

HM greets President of Croatia

His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Zoran Milanović of Croatia, on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president and the friendly people of Croatia. – **ONA**



P12

ALCARAZ SETS UP QUEEN'S FINAL AGAINST DE MINAUR



P15

O BUNKERING LAUNCHES OPERATIONS AT KHASAB PORT



P18

DEFYING ODDS TO PURSUE HER PASSION FOR FILM-MAKING



MUSCAT

HIS MAJESTY GREET'S EMIR OF QATAR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to his brother His Highness Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on the occasion of his accession to the throne. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to His Highness Shaikh Tamim, praying to Allah the Almighty to return this occasion and similar ones while the friendly Qatari people have achieved more progress and prosperity.

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF MOZAMBIQUE

His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Filipe Nyusi of Republic of Mozambique, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president and the friendly people of Mozambique.

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF SLOVENIA

His Majesty has sent a cable of greetings to President Nataša Pirc Musar of the Republic of Slovenia on the occasion of her country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the president and the friendly people of Slovenia.

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Habta heralds Eid festivities

Habta market for cattle in Samayil on Saturday. With Eid al Adha round the corner, Habta markets are coming alive across wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman. **Photo by Yahya al Qasmi**

Job rotation available for 3,251 slots: MoL

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour (MoL) said the government units are finalising the procedures of the employees who have been admitted through the job rotation opportunities which stand at 3,251 in total.

The second job rotation announcement was published during the period from April 15 to May 6 and 15,500 applications were received.

Khalsa bint Habeeb al Farsiyah, Director of the Job Rotation Initiative at MoL, noted that some 100 employees availed of the first announcement in December year with 3,860 applicants vied for 1,130 job rotation opportunities.

She pointed out that the job rotation initiative is one of the

modern administrative methods that help discover the skills and capabilities of individuals.

Job rotation is one of the best comprehensive training strategies that aim at creating effective human capital.

It is one of the methods of career development and aims to achieve the highest levels of investment in human energies in the fields of technical and administrative work as well as supervisory management and leadership levels. Job rotation could be useful in filling temporary needs, transfer and exchange of knowledge and achieving balance in the numbers of employees, she said.

— **ONA**

All Haj pilgrims from Oman leave for Mecca

Annual rituals begin today at the Grand Mosque

MECCA: The last groups of pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman departed to the holy land on Saturday as Haj rituals begin late on Sunday at the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

A total of 14,000 pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman will be performing Haj this year. Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Kaabi, head of the delegation overseeing Haj companies, said that the Omani Haj Mission visited the premises of the Haj companies in Mecca to check for the quality of services provided to the pilgrims.

He affirmed that the members of the Omani Haj Mission are working around the clock to ensure that the pilgrims perform the Haj rituals seamlessly.

Meanwhile, the Military Haj Mission arrived in Mecca from Medina, on Saturday. The mission is accompanied by an administrative team tasked with providing services to the pilgrims.

The Saudi Ministry of Interior and leaders of the Haj security forces on Friday gave details of their security, traffic and organisational plans for this year's Haj season, and said that all preparations have been completed. Saudi Arabia's Minister of Haj and Umrah Tawfiq al Rabiah says the cost of the pilgrimage this year has dropped 39 per cent for 1.4 million pilgrims arriving from



A pilgrim prays during a visit to Mount Al Noor in the holy city of Mecca on Sunday. – **Reuters**

outside the Kingdom. Al Rabiah added that there has been a considerable upgrade in services this year as the numbers of pilgrims return to pre-Covid-19 levels. "The cost of Haj has decreased, and Haj packages have decreased by 39 per cent for pilgrims outside the Kingdom, benefiting more than 1.4 million... and we will see better services because of the nature of competition that helps enhance quality and reduce prices," he said last week.

More than 2 million pilgrims are expected to take part in the

biggest Haj pilgrimage in years — a dramatic increase on the 926,000 from last year, when numbers were capped at one million following the Covid-19 pandemic. Pilgrims in white robes and sandals packed the ancient city, now dotted with luxury hotels and air-conditioned shopping malls, after flooding in on planes, buses and trains for the annual rites. About 1.5 million pilgrims from abroad had already arrived by Wednesday evening, Saudi authorities have said.

— **ONA and agencies**

SEE ALSO P2



Riders thrill with skills

Sixth Dhul Hijjah Festival for horse and camel sports was held in Bidiya on Saturday. Horse and camel owners from Al Sharqiyah North and South governorates took part. – **ONA**

Russian mercenaries agree to turn back

ROSTOV-ON-DON/VORONEZH: Mutinous Russian mercenary fighters who surged most of the way to Moscow have agreed to turn back to avoid bloodshed, their leader said on Saturday, in a de-escalation of what had become a major challenge to President Vladimir Putin's grip on power.

The fighters of the Wagner private army run by former Putin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin were already most of the way to the capital, having captured the city of Rostov and set off on an 1,100 km (680 mile) race to Moscow.

In an audio message, Prigozhin said the fighters would return to base because of the risk of blood being spilled.

A deal to halt further movement of Wagner fighters across Russia in return for guarantees of safety for the rebels was brokered by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, his office said.

Earlier, Prigozhin said his men were on a "march for justice" to remove corrupt and incompetent Russian commanders he blames for botching the war in Ukraine.



A member of Wagner group stands guard in a street in the city of Rostov-on-Don, on Saturday. – **AFP**

In a televised address from the Kremlin, Putin said Russia's very existence was under threat. "We are fighting for the lives and security of our people, for our sovereignty and independence, for the right to remain

Russia, a state with a thousand-year history," he said.

"All those who deliberately stepped on the path of betrayal, who prepared an armed insurrection, who took the path of blackmail and terrorist methods, will suffer inevitable punishment, will answer both to the law and to our people."

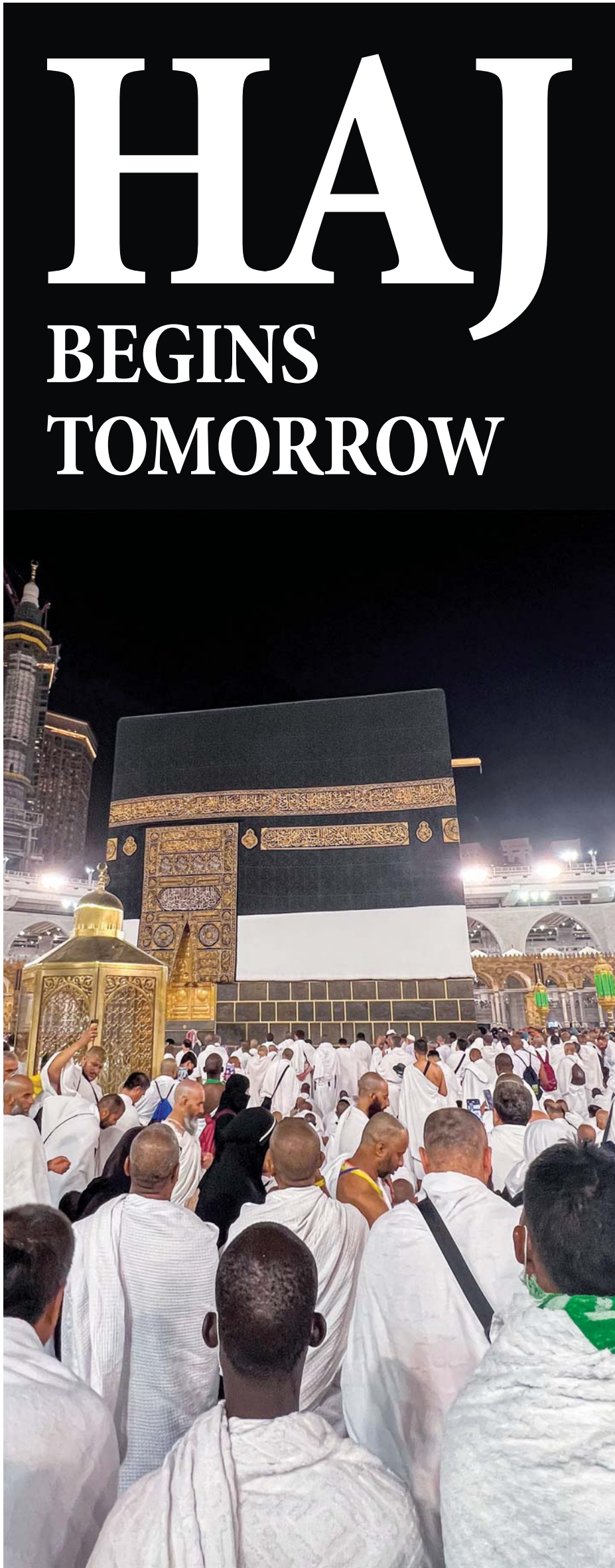
Putin later signed a law tightening rules for breaking martial law in places where it has been imposed, the RIA news agency said.

Video obtained by Reuters showed troop carriers and two flatbed trucks each carrying a tank driving 30 miles (50 km) beyond Voronezh, more than half way to Moscow, where a helicopter fired on them.

Prigozhin, whose private army fought the bloodiest battles in Ukraine even as he feuded for months with the military top brass, said he had captured the headquarters of Russia's Southern Military District in the city of Rostov without firing a shot.

Rostov serves as the main rear logistical hub for Russia's entire invasion force in Ukraine. — **Reuters**

EARLIER REPORT ON P6



KABEER YOUSUF
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Nearly 2 million people from across the world are gathering in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to perform the rituals of this year's Haj which will begin on Monday. This will be followed by Day of Arafah on June 27 while Eid al Adha will be celebrated in the Arab region including Oman and Saudi on Wednesday, June 28.

Haj is an annual pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia and one of the five pillars of Islam. It is a significant religious duty for Muslims and is considered one of the most important acts of worship in Islam.

This year, around 14,000 pilgrims comprising both citizens and expatriates from the Sultanate of Oman are in the holy land to perform Haj, corresponding to the Dul Hijjah 1444 AH, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Out of the total, as many as 250 are Arabs residing in Oman while the remaining 250 are non-Arab residents and as many as 700 opportunities were allocated to serve them for Haj and Umrah companies, at a rate of 5 per cent of the number of pilgrims for each company.

In order to make the Haj procedures hassle-free and safe, the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued some set of health recommendations for pilgrims, general health advice and guidelines for those who perform Haj.

WHO has developed a list of recommendations that every pilgrim should follow, which are consistent with the health requirements set by the health authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for those arriving during the Haj season this year.

It recommends that the countries from which pilgrims come take into account the existence of a minimum level of physical capacity for the pilgrims. It also warns of the high risk



The last groups of pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman departed to the holy lands on Saturday. – ONA

of infection with infectious diseases in the elderly and severe cases of chronic diseases such as advanced cancers, heart diseases, respiratory diseases, liver, kidneys, or aging.

It also recommends those coming for Haj and those with chronic diseases to bring evidence of their health status and the medicines they take, and to bring a sufficient amount of these medicines in their original packaging.

Haj involves several rituals and ceremonies that are performed over a period of several days including intention. It is the intention that defines the cause of the deed and it holds great role. It also involves Ihram which is

the first step as the pilgrimage begins with entering the state of Ihram. Ihram in simple words is the act of wearing two white seamless sheets for men, and modest attire for women and entering a state of consecration and purity.

There is also gathering at Mount Arafat where all the pilgrims are supposed to gather on the 9th day of the Islamic month of Dhul Hijjah. They spend the day in prayer and supplication, seeking forgiveness and mercy from Allah.

Once Arafah gathering is over, pilgrims will then proceed to Muzdalifah at night where they spend the night in open areas and engage in prayers and

remembrance of Allah.

Pilgrims then return to Mina and participate in the ritual of stoning three pillars that represent Satan. This act is to symbolise the rejection of evil temptations. The second last step in the whole process is to perform an animal sacrifice. This is to commemorate the willingness of Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to Allah.

After completing the stoning ritual, pilgrims perform another Tawaf around the Kaaba in Mecca. Pilgrims will then perform a final Tawaf called the Farewell Tawaf as a way of bidding farewell to the Kaaba before leaving Mecca.

