warmth in Sino-French relations since Macron made his own state visit to China in April 2023 and acknowledges the French leader's stature as an EU powerbroker.

The leader of the Communist state of more than 1.4 billion people, accompanied by his wife Peng Liyuan, was to be welcomed at Paris Orly airport by Prime Minister Gabriel Attal.

Xi is to hold a day of talks in Paris on Monday -- also including EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen -- followed by a state banquet hosted by Macron.

Tuesday will see Macron take Xi to the Pyrenees mountains to an area he used to visit as a boy for a day of

less public and more intimate talks.

A key priority of Macron will be to warn Xi of the danger of backing Russia in its attack of Ukraine, with Western officials concerned Moscow is already using Chinese machine tools in arms production.

"It is in our interest to get China to weigh in on the stability of the international order," said Macron in an interview with the Economist published on Thursday. "We must, therefore, work with China to build peace," he added.

Macron also said in the same interview Europe must defend its "strategic interests" in its economic relations with China.

Macron will be able to exercise much sway over the Chinese leader. The other two countries chosen by Xi for his tour, Serbia and Hungary, are seen as among the most sympathetic to Moscow in Europe. "The two core messages from Macron will be on Chinese support to Russia's military capabilities and Chinese market-distorting practices," said Janka Oertel, director of the Asia programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations. — AFP

Brazil mounts rescue effort as flooding kills 66

PORTO ALEGRE: Authorities were racing against time on Sunday to rescue people from raging floods and mudslides that have killed more than 50 and forced nearly 70,000 to flee their homes in southern Brazil. Viewed from the air, Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul state, is completely flooded, with streets waterlogged and the roofs of some houses barely visible.

The Guaiba River, which flows through the city of 1.4 million people, reached a record high level of 5.09 metres, according to the local municipality, well above the historic peak of 4.76 metres that had stood as a record since devastating 1941 floods.

The water was still advancing into economically important Porto Alegre and around a hundred other localities, with increasingly dramatic consequences.

In addition to some 70,000 residents forced from their homes, Brazil's civil defence agency also said more than a

million people lacked access to potable water amid the flooding, describing the damage as incalculable.

The agency put the death toll at 55, although that did not include two people killed in an explosion at a flooded gas station in Porto Alegre that was witnessed by a

I booked a ticket to Kochi last week, but had to postpone it twice and then cancel it because of the non-availability of seats to other airports

journalist. At least 74 people are also missing, it said.

Rosana Custodio, a 37-year-old nurse, fled her flooded Porto Alegre home with her husband and three children. "During the night on Thursday the waters began to rise very quickly," she said via a WhatsApp message.



People are rescued after floods in Canoas, at the Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil. — Reuters

Oman’s media freedom sees great strides



The World Press Freedom Index 2024 report published by Reporters Without Borders on Saturday did not paint a rosy picture when it comes to allowing journalists to work with freedom, especially in troubled zones.

The report, however, had something for the Sultanate of Oman to cheer about as it advanced 18 places to rank 137th in the report.

Oman secured 42.52 points compared to 37.87 points last year when it ranked 155th globally on the index, which measures the state of press freedom in 180 countries and regions annually using five metrics to assess press freedom including the political context, legal framework, economic context, social and cultural context and safety.

Recently, in his statement to the Majlis Ash’shura, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said that the Omani

media receives the support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who expressed his conviction in the significant role of the media in the next stage of development.

He said the Omani media is undertaking an enlightenment role, disseminating knowledge and achieving cultural openness with others.

The evolution of Omani media has been evident in the last 15 years with the evolution of social media, especially the X (formerly Twitter) that emerged as the common platform for the average people to raise their concerns and issues with the authorities concerned at the highest level.

Today we see the government, including ministers and senior officials, responding to the concerns of the people and taking long-term and short-term corrective measures.

A decade ago, the media reporting of incidents and accidents in the country was delayed. Today, the media reports events such as floods and rains

THE EVOLUTION OF OMANI MEDIA HAS BEEN EVIDENT IN THE LAST 15 YEARS WITH THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA, ESPECIALLY THE X (FORMERLY TWITTER) THAT EMERGED AS THE COMMON PLATFORM FOR THE AVERAGE PEOPLE TO RAISE THEIR CONCERNS AND ISSUES

and press meets live, letting every person in the country take note of the actual situation on the ground.

We do have a fear of the unverified and fake news spreading by the section of the social media or so-called citizen journalism, but in general the official and licensed media in the country has been proactive and responsible in providing accurate news.

This year’s report indicated lack of political will on the part of the international community to protect journalists, especially in the war in Gaza, which saw a record number of violations against journalists and the press since October 2023 with more than 100 Palestinian journalists killed by the Israeli army.

The World Press Freedom Index 2024 showed a decline in the ranking of the United States, while the Middle East and North African countries suffered because of the conflicts.

Sadiq Khan — A mayor with global renown

JAMES PHEBY

Sadiq Khan, who was on Saturday re-elected for a record third term as London mayor, rose from humble roots to spar with world leaders and bring consequential change to the British capital.

The 53-year-old Labour party politician — a former human rights lawyer brought up on a London public housing complex — comfortably defeated Conservative rival Susan Hall for a third stint at City Hall, increasing his margin of victory compared to the last contest in 2021.

He now overtakes predecessor Boris Johnson as the longest-serving holder of the post, which notably has powers over the emergency services, transport and planning in the city of nearly nine million. “It’s the honour of my life to serve the city that I love and I’m beyond humbled right now,” he told supporters on Saturday, adding he wanted “to repay the trust you’ve placed in me” and deliver a “fairer, safer and greener” capital.

Victory continues a remarkable journey for the Pakistani immigrant bus driver’s son, who became the first Muslim mayor of a Western capital when initially elected in 2016.

As mayor, he has made a name for himself as a vocal critic of Brexit and successive Conservative prime ministers, including Johnson, as well as for a feud with former US president Donald Trump.

The pair became embroiled in an extraordinary war of words after Khan criticised Trump’s travel ban on people from certain Muslim countries.

Trump then accused Khan of doing a “very bad job on terrorism” and called him a “stone cold loser” and a “national disgrace”.

The mayor in turn allowed an infamous blimp of Trump dressed as a baby in a nappy to fly above protests in Parliament Square during his 2018 visit to Britain. “He once called me a stone cold loser. Only one of us is a loser, and it’s not me,” Khan said during his 2021 campaign. But Khan’s own tenure has not been without its controversies, particularly over last year’s expansion of an Ultra-Low Emission Zone into the largest pollution-charging scheme in the world.

The daily toll on the most-polluting vehicles prompted a fierce backlash in outer boroughs of Greater London, with anger at the extra financial burden during a cost-of-living crisis.

Khan has also been criticised for failing to get to grips with high levels of knife crime and since last year, his handling of large weekly pro-Palestinian protests. Born in London in 1970 to parents who had recently arrived from Pakistan, Khan was the fifth child out of seven brothers and one sister. — AFP



Karim Easterbrook

The writer is former Principal Cambridge United Kingdom

The exploitation of democracy

The word democracy comes from the Greek words ‘demos’ (people) and ‘kratos’ (power), so means literally ‘the power of the people’ as opposed to despotism. The philosophical question that should be asked is “which people are you referring to?”

The word democracy is open to many interpretations and is often used by western politicians to condemn other countries who fail to conform to their particular interpretation of the word. It is sloppy thinking to accept this word at face value. If you were to put ten different people of different nationalities in a room to discuss democracy each one would likely define democracy differently.

Democracy is not a word like cat or camel. We all know what a cat or a camel is. These words, unlike democracy, aren’t open to a myriad of different definitions and interpretations.

In this article I put forward the argument that the word democracy when used by politicians to describe a political model is meaningless, deceptive, manipulative and even dangerous unless its meaning is defined in advance. Moreover I would argue that without defining what your particular model of democracy is, any debate about whether it is good or bad, whether it is better or worse and whether or not it is a political model that should be used by governments, is quite frankly a waste of one’s breath.

The word democracy has been abused and used by political puppeteers for centuries and has even been used to justify wars and the invasion of foreign lands. If you Google the meaning of the word democracy hoping to find a universal definition you will quickly discover this to be a pointless task. Wikipedia will give you at least 70 different definitions.

And no, I am not going to bore you with an explanation of what all these different definitions of democracy mean. The democratic model that exists in most western countries is described as Representative Democracy. It describes a form of democracy in which governments and politicians can be voted into office by all citizens over a certain age. Every adult citizen has a right to vote. Once in office the politicians represent the people who voted for them and are expected to carry out policies as promised in their election campaign manifesto. They provide education which is of a fairly high standard, they usually but not always protect human rights and if those who



A coalition of University of Michigan students camp in the Diag to pressure the university to divest its endowment from companies that support Israel on the University of Michigan college campus in Ann Arbor, Michigan. - Reuters file photo

voted them in do not like how they have been governed they can change their government at the next election by voting them out. They also allow, or should allow, freedom of speech.

Above all they have a legal system which in general has laws which treat all citizens equally. As we watch the university students demonstrating in the US in support of Palestine and the excessive force being used to crush their

THE WORD DEMOCRACY HAS BEEN ABUSED AND USED BY POLITICAL PUPPETEERS FOR CENTURIES AND HAS EVEN BEEN USED TO JUSTIFY WARS AND THE INVASION OF FOREIGN LANDS

freedom of speech we could put forward an argument that western democracy has deteriorated in the last few decades and that many of its central pillars are crumbling. That is perhaps an argument that needs a separate article. Suffice it to say that democracy is open to many different interpretations. It can be used manipulatively and is meaningless without defining it first.

The Israeli government is fond of stating that it is the only democracy in the Middle East. Owing to the many definitions of democracy it is in its rights

to call itself thus but, as mentioned above, without defining its own particular type of democracy the Israeli statement is empty, meaningless and manipulative.

Communist East Germany was referred to as the German Democratic Republic whereas West Germany was described as the Federal Republic of Germany. Having once visited both West Germany and Communist East Germany before the Berlin Wall came down I can assure you that democracy as practised in Communist East Germany was very different from the democracy as practised in West Germany. It is open to interpretation as to which one was the best. And so it is with Israel. One thing we can state unequivocally is that its democracy is not based on the western model. Above all its legal system fails to give equal rights to all its citizens.

Since 1948 when it unilaterally declared itself to be an independent sovereign State in Palestine, Israel has passed 65 laws that either directly or indirectly discriminate against Arabs.

