

HM to pay state visit to UAE tomorrow

HIS MAJESTY TO MEET SHAIKH MOHAMMED, PRESIDENT OF THE UAE

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state-visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Monday, during which he will meet with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

A statement was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect. It reads as follows:

“In affirmation of the deep-rooted and historical relations bidding the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state-visit to the UAE with effect from Monday, April 22, 2024, during which he will meet with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

The visit stems from the fraternal bonds and good neighbourliness between Oman and the UAE. It also reflects the keenness of the two countries’ leaderships to enhance joint ties and push them towards wider horizons.

The visit will explore areas of the existing cooperation between the two countries in various spheres and means

of promoting them to serve interests of the Omani and Emirati peoples and meet their current and future aspirations for further progress and prosperity.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority; and Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a source of pride for his nation!” — ONA

ABBAS: PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY WILL ‘RECONSIDER’ TIES WITH US

A Palestinian woman and children check the rubble of a building hit by overnight Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority will “reconsider” its relationship with the United States after Washington vetoed a Palestinian bid for full UN membership earlier this week, President Mahmud Abbas said on Saturday.

“The Palestinian leadership will reconsider bilateral relations with the United States to ensure the protection of our people’s interests, our cause, and our rights,” Abbas told the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Wafa said his remarks came “on the heels of the United States’ use of veto power” at the UN Security Council.

Thursday’s vote saw 12 countries on the Council back a resolution recommending full Palestinian membership and two — Britain and Switzerland — abstain.

Only the United States, Israel’s staunchest ally, voted against, using its veto to block the resolution.

Abbas said the Palestinian leadership will “develop a new strategy to protect Palestinian national decisions independently and follow a Palestinian agenda rather than an American vision or regional agendas”.

He said Palestinians would “not remain hostage to policies that have proven their failure and have been exposed to the entire world”.

And he said the stance of the US government had “generated unprecedented anger among the Palestinian people and the region’s populations, potentially pushing the region towards further instability, chaos and terrorism”.

Meanwhile, Iran has dismissed as akin to child’s play Israel’s reported retaliation for an unprecedented Iranian strike, as both sides on Saturday appeared to step back from wider conflict stemming from the war in Gaza.

However, a deadly blast at an Iraqi military base emphasised the high tensions which persist in the region, as did more deadly Israeli strikes in Gaza and intensifying clashes in the West Bank.

Fears have soared this month that escalating tit-for-tat attacks between Israel and Iran could tip over into a broader war in the Middle East.

Israel had warned it would hit back after Iran launched more than 300 missiles and drones a week ago in its first-ever direct attack on its arch enemy’s territory. **SEE ALSO P6**

People join hands with authorities for clean up

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

People joined hands with the Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority (CDAA), the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and Muscat municipality in removing the debris and cleaning the premises that were devastated by the recent rains in wilayats such as Suhar, Shinas, Saham and Liwa.

In Suhar, the Takaful Charitable Team, in cooperation with ROP and the Engineering Services of the Royal Army of Oman, and a large number of volunteers removed mud and debris in several areas of the Wilayat. The campaign which began on Thursday continued till Saturday.

They came together over the weekend taking shovels, pumps, mops and other tools to make the houses inhabitable, farms and roads usable.

The Municipality Department in Saham



along with volunteers removed mud, sand and rocks to facilitate traffic as well as cleaned homes, mosques and cemeteries. They used lorries, shovels and dredging machines to clear the debris from the public areas and houses in the villages during the campaign. They also supplied food, mattresses and blankets to the people affected.

Speaking to the observer, Mazin Abu al Hawari, a social media influencer who took

part in the campaign, said that volunteers in large numbers came together with the mission of cleaning their villages, schools, mosques and other places.

“Several youngsters as well as elders took part in a national campaign in cooperation with the ROP and the Royal Army of Oman and other agencies and we are able to bring these villages back to normalcy,” he said.

“There are many situations in which the Omani youth have proven that they are the arms of the nation, and they are the ones who stood by whenever there is a natural emergency and we are confident that our youth is fully dedicated to the nation building process,” a senior citizen said.

University students from many wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman participated in the campaign and they volunteered to repair the damages inside the homes of the affected.

PHOTO BY MAZIN ABU AL HAWARI

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RAPID STRIDES IN RIGHTS

OMANI WOMEN WORKERS 3.1% IN 2023

208,796
70,252
14,194
86,989

55,632
136,036

41%
59%

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S P O T L I G H T



BONDED BY FRIENDSHIP AND ECONOMIC TIES



His Majesty the Sultan with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates in Muscat in September 2022.
– File photo

The Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are bound by fraternal bonds and strategic partnership. These bilateral relations are witnessing a remarkable progress, thanks to the support and attention accorded by the wise leaderships of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The two leaders are keen to elevate the relations towards wider horizons in a manner that serves interest of the two countries' peoples and maintains security and stability in the region and the world at large.

The distinguished relations between the two sides are based on economic and trade partnership.

These relations were unique since the first meeting between the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said and Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan. The two countries shared the same vision towards issues of mutual concern to the two countries' peoples. Their relations represented the real meaning of fraternity and harmony over the past five decades.

The state-visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the UAE on Monday and his meeting with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan assumes a great importance. The visit aims at promoting the bilateral relations and pushing them forward towards wider horizons. During their meeting, the two leaders will exchange views on the regional and international developments.

Oman and the UAE strive to boost the effective cooperation between them on the principle of

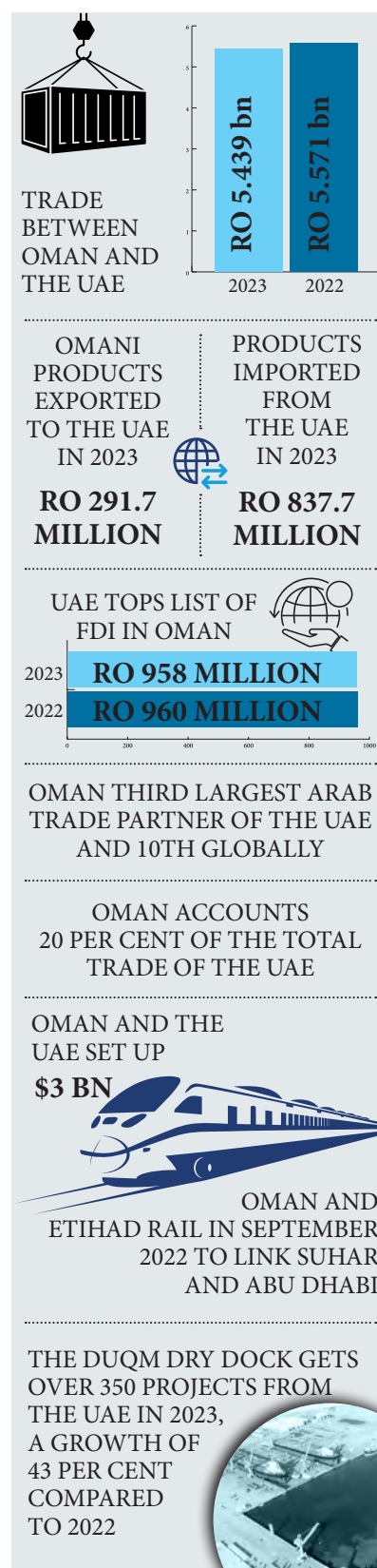
mutual interest in various fields.

The joint supreme committee between the two countries, which was established in 1991, seeks to enhance ways of cooperation and coordination between the two countries in diverse economic, commercial, cultural and educational fields. It also works to link electricity and communications networks, coordinate land transport and transportation procedures between the two countries through various border crossings, in addition to promoting opportunities and areas of joint investment, for the present and future benefits of Omanis and Emiratis.

Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to the UAE, said that His Majesty's upcoming visit to the UAE will contribute to accelerating and developing the path of cooperation, integration and partnership between the two countries. He pointed out that the mutual visits of the leadership of the two countries culminated during the last period through the signing of 16 agreements and memorandums of understanding in various fields.

He said there is a remarkable leap in the economic relations between Oman and the UAE, thanks to the attention accorded by the leaderships of the two countries. The ambassador expected that the upcoming period will witness more joint investment cooperation that would contribute to consolidating and developing the existing economic partnership between the two countries.

He explained that the key Omani investments in the United Arab Emirates include finance, insurance, manufacturing, real



estate, professional and technical activities, wholesale and retail trade, information and communications. Meanwhile, the list of the most important Emirati investments in Oman include the industrial, financial, banking, tourism, power generation and real estate activities, retail trade and construction, he noted.

Sayyid Dr Ahmed said that the UAE is one of the most important trading partners of the Sultanate of Oman. He pointed out that the indicators of continuous growth in the volume of trade and investment exchange between the two countries over the past years reflect the advanced economic partnership between them and its lucrative prospects. He noted that Omani exports to the UAE during 2023 exceeded RO 1 billion, marking an increase of 20.4 per cent compared to 2022.

The Embassy of Oman in the UAE strives to boost the economic and investment cooperation between the two countries through continuous communication with the relevant government agencies, chambers of commerce and industry, and investors in the UAE, said Sayyid Dr Ahmed.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that the volume of trade between Oman and the UAE by the end of 2023 amounted to about RO 5.439 billion, compared to RO 5.571 billion by the end of 2022.

The statistics also showed that the value of Omani products exported to the UAE by the end of last year amounted to more than RO 291.7 million, represented by metal products, chemical industry

products, related industries, and other products and commodities. Meanwhile, the value of products imported from the UAE amounted to more than RO 837.7 million. They included machinery, appliances, electrical equipment and other products.

The figures showed that the UAE topped the countries attracting direct Omani investments abroad, amounting to RO 960 million until the end of 2022, while the total direct Emirati investments in Oman until the end of last year amounted to about RO 958 million.

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the most important markets for Emirati trade. It is ranked third in the Arab world and 10th globally in the list of trade partners of the UAE and accounts for 20 per cent of the total trade of the Emirates, due to the ease of transporting goods and the smooth and free movement of national products between the two countries through land ports.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the fraternal bonds between Oman and the UAE represent a solid ground for integrated partnership in the economic and trade sectors.

He said the UAE is one of the most important trading partners of Oman through direct investment in a number of sectors, including manufacturing industries, real estate and rental activities, commercial project activities, construction, financial intermediation, transportation and storage, hotels, and others. He pointed out that the UAE comes in first place as a destination for the direct Omani investments abroad.

— ONA



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OMANIS BAG INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION AWARDS IN GENEVA

GENEVA: Omani innovator Sumaya bint Said al Siyabiyah won the grand prize at the International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva while Razan bint Hamad al Kalbaniyah won the silver award. The exhibition saw fierce contention from more than 1,000 innovations representing 40 countries.

Sumaya al Siyabi said that her participation in the was aimed to showcase her scientific innovation in bioanalysis of microplastics that combines biology and nanotechnology.

Al Siyabi pointed out that her project offers a promising solution to eliminate and dispose of microplastics in a safe and



environmentally friendly manner using microbial confinement and catalytic agent (nano zinc oxide).

Razan al Kalbani said: "I have invented a paint that absorbs X-ray from a natural component, (lycopene), the red pigment found in tomatoes, watermelon, and red fruits and vegetables in general.

She added that her project is the first of its kind in the world for using a natural compound to shield the x-ray room, as the coating can absorb radiation by 97 per cent.

Razan al Kalbani and Sumaya al Siyabi expressed their happiness with this achievement and for representing the Sultanate of Oman in this global forum, highlighting the interest they receive and the ability of Omani youth to innovate and compete globally.

The International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva is the largest global event for inventions, and is held annually in coordination with the World Intellectual Property Organization.

— ONA

RAM launches training for middle managers today

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) announced the launch of Etimad, the national leadership development programme for the Omani middle managers in the private sector.

Dr Fathiya al Rashdi, Vice-President of the Royal Academy of Management for Programme Affairs, stated that the programme targets middle-level leadership in the private sector. The previous

two editions have successfully trained around 400 leaders working in private sector institutions. The new edition aims to qualify 200 participants with the required skills for senior leadership positions, enhance their knowledge to achieve excellence in performance, efficiently accomplish institutional goals, and develop their leadership and supervisory skills to increase

productivity in the private sector. These efforts will have a positive impact on the Omani economy.

The programme takes participants on a learning journey lasting seven months, consisting of four educational units built on guided specialised training, simulation workshops, remote learning, leadership sessions, group learning projects and virtual learning.

— ONA

MoD conducts clean up

MUSCAT: Units of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) ratcheted up efforts to restore semblance of normality and by removing debris, opening roads and restoring public services following the recent heavy rains and flash floods.

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO), represented by the Sultan's Armed Forces Engineering Unit, Sultan's Armed Forces Transport, and the Second Battalion of the Border Guard Brigade, have completed road pavement works reopened the Mahdha-Al Buraimi road to traffic in the Al Buraimi Governorate.

It also provided requisite support and heavy equipment to rehabilitate and reopen Al Fai Road in the Wilayat of Mahdha in Al Buraimi Governorate.

In the Al Batinah North Governorate, the Ministry of



Defence's engineering services alongside the other government establishments continued cleansing roads and public places. Suction pumps and water tanks were given in Wadi Bani Omar and Makhilief in the Wilayat of Saham and Wadi Haibi in the Wilayat of Suhar.

In the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, the coast security battalion of RAO, provided the

necessary support to reopen the roads in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi.

The RAO's desert Battalion in the Niyabat of Samad Al Shaan in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, carried out support operations with heavy equipment and to complete road maintenance and road rehabilitation work.