Oman in finals at 2023 Berlin Special Olympics World Summer Games

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Berlin witnessed the remarkable participation of Oman, in the 16th edition of the World Summer Games of Special Olympics 2023 whose team in Futsal has qualified for the final round of the group and will face Pakistan on Sunday (today).

“The objective of the games is to achieve greater recognition and social participation of people with intellectual disabilities in our society,” stated Special Olympics, World Games, Berlin 2023.

The Summer Games in Berlin has 36 athletes from Oman competing in various sports.

When Zaid bin Ahmed al Jabri was a panelist at the press conference announcing Oman's participation at Summer World Games at Berlin 2023, he showed a cool confidence.

Today he has the same attitude wearing his gold medal as he won in Golf at World Games Berlin 2023.

Discipline and hard work



paid off, but was not quite so easy, said Zaid's father, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Jabri. “It was a tough game and Zaid was a bit nervous while facing his opponents, judges and people surrounding him, but with Allah's grace he did well on second and third day. The final day was very good for him. This has given him tremendous experience. As parents we would like Zaid to continue with Golf and provide him further training so he can participate in more national and international competitions. He is at the moment very excited and I am proud of what he has



achieved.” Parents have been excited watching their children participate and win leaving behind any thoughts on disabilities. Since the games began on June 17, Oman Special Olympics Team



has won 20 medals in total - four gold medals, four silver medals and 12 bronze.

The latest two gold medals have been won by Deema al Raisi and Ameera al Raisi. Mulook al Yahyai won gold in roller skating and

Mashal al Amri won gold in 50m swimming race.

Thuraiya al Shibani won silver in athletics and Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Azizi won bronze for men in the same field.

Mohammed al Siyabi and Haitham al Mandari won silver in table tennis.

Shadia al Shukaili won the bronze medal in the long jump category as part of the intense competitions. Mohammed al Mukhaini was recognised for his distinguished performance for different competitions in weightlifting and is bringing home three bronze medals. Abdulaziz al

Balushi won four bronze medals in weightlifting.

Hammam al Rowas won bronze in roller skating, Fatma al Harthi also won bronze in equestrian. The badminton team consisting of Khalid al Marhoon and Ajman Bait Maqas claimed bronze.

The World Games achieved what it set out for and on June 24 major events came to a conclusion. On June 25, the finals will see Oman Team at Futsal.

Mark Solomeyer, National Athlete Leader and Special Olympics Germany Vice-President, had stated, “We want to welcome people from all over the world to Berlin. We want to show through the spirit of sport how invaluable inclusion can be for everyone, and how much fun and joy we can have together.” And the players did just that as they also experienced playing with unified teams, spirit of winning and losing, being exposed to different cultures and international audience and most importantly, inclusion.



Omani start-up delegation reviews Swiss experiences

GENEVA: The delegation accompanying HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of Promising Omani Start-ups Programme, completed visits to Swiss institutions and specialised centres.

The delegation members visited Novartis pharmaceutical corporation and Roche healthcare company where they were acquainted with the working mechanisms and advanced technologies utilised by both companies.

It is noteworthy that Novartis has legal representation in 140 countries around the world including an office in the Sultanate of Oman.

The delegation members and the company's officials discussed ways of establishing



data processing clusters and ways of attracting investors to this field. The company confirmed

its commitment to enhance its investments in the Sultanate of Oman and to provide training

programmes and scholarships for Omanis. The company affirmed its readiness to boost cooperation with a number of private healthcare institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

An invitation was extended to the company's officials to visit the Sultanate of Oman to conduct workshops on pharmaceutical industry and to activate cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

The delegation also held a meeting with the officials from Seedstars company, one of the world's leading institutions in supporting emerging companies through business accelerators. The delegation members held discussion on ways of cooperation with the Promising Omani Start-ups Programme. — ONA

INSPECTION CAMPAIGNS REGULATE LABOUR MARKET



MUSCAT: As many as 4,149 inspection campaigns were carried out by the Ministry of Labour in different parts of Oman since the beginning of 2023 as part of efforts to implement the provisions of the Labour Law and regulate the labour market.

The campaigns unearthed violations in different governorates of Oman as follows: 2,066 in the Governorate of Muscat, 12 in the Governorate of Al Buraimi, 342 in the Governorate of South Al Batinah, 458 in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, 174 in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah,

156 in the Governorate of Dhofar, 265 in the Governorate of North Al Batinah, 474 in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah, 48 in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah and 154 in Al Wusta Governorate.

These campaigns reflected positively in curbing illegal practices, regulating the labour market and removing illegal manpower.

It is worth noting that similar inspection campaigns are carried out jointly with different government departments like municipalities, the Ministry of Education and the Royal Oman Police. — ONA

Future Tech event to showcase local talents with global expertise

KABEER YOUSUF
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Tech-savvy people will have an opportunity to witness the latest technological know-how at Future Tech, which is scheduled to take place on November 27 and 28 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The platform will showcase the true potential of the Omani youths in areas like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data and 4IR, along with their global counterparts.

The 3rd Future Tech, the Sultanate of Oman's B2B and B2G bespoke technology event, will also offer networking opportunities for C-Level executives, leading industry experts, policymakers and government officials from different sectors.

"It is a definitive meeting place facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue with a power-packed line of panellists from various sectors," Ulrika Varela, Project Director, told the *Observer*.

The panellists will hold brainstorming sessions on the value chain to foster collaboration, discuss current challenges and business opportunities, develop market strategies, share knowledge and identify solutions shaping the future of technology.

Future Tech event will feature an expansive line-up of stellar speakers, case studies, panel discussions and unique presentations, providing access to industry-leading knowledge, sharing best practices and experiences, spotlighting trends, information exchange, insights and outlooks with actionable takeaways.

The event will feature a comprehensive B2B Expo showcasing an array of avant-garde solutions, specific, transverse, latest technologies, cutting edge innovation, unique launches, cost-effective products, services and solutions that are customised to adapt to the given demands across all sectors.

"We have diverse and cost-



effective packages to ensure your participation with assured ROI, including speaking slots and exhibition booths to create a strong impact and presence at the event," she adds.

The event is organised in line with Oman Vision 2040 Digital Transformation, which is expected to play an integral role, boost and nearly double to RO 2.2 billion (\$5.6 billion) by 2024, up from RO 1.2 billion (\$3.2 billion) in 2019, according to a recent report by the market research firm Global Data.

The expansive line-up of stellar speakers include Dr Margarete Schramboeck, Board Member of Aramco Digital, International Strategic Adviser and CEO of MSCH Management, and former minister of Digital and Economic Affairs, Austria, Aramco Digital, MSCH Management; Ahmed Halabi, Managing Director, (MENA) Resecurity, and Tim Phillips, Managing Director, (Middle East and Asia).

Smart case studies, panel discussions and unique presentations providing access to industry-leading knowledge, sharing best practices and experiences, spotlighting trends, information exchange, insights and outlooks with actionable takeaways are the highlights of the 2-day event.

Also, more than 250 senior leaders and decision-makers (C Level and CISOs) responsible for or influencing IT and Technology strategy at their organisations will be present at the Future Tech event, besides an eminent line-up of 1,000 industry experts, decision-makers, technologists, entrepreneurs and investors.

Turtle reserve gears up for Eid al Adha holidays

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

The Turtle reserve management is preparing to welcome tourists during the Eid al Adha holidays. With the peak of the turtle nesting season in the Ras al Hadd area coinciding with the Eid holiday, the reserve expects a significant increase in tourist numbers.

Located on a vast 120-square-kilometre area, the Turtle Reserve in Ras al Hadd is renowned as one of the most captivating tourist attractions in the Sultanate of Oman. It serves as a home to over 20,000 turtles, predominantly green turtles.

Established in 1996, the reserve's primary objective is the conservation of turtle species that inhabit the Arabian Gulf, as well as those migrating to the coasts of the Sea of Oman from the Arabian

Gulf, Red Sea, and Somalia. It stands as one of the world's largest nesting sites for the endangered green sea turtle. Each year, tens of thousands of turtles migrate to this region, laying an impressive number of eggs.

A highlight for visitors at the reserve is observing turtles laying their eggs. The reserve management organises two tours daily, in the evening and morning, with experienced guides specialising in marine life protection. These visits provide a unique opportunity to witness sea turtles in their natural habitats as they lay their eggs.

Ras al Jinz Turtle Reserve captivates tourists from around the globe. Official statistics reveal that the average number of visitors on regular days ranges between 300 and 500, while during official holidays, the count reaches 700 visitors.

Apart from the sea turtle encounters, the reserve offers the



chance to enjoy its pristine sandy beaches. Upon arrival, guests are provided with guidelines and regulations that must be followed, including not using excessive lighting or loud noises and refraining from littering.

Visitors eagerly await the morning tour, commencing at five o'clock. This tour offers the breathtaking sight of sunrise, as this region is recognised as the first area where the sun rises in the Middle East. It presents tourists with the opportunity to capture beautiful memories through photographs and create unforgettable moments.

During a visit to the reserve, visitors may also spot dolphins and seabirds that frequent the coasts of this region from time to time.

Established in 2008, the Museum of the Scientific Center of the Turtle Reserve is a state-of-the-art science museum that provides comprehensive information about turtles and their life cycle. The museum features cutting-

edge technology and offers scientific presentations in multiple languages, including Arabic, German, and English.

Additionally, the museum showcases a three-dimensional screen that explains the history of the reserve's location, highlights the significant crafts practiced by the region's residents, and exhibits important archaeological findings. Notably, the museum houses a model of the Majan civilisation boat, constructed entirely from sugar cane.

Ras al Jinz, a fishing village situated within the Ras al Hadd Turtle Reserve on the eastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula, boasts a world-renowned beach known for the nesting endangered green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). It is considered the most vital nesting concentration in the Indian Ocean. This location provides the public with a unique opportunity to observe the nesting process of these extraordinary sea giants.



TRUCKS CONTINUE TO IMPACT TRAFFIC FLOW



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

In spite of stringent regulations prohibiting traffic during peak hours, a number of truck drivers persist in violating such laws, leading to traffic disruptions and safety concerns.

The authorities implemented intensive traffic campaigns and strict penalties but there has been a rising number of violations by truck drivers. They include lane deviation, excessive speeding, failure to yield the right of way and sudden manoeuvres.

All these endanger the lives of truck drivers and others on the road. Furthermore, similar behaviours are observed among bus drivers, displaying a disregard for the safety of passengers and fellow road users.

Saif al Raisi told the *Observer* that the issue of truck-induced congestion persists during peak hours. He however noted a decrease in the severity of the problem due to awareness campaigns and the ROP's concerted efforts to educate and enforce traffic laws.

"The fear of substantial fines has played a significant role in ensuring compliance among some drivers," he said.

"We know that Oman is witnessing a great urban development and it needs the speedy completion of such projects. Therefore, many construction projects and sites require the entry of trucks due to the continuation of the construction process and the completion of projects. For that, some truck drivers are given the necessary permits to use the roads," he added.

Al Raisi suggested that the situation may improve further if they can reduce the number of these trucks during peak hours to facilitate traffic.

Abdullah al Amri emphasised that trucks and buses often engage in reckless driving behaviours, including speeding and failure to adhere to designated lanes. He advocated for an increase in the number of traffic patrols and the use of surveillance cameras at traffic lights to record and penalise violators.

He emphasised that the presence of trucks during peak hours contributes to traffic confusion and congestion. "Moreover, noncompliance of truckload regulations, particularly when carrying excessive weights such as building materials, negatively impacts the lifespan of the roads," he said.

According to Al Amri, one of the finest things that motorists can do to take an active part is to call the ROP and report infractions by trucks. He emphasised the significance of obeying traffic laws and giving other vehicles the right of way to other road users.

While a comprehensive strategy is needed to address the ongoing truck-related congestion problem, stricter enforcement, public involvement and increased cooperation amongst pertinent authorities should all be part of such strategy.



Recall Date: 25-06-2023

KIA
CARNIVAL – KA4

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
KIA CARNIVAL - KA4	2021-2023	71

Recall consequence

On some Carnival (KA4) of 2021-2023MY produced within specific production date range provided in TSB, the power sliding door (PSD) auto-reverse feature in the subject vehicles is a supplemental feature and may not activate in all situations. Kia has become aware of a small number of injuries during closure of the PSD. Although a cause related to a manufacturing or design issue has not been identified, Kia believes the cause of injuries may be associated with customers' unawareness that the PSD is closing.