The laws which perhaps above all demonstrate the undemocratic nature of Israel as defined by most western countries include the citizens’ right to acquire or lease land, the right of return, the right of residency, the right to commemorate the Naqba and the right to family life if your family is living outside Israel and wants to join you.

All these laws are the preserve of Jews. If we define an apartheid State as one which implements and maintains a system of discriminatory laws against people because of their ethnicity, religion or race then Israel fits the bill.

Heroes in different missions...

As the saying goes, without labour, nothing prospers! It is true that labour or employees are the heroes behind delivering every milestone and success of any organisation. They are the backbone of any organisation, which relies on them to achieve the overall objectives and mission. Of course, employees are the assets of any business and if they are well-invested, then the return will be reflected on their own performance. This is the formula that works here; treat people as you want to be treated! Once employees are justly treated and sufficiently paid, they will give back to the business.

However, in many cases employees are undervalued and not well-rewarded for their hard work, and dedication. Despite their sacrifice of their time, effort and comfort, sometimes they are not fairly paid as a return to what they do. It is totally unfair and unacceptable indeed! Sometimes they are not even respected as human beings, so how they could be expected to bring their best to the organisation they work for!

Although there are international standards and regulations that have been set to identify the legal rights and obligations of employees, they could be not fully implemented. The local authorities also have issued certain rules and procedures to protect employees and ensure they get what they deserve.

When it comes to preserving the employees' rights, it is not only from the financial aspect. Yet, sometimes all what they need is just respect and appreciation more than money. Unfortunately, it is not always ensured that employees get respected or appreciated for what they produce or achieve. This is more irritating to them than not even receiving rewards or financial increment on their salary. Respect is the ultimate requirement for one's dignity and not money. Generally, all what employees need is to be valued; they need to feel that



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THE LABOUR DAY IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL EMPLOYERS TO RECOGNISE THE EFFORTS OF THEIR EMPLOYEES

they are real assets to their employers.

Here comes that significance of the Labour Day, which falls on May 1 every year and being observed worldwide. The day is an opportunity for all employers to recognise the efforts of their employees. It marks the right occasion to value all their hard work and devotion to the business. It is a day for rewarding employees even if their records are having no achievements. Dedicating their time and effort for 8 or 10 hours a day and over 40 hours a week is by itself an achievement. Thus, in return they deserve a token of appreciation for their daily commitment. Perhaps celebrating the Labour Day by having a day off or a special celebration where employees get together could be the reward.

Celebrating this day is more of saying thank you to all employees all over the world. It is their day to be appreciated, thanked and rewarded. Whatever the award is, but they need to feel the appreciation and pride of their employers. I believe everyone of us would love to be appreciated and to get his work praised and commended by others. Regardless of what everyone of us do, but it is the right that each one of us is asking for. Unfortunately, some people think that the Labour Day is the day for the blue-collar men who are working on the low-paid professions. Instead, it is totally untrue what they believe in.

As a matter of fact, all those working on handicrafts or less-privileged professions are even more honoured and should be highly appreciated than the other ones. The Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him, was asked what type of earning was best, and he replied, "A man's work with his hands and every lawful business transaction." That is why people should not undervalue others no matter who they are or what they do! We are all labours, but everyone is minding his own specialisation and area of business. We all complement one another in what we do in this life.

WALKING ATOP!



A member of a Russian military band walks after a rehearsal for a parade, which marks the anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two, near the Cathedral of the Archangel in central Moscow, Russia, on Sunday. – Reuters

A free press fosters nation's development

Each year on the third of May, the world celebrates World Press Freedom Day. This celebration emphasises the importance of freedom in journalism, as it enables the media to uncover and report the truth at both local and global levels. The day serves as a reminder of the essential right to freedom of expression and opinion. Designated at a Unesco conference in 1991, World Press Freedom Day is a symbol of the Windhoek Declaration, which advocates for a free, independent, and pluralistic press. This day allows journalists to reflect on their achievements and the principles of press freedom, while also acknowledging the ethical responsibilities that come with their profession.

Recognising World Press Freedom Day is crucial, not only to promote freedom of the press and honour the sacrifices of journalists who face political risks, but also to address the modern challenges facing the industry. These challenges include digital advancements and technological changes that can lead to restrictions and censorship, as well as cybercrime, lawlessness, and misinformation that make journalistic work more difficult. In today's landscape, artificial intelligence and the spread of false information pose additional obstacles.

In light of these challenges, the journalism industry must engage in discussions to find solutions that support journalistic practices,



Aisha Al Darmaki

The writer is a specialist researcher in the area of semiotics, and a member of the State Council

ALTHOUGH OMAN SHOWED IMPROVEMENT ACROSS ALL INDICATORS IN THE RANKINGS, THE REPORT DID NOT FULLY CAPTURE THE COUNTRY'S ADVANCEMENTS IN PRESS FREEDOM AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

freedom of expression, and the delivery of balanced, fact-based content. This involves addressing new trends with creativity, leveraging technical advancements and artificial intelligence, and enhancing journalist training to ensure responsible reporting on global and local events.

To commemorate World Press Freedom Day, Reporters Without Borders released the World Press Freedom Index 2024, which focused on the "political index" as one of the key indicators (alongside economic, legislative, social, and security factors) used to evaluate countries. The latest classification showed a significant decline in the political index, dropping to 7.6 points, highlighting the challenges faced by journalists, particularly in war-torn regions and areas of political strife. The report noted a lack of international political will to protect journalists, exemplified by the high number of violations during the conflict in Gaza involving the Israeli military. This conflict led to a record number of journalist casualties, with over 100 Palestinian journalists killed, including 22 who lost their lives while reporting. Due to these violations, Palestine ranked 157th in terms of journalist security and safety in the classification.

As a result, the classification underscores the political

obstacles and risks journalists face globally due to wars and geopolitical conflicts that pull journalism into ideological struggles. Elections and political parties tainted by incitement, threats, and press freedom restrictions exacerbate these challenges, making it incredibly challenging to maintain freedom of the press and ensure journalist safety in many countries worldwide.

Norway topped the World Press Freedom Index 2024, followed by Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Finland in the top five positions. The countries in the Maghreb and the Middle East region experienced a decline in the political index due to events in Palestine and actions taken by Israel to control information flow from the besieged area, incorporating misleading information into its system. Meanwhile, Qatar progressed in the rankings, and the Sultanate of Oman jumped 18 places to rank 137th with a score of 42.52.

Although Oman showed improvement across all indicators in the rankings, the report did not fully capture the country's advancements in press freedom and freedom of expression. The classification failed to consider the unique religious, moral, and societal identity of Oman and relied

on outdated data from 2016 to 2021 to evaluate the media landscape, which may not have been entirely objective or fair. Furthermore, it included the same data and findings from the previous year's classification report.

The ability of these reports and classifications to monitor press freedom developments globally may encounter various problems and obstacles. It is not feasible to assess these developments using a single scale without considering the unique aspects of each country or region, leading to potential contradictions and lack of objectivity. While these tools are important for evaluation and progress, their accuracy and integrity should be based on up-to-date annual data, accounting for the social and religious characteristics that distinguish countries worldwide.

Nevertheless, the classification serves as a valuable indicator for general assessment, aiding in the enhancement of journalistic practices and the establishment of a more open and liberating media environment capable of adapting to evolving and rapid changes, particularly in technology.

Oman's media landscape boasts several advantages in terms of freedom of expression and balanced press freedom,

fostering journalistic innovation and promoting diversity and objectivity. However, with the advent of the digital age, the proliferation of information and data, and the rise of artificial intelligence applications, achieving higher levels of press freedom and facilitating access to information will significantly enhance the role of journalism and media in promoting development across all sectors.

Press freedom, transparency, and media diversity are driving forces that benefit all sectors. Therefore, prioritising the development and growth of the media industry is crucial for national progress. This involves empowering journalists, providing them with training and support, and establishing policies and regulations that align with the evolving media landscape to enhance the media's role as a pioneer in society.

Preserving and building upon the gains of press freedom and freedom of expression in Oman is essential to furthering the development of our country and positioning it among developed nations. It is imperative to uphold and improve upon these achievements to serve our beloved homeland and propel its development forward.

(The original version of the article was published in Arabic in Oman newspaper on May 4)

sport

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PSV Eindhoven crowned Dutch champions

THE HAGUE: PSV Eindhoven were crowned Dutch champions for the 25th time on Sunday, the club's first title since 1988, in a season also notable for the implosion of rivals Ajax.

Peter Bosz's men made sure of the Eredivisie trophy with two games to spare via a 4-2 win over Sparta Rotterdam in a party atmosphere at a sunny Philips Stadion.

This meant second-placed Feyenoord could no longer catch PSV, who celebrated in front of their jubilant fans at the final whistle.

It has been a season to remember for the Eindhoven club whose shirt has been graced by Brazilians Romario and Ronaldo, as well as Dutch legends Mark van Bommel and Arjen Robben.

They went 17 games before even dropping a point in the Eredivisie, finally losing their

unbeaten record on the 27th matchday with a 3-1 loss away to NEC Nijmegen.

Particularly sweet was a 5-2 win at home to Ajax and a crunch 2-1 victory away in Feyenoord's intimidating De Kuip stadium, which set PSV on their way towards the title.

Central to PSV's success this term has been the form of their veteran Dutch striker Luuk de Jong, whose 27 goals has made him the league's joint top goalscorer.

This team has some way to go before matching the legendary 1987/88 Guus Hiddink-coached side that swept all before them, beating Benfica on penalties in the European Cup final.

But the Eredivisie trophy will assuage the frustrations of previous seasons when PSV finished second on three consecutive occasions, watching



Luuk de Jong celebrates the 1-1 goal. – AFP

Ajax or Feyenoord lift the title.

PSV also enjoyed a good run in Europe, coming second in a Champions League group that included Arsenal, Sevilla and Lens, before crashing out to Borussia Dortmund in the last 16.

HORROR SEASON FOR AJAX

Feyenoord can count themselves

unlucky to have come up against an all-conquering PSV this year — the Rotterdam club have only lost twice all season in the top flight.

The De Kuip faithful will settle for second place plus a Dutch Cup triumph but are set to lose their coach, with Arne Slot heading to Liverpool to replace

Jurgen Klopp. Meanwhile, Ajax fans would settle for anything after a season which would have Johan Cruyff turning in his grave.

The four-time European Cup champions seem unlikely to qualify for any European football next season, lying a shocking fifth — nine points behind AZ Alkmaar.

The 5-2 win for PSV over Ajax in October was doubly joyous for the Eindhoven club as it also, briefly, condemned their perennial rivals to a historic last place in the Eredivisie.

