

HM greets Lithuania President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Dr Gitanas Nausėda of the Republic of Lithuania on being re-elected for a new presidential term. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Dr Gitanas Nausėda. His Majesty also wished the people of Lithuania further progress and prosperity and the bilateral relations further development and growth.

SUNRISE - 05:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:55 AM

DHUHR - 12:09 PM

ASR - 03:29 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:52 PM

ISHA - 08:14 PM



Industrial Strategy 2040

T O A C C E L E R A T E E C O N O M I C D I V E R S I F I C A T I O N



HIS MAJESTY
REVIEWS
DOMESTIC
CONDITIONS

DECLINE IN
VOLUME OF
PUBLIC DEBT

A SECONDARY
MARKET AT MSX
TO BE SET UP

PROMOTE A
CULTURE OF
INDUSTRIAL
INNOVATION

NEW OMAN
ENDOWMENT
FOUNDATION
TO BE FORMED

RO 70M TO BOOST
RESIDENTIAL
ASSISTANCE

DEDICATED
MONTHLY
ALLOCATIONS
FOR STUDENTS

THE ONGOING
UNJUST WAR
IN GAZA STRIP
DISCUSSED

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the bounties with which He endowed Oman, its noble people and all those residing on its land.

His Majesty the Sultan prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow His riches on all and to grant all good health, well-being and prosperity.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed domestic conditions. On the economic aspect, the Council of Ministers approved the closing account of fiscal year 2023, which indicated an improvement in the financial standing and a decline in the

volume of its public debt — leading to improved credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman. His Majesty commended all the efforts made in this respect.

FUNDING OPTION

Pursuant to the Council of Ministers' keenness to develop the capital market sector, activate its role as funding option, enhance the contribution of commercial companies to the local economy and to augment the market value of Muscat Stock Exchange and to increase the number of companies listed therein, His Majesty the Sultan issued Royal directives to launch an incentive programme that comprises a number of initiatives to convert companies interested in the aforementioned programme into joint stock companies

and list them in stock markets.

The Royal directives also provide for the establishment of a secondary market at Muscat Stock Exchange, to be named 'Promising Companies Market', that targets private firms, family companies, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and startups. The Royal directives also point to the launch of an initiative to convert limited liability companies into closed companies, notably by offering a package of incentives to the aforementioned companies.

DIVERSIFICATION

Due to the importance of the industrial sector, being one of major economic diversification sectors and a propeller of Oman Vision 2040 and to establish

a culture of industrial innovation in the Sultanate of Oman, the Council of Ministers approved the 'Industrial Strategy 2040' aimed to accelerate economic diversification, improve the standard of Omani industrial products and establish a modern technology-based infrastructure for converting industries.

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan commended all efforts made by government departments that participated in devising the aforementioned strategy.

ENDOWMENT SYSTEM

In affirmation of the attention accorded by His Majesty to the social aspect, notably through the priorities set by the government to develop the

endowment (Waqf) system in the Sultanate of Oman and its contribution to consolidating principles of collaboration and compassion among members of society, to introduce a new vision for endowments and ensure the sustainability of endowment funds and prepare them for investment, His Majesty the Sultan issued directives to establish 'Oman Endowment Foundation.' This foundation will be mandated to invest endowment funds and funds from Bait Al Mal (House of Funds). The new foundation will be set up in accordance with the best practices in this field. The foundation will be provided by persons of expertise in the fields of investment and financial management, both from the public and private sectors. **TURN TO P2**





HM presides over Council of Ministers meeting



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

FROM P1

Pursuant to the government's continuous quest to develop norms for a dignified life and to provide decent residences for citizens in a manner that tallies the development plans, the Council of Ministers approved the addition of RO 70 million to boost the residential assistance programme at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for

the years 2024 and 2025. Part of the fund will be dedicated to purchasing readymade residences for those entitled (in modern projects). This is made within the context of the national initiatives for neighbourhoods that is overseen by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

SCHOLARSHIPS
Following the continuous Royal attention

to education and action to address the livelihood challenges posed to some students on scholarships at private higher education institutions, His Majesty the Sultan issued directives to the departments concerned to dedicate monthly allocations, with effect from next academic year, to entitled students on domestic scholarships at private higher education institutions, in accordance with the measures endorsed by the National

Subsidy System Committee.
In his review of regional and international issues, His Majesty the Sultan referred to the conditions in the region and the ongoing unjust war in Gaza Strip. He also spoke about bilateral relations with Arab and friendly countries and about the outcome of recent visits and meetings with Arab countries. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan affirmed the keenness of the Sultanate of Oman to strengthen

its relations with all Arab and friendly countries and to upgrade cooperation with them in a manner that serves common interests among the peoples.
At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan touched on various aspects of concern to the nation and citizens, and he issued Royal directives to this effect. His Majesty the Sultan wished all success to achieve growth and prosperity for Oman and its people. — ONA



Royal directives would realise endowments sector goals: MoARA

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) underscored the significance of the Royal directives His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq gave while presiding over the Council of Ministers' meeting to set up the Oman Endowment Foundation to invest funds of endowments and Bayt Al Mal (house of wealth) in accordance with best practices providing it with qualified competencies in the field of investment and financial management from the public and private sectors.
Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, said: "The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs will soon start putting into effect His Majesty's directives in coordination with the authorities concerned with establishing the Oman Endowment Foundation and its related governance."
The minister stated that these directives would achieve the goals of the endowment sector and its strategy to take care of the civilisational dimension of endowments and realise the desired goals of endowments.





Sayyid Bilarab tours SMEDA's new building

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the Promising Omani Start-ups Programme (POSP), on Tuesday visited the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) in the presence of Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

HH Sayyid Bilarab toured the Authority's new building in the Ministries district in the Al Khuwair area. He visited the customer services centre and the Riyada Business Incubator which houses small and medium enterprises and technology-based emerging companies in various promising sectors such as renewable energy, communication technologies, artificial intelligence, consultancies and talent management.

The Riyada Business Incubator offers an appropriate environment for projects during their first years to augment their chances of success and build a new class of start-up companies with high technical and administrative capabilities. — ONA



SJC unveils video calling and marriage contract card services

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 28

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) launched two new services, namely, a video calling service and marriage contract card service, as part of its participation in COMEX 2024.

The video communication service allows citizens and residents to communicate with courts and judges remotely, thereby making it easier and convenient for litigants to follow up on their court matters. The initiative is particularly beneficial for those faced with mobility issues as well as other challenges.

Equally significant is the marriage contract cards service, which is considered a qualitative leap in facilitating the documentation and issuance of marriage contracts in a digital and secure manner. These smart cards allow couples to document their contracts quickly and efficiently, with the ability to save them electronically, which contributes to protecting data and making it easy to access when needed.

This initiative comes within the Council's efforts to simplify administrative procedures and promote comprehensive digital transformation in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Mohammed bin Ali al Shuaibi, Director of the Electronic Tawtheeq Project, indicated that



The self-service machines will be equipped with modern technologies to ensure data security and speedy action

MOHAMMED AL SHUAIBI
Director of the Electronic Tawtheeq Project

the video communication service enables people to complete transactions remotely. The person can engage with the notary public from anywhere via video communication, and complete the

transaction.

Al Shuaibi said the initiative is still in the experimental phase, and will be launched within the next two months.

The marriage contract cards

service is an important step towards simplifying and facilitating the official procedures related to marriages. It allows individuals to go to self-service machines, which will be installed in the court complexes immediately after the end of the COMEX exhibition. Applicants can use these machines to extract marriage contracts quickly and easily.

Al Shuaibi pointed out that the self-service machines will be equipped with modern technologies to ensure data security and speedy action.

Al Shuaibi explained that the new marriage contract includes two cards, one for the man and the other for the woman. To obtain contract cards, the contracts must be authenticated by a notary public, and after authentication, they can go to the self-service machines to obtain the cards.

Al Shuaibi stressed that contracts must be issued through the new system using the electronic notary platform "Tawtheeq." Al Shuaibi added that old contracts are currently subject to data processing, and the mechanism for extracting these contracts will be clarified later.

Currently, the service includes new contracts that have been issued since last January. This service is currently available to Omanis only, with plans to include residents of the Sultanate of Oman at a later date.



The COMEX exhibition provided an opportunity for the Social Protection Fund to engage with its target groups

25 NEW DIGITAL SERVICES TO ENSURE EASY SOCIAL PROTECTION

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 28

The Social Protection Fund is actively participating in the COMEX exhibition being held from May 27 to 30 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, to showcase their advancements in electronic technologies.

The event aimed to keep beneficiaries informed about over 25 new electronic services designed to facilitate easy and convenient access for both insured individuals and employers.

Habib al Lawati, Director-General of the General Directorate of Digital Solutions for the Social Protection Fund, highlighted the Fund's focus on social benefit services in 2024. These services cater to the elderly, children, people with disabilities, orphans and widows. The digital transformation initiative has streamlined processes by linking necessary documents and verification with various service ministries such as the Royal Oman Police, Civil Service, and the banking sector.

This integration significantly reduces the time and burden on beneficiaries, allowing for quick and efficient registration and benefits disbursement.

Al Lawati emphasised that this year marks the Fund's inaugural participation in the COMEX exhibition. The event served as a platform to launch various social services and gather public feedback to enhance these offerings.

The Fund also announced the upcoming launch of a mobile application, which will be developed based on citizen feedback and suggestions.

The COMEX exhibition provided an opportunity for the Social Protection Fund to engage with its target groups and the broader community. Through an interactive booth, visitors could contribute to the development of the Fund's electronic services system by sharing creative ideas for designing and engineering the new smartphone application. This initiative aims to meet the aspirations and needs of both individuals and institutions, enhancing overall service delivery.

MoH launches MFS for visa medical certification

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Ministry of Health (MoH) launched Medical Fitness Service (MFS) as an electronic certification system of medical reports for expatriates under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, at the ongoing COMEX 2024 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Accordingly, with the MFS, non-residents can register themselves online for medical fitness test and registration facility will also be available through Sanad Offices. Documents can also be verified through Wafid platform.

The MFS aims to streamline procedures and ensure the integrity of medical examinations. Visa procedures can be completed through the Royal Oman Police (ROP) website as well.

According to MoH, MFS will ensure better service while saving time and the service will be beneficial in preventing fake certificates.

Under the new system, there will be no need to take X-rays. Instead, Iqra test should be completed and it belongs to the category of blood tests.

Also, traditionally, the fingerprint and photo of the candidate were uploaded using the respective software of the concerned visa medical



institutions. However, through MFS, it is now possible to upload directly to the Ministry of Health.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Mayabbu Beery of the Ruwi Hani Clinic in charge of Visa Medical,

said effective on Tuesday, May 27, procedures for visa medical for expatriates have been changed and adherence to the same will help the clinics save time and efforts.

"As per the new system, an expatriate needs to have a PKI-enabled SIM card which is available from their respective telecom operator and needs to be activated and linked with the resident card at the Sanad office and this is a one-time activity," he said.

Once activated, the expatriate can avoid visiting Sanad office to register for the medical fitness examination as it can be done online, including payment for the service.

"The rest of the procedures remain the same including getting the examination done at the medical centre," said another leading clinic that conducts medical services for visa.

Oman necessitated medical test for visa based on the Gulf Health Council standards that aims to evaluate the health and fitness of expatriates to ensure that they are medically fit to work and free from infectious diseases.

One can log on to MedicalCertificate.in, submit details and wait for a certified Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) to reach out if any further details required.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has earlier launched self-service

registration for expatriates, who have to undergo medical fitness examination while renewing their visa.

This service was introduced to allow expatriates and companies to easily obtain the results of medical examinations to renew residency or obtain residency cards from service centres in civil affairs, and also while obtaining visas for the first time or renewing the same.

Authorities have said that with this online service, better transparency, eliminating counterfeit reports, and saving time and effort in issuing medical reports through electronic linkage with the Royal Oman Police are ensured.



AFRAH AL
BALUSHI
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OMAN IS
CURRENTLY
experiencing unusually
high temperatures, nearly
reaching summer peaks.
This heat surge is
pushing snakes out
of their natural
desert habitats

in search
of more
humid and
cooler areas.

Incidents
of snake bites
are becoming
more frequent,
especially on farms
during the summer
months. Snakes
often invade farms
and homes to
escape the intense
heat, seeking cooler
temperatures and
humidity.

The presence of
snakes in residential
areas is primarily due
to the summer heat,
which also heralds the
season for insects and
reptiles emerging from
hibernation. Homes
with extensive plant
cover and abundant
insects become attractive
environments for snakes.

If snakes are found in
such areas, it is usually a
sign that the environment
is conducive to their
presence.

In response to this
growing concern, the
Ministry of Heritage
and Tourism (MoHT)
has released the second
updated edition of the
“Guide to Snakes in
the Sultanate of Oman.”
This illustrated guide
aims to educate and
raise awareness about the
various types of snakes in
Oman, categorising them as
poisonous, moderately toxic,
or harmless. It also highlights the
risks posed by snakes in the Arabian Gulf
region, with a particular focus on Oman. The guide, backed by
scientific reviews from experts like Dr Salvador Carenza of the Institute of
Evolutionary Biology in Barcelona and Ahmed al Busaidy, a wildlife specialist at
the University of Nizwa, provides detailed descriptions of the snakes’ characteristics
and habitats.

The summer season is a popular time for families in Oman to travel and enjoy
nature, particularly with students on vacation. Many families opt to spend their
holidays on farms and in rest houses, where the risk of snake bites is higher.

Last year, researchers from the Department of Emergency
Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University
Hospital conducted a study on
snakebite risk factors and
complications. The study,
which involved 236 patients
from Al Rustaq Hospital and
Sultan Qaboos University
Hospital, found that most
victims were adult males, with
incidents peaking in August. The
study also noted that blood clots,

acute kidney injury, and external bleeding were common complications.

To prevent snakes from entering homes, several measures can be taken. These include trimming
plants that climb on house walls, ensuring plants are shorter than windows, and addressing potential
entry points such as holes in doors, garages, or walls. Municipalities also intensify control efforts during
the summer by using repellent materials, sticky traps, and implementing preventive control programmes
in gardens and parks.

Maintaining a tidy environment is crucial, as snakes thrive in messy, dark, and densely vegetated areas.
Regularly trimming grass and eliminating food sources like large insects or mice can help keep snakes
away. It’s essential to repair and fill any gaps or holes around the house to prevent even small snakes
from squeezing through.

By following these precautions and staying informed, residents can reduce the risk of snake
encounters and ensure a safer, more enjoyable summer season.