— ONA



JOB VACANCY

Oman Electricity Transmission Company SAOG (OETC) has a vital role in the Oman Electricity Sector, as it owns and operates the main transmission network as well as transmission network in Dhofar through which electricity is transmitted from the generating stations to the distribution load centers in all governorates of the Sultanate. The main electricity transmission network operates at high voltage of 132kV and above. Also, OETC has the responsibility of balancing generation and demand at all times of the day as part of its responsibilities for the economic dispatch of power in the Sultanate, and are currently looking for motivated Omani candidates for the following positions:

Job Title	Job Code
Information and Communication Technology General Manager	IRC18769
Business Planning and Risk Management Manager	IRC18781
General Manager Asset Management	IRC18785
Senior SCADA System Engineer	IRC18768
Senior Settlement Engineer	IRC18767
SCADA Software Engineer	IRC18766
Senior Operation Network Engineer - Musandam	IRC18765
Operation Network Engineer - Musandam	IRC18764
Control Shift Engineer	IRC18743

Interested candidates may apply for this post through www.omangrid.com by not later than 30th April 2024. Please attach the following when applying:

- CV
- University Degree
- Experience Letters

Note: only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.



OETCOMAN



WELCOME



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Philip Bacon
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Leader - Valuations - Horwath HTL



Rajesh Pant
Director HTL,
Crowe Oman



Dr Jeevan Sudhakaran
Owner, Samudra Shipyard



Jitendra Rami
Director at West Coast
Marine Yacht Services



Bose Krishnamachari
Leading Indian Artist
and Art Curator

The Oman Forum on Hotel, Tourism & Leisure
under the Patronage of Ministry of Heritage & Tourism
at Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat, Qurum
on Monday 22nd April 2024 at 8:30am.



Chief Guest
H E Azzan bin Qassim Al Busaidi
Undersecretary of
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

For further details, please contact:
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RAPID STRIDES IN RIGHTS



208,796
IS THE NUMBER OF GIRLS ENROLLED IN SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023

70,252
IS THE TOTAL NUMBER ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

OMAN has made great strides in women's rights. The Sultanate was the first Gulf country to grant women their political rights in 1994 which indicates that the Omani political leadership believes in the important role women play in the development of the country, and in their ability to effectively assume senior positions.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has paid great attention to the women's pivotal role in society as a key partner in sustainable development and entrusted senior positions to Omani women to build the nation's present and future.

The new Oman Labour approved by His Majesty the Sultan granted numerous benefits to working women. These privileges include an allocated hour each day for child care and a 98-day maternity leave provision. Further, it allows them to avail themselves of an unpaid leave period lasting up to a year for child care. The law also obliges employers to provide a dedicated rest place in establishments where the number of female workers exceeds 25.

To celebrate the contributions of Omani women and inspire them, the Sultanate of Oman has designated October 17 as Omani Women's Day. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the Omani women workers (15 years and above) reached 32.1 per cent in 2022, compared to 27.7 per cent of the previous year. There are 95,652 women, or 41 per cent, in the government sector, and 136,930 women, or 59 per cent, in the private and civil society sectors.

The total number of Omani women business owners in 2022 is 14,194 with 46 per cent of those (15 years and above)

concentrated in wholesale and retail trade, and manufacturing.

The number of social security beneficiaries reached 86,989 women.

The total number of girls (from the age of 10 years and above) enrolled in school education for the academic year 2022/2023 reached about 208,796, while the total number enrolled in higher education reached about 70,252. The illiteracy rate of Omani women (10 years and above) came down to 5.8 per cent in 2022 compared to 6.3 per cent in the previous year.

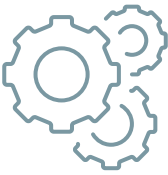
Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, said: "One of the challenges facing women in the Sultanate of Oman is customs and traditions in society that may limit their freedom and ability to make decisions. Raising awareness of women's rights in society has enhanced their presence in decision-making, self-confidence and their ability to advance in society."

Al Faroojiyah said that women entrepreneurs have proved themselves in various sectors and in leadership positions in government and private institutions.

There is no discrimination between women and men in loans and salaries, unlike other countries. They have the right to open companies, obtain credits and open businesses. The Social Protection Law also pays great attention to women by providing them with legal protection. Rights are guaranteed to women by law in order to enhance their role and emphasise the importance of their empowerment in society.

Dr Badria bint Ibrahim al Shehiyah, Deputy Chairperson of the State Council, said: "The greatest challenge for women is themselves. Women are half of society and are the ones who raise children. We do not limit women to education and raising children."

OMANI WOMEN WORKERS 32.1% IN 2022

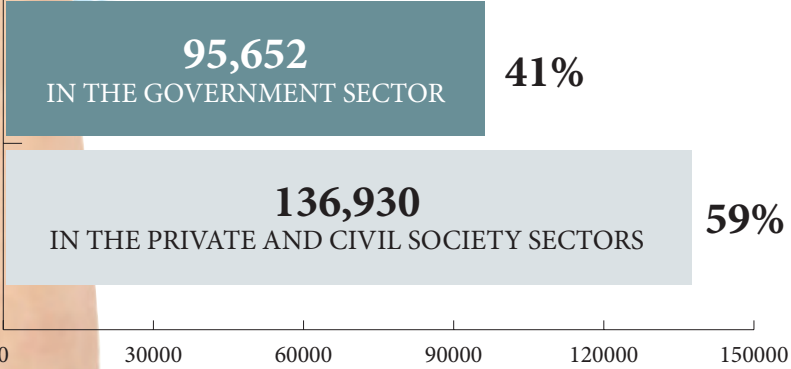


14,194
IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF OMANI WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS IN 2022 CONCENTRATED IN WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE AND MANUFACTURING



86,989
IS THE NUMBER OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFICIARIES

WOMEN AT WORK





SABIS Stars contest features young talent

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The SABIS STARS international competition, which is held every two years and brings together students from SABIS schools from all over the world, started at The Choueifat International School in Muscat on Friday.

The competition lasts for two days, during which students compete in various academic and cultural fields to showcase their talents and creativity.

The event witnessed the wide participation of around 500 students representing 36 schools from various countries, including Brazil, the United States, Germany, Kenya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, China and others, reflecting the cultural and creative diversity of the participants.

The activities in which students compete include several categories, including advertising, where teams are asked to prepare a marketing campaign including the brand name, a short video and a billboard. These are evaluated by the judging committee the following day. There's also a category for poetry recitation where participants are allowed to perform two poems, one in Arabic and the other in English. One contestant per school for each category.

In creative writing competition, students are given a specific topic in the form of a phrase, quote, or image, and they write a creative piece about it within 3 hours. Additionally, there's a debate category where teams compete on a topic in English, with evaluation based on the accuracy of information and persuasive ability within a set time frame. Another category is the science exhibition where teams from each school present educational projects in a chosen speciality, accompanied by a distinctive display board.

In the oratory category, one



The Choueifat International School in Muscat is the venue of the SABIS® STARS international competition



contestant from each school delivers a 3 to 4-minute speech in English without using a microphone. The art category comprises two contestants per school who are given a full day to complete an artistic piece on a predetermined topic set by the organising committee. In photography, each contestant takes a picture on a predetermined topic within a specified time frame to submit their best image for the competition.

The "Our World, Our Concerns" category requires students to plan, execute,

and document an awareness campaign within the school community explaining a problem and offering solutions. Students will take on roles related to future jobs in the age of robots and artificial intelligence, the benefits of renewable energy, carbon dioxide processing in the atmosphere, and the role of youth and education in climate action.

In singing, each contestant performs a song of their choice, with their performance evaluated by the judging committee based on specific criteria.

Students' painting exhibition on Muttrah concludes

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education concluded the exhibition of "Modern Colors in Corridors of Muttrah" by the students of Hail Al Awamer School for Basic Education in Muscat Governorate.

The exhibition lasted for four days and targeted the educational groups in the ministry's general diwan, the supervisory and teaching groups for the subject of plastic arts, and students in the educational governorates, as well as community groups, and visitors. The exhibition took place at the lobby of the Ministry's General Diwan.

The exhibition included 25 paintings about the historical, touristic, cultural and heritage monuments of the Wilayat of Muttrah. The paintings varied between 11 drawings, 6 embroidery pieces, and 5 paintings for artistic works, in



addition to home art pieces, a mosaic table and chair.

The exhibition aimed to introduce the importance of studying the fine arts subject, its positive role in adding aesthetic aspects, and the experiences it provides to students that qualify them for small and medium projects, and to provide care and moral support to educational

governorates and schools to display students' works in the field of fine arts.

It also aimed to enhance the efforts made by the teaching groups for the fine arts subject in implementing the curriculum and nurturing student talents, and to contribute to spreading the culture of fine art among the elements of the educational process and society, by displaying students' artistic works, and highlighting the artistic and skills aspects acquired by the students as a result of their study of the fine arts subject.

It is worth noting that the exhibition comes within the initiative of the Fine Arts Supervision Unit at the Individual Skills Supervision Department to support school exhibitions and activities in the field of fine arts.

COUNCIL OF OMAN TAKES PART IN ARAB PARLIAMENT MEET

CAIRO: The Council of Oman took part in the 3rd plenary session of the third session of the fourth legislative term of the Arab Parliament, which was held at the headquarters of the Secretariat- General of the League of Arab States (LAS), in Cairo, on Saturday.

The session discussed the report issued by the third meeting of the Palestine Committee of the Arab Parliament. It also reviewed the draft resolution of the Arab Parliament issued by the third session of the Arab Parliament regarding the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Also discussed was the report of the joint committee on developing joint Arab action and activating its mechanisms as well as the reports of the permanent committees of the Arab Parliament.

The Council of Oman also participated in the 5th meeting of the Arab Parliament's Office, and the meetings of the preparatory committees for the plenary session which discussed developments in the region and the Arab Parliament's visions for resolving current crises as well as the draft laws under preparation by the Arab Parliament.

The Legislative, Legal and Human Rights Affairs Committee, headed by Shaikh Said bin Hamad al Saadi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ashshura, discussed the report on



the human rights situation in the Arab world for 2023.

The committee also discussed the Arab parliamentary vision on addressing the impact of climate change on human rights in the Arab world and the preparation of an Arab guiding law to combat illegal immigration in the Arab world as well as the draft Arab guiding law to combat bullying in the Arab world.

Shaikh Dr Talib bin Hilal al Hosni, member of the State Council, participated in the meeting of the Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs Committee, which discussed political and security developments in the Arab world, the initial draft of the report on the political situation in the Arab world for 2023 and ways to enhance security and stability

in the Arab world. Meanwhile, Sariya bint Khalfan bin Amer al Hadiyah, member of the State Council, participated in the Social, Educational, Cultural, Women and Youth Affairs Committee, which discussed preparations for a symposium on protecting societal values in the Arab world and arrangements for launching the parliamentary document for Arab women. Humaid bin Ali al Nasiri, member of the Majlis Ashshura, participated in the meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee, which discussed the ongoing preparations for the second edition of the Arab Economic Forum on enhancing economic integration between Arab countries and the preparation of the Arab entrepreneurship strategy. — ONA



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
167/2024	Establishing a warehouse in the Department of Social Development at the Wilayat of Bidiya	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting + interior decoration implementation works registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board at the fourth degree	Sunday 12-5-2024 02:00 PM	Sunday 2-6-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) . On **Sunday 21/4/2024**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om



ISRAELI STRIKES KILL 9 OF A RAFAH FAMILY

RAFAH: Gaza’s civil defence agency said on Saturday an overnight Israeli strike killed nine members of a Palestinian family including six children in the southern city Rafah.

Five children aged one to seven and a 16-year-old girl were among the dead, along with two women and a man, according to the city’s Al Najjar hospital.

“Nine martyrs including six children were pulled out from the rubble after Israeli air forces struck a house of the Radwan family in Tal al-Sultan in Rafah,” Gaza Civil Defence agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said in a statement. Outside the hospital a journalist saw people grieving over small body bags. A woman stroked a dead boy’s forehead as planes rumbled overhead.

“People were sleeping peacefully,” said neighbour Abu Mohammed Ziyadah. “As you can see, there were no militants, not even male adults, except for the head of the family. They were all women and children.”

Soon after the war in Gaza began on October 7, Israel told Palestinians living in the north of Gaza to move to “safe zones” in the territory’s south such as Rafah.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has since vowed to invade the city, where around 1.5 million people — more than half the territory’s population — are sheltering.

Israel has for two months threatened to send troops in against Palestinian groups, but even without such an operation Rafah is under regular



Palestinians walk between a cemetery and a building hit by overnight Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

bombardment. Bassal said the Israeli army struck several areas in Rafah overnight, including Salam neighbourhood where one person was killed and several wounded. He said the army hit a house and a nursery school. “It has been a very

hard night on Rafah,” he said.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army said on Saturday that its security forces killed 10 Palestinians in an ongoing raid around Nur Shams, a refugee camp in the north of the occupied West Bank.

The army said eight soldiers and a police officer had been injured in the raid. A journalist in nearby Tulkarem heard gunshots and blasts coming from Nur Shams on Saturday.

Residents said that there was

a power outage and food was running short in the camp, saying nobody was allowed to enter or leave.

The violence has further escalated since the war in Gaza broke out on October 7. Israeli

forces say their frequent raids in the West Bank target Palestinian fighters, but civilians are often among the dead. Around 480 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli troops or settlers in the West Bank.

— AFP

Calls for calm after reported attacks on Iran

TEL AVIV: World leaders appealed for calm after reported Israeli retaliation against Iran added to months of tense spillover from the war in Gaza, with Iranian state media reporting explosions in a central province. Israeli officials made no public comment on the attack and Iranian officials played down its significance.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said Israeli micro-drones used in the operation had caused no deaths or damage, dismissing it as a “desperate attempt to make a victory out of their repeated defeats”.