Historic low followed historic low Ajax, a club that counts Cruyff, Marco Van Basten and Dennis Bergkamp as alumni, as they crashed out of the Dutch club to amateur club Hercules.

The nadir for the Amsterdam club came in early April when they suffered humiliation in De Kuip, losing 6-0 to Feyenoord in

the Dutch "Klassieker"

Frustrations on the pitch have boiled over into violence in the stands and chaos in the boardroom.

CEO and chairman Alex Kroes was suspended on suspicion of insider trading, only to return a few weeks later as technical director.

A few days after his suspension, it emerged that club chairman Michael van Praag, who had vocally criticised Kroes, had "forgotten" to declare his own shares in the club to the correct authorities.

Vitesse Arnhem were relegated for the first time in 35 seasons after the Dutch federation imposed an 18-point penalty on them.

They currently sit on two points after their punishment for breaches of the league's licensing regulations.

Real Madrid secure LaLiga title after Girona thrash



Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz celebrates with Fran Garcia.

REAL MADRID: Real Madrid claimed a record-extending 36th LaLiga title on Saturday after Girona fought-back to beat Barcelona 4-2, a result that left Carlo Ancelotti's side with an unassailable lead in the standings.

Real Madrid, who have lost only once in the league this season, beat lowly Cadiz earlier on Saturday. They hold a 13-point advantage over second-placed Girona while Barcelona dropped to third with four matches remaining.

Real now can turn their attention to a LaLiga-Champions League double as they get ready to host Bayern Munich in the semi-final return leg on Wednesday after snatching a 2-2 draw in Germany last week.

It was an afternoon of celebration for Girona too as the win secured them a spot in Europe for the first time after they qualified for next season's Champions League.

A brace from substitute Portu helped surprise package Girona to humble their Catalan rivals for the second time this season. Girona had also beaten Barca

away in December by the same score.

On Saturday Andreas Christiansen gave Barca the lead in the third minute before Girona hit back a minute later with LaLiga top-scorer Artem Dovbyk heading in the equaliser.

Robert Lewandowski put the visitors back in front from the penalty spot after Lamine Yamal was fouled inside the box just before the break and a wasteful Barca missed several chances to extend their lead early in the second half.

However, in the 65th minute, in his first action after coming off the bench, Portu netted the equaliser and Miguel Gutierrez scored from a rebound two minutes later to give Girona the lead. A stunning volley from Portu in the 74th minute secured the win.

"It's incredible to look at your shirt and experience this. There is nothing more beautiful than living this," an emotional Portu told DAZN with tears rolling down his face.

"I had a thorn in my side with this club. A few years ago, I experienced the other side, which was relegation and I felt very responsible because I

played a lot. Today I made amends with the fans and I can smile again."

If Barcelona end up finishing outside the top two, it will be a further blow to the club which is facing mounting financial problems related to their massive wage bill, a 1.2 billion euro debt and a 1.6 billion euro Camp Nou stadium renovation project.

The champions and runners-up of the Copa del Rey and LaLiga contest the lucrative Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia, with the winner bagging a potential 6.6 million euros.

With four matches remaining, Barca now rely on Girona slipping up if they are to have any chance of contesting the Super Cup.

"I am sad, disappointed. We have experienced both sides of the coin. Ineffectiveness have killed us once and again," Barca manager Xavi Hernandez, who last week announced he will stay in charge for another season, told a press conference.

"I'm the first to be angry with this situation, I understand the fans. Before being a coach, I was a fan. I understand our people's frustration." — **Reuters**

OMAN VOLLEYBALL TO TAKE JORDAN IN MUSCAT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 5

Oman volleyball team will commence their campaign in the West Asian U-18 qualifiers, which will be hosted by Muscat during May 10 to 12, at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The opening day will witness two matches, Oman will take Jordan at 7:30 pm (Muscat time), Lebanon will face Saudi Arabia at 5:00 pm.

The Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) is fully set to organise this West Asian event in Muscat, after they completed all the technical and logistics preparations. Four teams will vie for direct tickets from West Asian zone to the Asian event including Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Oman. This even in Muscat will serve as qualifiers for the 15th Asian Men's U-18 Volleyball Championship which will take place in Bahrain at Manama City during July 28 to August 4.

Oman U-18 volleyball team will meet Lebanon in the following match which will be held on Saturday and they will conclude their qualifiers games against Saudi Arabia in a tight match. Oman team, coached by Islam Mohammed, is under way in their training sessions after they have completed their participation in



the last GCC Youth Games, which concluded recently in UAE.

Oman volleyball team will aim for better show than the Gulf event as they could not end their participation with a medal after suffering five defeats. Oman national junior bikers will eye to reach the Asian event for the first time in history with its team that is comprised of many potential players who can deliver top technical performance.

The team raised their readiness level in these days as they will begin their actions soon in the West Asian assignment. Oman players will receive the right support from national team fans as the event will be hosted in Muscat. During the last month, the national U-18 volleyball team went in a joint camp with the national senior volleyball team in Suhar. The camp had featured from several training sessions and some warm up matches against the senior team.

'FOTINA' ACHIEVES SECOND PLACE IN FRENCH



The mare 'Fotina', owned by Royal Cavalry, achieved second place in the first half "Al Nujaifi Round", which was held at the French Bourdrex track on Sunday, the first half was allocated to purebred Arabian horses for a distance of 1,600 metres. The mare was under the leadership of jockey Michael Forrest, and under the supervision of Frederic Chanchez.

All-round Jadeja helps Chennai jump to third

Dharamsala: All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja starred with bat and ball as defending champions Chennai Super Kings thrashed Punjab Kings by 28 runs to boost their IPL play-off hopes on Sunday.

Left-hander Jadeja top-scored with 43 off 26 balls to guide Chennai to 167-9 after being invited to bat first in Punjab's adopted home ground of Dharamsala.

Jadeja then returned figures of 3-20 from his four overs of left-arm spin to help restrict Punjab to 139-9 for Chennai's sixth win in 11 matches as they climbed to third in the table.

The top four teams will make the play-offs with the final on May 26 in Chennai.

The performance from the veteran Jadeja comes as a welcome sign ahead of the T20 World Cup in Juwne in the West Indies and the United States.

Chennai suffered an early blow with Sri Lanka pace bowler Matheesha Pathirana set to return home due to a hamstring injury. Pathirana, called "Baby Malinga"



for his slinging action modelled on former Sri Lanka quick Lasith Malinga, was Chennai's standout bowler and took 13 wickets in six matches.

But medium-pace bowler Tushar Deshpande took on the responsibility in the absence of Pathirana and injured Deepak Chahar as he struck twice in his first over and Punjab's second in the chase.

Deshpande sent Jonny Bairstow, bowled for seven, and then Rilee Rossouw, bowled for a duck, trudging back to the pavilion in the

space of four balls.

Prabhsimran Singh, who made 30, and Shahshank Singh, who hit 27, attempted to rebuild in their stand of 53 but their departure triggered a collapse.

Jadeja struck regular blows including skipper Sam Curran to rattle the middle-order and derail the opposition chase.

Earlier Chennai suffered from a lack of partnerships despite a second-wicket stand between skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, who hit 32, and Daryl Mitchell, who struck 30.

Jadeja took charge and with some help from the middle order as he took Chennai to a par total at the picturesque ground overlooking the Himalayas.

But the Sunday crowd were left disappointed when veteran M.S. Dhoni was bowled for a first ball duck off a slower ball from Harshal Patel, who along with Rahul Chahal took three wickets each. Jadeja smashed three fours and two sixes before departing in the 20th over from left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh.

Verstappen takes pole in Miami after sprint race win

Miami Gardens: Red Bull's Max Verstappen continued his domination of Formula One, taking pole position for Sunday's Miami Grand Prix after clinching the sprint race earlier on Saturday.

The reigning world champion and championship leader, who has won four out of five Grand Prix races this season, secured his seventh straight pole position with another dominant drive.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, whose fastest lap was 0.141 seconds behind Verstappen, will start second with his team-mate Carlos Sainz in third place and Verstappen's Red Bull partner Sergio Perez fourth.

Three-time world champion Verstappen has won both the previous Miami Grand Prix races but never from pole and he said he still found qualifying tricky.

"Every single year that we come here, I find it extremely difficult to be very consistent with the car

feeling, the tyre feeling over one lap," he said.

"It's not the single most enjoyable lap of my career just because of how slippery it is. You are not very confident on the lap but we are on pole and of course that is the most important thing."

Leclerc said it had been hard to manage the tyres, with overheating a problem, but said his performance in the sprint race gave him encouragement.

"That's where we lost a little bit of time, however the race is long tomorrow, we showed good pace this morning (in the sprint race) and I hope we can put Max under a bit more pressure," he said.

Sainz underscored just how tricky it had been for drivers to deliver their fastest lap on the course around Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins.

"It's really tricky around here with a new soft. Every lap is a bit



of adventure," he said.

"With the wind you don't know what will happen. Keeping all that in mind, the laps were not too bad.

"You always finish the lap and think you could have gone so much faster, but it's almost impossible to put a perfect clean lap around here."

Lando Norris will start in P5, just ahead of the Mercedes pair George Russell and Lewis Hamilton.

Earlier, Verstappen cruised to victory in the sprint race, finishing 3.3 seconds ahead of Leclerc.

The Dutchman led from pole and was never challenged after a chaotic opening lap.

Verstappen's team-mate Perez was third as the world champions gave themselves a points boost.

The Red Bull driver held off Leclerc's strong start to secure his place at the front but there was plenty of action and incident in

the middle of the pack.

Haas's Kevin Magnussen and Mercedes' Hamilton jostled hard but in the end the Dane picked up three penalties, adding 25 seconds to his time, after frequently leaving the track and gaining advantage.

Hamilton also received a penalty, leaving him outside the points positions in 16th after speeding in the pit lane.

The safety car was brought out after the first lap, which saw a start line incident involving Hamilton, Fernando Alonso, Lance Stroll and Norris.

But away from those skirmishes, it was business as usual for Verstappen, who added another eight points to his season tally with the victory.

"I think my engine wasn't good in the start and so then I had to speed it a bit, luckily everything worked out in turn one," said Verstappen.

TOP-RANKED Iga Swiatek came through “the most intense and crazy final” she has ever contested to avenge her loss to Aryna Sabalenka in last year’s Madrid final with a gruelling three-hour 11-minute victory in the Spanish capital on Saturday.