BEWARE OF SNAKES IN SUMMER

PATIENTS FROM AL RUSTAQ
HOSPITAL AND SULTAN QABOOS
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, FOUND
THAT MOST VICTIMS WERE
ADULT MALES, WITH INCIDENTS
PEAKING IN AUGUST

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SMEDA meet calls for investment in startups



SMEDA meeting was a continuation of it's efforts to enhance the entrepreneurship environment and spread the culture of innovative financing

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) recently convened a meeting with family business owners and project leaders to encourage investment in Omani startups and highlight the significance of angel financing.

Recognising family-owned enterprises as key drivers of the national economy, the meeting focused on strengthening partnerships between business owners and entrepreneurs. The event also included decision-makers from various entrepreneurship ecosystem partners, entrepreneurs, startup owners, and advocates of innovative financing in Oman.

Fathiya bint Juma al

Hakamaniyah, Director of the Enterprise Investment Department at SMEDA, emphasised, “This meeting is a continuation of the SMEDA’s efforts to enhance the entrepreneurship environment and spread the culture of innovative financing. This type of financing is distinguished by its focus on leveraging private capital to support high-quality, sustainable economic projects.”

The meeting featured a presentation on the OQAL project from Saudi Arabia, a platform that connects angel investors with startup owners to form economically viable partnerships. Participants highlighted that angel financing serves as a critical bridge for determined entrepreneurs to secure initial funding from specific investors, enabling their startups to

grow and expand.

Angel investors are individuals with substantial financial resources and a high tolerance for the risks associated with early-stage startup investments. Their expertise in the operations and growth of startups makes them ideal partners for nurturing and developing promising projects in Oman.

Reflecting SMEDA’s commitment to innovative financing, the SMEDA has conducted a series of workshops across various governorates and educational institutions in Oman.

These workshops aim to educate entrepreneurs and innovators on the importance of innovative financing mechanisms and how to leverage them to support and develop their ventures.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY SPOTLIGHTS SMART CITY INITIATIVES

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 28

Muscat Municipality is participating in COMEX 2024 with a strong focus on its ongoing efforts to transform Muscat into a “Smart and Sustainable City,” aligning with its comprehensive digital transformation strategy.

Its booth features an extensive range of digital services designed to simplify and streamline transactions for citizens and residents. These services, part of a broader initiative to enhance electronic readiness and leverage modern information technologies, aim to eliminate the need for physical visits to administrative offices, thereby improving the overall quality of life in Muscat.

A centrepiece of the municipality’s showcase is its unified municipal system project, which emphasises smart governance and the integration of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence.

Launched in April 2023,



this ambitious project is a key component of Oman Vision 2040. It aims to unify and enhance municipal procedures, ensuring sustainable digital operations while significantly improving the user experience.

Phase one of the unified municipal system project had already been completed, involving a comprehensive assessment of current municipal infrastructures, existing programs, and geographic information systems. This phase also reviewed smart city projects and services provided by municipalities throughout Oman. The project underscored

a commitment to innovation and efficiency, focusing on developing smart digital solutions that enhanced service delivery and governance.

Muscat Municipality’s participation in COMEX 2024 provided an opportunity to inform and engage visitors about the significant progress made in its digital transformation journey.

Through these initiatives, Muscat Municipality reaffirmed its dedication to becoming a leading example of a smart, sustainable city, continuously improving service quality and operational efficiency for the benefit of all its residents.

Madayn receives ‘Qualified by EFQM’ certification

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has been awarded Level 2 certification on ‘Qualified as an organisation using the EFQM model’ by the European Foundation for Quality Management in recognition of its adherence to EFQM Model standards. This achievement reflects its commitment to implementing the ‘Madayn Institutional Excellence Programme’ and maintaining service quality and maturity levels at the head office and Masar Service Centres throughout its industrial cities.

Launched in June 2021, the ‘Madayn Institutional Excellence Programme’ involves a comprehensive restructuring of the strategy and support sector, and a thorough study of Madayn’s ecosystem, including stakeholders, employees, investors, clients, government and private bodies, competitors, and the overall international investment climate.

Eng Abdullah al Kabi, Acting Head of Strategy and Institutional Support Sector, and Head of the Executive Committee for the Institutional Excellence Programme, commented that Madayn has achieved a significant milestone by becoming the first among all government and private bodies in the Sultanate to reach Level 2 of the EFQM model, highlighting its commitment to quality and excellence.

“Attaining this level signifies Madayn’s success in aligning its strategies, plans, and programmes



The achievement reflects Madayn’s commitment to quality service for institutional transformation with the international standards set by the EFQM – a framework encompassing leadership, guidance, execution, monitoring and impact measurement tools applied in approximately 50,000 companies and organisations worldwide,” Al Kabi said, adding: “The adoption of the EFQM Model by Madayn followed an extensive study of globally key excellence and quality models. In fact, the EFQM Model was chosen for its comprehensiveness, depth, and ease of implementation, aligning with Madayn’s objectives to enhance its regional and international competitiveness, attract and retain clients, and ultimately increase profitability through institutional excellence.”

Huda bint Hilal al Battashiyah, Director of Excellence and Institutional Transformation Department at Madayn, emphasised the major role played by internal teams in executing the Institutional

Excellence Programme. “These teams conducted in-depth analysis and restructuring of the strategy sector, internal and external process and service engineering, utilising methodologies including Kaizen approach, Project Management Office, internal assessment, ADKAR Model, EFQM Radar methodology, among others, which have all contributed to the realisation of this milestone,” Huda al Battashi underscored. She also emphasised that applying the EFQM Model represented a significant challenge for Madayn’s employees, as it introduced a new framework to the work environment, necessitating the adoption of entirely new approaches, initiatives, and monitoring and measurement tools. “The level of achievement reached by Madayn instils optimism and confidence in the future. This achievement has become a reality through the management’s major support in the Institutional Excellence Programme,” she added.

On his part, Mohammed al Ajmi, Head of Project and Improvement Management Department and Head of the Excellence Team at Madayn, underscored that institutional excellence has become a fundamental principle in organisational practices, aimed at achieving outstanding performance and outperforming competitors by implementing innovative and effective practices across all operational areas.

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة

Tender Notice

The Internal Tenders Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites for the Following Tenders:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MT CIT/ 125/2024	AUDIO, VISUAL AND PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTION FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS 2024	27-05-2024	10-06-2024	08-07-2024	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD ALL CLASS	(25/-) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL COMPANIES (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE
MT CIT/ 126/2024	CONSULTING SERVICES TO STUDY THE STATUS OF GREEN MOBILITY IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN	28-05-2024	10-06-2024	08-07-2024	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD CLASS (FIRST & SECOND)	(25/-) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL COMPANIES (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with the Secretariat General of Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted online on given website

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

2. E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail : etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDERS COMMITTEE

www.mtcit.gov.om

@mtcitoman

TENDER NOTICE

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
367/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-24	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR DESIGN OF MARINE RESEARCH CENTRE AT KHASAB, MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE	Sunday 26/5/2024	Sunday 16/6/2024	Thursday 4/7/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with third grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for International company that not have head quarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender) and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.

All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



A girl looks on, while Palestinians travel with their belongings, as they flee Rafah due to Israeli strikes. – Reuters

ISRAELI TANKS REACH CENTRE OF RAFAH

RAFAH: Israeli tanks penetrated the heart of Rafah on Tuesday despite global outrage over a strike that set ablaze a crowded camp in Gaza’s far-southern city, killing 45 people according to Palestinian officials.

Israeli tanks were “stationed on the Al Awda roundabout in the centre of the city of Rafah,” a witness said. A Palestinian security source confirmed tanks were in the centre of Rafah where Israeli troops launched a controversial assault earlier this month.

Sunday evening’s camp strike, which Gaza medics said also left hundreds of civilians with shrapnel and burn wounds, drew condemnation from world leaders and was set to be discussed at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council.

The sight of the charred

More air strikes and shelling rained down overnight on besieged Gaza — including Rafah’s Tal Al Sultan area near a facility of the UN agency

carnage, blackened corpses and children being rushed to hospitals led UN chief Antonio Guterres to declare that “there is no safe place in Gaza. This horror must stop.”

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the strike a “tragic accident” but also vowed to push on with the military campaign to destroy Palestinian groups over the October 7 attack and bring home all the captives.

More air strikes and shelling rained down overnight on

besieged Gaza — including Rafah’s Tal Al Sultan area where the displacement camp went up in flames near a facility of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

“The situation is very dangerous,” said one resident, Faten Jouda, 30. “We didn’t sleep all night. There was random bombing from all directions, including artillery shelling and air bombardment as well as firing from aircraft.”

UNRWA said that one million civilians had fled Rafah since Israel launched its assault on the city in early May despite a chorus of international warnings.

“This happened with nowhere safe to go & amidst bombardments, lack of food & water, piles of waste & unsuitable living conditions,” the UN agency posted on X.

“Day after day, providing

assistance & protection becomes nearly impossible.”

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 36,096 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the territory’s health ministry.

The resulting civilian toll in Gaza prompted a wave of condemnation, with Palestinians and many Arab countries calling it a “massacre”.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of UNRWA, said on Monday that “the images from last night are testament to how Rafah has turned into hell on Earth”.

The EU’s foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell said he was “horrificed” and French President Emmanuel Macron said he was “outraged”.

A US National Security Council spokesperson said Israel “must take every precaution possible to protect civilians”.

— AFP

Spain, Ireland and Norway recognise Palestinian state

MADRID: Spain, Ireland and Norway formally recognised a Palestinian state on Tuesday in a coordinated decision, more than seven months into the devastating Gaza war.

The three European countries believe their initiative has strong symbolic impact that is likely to encourage others to follow suit.

After Ireland’s government formally approved the measure, Prime Minister Simon Harris said the aim was to keep Middle East peace hopes alive.

“We had wanted to recognise Palestine at the end of a peace process. However, we have made this move alongside Spain and Norway to keep the miracle of peace alive,” he said in a statement, urging Israel to “stop the humanitarian catastrophe” in Gaza.

As Oslo’s recognition went into effect, Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide hailed the move as “a special day for Norway-Palestine relations”.

And after Spain’s cabinet backed the move, Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said it was a day that would be “etched in Spain’s history”.

Earlier, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said recognition was “essential” for peace, insisting the move was “not against anyone, least of all Israel” and the only way to secure a future of two states living side-by-side “in peace and security”.

The plans were unveiled last week by the prime ministers of the three countries, sparking a furious response from Israel and further exacerbating its diplomatic tensions, notably with Spain.

Last week, Sanchez’s far-left deputy Yolanda Diaz hailed the move saying: “We cannot stop. Palestine will be free from the river to the sea.”

For decades, formal recognition of a Palestinian state has been seen as the endgame of a negotiated peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Washington and most Western European nations have said they are willing to one day recognise Palestinian statehood, but not before agreement on thorny issues. — AFP



A protester holds a sign reading 'Rafah, Stop Genocide' during a pro-Palestinian demonstration, in Madrid. – AFP

WHO condemns ‘abrupt halt’ to medical evacuations

GENEVA: More people will die in Gaza because medical evacuations from the Palestinian territory have halted since Israel launched its offensive in Rafah three weeks ago, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday.

The WHO has long been pleaded with Israel to allow more critically ill and wounded people to leave Gaza.

Thousands of Gazans are estimated to require urgent medical evacuation but few have been able to leave the besieged territory since war started.

WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said that since Israel launched a military offensive in the densely crowded southern city of Rafah in early May, “there’s been an abrupt halt to all medical evacuations”.

She warned that the cut-off obviously meant more people will die waiting for treatment.



Palestinians mourn by the bodies of relatives killed after an Israeli strike in Rafah. – AFP

“Those people didn’t go away simply because conflict started, so they all still need a referral,” Harris told reporters in Geneva.

Since services in Gaza have been disastrously disrupted by the conflict, far more people need to leave for treatment they used to access inside Gaza, like chemotherapy or dialysis, she said.

In addition, thousands now need to evacuate after suffering severe injuries in the war. “If they don’t get the treatment sadly they die,” she commented.

Israel’s military retaliation has killed at least 36,096 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the Hamas-run territory’s health ministry. WHO estimates that there are now typically “around 10,000 people who need to be evacuated... to receive the much-needed medical treatment elsewhere”, Harris said.

They include more than 6,000 trauma-related patients and at

least 2,000 patients with chronic conditions, like cancer, she said.

Since medical evacuations halted on May 8, an additional 1,000 critically ill and wounded patients have been added to that list, Harris said.

Before the cut-off, WHO had received approval from Israel for 5,800 medical evacuations — about half of the number it had requested since the war began.

James Elder, spokesman for the UN children’s agency UNICEF, dismissed that assertion.

“I guess the question is what then to call the ferocious attacks that have killed thousands and thousands of children... (or) the countless children who have had arms and legs amputated or the thousands who have been orphaned?” he asked. “I think surely the question that needs to be asked is how many more mistakes is the world going to tolerate? — AFP



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In brief

■ DUBAI



VESSEL HIT OFF YEMEN'S COAST, SAY SHIPPING SOURCES

A Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier off the Yemeni coast took on water after being targeted with three missiles.

The ship issued a distress call, saying it had sustained damage to the cargo hold and was taking on water about 54 nautical miles southwest of Yemen's port city of Hodeidah, British security firm Ambrey said.

Greek shipping sources said the vessel, which bears the name Laax, was sailing to a port nearby to assess the extent of the damage. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said that it had received a report of an incident 31 nautical miles southwest of Hodeidah. — **Reuters**

■ BAGHDAD



IRAQ ANNOUNCES HAUL OF 2.5 MILLION CAPTAGON PILLS

Iraqi authorities announced the seizure of 2.5 million captagon pills on Tuesday. Authorities in Iraq regularly announce large hauls of captagon, much of it trafficked across the porous 600-kilometre border with Syria.

Officers "carried out an intelligence operation that led to the seizure of 2.5 million captagon pills" in Najaf and Anbar provinces, said Hussein al Tamimi, spokesperson for the Anti-Narcotics Directorate.

The directorate said it had arrested 6,000 suspects for drug-related crimes in 2024 and seized 10 tonnes of various drugs. Iraq has faced an explosion in drug use in recent years. — **AFP**

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA QUARRY COLLAPSE AS CYCLONE DEATHS CLIMB TO 23

Torrential rains brought by cyclone Remal caused a collapse in a stone quarry in India's state of Mizoram, killing 15 people and trapping seven, while eight more died in landslides and other accidents elsewhere in the remote region, officials said.

"There have been incessant rains in the wake of cyclone Remal, which led to the quarry collapse."