But the spectre of direct hostilities between the Middle East arch-foes rattled world markets with prices of oil, gold and equities seesawing.

Israel had warned it would hit back after Iran fired hundreds of missiles and drones almost a week ago in retaliation for a deadly April 1 air strike — widely blamed on Israel — that levelled the Iranian consulate in Damascus and killed seven Revolutionary Guards.

A senior US Congressional source said that there had been retaliatory Israeli strikes but declined to provide any details, saying they were classified.

After state television said explosions were heard near the city of Isfahan, Iran activated its air defence systems over several cities, official media reported.

An unidentified Israeli official told *The Washington Post* the “strike” was retaliation for Iran’s drone and missile barrage and was intended to signal that Israel



A Palestinian man mourns relatives killed in Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

was able to hit inside Iran.

Fars news agency reported “three explosions” close to Qahjavarestan, near Isfahan airport and the 8th Shekari army airbase.

Iran’s army commander-in-chief Abdolrahim Mousavi attributed explosions to “the firing of anti-aircraft defence systems on a suspicious object”.

Nuclear facilities in Isfahan were reported to be “completely secure”, Tasnim said, and the UN’s atomic watchdog confirmed “no damage” to Iran’s nuclear sites.

Washington received advance

A senior US Congressional source said that there had been retaliatory Israeli strikes but declined to provide any details, saying they were classified

notice of Israel’s reported strike, but did not endorse it or play any part in its execution, US media

quoted officials as saying.

However, foreign ministers of the G7 group of developed economies, meeting in Italy on Friday, kept up that pressure.

The group said they opposed a “full-scale military operation in Rafah”, where most of Gaza’s population is sheltering, because it would have “catastrophic consequences” for civilians.

UN chief Antonio Guterres has called for an end to “the dangerous cycle of retaliation” in the Middle East, his spokesman said. Analysts said further tit-for-tat violence could be avoided.

— AFP

Türkiye says ending occupation first priority of world powers

ISTANBUL: Tension between Israel and Iran should not distract from the situation in Gaza and the first priority of the international community should be ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said.

Fidan was speaking in Istanbul on Saturday during a visit by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, who urged Iran and Israel to exercise restraint.

Shoukry’s visit to Türkiye comes amid high tensions in the Middle East following the apparent Israeli attack on Iran. Israel has said nothing about the incident.

Speaking at a joint news conference with Fidan, Shoukry said there was concern in the region over the ongoing escalation.

Fidan said the main cause of instability in the Middle East was Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories and Western backing for Israel.

“Any development that could distract us from this fact should be ignored,” he said. “Our first priority should be ending Israel’s occupation in Palestine and a two-state solution.”

He said he and Shoukry

discussed efforts for delivering more humanitarian aid to Gaza. Separately, Shoukry said Egypt would host a Turkish delegation to prepare for a visit by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to Türkiye at a future date.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged Palestinians to unite amid Israel’s war in Gaza, following hours-long talks with Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Istanbul on Saturday, his office said. “It is vital that Palestinians act with unity in this process. The strongest response to Israel and the path to victory lie in unity and integrity,” Erdogan said according to a Turkish presidency statement. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan discussed efforts to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid there with Haniyeh during the meeting, state broadcaster TRT said.

Israel’s military offensive in the Gaza Strip has killed at least 34,049 Palestinians and wounded 76,901 since October 7, the Palestinian enclave’s health ministry said on Saturday.

Thirty-seven Palestinians have been killed and 68 injured in the past 24 hours, the ministry added in a statement.

— Agencies



Palestinians fill canisters with water from a hose in Deir el-Balah. – AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

In brief

■ SEOUL



SOUTH KOREAN DOCTORS REJECT GOVT PROPOSAL TO END STRIKE

South Korea's leading doctors' body on Saturday rejected a revised medical reform plan from the government. The government offered its first concession, allowing 32 universities to admit as few as 1,000 medical students instead of the initially proposed 2,000 -- but the Korean Medical Association (KMA) said the plan must be abandoned entirely. "Since this is not a fundamental solution, the committee of the KMA clearly states that it cannot accept it," Kim Sung-geun said, a KMA spokesperson. "To protect the health of patients currently suffering, we ask the president to discuss this again." — AFP

■ MEXICO CITY



2 MEXICAN MAYORAL CANDIDATES REPORTED KILLED IN SINGLE DAY

Two mayoral candidates were reported killed in Mexico, one in the country's northeast and another in the south, authorities said -- part of a wave of political violence ahead of June elections. In Tamaulipas, a manhunt was launched for the person who stabbed candidate Noe Ramos. Local media reported the centre-right candidate was walking through the streets to meet with residents when he was attacked by a man with a knife. Meanwhile, in the southern state of Oaxaca, another mayoral candidate, Alberto Antonio Garcia, was found killed on Friday after going missing this week, according to the state prosecutor's office. — AFP

■ MADRID



MASS PROTESTS IN CANARY ISLANDS DECRY OVERTOURISM

Tens of thousands of demonstrators hit the streets across Spain's Canary Islands on Saturday to demand changes to the model of mass tourism. Rallying under the slogan "The Canary Islands have a limit", demonstrators began rallying at midday, flag-waving crowds packing the streets of the main towns across all of the archipelago's seven islands. Organisers say mass tourism perpetuates an economic model that harms local residents and are demanding the authorities limit the numbers. Police said 20,000 demonstrators had turned out for the demonstrations. — AFP

Civilians killed as Ukraine, Russia trade strikes

KYIV: Ukraine launched a wave of drones at Russia in the early hours of Saturday, setting a fuel depot ablaze, officials said, as both sides accused each other of deadly attacks on civilians.

The governor of Russia's Belgorod region said cross-border Ukrainian attacks left at least three people dead, while a Russian strike killed two in Ukraine's northeast.

A source in Ukraine's defence sector said that Kyiv targeted eight Russian regions in the "large-scale" drone attack, which was aimed at "energy infrastructure that feeds Russia's military-industrial complex". "At least three electrical substations and a fuel storage base were hit and caught fire," the source said, calling it a "joint operation" of Ukraine's SBU security service, army and military intelligence.

Russia's defence ministry said it had intercepted 50 Ukrainian drones overnight, some of them hundreds of kilometres from the border, including near the capital Moscow.

Video on social media purportedly showed a large blaze burning at a fuel depot in Russia's western Smolensk region, an attack that the governor confirmed was caused by drones.

"Air defence forces shot the aerial vehicles down. However,



A Russian sapper checks a ruined building in Mariupol, in Russian-controlled Ukraine. — AFP

Russia's defence ministry said it had intercepted 50 Ukrainian drones overnight, some of them hundreds of kilometres from the border, including near the capital Moscow

as a result of falling debris, a tank with fuel and lubricants caught fire," governor Vasily Anokhin said.

Kyiv has ramped up strikes on Russian oil and gas facilities in recent months, part of what it calls "fair" retaliation on infrastructure

used to fuel Russia's war.

Ukrainian drones left two people in Russia's Belgorod border region dead, its governor said early on Saturday, while shelling later in the day killed a pregnant woman.

A residential building and a barn in the village of Poroz, less than two kilometres from the frontier, were "completely burned

down", governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Another building was severely damaged.

"As a result of the release of two explosive devices, a private residential building caught fire. Tragically, two civilians died -- a woman who was recovering from a fractured femur, and a man who was caring for her," Gladkov wrote on Telegram. — AFP

Iraq army investigates as base was attacked



Iraqi military personnel receive treatment at a hospital in Hilla in the central province of Babylon. — AFP

BAGHDAD: A huge blast at a military base in Iraq early on Saturday killed a member of an Iraqi security force that includes Iran-backed groups. The force commander said it was an attack while the army said it was investigating and there were no warplanes in the sky at the time.

Two security sources had said earlier that an air strike caused the blast, which killed a member of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and wounded eight others at Kalso military base about 50 km south of Baghdad.

In a statement, the PMF said its chief of staff Abdul Aziz al Mohammedawi had visited the location and reviewed information from investigators.

The Iraqi military said a technical committee was looking into the cause of an explosion and fire at the base, which it said happened at 1 am on Saturday.

"The air defence command report confirmed, through technical efforts and radar

An air strike caused the blast which killed a member of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and wounded eight others at Kalso military base

detection, that there was no drone or fighter jet in the air space of Babil before and during the explosion," the military said in a statement. A video broadcast by Al Ahad TV showed debris and a crater left by the explosion.

The incident in Iraq's Babil province occurred with frictions even higher than usual across the Middle East, following what sources said was an Israeli attack in the Iranian city of Isfahan on Friday. Tehran has played it down and indicated it had no plans for retaliation.

That incident came six days

after Iran fired a barrage of missiles and drones at Israel in response to a presumed Israeli air strike that destroyed part of Iran's embassy in Damascus, killing seven Iranian officers on April 1.

The PMF have attacked US troops in the region and targeted Israel since the eruption of the Gaza war, declaring support for the Palestinians.

Their attacks on US forces in Syria and Iraq stopped in early February after a drone strike killed three US soldiers in Jordan, prompting heavy US air strikes in Iraq and Syria.

The US military's Central Command, in a post on X early on Saturday, denied what it said were reports that the United States had carried out air strikes in Iraq.

The PMF started out as a grouping of armed factions, many close to Iran, that was later recognised as a formal security force by Iraqi authorities.

— Reuters

N KOREA TESTS SUPER-LARGE WARHEAD

SEOUL: North Korea has tested a "super-large warhead" designed for a strategic cruise missile, state media said on Saturday, the most recent test since UN sanctions monitoring against the nuclear-armed nation was upended last month by Russia. The announcement comes after Russia in March used its United Nations Security Council veto to effectively end UN monitoring of violations of the raft of sanctions on Kim Jong Un's government for its nuclear and weapons programme. Analysts have warned that North Korea could be testing cruise missiles ahead of sending them to Russia for use in Ukraine, with Washington and Seoul claiming Kim has shipped weapons to Moscow, despite UN sanctions banning any such moves. "The DPRK Missile Administration has conducted a power test of a super-large warhead designed for 'Hwasal-1 Ra-3' strategic cruise missile," KCNA news agency said on Saturday. North Korea also carried out a test launch of a "Pyoljji-1-2" new-type anti-aircraft missile in the West Sea of Korea", KCNA said, adding that both tests were carried out on Friday afternoon. Seoul's military said on Saturday it detected "several cruise

missiles and surface-to-air missiles" fired towards the same body of water, also known as the Yellow Sea, at around 3:30 pm on Friday. It added that it was "closely watching" the North's military activities, and if Pyongyang "commits a provocation, we will punish it overwhelmingly and resolutely". This year, Pyongyang has declared South Korea its "principal enemy", jettisoned agencies dedicated to reunification and outreach, and threatened war over "even 0.001 mm" of territorial infringement. Unlike their ballistic counterparts, the testing of cruise missiles is not banned under current UN sanctions on North Korea. Cruise missiles tend to be jet-propelled and fly at a lower altitude than more sophisticated ballistic missiles, making them harder to detect and intercept. Ahn Chan-il, a defector-turned-researcher who runs the World Institute for North Korea Studies, said that the test announced on Saturday appears to involve "a new type of solid fuel, and it seems to be part of the production of exports in response to Russian demand". — AFP



A missile is launched, as the state media reports North Korea test-fired a new mid- to long-range solid-fuel hypersonic missile, at an unknown location in North Korea. — Reuters file photo

More people experience mental health problems



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

A few months ago, a report was published showing an increase in the number of visits to mental health clinics in Oman reaching 110,000 in 2022, an increase of 8 per cent compared to 2021.

This might be attributed to an increase in public awareness about mental health but also an actual increase in people experiencing mental illness which is a worldwide phenomenon. There are also reports of what used to be “White man problems” such as eating disorders and gaming addiction increasing in developing countries, including Oman and other GCC countries which can be challenging in terms of detection and providing the appropriate care.

The book “The Anxious Generation” by social psychologist Dr Jonathan Haidt offers a possible explanation for the increase of people experiencing mental health problems based on what he calls “the decline of unsupervised outdoor play-based activities during childhood, which is essential in the development of the human brain during childhood and early

adolescence. This fear and the continual adult supervision deprived children of essential skills on how to overcome the normal fears and anxieties of childhood, the chance to explore nature, share adventures with friends and peers, and learn how to judge risks for themselves.

The second explanation Dr Haidt calls “phone-based childhood” is when play-based activities were replaced by hand-held devices such as smartphones, tablets or video games. The speed of the internet and social media platforms lead to the “Great Rewiring of Childhood”, as Dr. Haidt calls it. Most children and young adults browse the Internet with limited supervision from their parents which eventually leads to problems like gaming, internet addiction and online bullying.

Dr Haidt concludes that “overprotecting children in the real world while under protecting them in the virtual world is the main issue behind the rise of mental health problems among teenagers and younger adults.

While I agree with some of the theories proposed by the author, I think we need to explore other explanations such as financial

IN HIS BOOK ‘THE ANXIOUS GENERATION’, SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST DR JONATHAN HAIDT SUGGESTS THAT THE REDUCTION OF UNSUPERVISED OUTDOOR PLAY IN CHILDHOOD, COUPLED WITH INCREASED TIME SPENT ONLINE, CONTRIBUTES TO THE RISE IN MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG CHILDREN”.

difficulties, limited employment opportunities, and changes in social structure with more people feeling lonely and isolated. I was preparing a presentation about loneliness among the elderly and was expecting them to be the loneliest when it comes to age groups but I came across a 2022 survey conducted in 16 countries showing loneliness to decrease with age.

Nearly 60 per cent of young adults between 18 and 24 years reported negative effects on wellbeing from feelings of loneliness, while around 22 per cent of respondents aged 65 and older reported the same. Loneliness is reported to be a risk factor for several psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression and drug addiction.