Coming back from 1-3 down in the decider and saving three match points in total, Swiatek claimed a 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) victory to secure the Madrid Open trophy for the first time.

“Well, who is going to say now that women’s tennis is boring, right?” said Swiatek. Swiatek, who picked up the 20th title of her career, and ninth at the WTA 1000 level, has now won her last eight consecutive finals and joins Elena Rybakina with a tour-leading 30 victories this season.

The 22-year-old Pole confessed she felt tight in the first two hours of the contest but drew inspiration from Rafael Nadal, and his ability to step up mentally when it mattered the most.

“I was surprised that in the third set I felt the best mentally,” said Swiatek, who improved to 7-3 lifetime against two-time Madrid champion Sabalenka.

“One thing that came through my mind was that I think Rafa had a couple of matches like that.

“I remember exactly when he was playing (Daniil) Medvedev in Australia (Open final in 2022) and it clicked for him. He also struggled for a bit of time, he was tense and I think stressed. That kind of gave me hope that maybe it will click, even after two hours.”

In warmer temperatures but breezier than usual conditions at the Caja Magica, the pair traded breaks to kick off the final and were neck and neck until Swiatek drew a forehand error from Sabalenka to break for 6-5 and closed out the 61-minute opening set on her first opportunity.

Despite squandering a 2-0 lead early in the second, Sabalenka manifested a set point on Swiatek’s serve in game 10, forcing a decider with a lightning-fast down-the-line forehand winner.

It was the fifth time in six matches this fortnight that Sabalenka found herself embroiled in a three-set duel and she was clearly ready to go the distance.

‘INTENSE’ FINAL

The defending champion broke for 3-1 in the decider, peppering Swiatek with deep, powerful shots, but her lead was short-lived. Swiatek saved a pair of match points on her own serve at 5-6 as the high-quality affair fittingly went to a deciding tiebreak.

Sabalenka produced an ace to save match point at 5-6 in the breaker and saw one of her own slip away as Swiatek survived for 7-7.

Moments later, the Polish world number one flung herself to the ground in disbelief as she sealed a heroic victory on a long backhand from Sabalenka.

“I think it was the most intense and, like, crazy final I played,” said Swiatek after the match.

Despite the loss, Sabalenka feels she has recaptured her best form that saw her successfully defend her Australian Open title in January.

The world number two admits her level dipped after Melbourne but her long battles in Madrid have helped her get back to her battling best.

She said the tight defeat is a “tough one to accept” but she’s proud of her efforts against her fellow “Big Three” rivals, Rybakina and Swiatek this fortnight.

“I really want to see many more finals against her,” said Sabalenka.

“I really hope that we’ll be able to increase the level every year. I’m really happy to be one of these Big Three, as you call us. “It’s really motivating me a lot to keep working and to keep improving myself just so I stay there and get as many wins against them as I can.” — AFP





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Marsa LNG solar power project to come up in Shinas

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 5

A site in Shinas in Al Batinah North Governorate has been selected to host a 300 MWp-capacity solar PV project that will meet 100 per cent of the energy requirements of the LNG bunkering hub of Marsa LNG set to come up at Sohar Port and Freezone.

According to officials of Omani integrated energy group OQ, who own a 20-per cent stake in Marsa LNG (alongside French energy group TotalEnergies with 80 per cent), the proposed Shinas site is located around 30 km from Sohar Port and Freezone.

Last month, the two partners also announced tentative plans to jointly develop a portfolio of renewable energy projects of up to



800 MW in the Sultanate Oman.

OQ Alternative Energy, a subsidiary of OQ Group, is tipped to have a 51-per cent stake in this new partnership, with the remaining 49 per cent to be held by TotalEnergies.

First off for development in this portfolio is the 300 MWp-capacity solar farm at Shinas.

Asked how the Shinas Solar PV project would supply renewable energy to the LNG plant during periods of low sunlight or at night, an OQ official noted: “Battery

storage is one option to address night-time renewable energy supply. In any event, the 300 MWp solar project will generate far more than what the LNG plant requires to operate 24x7.

“This will enable the LNG plant to secure its night-time energy needs directly from the grid. Marsa LNG is set to become the first LNG bunkering hub in the Middle East.”

When operational by Q1 2028, the 1 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) capacity LNG project is set to be one of the lowest GHG emissions intensity LNG plants ever built worldwide, with a GHG intensity below 3 kg CO₂e/boe (as opposed to the average emission intensity of LNG plants of around 35 kg CO₂e/boe).

Importantly, the new 300 MW associated solar PV plant of Marsa LNG is set to bolster the presence of TotalEnergies in Oman’s renewable energy space.

Last year, the French energy company, in partnership with Veolia, unveiled a 17-MWp solar PV farm in Sur to support the energy requirements of the latter’s Sharqiyah Desalination Plant.

The facility generates over 32,000 megawatt-hours (MWh) of green electricity per annum, which covers the plant’s entire daytime consumption.

TotalEnergies Renewables Distributed Generation Middle East & Africa signed an agreement with Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, to develop a 4.6 MWp solar rooftop project that will cover the annual green energy needs of the complex.

BGP Oman Corporate Social Responsibility Report

About Us

BGP Inc., China National Petroleum Corporation or BGP started its oil and gas exploration business in the 1950s and expanded its international collaborations in the 1980s. After 70+ years of development, BGP has led the world in providing geophysical solutions, offering comprehensive and cutting-edge geophysical products and high-quality services to the energy industry. Its business scope covers over 80 countries and regions worldwide, serving 300+ energy companies.

BGP Oman, a subsidiary of the BGP Inc., China National Petroleum Corporation, established in 2003 as BGP Oil & Gas Services LLC. It provides oil and gas exploration services to major oil and gas companies operating in various blocks across Oman. Being committed to the organic integration of economy, environment, and social responsibilities, BGP Oman strives to provide advanced and valuable services to its clients, operates in compliance with laws and regulations, promotes green exploration and environmental protection, actively fulfills its social responsibilities, gives back to society, and aims to achieve shared values. It aims to become an internationally renowned geophysical company with brand influence and social appeal.

Employment and Development



Creating more employment opportunities for the local community has always been a guiding principle for BGP Oman. After 20 years of exploration and acquisition, BGP Oman has built a team primarily consisting of local employees, providing 2,800+ job opportunities. Among them, 228 Omani graduates have advanced to management positions. In other words, BGP Oman has achieved 88.5% localization with 65% of local mid-level managers.

BGP Oman highly values the training of local employees, leveling up their operational skills with methods like apprentice programs and pairing systems. It cares about the youth of the Z generation in Oman and has established partnerships with renowned universities such as Sultan Qaboos University and the Technical University of Germany. Launching activities like technical lectures, open days, and cultural exchanges, and Omani youth are invited to seismic exploration sites to learn about acquisition technologies and cutting-edge geophysical knowledge, that help them bridge the gap between theory and practice, systematically improving their skills. Additionally, BGP Oman provides comprehensive training for local employees, covering the entire production process, including HSE, operations, technical skills, and languages. Such training enhances the work skills and HSSE awareness of local employees. We have provided applicable training 81,850 times, cultivating a large pool of exploration and acquisition professionals.

BGP Oman never stops improving compensation and benefits, refining talent development pathways and rewarding outstanding employees. To encourage and enhance cohesion among local employees, BGP Oman holds annual award events to honor outstanding employees and organizes learning tours to China for them.

Furthermore, BGP Oman is committed to promoting cultural diversities and fostering mutual understanding, trust, appreciation, and learning among employees from different cultures, thereby

enhancing team cohesion and creativity. To promote mutual understanding between Chinese and local employees, BGP Oman organized cultural exchanges to showcase the brilliant traditional cultures of these two nations. These events have been actively participated by Chinese and Omani employees.

On its seismic crews, BGP Oman tries to cultivate a “family” culture by regularly having open conversations between managers and employees to understand more about their lives and minds. By doing so, the problems of employees are solved and their burdens shared. BGP Oman celebrates holidays and employees’ birthdays with a human-centered mindset that facilitate harmony in its big family of people from different countries.

Safety and Health



Following a people-oriented philosophy, BGP Oman puts its employees’ physical and mental health as a priority. The company has been upgrading its emergency response capabilities and conducting comprehensive occupational health management, including employee health monitoring and monitoring of occupational hazards in the workplace. BGP Oman has set a world record of 19 consecutive years of safe operations since day one with a total of 36 million manhours without a lost time injury (LTI), which has been achieved through a high safety awareness and strict management.

BGP Oman strives to prevent safety risks and accidents from the beginning of all its operations, focusing on identifying and mitigating any potential hazards that may jeopardize the health and safety of its employees in the workplace. As for safe operations, BGP Oman has invested \$18 million in safety funding, reinforcing the vehicles used for workforce transportation with more robust protection structures. Anti-fatigue driving systems have been installed in long-distance vehicles and safety incentives have been introduced, creating a unique safety culture within BGP Oman.

To ensure employees receive timely medical treatment in case of emergencies or critical illnesses, BGP Oman has set a green channel for employee medical care and built an SOS medical clinic that meets international

standards. The company also provides year-round health counseling and services for employees, creating a conducive work environment for their well-being. When accidents or critical illnesses happen, the SOS clinic can provide timely treatment.

Low-Carbon and Environmental Protection



BGP Oman adheres to the “green, low-carbon, and prioritizing environmental protection” concept in seismic exploration. It considers ecological environment protection as a top priority and promotes the coordinated development of safety, environmental protection, and production. The company focuses on ecological restoration, actively promotes energy conservation and carbon reduction and fulfills its environmental commitments. BGP Oman has increased its technical research into CCS/CCUS, it has completed the first low-concentration CO₂ capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS) in Oman, effectively promoting carbon storage and carbon neutrality. The company attaches great importance to environmental protection and has introduced advanced sewage treatment at its major sites in Oman, achieving zero discharge of sewage. In terms of waste management, BGP Oman has installed segregated waste bins/containers, food dryers, and waste incinerators. Local energy officials in Oman have praised BGP’s projects as representing the highest level of environmental management in the oil and gas industry in the region.

Over the past two decades, BGP Oman has earned recognition and trust from partners and local government with its excellent project execution, recognition and trust from contractors through sincere communication and sharing of benefits. In the future, BGP Oman will maintain good communication and cooperation with various sectors of Oman, from health, environment and safety policies to community engagement, localization and social development initiatives. It will leverage its strengths to better understand and serve Oman’s development, promoting sustainable social and economic development in the country.