Recall Action

Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list, Upgrade Software process - PSD operation logic improvement, the updated software of PSD Module adds two (2) warning chimes when the power sliding door begins to open or close. The updated software will also change the door speed to move more slowly as the door approaches its latching point. All affected vehicles will be inspected and repaired at no expense to the vehicle owner.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>



Reliable International Automotive LLC
C.R. 1707183
Contact details: Toll free - 80073222
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:30 - 17:30 hrs.





Oman shares its experience on counterterrorism in New York



NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman outlined its experience in tolerance, coexistence and combating terrorism at the third UN counterterrorism week (CT Week) being held in New York.

Oman's event was titled 'Towards a Society Free of Terrorism: The Omani Experience in Combating Terrorism and Extremism'.

During the event, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Ma'amari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, presented a paper themed 'Peaceful Coexistence in order to Promote Tolerance and Mutual Respect to Combat Terrorism'.

The paper dealt with Oman's policy on international relations, which is typically

based on peaceful coexistence among nations and peoples, good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and respect for the sovereignty of states.

The paper also underlined Oman's contributions to resolving disputes by peaceful means.

In a similar gesture, Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, presented a paper entitled 'The Omani Experience in Combating Extremism and Terrorism'.

The paper highlighted the salient features of Oman's national strategy on combating terrorism. It unveiled the measures

undertaken by Oman to protect society from extremism and terrorism, as well as efforts exerted by the country in combating terrorism and terrorism financing in the domestic and international arenas.

Organised by the National Counter-Terrorism Committee in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the event was held under the auspices of Vladimir Voronkov, Under Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism at the UN Office. It was attended by Miguel Moratinos, UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations, heads of states and representatives of permanent missions accredited to the United Nations in New York. — ONA

Summer recreation activities lined up in North Al Batinah

SIHAM AL SAIDI
BATINAH, JUNE 24

As the summer heat embraces North Al Batinah Governorate, the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth has come out with an impressive line-up of activities to engage and entertain residents and visitors alike. With a focus on fostering community spirit and promoting an active lifestyle, these events help to make the summer an unforgettable experience for all participants.

From sports enthusiasts to culture aficionados, there is something for everyone in the diverse range of activities organised by the directorate.

Whether participants are passionate athletes or simply enjoy staying active, the sports events will cater to the interests of all. The programme includes thrilling ball championships, robotics, programming and other art and cultural works.

The programme takes place in the General Directorate of Sports facilities and will continue for five weeks for both males and females. During these weeks, the participants will choose to join only one of these cultural and artistic weeks. These weeks include workshops in the cultural and artistic field, including a workshop on artificial intelligence and painting with acrylic techniques, the art of resin and many other cultural and artistic activities.

For men, there are activities like futsal, swimming, karate and basketball, while for female activities, handball, basketball and badminton are there.

The 'Ajyal Summer Centre'



also includes the Children's Summer Centre, which offers a range of activities and interactive programmes for children of different ages. These events aim to promote healthy competition, teamwork and physical fitness while fostering a sense of camaraderie among participants and spectators.

The programme aims to provide the participants with skills that enable them to play roles in society and refine their capabilities in achieving the goals of sustainable development.



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No.	82/2023/ MHT/HQ-16	Tender Name	Restoration of Al Helal Fort at AL Suwaiq - North AL Batinah Governorate
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	16/07/2023		
Last Date for Bid Submission	9/08/2023		
Grade	Third		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.
 - The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-188/2021/RECALL-2	Replacement of Main Water Purification Unit Reverse Osmosis (RO) at Haima Hospital in Governorate of Al Wusta	6/7/2023	2/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent, First & Second Grade	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-191/2023	Supply of Surgical Items (Consumables)	29/6/2023	19/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-192/2023	Supply of Surgical Items (Shoulder Arthroscopy)	29/6/2023	19/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-193/2023	Supplying of equipment to Restructure Network and Telecommunication Room at Directorate General of Information Technology	29/6/2023	19/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-194/2023	Supply and Installation of Fundus Camera for Retinopathy Screenings for Diabetic at Various Health Establishments	29/6/2023	5/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-195/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for New Central Public Health Laboratory	6/7/2023	26/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	100/= Per set
MOH/HQ-196/2023	Supply of Surgical Items for The Royal Hospital	6/7/2023	26/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-197/2023	Construction of Khasab Medical Store in the Governorate of Musandam	6/7/2023	9/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent Grade	172/300 Per set
MOH/HQ-198/2023	Supply of Surgical Items (Shoulder Arthroscopy)	6/7/2023	26/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-201/2023	Supply Hewlett Packard Enterprise Synergy Compute Node Memory For DGIT	6/7/2023	12/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-202/2023	Supply and Install CCTV IP System for Higher Medical Committee in Madinat Sultan Qaboos at Muscat Governorate	6/7/2023	26/7/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent Grade	25/= Per set
MOH/HQ-203/2023	Replacement of Electrical Switch for The Royal Hospital	6/7/2023	2/8/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent Grade	25/= Per set

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



World closely watches with concern as Wagner mutiny unfolds in Russia

PARIS: Countries around the world were on Saturday closely watching events unfolding in Russia, where a mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group posed the most serious challenge yet to President Vladimir Putin's long rule. Governments and analysts are saying about the extraordinary situation taking place in nuclear-armed Russia.

The US President Joe Biden was briefed on the situation in Russia and Washington and "will be consulting with allies and partners on these developments", National Security Council spokesman Adam Hodge said.

European Union chief Charles Michel tweeted that the bloc was "closely monitoring the situation in Russia as it unfolds. In touch with European leaders and G7 partners."

"This is clearly an internal Russian issue," he wrote, adding that "our support for Ukraine" remains "unwavering".

The bloc's diplomatic chief Josep Borrell said the EU was in "permanent contact with our ambassador in Moscow and continuing our internal consultations with our member states."

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urged "all parties to



Members of Wagner group sit atop of a tank in a street in the city of Rostov-on-Don. — AFP

be responsible and to protect civilians."

"We're in touch with our allies

as the situation evolves. I'll be speaking to some of them later today and the most important

thing is for all parties to behave responsibly," he said.

The Austrian Chancellor Karl

Nehammer, who has met Putin since the launch of the Ukraine war, warned of the nuclear risks of

the instability in Russia.

"The operations of the Russian Federations are always of the utmost importance, because the Russian Federation has a great potential for biological, chemical and nuclear weapons," he said.

The EU's Borrell announced that foreign affairs ministers of the G7 nations held a call to "exchange views" on the situation on Saturday.

Borrell didn't provide details of the exchange in his tweet, which Berlin also confirmed, saying German Foreign Affairs Minister Annalena Baerbock "just discussed the situation" with her G7 counterparts.

The UK Ministry of Defence said in an intelligence update that "this represents the most significant challenge to the Russian state in recent times."

"Over the coming hours, the loyalty of Russia's security forces, and especially the Russian National Guard, will be key to how the crisis plays out," it said.

The US-based Institute for the Study of War said the armed rebellion was "unlikely to succeed" but that "an armed Wagner attack against the Russian military leadership in Rostov-on-Don would have significant impacts on Russia's war effort in Ukraine."

— AFP

Russian helicopters battle rebel mercenaries rolling towards Moscow

ROSTOV-ON-DON: Russian military helicopters opened fire on Saturday afternoon on a convoy of rebel mercenaries already more than half way towards Moscow in a lightning advance after seizing a southern city overnight. Fighters from Yevgeny Prigozhin's private Wagner militia were in control of Rostov-on-Don, a city of more than a million people close to the border with Ukraine, and were rapidly advancing northwards through western Russia.

Army helicopters were seen open fire at an armed Wagner column that was advancing past the city of Voronezh with troop carriers and at least one tank on a flatbed truck. The city is more than half way along the 1,100-km highway from Rostov to Moscow.

Prigozhin, whose private army fought the bloodiest battles in



Fighters of Wagner private mercenary group are deployed in a street near the headquarters of the Southern Military District in the city of Rostov-on-Don. — Reuters

Ukraine even as he feuded for months with the top brass, said he had captured the headquarters of Russia's Southern Military District in Rostov after leading his forces into Russia from Ukraine.

In Rostov, which serves as the main rear logistical hub for Russia's entire force, residents milled about, filming on mobile

phones, as Wagner fighters in armoured vehicles and battle tanks took up positions.

One tank was wedged between stucco buildings with posters advertising the circus. Another had "Siberia" daubed in red paint across the front, a clear statement of intent to sweep across the breadth of Russia. — Reuters

Putin slams 'treason' as forces tackle Wagner revolt

MOSCOW: As rebel mercenaries advance north towards Moscow after seizing a key military base on Saturday, Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin's vowed to defeat the revolt and head off the threat of civil war.

Putin's spokesman insisted the Russian leader was still at work in the Kremlin and had not fled Moscow, as regular forces launched a "counter-terrorist operation" to halt the rebel advance in the Voronezh region, on the Wagner force's route to the capital.

The governor of the Lipetsk region, whose capital is just 420 kilometres south of Moscow, said Wagner's private military force was "moving across" the territory and urged civilians not to leave their homes.

Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, once a close Putin ally, said his troops had taken control of the military command centre and airbase in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, the nerve centre of Russia's offensive in Ukraine, and vowed to topple Moscow's top military leaders.

"We got to Rostov. Without a single shot we



Russian President Vladimir Putin gives a televised address in Moscow, Russia. — Reuters

captured the HQ building," he said, in an audio message on social media channels, claiming that local civilians had welcomed the operation.

"Why does the country support us? Because we went on a march of justice," he said, claiming his men had not killed any soldiers despite having been hit with strikes from army "artillery and after that from helicopters". — AFP

GENEVA

UN urges action to stop 'wanton killings'

The United Nations called on Saturday for immediate action to stop "wanton killings" of people fleeing El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state.

The deadliest violence has raged in Darfur, where the United Nations has warned the conflict has taken an "ethnic dimension".

"We are gravely concerned that such wanton killings are ongoing and urge immediate action to halt them," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina



Shamdasani said. "People fleeing El Geneina must be guaranteed safe passage and humanitarian agencies allowed to access to the area to collect the remains of those killed," she added. — AFP

BEIJING

4 arrested over blast that killed 31

Chinese police arrested four people on Saturday linked to a restaurant explosion that killed dozens, state media reported.

At least 31 people were killed and seven others injured when a gas explosion ripped through a barbecue restaurant in the northwestern city of Yinchuan on Wednesday. The suspects included the restaurant owner, two shareholders and the manager, state news agency Xinhua reported.

They were arrested for



allegedly "causing a serious accident through negligence" and a criminal investigation was under way, Xinhua said.

The local public security bureau had frozen the assets of nine individuals, it added. — AFP

JERUSALEM

Israel forces kill Palestinian at checkpoint

Israeli forces on Saturday killed a Palestinian who opened fire on a checkpoint north of Jerusalem, police said while a Palestinian militant group claimed the attack.

Israeli police said a "suspect opened fire at the security forces operating at the Qalandia crossing."

"The security forces operating at the crossing engaged the threat by returning fire. The death of the attacker was later determined at the scene," a police statement



said. The Qalandia checkpoint is the main gateway used by Palestinians between annexed east Jerusalem and Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank.

— AFP

Biden seeks to bolster ties with Modi while soft-pedaling differences



Peter Baker

The writer is the chief White House correspondent for The New York Times.

President Joe Biden emphasised common ground with Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India during a lavish state visit, publicly skirting points of friction over the government's crackdown on human rights in India and Russia's war in Ukraine in hopes of bolstering economic and geopolitical ties with the world's most populous nation.