Authorities in India's eastern state of West Bengal were working to restore electricity in the worst-affected areas.

Remal is the first of the frequent storms expected to pound the coasts of the South Asian neighbours. — **Reuters**

Zelensky presses Biden to attend summit

BRUSSELS: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday urged US leader Joe Biden to attend a June peace summit in Switzerland, as he accused Russia's Vladimir Putin of trying to derail the gathering.

Zelensky's appeal came as he locked in a commitment from Belgium to supply 30 F-16 fighter jets by 2028, on the latest leg of a whistle-stop tour to rally Western support.

Ukraine is pushing to whip up attendance at the peace conference next month where it hopes to win broad international backing for its vision of the terms needed to end Russia's war.

But the meeting threatens to be overshadowed if key Ukraine backer Biden — who has given no sign he would participate — ultimately stays away.

"If Biden is not present, it will be just like applauding Putin: personally applauding and doing so standing," Zelensky said at a press conference alongside Belgium's Alexander De Croo.

The Ukrainian leader said that Putin was "very scared" of the peace summit and was trying to derail the event set for June 15-16.

"He has been trying to thwart this summit and continues to do so," said Zelensky, who has ruled out Russian participation in the gathering.

Zelensky's latest tour of allies comes as Ukraine is struggling to hold back a Russian ground offensive in the Kharkiv region, where Moscow recently has made its largest territorial gains in 18 months.



(From L) Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky listen as they meet with Belgian F-16 pilots, north-east of Brussels. — **AFP**

Zelensky's appeal came as he locked in a commitment from Belgium to supply 30 F-16 fighter jets by 2028, on the latest leg of a whistlestop tour to rally Western support

Belgium's commitment of fighter jets — which it hopes to start delivering by year's end — came a day after Spain promised Zelensky one billion euros in support on a visit to Madrid, and before he heads to Portugal later on Tuesday.

The pledge was made as part of a bilateral security and long-term support accord signed by Zelensky and De Croo, the latest in a string of similar Ukrainian

deals with Western backers.

The security agreement, Zelensky said, "includes at least 977 million euros in Belgian military aid to Ukraine this year," in addition to a commitment of support over the next 10 years.

Meanwhile, Sweden unveiled on Tuesday a new aid package for Ukraine to secure the war-ravaged country's energy supply, a sector that has been targeted by Russian strikes.

"Access to energy is essential for Ukrainian society, the economy and businesses to continue to function," Swedish Aid Minister Johan Forssell told reporters.

"Russia is increasingly focusing its attacks on Ukraine's energy system in a bid to knock out important infrastructure. To boost Ukraine's resilience, we are therefore increasing our aid for the energy sector," he said. — **AFP**

PNG evacuates thousands under threat of new landslide

PORT MORESBY: Thousands of people living near the site of a deadly Papua New Guinea landslide have been told they may have to evacuate because of the risk of further slips, a top provincial official said on Tuesday.

"We're trying to evacuate," Enga provincial administrator Sandis Tsaka said. "Every hour you can hear rock breaking — it is like a bomb or gunshot and the rocks keep falling down," Tsaka said.

The Enga official initially put the number to be evacuated at almost 7,900, but later said

that was in fact the estimated population in the area affected by the landslide.

"Most of them are on notice," he said, without giving a new figure for the number of evacuees. "People are being asked to relocate to ensure safety."

A hillside community in Enga province was almost wiped out when a chunk of Mount Mungalo collapsed early on Friday morning, smothering scores of homes and the people sleeping inside them.

Papua New Guinea's national disaster centre fears more than 2,000 people were buried, but

only five bodies and the leg of a sixth have so far been pulled from the rubble.

Rescue workers are trying to remove people from the area to be sure "the ongoing landslide is not going to take any more lives than those already lost," Tsaka said.

The area has been "completely devastated" and the community is "traumatised," he said.

"Entire families buried under debris," he said. "Everyone in the Enga province has a friend or family member that was killed, is missing or was impacted by this tragedy," he added. — **AFP**



Onlookers react as people clear an area at the site of a landslide in Yambali village, Enga, Papua New Guinea. — **Reuters**



Former US President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump sits in court during his trial at Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City. — **AFP**

Trump trial to hear closing arguments

NEW YORK: Donald Trump arrived on Tuesday for closing arguments in his New York hush money trial ahead of the jury deciding whether to make him the first criminally convicted former president and current White House hopeful in history.

The defence team to start off, seeking to persuade the jury that the Republican committed no crime when he paid to bury a news story on the eve of his shock 2016 election win about an alleged encounter with Stormy Daniels.

Prosecutors will lay out the case that Trump falsified business records to keep the hush money payment secret amid fear that the episode could sink his already rocky outsider's bid to defeat Hillary Clinton.

The 12 jurors — whose identities have been kept secret for their protection — will then start deliberations as early as Wednesday, with a guilty verdict potentially triggering a prison

sentence.

Coming less than six months before the November presidential election, in which polls show Trump neck and neck against President Joe Biden, the verdict will mark a new moment of extreme tension in an already unprecedented contest.

Trump, 77, is already the first former or sitting president under criminal indictment, with charges ranging from the relatively minor hush money case to accusations that he took top secret documents and tried to overthrow the 2020 election in which he lost to Biden.

The New York case, which featured more than 20 witnesses over five weeks, is the only one likely to have been completed, or even come to trial, by November 5 election day.

If convicted, Trump faces up to four years in prison on each of 34 counts, but legal experts say that as a first-time offender he is unlikely to get jail time. — **AFP**

Iran’s ‘Millennia Deal’ — A strategic collaboration



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

The more I learn about Iran, the more I realise how little the world understands one of its greatest civilizations. My fascination with Persian culture began in childhood when I discovered that the name of Sultanate of Oman’s late Sultan Qaboos, meaning “the bright face,” was derived from Shah Kavus, a legendary Persian ruler mentioned in Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh. This early interest led me to focus my college research on modern Iran, culminating in an unforgettable historical journey through Shiraz, Takht Jamshid/Persepolis, Isfahan, and Tehran.

With the tragic demise of Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi and key leaders, including Foreign Minister Hussain Amir Abdullaahian, may their souls rest in peace, in a helicopter crash, it’s time for a paradigm shift in our approach to Iran. The world must move from a stance of confrontation to a strategic and socioeconomic partnership - a ‘Millennia Deal’.

Historically, peace and prosperity in the world have been elusive while its centre, Iran, faces isolation and sanctions. The current global landscape, marked by a climate crisis, pandemics, and rising living costs, demands a cooperative effort leveraging global knowledge to innovate solutions

for future generations. Decades-long containment strategies have failed to deliver sustainable peace or prosperity in one of the world’s most strategic regions, Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA).

Iran’s geopolitical position is crucial. It’s isolation disrupts global trade and exacerbates economic challenges worldwide. To address the multifaceted crises we face, integrating Iran into the global community is not just beneficial but essential. This strategic integration can foster a collaborative environment, enabling the sharing of ideas and resources necessary to tackle global challenges.

An African proverb states, “When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.” Similarly, when the West conflicts with Iran, it is the people who suffer from lack of healthy relations and resource exchanges. The ongoing geopolitical tension disrupts the global flow of goods and services, contributing to the rising cost of living worldwide.

Socially, the continued fascination with Persian cuisine, carpets, cats, comedians and artists, like the late ustath Muhammad Reza Shajarian, contrasts sharply with the participation in sanctions that isolate Iran. This contradiction highlights a flawed strategy that has been counterproductive for decades. The ‘Millennia Deal’ would open the world

THE ‘MILLENNIA DEAL’ IS NOT JUST A NECESSITY BUT A MORAL IMPERATIVE. IT AIMS TO RESTORE FAITH IN UNIVERSAL HUMAN VALUES, CURRENTLY UNDERMINED BY POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND INJUSTICES

to Iran, facilitating cultural exchange and economic cooperation, and mitigating Iran’s disruptive regional interventions that foster mistrust and suffering.

The ‘Millennia Deal’ is not just a necessity but a moral imperative. It aims to restore faith in universal human values, currently undermined by political conflicts and injustices. The West’s complicit support for Israeli occupation force’s genocide against Palestinians has further complicated the regional dynamics, making a new approach towards Iran even more critical.

By embracing a ‘Millennia Deal,’ the global community can pave the way for strategic and socioeconomic collaboration. This shift will not only enhance global stability but also promote a just and equitable world order. Iran’s integration into the international fold can catalyse a new era of peace, prosperity, and mutual respect, benefiting all of humanity.

In conclusion, the time has come for a bold, transformative approach to Iran. The ‘Millennia Deal’ offers a pathway to strategic and socioeconomic benefits that can address the pressing challenges of our time. It is an opportunity to forge a new relationship with one of the world’s oldest civilisations, ensuring a better future for generations to come.

Ex-leader Zuma back in the spotlight for election

NELLIE PEYTON, ALEXANDER WINNING

Six years after South Africa’s scandal-plagued former president Jacob Zuma was pushed out of office, he is backing a new party against his longtime political home the African National Congress (ANC) in Wednesday’s national election. Zuma’s political return as the leader of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), a party named after the ANC’s former armed wing, is significant since the ANC is fighting to retain its majority amid declining popularity. Support for MK is around 8-14 per cent nationally, according to opinion polls. Although 82-year-old Zuma is legally barred from standing for parliament due to a jail sentence, MK’s emergence has disrupted the political landscape, testifying to his enduring influence particularly in his home province KwaZulu-Natal.

An anti-apartheid veteran and Zulu traditionalist, Zuma has a strong following especially in rural areas due to his populist style and modest upbringing.

He rose through the ANC to serve as deputy president of South Africa from 1999 to 2005 under former President Thabo Mbeki, but was dismissed when he was implicated in a graft trial relating to a \$2 billion arms deal. Corruption charges against him were dropped and reinstated multiple times amid claims of political interference, and the case is only scheduled to go to trial next year. Zuma’s nine years as president from 2009 were defined by what South Africans call “state capture” after an inquiry pointed to systemic corruption in which well-connected business people plundered state resources. When the ANC eventually pressured him to quit in 2018, Zuma ranted to the state broadcaster for an hour about his treatment by the party he had served since he was a teenager, saying his comrades had not followed proper party procedure. South Africa experienced economic stagnation during Zuma’s presidency, which some critics characterise as a period of national embarrassment and accuse him of ignoring the greater good of Nelson Mandela’s “Rainbow Nation”. Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in jail in 2021 for failing to appear at an inquiry into corruption during his time in power, although he only served two months before being released on medical parole. More than 300 people were killed in the riots and looting spree that followed his arrest. Commentators wrote off Zuma’s political career several times, but he proved them wrong consistently, earning himself the nickname of the “great survivor”. — Reuters



Zahir Al Mahrooqi

Is an Omani writer and the author of The Road to Jerusalem

The ICC’s controversial equivalence...

One of the greatest injustices by the International Criminal Court (ICC) is equating the executioner with the victim. This was evident on Monday (May 20, 2024), when Karim Khan, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, announced that he had requested arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, and Yoav Galant, Defence Minister.

They are accused of war crimes and genocide against humanity, with evidence suggesting their involvement in causing suffering and starvation among civilians in Gaza. While such accusations are significant, it is unusual that Khan also stated, “there are reasonable grounds to believe that Yahya al Sinwar, leader of the Hamas movement in Gaza, Muhammad Al Deif, the chief of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’ political bureau, are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Israel.”

It appears that the court only dared to issue warrants for the Israeli officials by also targeting Palestinian resistance leaders, who have been defending their homeland for over 70 years under severe suffering. The inclusion of Ismail Haniyeh, primarily involved in political affairs and negotiations, is particularly perplexing.

The United Nations describes the ICC as the first permanent international criminal court, established to investigate and prosecute serious crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. Its mandate emphasises justice for the victims of atrocities. However, this mission seems to overlook the thousands of Gazan martyrs, including over 15,000 children, more than 10,000 women, and over a thousand elderly people, along with journalists and medical teams.

Although the ICC lacks enforcement mechanisms, meaning Israeli leaders remain effectively safe, the court’s actions have provoked significant reactions. Israel condemned the prosecutor’s request, calling it a “historical disgrace,” while Netanyahu labelled it a “scandal” and vowed to continue the military campaign in Gaza. Additionally, Israel is attempting to obstruct any official court decision, as evidenced by Foreign Minister Israel Katz’s announcement of a special effort



Palestinians flee the area of Tal al Sultan in Rafah with their belongings following renewed Israeli strikes in the city in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — AFP

to counteract the ICC’s move, including lobbying major countries to disregard any

THE UNITED NATIONS DESCRIBES THE ICC AS THE FIRST PERMANENT INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT, ESTABLISHED TO INVESTIGATE AND PROSECUTE SERIOUS CRIMES, INCLUDING WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

arrest orders.

Israel’s strength is derived from the Arab states’ reliance on external support, notably from the United States. President Joe Biden strongly defended Israel, asserting that its military actions in Gaza do not constitute genocide and reaffirmed unwavering American support for Israel’s security and its efforts against Hamas leaders.

Despite US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken’s rejection of the ICC’s requests and concerns over potential impacts on negotiations, he criticised the equivalence drawn between Israel and Hamas, deeming it “shameful.” Blinken even suggested imposing sanctions on the ICC,

highlighting America’s double standards; the same court was praised when it indicted Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In the light of American and Israeli opposition to holding Netanyahu and Gallant accountable for war crimes, it is clear that the recent shifts in global perceptions, brought about by (Toofan Al-Aqsa) the Al-Aqsa Flood, have led to increased recognition of the Palestinian cause. Countries like Norway, Ireland and Spain have officially recognised Palestine, and more may follow. The ICC’s unprecedented move to seek the arrest of Israeli leaders marks a significant moment in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

However, while the US and Israel oppose these efforts, the response from Arab countries and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah regarding the inclusion of Hamas leaders remains notably absent. Only Hamas has condemned the prosecutor’s decision, and it is plausible that some Arab nations might even facilitate their trial if the opportunity arises. Despite its symbolic nature, the ICC’s step against Israeli leaders is a positive development, evidenced by the intense dissatisfaction from the US, the West, and Israel. A time will come when justice prevails, as the pursuit of accountability has already begun. *(Translated by Bad al Dhafri and the original version of the article was published in Arabic in Oman newspaper on May 20)*

Living with the aging clock

Even as many people dream of living to 100 or beyond, many among the elderly do not want to live longer. They think living too long can lead to age-related diseases and rob them of their ability and creativity. Living longer with a disability, they believe, will make them feeble and ineffectual! They do not want to live counting their days with a new ache or pain of uncertain duration, adding to their existing maladies. So they want a healthy life right up to the day they die! It is not hyperbole, but a state that is worse than death! And the simple truth is that we humans live only a few years of our lives without diseases!