Bank Muscat showcases financial services, facilities offered for real estate development

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to partake in conferences and exhibitions in different fields, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, participated in the Real Estate Conference organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, which was held from April 29, 2024 till May 1, 2024 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

This year, the conference coincided with the 19th edition of the Oman Design and Construction Week 2024. The conference witnessed the participation of more than 150 local and international exhibitors representing 40 countries.

The conference hosted around 10 panel discussions on various topics, featuring 42 working papers. This event represents a platform to exchange knowledge and expertise, and showcase cutting-edge technology in the field.

The 3-day conference



focused on various topics, including Oman's structure as a promising investment hub in real estate development, supporting emerging companies, empowering financial and human resources, creating an integrating environment between sectors, and shed light on the latest digital developments in the sector.

Within the topic of "Future-Ready Real Estate: Financing, Technology and Community

Living," Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager, Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, presented on Bank Muscat contribution to real estate market and Sustainable Finance in Oman.

He shed light on Bank Muscat's contribution and commitment to supporting real state sector in Oman, the services and products offered in this regard such as Baituna housing loan from Bank Muscat and Meethaq Home

Finance, and its wide network of channels across the Sultanate of Oman.

In addition, he reflected on the bank's role in supporting national strategic projects like Sultan Haitham City where individuals wishing to avail residential units will enjoy a discounted rate of interest on Baituna housing loan.

He also touched upon Bank Muscat's commitment to providing sustainable financial options such as Green Finance product as well as other solutions designed specifically to support the goals set in this regard.

Housing finance development is particularly important in boosting equitable economic growth, enabling households build assets, improving living conditions, empowering a country's population, and strengthening communities and overall social cohesion.

Bank Muscat is committed to supporting this crucial sector and strengthening its role in the development and growth of the

Sultanate of Oman's economy. As Oman prepares for the next phase of its progress and development under the landmark Oman Vision 2040, the role of home financing is only set to grow more and more important.

Bank Muscat customers can take advantage of the fast processing of applications and the excellent insurance coverage for their financing. Bank Muscat also offers Green Finance, which is Oman's first environmentally-friendly finance product.

The bank's Green Finance was launched in 2019 in association with the International Finance Corporation (IFC). It encourages customers to install solar panels on their rooftops and use solar energy for a large part of their household energy requirements.

This unique initiative reflects the bank's commitment to responsible banking and its continuous contributions to the country's overall progress and development.

National Finance backs SQU accounting league

MUSCAT: Committed to empowering the next generation of leaders and change-makers, National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, proudly sponsored the SQU League, a thrilling competition showcasing the accounting acumen of Sultan Qaboos University students.

Twenty participating teams contended to master a series of challenging accounting tasks and questions. The event culminated in a closing ceremony celebrating the students' remarkable skills and talent.

During the ceremony, the winning teams were honoured in the presence of a number of students and faculty members at the College of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University.

National Finance's support for student-driven initiatives underscores the company's keen understanding of the importance of nurturing the next generation of finance professionals.

By sponsoring events like the SQU Accounting League, the company aims to provide students with vital platforms to showcase their talents, refine their skills, and pave the way for successful careers.

Commenting on the occasion, Tariq bin Suleiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, said, "The future of our beloved country lies in the hands of our exceptionally talented youth. We believe that with the right kind of support, encouragement and by providing them with opportunities to thrive, grow and learn, we are investing in their potential, ensuring a promising future for our communities." He added, "The SQU Accounting League offered aspiring finance professionals an invaluable opportunity to sharpen their skills, engage in problem-solving, and foster team spirit — essential qualities for a well-rounded career. We wish all participating students the very best."



NBO's Muzn reinforces commitment to Sharia compliance

MUSCAT: Muzn, the Islamic banking window of the National Bank of Oman (NBO), conducted its 1st Sharia Supervisory Board (SSB) Meeting of 2024. This significant event gathered esteemed board members, reaffirming Muzn's unwavering commitment to Sharia compliance in its financial solutions.

Present at the meeting were the esteemed members of the SSB, which included Shaikh Mufti Dr Muhammad Zubair Usmani, who serves as the Chairman of the Muzn SSB. Accompanying him were Shaikh Dr Abdulrahman bin Abdullah al Saadi, Shaikh Dr Saleh bin Nasser al Kharusi, all of whom bring their extensive expertise to guide Muzn in adhering to Islamic financial principles.

Salima al Marzouqi, Chief

Islamic Banking Officer, said, "Cultivating the principles of Sharia in our financial solutions is at the core of Muzn's mission. Our 1st SSB Meeting of the year 2024 signifies our enduring dedication to fostering the Islamic finance sector's growth in Oman. By collaborating with our esteemed Sharia Board members, we are actively shaping the future of Islamic banking, ensuring our products and services align with the highest standards of compliance. We remain dedicated to delivering seamless, innovative solutions whilst always putting our customers' values first." Muzn stands at the forefront of the Islamic banking sector, offering innovative, competitive and quality financial solutions that align with Sharia values.

Sohar International branch, Sohar Islamic service centre in Duqm commence operations

MUSCAT: In alignment with the bank's ongoing organic expansion strategy to serve customers and achieve further financial inclusion, Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman, is pleased to announce the commencement of operations at its premium Sohar International branch and Sohar Islamic service centre located in the Wilayat of Duqm.

The new service points are fully equipped to offer a superior banking experience to customers across all segments.

Strategically situated to provide convenience, the Sohar International branch and Sohar Islamic service centre boast a prime location, spacious facilities, and ample parking, ensuring easy access for customers.

Staffed by a team of seasoned professionals, the new service points are committed to delivering efficient, responsive, and tailored banking services that meet the diverse needs of our valued clientele.

The new state-of-the-art service points feature a 24-hour digital lobby equipped with fully



functional ATMs and CDMs, enhancing accessibility and convenience for customers at all times.

Abdulqadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International, underscored the strategic significance of expanding operations into Duqm.

"This expansion reaffirms our steadfast dedication to delivering inclusive and innovative banking solutions tailored to diverse customer needs.

We are excited to extend our premium services to the Duqm community, ensuring convenient access for valued customers in the wilayat and neighbouring areas. The comprehensive suite

of banking services and products at our new branch encompasses account opening, card issuance, and financing facilities," said Abdulqadir al Sumali.

In line with its customer-centric approach, Sohar International emphasises the importance of human interaction alongside digitalisation. By increasing its branch footprint, the bank aims to strengthen relationships with customers, recognising the enduring value of personalised service.

Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Sohar International, emphasised the institution's commitment to setting new benchmarks and fostering innovation within the Omani banking sector.

"Our expanding network of branches, alongside a suite of thoughtfully designed services and products, reflects our dedication to delivering a delightful banking experience.

We continually strive to offer integrated and innovative banking solutions at convenient locations, exemplified by our new branches."

BankDhofar organises women's leadership forum

MUSCAT: BankDhofar is organising the Omani Women's Leadership Forum at Al Bustan Palace Ritz-Carlton Hotel on May 8.

The event is held under the auspices of Al Sayyida Maani bint Abdullah al Busaidy, Director General of Family Development and of the Child Protection Committee at the Ministry of Social Development, in line with supporting the government's directions aimed at empowering Omani women in various sectors, especially the economic and the financial sectors.

The forum will address several

topics, like women in financial sector, diversity and inclusion at work place, as well as guiding women on how to develop their talent and enhance skills to transform them into projects on the ground with optimal utilisation of media to promote their brand or project.

Céline Schillinger, a global engagement influencer, is a prominent speaker at the forum. She is one of the leading women in France who was awarded the National Order of Merit by the French government for her innovative initiatives in the business world.



Schillinger, a TEDx speaker currently works as a consultant in leading organisation, enabling

institutional transformation, and enhancing the value of work. She has written a book on engagement

Leadership, which was published in 2022.

BankDhofar supports government initiatives and directions that are in line with Oman Vision 2040, especially in the employment field and digital transformation, as the bank contributed to providing job opportunities for citizens, and was able to employ more than 250 Omani Talents in recent months, which contributed to raising the Omanisation rate to 92%.

As for the digital transformation sector, the bank is constantly investing in digital transformation and technology

to enrich the banking experience for customers and provide them with the best services. It has expanded its digital channels by providing customers with the opportunity to open bank accounts through smart phones and other digital channels, which enable them to complete their banking transactions with complete ease.

Easily and conveniently at the right time and place, which led to an increase in the total number of transactions via digital channels in 2023 by about 85.5%, in addition to an increase in the value of completed transactions by 55.3%.



FSA reforms Raysut Cement's board of directors



The new board will continue the mission started by the previous board appointed under Resolution No 149/2022.

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority (FSA) issued a decision to restructure a new board of directors for Raysut Cement Company, composed of experienced, independent and neutral individuals to temporarily manage the company's affairs.

The new board is led by Shabib bin Mohammed al Darmaki, with members Nasser bin Juma al Zadjali, Badr bin Awadh al Shanfari, Ali bin Rashid al Shuhi and Abdul Hamid bin Ahmed al Balushi.

The Authority stated in its statement that the new board will continue the mission started by the previous board appointed under Resolution No 149/2022 to complete the restructuring of the company, its structure and governance to ensure the stability of its financial and operational situation, correct its course to ensure sustainable performance, protect the interests of all shareholders and enhance market stability.

The Authority explained that the new board of directors will lead the company in the coming period to seriously address financial liquidity issues in the near term to achieve financial stability, ensure the continuity of the operational activities of the parent company and its subsidiaries and restore the group to profitability.

The Authority informed all shareholders, investors and stakeholders that the financial and operational situation of Raysut Cement and its subsidiaries is closely monitored by the Authority through the appointed board of directors to ensure the correct path for the company and disclosure of its unaudited quarterly and audited annual financial reports continuously.

These measures taken by the Authority come within its primary role to ensure the stability of the sectors and institutions under its supervision under its system's decree issued by Royal Decree No 20/2024 and in accordance with the powers stipulated in the Commercial Companies Law and Securities Law aimed at protecting investors and maintaining the stability of the capital market in the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

MoTCIT to launch space entrepreneurship workshop next month

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 5

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has announced the launch of a space entrepreneurship programme.

According to the Ministry, the training course, which will take place during June 9-13, will primarily aim to enhance space project management skills, and introduce SMEs and individuals to space entrepreneurship.

The training course will cover several major topics



The workshop is open to local start-ups, SMES, employees and job-seekers.

including technical aspects of space projects, entrepreneurship in the field of space and business models, planning and executing projects, space project

management and the future of space exploration.