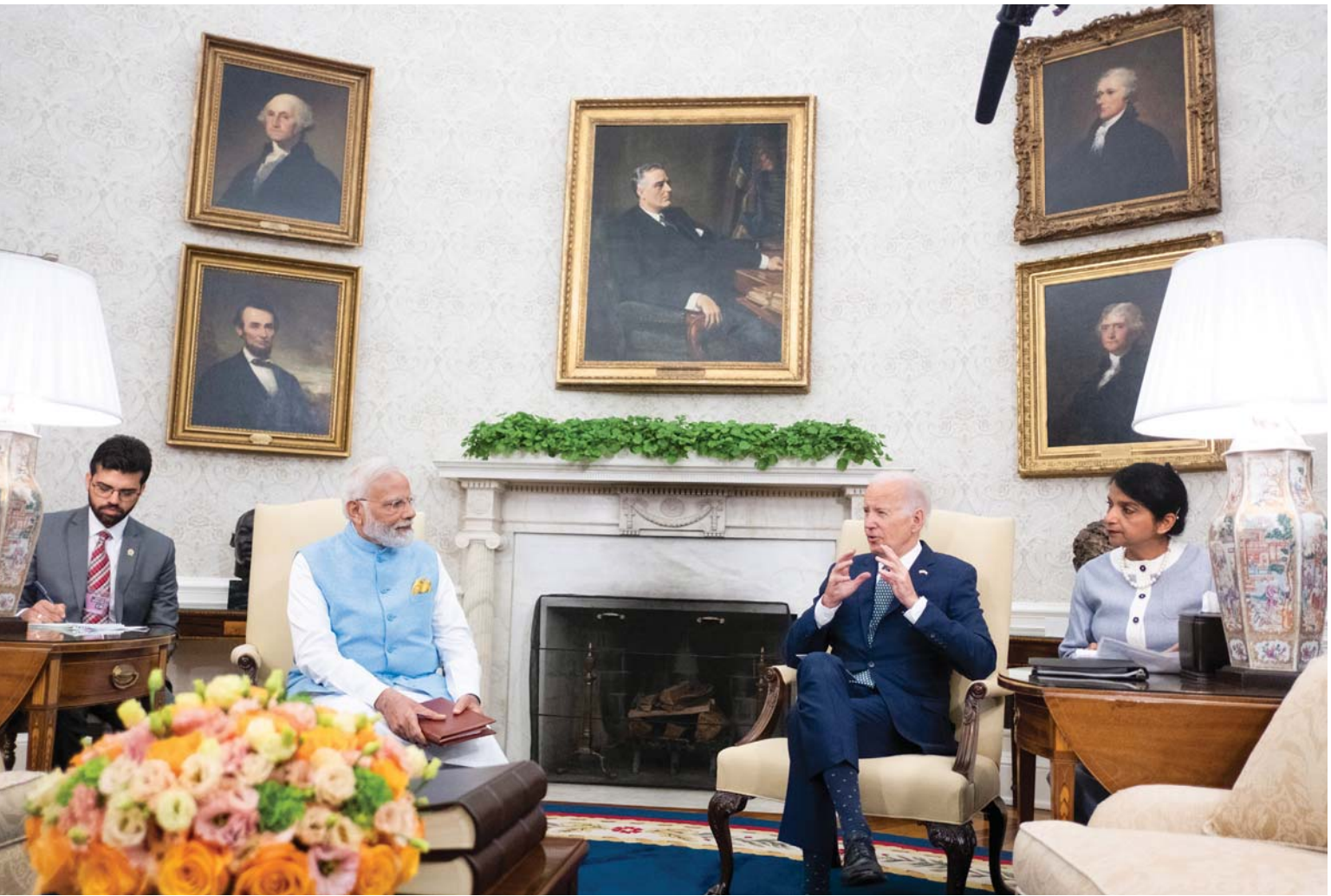
Biden treated Modi to a day of red-carpet pageantry and showered him with expansive flattery as he sought to draw India closer at a time when the United States finds itself locked in open conflict with Moscow and in an uneasy standoff with China. But even as the leaders announced a range of initiatives, they made no evident progress resolving the disagreements that have strained the relationship in recent months.

The visit's most surprising breakthrough was a modest if notable one as Biden coaxed Modi into taking questions from reporters at a joint news conference, one of the rare times the nationalist prime minister has done so in his nearly decadelong tenure. Challenged on his record on human rights and freedom, Modi insisted that democracy is "in India's DNA" and denied that his government has fostered prejudice in serving its people.

"Democracy is our spirit. Democracy runs in our veins. We live democracy," Modi said as Biden watched in the East Room of the White House. "In India's democratic values, there's absolutely no discrimination neither on basis of caste, creed or age, or any kind of geographic location," Modi added, even as demonstrators outside the White House gates protested the crackdown on dissent back in India.

Although Biden shied away from criticism of India's democratic backsliding, he stood by his characterisation of Chinese President Xi Jinping during a campaign fundraiser this week. Avoiding "the facts with regard to" China, he told reporters, "is just not something I'm going to change very much." But he shrugged off the protests from Beijing, saying he still expected to meet with Xi later this year despite his remark. "I don't think it's had any real consequence."

In cultivating Modi, Biden put aside his language about "democracy versus autocracy" being the defining struggle of his time. In his welcome remarks and the later appearance before reporters, Biden



Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and President Joe Biden during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, June 22.

described the two countries as fellow democracies committed to universal values without directly mentioning the increasing suppression of minority groups and opposition voices in India.

In their moments before cameras together, Biden pronounced America's partnership with India "the most consequential in the world."

Modi offered no indication that he had changed his mind about Russia or China, much less about human rights at home. Indeed, during an address to a joint session of Congress after meeting with Biden, Modi avoided even using the words "Russia" and "China," sticking to passive formulations.

"With the Ukraine conflict, war has returned to Europe," he said, without saying who started the war. And he warned of "dark clouds of coercion and confrontation" that are "casting their shadow in the Indo-Pacific" without saying who was doing the coercing or the confronting.

Among other things, Modi pointedly noted that his country has grown from the world's 10th-largest economy when he last addressed Congress in 2016 to the

fifth largest today, almost as if determined to force the United States to see India as a near equal, not just an emerging power, but a great and rising one.

To mark their ties, the two leaders rolled out a long list of joint initiatives on telecommunications, semiconductors, artificial intelligence and other areas. Modi agreed to sign the Artemis Accords, a set of principles governing peaceful exploration of the moon, Mars and other celestial bodies, and the two announced a joint mission to the International Space Station in 2024. The United States and India will open additional consulates in each other's country.

Among the most concrete agreements highlighted on Thursday was a deal between General Electric and the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited to manufacture in India F414 engines used to power the Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet. The two sides also announced that India would proceed with a long-stalled \$3 billion purchase of MQ-9B Predator drones from General Atomics.

The military hardware sales may help wean India off Russian arms suppliers. Biden administration officials suggested

the meeting was just one step in an evolution of India's stance on the Ukraine war, part of what they characterised as "bending the arc of India's engagement."

But Modi again stressed the need for "dialogue and diplomacy," adding that "we are completely ready to contribute in any way we can to restore peace," without condemning Russia's unprovoked attack of a neighbouring country.

Biden made no effort in public to pressure Modi on the matter. Instead, he concentrated on cementing bonds, pointing to the prevalence of Indian Americans in prominent positions in Washington. "We see it here at the White House where proud Americans of Indian heritage serve our country every day — including our vice president of the United States, Kamala Harris," he said, turning to Harris standing off to the side.

Harris, who will host Modi for lunch on Friday, traces her Indian background to her mother, who emigrated to the United States as a teenager. Biden cited the story of "a family like so many of ours in our nation that speaks to the thousands of stories of determination, courage and hope."

In their moments before cameras together, Biden pronounced America's partnership with India "the most consequential in the world."

Jails officer faked suicide prevention training for 74 guards



Jonah E. Bromwich

The writer covers criminal justice in New York.



Hurubie-Mako

The writer worked as a gun violence reporter at The Kansas City Star.

Amid a suicide crisis in New York City's jails, a correction officer falsified records to show that scores of her peers had taken a suicide prevention course that they had not actually completed, Bronx prosecutors and the Department of Investigation said.

The Rikers Island officer, Vinette Tucker-Frederick, was said by the Bronx district attorney's office to have awarded credit for the course to 74 officers who were on leave in 2021. She gave their login information to colleagues and told them to take the digital training in the place of the absent officers, prosecutors said.

The Bronx district attorney, Darcel Clark, said

in a statement that Tucker-Frederick's directions had resulted in the officers' receiving credit "despite the fact that they weren't even on Rikers Island."

A nine-year veteran of the Department of Correction, Tucker-Frederick, 41, was charged with tampering with public records and identity theft, and has been suspended indefinitely without pay. Her lawyer, Peter C. Troxler, said she "adamantly maintains her innocence and has every expectation of being exonerated."

The acts described by prosecutors came as the department was under pressure to remedy the growing crisis of suicide among incarcerated people, Clark said. At least 13 people are thought to have killed themselves in the jails since the beginning of 2021.

The rash of suicides that year coincided with mass absenteeism among correction officers that sent the long-troubled jail complex on Rikers Island into a spiral of violence and chaos. Without guards in key posts, conditions sharply deteriorated; New York lawmakers who visited described what they saw as a humanitarian crisis.

Rates of self-harm rose precipitously at that time. In August 2021, the court-appointed monitor who oversees conditions at Rikers, Steve J. Martin, wrote that there had been four suicides since December 2020 and expressed concern about "the adequacy of staff's response." Staff members acted slowly to confront emergencies, he noted.

Louis A. Molina, commissioner of the Department of



Rikers Island jail complex, seen from the Bronx borough of New York.

Recent reports from the federal monitor have taken direct aim at the agency's leaders, saying that violence within the city's jails is unabated.

Correction, said on Friday that jail officials are working to improve conditions, and that corruption is unacceptable.

According to the department, all uniformed staff are trained in suicide prevention upon joining, and 68 per cent had received a refresher course, up from 37 per cent on Jan. 1. "This act was the kind of egregious behaviour that was tolerated in the past and has no place in this administration," Molina said in a statement. "Suicide prevention training is critical for any public safety organisation and especially for a correctional facility. We continue to push this important training to all of our employees and will hold everyone accountable."

Clark, who is in a primary race against Tess Cohen, who has been critical of her oversight of Rikers, has announced three indictments related to the jail complex in recent days. Clark's office indicted a former correction officer who is charged with accepting a \$2,500 bribe to smuggle a cell phone to a detainee. It also charged four detainees with brutally beating another incarcerated person, lacerating his spleen, which needed to be removed.

Though Friday's charges cover events said to have taken place during the last administration, the Department of Correction has continued to be criticised for lacking transparency. Recent reports from the federal monitor, Martin, have taken direct aim at the agency's leaders, saying that violence within the city's jails is unabated, while officials hide information.

Do we need virtual friends?



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

As if modern life — and relationships—are not complicated enough, we get introduced to virtual relationships where you chat with someone through social media messaging applications without having to meet them face to face.

If you think such relationships are mainly popular amongst the younger generation, think again, the fact is anyone with a mobile phone can and would probably have virtual friends at one time. Virtual friendships are not necessarily bad. It is a form of connecting with another human being or sometimes an artificial intelligence app.

What can be bad is how much time is invested in such relationships and how they affect your life and other conventional friendships. For some people, having a virtual friend is a form of escapism from reality to a place where they can be someone else and adopt a new identity or even a new name so someone who feels shy and intimidated when meeting people face to face would feel more comfortable chatting through text messaging.

Other people would adopt a new persona with almost identical traits to get the attention from others. However, many of such relationships can be genuine and people exchange positive feelings through them such as caring, empathy and being kind and supportive to one another.

I personally have a few virtual friends that I chat with from time to time and we learned to respect each other and be supportive. After all, we all need somebody to lean on and feel connected to. Just like face to face friendships, virtual friendships need nourishment and consistency. You can not connect to people only when you are having a bad day and wanting someone to rant to so they can lift your mood. Throughout the years I had my share of disappointment with some virtual friendships when the other party — knowing that I am a psychiatrist —wanted free consultation where I am expected to listen all the time and be available yet I don't get the same privilege.

On the other hand there are more productive virtual friendships where the relationships are mutual and the other person would ask how my day was and we would have more positive discussions.

VIRTUAL FRIENDS CAN BE A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS OR DISAPPOINTMENT, SO CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS WELL

Having said all of that, one would need to be mindful that connecting with people through texting has its own downsides especially when the other person has bad intentions.

So what would be the warning signs that your virtual friendship is not healthy? In general, avoid sharing personal information with people you don't know well and remember that some people may be manipulative and would play mind games to keep you hooked to them— they would disappear for a few days, then appear with a fake apology to gain your attention only to disappear again.