However, despite growing threats from age-related diseases or more years spent in poor health, life expectancy or life span (while both terms relate to the number of living years, they actually have different concepts) has increased dramatically around the globe. The latest findings of a study forecast that global life expectancy will increase from 73.6 years of age in 2022 to 78.1 years of age in 2050. At the same time, the average number of years a person can expect to live in good health is expected to increase from 64.8 years in 2022 to only 67.4 years in 2050.

“Chronic ailments like heart disease, diabetes, cancer and lung disease are expected to play a more powerful role than infectious diseases in how long people live,” researchers of the study “The Global Burden of Disease Study 2021” published in the *Lancet* point out. This increase in global life expectancy is most significant in regions currently experiencing lower life expectancies, indicating a potential convergence in health outcomes worldwide, according to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021. Prior to this report, the McKinsey Health Institute expressed the same view in a report. According to it,



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AGING OF COURSE IS A FACT OF LIFE. PEOPLE FIND THEMSELVES HITTING A NEW AGE MILESTONE EACH YEAR BRINGING ABOUT PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE CHANGES

inequality is still a major problem. There is an 18-year gap in average life expectancy between low- and high-income countries and a 30-year gap between the lowest and highest life expectancies. “We are now spending more years in poor health than at any time in our history,” says the report quoted by the World Economic Forum. But it also says, “Things don’t have to be that way.” Echoing the same view, a BBC report pointed out that while people might be expected to live more years with disease simply as a function of living longer in general, the average number of healthy years has decreased since 1998. “We spend fewer years of our lives without disease, even though we live longer,” it said. Aging, of course, is a reality and fact of life. People find themselves hitting a new age milestone each year, bringing about physical, emotional and cognitive changes. This means aging occurs throughout our lives, right from the very beginning. However, as studies suggest, with medical advances and a healthier lifestyle, we can enjoy more years of quality life, though we cannot expect to live the life of Jeanne Calment, the French woman and the oldest documented person to ever have lived. She died in 1997 at the age of 122. It was reported that she smoked for all but the last five years of her life and ate more than two pounds of chocolate every week! Sure, you have to die of something someday, but you may not have to die so soon. A good death demands a good life. Remember, what our ancestors taught us: “Don’t be excessive at the dining table; do exercises; avoid stress; and get a good and blissful sleep.” Think that you still have more to contribute and leave the obsession about dying! After all, we’re part of life on earth!

FLYING HIGH!



■ Palestinian, EU and Irish flags flutter outside Leinster House in Dublin, Ireland, on Tuesday after Ireland has announced it will recognise the Palestinian state. — Reuters

How G7 can unlock financing for Africa

Climate change continues to ravage Africa, which is enduring extreme weather and natural disasters on an unprecedented scale. My own country, Kenya, has just emerged from its longest drought on record, only to suffer devastating floods, which have killed 289 people and affected more than 800,000. Meanwhile, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe recently experienced a severe drought that exposed millions of people to hunger, and the Sahel region was hit by a debilitating heatwave, resulting in more than 100 deaths in Mali. Climate change increasingly drives droughts in Africa, jeopardising water supplies. It ruins lives and livelihoods, cripples food production, and destroys homes and infrastructure. It affects migration patterns and exacerbates conflicts, forcing entire populations to flee in search of alternative livelihoods for survival. Making matters worse, African countries pay interest rates up to eight times higher than those attached to the typical World Bank loan, leaving them even less equipped to deal with climate-related challenges. This disparity reflects an international financial system that was established in 1945, when most African countries did not yet exist, and which remains tilted in favour of wealthy countries. Many African countries are trapped in a perpetual cycle of debt, with little or no fiscal space for development and investments in climate-change mitigation or adaptation.



William Ruto

The writer is President of Kenya

WITH MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES TRAPPED IN PERPETUAL CYCLES OF DEBT, FINANCING INVESTMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE

In fact, developing countries are now net contributors of financial flows to the global economy. Net financial transfers to developing countries plummeted from a peak of \$225 billion in 2014 to \$51 billion in 2022; and in 2023, \$74 billion in interest payments left International Development Association (IDA) countries (comprising low-income and some lower-middle-income economies) for wealthier donor countries. These financial strains are hampering African countries’ efforts not only to adapt to the impact of climate change, but also to make the transition to a low-carbon economy, not to mention allocating adequate resources for education, healthcare and social protections. That is why Africa — and the rest of the developing world — has been calling for urgent reforms to the global financial architecture. But it falls to the G7 and the G20 to take the necessary steps in this direction. As a major shareholder in the multilateral development banks, the United States can help lead the way. When the G7 meets in Apulia, Italy, for its 50th summit next month, the leaders of major donor countries can demonstrate solidarity with Africa by committing to support debt restructuring and cancellation, as well as make provisions for greater concessional and longer-term development financing. At the

Italy-Africa Summit in January, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni pledged to be Africa’s friend and envoy at the G7, and we remain confident that she and other well-meaning G7 leaders will deliver the keys to unlock the financing that Africa needs. A fair financial system would grant all countries equal access to equity. One readily available way to do this would be to reallocate Special Drawing Rights (SDRs, the International Monetary Fund’s international reserve asset) to the African Development Bank. While the G20 launched the Common Framework for

Debt Treatments four years ago, the pace of restructuring remains woefully misaligned with countries’ needs. Wealthy countries must show leadership and release the financing that African countries need to unlock their growth potential. Continuing merely to talk about it will achieve nothing. I recently hosted the IDA’s replenishment summit in Nairobi, where 19 heads of state or government from across the continent discussed Africa’s debt crisis, and how it has been compounded by climate-driven costs and the economic scars of

the Covid-19 pandemic. All agreed that we need wealthy countries to rise to the occasion and scale up financing to bridge Africa’s climate and development needs. We are calling on our friends — the US, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Japan — to provide a steady stream of long-term concessional financing, including at least \$120 billion for the IDA21 replenishment, on the way towards tripling the fund by 2030. Rather than playing the victims, we are keen to do our part to make the world more habitable. We are taking the lead and showing that it is possible to achieve prosperity without destroying the planet, through green industrialisation. As I conduct my state visit to the US, I will make clear that Kenya — and Africa more broadly — is open for business. We invite investments that will tap our immense renewable energy resources, our young and skilled workforce, and our conducive business environment. We offer major opportunities in apparel manufacturing, agriculture, information-communication technology, and much else. The US is already Kenya’s largest export market, and as we mark the 60th anniversary of US-Kenyan diplomatic relations, we will look to build on this relationship, and to enhance trade and sustainable development gains for both countries.



Climate change increasingly drives droughts in Africa, jeopardising water supplies.

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Oman now have a winning mentality, says coach Aikman

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 28

The Oman hockey team has now cultivated a winning mentality in its ranks compared to earlier times when they played only to compete, according to head coach Siegfried Aikman.

“Now the team has the confidence to go for the win against the top teams. That was evident during the Men’s Hockey5s Asia Cup and FIH Hockey5s World Cup,” the Dutch coach told Oman Daily Observer.

“It was a dream fulfilled for us when we clinched the bronze medal at the Hockey5s World Cup. We have a bunch of highly ambitious players who are instrumental in creating history for the team and country,” the coach said.

Aikman was speaking during an appreciation ceremony for the FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024 at the Sheraton Hotel Muscat on Monday evening.

HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, was the chief guest for

the evening in presence of International Hockey Federation (FIH) President Dato Tayyib Ikram, Oman Olympic Committee Chairman Shaikh Khalid al Zubair and Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma.

The bronze-winning Oman team members and coaching staff at the World Cup were honoured along with tournament officials, sponsors and the media organisations.

The FIH president said history was made when Oman successfully organized the first-ever Hockey5s World Cup in its record-time new hockey facility at Al Amerat.

“The Oman Hockey Association under the leadership of Dr Marwan deserves the appreciation for delivering a great World Cup. Oman Olympic Committee Chairman Shaikh Khalid also keeps requesting me to take care of Oman hockey whenever I meet him,” Ikram said.

He thanked the officials, sponsors and volunteers for making the inaugural Hockey5s World Cup a memorable one.



OHA HOSTS APPRECIATION CEREMONY FOR BRONZE-WINNING TEAM



Ikram also commended the support from Oman government and Governor of Dhofar during the Hockey5s Asia Cup and World Cup tournaments in Salalah and Muscat respectively.

JUNIOR AHF CUP NEXT TARGET

Aikman said the immediate target for Oman hockey is to win the Junior AHF Cup 2024 to be held in Singapore from June 14 to 23.

“Our target is to claim the title at the under-21 tournament and qualify for the Asian Cup. The top placed teams in the Asian Cup will qualify for the Junior World Cup 2025 tournament.”

Senior Asia Cup qualification will be the next target, the coach added.

The veteran coach also said Oman are taking part in the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Thailand from November 21 to 30.

“We are taking part in the Martial Arts Games with our hockey5s team. We would also like to take our indoor team provided approval from the Oman

Olympic Committee,” he said.

“Our indoor hockey team is in a growth phase, we need to get more exposure for the team. If the Oman Olympic Committee sends our indoor hockey team to the Martial Arts Games in Malaysia, it will be great,” the Dutch coach said.

The Oman indoor hockey team took part in the Men’s Indoor Asia Cup 2024 tournament for the first time and star player Rashad al Fazari said it was a new experience.

“We were playing against some of the top indoor teams in Asia. It was a completely new experience for our players. The matches tested our skills. We need more indoor tournaments and surely we will adapt to the game format,” he said. Oman finished sixth at the Indoor Asia Cup held at Taldykorgan in Kazakhstan from May 21 to 25.

Iran and Malaysia qualified for FIH Indoor Hockey World Cup 2025 after Iran thrashed Malaysia 7-1 in the final.

PICTURES BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMADANI



Mazin al Hashmi and Hood al Jalboubi

Oman take top two sports in Arab Beach Volleyball

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 28

Omani duos from team (B), Mazin al Hashmi and Hood al Jalboubi emerged champions in the 29th edition of the Arabian Beach Volleyball Championship after they defeated their teammates comprised from Ahmed al Hosni and Haitham al Shraiqi from Oman team (A) 2-1 (15-11, 18-21, 21-17) in the final summit clash on Monday in Amman city, Jordan.

The victorious of Omani pair secured their spot in the finals by defeating the Qatari team 2-0 in the semifinals. Meanwhile, the other Omani team also advanced to the semifinals with a 2-0 victory over the Lebanese team.

Oman’s top beach volleyball players from both Team A and Team B delivered an outstanding performances throughout the tournament. Ahmed al Hosni and Haitham al Shraiqi (Team A) advanced to the quarterfinals after topping their group with 2-0 victories over Lebanon (A), Bahrain (A), and Saudi Arabia (B). Team B, featuring Mazin al Hashmi and Hood al Jalboubi, managed to earn their quarters ticket with a 2-0 win against Saudi Arabia (A), a 2-1 victory over Jordan, and a 2-0 triumph against Qatar (B).

The Arabian triumph was the second accomplishment for the national team spikers as they had impressed as well in the 2nd edition of the West Asian beach Volleyball Championship which was concluded recently. Oman team (B)



comprised from Mazin al Hashmi and Hood al Jalboubi lifted the title of the West Asian following their victorious against Oman’s duo comprised from Ahmed al Hosni and Haitham al Shraiqi 2-0 in the concluding match last week. The Omani beach volleyball team, coached by national coach Bader al Subhi, has demonstrated exceptional technical skills and the ability to compete at the highest levels in Asia.

Eng Ibrahim al Maqbali, Chairman of the Oman Volleyball Association (OVA), congratulated the players and the head coach for their accomplishment. “I am proud of this historic achievement. This success is the result of disciplined and coordinated efforts between OVA and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth,” he stated.

AL RAWAHI RESUMES JWRC PROGRAMME IN SARDINIA

ALGHERO (SARDINIA): The Oman Rally Team's Abdullah al Rawahi is on the picturesque Mediterranean island of Sardinia preparing to resume his programme of events in the competitive FIA Junior World Rally Championship (JWRC).

This weekend's (May 31st-June 2nd) Rally Italia Sardegna is the sixth round of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) and the third in the JWRC calendar after events in Sweden and Croatia. Al Rawahi got his first ever taste of racing on snow between banks in the forests on the season's opener in Scandinavia but was forced to miss round two on tarmac because of a back injury.

With his usual Jordanian co-driver Ata Al Hmoud unavailable because of other commitments this week, Al Rawahi lines up against 17 JWRC rivals with British co-driver Ross Whittock for the first time.

Both the Omani and his stand-in co-driver were in action at last week's Jordan Rally but both retired early: Whittock was sitting alongside Qatar's Khalid al Suwaidi until they crashed in the opening stage and Al Rawahi and Al Hmoud were sidelined with engine damage after an accident

on the third gravel stage. The defending FIA Middle East rally champions had been leading the event after the second stage.

Al Rawahi said: "I am very excited for this rally. This is a gravel rally compared to the one in Sweden and the second one that we missed. I think we will be more comfortable on gravel terrain. There is still a lot to learn in the World Rally Championship.

"Obviously, the competition is very high and we are still looking to gain experience and learn more and even learn from my co-driver as well. Maybe we will have a different perspective from (stage) notes and stuff. Hopefully, it will be a good rally and a safe one too."

Crews taking part in the JWRC use identical M-Sport Poland Ford Fiesta Rally3 cars running on Pirelli tyres. While Al Rawahi is using the opening events to gain experience on different surfaces and against new competition, the prize for the winner will be an arrive and drive package to contest four European rounds of the 2025 FIA World Rally Championship in a Ford Fiesta Rally2 car.

The Omani's rivals this weekend include the series-leading Estonian Romet Jürgenson, Australia's



Abdullah al Rawahi in action at the opening JWRC event in Sweden. (1)

Taylor Gill, Romania's Norbert Maior and other competitors from as far afield as Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Perú, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Belgium. The on-stage action gets

underway on Friday afternoon with two passes through a pair of gravel stages between Osilo, Tergu, Sedini and Castelsardo to the north of Alghero in northwestern Sardinia.

Saturday's action features two passes through the Tempio Pausania, Tula-Erula, Monte Lerno-Monti Di Ala and Coiluna-Loelle stages, before a further two passes through the Cala Flumini

and Sassari-Argentiera specials rounds off the weekend's action on Sunday morning (June 2nd).