Humans are social creatures by nature and that is why we read about individuals in big cities like Tokyo who rent a stranger to be their friend, seek their advice, accompany them to social events, or simply share a cup of coffee with them to escape loneliness, even if it’s only for a day. It will not be surprising to see such phenomena occurring in other cities.

AI’s relentless rise gives journalists tough choices

ANNE PASCALE REBOUL

The rise of artificial intelligence has forced an increasing number of journalists to grapple with the ethical and editorial challenges posed by the rapidly expanding technology.

AI’s role in assisting newsrooms or transforming them completely was among the questions raised at the International Journalism Festival in the Italian city of Perugia that closes on Sunday.

AI tools imitating human intelligence are widely used in newsrooms around the world to transcribe sound files, summarise texts and translate.

In early 2023, Germany’s Axel Springer group announced it was cutting jobs at the Bild and Die Welt newspapers, saying AI could now “replace” some of its journalists.

Generative AI — capable of producing text and images following a simple request in everyday language — has been opening new frontiers as well as raising concerns for a year and a half.

One issue is that voices and faces can now be cloned to produce a podcast or present news on television. Last year, Filipino website Rappler created a brand aimed at young audiences by converting its long articles into comics, graphics and even videos.

Media professionals agree that their trade must now focus on tasks offering the greatest “added value”.

“You’re the one who is doing the real stuff” and “the tools that we produce will be an assistant to you,” Google News general manager Shailesh Prakash told the festival in Perugia.

The costs of generative AI have plummeted since ChatGPT burst onto the scene in late 2022, with the tool designed by US start-up OpenAI now accessible to smaller newsrooms.

Colombian investigative outlet Cuestion Publica has harnessed engineers to develop a tool that can delve into its archives and find relevant background information in the event of breaking news.

But many media organisations are not making their own language models, which are at the core of AI interfaces, said University of Amsterdam professor Natali Helberger. They are needed for “safe and trustworthy technology”, he stressed.

According to one estimate last year by Everypixel Journal, AI has created as many images in one year as photography in 150 years.

That has raised serious questions about how news can be fished out of the tidal wave of content, including deepfakes. — AFP

Perfectionism is a trap. Here’s how to escape.



Christina Caron

Yuxin Sun, a psychologist in Seattle, sees a lot of clients at her group practice who insist they aren’t perfectionists. “Oh, I’m not perfect. I’m far from perfect,” they tell her. But perfectionism isn’t about being the best at any given pursuit, Sun said, “it’s the feeling of never arriving to that place, never feeling good enough, never feeling adequate.” And that can make for a harsh internal voice that belittles and chastises us.

Perfectionism is so pervasive that there’s a test to measure it: the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. When researchers looked at how college students have responded to the scale’s questions over time, they found that rates of perfectionism surged in recent decades, skyrocketing between 2006 and 2022.

Thomas Curran, an associate professor of psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science who led the analysis, said the type of perfectionism with the steepest rise — socially prescribed perfectionism — was rooted in the belief that others expect you to be perfect. Today’s young person is more likely to score much higher on this measure than someone who took the test decades ago. There could be a number of causes for the uptick: increasing parental expectations, school pressures, the ubiquity of social media influencers and advertising.

The feeling of not being good enough or that “my current life circumstances are inadequate or not sufficient” has created an “unrelenting treadmill,” Curran said, where there is “no joy in success and lots of self-criticism.”

Regardless of whether you consider yourself a perfectionist, experts say there are a number of small things you can try to keep your inner critic in check.

Get some distance from your thoughts

Ethan Kross, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and the author of “Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why it Matters and How to Harness It,” said a process called distancing is his “first line of defence” against negative thoughts.

Distancing is a way of zooming out



Perfectionism is so pervasive that there’s a test to measure it: the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. — NYT

on our inner chatter to engage with it differently. If you’re agonising over something in the middle of the night, for example, that’s a cue to “jump into the mental time-travel machine,” he said.

Begin by imagining: “How are you going to feel about this tomorrow morning?” Anxieties often seem less severe in the light of day. The time period could also be further into the future. Will the fact that you stumbled a few times during your big

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A PERFECTIONIST, EXPERTS SAY THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SMALL THINGS YOU CAN TRY TO KEEP YOUR INNER CRITIC IN CHECK.

presentation today truly matter three months from now?

Another way to practice distancing is to avoid first-person language when thinking about something that upsets you.

Instead of saying: “I cannot believe I made that mistake. It was so stupid of me,” someone might gain a new perspective by saying: “Christina, you made a mistake. You’re feeling

bad about it right now. But you aren’t going to feel that way forever. And your mistake is something that has happened to a lot of other people.”

In Kross’ research, he found that when people used the word “you” or their own name instead of saying “I,” and started observing their feelings as though they were an impartial bystander, it “was like flipping a switch.” It resulted in an internal dialogue that was more constructive and positive than that of the people who spoke to themselves in the first-person. A number of studies have reported similar benefits to assuming a more detached point of view.

Accept what’s good enough
Curran, who writes about his own struggles in his book “The Perfection Trap,” explained that he has worked to embrace “good enough” over perfectionism and its accompanying negative thoughts.

With perfectionism it can feel as though nothing is ever “enough.” Accepting what’s “good enough” requires letting go, Curran said. Working nights, weekends and holidays had become part of his identity, but after the birth of his son he scaled back his hours, which became “liberating.”

His past decisions were driven by an anxious need to better himself, he added. Now, when thinking about how to spend his time, he tries to focus on the things that bring him joy, purpose and meaning.

— The New York Times

Maybe we can learn from this...

The tragic loss of 19 souls, including 12 students, during last week's floods across the Sultanate of Oman, but most severely in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, is one that is difficult to reconcile in any way, shape, or form. God bless and keep them all.

However, we can take some minor comfort that two positive factors emerge from the tragedy.

First, when scrutinising the news media, and social media coverage, it is absolutely apparent that the toll could have been much higher, and it is clear that only prompt action by the police and civil defence authorities, and their men and women, prevented a far greater loss of life. It appears these brave companies of heroes are called upon regularly, given the country's flood prone wadis, and the seemingly unregulated distribution and redistribution of gravel and sand by contractors. One thing is certain in regard to geographical features and structures. Whether upstream or downstream, there are always consequences for the removal of soil or metal, or dumping of excess, each having consequences in the alteration of natural courses.

Mother Nature is an affectionate partner, but scorned, is a brutal mistress!

Secondly, a glimmer of hope must surely emerge that greater deference will be attributed to planning and resource matters, maybe even to the extent of a managed retreat, by moving vulnerable families, communities, and schools, from locations under threat from increased rainfalls.

Of course there will be resistance, as tribal and ancestral lands fall into the category of being unsafe, however, even one life is one too many to lose in the name of pride. Again, faith and nature will sustain us all, but we challenge them to our cost!

Ironically, while this traumatic situation was unfolding on your doorsteps, I was taking in the consequences of the devastation wrought by Tropical Storm Gabrielle, in February 2023, when 150kmph winds and torrential rains struck, among others across the Pacific Ocean, Australia and New Zealand, the Hawkes Bay region on the East Coast of the North Island.

Complacency, with no significant



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The writer is a media consultant

storms since 1968, had allowed a culture of “it could never happen here,” to develop, with consequent lack of regional investment in flood banks and flood resources.

Eight people perished in those raging floodwaters, but hundreds were saved, being lifted from their house roofs, with no other possible rescue hope, by police, civil defence, and armed forces helicopter interventions. Power, water, and gas supplies failed almost immediately, road links were cut within minutes, and with the onset of night, more than 8,000 people were forced into temporary community shelters. Initially, almost 1,100 homes were marked for demolition as being unsalvageable. All of this is redolent of the Omani situation.

The aftermath has focused on the apathy that had established itself institutionally, socially, and in local government, with significant deforestation taking place in the region's heights, leading to the rainfall being unhindered in its downhill rush to the sea. Lack of attention to flood-banks on the plains, and over-confidence certainly also contributed to the attitude of the region towards its vulnerability.

In fact, within only days, the government had ordered a review of logging industry ‘slash’ practices, where discarded branches and offcuts exacerbated the damage to property, and the restoration of forested acreage was negligible.

Interestingly too, the concept of a Hawkes Bay ‘managed retreat,’ has become an agenda item for the government's Climate Change Adaptation Bill, and disaster response policies. Across the region a total of 10,000 properties will only be permitted to be repaired and resettled if flood protection groundworks are completed, while 700 have been ‘red-stickered’ as unsafe to rebuild or reoccupy. Again, there are similarities in Oman.

It is clear then, that the issues facing the authorities in Oman are not peculiar to the Sultanate of Oman, but are part of global responses to our treatment of the natural heritage of our planet, our inability to understand the impact of even minor changes in the natural state. We must respond more effectively to the depletion of nature's protection, as its strength is in direct response to our care factor. We must care... more!

IT IS ABSOLUTELY APPARENT THAT THE TOLL COULD HAVE BEEN MUCH HIGHER, AND IT IS CLEAR THAT ONLY PROMPT ACTION BY THE POLICE AND CIVIL DEFENCE AUTHORITIES, AND THEIR MEN AND WOMEN, PREVENTED A FAR GREATER LOSS OF LIFE

FLOWER POWER



A woman walks by floats with flowers during the annual Flower Parade of the Bulb Region in Noordwijk, the Netherlands, on Saturday. – AFP

The ozone layer’s recovery shows how to protect the planet

There was a time, not so long ago, when the depletion of Earth's ozone layer seemed like an insurmountable challenge. Decades of using harmful chemicals, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), had threatened to cause irreparable damage to our planet. Without swift action, we faced the risk of climate destabilisation, ecosystem collapse, and the breakdown of our food system. Consequences that were once almost unthinkable became painfully real.

But then, the most remarkable thing happened: humanity united to protect the ozone layer. Heeding the warnings of Nobel laureate scientists Paul Crutzen, Mario Molina, and Sherwood Rowland, whose research underscored the severity of the threat, we did not ignore or dismiss the scientific evidence, nor did we bury our heads in the sand and claim that the challenge was too daunting. Instead, the global community recognised the urgent need for



Robert Redford
Redford, co-founder of the Redford Center, is an actor, director, and producer



Xiye Bastida
Bastida is a climate-justice activist from the Otomi-Toltec indigenous community in Central Mexico

collective action.

By harnessing scientific knowledge, entire industries have been transformed, and equitable policies have been put in place to shield countries that did not contribute to the problem. Thanks to the Montreal Protocol, ratified by 197 countries, nearly 99 per cent of ozone-depleting substances have been phased out. This includes the reduction and replacement of CFCs, which has slowed climate change by at least a decade.

The successful global effort to protect the ozone layer should serve as a beacon of hope for all of us. It is one of humanity's greatest environmental achievements, showing what we can achieve when we act together with commitment, respect, and determination.

But it can also serve as a warning. A 2023 study by Johan Rockström and 28 other leading climate scientists

revealed a startling new reality, underscoring the need to adopt a collaborative approach to protecting the planet before it is too late.

The planetary boundaries model, introduced by Rockström and others in 2009, provides a useful framework for assessing the planet's health. It identifies nine interconnected factors — including climate, freshwater

availability, biodiversity, and land use — that are crucial for the planet's stability and habitability. In their recent study, Rockström and his co-authors found that six of these nine boundaries have already been breached, putting Earth on a dangerous course that undermines the planet's resilience and jeopardises human well-being. Notably, the ozone layer is the only area showing

signs of improvement.

Given that Earth functions as an interconnected system, we cannot solve one problem without addressing the others. Despite being aware of the critical role of planetary boundaries in preserving our Earth's habitability, we have not acted decisively enough to halt our slide towards catastrophe.

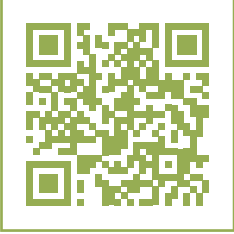
For example, we know that more than a million species are on the brink of extinction, potentially triggering the collapse of entire ecosystems. We also know that nitrogen and phosphorous runoff leads to the proliferation of toxic algae blooms in oceans and freshwater systems, thereby breaching the biogeochemical flow boundary. Similarly, tolerating dangerous levels of chemical pollution and allowing our children to ingest microplastics compromise the life-support systems necessary for humanity's survival.

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STELLAR SHOW BY OMAN ATHLETES, CHESS PLAYERS AT GCC GAMES



WALEED AL JAHWARI
DUBAI, APRIL 20

Oman athletes bagged five medals in the final day of athletic competitions while the chess team snatched three medals on the second day of chess competitions at the GCC Youth Game in the UAE.

On Saturday, Kaltham al Jabri won a silver medal in shot put while Moaayad al Badri snatched bronze in 400m race. Aza al Hinai claimed the bronze medal in the 200m race. In relay, Oman men and women snatched the bronze medal.

At Sharjah Cultural Chess Club, national chess players won three medals. The Oman women won silver and bronze medals while men finished with bronze medal.

The sailing competitions concluded on Saturday



after five days of thrilling competitions in Aptimus, IIKA4 and IIKA6 classes. The sailing games were held at the Abu Dhabi Marine Sports Club.

Omani sailors delivered an outstanding show despite difficult weather and unstable winds. In the IIKA4 competition, Omani sailors finished first in the opening race. In the ILKA competition, Omani sailor Elias took first place in the opening race and the national sailing team won a gold

medal on the first day of the team competitions.

Oman volleyball team suffered a defeat in their opening match against the UAE at Al Nassir Club hall in Dubai. Omani youth tried to balance the match but the UAE team dominated the match. The Kuwaiti volleyball team also lost its first match to the Bahrain team in three sets. Oman's team will take on Kuwait in the following match on Sunday morning while Saudi Arabia will meet UAE.