The programme is open to local start-ups, SMES, government employees and job-

seekers. The course is part of a larger initiative launched by the Ministry and local tech company Code Academy, to build local space sector capacities, following the guidelines of the newly issued National Executive Space Programme.

Earlier editions of the programme included a training course on utilising cloud computing-based Earth observation data in disaster management programmes, as well as Artificial Intelligence and deep learning in the field of spatial mapping.

Earlier this year, Dr Ali bin

Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, revealed that Oman attracted over RO 20 million worth of investments in the space sector within the last two years. It is worth noting that the Executive Space Programme is part of a larger effort to enhance the digital economy in Oman, which currently contributes 2 per cent to the local GDP. The programme aims to increase this figure to 5 per cent by 2030, and 10 per cent by 2040.

Oman-Netherlands business ties strengthened at King's Day celebration

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 5

The Koningsdag (King's Day) of the Netherlands celebration held on Tuesday, April 30, saw Stella Kloth, the Ambassador for the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Oman, deliver a speech underscoring the deepening business relations between the two nations.

Set against the backdrop of Oman Sustainability Week, the event served as a testament to the shared commitment of Oman and the Netherlands towards accelerating the green energy transition and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

In her address, Ambassador Kloth reflected on the enduring historical ties between Oman and the Netherlands, tracing their origins back to the arrival of Dutch vessels in the port of Muttrah four centuries ago.

These historical connections have blossomed into a modern partnership centred around sustainability, with a specific focus on collaborative efforts in advancing green energy initiatives.

Looking back on the past year, Ambassador Kloth expressed gratitude for the milestones that have strengthened cooperation between the two nations. She stated, "Cherishing the memories and milestones that have strengthened our cooperation."

Notable highlights included the visit of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs to Oman and the active participation of Dutch



Stella Kloth, Ambassador for the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Oman, and special guests were pictured during the celebration of Koningsdag (King's Day) of the Netherlands held last week.

companies in key sustainability-focused events such as the Green Hydrogen Summit and the Oman Sustainability Week. These interactions have showcased the increasing engagement and interest of the Dutch business community in Oman.

Furthermore, Ambassador Kloth highlighted the fruitful exchanges between Dutch and Omani organisations, particularly in the realms of education and research. Prestigious institutions such as Utrecht University, Wageningen University and Delft University have been at the forefront of collaboration, engaging in joint programmes with Omani counterparts to drive sustainable initiatives forward.

Similarly, the Oman Royal Academy of Management's visit to the Netherlands and



Nawa Group, the winners of a sustainability challenge for women, will showcase their innovative designs in the Netherlands during the Dutch Design Week.

collaboration with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities underscored the broad spectrum of partnership opportunities between the two nations.

"A week like this demonstrates the paramount importance of Sustainable Development Goal 17, emphasising collaboration

and partnership as integral components of our journey towards a sustainable future," remarked Ambassador Kloth.

This sentiment resonated throughout her speech, underscoring the pivotal role of dialogue and cooperation in fostering peace and security,

especially in the face of regional challenges.

The ambassador also extended appreciation to Oman for hosting events like Oman Sustainability Week which provide a platform for representatives from both countries to engage in constructive dialogues on critical sustainability issues.

The active participation of 14 Dutch companies in these events further highlighted the commitment of the Dutch business community to promoting sustainable practices within Oman.

Closing her remarks, Ambassador Kloth thanked the Dutch community in Oman for their unwavering dedication in fostering strong ties between the two nations, alongside key partners including Sohar Port and Freezone, Shanfari Group, Damen, Van Oord, and others for their contributions to the event's success.

Additionally, she recognised the winners of a sustainability challenge for women in Oman, the Nawa Group, who will showcase their innovative designs in the Netherlands during the Dutch Design Week.

Ambassador Kloth's address at the King's Day Celebration exemplified the evolving business relationships between Oman and the Netherlands, highlighting a mutual commitment to sustainability and green energy initiatives that will define the future trajectory of cooperation between the two nations.

Oman Post wins first place in international express mail service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Post, a subsidiary of Asyad Group, has achieved first place in the performance of international express mail service for the second year in a row, and second place in the customer experience category among 190 members of the Universal Postal Union.

Oman maintains its global leadership in the performance of express mail service, which Oman Post has successfully achieved over the past years, while its second place in the customer experience category reflects the company's efforts to provide advanced postal services and integrated solutions.



Oman maintains its global leadership in the performance of express mail service.

An annual awards ceremony for the performance of express mail service is held by the International Express Mail Cooperative to honour postal

operators for their outstanding performance in international express mail service, a service provided by postal companies to members of the Universal

Postal Union within a network connecting 175 countries and regions around the world.

In recent years, express mail services in Oman have witnessed significant development to become a world-class service.

This transformation led by Oman Post has been crowned with international awards reflecting the company's success in providing modern competitive solutions that adapt to global changes and meet the needs of customers from various segments.

Oman Post's express mail service is a fast postal solution that complies with the best international standards, enabling

sending messages and parcels abroad within 3 to 10 days, with the option to send and receive shipments from post offices, homes, or workplaces to provide a better experience for customers.

Oman Post also offers its services in more than 190 countries and regions around the world, ensuring reliable, secure and efficient delivery of messages and parcels.

Badr bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Post and Asyad Express, stated that the company's retention of first place in the performance of express mail service — for the second

consecutive year — confirms the success of the company's business development strategies and reflects its steadfast commitment to excellence, reliability and quality.

On his part, Shaikh Ibrahim bin Sultan al Hosni, Acting CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, said that this achievement demonstrates the fruits of the long journey of transformation and growth that Oman Post has undertaken, along with its distinguished institutional approach, emphasising continued efforts to improve the company's solutions and products to set new standards for success. — **ONA**

Is it good to go exclusive?



LAUREN HIRSCH

The author joined The New York Times in 2020, where she covers deals and major Wall Street stories, including leading coverage of Elon Musk's \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter and breaking news on the \$11 billion leverage buyout of Dunkin' Brands and JetBlue's \$3.6 billion bid for Spirit Airlines.

Paramount's proposed merger with Skydance has been the most tumultuous media deal in years. Now it has taken yet another turn after the exclusivity period for negotiations expired without an agreement in hand.

A month ago, a special committee of Paramount's board agreed to enter into exclusive talks with Skydance — a Hollywood studio run by tech scion David Ellison — even as private equity giant Apollo Global Management reached out with a \$26 billion offer. Paramount shareholders grumbled that granting exclusivity was a mistake, and that the company should have engaged with Apollo instead.

This past week, the special committee told Skydance that it was letting the exclusivity period lapse.

The end of exclusivity doesn't alone kill the deal with Skydance. But it does allow Paramount to open up negotiations with Apollo and Sony Pictures Entertainment, which joined Apollo's bid. The so-far-fruitless negotiations raise a question that deal-makers have long debated:

Why do companies such as Paramount agree to exclusivity in the first place?

Buyers often prefer exclusivity more than sellers. Exclusivity is a sign from the seller that it is committed to doing a deal and not just using a bid to drum up higher offers.

Sellers generally prefer to negotiate without exclusivity because it limits their ability to shop around for a higher price. And since they've already signalled to a buyer that they're willing to make a deal, they've weakened their bargaining power.

Many big public company

deals are negotiated without exclusivity, since shareholders expect the company to get the highest possible price.

Exclusivity can help sellers with thorny deals. In addition to helping to cajole a potential buyer to spend millions on due diligence, committing to negotiate with just one party can obscure limited interest.

"An auction is a really good way of selling something when you have multiple bidders," Edward Rock, a professor of corporate law at New York University, told DealBook. "It's a really bad way of selling something if you announce an auction and only one person shows up, because now everybody knows there's no one else out there interested in buying the company."

For Paramount, other factors were most likely in play. Shari Redstone, the company's board

chair, almost certainly prefers a Skydance deal, which would allow her to sell her shares at a control premium. It's unclear whether the all-cash Paramount offer from Sony and Apollo would be as lucrative for her.

Redstone appointed the special committee to lead Paramount's negotiations to avoid conflicts of interest. But that committee is nonetheless aware that Skydance's bid for National Amusements, the parent company of Paramount, was supported by Redstone, the company's most influential shareholder.

That was probably a factor in its decision to move forward with exclusive talks, said Steven Davidoff Solomon, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law.

Solomon said the special committee might have seen Skydance's offer as the only plausible deal on the table.

"Let's see if we can get it done," Solomon said, articulating his interpretation of the committee's approach. "If we can't get it done, then 30 days later, we can go do another deal."

The highly publicised 30-day deadline put a spotlight on the deal, adding an unwelcome level of dramatic tension as the two sides sought to hammer out a tricky agreement.

The 30 days also coincided with the departure of Paramount CEO Bob Bakish, which left the company on shakier footing and potentially weakened its bargaining power.

If Paramount begins talks with Sony and Apollo, it's not clear they will result in a deal. It's not clear whether there will now be any deal at all. But in any case, Paramount's special committee will have a lot to talk about when it meets to discuss its options.

— NYT

What fiscally sound industrial policy can do



KEUN LEE

The author, Vice Chair of the National Economic Advisory Council for the President of South Korea, is Distinguished Professor of Economics at Seoul National University and the author of *China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: A Schumpeterian Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2022).



An employee works at an assembly line of Hyundai Motor's plant in Asan, South Korea. – Reuters

I recently gave a talk about industrial policy at the International Monetary Fund. That is a sentence you probably would not have read even a few years ago: historically, the IMF has been a sharp critic of industrial policy.

But as many of its client countries embrace the concept, the Fund has recognised the need to clarify its position and update its guidance.

IMF economists have long worried that industrial policy can cause undue harm to a country's fiscal position. But while some industrial-policy tools do demand significant fiscal resources, others do not. For example, entry control – when the government permits only a certain number of qualified firms to operate in strategic sectors – costs very little.

The logic behind entry control is simple: a few firms earning profits in an oligopolistic market is better than many firms reaping no profits in perfect competition, not least because profits can be re-invested in the selected firms.

The policy also causes the rate of return to exceed interest rates – good for boosting private investment in manufacturing, which typically offers lower rates of return than services, with longer time horizons.

Entry control can be effective when an emerging economy with limited market size, resources, and technological capabilities seeks to enter new sectors and initiate new projects.

But the government must choose firms wisely — accounting for factors like plans to import or license necessary technologies and to collaborate with other partners — and arrange financing.

Entry control has been successfully implemented in China, Japan, and South Korea (where for a time only two or three firms were permitted to produce automobiles or provide wireless telephone services).