Competitors will tackle 266.12 competitive kilometres in a route of 1,027.90 km.

Al Wahda Football League 2024 kicks off



SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 28

The Amateur League 2024, organised by Al Wahda Club, kicked off on Saturday under the logo 'Support Your Team', the league witness participation of 12 teams competing in a knockout system. The opening matches witnessed fierce competition between the teams.

The league started on Saturday with a clash between Al Hiddah and Al Bandar Al Jadid teams, the match ended with 1-1 draw in regulation time, while Samir al Sunaidy scoring Al Bandar Al Jadid's goal in the 7th minute and Bassam al Makhini equalising for Al Hiddah in the 23rd minute. In the penalty shootout, Al Hiddah team advanced. In the second match Al Qabas team defeated Shabab Al Suwaih with a score of 1-0, thanks to Ahmed Khadem's

goal, to qualify to the next round.

On Sunday, an exciting match took place between Al Ittihad Al Gharbi and Al Dhahir teams, ending in a 1-0 victory for Al Dhahir with a goal scored by Khalid al Alawi. The second clash bring Al Jawabi team with Al Khuwaimah team in a match that ended in a 1-1 draw in regulation time, Fahd al Zarai scored for Al Khuwaimah, while Rashid al Alawi equalised for Al Jawabi. The two teams went into a penalty shootout, which was decided in favour of Al Jawabi.

On the third day of matches, Shabab Al Ashkharah team managed to defeat Al Falaj team with a score of 2-0, goals from Yasser al Jaafari and Ahmed al Jaafari. The first round concluded with the Al Hayrah team's victory over the Sih Al Sindi team with a score of 1-0, scored by Hamad al Maqhooshi.

Oman defeat Papua New Guinea in first warm-up in Trinidad



Zeeshan Maqsood

Port of Spain in Trinidad.

In the three warm-up games in Barbados, Oman won two against Barbados XI and one against the University of West Indies team. In his remarks after the win against PNG, Mendis said: "Our preparations are on track and these victories are morale-boosters for the players. The confidence among my boys is great and they are in good shape."

He added, "It was a good win against PNG in the first official warm-up match. We have played so far three unofficial games in Barbados and one official warm-up match [vs PNG]. We won all of the four. Our preparations are ideal for the World Cup, where we have tough teams to negotiate."

The head coach said: "The early arrival has helped the boys a lot as they got time to acclimatise to the weather conditions and also got a feel of the wickets in the West Indies. Thanks to the support of Oman Cricket board who arranged the pre-World Cup tour. We have another tough test against Afghanistan tomorrow [May 29] and hope to keep the winning streak."

Oman play their opening encounter on June 2 against Namibia in Barbados, a side they've defeated twice in the past, and a win could set the tone for their tournament.

They next play former champions Australia on June 5 before travelling to Antigua for the remaining games.

Oman's third group game is against fellow Associate nation, Scotland on June 9 before concluding their Group B engagements with a match against defending champions England on June 13.

Oman are being led by all-rounder Aqib Ilyas, a top-order batter and team's leading spinner.

MUSCAT: Oman's preparations for the ICC T20 World Cup is on track with the Men in Red notching up a win in the official warm-up game against Papua New Guinea (PNG) in Trinidad on Monday and the fourth win on a trot since their arrival in West Indies.

On Monday, Oman, coached by Sri Lankan great Duleep Mendis, chased down PNG's total of 137 with five balls to spare to win by three wickets at Brian Lara Stadium, Tarouba in Trinidad.

Having been put into bat, PNG found scoring tough going with Lega Siaka posting their highest score with 28 off 20 balls before being dismissed to leave his side at 55 for three. A late cameo of 17 from 10 balls from Alei Nao pushed PNG to 137 from their 20 overs as captain Aqib Ilyas disrupted the middle order with three wickets for 22.

Oman now face Afghanistan in the final warm-up game on Wednesday at Queen's Park Oval in

ISC MKW win Women Summer League 2024

MUSCAT: ISC MKW beat OCA Women's A by 6 wickets in the Finals of the Oman Cricket Women's Summer League 2024. ISC MKW have displayed sheer dominance across both OC Women's League Season 2023-24 and the OC Women's Summer League 2024 with accumulated consecutive 11 out of 11 wins.

OCA Women's A were bundled to 85 in 17.1 overs opting to bat first. Sameera Khan scored 34 of 29 while Hina Javed scored 26 of 28. Amanda D'Costa picked 4 wickets while Pratima B scalped 2 wickets. Priyanka Mendonca and Merita Pinto picked a wicket each. In response, Trupti Pawde gave ISC a start scoring 24 of 33 and Priyanka Mendonca's 35 of 28 finished the innings in joy for ISC as they chased down the target with 6 wickets in hand and 26 balls to spare. Fiza Javed, Hina Javed and Sameera Khan picked up a wicket each.

Oman Cricket witnessed a participation of 8 teams in the league this season through in continuation to its Cricket4Her - Women's Cricket Development Programme. The teams were divided in two groups wherein ISC MKW topped Group A winning 3 out of 3 matches while OCA Women's A won 3 out of 3 matches in Group B. ISWK Women's and OCA Women's C were the other teams qualified for the Semi Finals but lost to the finalists.



Fiza Javed - Player of the Tournament

In the closing ceremony, Paul Sheridan - Vice Chairman and Women's Cricket Committee Member, Oman Cricket presented the awards. The player of the match for the final was handed to ISC MKW's Priyanka Mendonca for her all-round performance picking a wicket and scoring 35 runs. The league accolades adjudged were - Best Batter : Fiza Javed of OCA Women's A scoring 279 runs in 5 innings with 2 hundreds and 1 fifty, Best Bowler : Amanda Dcosta picking 13 wickets in 5 matches and the Player of the Tournament was Fiza Javed for displaying exemplary performance with the bat throughout the League.

BRIEF SCORES: OCA Women's A 85/10 in 17.1 overs (Sameera Khan 34(29); Amanda Dcosta 4/14) lost to ISC MKW 86/4 in 15.4 overs (Priyanka Mendonca 35(28); Fiza Javed 1/10) by 6 wickets.

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FRENCHWOMAN ALIZE CORNET’S career ended on Tuesday after her record-extending 69th consecutive Grand Slam appearance at the French Open, the tournament where she made her debut aged 15 and was once a ball girl.

Cornet was no match for China’s Australian Open runner-up Zheng Qinwen on Court Philippe Chatrier in the first round, losing 6-2, 6-1.

She made her debut at Roland Garros in 2005 and has not missed a Grand Slam tournament since the 2006 US Open.

The 34-year-old’s run of consecutive appearances at the majors smashed the previous women’s record of 62 set by Japan’s Ai Sugiyama.

“Emotionally it was not easy,” said Cornet on her decision to retire after a 20-year professional career.

“Some days I was really excited about retirement and some other days I was very scared and very uncertain. So overall, I feel in peace today about it, and so I’m very happy about that decision.”

Cornet reached a career-high ranking of 11th in 2009 and enjoyed a surprise run to the 2022 Australian Open quarter-finals, beating Simona Halep along the way.

Cornet’s career will also be remembered for a run of three successive wins over Serena Williams in 2014 — including dumping the 23-time Grand Slam champion out of Wimbledon in the third round.

“The quarter-finals in Australia was the source of a lot of emotions,” she said on making the last eight at

a Slam for the first time at the 63rd attempt.

“My win over Serena was strong, intense, it was a source of great joy. But the quarter-finals — I had been running after this quarter-final for such a long time, and also winning against Simona Halep with that heat, well, it was overwhelming.

“I think I will remember that.”

Cornet ended her career on home soil with a 20th French Open appearance.

She was also a ball girl at the tournament as a child, including for a match featuring former world number one Amelie Mauresmo, now the tournament director who presented her with an award on Tuesday.

“It was wonderful,” she said of being a ball girl.

“It was a first experience where I was close to the players. When I think back now, Amelie Mauresmo is handing me the end-of-career trophy, and she’s been there all the time. I think about all the journey behind me.”

Cornet’s only previous meeting with Zheng was when she retired injured during their third-round match in Paris two years ago while trailing 6-0, 3-0. She admitted she feared going out on a sour note when she found herself 4-0 down again in the first set.

“I didn’t want to end my career with such a horrible defeat. But then when I had my first game, I managed to be back on track again.

“Well, I still lost anyway. It’s not like I won in any way, but it’s better than 6-0, 6-0.” — AFP





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Al Rifaa

CBO to issue draft guidelines for digital banks by year-end

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 28

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has launched a number of initiatives to help modernise banking services in the Sultanate of Oman.

According to Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Central Bank of Oman Executive President, several key regulations have been issued over the past two years as part of its “catalytic role” in creating an enabling environment for the growth of a new era of banking in the country.

Delivering the keynote address at the 9th New Age Banking Summit held here on Tuesday, dwelt on some of these initiatives.

“The Master Circular on Products and Services has provided greater operational freedom to banks to innovate and offer new products and services.

To provide clarity to new and existing players, the Licensing Policy of the Central Bank was issued. So far, we have licensed seven PSPs, three of which have seen significant growth. E-KYC guidelines have been issued to facilitate digital onboarding of customers,” he said. Further, with a view to providing greater ease of access to short-term small-credits, draft guidelines on the Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) programme have been placed for public consultation, said Al Amri.

Yet another landmark initiative spearheaded by the apex bank concerns plans for the authorisation of digital banking.

“To encourage full-fledged focus on digital offerings, we expect to issue draft guidelines for licensing of digital banks



Dignitaries attending the opening of the New Age Banking Summit on Tuesday. (Picture: Abdulwahid al Hamadani)


The National Payments System (NPS), the backbone of the financial system, is robust, safe, reliable, and efficient. Our payment infrastructure is not only modern, it also provides a wide array of products for retail and wholesale payments.

TAHIR BIN SALIM AL AMRI
*Executive President
Central Bank of Oman*

before the end of 2024 for consultation. At the same time not to take the foot off the pedals of risk management and

customer protection, Regulatory Frameworks for Financial Consumer Protection and Cyber Security & Resilience have been issued,” he stated.

In his address, Al Amri also underlined the high-tech nature of the Bank’s technology infrastructure. “The National Payments System (NPS), the backbone of the financial system, is robust, safe, reliable, and efficient,” he said. “Our payment infrastructure is not only modern, it also provides a wide array of products for retail and wholesale payments.”

Another key component of the bank’s infrastructure is the wholesale payment system, RTGS, which is currently operating 24/7, enabling all stakeholders to conduct transfers anytime.

“We are in the final lap of linking our RTGS with GCC-RTGS for seamless cross-border payments within the GCC,” he said.

“Work is also progressing rapidly for integration with

the Arab Regional Payment System (ARPS BUNA). Recent initiatives include guidelines on payment card tokenisation for a new, seamless, and easy payment experience, operational and technical enhancements in direct debit services including the introduction of e-mandate, and upgrades to the national instant payment platform (MPCSS) system.”

Furthermore, to foster the growth of Fintech, the CBO’s Fintech Regulatory Sandbox has attracted several participants who are currently enrolled in the Sandbox in three different cohorts, namely, Payment Solutions, Blockchain driven Trade Finance and Digital Lending, he said

Crowning these efforts is the recent unveiling of the draft Open Banking Regulatory Framework, which has been issued for public consultation, he added. The New Age Banking Summit 2024 was co-organised by UMS Group and supported by the Oman Banks Association.

Oman celebrates landmark copper export from new mine

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 28

Oman has reached a pivotal moment in its minerals sector with Al Hadeetha Resources announcing the inaugural export of copper concentrate. This landmark event signifies a major breakthrough for both Oman and Al Hadeetha Resources, heralding a new chapter in the nation’s economic diversification efforts.

The ambitious copper project, led by Al Hadeetha Resources, represents a cornerstone of Oman’s strategic plans to broaden its economic base.

Situated in Al Washihi – Al Majaza in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, the project features cutting-edge mining and processing facilities designed to extract and refine copper ore into high-quality copper concentrate.

This initiative not only aims to invigorate the local economy but also positions Oman as a formidable contender in the global copper market.

Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed

bin Saif al Busaidy, Chairman of Al Hadeetha Resources, expressed his enthusiasm: “Today is a remarkable day, marking the commencement of a groundbreaking journey for both Oman and our company in the minerals and mining sector.

This milestone will significantly contribute to the Sultanate of Oman’s economy in various ways, including creating employment opportunities for Omani citizens, attracting foreign currency, enhancing in-country value, and providing substantial support to local communities.”

The first export of copper concentrate underscores Oman’s dedication to economic diversification and sustainable development.

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC remains committed to advancing the minerals sector, fostering national prosperity. This achievement is merely the beginning of a promising future for Oman’s mining industry, poised to deliver substantial economic benefits and growth opportunities.



The first export of copper concentrate underscores Oman’s dedication to economic diversification and sustainable development.

GCC to implement e-commerce regulatory framework

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 28

A framework for the regulation of online trade and e-commerce within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region will soon be released, according to a key official of the Emirati Ministry of Economy.

Hassan al Kilani, Senior Legal Adviser at the Ministry, shared that the new framework will replace outdated legislation and seek to stay abreast of modern developments in online trade.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of the E-commerce Forum held earlier this week, Al Kilani said the new framework will allow each country to create

their individual e-commerce laws within the context of the framework.

“The difference between a unified regulatory framework and a unified law is massive. Coming up with this innovative idea for regulatory framework will allow every single country in the GCC to create their own local law within the remit of the regulatory framework.”

Furthermore, the official shared that framework will act as an enabling tool. “When treated as an enabling tool” it will extend indemnity and safeguards to traders and consumers. So, this will develop trust to buy online, and to buy smart applications.

Additionally, the official



GCC officials taking part in the E-Commerce Forum.

believes that it will also allow the GCC e-commerce and digital market to thrive, and to expand beyond the region.

In 2023, revenues of the GCC e-commerce market reached

THE NEW FRAMEWORK WILL ALLOW EACH COUNTRY TO CREATE THEIR INDIVIDUAL E-COMMERCE LAWS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE FRAMEWORK.

\$25.66 billion according to Statista. The figure is expected to grow by a compound annual growth rate of 9.93% to reach \$46.88 billion by 2029.

Furthermore, the number of buyers is expected to reach 30.7 million by 2029. The framework, which has been under development for the past two years, is now it in its final stages and is expected to be released soon.



OAB showcases innovative banking solutions at COMEX

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) participates in the COMEX Global Technology Show 2024, the largest technology event in the Sultanate of Oman.