Some would express jealousy when you post photos with friends or colleagues and try to isolate you, others would exaggerate their feelings towards you before they get to know you well. Some people may use you to fill their free time so they would drag you into endless discussions only to fill a void in their lives.

If you are not careful, this may distract you from focusing on your work and your family. In conclusion, virtual friends can be a source of happiness or disappointment, so choose your friends well.

Climate protesters aim to bring London to a halt

CAROLINE TAI X

Slow-moving climate protesters have become a daily sight on London's streets, undeterred by the honking horns of irate motorists, personal insults and even arrest.

"No more extraction of fossil fuels," Peter Lippiett shouts through a loudspeaker over the noise of the traffic at one recent demonstration.

Alongside the elderly Anglican vicar are a dozen or so other activists from the Just Stop Oil movement, bringing traffic to a standstill in the British capital.

A man on the pavement makes an obscene gesture towards them as he passes but it takes a lot more to put the protesters off.

Their aim is straightforward: cause as much disruption as possible to publicise their cause and put pressure on the government, even if it means public anger and being detained by the police.

Just Stop Oil has repeatedly hit the headlines with its high-profile direct-action protests, such as disrupting Premier League football matches and sporting events, to publicise their cause.

They have thrown tomato soup on famous paintings and glued themselves to picture frames in galleries.

Less spectacularly, some 150 slow marches have been held since April involving some 600 people.

"Slow marches are more accessible to new joiners," said Sarah Webb, who has been involved in the movement since the start.

Just Stop Oil wants the government to end all new oil and gas exploration and has promised not to let up in its protests until it does so.

"I'm here because the government is issuing new licences for oil and gas in the North Sea," adds Jason Scott-Warren, 53, a senior lecturer at the University of Cambridge.

"That's incompatible with keeping the Paris agreement. It's a death sentence," he added, referring to the 2015 UN climate change accord to cut global warming.

Others at the march, not far from Buckingham Palace, include a retired carer, an engineer in a checked shirt, a mental health researcher and a bar worker.

Just Stop Oil describes them as "ordinary people" from 22 to 75 years old.

The response from the police to the marches has become quicker — and more decisive — in recent weeks, with arrests increasing.

Since May, police powers to curb demonstrations have been strengthened, while lawmakers voted this month to lower the threshold for protests deemed to cause a "serious disruption". — AFP



Dambisa Moyo

The writer, an international economist, is the author of four New York Times bestselling books, including Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy Is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth – and How to Fix It

An economic model for the AI age

In April, Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai predicted that artificial intelligence would have an impact "more profound" than any other human innovation, from fire to electricity. While it is impossible to know precisely what that impact will be, two changes appear particularly likely: demand for labour will fall, and productivity will rise. In other words, we appear to be moving toward a labour-less economic model, in which fewer human workers are needed to sustain growth.

Jobs in back-office support, legal services, and accountancy seem to face the most immediate risk from new generative AI technologies, including large language models like ChatGPT-4. But every sector of the economy is likely to be affected. Because language tasks account for 62 per cent of employees' time, a recent report by Accenture notes, large language models could affect 40 per cent of all working hours.

Accenture estimates that 65 per cent of the time spent on these language tasks can be "transformed into more productive activity through augmentation and automation." And a new McKinsey report predicts that the AI-driven productivity boost could add the equivalent of \$2.6-4.4 trillion in value to the global economy annually.

But, even as higher productivity boosts economic growth, the diminution of labour would undermine it, meaning that, ultimately, growth could well stagnate. Reduced demand for human workers implies a steep rise in unemployment, especially since the world population is set to continue growing.

Unemployment is already a persistent problem. According to the International Labor Organization, the total number of unemployed young people (15-24 years old) has remained around 70 million for more than two decades. And the global youth unemployment rate has been trending up, from 12.2 per cent in 1995 to just under 13 per cent after the 2008 global financial crisis to 15.6 per cent in 2021.

AI will exacerbate these trends. And because AI's impact on labour markets is likely to be structural, the



AI Learning and Artificial Intelligence Concept. Business, modern technology, Internet and networking concept.

WE APPEAR TO BE MOVING TOWARD A LABOUR-LESS ECONOMIC MODEL, IN WHICH FEWER HUMAN WORKERS ARE NEEDED TO SUSTAIN GROWTH.

rise in unemployment would amount to a permanent dislocation. Structural unemployment could return to levels last seen in the deindustrialisation of the 1980s, when joblessness in the United Kingdom, for example, remained above 10 per cent for the better part of the 1980s.

How can governments support GDP growth in a new era of persistent structural unemployment? The most obvious likely response is a shift to greater redistribution, with governments raising taxes on the proceeds from AI-driven productivity gains and using those revenues to support the wider population, including by implementing some version of a universal basic income.

To ensure adequate revenue to support expanded social safety nets, governments might move beyond taxing excess profits generated by AI-driven productivity gains to taxing the revenues of the firms reaping the biggest rewards. That way, the state – and, in turn, the general population – would claim a greater share of the AI windfall.

Of course, the AI revolution

also has profound implications for businesses. For starters, companies will have to adjust their strategies and operations to account for the combination of higher productivity and a smaller labour force, which will enable them to generate more output with less capital. Companies that adjust as needed, and deliver low cost-to-income ratios, will attract investors; those that are slow to change their operating models will lose competitiveness and could fail.

The effects of such corporate adjustments will reverberate throughout the economy. Reduced demand for capital by firms will put downward pressure on the cost of capital, and companies will have less need to borrow from banks, causing overall activity in capital markets also to decline.

Higher taxes on corporate profits (or revenues) would create additional challenges. While the state will need to increase revenues to support the growing number of unemployed, this could leave corporations with lower retained earnings to reinvest, despite the additional profits generated by AI-driven productivity gains.

This is bad not only for the companies themselves. Lower investment in the economy would undermine growth, shrink the economic pie, and lower living standards. It would also narrow the tax base, erode the middle class, and widen inequality between the owners of capital and the traditional labour force.

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To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Celebrate words of wisdom

You may not think it, but your Arabic literary culture is a survivor. Authors and researchers both within, and outside

the region, point to a remarkable 600,000 different documents having survived the heat, humidity, and deprivations of this often inhospitable region.

Frenchman Constantin Chassebouf was one who, in 1780, was confounded by the work required to produce, copy, and reproduce the local literature, while compatriot and Orientalist Etienne-Marc Quatrienne, during the early 18th century commented on the drastic impact of the Mongol hordes on learning and literature from the additional perspective of occupation, a narrative that has appeared Omnipresent in the Middle East since time began.

To demonstrate the effects of this, what has become a cultural diaspora, and the European pillaging of this element of the Arab culture, it appears to be a signature lesson that the Rousseau family, so prominent in the French hierarchy, following the death of their scion John-Jacques in 1864, sold 'his' Quranic manuscripts to the city of St Petersburg, in Russia. It can be a complex question 'ownership, can't it? It's clear to me, in my brief study of the phenomena, that this acquisition of Arabic manuscripts was probably an overflow from the European fascination with the Orient following the cultural envelopment of the trade route known as the Silk Road, which offered a land-based trade route to the West. The cloths, fashions, and sophistication of the East overpowered their counterparts in France and Italy in particular, and Oriental script was full of mystery, so was attractive to the West, and so it proved for your culture.

Ahmed al Shamsy writes of rediscovering his literary culture, that it had allowed its books to, "rot, be devoured by insects, and destroyed by neglect," though they will never tear up a page. He also recounts that French soldiers under General Kleber had, at the end of the 17th century, risked life and limb to rescue a Quranic parchment from the Azhar Mosque in densely populated Fustat



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The writer is a media consultant

AUTHORS AND RESEARCHERS BOTH WITHIN, AND OUTSIDE THE REGION, POINT TO A REMARKABLE 600,000 DIFFERENT DOCUMENTS HAVING SURVIVED THE HEAT, HUMIDITY, AND DEPRIVATIONS OF THIS OFTEN INHOSPITABLE REGION

City, in Cairo, so there was some literary compassion. Such Arabic giants have emerged from the 8th and 9th centuries as Persian scholar Abu Dishr Amr ibn Qanbar Al Asri, also known as Sibawayah. His 'Al-Kitab,' or 'The Book,' is among the first and greatest of the enduring, 8th century, Arabic literary icons, a five volume dissemination on the Arabic language and linguistics that has become the foundation for the region's written word, lauded even outside the region. Abu Yayiib Al Buwayti's Arabic language and law writings of the 8th century are also highly rated, but his reputation was tainted by criticisms of the Holy Quran, and he died in prison, in chains.

The Imam Malak Ana's 'Muwatta,' of the 9th century, was an early collection of the hadiths of the faith embracing the cultural norms of the time, traditions, rituals, and the revisionist laws of his time. Abu Jarir Al Tabari's interpretation of the Holy Quran of the same generation, marked him as an author of profound wisdom within the Sunni branch of the faith described as a "truly righteous person, worshipful, ascetic, and pious," though he too perished in disgrace, under home imprisonment. It was clearly a difficult time to have an opinion.

Another literary great was Abu Abdullah Al Shafi, whose legal essays on the principles of jurisprudence ensured his prominence. He too fell afoul of religious dogma, no little jealousy, and politics, and was killed, ironically, in the city of Fustat (Cairo), in his fifties. Al Maaki's Sufi manual, Al Ashari's theological survey, and Al Hariri's, 'Maqamat,' Ibn Khaldun's extensive historical and sociological tomes, are all notable during the 9th to 12th century, all however, just drops in the sea, threads in the tapestry of a language and written record of how your ancestors lived, thought, wrote, prayed, loved, and died.

I myself, have been guilty of accepting the narrative of Arabic being a largely oral literary tradition, however I respectfully bow to history and fact as being more authentic sources, and encourage you to discover, and celebrate, your heritage in the written word.

SAFE SHOULDERS



A man carries a child on his shoulders as he walks amidst rubbles at the site of an apartment building damaged during Russian missile strikes in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Saturday. – Reuters

On eve of election, Greece eyes Mitsotakis win

MARINA RAFENBERG AND HELENE COLLIOPOULOU

ipping her four-euro (\$4.36) freddo in a suburban Athens cafe, Maria N says she has no illusions about how Greece's national election on Sunday is going to turn out.

"I'm not even sure I'm going to vote, the outcome is foregone," the doctor says.

With opinion polls giving him a lead of around 20 percentage points, conservative leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis is almost assured of winning a second straight four-year term.

But he fears that voter apathy could end up costing him the absolute majority he seeks, which was the whole point of him calling fresh elections for the second time in a month.

Crediting him with bringing back stable economic growth to a country once notorious for its debt woes, voters gave Mitsotakis 40.79 per cent of the vote on May 21.

But his party fell five seats short of a parliamentary majority, which would have required the 55-year-old to govern in a coalition, something that he has refused.

WITH OPINION POLLS GIVING HIM A LEAD OF AROUND 20 PERCENTAGE POINTS, CONSERVATIVE LEADER KYRIAKOS MITSOTAKIS IS ALMOST ASSURED OF WINNING A SECOND STRAIGHT FOUR-YEAR TERM

Getting voters to return to the polls however is a gamble for the former Harvard graduate and McKinsey financial consultant. His key challenge is to keep the 9.8 million eligible Greek voters away from the beach this weekend.

He has even gone as far as to warn of a third election in August, at the height of the busy tourism season, if he fails to clinch enough votes to form his own government.

"I hope we don't have to meet again in early August," he told Skai TV on the last day of campaigning. "This is no joke," he added.

On May 21, Mitsotakis crushed the leftist Syriza party of former prime minister Alexis Tsipras by over 20 points in a victory nobody expected to be as clear.

A Pulse poll for Skai TV on Thursday suggested that 73 per cent would vote for the same party they chose in May.

Tsipras is still remembered as the prime minister who nearly crashed Greece out of the euro. Having now lost four electoral contests to Mitsotakis, his future as head of Syriza is at stake.



Kyriakos Mitsotakis waves at supporters during a pre-election rally in Athens on Friday. – Reuters

He warned this week against giving Mitsotakis a "blank cheque" that would enable him to carry out a "hidden agenda" of anti-social policies.