Local content requirements, which oblige manufacturers to source a certain share of the final value of a product domestically (the localisation rate), also have limited fiscal costs.

Such requirements can

WHILE INDUSTRIAL POLICIES CAN HELP COUNTRIES COPE WITH RISING ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY, THE DETAILS MATTER. ANY GUIDANCE BY THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND ON THE ISSUE MUST HIGHLIGHT FISCALLY PRUDENT TOOLS AND EMPHASISE THE IMPORTANCE OF STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN PROTECTION AND MARKET DISCIPLINE.

support job growth, boost domestic value-added, and contribute to the upgrading of critical industries.

That was the case for China's wind-turbine industry, which was dominated by Danish firms until China's government introduced a set of supportive policies, including local content requirements, in the 2000s.

Within a decade, domestic firms accounted for almost 90% of the Chinese wind-turbine market. China also implemented local content requirements in its automotive sector, rewarding higher localisation rates with lower import tariffs.

Imported parts and components of final goods with localisation rates of 40-60% were subject to a 75% tariff, compared to a 60% tariff for goods with 60-80% localisation rates.

But local content requirements violate World Trade Organisation rules, so China had to reverse them before its 2001 WTO accession.

To help cushion the blow for local component manufacturers, which now faced greater competition from foreign firms, the government introduced new tariffs on imported parts and components. As a result,

localisation rates have continued to increase among leading automotive manufacturers in China, reaching some 80% in the 2010s.

Malaysia also achieved some success with local content requirements – which helped to increase domestic firms' share of the small-car market from 30% in 1992 to 60% in 1996 – before reversing them in 2004.

Thailand tried something similar, but had to abolish the policy prematurely, at the WTO's request, so its full potential was not reached. But local content requirements appear to be making a comeback – most prominently, in America's recently introduced industrial policy, the Inflation Reduction Act.

In fact, China has filed a complaint at the WTO about the IRA over what it claims are discriminatory subsidies, which favour domestic producers. Given the WTO's record of forcing countries to roll back local content requirements, especially those that are accompanied by subsidies, its handling of IRA-related disputes will be telling.

Import tariffs aimed at protecting nascent industries are a third industrial-policy tool

worth mentioning. Whether one believes tariffs are effective depends significantly on which metric one considers.

For example, one study found that tariffs reduced total-factor productivity in South Korean industries in 1963-83. But others, including my own, show that tariff protection did boost Korean firms' export volumes and enable them to expand their market share over roughly the same period (1967-93).

This is appropriate. When an economy is in its earlier stages of development, productivity growth is not the primary objective. Far more important is increasing output and enabling firms to expand their market share, so that they can make the most of economies of scale, invest in technological upgrading, and create more jobs.

For example, it was thanks to high tariffs on imported cars (up to 82%) that Hyundai was able to capture 44% of the Korean market with its first own-brand car, the Pony, within a year of its introduction.

Though the Pony was never able to compete in foreign markets – it cost just \$1,850 in the United States, compared to \$4,500 in South Korea – tariff

protections effectively guaranteed domestic profits, enabling Hyundai to expand and invest in research and development.

Tariff policy need not be a blunt instrument. South Korea's asymmetric approach – extremely high tariffs on consumer goods (to protect export industries) but considerably lower tariffs on capital goods – accounted for the economy's specific needs at the time. Moreover, government protection was linked to export performance, which meant that firms were still exposed to foreign competition.

This combination of domestic-market protections and discipline from world markets was one of the most important features of Korean industrial policy in the 1980s and 1990s, not least because it ensured that late entrants still had a chance. Industrial policy can help countries cope with growing economic and political uncertainty.

But the details matter. Any IMF guidance on the issue must not only highlight fiscal prudence tools, but also emphasise the critical importance of striking the right balance between protection and market discipline.

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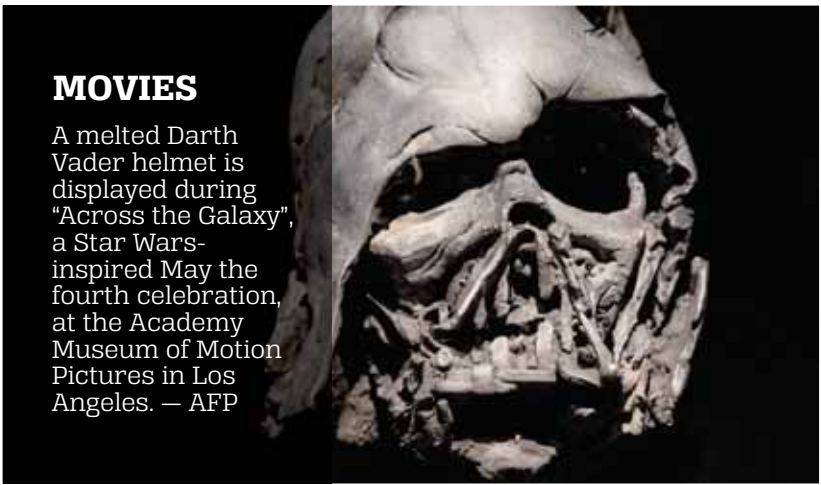


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MOVIES

A melted Darth Vader helmet is displayed during "Across the Galaxy", a Star Wars-inspired May the fourth celebration, at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US singer Jason Aldean performs on stage during the iHeart Country Festival at Moody Center in Austin, Texas. —AFP



CULTURE

Drummers perform as the Wicker Man goes up in flames during the Celtic fire festival Beltain in Waterloooville, southern England. — AFP



MUSIC

US pop star Madonna performs onstage during a free concert at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Madonna ended "The Celebration Tour" with a performance attended by some 1.5 million enthusiastic fans. — AFP



ART

Employees install the painting "La Liberté guidant le peuple, 1830" (Liberty Leading the People) by Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) after six months of restoration work, at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. — Reuters

art & life

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YOUNG OMANI
EARNS ACCLAIM
IN A GCC-WIDE
PHOTOGRAPHY TILT

With his architectural work showcasing Oman's craftsmanship, Ammar al Ameri, a young Omani photographer, secured second place in a GCC-wide photography competition hosted by Al Qasimia University. Ammar's success highlights his journey of learning, growth, and the celebration of Omani talent on a regional platform... **P20**

CULTURE

Spain
abolishes
national
bullfighting
award in
cultural shift

SPAIN SCRAPPED AN annual bullfighting award on Friday, prompting a rebuke from conservatives over a backlash against a centuries-old tradition they see as an art form but which has

run into growing concern for animal welfare.

Spanish-style bullfighting, in which the animal usually ends up killed by a sword thrust by a matador in shining garb, is for supporters a cultural tradition to be preserved, while critics call it a cruel ritual with no place in modern society.

The Culture Ministry said it based its decision to abolish the award on the "new social and cultural reality in Spain" where worries about animal welfare have risen while attendance at most bullrings has declined.

"I think that's the feeling of a majority of Spaniards who can understand less and less why animal torture is practiced in our country..., and much less why that torture gets awarded with public money," Culture Minister Ernest Urtezar said on X.

The national award came in the form of a 30,000-euro (\$32,217) government cheque and has been bestowed on famous bullfighters such as Julian Lopez, known as "El Juli", or cultural associations related to the



bullfighting tradition.

It has recently become a defining issue in Spain's culture wars, pitting left-wing parties such as Sumar, to which Urtezar belongs, against right-wing conservatives who support the tradition.

Borja Semper, spokesperson for the opposition conservative People's Party, told reporters the government move showed that it "does not believe in cultural diversity or liberty", and that his party would reinstate the award whenever it regained power.

The PP leader of the Aragon region, Jorge Azcon, said it would introduce another award. "Tradition should be something that unites us rather than divides," he said.

Opposition to bullfighting has also grown in Latin America, where the tradition was exported in the 16th century, and in southern France, where it spread in the 19th century.

In Spain, the average bullfighting aficionado has gotten older and the number of bullfighting festivals dropped by a third between 2010 and 2023. — Reuters

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WHO ARE THE HOSTS OF THE MET GALA?

Each spring a handful of attractive celebrities who do not seem as if they would hang out in any other situation are selected as co-chairs of the Met Gala, the black-tie blowout that is essentially the X Games of fashion (subtract motorcycles, add tulle). This year, Anna Wintour, Zendaya, Jennifer Lopez, Chris Hemsworth and Bad Bunny will head up the gala taking place Monday. The co-chairs were revealed in



February in an Instagram video created to look as if the five were yukking it up in a group text message. "I can free up that day," Hemsworth wrote, with a wink. Bad Bunny contributed three flame emojis. Random as it may seem, co-chair selection is a delicate alchemy that seeks to telegraph the event's appeal across age groups and creative industries, especially fashion, film, music and social media. The lineup of Timothée Chalamet, Billie Eilish, Naomi Osaka and Amanda Gorman in 2021 seemed to scream "We are relevant to Gen Z!" The co-chairs also tend to be among the night's earlier arrivals. Please, spare yourself the embarrassment of asking your Met Gala watch party whether that's the Hemsworth who plays "Thor" or the Hemsworth who was in "The Hunger Games" — we're here to help.

ANNA WINTOUR
You know her from: Vogue

Try not to look too surprised. Wintour, 74, the global editorial director of Condé Nast and the editor-in-chief of Vogue, has been the driving force behind the gala since 1999 and has essentially become its perma-host. Since her first spin hosting the gala in 1995, she has been credited with transforming the event from a fusty dinner into one of the most coveted invites of the year, not to mention a blockbuster fundraiser for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. Wintour gets final say over every invitation sent and hand-picks her co-chairs. She also hits the carpet each year in her signature helmet-like bob and a gown, often by Oscar de la Renta, Prada or Chanel. It's one of the few times a year she leaves the sunglasses at home.

ZENDAYA
You know her from: the sands of Arrakis; the red carpets of Earth

Zendaya, 27, rose from Disney fame to leading roles in HBO's Gen Z drama "Euphoria" and in the poly-curious tennis film "Challengers." She has not attended the Met's signature event since 2019 — but she has been turning pretty much every red carpet into her own personal Met Gala instead. The actress promoted the film "Dune: Part Two" in a sandstorm of cyborg looks,

including a gleaming, vintage robot suit by Mugler. Her "Challengers" press tour fashion has been explicitly athletic, like the varsity-style tennis dress she wore in Rome last month with tennis-ball stilettos to match. Those looks were assembled by the "image architect" Law Roach, who showed up on the red carpet with Zendaya for her Met Gala appearance in 2019, as the fairy godmother to her Cinderella.