Held at the Oman Exhibition and Convention Centre (OCEC), COMEX was inaugurated under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

OAB invites visitors to their banking, fintech, and insurance pavilion at COMEX 2024 to explore its distinguished services and pioneering role in Oman's digital banking development.

The bank presents cutting-edge technical solutions and applications used to serve its customers and provide a wide range of electronic services via the mobile application and online platform.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of OAB, said: "OAB, a well-established financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, believes that the most influential factor today is technical development and innovation.

Financial technologies have led to positive change in various financial sectors, supported development of the banking and financial sector and improved customer service.

Al Harthy added: "OAB is always keen to strengthen its

leadership in financial services, providing the newest electronic solutions and leading innovation in the Omani banking sector, in line with the future vision and the digital transformation strategy in the Sultanate of Oman.

OAB was the first bank to take the initiative to establish an innovation department to encourage new ideas that enhanced performance in all aspects of the operations, enriched its customers' experience, and facilitated and expanded services through the application and digital platforms."

Al Harthy said that the bank adopted a long-term growth strategy to invest in digital transformation, and information security, and to support innovation, which strengthened its leadership in the local banking sector, and led to tangible success in developing financial solutions in line with customers' objectives, to facilitate transactions and services across all communication points and modern channels.

From its leadership position in the Omani banking sector, OAB remains committed to enhancing creativity and actively contributing to spreading the innovation and encouraging Omani talents to develop applications that enhance banking services and contribute to the advancement of services.

Sohar International CEO clinches 'CEO of the Year' award

MUSCAT: In a remarkable testament to his commitment to excellence, Ahmed al Musalmi, the Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, has been honoured with the prestigious 'CEO of the Year – Banking Sector in Oman' award, at the Oman Banking & Finance Awards 2024, held on the sidelines of the New Age Banking Summit (NABS).

The prestigious accolade underscores Ahmed al Musalmi's outstanding leadership and catalytic role in transforming the organisation across all facets and a testament to the remarkable growth and success the bank has achieved under his stewardship, positively impacting not only the employees and stakeholders of the organisation but also the broader community and nation it serves.

Ahmed al Musalmi remarked, "I am deeply honoured to receive this award, which not only celebrates my personal journey but also underscores the collective effort and dedication of the entire Sohar International team.

Together, we have navigated challenges, seized opportunities, and relentlessly pursued excellence in every facet of our



operations.

This accolade inspires us to continue innovating, delivering exceptional service, and setting new benchmarks in the banking industry. I am immensely proud of what we have accomplished together and look forward to achieving even greater heights."

In an era marked by the complexities of an ever-evolving market, Sohar International has firmly established itself as a pioneer in the financial sector.

Ahmed al Musalmi has been instrumental in driving this transformation, leading the bank to unprecedented heights. His ability to instil a sense of purpose

and clear objectives throughout the organisation has been critical to the bank's remarkable journey towards excellence.

Under his visionary leadership, Sohar International has established itself as a key player within the Sultanate of Oman in a mere five years. The bank's commitment to becoming a leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman is evident through its purposeful growth, innovation, and dedicated focus on serving customers, stakeholders, and the nation.

Demonstrating remarkable financial performance, Sohar International recorded the highest

asset growth rate in the GCC in 2023.

This robust performance is underscored by an impressive 89 per cent increase in net profit, reaching RO 25.1 million in Q1 of 2024.

Strategic expansion has been pivotal to the bank's growth, marked by its entry into the Saudi Arabian market earlier this year and merger of HSBC Oman into Sohar International in 2023.

Regionally, Al Musalmi has led the bank to position itself as a trailblazer among the top banks in the GCC, with a robust road map for progress for shareholders.

The recent KPMG report, "GCC Listed Banks' Results: Adaptation and Growth," highlights Sohar International's top rankings in Total Assets and ROE across all GCC banks.

The bank achieved the highest year-on-year growth in total assets across the GCC, with an impressive 61.9 per cent increase.

Additionally, Sohar International secured the second position in the ROE category, reflecting its efficient use of equity and ability to generate substantial profits from its assets.

Al Zain Food Express announces opening of three new outlets in Muscat

MUSCAT: Al Zain Food Express is delighted to announce the upcoming opening of three new outlets in Muscat, following the tremendous success and overwhelming customer response at Avenues Mall Ghubrah.

The new branches will be located at City Centre Seeb, Mall of Oman, and City Centre Qurum, significantly expanding the brand's reach and bringing its high-quality offerings closer to more customers.

The new outlets are scheduled to open in the coming weeks, reflecting Al Zain Food Express's commitment to providing exceptional dining experiences across the city.

Each location has been carefully selected to offer convenience and

accessibility, allowing more patrons to enjoy the brand's signature dishes.

Shabbir Boriyawala, MD of Al Zain Food Express, expressed his excitement about the expansion. "The positive feedback and support we received at Avenues Mall Ghubrah have been incredible. We are thrilled to bring our unique dining experience to City Centre Seeb, Mall of Oman, and City Centre Qurum. We look forward to serving even more customers and becoming a favourite dining destination in these prime locations."

Al Zain Food Express is renowned for its commitment to quality and freshness. The brand exclusively uses fresh Omani



Halal chicken, which is free from antibiotics and hormones, ensuring the highest standards of health and taste.

The diverse menu features

a variety of delicious options, including mouth-watering broasted chicken, Tenders, Burgers, wraps and fresh salads, all prepared with high quality ingredients.

Bank Muscat, Meethaq Islamic Banking stall witness great turnout at COMEX

MUSCAT: As the annual largest technology exhibition unfolds, Bank Muscat and Meethaq Islamic Banking's stall witnessed a great turnout during the launch of COMEX 2024, which was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. Visitors got introduced to a wide selection of services and digital banking solutions offered through Internet Banking and Mobile Banking.

Bank Muscat and Meethaq's participation encompasses their keenness to continuously participate in various exhibitions and events that shed light on their role in digital transformation and demonstrate their state-of-the-arts products, financial facilities and digital banking services.

Moreover, the Bank's participation and support are in line with its role in strengthening national development and digitalisation of the economy.

About Bank Muscat participation in the 33rd edition of



COMEX, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager — Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are proud of all the successes and achievements that the Bank has achieved during the past period, especially in the field of digital transformation and enhancing the awareness of community members in the use of digital banking channels as one of the options in completing transactions.

The digital channels have

become an essential option for a large number of customers and individuals in general.

The Bank has sought to update its systems and services in accordance with the latest technologies used in this sector to ensure providing high-quality service to customers all the time.

The Bank's participation represents an opportunity to introduce its role in the field of enhancing digital banking services as well as introducing the

newest financial solutions.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite customers to visit the booth in the exhibition and get more details about the digital services offered."

About Meethaq's participation, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager — Meethaq Personal Banking, said: "Meethaq is dedicated to investing in the development of its infrastructure to keep pace with the rapid developments in the banking sector, particularly in Islamic banking.

For this, it recently upgraded its internal system to a more sophisticated system, aiming to provide services and products catering to the needs of its customers in accordance with international standards.

Meethaq's digital channels, including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking, offer a wide range of features and services, enabling customers to manage their financial transactions easily and securely.

Microsoft highlights advancements in generative AI at COMEX 2024

MUSCAT: Microsoft is demonstrating how the latest advancements in Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) are unlocking new opportunities for individuals and businesses to enhance their productivity at the 33rd edition of the COMEX Global Technology Show, which opened today at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Participating as the show's official Innovation Partner and as one of the main event sponsors, Microsoft is showcasing its latest AI solutions that are empowering professionals across Oman and the region to drive innovation and thrive in the new AI-powered era.

The company is exhibiting alongside seven of its partners including BI-Technologies, Netways Solutions, CYPHER Learning, International Information Technology Co (IITC), Inspira Enterprise, PwC, and Novatiq.

Microsoft's stand at COMEX 2024 features a demo zone where Microsoft's partners can spotlight their solutions, an executive boardroom, a café with networking areas, and a space dedicated to highlighting Microsoft's latest innovations and technology trends.

Shaikh Saif bin Hilal al Hosni, Country Manager, Microsoft Oman and Bahrain, said that Oman has entered a new era of work which necessitates the adoption of game-changing AI solutions such as Microsoft Copilot to empower professionals to keep pace with the growing volume of work, while also enhancing their ability to drive innovation.

"Organisations in Oman have embraced the potential of Generative AI in helping their workforce to spend less time on mundane and repetitive tasks and instead focus on more creative and fulfilling work.

Microsoft is committed to supporting organisations of all sizes and across all sectors achieve this through our comprehensive portfolio of productivity solutions, including Copilot for Microsoft 365, which we are showcasing today at this year's edition of COMEX."





Omani company utilises tech to provide property solutions

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, MAY 28

Omani proptech company 'Doorly' utilises technology to provide potential buyers with property solutions. Through an online chatbot launched earlier this year, the company acts as a tech broker between buyers and sellers, providing potential buyers with multiple offers.

Speaking to the *Observer* during COMEX 2024, CEO of Doorly, Bader al Rahbi, shared the following: "Doorly is a service that connects real estate agents with clients through real estate requests, and plays a role of a technical intermediary that takes real estate requests from clients through a chatbot, through WhatsApp."

According to Al Rahbi, clients can provide detailed property requests, and receive offers within less than 24 hours. So why would a person resort to Doorly instead of other platforms to look for property?

According to the CEO, the service saves clients time and provides them with multiple options that are tailored for their needs. "It is easy for anyone to search for a property through platforms. But imagine you didn't find one. You could do it the



traditional way: call a friend, contact a real estate agent, and look for a property with these specifications. Don't tire yourself.

With us, simply contact us, and we will take the request from you and provide multiple offers," he explained. "Our service allows you to receive multiple offers from multiple agents within the same real estate companies, and this process works while maintaining the client's privacy," he added.

Doorly is also keen on protecting client privacy.

"Your number and name will not be known unless you are interested in a specific property, then it connects you with the property you are interested in buying or renting."

The company is currently developing an application that utilises data analysis.

According to the CEO, this application will provide clients with offers in less than two hours, significantly reducing the wait time.

Omani firms eye contracts for rail depot and freight yards

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, MAY 28

As preliminary work commences on the landmark Hafeet Rail project, connecting Abu Dhabi with Suhar, local contractors are now keenly eyeing advisory and construction opportunities linked to the establishment of freight yards and depots at key locations on the Oman side of the network.

The partnership of Trojan Construction Group (NPC) of the UAE and Galfar Engineering & Contracting of Oman is currently undertaking the main civil works of the 303-km rail network at an estimated cost of \$1.4 billion.

But up for grabs is a tender for the design and construction of, among other components, facilities for the handling of freight, and marshalling and maintenance yards.

Collectively part of the 'I2' tender floated by Hafeet Rail



Al Buraimi and Suhar will host an array of rail yards and associated facilities.

(formerly Oman-Etihaad Rail Company), these facilities are planned to be established at Al Buraimi and Suhar.

Envisaged at Al Buraimi is a yard featuring, among other things, offices for customs, a light maintenance workshop, refueling point, signaling and maintenance facilities and other amenities.

However, the majority of the facilities outlined in the tender are planned to come up at Suhar.

The biggest of these is the

Suhar Depot & Marshalling Yard, hosting a series of maintenance workshops for paintwork, underfloor wheel lathe work, storage, and so on. Also at Suhar, Hafeet Rail has called for the construction of a specialised yard for the handling of aggregates.

In addition to a customs office and administrative block, it will also feature various kinds of utilities.

Closer to Sohar Port and

Freezone is envisioned a main freight yard catering to the handling of containers.

The complex will also host workshops for maintenance, customs and admin offices and other utilities.

In line with the collaborative nature of the project's overall delivery, companies from both the UAE and Oman are forming partnerships and alliances to bid for the I2 tender.

Total investment in the Hafeet Rail project is estimated at \$3 billion. Besides strengthening the positioning of Oman and the UAE as regional logistics hubs, the rail link will also unlock immense opportunities for investment, SME development and job creation commensurate with the operation and maintenance of a rail industry and its indirect spinoffs in the form of trade, commerce and logistics growth.

MoH showcases tech innovations at COMEX

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, MAY 28

The Ministry of Health (MoH) is showcasing its latest technological advancements and strategies at COMEX 2024 aimed at transforming healthcare services nationwide.

According to Al Mu'tasim bin Abdullah al Mamari, a spokesperson of the ministry, four primary objectives are in focus as part of the participation in the expo. Firstly, the ministry seeks to demonstrate the breadth of its electronic services portfolio while introducing new offerings designed to benefit a diverse range of users.

Secondly, the ministry endeavours to foster collaboration with domestic partner institutions to enhance the quality and accessibility of government electronic services, thereby improving citizen satisfaction and engagement.

Additionally, the ministry is exploring opportunities for investment and collaboration with private sector entities to further innovate and refine its service delivery mechanisms.



MoH's booth spotlights the complete portfolio of its electronic services.

This strategic partnership aims to leverage the collective expertise of both public and private sectors to address evolving healthcare needs effectively.

Furthermore, the ministry aims to leverage the COMEX platform to draw insights from both national and international experiences, enhancing its technological capabilities and staying abreast of global best practices in healthcare technology deployment.

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, emphasised the ministry's commitment to leveraging technology to improve healthcare

outcomes. "Our participation at COMEX 2024 underscores our dedication to advancing electronic services in the healthcare sector," he remarked.

"Through collaboration, innovation and learning from global experiences, we aim to elevate the standard of healthcare delivery and enhance the overall well-being of our citizens."

Among the ministry's notable achievements is the longstanding utilisation of the 'Shifa' application, which has been instrumental in facilitating healthcare operations for over two decades. Plans are underway to expand its scope beyond Ministry of Health entities,

encompassing various national healthcare institutions and private sector stakeholders.

The ministry's 'Shifa' application, boasting over 300,000 users, has emerged as a cornerstone in fostering positive interactions between the ministry and its beneficiaries.

Its user-centric design and practical functionalities have garnered widespread acclaim, further cementing the ministry's reputation as a leader in digital healthcare innovation.

In a recent triumph, the Ministry of Health secured recognition in the government initiative category at COMEX 2024. Its groundbreaking proposal, in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, aims to harness information technology to support public health initiatives.

Additionally, the ministry won in the National Centre for Virtual Health initiative, signaling its proactive stance in embracing emerging technologies to enhance healthcare delivery.

SalamAir launches direct flights from Muscat to Cairo



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 28

SalamAir announces the launch of direct flights from Muscat to Cairo, providing passengers with convenient access to Egypt's vibrant capital city. Starting from June 15, with 3 flights a week, travellers can enjoy the ease and comfort of flying directly to Sphinx International Airport.