But cafe-owner Agueliki Giannopoulou, 45, is not

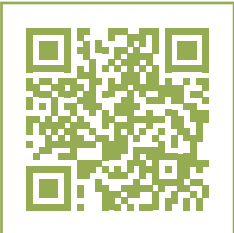
convinced. Tsipras, he said, "says nothing of note. His message is not strong".

For many Greeks however, high consumer prices remain a constant source of worry despite the headline growth figure touted

by Mitsotakis. In front of a sports betting shop, two retirees were discussing the high cost of living. "Prices are changing every day at the supermarkets," said Konstantinos Noumas, noting that cherries were being sold for 1.70 a kilogramme at cooperatives as supermarkets charged 6.0 euros a kilo. His friend, Zissis Karagiorgos, 67, hoped that "the people, especially young people will stop being afraid of change". While normally more inclined to vote left, even young Greeks mainly voted conservative at the last vote. Nikos Giorgiou, 24, who had turned up with her mother at Syntagma Square on Friday for Mitsotakis' final campaign rally said he "deserves an absolute majority". "Only Mitsotakis can allow the country to stabilise economically and to offer a future for young people who had gone into exile during the economic crisis." Student Giorgos Bistouras, 20, said he simply hoped that "salaries will improve and that promises will be kept". — AFP

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AL YARUBI BAG GOLD WITH NATIONAL RECORD IN ARABIAN ATHLETICS

OMAN BAGS TWO GOLD MEDALS IN MARRAKESH MEET

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

Salim bin Saleh al Yarubi, raised Oman's medal tally in the Arabian Athletics Championship to two medals, as he clinched a gold medal in triple jump at the Arabian Athletics Meet in Marrakesh on Friday.

Al Yarubi emerged winner after he cleared a distance of 16.42 meter while Malaib Abdul Hakeem from Morocco captured the silver medal after he registered 15.73 meter and his teammate Hammadi Ahmed bagged the bronze medal as he recorded 15.73 meter too.

Beside the gold medal accomplishment, Al Yarubi broke the national record in the triple jump competition.

Earlier, Fatik Abdulghafoor claimed the first gold medal for Oman in high jump competition as he registered a jump of 2.15 meters while the silver medal went to Iraq's Hussain Falah Hussain with a mark of 2.12 and Qatar's Hamdi Abkar finished third with a jump of 2.12 metres.

In other competitions of Arabian meet in Morocco, Oman's Mohammed al Saadi and Rashid al Asmi progressed to the finals of the Men's 200 meter race competition.

Al Saadi registered a timing of 20.91 seconds in the qualifiers while Al Asmi clocked 21.10 seconds.

Barakat al Harthy was placed sixth in the men's 100 metre race at 10.64 seconds. Mazoon al Alawi finished fourth in the women's 100 metre with a timing of 11.99 seconds.



Fatik Abdulghafoor claimed the first gold medal for Oman in high jump competition as he registered a jump of 2.15 meters

Mazoon also took part in the women's 100 metre hurdles and was placed in the fifth position after she clocked 14.85 second.

The national hammer throw record holder Mubeen al Kindi came in the ninth place after cleared 56.97 metre in the competition which saw Egypt's Mustafa al Jamal snatching the gold medal with a throw of 75.70 metre.

Egypt's Ahmed Tariq Ismail claimed silver with a throw of 70.65 meters and Tunisian Mohsin Annati finished third with a throw of 67.48 metres.

The 23rd edition of the Arabian Athletics Championship concluded on Saturday in Morocco after five days of thrilling competition in different competitions. As many as 250 athletes representing 16 countries took part in the Arabian meet.

After the Moroccan assignment, Oman's athletes will gear up for the Arabian Sports Games which will be held in Algeria during July 5 to 15.

Then, the national athletics team will take part in the Asian Athletics Championship for senior category in Pattaya, Thailand from July 12 to 16.



Wolves captain Neves joins Saudi's Al Hilal

PARIS: Wolves captain Ruben Neves on Friday became the latest major player to move to Saudi Arabia, the 26-year-old Portuguese international joining Al-Hilal.

"From the 'Wolves' to the biggest team in Asia," Al-Hilal announced on social media after the player signed a three-season deal in Paris.

Neves leaves Wolves after six seasons for "a club record fee", the Premier League side announced, reported to be around 55 million euros.

Neves, who arrived at Wolves from Porto, had one year on his contract left at Molineux.

He joins in the Saudi Pro League Real Madrid's Karim Benzema, 35, and Cristiano Ronaldo, 38, in what is expected to be just the start of a series of move for stars based in Europe.

Thanks to its oil riches, Saudi Arabia, the conservative Gulf



monarchy frequently targeted over its human rights record, has swiftly achieved a prominent role in world sports, dishing out billion of dollars in the process.

France's World Cup-winning midfielder N'Golo Kante, 32, has joined Benzema at Al-Ittihad.

The kingdom's league had already signed up five-time Ballon

d'Or winner Ronaldo, who joined Al-Nassr in January.

But in contrast to recent moves for players in the twilight of their careers, Neves still has his prime years ahead of him.

Barcelona had held a long-term interest in the former Porto midfielder. The huge deal eases Wolves' financial pressures.



They have been under pressure to sell to avoid breaching Premier League spending rules after splashing out £150 million on transfers over the past 12 months.

Neves has made 253 appearances for Wolves, scoring 30 goals, since arriving in 2017.

"Ruben is the embodiment of everything you look for when trying to bring players into a football club; a leader, a humble man and an extremely talented footballer who took Wolves to a different level," said the English side's sporting director Matt Hobbs. He helped them win promotion from the Championship a year later and then to two consecutive seventh-placed finishes in the Premier League.

Wolves also reached the Europa League quarter-finals in 2020, but have struggled to replicate that success and finished 13th last season. — AFP



Ireland's Maguire strikes late for Women's PGA Championship

NEW YORK: Ireland's Leona Maguire birdied three of her last four holes to take a one-stroke second-round lead on Friday in the Women's PGA Championship at rain-soaked Baltusrol.

Maguire, who started the day three off the pace, shook off a slow start that saw her par her first five holes before a bogey at the 15th. She responded with a birdie at the 17th and grabbed another at the fourth before a bogey at the fifth.

Then she cantered home with birdies at the sixth, seventh and ninth to card a three-under 68.

Her five-under total of 137 put her one clear of a group of three on 138: England's Mel Reid, Norway's Celine Borge and China's Lin Xiyu.

Reid carded a 67, Borge signed for a 69 and Lin shot an even par 71.

It was a further stroke back to Australia's Minjee Lee, who posted a 67, and overnight leader Lee-Anne Pace of South Africa, who posted a two-over 73.

"Really happy with how I played today," Maguire said.

"Weather was a little bit trickier today, especially on the back nine when that rain came in.

"Didn't really hole any putts on the front side, but nice to get those three birdies coming in," added Maguire, who said a solid hybrid into the ninth gave her a comfortable seven-footer uphill putt to finish.

Maguire arrived in Springfield, New Jersey, riding the momentum of her second LPGA title at the Meijer Classic on Sunday.

Chasing a first major, however, requires a different mindset, she said.

"This is uncharted territory for me. Whatever happens this week, I'm sure I'll learn a lot, and just sort of taking it one day at a time," she said.

"I think this golf course demands that. I think you can't think more than one shot ahead, let alone a hole or a round ahead."

Maguire's European Solheim Cup team-mate Reid was delighted to hit 18 greens in regulation on what she called a "beast of a golf course." — AFP

Five-wicket Hasaranga leads Sri Lanka to rout of Oman

BULAWAYO: Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga took his second successive five-wicket haul as Sri Lanka crushed Oman by 10 wickets in the 2023 World Cup Qualifier on Friday.

Sri Lanka now have two wins from two matches and are well-placed to reach the Super Six stage.

Scotland are also on course for the next stage after they defeated the UAE by 111 runs in the day's other Group B fixture.

Hasaranga took six wickets in the opening win over the UAE, and was at it again with five for 13 against Oman who were bowled out for just 98.

Sri Lanka needed just 15 overs to chase that total down, Dimuth Karunaratne (61 not out) leading them home.

Lahiru Kumara (3-22) also starred with the ball for 1996 world champions Sri Lanka as Oman slipped to 20 for four.

A 52-run stand between Jatinder Singh (21) and Ayaan Khan (41) hinted at a recovery before Hasaranga entered the fray.

His triple wicket maiden ripped the heart out of the Omani middle order, leaving them in dire trouble at 72 for seven.

Hasaranga finally removed Ayaan before finishing off the innings by trapping Bilal Khan leg before. Sri Lanka showed their intent from the very first ball of the chase, Pathum Nissanka (39 not out) slashing Bilal for four over point. The pair never really



looked troubled, bringing up the 50 partnership in the seventh over with Karunaratne's fifth boundary of the innings.

"He's a champion. Whenever I throw him the ball, he delivers for me," Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka said of Hasaranga.

"Very good to see him keep getting five-wicket hauls and man of the match awards. I think the future is really bright and they support staff and management has done a good job to keep the environment calm."

Sri Lanka have now won two in a row with matches against Ireland and Scotland to come.

Oman can still reach the Super Six with a win over Scotland in their next game. Scotland backed up their thrilling one-wicket win over Ireland by beating the UAE by 111 runs, with a captain's knock from Richie Berrington.

His 127 with nine fours and three sixes fired them to 282 for eight before Chris Sole and Safyaan Sharif finished the job with the ball.

Michael Leask with 41 also shone with the bat.

"It was really important today after the win against Ireland to turn up and adapt to the conditions. Pleasing that we put

in such a clinical performance with the ball and make it pretty comfortable," said Berrington.

Plenty of UAE batters got in, including skipper Muhammad Waseem (36), but none were able to turn starts into big scores as wickets fell at regular intervals.

With two wins apiece, the West Indies and Zimbabwe meet in Harare on Saturday and are both well-placed to make the Super Sixes from Group A.

The other match between the Netherlands and Nepal could end up being decisive in the race for third place.

— AFP

England strike back in Ashes thanks to Beaumont's century



LONDON: Tammy Beaumont hit an unbeaten 100 as England reached 218-2 at close of the second day's play to leave the one-off women's Test against Australia delicately poised at Trent Bridge on Friday.

Earlier, Annabel Sutherland hit 137 not out as Australia were bowled out for 473.

But the visitors' hopes of taking a sizeable first innings lead were halted by Beaumont, who became just the fourth England player in either the men's or women's game to score an international century in Test, one day and T20 cricket.

"I think it's finely balanced. I think it's a very good batting wicket, if two people get in it's very hard to get them out," said Beaumont.

"I don't think I batted my best, I was stubborn, which (captain) Heather Knight has called me for years." Aussie all-rounder Sutherland continued her fine match with the ball as she took the wicket of Emma Lamb for 10.

But after Knight departed for 57, a partnership of 67 between Natalie Sciver-Brunt (41 not out) and Beaumont kept the hosts in the match. Australia resumed on 328-7 overnight and tailenders Alana King (21) and Kim Garth (22) did their bit to aid Sutherland in posting the sixth-highest total in the history of women's Test cricket.

England spinner Sophie Ecclestone took 5-129 in 46.2 overs, her first five-wicket haul in Tests.

— AFP

Al Hail School of Cricket organise Inter Academy Summer Camp

MUSCAT: The popular Al Hail School of Cricket is organising the second edition of Inter Academy Summer Camp tournament 2023. The camp will run from June 26 up to end of August, according to Abdul Ghani al Balushi, head coach of the Al Hail School of Cricket.

The camp competition will take place in Al Hail Cricket Club's grassy field in Mabela, among Omani and expatriates players of the academy only. The gathering will be an ideal opportunity for young cricket enthusiasts to improve their skills and meet new people.