Kuwait edge Oman to claim second straight win

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

Oman under-17 football team suffered a shock 1-0 loss against Kuwait on Friday at Al Nahyan Stadium in Al Wahda club in Abu Dhabi at the Gulf Youth Games. The national junior players excelled with an outstanding technical performance but Kuwait's Fawaz al Dawood scored the winner in the 65th minute to deliver a crucial three points to his team. Kuwait lead the table by six points from two games after they defeated Bahrain in the opening game. Oman has three points following its triumph against the hosts UAE in the opener by 2-1. UAE thrashed Bahrain in an early match by 6-1. The victory meant the hosts captured their first three points in the event.



Oman team, coached by the national head coach Anwar al Habsi, will eye on three points in the crucial clash against Bahrain on Monday. Oman's chances to claim the gold medal are not guaranteed after the defeat against Kuwait but other matches in the concluding round will help the junior Red Warriors.

Oman's players made remarkable performance during both halves but without reaching to the net of the opponent. They were very organised on the pitch and dominated the game. Ahmed al Omrani missed two scoring attempts in the first half as he sent a strong ball and then continued the ball with a header that touched the bar. Kuwait's presence in the first half was very few as the only actual attempt came by Masfar al Awini. The first

half ended at a goalless draw.

Oman began the second half with more focus to break the deadlock. Ahmed al Omrani worked very hard to ward off Kuwait's defending line and the goalie behind them. He managed to score a goal but it was cancelled due to offside. From a defending mistake by Al Waleed al Buraidi, Kuwait's Fawaz al Dawood managed to open the scoring in the match.

Later on, Oman's players including Ahmed al Omrani and Mohammed al Mushaikhi pressed hard to score but all their attempts did not find the target. Coach Anwar al Habsi made many substitutions to allow new faces but Kuwait's defending line and the goalie's activeness broke all Oman's chances to score the equaliser as the match ended for Kuwait at 1-0.



Frankfurt boost European football hopes after 3-1 win against Augsburg

BERLIN: Eintracht Frankfurt took a big stride towards European football next season as they came from a goal down to secure a 3-1 Bundesliga victory over FC Augsburg on Friday.

The result strengthened Frankfurt's bid to secure a spot in the Europa Conference League qualifiers next season as they are sixth in the standings with 45 points. They are six points ahead seventh-placed Augsburg.

Ruben Vargas opened the scoring for Augsburg in the 13th minute as he latched on to a pass inside the box and slotted it into the net from an acute angle.

The hosts completed the turnaround after 61 minutes when Hugo Ekitike, on loan from Paris St Germain, unleashed a low shot into the net from the edge of the box

Hugo Ekitike, on loan from Paris St Germain, unleashed a low shot into the net from the edge of the box.

As Augsburg sent every player up front for a last-ditch attempt at finding an equaliser late into stoppage time, Frankfurt managed to get the ball to Omar Marmoush and the Egyptian striker fired into an open net to complete the 3-1 win.

— Reuters

Own goal helps Juventus come from two goals down to draw at lowly Cagliari



Juventus' Dusan Vlahovic attempts to shoot at goal. — Reuters

CAGLIARI: A late own goal by defender Alberto Dossena salvaged a 2-2 draw for Juventus at lowly Cagliari in Serie A on Friday after the hosts went two goals up in the first half thanks to penalties.

Juventus, who have yet to seal their return to the Champions League after missing out on the European competitions this season, are third on 64 points after 33 games.

They have won only one of their last seven Serie A games and are five points ahead of fourth-placed Bologna who visit AS Roma, in fifth, on

Monday.

"We recovered it but today's performance must make us think," coach Massimiliano Allegri told Sky Sport. "You cannot leave a whole first half to the opponent... We missed so many simple things. So many passes.

"After the first half I should have changed them all. Myself included. I saw technical errors that I didn't want to believe. Then we did well to put it back on its feet... I'll take the point and the second half."

It was far from a dream start for Allegri's side when Gianluca Gaetano put Cagliari

in front in the 30th minute, sending Juve keeper Wojciech Szczesny the wrong way after they were awarded a penalty for a Gleison Bremer handball.

The hosts won another penalty when Szczesny attempted to stop the racing forward Zito Luvumbo with a foul, and Yerry Mina converted from the spot again to double their lead six minutes later.

Dusan Vlahovic thought he pulled one back for Juve before the break but his close-range effort was ruled out for offside.

The Serbian striker,

however, made no mistake in the second half when he netted a free kick from just outside the box, which was given to Juve for Nahitan Nandez's foul on Federico Chiesa.

Juventus had 75 per cent possession as the game neared to a close but continued to lack sharpness in attack.

Cagliari, who held title-chasing Inter Milan to a 2-2 draw at the San Siro last weekend, thought they were about to seal the much-needed three points when their defender Dossena levelled for the visitors with an own goal

three minutes from the end.

Juve forward Kenan Yildiz sent a long cross inside the box and an unsuccessful clearance by Dossena sent the ball past their keeper Simone Scuffet.

Juventus are now winless in their last six away league games, their longest streak without a win on the road in a single league campaign since May 2010.

They won 12 of their previous 13 matches against Cagliari in Serie A.

Cagliari are 14th with 32 points, five above the relegation zone. — Reuters

LaLiga title race on the line at Clasico against Real, Xavi says

MADRID: Barcelona boss Xavi Hernandez said winning Sunday's "El Clasico" in the Spanish capital is the only way his side can hold off Real Madrid's run to the LaLiga title - the only remaining major silverware Barca could win this season.

Real, brimming with confidence after their statement Champions League win at Manchester City midweek, sit comfortably on top of LaLiga on 78 points, ahead of Barca on 70 and Girona on 65. A win on Sunday would give Real an 11-point lead with only six games left.

"On Sunday we are playing for the league title. We have to win," Xavi told a press conference on Saturday.

"We have to manage our feelings and move on, let the frustration and impotence of the other day (elimination from the Champions League) which are difficult to digest turn in our favour. We will have a morale-strengthened Real Madrid in front of us.



“
We will face a Real Madrid with euphoria through the roof. We need to overcome the Champions League hangover and have a team with all the enthusiasm in the world to fight for this league

XAVI HERNANDEZ
Spanish professional football manager



Real Madrid players attend a training session in Madrid on April 20, 2024. — AFP

"On Sunday we have the chance to get back into LaLiga title race. It will be the most important game of the season."

The last chance saloon has

opened its doors early for battered Barcelona as they travel to Madrid after another European disappointment suffered midweek at home.

While Barca were knocked out of the Champions League, Real progressed with a shootout win at holders Manchester City on Wednesday.

Xavi praised Real for beating "the best team in the world" in Manchester City and said he will need a near flawless performance by his side to leave the Santiago Bernabeu stadium with a win.

"We will face a Real Madrid with euphoria through the roof. We need to overcome the Champions League hangover and have a team with all the enthusiasm in the world to fight for this league," Xavi said.

Real manager Carlo Ancelotti acknowledged that his side is edging closer to the title but said it all could change if they lose focus and take their old rivals lightly on Sunday.

"We are doing well. The cake is ready and all that remains is the icing on top," Ancelotti told a press conference on Saturday.

"Barca is still alive and will be a very competitive opponent who are doing very well despite the PSG loss. We're convinced that it's going to be a usual Clasico, hard fought. But it's a great opportunity to get closer to the title." — Reuters

DHOFAR AND AL SHABAB PLAY OUT GOALLESS DRAW

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

Dhofar and Al Shabab played out a goalless draw on Friday during the match that took place at Al Rustaq Sports Complex as part of the 17th round of the Oman League. The first half saw the game confined to the midfield by both sides without any real chances for either team. Al Shabab played with a tight and organised zonal defence and relied on quick counter-attacks to create attacking opportunities while Salalah based team tried to play with a build-up from the back style. The home team Al Shabab tried to surprise Dhofar with a few chances, the most notable of which was Mahmoud al Khasibi's shot in the 42nd minute, while Dhofar's players did not record any real chances to remember, as the first half ended in a 0-0 result.

Al Shabab took the initiative to attack from the start of the second half, looking to snatch the lead. Their player Mohammed Faraj shot a powerful ball that went just over the crossbar in the 58th minute. Al Shabab continued their pressure, and Emerson almost scored with a header that went wide of Dhofar's right post in the 66th minute. They also had several other chances that Dhofar's defenders and goalkeeper Mazen al Kasbi managed to block successfully. Al Shabab players demanded a penalty after a foul inside the box, but the referee did not respond to their demands. Dhofar retreated into their half as time went on, relying on counter-attacks. They made a substitution by entering Mohammed Salem to replace Awad Mohammed in the 77th minute. Al Shabab striker Emerson threatened



Dhofar's goal with a powerful shot that went just over the crossbar in the 80th minute. The final minutes of the match saw a flurry of attempts from both teams to break the deadlock but to no avail. The match ended in a goalless draw.

With this result both teams raised their points tally to 20, with Al Shabab holding the edge on goal difference, placing them in eighth while Dhofar sits in ninth. The stalemate failed to shake up the table, as neither team capitalised on Al Rustaq's defeat of Ibri to snatch sixth place.



‘Rahul can play himself into WC spot with IPL heroics’

LUCKNOW: Lucknow Super Giants skipper KL Rahul will be among the front-runners for the wicketkeeper-batsman role in India's Twenty20 World Cup squad if he can maintain his recent Indian Premier League (IPL) form, former batsman Robin Uthappa said.

Rahul followed up scores of 33, 39 and 39 with a blistering 53-ball 82 that included nine fours and three sixes to help his side to an eight-wicket win over defending champions Chennai Super Kings on Friday.

As Indian selectors finalise a squad for the World Cup in the United States and West Indies in June, Rahul has emerged as an option alongside Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson despite not playing a T20 international since November 10, 2022.

"Over the last couple of weeks, I was thinking, I don't think he's going to figure in the World Cup squad, but if he continues to bat the way he is batting now he'll find himself a spot," 2007 T20 World Cup



winner Uthappa said on JioCinema.

"Whether it's as a reserve opener and wicketkeeper, that's a dual role he can fulfil.

"He just makes batting look so beautiful. He's one of those guys who makes it for a viewer, a delightful experience to watch cricket, an easy experience, and just all the other shots that he plays."

Former Australia wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist said before the match that there would be a lot of talk about World Cup selections in the coming weeks but it would be performances on the pitch that ultimately count.

"The narrative has to get away from who's going on the World Cup," Gilchrist told Cricbuzz.

"How do they get into the World cup? He (Rahul) has got to work out like every other player in this tournament. You'll be on the plane if you're in the narrative of selecting."

— Reuters

SWIATEK'S PERFECT 10 IN STUTTGART AS SABALENKA, GAUFF CRASH OUT



STUTTGART: World number one and defending champion Iga Swiatek took her Stuttgart winning streak to 10 matches on Friday with a straight sets quarter-final victory over Emma Raducanu while title rivals Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff suffered shock defeats.

Top seed Swiatek, the 2022 and 2023 champion at the German clay-court tournament, saw off former US Open champion Raducanu 7-6 (7/2), 6-3.

Reigning Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova beat world number two and three-time Stuttgart runner-up Sabalenka 3-6, 6-3, 7-5.

US Open champion Gauff, the world number three, fell 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) to Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk.

The 22-year-old Swiatek needed just over two hours to defeat Raducanu who was playing in her first quarterfinal since 2022.

"She started playing at the beginning pretty loose, like she had nothing to lose, and I totally get that. Sometimes it is like that," said Swiatek.

"But I knew I was kind of questioning if she's going to be able to keep the same intensity throughout the whole match. It wasn't about service games or return games. I was just waiting for my chances to break back and I was sure that I'm going to get them."

Despite her loss, there were encouraging signs of a return to form for Raducanu.

Her two wins for Britain in the Billie Jean King Cup win against France last weekend followed by two victories in Stuttgart mark the first time she has won four matches in a row since her 2021 US Open title triumph.

The former world number 10 came into Stuttgart ranked at 303. Twelve months ago, Stuttgart proved to be her final

event of 2023 before undergoing surgery on both wrists and her ankle.

Swiatek will face fourth-seeded Elena Rybakina, who defeated Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 5-7, 6-3, for a place in the final.

Vondrousova reached her first semifinal since clinching the Wimbledon title last July when she stunned Sabalenka.

The sixth-seeded Czech celebrated her first win over Sabalenka in six years after losing four in a row between 2018 and 2023.

Australian Open champion Sabalenka had been attempting to make the Stuttgart final for a fourth successive year.

The powerful Belarusian crunched 35 winners to Vondrousova's 17, but committed 48 unforced errors compared to 19.

Vondrousova crucially converted seven of eight break points while Sabalenka only capitalised six times from 15 opportunities.

Vondrousova will face Kostyuk for a place in Sunday's final after the 27th-ranked Ukrainian avenged her Australian Open quarterfinal loss to Gauff.

The 21-year-old Kostyuk had needed over three hours to defeat Laura Siegemund in the first round before saving five match points to get past Zheng Qinwen in the last 16.

On Friday, she battled back from 4-2 in the second set and 3-1 down in the third while Gauff had to save a total of seven match points.

The Ukrainian carved out 21 break points in all and hit 35 winners as she reached her third semifinal of 2024.

"Well, definitely means a lot, because to be consistent in tennis, it takes a lot of work and a lot of discipline," Kostyuk told wtatennis.com

"Everything around you has to work really well."