The launch of direct flights to Cairo holds significant importance as it caters not only to leisure travellers, but also to the thriving Egyptian community residing in Oman. SalamAir recognises the importance of facilitating travel for expatriates, students and professionals, further strengthening people-to-people ties, and cultural and trade exchange between the two countries.

"We are excited to introduce

direct flights between Muscat and Cairo," said Captain Ahmed al Shidhani, CEO of SalamAir.

"Cairo holds great appeal for many travellers, not only for its iconic history and landmarks, but also the immense infrastructural developments it's currently seeing. We are proud to connect passengers from Oman and the rest of the GCC to this dynamic destination, offering them more choice, convenience and value for money."

Sphinx International Airport, located on the periphery of Cairo, provides convenient access to the city's main attractions, including the Great Pyramids of Giza, the Sphinx, and the Egyptian Museum. Whether travellers are visiting for business or leisure, SalamAir's direct flights offer a convenient and hassle-free way to explore all that Cairo has to offer.

UTAS signs MoUs to implement tech in education

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 28

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) has signed four Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) to implement AI technology and educational methods. The MoU signings took place against the backdrop of COMEX 2024 presently underway in Muscat.

Commenting on the MoUs, Dr Huda al Shoaali, Vice-President for Electronic Services and Student Systems, stated, "We are focusing on automating manual processes and improving existing systems. We are also using data science tools like dashboards and

AI algorithms to enhance system performance."

She added, "The University of Technology and Applied Sciences is prioritising digital e-learning platforms. AI helps improve learning and reduces the workload for teachers, such as advising students and managing exams. Our goal is to streamline these tasks, allowing educators to focus more on teaching and mentoring."

The first MoU was signed with EnCoach, an Omani online learning platform that utilises advanced data analytics, predictive modeling, natural language processing (NLP), personalisation and



UTAS officials with the signatories.

recommendation engines using AI.

In remarks to the *Observer*, Dr Al Shoaali explained that the partnership will implement AI technology and simplify education for both students and

teachers, by correcting exams and giving instant feedback to students which will replace manual correction. Additionally it provides personalised learning based on students' learning levels.

The second MoU was

signed with Onsor, an Omani designer and producer of personal computers, to integrate their PC technology to UTAS infrastructure, while fostering support for local companies.

"We are part of Onsor — currently we are working with Onsor on their virtual reality machines and we are focusing on learning management systems where we focus on content, with the help of AI we do not need to create content," said Dr Al Shoaali.

"We are here to support local companies, to take care of them. We feel as a big university in Oman it's our responsibility to do so."

UTAS also signed a MoU

with Dell and Microsoft. The MoU with Dell was signed to implement new technologies in digital transformation to enhance student skills as well as the staff, supporting them to attend international conferences in the US and the UK. Microsoft will support the implementation of digital transformation for the benefit of students.

Johny Karam, Education Cloud Specialist at Microsoft, said: "This is just another milestone — a milestone that is well embarked and well built over artificial intelligence in a safe and smart approach in order to really be able to get the best for our students, faculty and staff."

Pressure on IMF to change gloomy forecast as UK bounces back



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) came under pressure last week to revise its gloomy forecasts for Britain. Figures showed the economy rose back to growth at the start of the year and that was enough to persuade the IMF to amend its data.

UK business has enjoyed its strongest growth for nearly a year — outpacing global rivals — in the latest sign that the recession has been left behind.

A closely watched survey compiled by data provider S&P Global showed private activity gathering pace this month with the healthiest expansion since last May.

S&P's latest purchasing managers' index survey suggested the bounce-back extended into April. It gave a reading of 54, up from 53.8 in March. A reading

above 50 signals growth and below 50 points to contraction.

The figure put the UK ahead of the US and the eurozone. In Germany and France, the private sector is experiencing little or no growth.

UK economist at Capital Economics, Ashley Webb, said the report suggests "the economic recovery is well under way." It came as separate figures from lender Nationwide showed households were starting to splash out more on gardening, eating out and holidays as cost-of-living pressures ease.

And in the financial district of London (known as the 'City') the FTSE 100 provided further cheer as it hit a new record high.

Officials from the IMF have been in Britain this month compiling their latest regular health check of the economy and have presented their findings.

The IMF's latest forecast last month suggested that UK gross domestic product (GDP) would grow by just 0.5 per cent this year.

Yet the most recent official figures show Britain grew by 0.6 per cent in the first quarter alone — bouncing back after a dismal end to 2023 when it slid into recession.

IMF staff have this month been meeting officials from the Treasury and the Bank of England as well as other experts, including the Institute for Fiscal Studies, a leading think-tank.

Its conclusions being revealed by managing director Kristalina Georgieva at a press conference alongside Chancellor Jeremy Hunt.

The mood between them may have proved frosty after the IMF recently warned that Hunt's cuts to national insurance could push up debt. The IMF has previously

said the Government should be spending more money on the NHS and the transition to net-zero instead.

But an upgrade for the UK is likely to be cheered by the Chancellor as the latest evidence boosted by the steep fall in inflation, which at the start of last year was running in double figures.

Last week's data showed it at 2.3 per cent, plunging close to its two per cent target for the first time in nearly three years.

That should mean interest rate cuts are coming this summer. The Bank of England has said a cut could come as soon as next month, providing relief for borrowers.

The upbeat signs for the economy have already prompted a number of forecasters to bump up their economic outlooks. Deutsche Bank, Pantheon

Macroeconomics and Capital Economics all expect UK GDP to grow by 0.8 per cent this year.

Panmure Gordon's chief economist Simon French, who had an upbeat view on the UK even before the first quarter data, said he feels 'more confident that I am the right side of the argument now'. He expects growth of 1.2 per cent this year.

Sam Miley, managing economist at the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR), said: "We think the IMF's forecast is a pessimistic one."

The CEBR predicts growth of one per cent as consumer spending is buoyed by falling inflation and buoyant wages. Miley added that other challenges facing the economy "are also expected to subside this year" including cuts to interest rates within the next few months.

More than money: Oman's strategy for attracting smart and sustainable FDI



AHMED AL RAIISI

The writer has over 16 years of experience in economics and business strategy. He combines his academic background in economics with practical experience in data analysis, project management, and consulting to create clear and engaging economic articles

Oman's Vision 2040 prioritises foreign direct investment (FDI) as a key driver for economic diversification.

The strategy appears successful, with a current FDI stock of \$49,560 million (as of 2022).

However, concerns linger about its long-term sustainability, particularly with a heavy reliance on the oil & gas sector (FDI inflows of \$3.7 billion in 2022).

Current strengths include relaxed regulations through the Foreign Capital Investment Law (FCIL) and attractive incentives like tax breaks in Special Economic Zones. However, Oman needs to broaden its focus beyond just capital to ensure sustainable FDI growth.

BEYOND TRADITIONAL FDI

Traditionally, FDI is viewed solely in terms of capital inflow. However, foreign investment also brings valuable intangible assets like:

Management techniques: Foreign companies often introduce advanced management practices, improving efficiency, productivity, and overall business processes within Oman. This knowledge transfer is further bolstered by the establishment of the Royal Academy of Management (RAM).

RAM serves as a dedicated platform for equipping Omani professionals with cutting-edge management skills, fostering a knowledge exchange environment, and ultimately accelerating the adoption of best practices across domestic businesses.

This combined approach strengthens Oman's domestic capabilities and creates a more competitive business landscape.

Technology transfer: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) can act as a powerful conduit for advanced technologies, allowing Oman to upgrade its production



Current strengths include relaxed regulations through the Foreign Capital Investment Law (FCIL) and attractive incentives like tax breaks in special economic zones.

capabilities and access new markets.

This technology adoption, however, goes beyond simply acquiring equipment.

Central to Oman's vision for economic growth is its commitment to digital transformation.

By attracting foreign companies with advanced technologies, Oman can leverage this FDI to not only acquire the technology itself, but also gain the knowledge and expertise needed to integrate these technologies effectively.

This fosters a knowledge transfer that fuels Oman's digital transformation journey, ultimately enhancing the nation's long-term economic potential and competitiveness in the global marketplace.

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

While economists might struggle to measure the value of knowledge transfer directly, its impact on an economy's

production possibilities is undeniable. Companies that acquire new management techniques and technologies become more efficient and innovative, leading to the following:

Increased productivity: Improved processes and technology can significantly enhance a company's output, boosting economic growth.

Enhanced product quality: Access to advanced technologies allows Omani companies to produce higher quality goods and services, making them more competitive in the global marketplace.

Diversification and innovation: Foreign knowledge can inspire local innovation and diversification, fostering the development of new industries and products ultimately reducing reliance on a single sector.

OMAN'S STRATEGY AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Oman can actively promote knowledge transfer by:

Joint ventures: Encouraging partnerships between Omani and foreign companies fosters knowledge exchange and technology adoption within the domestic market.

Technology parks: Establishing dedicated zones with infrastructure tailored for technology-driven industries can attract foreign companies willing to share expertise and collaborate with local partners.

Knowledge worker incentives: Offering competitive packages and streamlining the attraction process of skilled foreign workers who bring valuable expertise and best practices.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AS A CATALYST

Digital transformation plays a crucial role in facilitating knowledge transfer by:

Online collaboration tools: Platforms enabling seamless communication and

collaboration between Omani and foreign companies can accelerate the knowledge exchange process.

Data sharing: Secure data sharing protocols can facilitate the transfer of technical information and best practices, fostering innovation within Oman.

By implementing a multi-pronged approach that combines relaxed regulations, targeted incentives, workforce development, a commitment to digital transformation, and an emphasis on knowledge transfer, Oman can create a future-proof environment that attracts long-term, sustainable FDI partnerships beyond just capital inflow.

This focus on attracting investment that aligns with Oman's long-term goals, such as environmental responsibility and social development, will foster a more diversified, innovative, and resilient economy built for the future.

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INDIAN female, completed Masters in Computer Application (MCA), having experience in teaching profession and looking for a prospective job. Also having knowledge in Programming languages. Currently available in Muscat. Email: induchandran01@gmail.com. GSM: 94117967 / 79090343.

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

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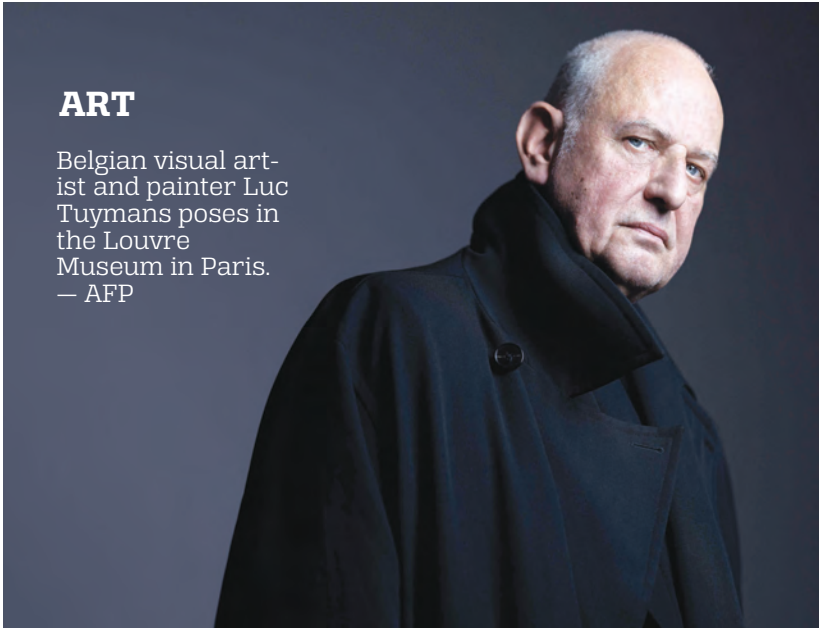
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LITERATURE

The BNU (Bibliothèque National et Universitaire) curator Aude Therstappen removes a book coloured in green with the toxic heavy metal arsenic from the library reserves, in Strasbourg, eastern France. — AFP



ART

Belgian visual artist and painter Luc Tuymans poses in the Louvre Museum in Paris. — AFP



FILM

Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi attends a press conference for the film "She's Got No Name" during the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



CONSERVATION

Parque Metropolitano de Santiago's scientists prepare an Andean flamingo to outfit with a GPS device of their High Andean Flamingo Conservation Programme, part to the SAFE (Save Animals From Extinction) Programme. — Reuters



CULTURE

A bronze statue of the Kleinreus (C), also known as "Little Giant", the symbol of Orania, is seen with several bronze busts of past Afrikaner leaders including Apartheid leaders in Orania. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | MAY 29, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 21, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

WHY IS THERE A RISE IN ADVOCATES PUSHING FOR GLUTEN-FREE LIVING?