Since cricket is a very popular sport among the locals as well

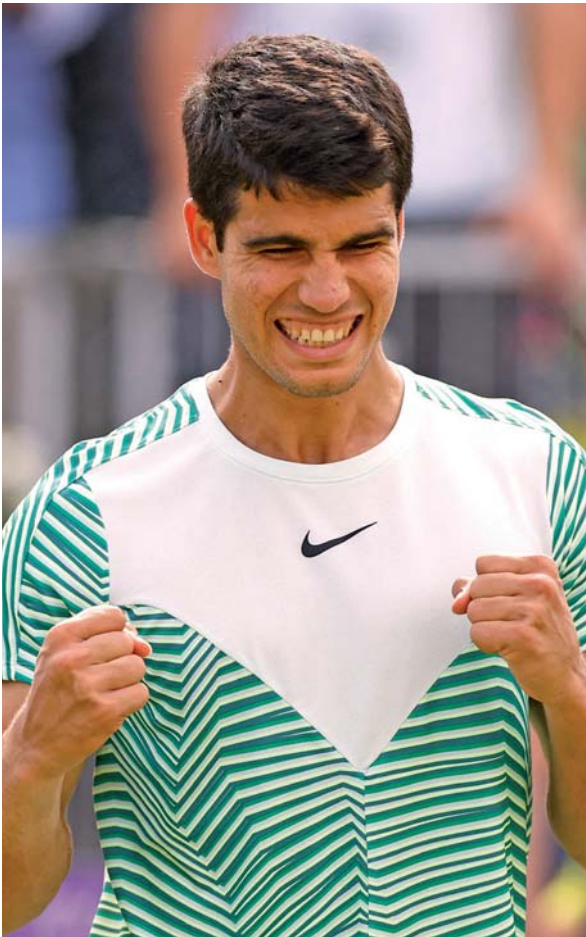
as the resident expatriates in Oman, while four Academy teams participating in this event from senior and junior. The camp apply league format tournament where each team has the opportunity to play three matches in the round stage before the top two teams advance to the championship match.

The camps activities include, hand-eye coordination games (for children aged 5 to 10), fielding drills, skill sessions, batting and bowling in nets, games, and more. Beginners and players of all levels of experience, also there are fun and growth programme.





Australia's Alex de Minaur celebrates after winning his semi-final match against Norway's Holger Rune. – Reuters



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates after winning his semi-final match against Sebastian Korda of the U.S. – Reuters

Alcaraz sets up Queen's final against De Minaur

LONDON: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz continued to thrive on London grasscourts in the build-up to Wimbledon as he beat unseeded American Sebastian Korda on Saturday to reach the Queen's Club final.

The 20-year-old lost his opening set at Queen's earlier in the week but has since looked ominously good and proved too powerful for Korda, winning 6-3 6-4.

In his first ATP Tour final on grass, Alcaraz will face Australian Alex de Minaur who earlier beat Danish second seed Holger Rune 6-3 7-6(2).

Should Alcaraz win Sunday's final he would reclaim the world number one ranking from Novak Djokovic and would be seeded one at Wimbledon which begins on July 3.

Korda, 22, was at full stretch to try and keep Alcaraz at bay in the opening set but still dropped serve twice, although he did also manage to break the Spaniard.

Alcaraz began to unleash some heavy groundstrokes and showed plenty of grasscourt acumen despite being a relative novice on the surface. He forged an early break ahead in the second set and never looked in danger from that point on.

LIVEWIRE
Fellow 20-year-old Rune had not dropped a set on the way to the semi-finals but found the livewire De Minaur a step too far as he fell short of also reaching his first final on grass.

World number 18 De Minaur, who put out

home favourite Andy Murray earlier in the week, is aiming for his second career title on grass having won at Eastbourne in 2021.

He is the first Australian to reach the final at the Queen's pre-Wimbledon event since Lleyton Hewitt in 2006.

Two breaks of serve allowed the seventh seed to cruise through the first set but he was pushed much harder in the second with both players forced to save break points.

However, De Minaur's greater experience on the slick lawns showed as he polished off the tiebreak. "I play pretty decent on the grass, I love playing on this court," he said. "Today was my best match so far this week. I just hope that I can go one better tomorrow." — Reuters





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Market-making, liquidity fund initiatives to propel stock market development in Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

A number of ground-breaking measures announced recently by Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) have the potential to ignite the growth of the capital market in the Sultanate of Oman, notably by fortifying the bourse's positioning as a thriving hub for investment.

The *Observer* looks at the six initiatives unveiled last week by the MSX with the support of the National Program for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development:

■ **Market-making initiative** paves the way for dynamic growth: At the forefront of this strategic push lies the Market Making Initiative, a game-changing manoeuvre that guarantees a seamless and active trading environment.

By facilitating continuous buy and sell orders for listed securities throughout the trading session, this initiative has far-reaching objectives.

Foremost among them is the provision of ample liquidity, allowing securities to flow freely and ensuring investors have a stable foundation for their



transactions.

Additionally, the Market Making Initiative seeks to strike a balance between the supply and demand of securities, while responding to any unwarranted fluctuations in stock prices.

■ **Securities Lending and Borrowing Initiative:** This initiative opens new avenues for investors and heralds the growth of diversified financial instruments. It seeks to bolster liquidity, enhance market efficiency, and reduce stock market volatility.

Investors can now explore a broader spectrum of opportunities based on a seamless access to an array of securities listed on the exchange.

■ **Pooled Trading Accounts Initiative:** Essentially an inclusive framework, it is designed to facilitate seamless management and trading of securities for multiple investors.

By consolidating accounts under a single investor number, this initiative streamlines operations and adheres to

global requirements for emerging market status. Moreover, it lays the foundation for establishing connections with international depository centres.

■ **Promising Companies Initiative:** Recognising the potential and dynamism of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the MSX has unveiled the Promising Companies Initiative — a platform that revolutionise the listing process, offering SMEs more flexible terms.

By facilitating financing and nurturing the expansion of these enterprises, the bourse aims to enhance their contribution to the nation's gross domestic product.

■ **Tripartite Governance Initiative:** This measure champions responsible investment through the Tripartite Governance Initiative.

By meticulously evaluating investments based on their environmental, social, and financial impact, this initiative ensures that companies align with sustainable practices.

■ **Liquidity Fund:** This is a vital instrument designed to fortify liquidity and enable efficient cash management. This tool fosters stability and equips market participants with the means to navigate challenging financial landscapes.

Oman's Q1 GDP at constant prices reaches RO 8.7 billion

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

The Sultanate of Oman's Q1 GDP at constant prices has reached RO 8.7 billion, according to recent data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The country's GDP growth rate at constant prices in the first quarter of 2023 was 4.7%, to reach RO 8.705 billion, up from RO 8.306 billion recorded in the same period last year.

The increase in GDP can be attributed to a rebound in the oil and gas sector, which accounts for a significant portion of Oman's economy. The sector grew by 3.5% in Q1 amounting to RO 2.829 billion, compared to RO 2.732 billion in the same period last year.

This growth was largely driven by an increase in oil production and higher global oil prices.

In addition to the oil and gas sector, other sectors of the economy also showed signs of recovery. The industry sector



grew to RO 1.760 billion, an increase of 4.4% compared to the same period last year, which amounted to RO 1.685 billion.

Mining and quarrying led the industry activities with 9.9% growth, followed by manufacturing with 5.2% increase, electricity and water supply with 4.4% growth and 3.1% growth in construction activities.

The services sector, which is the largest sector of Oman's economy, showed the biggest growth. The sector grew by 5.0% in Q1 2023 to reach RO 4.146 billion, compared to RO 3.947 billion in the same period last year.

This growth was driven by improvements in the wholesale and retail trade sector, which grew by 5.0% in Q1, amounting to RO 719 million compared to RO 685 million in the same period last year.

The transportation and storage services also saw an increase of 8.6% to reach RO 498 million compared to RO 458 million in Q1 2022.

Oman's Q1 GDP growth is a positive sign for the country's economy. The rebound in the oil and gas sector, along with improvements in other sectors, suggests that the country's economy is on a growth path.



Announcement in respect of the merger of Sohar International Bank SAOG ("Sohar International") with HSBC Bank Oman SAOG ("HSBC Oman") by way of incorporation (the "Merger")

Further to the resolutions passed at the Extraordinary General Meetings of Sohar International and HSBC Oman approving the Merger and respective disclosures published on 21 June 2023. In accordance with Article 37 of the Commercial Companies Law (Royal Decree No. 18/2019), any creditor of Sohar International who has an objection to the Merger is invited to submit their objection with the supporting documents within thirty (30) days from the date of this disclosure to the Secretariat of the Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

A copy of any objection must be filed within thirty (30) days from the date of this disclosure with (1) the Capital Market Authority, and (2) Sohar International to the following address:

Sohar International Bank SAOG

Attention: Chief Executive Officer

P.O. Box 44, Hai Al Mina, PC 114

Sultanate of Oman

E-mail: creditorsobjectionnotice2023@soharinternational.com

Further announcements on any material developments will be made as required.

Ahmed Al Musalmi
Chief Executive Officer

Sohar International receives ‘Best Investment Bank in Oman 2023’ award

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to spearhead innovation in the dynamic banking sector within the Sultanate of Oman, Sohar International has won the “Best Investment Bank in Oman award for the year 2023, at the Euromoney Awards for Excellence.

The Euromoney Awards for Excellence celebrates outstanding innovations and contributions in banking and finance at national, regional, and global levels.

Through a rigorous evaluation process, the awards are presented to banks based on various criteria such as investment leadership, product diversity, financial performance, asset and revenue quality, customer satisfaction, and digital offerings.

Sohar International emerged as the recipient of the Best Investment Bank in Oman Award, showcasing its market-leading investment banking offerings and adherence to best practices. The bank’s customer-centric approach reflects its significant contributions to the financial and banking sectors.

The Euromoney Awards for



Excellence was held on June 21, 2023, at the Shangri-la, Dubai. The evening witnessed the attendance of key delegates, top officials from leading corporate houses, and industry experts from different sectors.

The esteemed event also brought together top banks and institutions from the Middle East who have made significant contributions to the banking industry. Sohar International stood out among its peers and

received recognition for its exceptional performance and pioneering position in Oman’s banking sector.

Expressing gratitude for receiving the award, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, commented, “We are truly honoured to receive this esteemed award. It reaffirms our commitment to excellence, innovation, and customer-centricity in the dynamic

banking sector of the Sultanate of Oman.

At Sohar International, we strive to lead the way in investment banking, delivering market-leading offerings and adhering to best practices. This recognition reflects the dedication and expertise of our team, which consistently goes above and beyond to meet our customers’ evolving financial needs. As we continue our journey of growth and

transformation, we remain focused on driving sustainable economic development in Oman, and this award serves as evidence of our steady assurance to our customers and the nation.”

Sohar International has firmly established itself as a prominent bank in the Sultanate of Oman and has been recognised by various publications this year. Recently, the bank was presented with ‘Industry Leader in Digital Banking’ and ‘Best Bank in Growth’ at the renowned Oman Banking & Finance Awards 2023.

The OER Business Summit 2023 honoured Sohar International with the ‘Key Enabler of Sustainable Economic Growth’ award. Furthermore, the bank was also acknowledged as the ‘Top Omani Brand in the Banking Sector’ at the Alam Iktisad Awards. These accolades further strengthen Sohar International’s position as one of the prominent banks in the Sultanate of Oman, dedicated to delivering exceptional services and contributing to the sustainable economic growth of Oman.

OETC participates in GCC-Cigre environmental footprint seminar



MUSCAT: Recently, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) participated in the virtual GCC-Cigre Environmental Footprint Seminar. The one-day seminar organised by the Regional Committee for Electric Power Systems in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC-CIGRE) brought together all the leading utility companies to showcase the trend of environmental footprint reduction during the last 2 decades.

Furthermore, the seminar focused on and discussed the implemented policies and regulations at the firm and national levels in this area. OETC presented and showcased the development and courses of improving the overall environmental footprint on different aspects including energy efficiency and supply-side policies, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, air pollution (NOx, Sox) reduction, and demand-side management through policies and initiatives.

The seminar provided a platform to enhance knowledge and understanding and exchange experiences and initiatives among the participants. OETC is keen to participate in the different activities, events and initiatives in the field of energy and environment to translate its efforts and endeavours and present its experience in this sector; in addition, contribute to the achievement of national and international goals and aspirations in this aspect.

Dr Rashid al Badwawi, Corporate Affairs General Manager, affirmed the importance of participating in such activities and events to showcase and present the efforts undertaken by the different sectors in the Sultanate of Oman in achieving the national and international aspirations and goals in the power and environment sectors.