— AFP

Duplantis breaks pole vault record again in Xiamen Diamond League

XIAMEN, China: Armand Duplantis put down a marker ahead of this year's Paris Olympics as the Swede broke his own pole vault world record with a 6.24 metres effort in the first Diamond League meeting of the 2024 season on Saturday.

Duplantis bettered his previous mark of 6.23 metres set at the Eugene Diamond League finale in September, clearing the bar with ease before leaping up off the sponge mat below and racing off in celebration at his first outdoor event of the year.

It was the eighth time that Duplantis broke the world record, and the 24-year-old was the only man to clear six metres at the Egret Stadium.

The Olympic and two-time world outdoor champion had added a second world indoor title to his impressive resume in March, and he is set to head into his second Games in July and August as the firm favourite.

Australian Torrie Lewis enjoyed a stunning Diamond League debut as the 19-year-old pipped a strong field of American rivals that included



Sweden's Armand Duplantis in action during the men's pole vault final

Sha'Carri Richardson to claim the women's 200m gold with an effort of 22.96 from lane nine.

Richardson, winner of the 200m bronze at last year's world championships, finished second in 22.99 ahead of her compatriots Tamara Clark, Anavia Battle and Twanisha Terry.

World champion Marileidy Paulino earlier captured the

first track gold of the Diamond League season in the women's 400m, as the Dominican eased home in 50.08 seconds, ahead of Natalia Kaczmarek (50.29) and Britton Wilson (51.26).

Olympic champion Jasmine Camacho-Quinn then set the pace in the women's 100m hurdles, with the Puerto Rican cruising to victory in 12.45 seconds.

— Reuters





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Global praise for Oman’s efforts in supporting institutional innovation policies



Oman becomes the first country in Mena to implement a unified guide for institutional innovation across the government sector.

MUSCAT: The Global Innovation Institute praised the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to support and adopt policies for innovation and institutional creativity to enhance and build an advanced knowledge economy to contribute to promoting comprehensive development.

This praise comes through the Institutional Innovation Guidance Manual for the government sector, which is being worked on by the unit responsible for monitoring the implementation of Oman Vision 2040, targeting more than 44 institutions, following the model of the Global Innovation Institute.

Through this, Oman becomes the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to implement a unified guide for institutional innovation across the government sector.

The project aims to pave the way for cooperation between various sectors to ensure the creation of a unified vision towards innovation-driven development to achieve the targets of Oman Vision 2040, by promoting a culture of institutional innovation and addressing a number of challenges including: aligning innovation strategies, organising innovation-related efforts and enhancing capabilities in this aspect.

Since the launch of the project in December 2023, and in an effort to achieve its goals and engage all government institutions, the team has visited most governorates and held intensive discussion



sessions to ensure alignment of the activities of government institutions in the governorates with the project’s direction.

Sayyid Dr Munthir bin Hilal al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, of Oman Vision 2040 said: “Enhancing the culture of innovation is of great importance for the future of the Omani economy and society, as innovation provides a dynamic mechanism for addressing challenges and solving problems effectively and sustainably.”

He added, “The Institutional Innovation Guidance Manual seeks to create a unified vision among various involved institutions, reflecting Oman’s leading position in the region in making innovation-related policies and accelerating the transition to sustainable growth.”

It is worth mentioning that the Global Innovation Institute is the world’s leading body in providing professional certifications, accreditations and memberships in the field of innovation, with the aim of developing individuals’ capabilities and bringing about a transformation in institutional achievements by enhancing the skill of innovation. — **ONA**

Oman bets on green hydrogen to fuel clean transportation future

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The foundation stone for the first green hydrogen station in the Sultanate of Oman will be laid later this month against the backdrop of the Oman Sustainability Week 2024 (OSW), which takes place in Muscat from April 28 – May 2, 2024.

The initiative is being spearheaded by Oman Shell as part of its commitment to the country’s energy transition and Net-Zero strategy.

According to Malak al Shaibani, Oman Shell’s General Manager of External Relations, the foundation ceremony will be held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Sharing details about the initiative, Al Shaibani said: “Back in 2022, we actually launched the idea of green hydrogen for mobility during Oman Sustainability Week 2022.

And now, as we are in 2024, we will be laying the foundation of the first green hydrogen station. It will be opened under the auspices of Eng Salim al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and before the end of this year, you will be able to see hydrogen cars arriving in Oman.”

The company official made the announcement during the recent media briefing on OSW 2024.

Oman Shell is a Strategic Partner of the weeklong, high-profile event.

The hydrogen fuelling station stems from Oman Shell’s unveiling



Construction of Oman’s first hydrogen fuelling station to commence shortly.

We will be laying the foundation of the first green hydrogen station. Before the end of this year, you will be able to see hydrogen cars arriving in Oman

MALAK AL SHAIBANI
Oman Shell
GM of External Relations

of a ‘Green Hydrogen for Mobility’ project as the company’s 6th Gift to the Nation.

As part of the first phase of the project, Oman Shell signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Oman Airports. It enshrines a pledge by Oman Shell to provide up to 15 hydrogen cars

for the Oman Airports’ corporate usage.

The mobility project will also include development of hydrogen production units that will be powered by photovoltaic solar plants and installed at different fuelling units related to the project.

These stations will be selected strategically to maximise benefits to the project and allow members of the public to have visibility of the technology.

The initiative’s ambitions extend beyond the construction of a single hydrogen fuelling station.

The project aims to nurture the development of a comprehensive hydrogen economy within Oman. Stakeholders, including government bodies, energy companies, and infrastructure developers, are expected to collaborate to establish the

necessary regulatory frameworks and standards for the widespread adoption of hydrogen technology.

This collaborative approach is vital for attracting investment, streamlining operations, and ensuring the long-term success of the hydrogen sector.

The potential benefits of hydrogen mobility are significant. Hydrogen-powered vehicles offer a cleaner alternative to traditional gasoline and diesel cars, potentially leading to a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality, aligning with Oman’s environmental goals.

Additionally, hydrogen presents a promising avenue for diversifying Oman’s energy mix, reducing dependence on volatile fossil fuels and potentially enhancing the country’s energy security and independence.

This diversification could have a positive impact on Oman’s trade

Oman has abundant potential for solar PV investment

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

A new report of SolarPower Europe offers key insights into the Omani solar sector, and opportunities for international investment. The country will need to install minimum 13 GW solar by 2030.

The report, “Oman solar investments opportunities”, provides an overview of Oman’s business environment, and major macroeconomic trends, while analysing the regulatory framework and infrastructure network of the country.

It maps the Omani energy sector, including the energy mix; key stakeholders and developments; and the policy and legislative framework governing renewable energy generation.

This report also updates the



Bird’s eye view of Ibr2 Solar IPP. Image for illustration only.

Oman chapter of SolarPower Europe’s 2021 report; “Middle East: Solar investment opportunities.”

This revision contains the latest economic and political advancements in the country, and credible pathways for Oman to reach Net-Zero by 2050, following the most recent auction

announcements, and the latest electricity tariffs and energy mix data.

The country will need to install a minimum of 13 GW of solar in total by 2030, to stay on track to reach Net-Zero emissions by 2050. Moreover, the recommendations have been revised to reflect the evolving dynamics of the Omani

energy sector.

Katherine Poseidon, Chair of SolarPower Europe’s Global Markets Workstream, and Head of Strategy, Analytics & Process’ at Voltalia, stated; “There are no limits to Oman’s potential solar growth, as a country home to abundant natural resources. In an evolving regulatory and legislative

landscape, this report aims to make an important contribution to the country’s solar journey.”

Paolo Travaglini, Head of Area Coordination Renewables Africa, Asia, Oceania at Eni Plenitude and former Chair of SolarPower Europe’s Global Markets Workstream, added: “Thanks to its high potential for renewable energy and a government very committed to taking a leadership role in the renewable energy sector and green hydrogen production, Oman has all the prerequisites to become a success story of the energy transition and solar development.”

Benjamin Clarke, Global Markets Manager, SolarPower Europe: “Oman is primed to become a solar superstar. The country is going in the right direction on its journey to transition away from fossil fuels.

With this report, we want to guide the country in generating more investment in renewables, and unlocking the country’s true solar potential.”

Sonia Dunlop, CEO of the Global Solar Council said; “Oman has a unique opportunity here to show the world how to make the shift from being an oil and gas power, to a solar power.

With the right market structure, grid infrastructure, and investment, the country can seize this opportunity to secure economic growth and jobs in its Net-Zero future.

The publication was drafted by SolarPower Europe’s Global Markets workstream. The workstream launched in March 2018 to identify new avenues for worldwide business and cooperation, and contribute to the global energy transition.

OQ and partners invest \$2.825 billion in Al Wusta Governorate, maximising local value addition

MUSCAT: OQ and its partners are investing billions in Al Wusta Governorate to boost the local economy and promote social and economic development. This investment is aligned with their social responsibility goals and aims to support the growth of local companies, provide job opportunities and enhance innovation in small and medium enterprises.

The expenditure by OQ and its partners in Al Wusta Governorate on goods and services from local suppliers in Oman has reached \$2.825 billion. This investment focuses on maximising local value addition and creating economic momentum in Al Wusta Governorate and other regions, contributing to various economic activities and social development.

Duqm Refinery, a joint project between OQ and Kuwait

Integrated Petroleum Industries Company, has spent \$2.534 billion on goods and services during the construction stages.

This includes significant investments in small and medium enterprises, local companies and national industries, demonstrating a commitment to supporting local businesses and industries.

To further enhance local value addition and promote development, Duqm Refinery has allocated a percentage of its construction works to SMEs and local suppliers.

The project also invests in social projects to improve the lives of residents and strengthen community relationships, with a focus on education, health and the environment.

Duqm Refinery has undertaken initiatives such as the “Refinery Sciences” programme and



Duqm Refinery has allocated a percentage of its construction works to SMEs and local suppliers.

English language development for students in Al Wusta Governorate, in collaboration with the British Council. These programmes aim to develop essential skills in students and prepare them for the workforce effectively.

In terms of training and qualification, Duqm Refinery has provided training grants for

employees, opportunities for national talents and scholarships at both local and international universities. These initiatives support skill development and education for individuals in the region.

OQ has also signed agreements to support the health sector in Al Wusta Governorate, financing

projects such as the Emergency and Accidents Unit at health centres. These efforts aim to enhance healthcare services for residents and contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

The Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage Project, managed by Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO), is another significant initiative in Al Wusta Governorate to enhance economic diversification and sustainability.

This project has invested in local value addition, providing contracts to local companies, purchases from local suppliers, and support for SMEs. It has also created job opportunities and supported social responsibility projects in education and community service.

Marafiq, a joint project between OQ and Gulf Energy

Development, has also contributed to local value addition in Al Wusta Governorate.

The company focuses on providing utilities services such as electricity, water and sewage treatment for the industrial area in Duqm.

Its investment in goods manufactured in Oman, support for SMEs, and training programmes for Omani youth demonstrate its commitment to local development and capacity building.

The investments and initiatives by OQ and its partners in Al Wusta Governorate are driving economic growth, supporting local businesses, and enhancing social development. These projects aim to create sustainable opportunities for the community, foster innovation in SMEs, and contribute to the overall prosperity

MSX-listed companies Q1 profits jump to RO 212.7 million

MUSCAT: The net profits of public joint stock companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) in the first quarter of the current year rose to RO 212.7 million, compared to RO 187.3 million in the same period last year, recording a growth of 13.5 per cent.

The preliminary financial data announced by the companies on the Muscat Stock Exchange website showed an improvement in the financial results of most companies. Five companies moved from losses to profits, while five other companies moved from profits to losses.

The losses recorded in the first quarter of the current year decreased to RO 17.8 million, compared to losses of RO 19.3 million in the same period last year.



MSX-listed banks manage to increase their net profits in Q1 to RO 124.5 million.

Most leading companies announced their preliminary financial results, except for Omantel, which awaits financial results from Zain Group of Kuwait.

The financial results announced until the end of last week showed that 67 companies recorded profits during

the first quarter of the current year, while 24 companies recorded losses. The profitable companies were distributed across various sectors, with 25 companies in the financial sector, 21 companies in the services sector, 18 companies in the industrial sector, and 3 funds recording profits.

On the other hand, the losses were concentrated in the industrial sector with 12 companies, followed by the services sector with 7 companies, and the financial sector with 5 companies.

Bank Muscat recorded the highest profits at RO 54.2 million, leading public joint stock companies in net profits. Sohar Bank International came second with RO 25.1 million and National Bank of Oman (NBO)

ranked third with RO 15.4 million. OQ Gas Networks ranked fourth with RO 13.6 million and Bank Dhofar ranked fifth with RO 10.8 million.

The banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange managed to increase their net profits in the first quarter of the current year to RO 124.5 million, compared to RO 106.3 million in the same period last year, registering a 17 per cent increase.

All banks recorded growth in their profits, with Bank Muscat leading in profits, followed by Sohar Bank International in second place, National Bank of Oman in third place, Bank Dhofar in fourth and ahlilbank in fifth with profits of RO 8.6 million. Oman Arab Bank ranked sixth with RO 6.4 million and Bank Nizwa seventh with RO 3.8 million. — ONA

Salam Air continues to expand operations, launches new summer destinations



MUSCAT: Salam Air, Oman's low-cost carrier, continues to expand its operational scope by adding a new destination to its list of European destinations next summer.

Captain Ahmed bin Mohammed al Shidhani (pictured), Acting CEO of Salam Air, stated that the new destination for the company will be Tirana, Albania, starting from mid-June with two weekly flights. Tirana is a seasonal destination that will be operated during the summer period.

He mentioned that Tirana is the capital of Albania and its largest city, known for its moderate climate along with many tourist and archaeological attractions.

Salam Air will also restart seasonal flights from mid-June from Muscat to Baku in Azerbaijan, Trabzon in Türkiye, and Almaty in Kazakhstan.