JENNIFER LOPEZ
You know her from: the block

Lopez, 54, a singer and actress, has attended more than a dozen Met Galas since her first appearance in 1999. This is her first time serving as a co-chair, shortly after the release of her bewildering movie "This Is Me ... Now: A Love Story." Lopez has been a reliable source of fun on the Met's carpet over the past two decades, wearing a giraffe-print Michael Kors gown with a punky bouffant in 2013 and an Indiana Jones hat with a faux-shearing stole in 2021. This year, she may accessorize with her husband, actor Ben Affleck.

BAD BUNNY
You know him from: pop superstardom

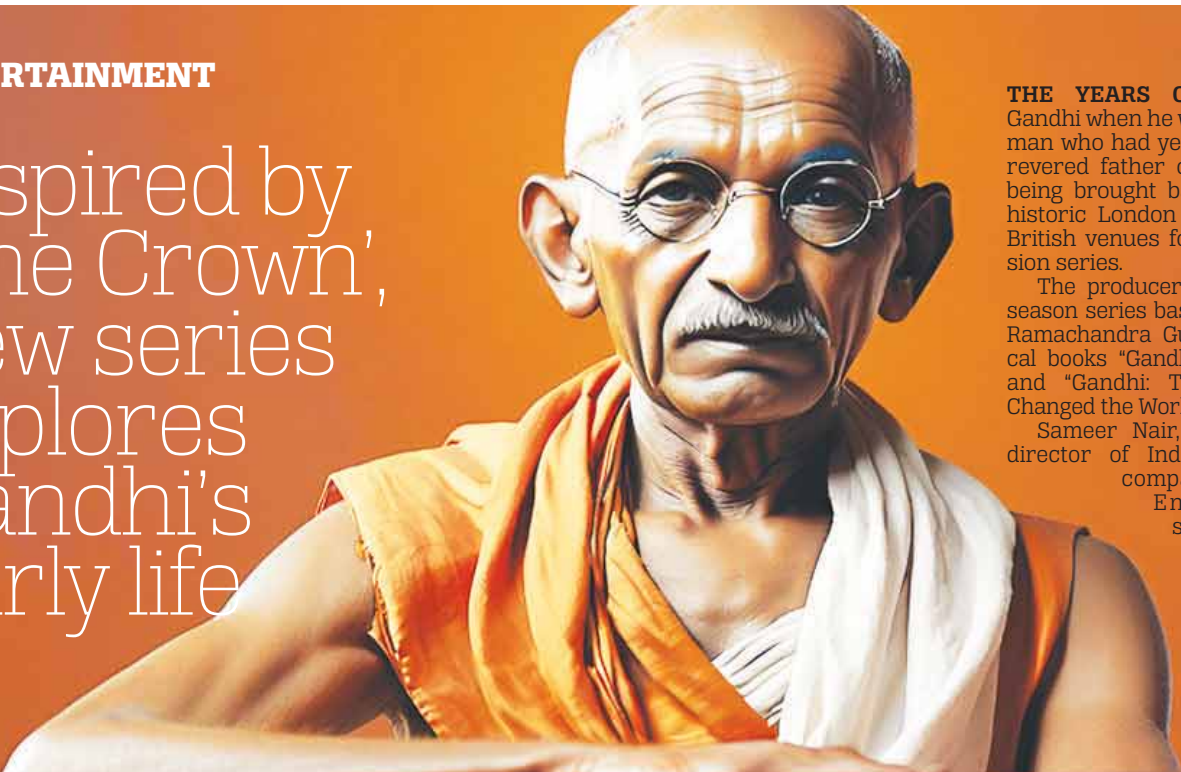
Bad Bunny, the 30-year-old megastar whose music draws from reggaeton, Latin trap and beyond, has reached the kind of success that expands the possibilities for Spanish-language pop worldwide, according to our critic Jon Caramanica. His 2022 album, "Un Verano Sin Ti," was the most streamed of that year, and the first release performed in Spanish to receive a nomination for album of the year at the Grammy Awards. He has also emerged as a gutsy, playful red-carpet presence. He showed up to last year's Met Gala in a backless suit with a sweeping, floral train by Simon Porte Jacquemus. He has attended twice, and has been notably chill about the invitations. "I know that day is going to be an exciting thing," he told The New York Times in 2022. "But I'm working a lot this week!"

CHRIS HEMSWORTH
You know him from: the Marvel and Hemsworth brother extended universes

Hemsworth, the 40-year-old Australian actor who swings around a hammer as "Thor" in the Marvel franchise, is probably nobody's idea of a fashion innovator. But he is a dependable box-office hitmaker who has two major movies coming out in the next year: "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" and "Transformers One." Hemsworth, who will be a first-time Met Gala attendee, is also a member of one of Hollywood's famous families. It is not yet clear whether his brother Liam, known for his role in the "Hunger Games" franchise as well as his short-lived marriage to Miley Cyrus, will attend. Chris Hemsworth's wife, model and actress Elsa Pataky, seems a safer bet. Will he go bananas on the red carpet? If his past attire is any indication, he may go for a tuxedo in black, navy or potentially even gray. —NYT

ENTERTAINMENT

Inspired by 'The Crown', new series explores Gandhi's early life



THE YEARS OF MAHATMA
Gandhi when he was a shy young man who had yet to become the revered father of a nation are being brought back to life in a historic London pub and other British venues for a new television series. The producers plan a three-season series based on historian Ramachandra Guha's biographical books "Gandhi Before India" and "Gandhi: The Years that Changed the World." Sameer Nair, the managing director of Indian production company Applause Entertainment, says that the extended format "much in the vein of (Netflix series) 'The Crown'" allows greater scope than, for instance, the films on Gandhi's life. "This is really a coming of age story. It's a very rich story that few people know about. You know the man, you don't know the story," Nair said during a break from filming at London's George Tavern. The first season, made up of eight episodes, went into production in India at the start of the year and is being filmed in Mumbai and Gujarat as well as Britain. Directed by film-maker Hansal Mehta, actor Pratik Gandhi, 44, takes on the title role. No relation of Mahatma, he has already played his namesake on stage for the last eight years in India. "Unknowingly, I was prepping for this day," he said. Despite the preparation, Pratik Gandhi feels the pressure of conveying the great man. His response is to anchor his performance in

Gandhi's human qualities. "He was not a born great person. He was not a superman or superhuman," he said. "All these experiences of his life made him what he became. And those capabilities are there in each one of us." Director Mehta says the series seeks to engage younger audiences. They could be drawn by the decision to cast British actor Tom Felton, known for his performances in the film adaptations of the Harry Potter books. Felton plays Josiah Oldfield, who became a friend of Gandhi when he studied law in London. The actor, 36, said he could not resist the role. "Clearly the world would look very different without him. To be part of realising why he became the way he became and how his actions were, it was pretty much a no-brainer for me to say 'yes, I'd love to be part of this'," he said. —Reuters

YOUNG OMANI EARNs ACCLAIM IN A GCC-WIDE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

AL QASIMIA UNIVERSITY INITIATED THE "ARTISTIC RADIANCES" COMPETITION TO BROADEN THE CREATIVE HORIZONS OF YOUNG TALENTS ACROSS THE GCC, WITH PLANS FOR FURTHER EXPANSION ON ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL STAGES IN THE YEARS TO COME



BY MOHAMMED AL DIGHAISHI

When Ammar al Ameri got the information that he was nominated for a GCC-wide photography competition, he said that he felt honoured to have been given such an opportunity.

Al Ameri recently returned home after securing second place in the Artistic Radiance competition held at the University of Sharjah. This annual event, held at the GCC university level, saw the participation of 150 students from 20 Gulf universities. The contestants showcased approximately 500 exceptional artistic pieces encompassing drawing, Arabic calligraphy and photography.

Al Qasimia University initiated the "Artistic Radiances" competition to broaden the creative horizons of young talents across the GCC, with plans for further expansion on Arab and international stages in the years to come.

"This was not my first international participation. I previously participated in an international FIAP competition, and that

and participants must assert ownership of their works. Additionally, artworks must be appropriately framed and display-ready," Al Ameri said.

A specially chosen jury appointed by the organising committee undertook the evaluation of the entries. Photography competitions typically assess technical skill, composition, creativity and adherence to the theme.

Judges evaluate factors like lighting, focus, exposure and post-processing techniques. Originality, emotional impact, storytelling and innovation are often crucial.

Additionally, image quality, clarity and coherence play significant roles. Some competitions also emphasise the photographer's ability to evoke feelings or provoke thoughts through their work. Overall, the balance between technical proficiency and artistic expression is key in determining winning entries.

Al Ameri said that for him, winning second place was a step in the right direction since competing in a GCC-wide competition prepares him for even bigger international competitions.



was a good learning experience. While I wasn't successful in bringing an award home that time, I took it as a challenge to become better," he shared.

Having seen the work of other serious photographers, Al Ameri said he has decided to learn more and refine his craft. As he became better, he said he has ventured to join more local competitions to better understand the industry.

"During my participation in Al Qasimia University competition, I wasn't afraid. Unlike most participants who relied on mobile phones for photography, I utilised a camera. I feel strongly that my work was stronger compared to most entries I've seen," he shared.

Jamal al Tarifi, President of Al Qasimia University, handed awards to the winners of the "Artistic Radiances" competition. The president toured the accompanying art exhibition, lauding the creative originality evident in the pieces and the enriching artistic workshops. The display included various mediums such as Sharjah architecture, oil painting and calligraphy, as well as an exhibition by Al Qasimia University graduate Yishuzhang from China.

Al Ameri mentioned that, along with a commemorative shield, the award also includes a financial prize of approximately RO 800. He encourages all creatives and artists to persist, emphasising that continuity is important.



Al Ameri shared he learned about his nomination through the head of the photography group at Sultan Qaboos University.

"The competition was very straightforward. I had a member of the photography team who nominated me. There were three divisions: photography, drawing and Arabic calligraphy. My entry was an architectural work that detailed the beauty of Oman craftsmanship," he shared.

"To enter the competition, certain basic requirements must be met. These include submitting entries through the university administration rather than individually,

"It's always a great pride to bring honour to Oman. I think for a lot of Omani photographers, we aim to showcase Oman's nature and architecture internationally by actively engaging in competitions, both domestic and international," he said.

Expressing gratitude, Al Ameri extends appreciation to the organisers, participants and individuals at Al Qasimia University for their warm reception, cooperation and the competition's success. He highlights that Al Qasimia University has generously covered all the participants' expenses.