Haya al Doseri and Samya al Shukaili advocate for gluten-free diets, highlighting the health issues caused by genetically modified wheat. Their efforts aim to improve health outcomes, particularly for those with celiac disease and gluten intolerance... P20



MOVIES

'Garfield' and 'Furiosa' battle in weak N America box office

"THE GARFIELD MOVIE" and "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" battled for the top spot in North American theatres over the long US holiday weekend, but it was still a rough Memorial Day at the box office, industry esti-

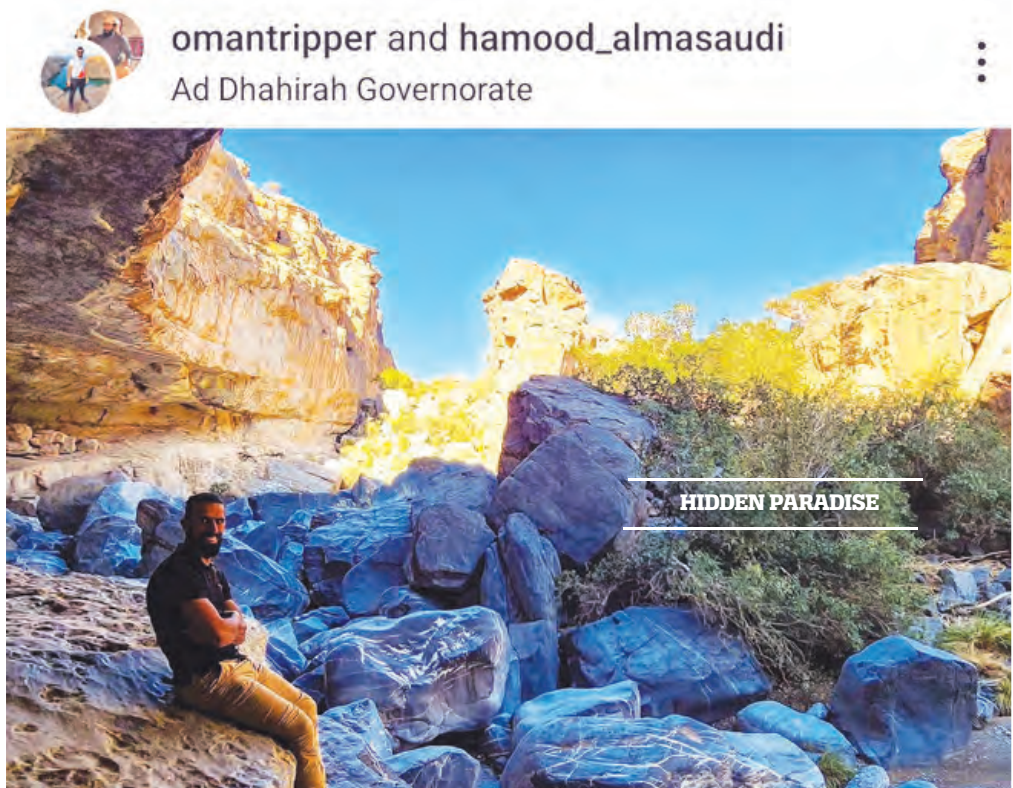
mates showed on Sunday. "The Garfield Movie," Sony's animated reboot about the lazy cat who loves lasagna, starring Chris Pratt ("Guardians of the Galaxy") as the orange feline, was expected to take \$31.9 million from Friday to Monday, Exhibitor Relations said. "Furiosa" — the fifth instalment in Australian director George Miller's "Mad Max" post-apocalyptic action series, starring Anya Taylor-Joy in the role first played in Charlize Theron — was right behind at \$31.5 million over the four-day weekend. "Furiosa," from Warner Bros, was ahead in the estimated Friday-Sunday totals, Exhibitor said, but the four-day figure is the key metric. Final figures are due out on Tuesday. "Garfield" is not among the animation elites, but it's reasonably budgeted," said industry analyst David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "It's doing what it's supposed to do." As for "Furiosa," Gross called it "a weak opening for Mad Max's 5th epi-



sode," adding that though it was well received by critics and audiences, the prequel paled at the box office in comparison to "Mad Max: Fury Road," which starred Theron. Memorial Day is the traditional kickoff to summer in the United States, and also usually a big week-

end for new movies — meaning studios are sure to be disappointed with the overall box office total. Both Variety and The Hollywood Reporter said whichever film triumphs, it will be the worst Memorial Day opening in nearly three decades. In third place at \$21 million was Paramount's animated feature "If," which stars Cailey Fleming as a young girl who, along with neighbour Ryan Reynolds, embarks on an adventure to reconnect forgotten made-up playmates with their children. Fourth place went to 20th Century action sci-fi "Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes," at \$17.1 million, and in fifth was Universal's action-comedy "The Fall Guy," starring Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt, with \$7.8 million. ROUNDING OUT THE TOP 10 WERE: "The Strangers: Chapter 1" (\$7 million) "Sight" (\$3.5 million) "Challengers" (\$1.7 million) "Back to Black" (\$1.3 million) "Tarot" (\$935,000) — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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27 years later...
RELIVING THE THRILL
OF CONQUERING
KHARDUNGLA PASS

BY ISHWAR DESHMUKH

It's been 27 years, but May 24, 1997, felt like it was just yesterday. Every traveller needs inspiration. No matter who you are or how much you've travelled, there will always be moments on the journey headed and why you chose to go there. The memories made on this particular day were the best times of mine.

As a physical education teacher at Bishop Cotton School Sadar, Nagpur, I was enjoying my summer vacation of 1997. I thought of spending scorching heat of Nagpur in a slightly different mode of transport to a crowded, famous hill station. It is said that if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together.

I thought of riding on a bike towards the northern part of India with my friends, with a zeal and motive to have pleasure, adventure, and fun. I coordinated with my friends to ride to the world's highest motorable road — The Khardungla Pass (18,380 feet above sea level) in Leh (Jammu and Kashmir). I have always believed that the thumb rule of the expedition is that everyone should stick together. This bike expedition was a chance to experience the charm of the region. The excursion was around two weeks, so we had ample time to explore the vast, cold desert at a slow and relaxing pace.

The team members were: Sunil Wahale, one of the fastest basketball players in Vidarbha and a representative of the Indian Korfball team at the world championships in Holland and Belgium in 1984 and 1990; Mickey, the owner of Mickey Motors in Shankar Nagar, Nagpur; and the youngest member, Asif Ali, one of my favourite students, who had just taken his SSC Board Examination. All were from Nagpur.

With careful planning and partial sponsorship for the expedition, we finally departed Orange City ATMs were not accessible everywhere, we carried hard cash and planned to ride until sunset each day. For accommodations, we chose to stay in Gurdwaras and Dharamshalas, known for being some of the safest places in the country, especially for travellers. Staying in various religious places across different states and enjoying the langar in the gurdwaras was a wonderful experience.

Our original plan was to reach Khardungla from Himachal Pradesh via Keylong and return to Srinagar via Kargil. However, upon reaching Madhi near Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, we learned that a landslide had closed the road for a week. This forced us to change our route. We rode to Srinagar via Jammu and decided to reach Khardungla via Dras and Kargil, the only options left. In total, we covered a distance of 5,448 kilometres on our journey.

On May 24 at 11:45 AM, we found ourselves on the World's Highest Motorable Road — Khardungla Pass, standing 18,380 feet above sea level. Feeling on top of the world, my friends and I shared an extraordinary sense of accomplishment and con-

quest. Achieving this required us to toil and step out of our comfort zones; true change begins at the end of one's comfort zone. The rare feeling of achievement and excitement was evident on the exhausted faces of my comrades. It is difficult to fully describe in words. Our journey tested our patience and endurance, but we ultimately hit the bull's eye.

We had several unforgettable experiences during this expedition:

1. Late one evening, we stayed at the Gurdwara in Awantipora, just before reaching Srinagar. On the way, we stopped to ask a local how far the nearest Gurdwara was. Within seconds, a group approached us with smiles, urging us to stay with them and explaining that it was unsafe to proceed further due to security reasons. As we were about to follow them, a J&K Police patrol jeep appeared, and the locals quickly disappeared. The inspector advised us not to stop on the road, to avoid interacting with locals, and to refrain from riding after sunset. We thanked the Almighty for the timely arrival of the police; had they been a few minutes later, who knows what might have happened.

2. Near Sonamarg, Capt. Ashok Kumar of the 5131 ASC Battalion (MT) of the Indian Army and his men helped us when we were caught in heavy snowfall on our way back to Srinagar.

3. The most terrifying moment occurred on the outskirts of the Dras region. We had stopped to take a few pictures when two Indian Army soldiers ordered us at gunpoint to raise our arms. They explained that the area was highly sensitive, and they had to follow strict security protocols. Despite this scare, we safely returned to our hometown on May 31, carrying both the sweet and not-so-sweet memories.

More than two decades later, I still frequently recall moments from this memorable trip. The lasting intimacy with the terrain, the unexpected changes in weather, and the stunning landscape—all experienced under our power—left a deep impression. The road surface, the contours of the landscape, and the curves of the road were not just seen but felt deeply.

Presently, the members of the expedition have continued their journeys in life. Sunil Wahale is now a freelancer; Mickey owns an automobile garage in Nagpur; Asif Ali works as a sales manager at Zesco General Trading in Dubai, UAE, and I am employed at an Indian school in Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.

Leading this expedition was a valuable learning experience that helped me develop strong leadership qualities. These memories are alive in my heart and continually draw me back to my bike in search of new adventures. Great rides stay with us long after our muscles have recovered. Life is meant to be filled with memories. Moments indeed last for seconds, but memories last forever.

The writer, currently employed at Indian School Salalah in the Sultanate of Oman, has served as Head of the Physical Education Department at many reputable schools in India and the Gulf countries.

LIFESTYLE

Climate change spurs early blooms in Bulgaria's historic rose industry



country in the southeastern Balkans, is one of the top global producers of fragrant rose oil that is also used in the cosmetics industry.

The best rose oil is produced in its central Rose Valley where, historians say, the flowers have been cultivated as crops since the ancient kingdom of Thrace in the 5th-3rd centuries BC.

The first oil factory was opened in 1820 in the nearby town of Kazanlak.

The process of making the 2 to 3.5



tonnes of rose oil produced in Bulgaria annually is not easy. For one gram of rose oil, more than 1,000 rose petals must be plucked by hand in the early morning as essential oil content is highest around 7 am. "Condensation forms each evening and clings to the rose, allowing the oil in the

blossom to be at its best," said Miroslav Terziev, a rose farmer in the village of Cherganovo.

Petals are also used for products including rose water, rose jam, rose tea and even rose brandy.

The quality of the petals and oil is heav-

ily dependent on weather conditions, with a combination of heat and humidity crucial, said Todor Nikolaev, chief technologist at the Terra Roza distillery.

He noted that with the recent mild winter and a very warm March, the roses began to bloom earlier this year and the picking season started about three weeks ahead of normal.

"The month of May is quite rainy, so the flowers do not bloom all at once, which allows for a good picking of the gardens. Low temperatures prevent the evaporation of oil — the season is favourable for everyone in the production system."

Scientists say climate change over recent decades has caused plants to start blooming weeks earlier than previously.

"We checked our archive from 1987 and found that the active, mass onset of flowering of rosebushes was between June 10 and 20. And we have roses today that start blooming a month earlier," said Valentin Kazandjiev, an agro-meteorologist at the National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology in Sofia.

Kazandjiev said farmers facing climate change should focus on technologies that mitigate its impact, while scientists should recommend different geographical zones for different crops every decade. —Reuters



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WHY IS THERE A RISE IN ADVOCATES PUSHING FOR GLUTEN-FREE LIVING?

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI
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These days, a growing number of individuals opt out of gluten consumption, a protein abundant in wheat and consequently present in all wheat-based products.

The gluten-free diet has gained popularity for several reasons but the top is that there's a growing awareness of gluten intolerance and Celiac disease, both of which require strict avoidance of gluten-containing foods for health reasons.

Many people believe that cutting out gluten can lead to weight loss and improved digestion.

Haya al Doseri, an environmental consultant and plant-based coach, attributes the genesis of the gluten conversation to the modification of modern wheat in soil, wherein its gluten content has been genetically enhanced to yield softer bread and foster consumer addiction. The outcome? Bread that is irresistibly soft and perpetually enticing, keeping us ensnared in the cycle of bakery indulgence.

She further explained that this genetic alteration triggers significant inflammation in our bodies, particularly in the stomach, where it weakens the intestinal lining and allows undigested food to leak into the bloodstream. This condition, known as "leaky gut," carries various health implications because the body perceives undigested food in the bloodstream as a threat or invading pathogen. Consequently, the immune system begins to assail and harm our bodies from within, leading to the development of numerous autoimmune conditions such as acne, eczema, brain fog, psoriasis, and even rheumatoid arthritis.

You could have grown up eating bread with no problems at all and not suddenly start getting all kinds of reactions when you eat a little pastry as an adult.

"The truth is, our bodies didn't change. Rather, wheat has been altered to become an unhealthy food due to modern agricultural methods like genetic modification, spraying pesticides and herbicides, and using chemical fertilisers. This is why when people omit gluten or mainly wheat from their diets, they feel better than ever," she pointed out.

Haya mentioned that she has been on a whole food, gluten-free diet for the last eight years and she enjoys the health benefits like having clear skin, no bloating, better focus, easier digestion and

faster weight loss.

"I consume naturally gluten-free starches like potatoes, brown rice, corn, sweet potatoes. I am also making gluten-free bread at home using easy recipes. I was confused at first but slowly learned my way around this diet," she noted.

Now assisting her clients in transitioning to nourishing whole food, gluten-free diet for weight loss and improved health, Haya observed, "I've witnessed remarkable transformations in numerous individuals, particularly children, including the healing of severe eczema, reduced menstrual discomfort, clearer skin and easier weight loss."

YouTube offers numerous simple recipes for gluten-free bread. "My personal favourite is gluten-free oat bread, which I relish with cashew cheese and lettuce or crunchy tofu and sriracha. This bread makes an excellent addition to your kids' lunchboxes, paired with hummus and cucumbers," she recommended.

Despite the prevalence of wheat-based products in most cafes and restaurants, gluten-free alternatives have begun to emerge in response to the increasing demand. Samya al Shukaili, an Omani woman who suffers from Celiac disease (gluten sensitivity), was compelled to master the art of crafting gluten-free products. She generously shares her knowledge and recipes with her followers on Instagram (@samya_glutenfree).

Explaining the nature of gluten, she noted, "Gluten, a protein naturally found in wheat and barley, is prevalent in various foods such as bread, pasta, and pastries, posing harm to the small intestine lining of Celiac patients. Additionally, gluten lurks in numerous everyday products like packaged foods, lip balms, lipsticks, toothpaste, vitamins, and nutritional supplements, and is occasionally present in medications."

For individuals with Celiac disease, even a small bite of wheat bread or

inadvertent exposure to gluten during food preparation or baking can trigger health issues.

"Symptoms vary among affected individuals, but commonly include diarrhoea, severe abdominal pain, and deficiencies in iron and essential nutrients, leading to weakness, fatigue and lethargy," she explained.

Samya is hopeful that the Ministry of Health will take proactive steps to support Celiac patients by offering financial assistance or providing them with suitable food options instead of relying solely on medication.

"Unfortunately, there is no cure for this condition, but adhering to a gluten-free diet can effectively manage symptoms and prevent long-term complications," she emphasised.

However, not all individuals with Celiac disease can afford the expenses associated with this diet due to its high costs and limited availability. For instance, the price of 1 kg of gluten-free flour can reach approximately RO 5, and it may not always be readily accessible in the market.

Samya intends to share her expertise in this area through upcoming training courses, which she will announce on her Instagram account. "I've learned to create proper bread using various types of flour and more affordable ingredients than those found in large stores. These courses will enable others to do the same. Additionally, I've developed recipes for many dishes using diet-compatible ingredients, including the popular local meal Harees, which maintains its traditional flavour," she revealed.

Recently, numerous local initiatives have surfaced, utilising natural yeast in the production of bread made from regular wheat, commonly known as sourdough bread. "Through natural fermentation, gluten in the bread is broken down, resulting in a lighter and more easily digestible product," she explained.

"This bread possesses several properties beneficial for individuals with digestive disorders and various other ailments, aiding in the body's recovery.

However, it remains unsuitable for individuals with Celiac disease unless gluten-free flour is employed."