In response to the increased demand from tourists to visit Dhofar Governorate during the autumn season, Salam Air will operate four daily flights from Muscat to Salalah, as well as connecting Salalah to Suhar.

Salam Air will also operate flights to Salalah from Fujairah in the UAE and Manama in Bahrain.

The Salam Air fleet currently consists of 13 new aircraft of Airbus A321 Neo and A320 models, as well as a cargo aircraft of Airbus A321 model.

During 2023, Salam Air transported over 2.7 million passengers, showing a 28 per cent increase compared to the previous year, affirming its positive role in enhancing the tourism and service sectors in Oman.

To enhance the customer experience during the booking process, Salam Air will release a new update for its mobile phone application tailored to the needs and preferences of customers.

— ONA

Nama Water commits to uninterrupted water service during exceptional weather conditions

MUSCAT: Driven by its vision to become a leading provider of water management solutions, Nama Water Services has activated its emergency plan in response to the recent Al Mateer depression. This proactive measure ensures continued water services for governorates affected by the heavy rains.

The move reflects the company's commitment to sustainable water management and the well-being of Oman's communities.

Eng Ahmed bin Mubarak al Araiimi, Acting Water and Wastewater Operations and Maintenance General Manager said: “Quick action under the company's emergency plan ensured uninterrupted water supply to residents during the recent low-pressure weather conditions. Despite challenges to distribution networks, residents continued to receive potable water thanks to the successful activation of these protocols.”

Al Araiimi, outlined the company's proactive measures to ensure water supplies and wastewater services remain uninterrupted. “Leveraging past experience and technical expertise, our crisis management team has activated the emergency



Eng Ahmed bin Mubarak al Araiimi
Acting Water and Wastewater Operations and Maintenance General Manager.

plan. This plan ensures key water tanks are filled, providing a 48-hour buffer in case of disruptions to pumping operations.”

Al Araiimi elaborated “Real-time monitoring of water levels and pumping activity is ongoing through the National Water Monitoring and Control Centre.

Additionally, emergency wells have been activated, with dedicated water quality teams guaranteeing water safety.

Water tankers stand ready for deployment to address potential shortages or service disruptions reported across governorates.”

These actions demonstrate the company's commitment to providing reliable water services to its subscribers during any unforeseen circumstances.



Real-time monitoring of water levels and pumping activity is ongoing through the National Water Monitoring and Control Centre.

Elaborating on the efforts exerted by the company he added: “Nama Water Services implemented a comprehensive pre-emptive plan in anticipation of the adverse weather conditions, including, engaging with contractors, including plants operators, associated maintenance personnel, and project contractors, to establish precautionary measures safeguarding facilities, plants and excavations, prioritising public safety.

Additionally, the company issued informative and cautionary

messages to all company staff, disseminating updates on the evolving weather situation in alignment with directives from the Civil Aviation Authority and pertinent authorities, emphasising safety protocols at work sites. Nama Water Services has also liaised with relevant entities to rehabilitate roads impacted by soil erosion around reservoirs.”

Commenting on the impact of weather conditions on the company's operations and assets, Al Araiimi stated: “A number of the company's assets were affected by floods and heavy rains despite

the precautionary measures taken.

A break occurred in the water line feeding the main reservoir in Wadi Bani Khalid, which was promptly addressed by the operations and maintenance teams.

Additionally, several breaks occurred in the distribution networks in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi and several other wilayats. Emergency wells were activated in some wilayats after taking water samples and ensuring their compliance with the approved specifications and standards for drinking water.”

Al Arimi added that the sewage treatment plant in the Wilayat of Suhar was affected and its operations were suspended due to the flooding. However, the company's efforts were successful in bringing the plant back online within less than 6 hours of its shutdown.

Al Araiimi concluded by expressing his gratitude to the company's employees for their continuous efforts to ensure the uninterrupted provision of water services. He further extended his appreciation to the subscribers for their water conservation efforts, which play a vital role in ensuring uninterrupted service.

Oman's electricity and water production increases



MUSCAT: The total electricity production of the Sultanate of Oman by the end of January 2024 recorded an increase of 14.1 per cent to reach 2,609.3 gigawatt-hours compared to 2,287.2 gigawatt-hours during the same period last year.

Statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the governorates of Al Batinah North and South and Al Dhahirah recorded a total production of 1,660.1 gigawatt-hours by the end of January 2024.

The total production in Muscat Governorate decreased by 114.3 per cent by the end of January 2024 to reach 1.7 gigawatt-hours and in Dhofar Governorate by 2.0 per cent to reach 297.2 gigawatt-hours.

The total production in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North and South increased by 30.5 per cent by the end of January 2024 to reach 627.9 gigawatt-hours, while the total production in Al Wusta Governorate decreased by 93.5 per cent to reach 1.4 gigawatt-hours and in Musandam Governorate, the total production increased by 14.2 per cent, reaching 24.4 gigawatt-hours.

The statistics also indicated that the net electricity production of the Sultanate of Oman by the end of January 2024 increased by 17.7 per cent to reach 2,608.2 gigawatt-hours.

The statistics noted that the total amount of water produced in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 1.8 per cent to reach approximately 42,185,700 cubic metres by the end of January 2024, compared to 41,421,600 cubic metres in the same period of 2023. — ONA

Oman's first subsea cable power project to be high-tech: OETC

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

A submarine cable proposed to link Masirah Island with the national grid of the Sultanate of Oman is not only the first of its kind, but will also be technologically cutting-edge, according to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the operator of the grid.

A number of international contractors are currently participating in a competitive tender for a contract to lay the cable, which will enable the supply of cost-competitive natural gas-powered electricity to the island, thereby displacing expensive and carbon-intensive diesel-based generation used to power the island.

Work on the landmark project — the most notable of OETC's strategic investments planned this year, aside from the ongoing North-South Interconnection Project (Rabt) — will be launched during 2024, the majority state-owned grid operator said.

"OETC is set to embark on a historic project in the Sultanate of Oman. This project aligns with Oman's Vision 2040 that aims to achieve carbon neutrality by marking a significant step towards reducing carbon emissions," OETC noted in its 2023 Annual Report issued earlier this week.

"The key project involves linking the island of Masirah to OETC's Transmission Network through a 35-kilometre submarine cable with a voltage of 132 kilovolts and 60 kilometres of overhead power transmission lines.

The connection will extend from the Mahout substation at 400/132kV kilovolts to the Masirah 132/33kV grid station.



Projects worth RO 197 million were completed by OETC during 2023.

This project includes a unique technological component in the form of the submarine cable, which employs complex and highly critical technologies," the company further stated.

OETC has been ploughing sizable sums into the expansion and modernisation of the country's transmission system in recent years, in part to support Oman's transition to renewables, as well as the achievement of its Net Zero goals.

In 2023 alone, the company invested around RO 200 million in a number of strategic projects. The bulk of this investment has gone into the construction of Phase 1 of the North-South Interconnection Project (Rabt).

As many as five major grid stations were launched as part of the initiative in 2023, alongside the roll-out of 660 kilometres of overhead transmission lines.

"The projects completed in 2023 had a combined cost of roughly RO 197 million. They improve the transmission grid in line with the operational and strategic plan. They were established to ensure that the system has the capacity and readiness to handle the rising demand for electricity throughout Oman," the company stated in its report.

Also in 2023, OETC successfully completed all the required tests to remotely control generation at the Ibri Solar IPP — the first major solar power

project to be connected to the national grid. It was also the first renewable energy plant to be controlled remotely from OETC's Load Despatch Centre in Muscat.

Another key project that was delivered last year was the Cyber Security Operations Centre (CSOC), a first of its kind facility that integrates cyber security monitoring systems with operational and information technologies.

Finally, an Online Condition Monitoring (OLCM) system was launched to monitor the company's assets remotely. The initiative is expected to make a quantum leap in monitoring and improving the health of OETC's assets, it added.

Oman's natural gas production, import reach 8.387 billion cubic metres



MUSCAT: The total local production and import of natural gas in the Sultanate of Oman amounted to 8.387 billion cubic metres by the end of February 2024, a decrease of 2 per cent compared to the same period of the previous year when the total was 8.556 billion cubic metres.

Statistics show that industrial projects accounted for 68.2 per cent of the usage of natural gas in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of February 2024, with industrial projects using 5.722 billion cubic metres.

The total usage of natural gas for oil fields was 1.523 billion cubic metres, for power generation stations was 1.098 billion cubic metres, and for industrial areas was 43.600 million cubic metres.

It is worth mentioning that the non-associated natural gas production, including imports, amounted to 6.717 billion cubic metres, while the associated production was 1.670 billion cubic metres.

— ONA

Omani rial exchange rate index rises by 3.1%: NCSI data

MUSCAT: The real exchange rate index of the Omani rial rose by 3.1 per cent at the end of January 2024 to reach 116 points.

Preliminary statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the broad money supply (M2) in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 14 per cent at the end of January 2024 to reach RO 23.375 billion.

The NCSI data indicated a 1.6 per cent decrease in the total domestically produced money supply, reaching RO 1.575



The data indicated a 1.6 per cent decrease in the total domestically produced money supply.

billion at the end of January 2024 compared to RO 1.600 billion at

the end of January 2023. On the other hand, NCSI

report said the narrow money supply (M1), consisting of total cash outside banks, current accounts, and demand deposits in local currency, increased by 9.2 per cent to reach RO 6.090 billion compared to RO 5.577 billion at the end of January 2023.

Total foreign assets in the Central Bank of Oman rose by 7.8 per cent, reaching RO 6.741 billion at the end of January 2024 compared to RO 6.254 billion at the end of January 2023.

Private sector deposits in commercial banks and Islamic

windows reached RO 19.559 billion at the end of January 2024, an 11.6 per cent increase from the same period in 2023, which had witnessed deposits of RO 17.532 billion.

Total loans and financing in commercial banks and Islamic windows at the end of January 2024 increased by 3.8 per cent to reach RO 30.485 billion compared to RO 29.358 billion.

The average interest rate on total loans increased by 4.5 per cent, recording 5.546 per cent at the end of January 2024. — ONA

Oman inflation rate rises by 0.2 per cent in March



Al Sharqiyah North Governorate recorded the highest inflation rate.

MUSCAT: The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 0.2 per cent in March 2024 compared to the same month in 2023, according to data from the Consumer Price Index issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicated an increase in prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages by 3.4 per cent, diverse personal goods and services by 2.9 per cent, culture and entertainment by 0.4 per cent, tobacco by 2.4 per cent, and

clothing and footwear by 0.1 per cent.

On the other hand data from NCSI indicated that prices decreased for transportation by 4.6 per cent, restaurants and hotels by 0.1 per cent, furniture, household equipment, and routine household maintenance by 0.3 per cent, communications by 0.3 per cent, and education by 0.4 per cent, while prices remained stable for other groups.

In the food and non-alcoholic beverages category, prices rose for

fruits by 0.7 per cent, milk, cheese, and eggs by 3.9 per cent, sugar, jam, honey, and confectionery by 1.7 per cent, oils and fats by 2.0 per cent, bread and cereals by 1.2 per cent, food products by 3.6 per cent, vegetables by 16.2 per cent, meat by 2.3 per cent, and fish by 2.8 per cent.

Al Sharqiyah North Governorate recorded the highest inflation rate at the end of March 2024 compared to the same period in the previous year, where the index rose by 1.3 per cent.

Additionally, it increased by 1.1 per cent in Al Wusta Governorate and 1.0 per cent in Al Batinah North Governorate.

The rate increased by 0.8 per cent in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, 0.6 per cent in both Al Batinah South and Musandam governorates, and Al Dhahirah, and 0.4 per cent in both Al Buraimi and Dhofar governorates, while the rate decreased by 0.4 per cent in Muscat Governorate and 0.3 per cent in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. — ONA

Crypto market correction hits gaming tokens, but long-term outlook remains positive



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WHILE GAMING TOKENS HAD SHOWN RELATIVE RESILIENCE IN PREVIOUS MARKET DOWNTURNS, THE SEVERITY OF THE CURRENT CORRECTION SHOWS THE INHERENT RISKS OF INVESTING IN THIS DYNAMIC SPACE.

The cryptocurrency market has taken a sharp turn recently, with major players like Bitcoin and Ethereum experiencing substantial price declines.

This downturn highlights the volatility of the crypto space and its impact on various sectors, including blockchain-based gaming.

Bitcoin has lost over 12% of its value this week, falling to around \$61,500 after peaking above \$71,000. Ethereum has fared even worse, shedding almost 15% of its value and currently trading at around \$3,000.

The gaming token sector has been hit disproportionately hard. Major tokens like Gala Games (GALA), Pixels (PIXEL), Portal (PORTAL), and Xai (XAI) have plummeted by upwards of 30%.

Some have even set new all-time lows, suggesting a significant loss of investor confidence. Even well-established projects like Axie Infinity (AXS) and ApeCoin (APE) haven't escaped the sell-off, both suffering losses of around 27%.

This sharp decline demonstrates that even the most promising crypto projects are not immune to sudden market changes.



Illustration shows representations of cryptocurrency Ethereum in front of a stock graph and US dollar. – Reuters

While gaming tokens had shown relative resilience in previous market downturns, the severity of the current correction shows the inherent risks of investing in this dynamic space.

Interestingly, one token stood out amidst this widespread slump. The GOG token of the highly anticipated mobile fantasy game Guild of Guardians is

Meanwhile, Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, has converted its entire \$1 billion Secure Asset Fund for Users (SAFU) into Circle's USD Coin (USDC), emphasising stability and transparency.

Binance now holds roughly

3% of USDC's circulating supply. SAFU is an emergency insurance fund designed to protect Binance users from potential losses in extreme situations such as hacks.

While the current downturn might dampen spirits in the short term, experts predict that a fresh Initial Coin Offering (ICO) boom could be on the horizon, fuelled by advancements like real-world asset tokenisation and innovations in decentralised finance.

Lessons learned from the 2018 ICO frenzy mean the upcoming wave of ICOs will likely face much greater scrutiny from both investors and regulators,

potentially leading to a landscape more closely resembling the traditional financial ecosystem.

The crypto market continues to evolve, and with it, the profile of the typical ICO investor is also changing.

The next wave of ICOs will likely attract entrepreneurial investors interested in supporting the next major exchange or blockchain innovation.

Alongside the potential for a new ICO wave, the crypto industry is witnessing increasing adoption of public blockchains by major institutions.

This trend is exemplified by BlackRock's recent launch of a tokenised fund on Ethereum and Ernst & Young's enterprise contract management service that leverages zero-knowledge (ZK) technology on the Polygon network.

The development of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) continues to gather pace, with the Deutsche Bundesbank collaborating with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Digital Currency Initiative (DCI).

This project will support designing robust security and privacy measures for a potential digital euro, with a focus on user privacy that differentiates CBDCs

from private payment solutions.

CBDCs represent a significant shift in the global financial landscape, offering the potential to improve payment systems and enhance financial inclusion.

However, their development raises important questions about possible impacts on traditional banking and the balance between privacy and preventing illicit activities.

Research collaborations between central banks and institutions like MIT are a great starting point in exploring these complexities to ensure responsible and innovative CBDC design.

****Disclaimer:**** The information provided in this article should not be considered financial advice. The cryptocurrency market remains dynamic and carries risks. It's essential to conduct your own thorough research and consult with qualified professionals before making any investment decisions. Defying the broader market trend, surging by a remarkable 69% this week.

This move is likely spurred by Immutable's announcement of a crossover event with the popular card-battler Gods Unchained, indicating a strong level of support for the project.

New bonus allocation framework to enhance organisational integrity, employee satisfaction



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The writer is an academic lecturer and adviser at Oman College of Management and Technology

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE BONUS AS A KEY DEPENDENT VARIABLE WITHIN ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES IS CRUCIAL. TYPICALLY, A COMPANY ALLOCATES A BONUS POOL TO EACH UNIT BASED ON THE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCES OF BOTH THE COMPANY AT LARGE AND THE INDIVIDUAL UNIT.

This text aims not to offend any organisations or criticise their internal systems and policies. Instead, it contributes towards improving the bonus distribution system to satisfy both employers and employees, thereby preventing any perceived unfairness.

Moreover, this initiative is grounded in academic research, through which I seek to introduce a new bonus model in financial institutions.

A bonus is essentially an extra amount of money awarded to employees as a reward for satisfactory work performance. These bonuses can take various forms, including mid-year bonuses and performance-based bonuses. Understanding the role of the bonus as a key dependent variable within organisational structures is crucial. Typically, a company allocates a bonus pool to each unit based on the financial performances of both the company at large and the individual unit.

This pool is then distributed among sub-units and ultimately to individual employees, often based on a subjective evaluation of each employee's performance.

Consequently, the bonus payment is directly linked to the financial success of a unit and the contributions of its employees.

Bonuses have been recognised as powerful tools for enhancing employees' attitudes toward work, encouraging them to improve their performance and competencies. Employees



Implementing this model will likely result in all employees receiving bonuses that accurately reflect their value to the organisation.

generally look forward to receiving bonuses as recognition for their hard work and commitment. However, whether a bonus is a demandable right of an employee remains a contentious issue, as most employment contracts do not specify bonuses. Given that employees contribute significantly to company profitability, they might view bonuses as just rewards for their efforts.

According to the ruling in Manila Banking Corporation v. NLRC et.al., G.R. 107487,

dated September 29, 1997, the decision to grant bonuses is a management prerogative and not a mandatory obligation beyond paying the basic salaries or wages.

The period when bonuses are distributed is often marked by disagreements, heated discussions and disputes, which can lead to perceptions of unfairness. Questions arise concerning the fairness and accuracy of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to rate employees.

It is essential to consider

whether the KPIs were appropriately set, whether employees were adequately informed about their responsibilities and whether the assessors are suitably qualified to evaluate the employees accurately. Management literature suggests that differentiated ratings can demotivate employees if they perceive their compensation as unfair.

Many talented employees have left organisations due to such perceptions of unfair bonus distribution, which often stems from non-scientific distribution

methods and hierarchical misuse of power.

A common method for determining bonuses involves performance ratings, typically on a scale from 1 to 5, with corresponding payouts.

For example, a rating of 3 might yield a bonus of three times the basic salary, e.g., RO 1,500 x 3 = RO 4,500.

However, this model's flaw lies in the subjective nature of assessments, which can be influenced by personal biases or emotional responses.

To rectify this, I propose a new model that evaluates employees based on more objective criteria: years of experience within the organisation, professional development activities undertaken, contributions of ideas, and the completion of assigned tasks over the year.

This method ensures a fairer distribution of bonuses, reflecting employees' true value and contributions.

Implementing this model will likely result in all employees receiving bonuses that accurately reflect their value to the organisation.

Nonetheless, management can proudly claim that 100 per cent of employees received bonuses based on objective, scientific methods, eliminating the randomness and potential unfairness of previous systems.

This approach not only aligns with principles of equity and motivation but also enhances organisational integrity and employees' satisfaction.

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MUSIC
French-Lebanese trumpeter and composer Ibrahim Maalouf performs in the street after a concert at the Grand Rex cinema and concert hall in Paris. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Moroccan group Hna-Ya performs contemporary dance during the 13th edition of the African Entertainment Arts Market (MASA) at the Palais de la Culture in Abidjan. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD
A Palestinian woman mourns the death of a loved one at Al-Najjar hospital following overnight Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, amid the continuing conflict between Israel and Hamas. — AFP



ART
A visitor takes a picture of portrait of François I of France painted by Jean Clouet, at the Louvre Museum, in Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE
A foreign tourist holds a surfboard during sunset at Kuta beach near Denpasar on Indonesia resort island of Bali. — AFP

art & life

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YOUNG OMANI ENTREPRENEURS LOOK AT EMBROIDERY AS A MODERN MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD

The art of embroidery has been an integral part of Omani culture for centuries, manifesting in traditional clothing and household items. Raya al Lamki, Thuraya al Lamki, and Yousra al Bahri had been fascinated by the craft and decided to launch a project that not only fuels their passion but allow them to make money out of it... **P19**

This photo is AI-generated and is for illustration purposes only.

MOVIES

Ritchie's tale of ungentlemanly warfare aims to be fun

WITH HIS LATEST MOVIE "The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare", which is inspired by a real World War Two mission, director Guy Ritchie aims to shine a light on a historically significant event yet still make it fun. The movie is a fictional retelling of Operation Postmaster, a 1941-42 raid on German and Italian ships off the coast of West Africa, carried out by a commando unit formed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the Special Operations Executive, a group of military officials including author Ian Fleming. Based on a novel by Damien Lewis and declassified files from the British War

Department, the film sees Major Gus March-Phillips, played by Henry Cavill, leading his team of misfits to fight the Nazis with what are deemed "ungentlemanly" war tactics. "In typical Guy Ritchie style, it's a slightly hyperbolic example of this story," Cavill said in an interview. "So, this is the amped up, rather more exciting version of the story, which still represents these characters for what they were, which is incredibly brave and heroic individuals," the 40-year-old British actor said. "What we wanted was fun," said Ritchie. "I make movies for me as much as I make them for anyone else. And if I'm not entertained, then I suspect other people won't be entertained. So that was my principal task." Ritchie, who co-wrote the screenplay, said the operation "changed the face of how wars are fought thereafter". "The reason that you have the Navy Seals and the SAS and so on is really, the genesis of all of that was from this mission. And in no small part, I suppose, it's the genesis of the whole Bond principle," said Ritchie. "Ian Fleming was always pressing the character I play, Gubbins, to tell this story. And because of the Official Secrets Act,



The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare

Gubbins couldn't do it. So, Fleming decided then I'm going to tell these stories through James Bond. So, we're really witnessing the birth of Bond through this story," said Cary Elwes, who plays Brigadier Gubbins, "M". Speculation over who will take over the role of James Bond from Daniel Craig in the film franchise has run rife recently. Both Cavill and Golding have appeared on lists of potential successors. "Whatever happens, I'm looking for, as a fan of Bond and that entire franchise, if we get more movies, it's a win for everybody. That's all we want," said Golding. The movie was shot in Türkiye and in between filming, Ritchie organised outings and barbecues for the cast and crew, the film's producer, Jerry Bruckheimer said. "It's like going to summer camp, working with Guy," said Bruckheimer. "Guy will cook for you, he's a great chef," Elwes said. "Yeah, he just is a gatherer. He loves to gather people," added actress Eiza Gonzalez, who plays agent Marjorie Stewart, also crediting Ritchie for letting her showcase her singing skills in the movie. "The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare" is out in cinemas globally from April 19. — Reuters

To Nanglu, the worms' presence also suggests that sometimes, reality really is stranger than fiction. — JACK TAMISIEA/NYT



Candace King, a customer, reacts to a remote cashier as she appears on a screen at an outlet of the SanSan Ramen restaurant, in New York. — NYT

STEFANOS CHEN

AT SANSAN CHICKEN in Long Island City, Queens, the cashier beamed a wide smile and recommended the fried chicken sandwich.

Or maybe she suggested the tonkatsu — it was hard to tell, because the Internet connection from her home in the Philippines was spotty.

Romy, who declined to give her last name, is one of 12 virtual assistants greeting customers at a handful of restaurants in New York City, from halfway across the world.

The virtual hosts could be the vanguard of a rapidly changing restaurant industry, as small-business owners seek relief from rising commercial rents and high inflation. Others see a model ripe for abuse: The remote workers are paid \$3 an hour, according to their management company, while the minimum wage in the city is \$16.

The workers, all based in the Philippines and projected onto flat-screen monitors via Zoom, are summoned when an often unwitting customer approaches. Despite a 12-hour time difference with the New York lunch crowd, they offer warm greetings, explain the menu and beckon guests inside.

But sceptical customers said they were not eager to join this particular Zoom meeting.

"You hear 'hello' and you say, 'What the hell is that?'" Shania Ortiz, 25, recalled of a recent trip to Sansan Ramen, a neighbouring Japanese restaurant that had a gold-framed, flat-screen monitor set up in the foyer with a surveillance camera trained on guests. "I never engage," she said.

The service is the brainchild of Chi Zhang, 34, the founder of Happy Cashier, a virtual-assistant company that was thrust into the spotlight last week, when a social media post about the overseas workers went viral.

He was caught off guard. The program has been quietly tested since October, but the company's website has not yet been set up. The technology is already available in stores in Queens, Manhattan and Jersey City, New Jersey, including at Sansan Ramen, its sister store, Sansan Chicken, and Yaso Kitchen, a Chinese soup dumpling spot. Two other

Chinese restaurants using the service on Long Island asked not to be named, he said.

Zhang is a former owner of Yaso Tangbao, a Shanghainese restaurant in Brooklyn that closed during the coronavirus pandemic. He said the experience reinforced the idea that restaurants were being squeezed by high rents and inflation, and that a virtual-assistant model, somewhat akin to that employed by overseas

call centres, could help maximise small retail spaces and improve store efficiency.

When the virtual assistants are not helping customers, they coordinate food delivery orders, take phone calls and oversee the restaurants' online review pages, Zhang said. They can take food orders, but they can't manage cash transactions.

The workers are employees of

Happy Cashier, not the restaurants. And Zhang said that their \$3-an-hour wage was roughly double what similar roles paid in the Philippines.

Tipping policy is set by the restaurants, he said, with one giving its virtual greeters 30 per cent of the pooled total each day.

The restaurant industry has long been an entry point for immigrants, and a hotbed for labour violations such as wage theft.

But the Happy Cashier model is legal and minimum wage laws extend only to workers "who are physically present within the state's geographical limits," according to a spokesperson for the New York State Department of Labor.

Zhang said he expected to quickly scale up by placing virtual assistants in more than 100 restaurants in the state by the end of the year.

The prospect is alarming, said Teófilo Reyes, the chief of staff at Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, a nonprofit labour group that has pushed for a higher minimum wage in New York.

"The fact that they have found a way to outsource work to another country is extremely troubling, because it's going to dramatically put downward pressure on wages in the industry," he said.

The fast-food workforce is already shrinking, and new technology could further transform the industry, said Jonathan Bowles, the executive director of the Center for an Urban Future, a public policy think-tank.

Fast-food restaurants in New York City had an average of 8.5 employees in 2022, he said, down from 9.23 in 2019, before the pandemic.

At the Sansan Chicken in Manhattan's East Village, Rosy Tang, 30, a manager, praised the service.

"This is a way for small businesses to survive," she said, adding that the cost and space savings it provided could allow her to add a small coffee stall to the store.

In practice, however, quirks with the model abound.

At the Sansan Chicken in Queens, the virtual assistant couldn't help a reporter order a sandwich without cheese on a touch pad menu. The assistant said the reporter should order from the in-person staff members at the Sansan Ramen next door, which shares a kitchen with the chicken restaurant.

Will Jang, 30, an associate at Goldman Sachs, had lunch on Wednesday at the Yaso Kitchen in Jersey City — and completely ignored his virtual host, Amber.

"I thought it was some advertisement," like the prerecorded videos in taxi cabs, he said.

— The New York Times

THE FRIED CHICKEN IS IN NEW YORK. THE CASHIER IS IN THE PHILIPPINES.

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