He also emphasised the role assigned to the company in contributing to this field and working towards advancing progress in all fields.

He added: “Since the beginning, OETC has taken into consideration the importance of translating the national aspirations and goals into its plans and operation.

OETC has worked hard to make a positive impact and development in them and that is what could be seen clearly through the different projects and initiatives implemented by the company in various fields, especially with regard to the environment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We also strive to sharing our experience and expertise in such areas with all those working in the sector”.

It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of the Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity in the Sultanate of Oman network, where electricity is transferred from generation stations to distributed load centres in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, and the transmission network operates at a voltage of 132 kV and above, to cover most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or in the south. In addition, OETC manages the interconnection lines between the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf interconnection network with a voltage of 220 kV.



National Finance wins excellence in SME financing award

MUSCAT: National Finance, a leading financial institution in Oman, has been honoured with the prestigious ‘Excellence in SME Financing’ award at the esteemed Oman’s leading women’s forum, Muntada Al Mar’a event held at Salalah Rotana Resort.

The event was graced by the presence of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar as the Chief Guest. The award highlights the company’s outstanding commitment and exceptional services in supporting the growth and development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region.

National Finance has consistently remained at the forefront of empowering SMEs, recognising their pivotal role in driving economic growth and job creation. The company’s commitment to understanding the unique challenges faced by SMEs and its proactive approach to offering flexible financing options have contributed significantly to its success.

Commenting on the achievement, Tariq al Farsi, CEO

of National Finance, expressed his gratitude and said, “We are immensely proud and honoured to receive the prestigious ‘Excellence in SME Financing’ award. This recognition serves as a testament to National Finance’s commitment to supporting the SME sector and empowering entrepreneurs to realise their business aspirations.

We believe in fostering strong relationships with our SME clients, providing them with the necessary financial tools, guidance and personalised assistance to thrive in a competitive market. This award reaffirms our position as a leading financial institution dedicated to driving the growth and success of SMEs in Oman.

We will continue to innovate and enhance our financial solutions, enabling us to better serve the evolving needs of our valued clients and contribute to the economic prosperity of the region.”

National Finance’s success in SME financing is a result of its customer-centric approach, industry expertise and robust financial solutions.

Bank Muscat inaugurates new branch in Al Amerat

MUSCAT: In line with Bank Muscat’s customer-centric vision “To serve you better, everyday”, and to enhance branches’ network that already counted to 178 branches in all over the Sultanate of Oman, a new branch was inaugurated at Madinat Al Nahdha in the Wilayat of Al Amerat recently in the presence of Shaikh Salem bin Rabie bin Khamis al Sunaidi, Wali of Al Amerat and senior bank’s officials.

The new branch is characterised by a modern design and distinctive space that provides customers comfort while completing their banking transactions. It is also located in a privileged location and close to the population density, shops and commercial institutions.

The new branch features a number of unique facilities including dedicated Sayyarati, Baituna and Najahi desks. Also, as part of the bank’s focus on improving access to persons with disabilities, the branch has implemented access ramps, teller counters and ATMs, which are disabled-friendly.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir N al Raisi, General Manager — Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “We are pleased today to open this new branch for Bank Muscat in Al Amerat.

This branch is featured by a modern design in order to keep abreast of developments in the banking sector and provide the best banking services and facilities for valued customers.

This step comes as part



of Bank Muscat’s strategy to strengthen the branch network in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and translate the bank’s vision “we work to serve you better every day”.

The bank will continue to open more of these new branches with a wonderful design and large space and also equipped with the latest modern technologies to meet the needs of the bank’s growing customer base”.

He added: “Over four decades of operations in Oman, Bank Muscat has earned a name for its customer-centric vision, backed by the largest branch and ATM-CDM-FFM network, a state-of-the-art Mobile and Internet banking platform, and a number of world-class financial products and services.

The opening of the new branch in Al Amerat will further help serve our customers better every day in line with our aim to provide an enhanced Customer Experience.

I take this opportunity to thank all our customers for their confidence and trust in

the bank, and for being our partners in the progress and development of the Sultanate of Oman. Bank Muscat will continue to open more such high-tech branches in the future to meet the needs of our ever growing customer family.”

Taya Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager — Regional Branches, Bank Muscat said: “We are delighted to open our new branch in Al Amerat as this will help us serve different customer segments in the wilayat. The new branch adds to the 55 branches which are already present in the Capital Region to serve our customers.

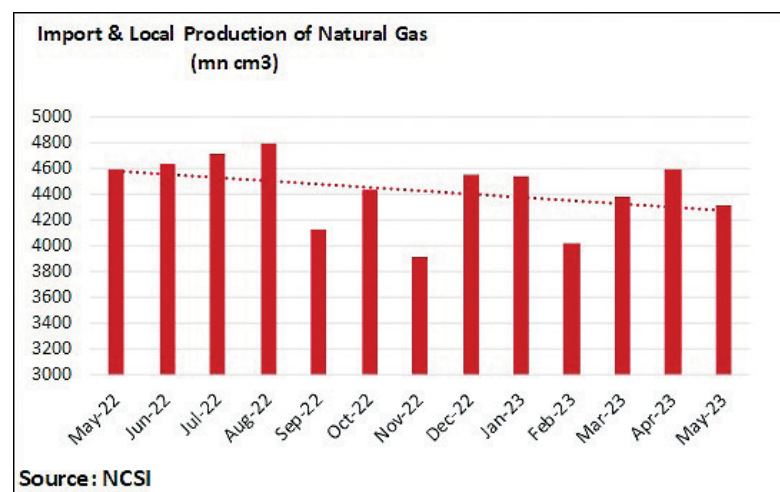
I invite all our customers to take advantage of the largest branch and ATM-CDM network in the country.

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We thank all our customers for their strong confidence in the bank and look forward to continue launching new products and services that addresses their aspirations.”



MSX 30 closes the week higher by 50 points



MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange 30 index closed last week at 4731.12 points, up by 50 points and 1.07 per cent high from the previous trading session, which stood at 4681.05 points. All major sector indices rose, except for the Industry Index, which fell by 0.81 per cent.

The Financial Sector increased by 1.51 per cent, the Service Sector Index was up by 0.31 per cent, and the Sharia Index rose by 0.60 per cent. The Ominvest-led consortium has made a public announcement of a Cash Takeover Offer to acquire 100 per cent of the issued share capital of Ahli Bank pursuant to the Takeover and Acquisition Regulation issued by CMA subject to regulatory approvals.

The consortium has made a cash offer of 200 baisas per share to all the shareholders of Ahli Bank, irrespective of their shareholding, legal status and jurisdiction.

This cash offer provides a fair and equal treatment to all shareholders including minority shareholders to participate and benefit from the offer.

Raysut Cement has appointed Sohar Islamic Bank as a financial adviser. Under the agreed terms and conditions, the Bank will facilitate and advise the company in pursuing the options to raise the long-term funding and business plan in order to present a comprehensive plan to the esteemed shareholders.

Bank Dhofar has invited shareholders to attend and EGM discuss the following agenda: To consider and approve increasing the Bank's authorised share capital from RO 500 million to RO 750 million; to consider and approve increasing the Bank's issued share capital from RO 299.6 million up to a maximum of RO 470 million (the New Issued Capital), and approve the allocation of the New Issued Capital in favour of the shareholders of Ahli Bank who have elected to receive shares in the Bank as a result of the takeover.

Muscat Gases Company informed its shareholders that in order to develop and expand the network and company's

commercial achievements towards profit increase, it has established a branch in Saudi Arabia, the official opening and operation of which will take place in the fourth quarter of 2023.

HSBC Bank Oman held an EGM where shareholders of the Bank approved: The dissolution of the Bank and the proposed merger of the Bank with Sohar International Bank through a merger by incorporation, whereby the Bank will merge into Sohar International with Sohar International as the surviving entity.

The Bank and Sohar International are targeting completion of the merger to take place tentatively on August 17, 2023. The data issued by the NCSI indicated that the domestic production of natural gas, including imports, decreased by 6.05 per cent YoY to reach 4.312 billion cubic metres, compared to 4.590 billion cubic metres during the period in 2022.

Ubhar Capital (U Capital), a leading brokerage and investment firm in Oman, has received a key license from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to provide market making and liquidity providing services on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

With this licence granted by the CMA, U Capital has become the first market maker and liquidity provider on the Muscat Stock Exchange. A market maker is a firm or individual that helps ensure the liquidity of a securities market by offering to both buy and sell securities. As the name suggests, market makers 'make the market,' and their primary job is to create liquidity in the market by buying and selling securities.

U Capital stated that it has a qualified and trained integrated work team in partnership with Al Ramz Corporation in the UAE. The company also possesses all the necessary requirements to start working in the market making and liquidity providing activity, including skilled staff, technical expertise and technology for the implementation of these activities.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Thai's PTTEP expands into Oman's green hydrogen space

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

Thailand's national energy company PTT Exploration and Production (PTTEP) has announced that its clean energy arm FutureTech Energy Ventures Co Ltd (FTEV) is a partner in a consortium that signed agreements this week to develop a mega-scale green hydrogen project in the Sultanate of Oman.

Bangkok-based FTEV joins five other multinational partners that successful bid for Block Z1-02 – a roughly 340 sq kilometre concession – located at Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate.

The consortium is led by South Korean steel manufacturing giant POSCO and French energy company ENGIE, and also groups Korean businesses Samsung Engineering, Korea East-West Power and Korea Southern Power, besides MESCOT Middle East DMCC.

Investment in the integrated project — encompassing upstream renewable power components, as well as the green hydrogen (electrolyser) and green



GROWING FOOTPRINT: GREEN ENERGY SUBSIDIARY FTEV JOINS POSCO-ENGIE LED CONSORTIUM IN DELIVERY OF A MAJOR GREEN HYDROGEN PROJECT IN DUQM

ammonia conversion plants — is estimated at between \$7-\$8 billion. Powered by around 5 GW of renewable capacity, the mega scheme will generate 220,000 tonnes per annum (tpa) of green hydrogen.

Much of this output will be converted into green ammonia at a 1.2 million tpa capacity plant at Duqm for eventual export to South Korea.

The rest will be retained in-country for local consumption. In a statement, PTTEP hailed the signing of a Project Development Agreement and sub-usufruct agreement in Muscat on Wednesday as a milestone for the Thai national energy conglomerate as it expands its footprint in the global green

energy industry.

At the same time, the deals will see PTTEP ramping up its presence in Oman's rapidly evolving energy space. In addition to a 20-per cent stake in Block 61 (home to one of Oman's biggest gas fields), PTTEP also owns minor stakes in Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Block 53 (Mukhaizna block) and Oman LNG.

Commenting on PTTEP's new investment in Oman through the Z1-02 Block acquisition, Montri Rawanchaikul, Chief Executive Officer, said: "Oman is at the forefront regarding driving substantial development in green hydrogen. Being granted the exclusive rights for this large-scale project is a significant milestone

for PTTEP and our partners in expanding the business into clean energy in one of the world's high-potential areas for renewables.

"PTTEP will leverage our experience and understanding of the energy business in Oman for over 20 years to contribute to the project development. Participation in this green hydrogen project will reinforce other future developments of new forms of energy, supporting our goal to become a low-carbon organisation."

PTTEP's green energy subsidiary, FutureTech Energy Ventures Company Limited (FTEV), was established in 2021 to develop and invest in the group's clean energy business such as renewable energy and hydrogen.

The new spin-off will explore business opportunities in low carbon fuels such as methanol and sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).

Construction work on the consortium's green hydrogen and green ammonia project is expected to commence in 2027, with commercial operations slated during 2030.

Saada Hospital officially inaugurated in Suhar

SUHAR: Marking a significant milestone, Saada Hospital in Suhar was officially inaugurated on Wednesday by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. With the support of the Ministry of Health, the hospital is primed to provide exceptional healthcare services exclusively focused on women and children in Suhar.

Aman Healthcare Services SAOC (Aman Healthcare), a healthcare platform managed by Oman Investment Corporation SAOC, proudly unveils Saada Hospital, Oman's first specialised healthcare facility dedicated to women and children. The shareholders of Aman Healthcare include esteemed pension funds, family houses and institutions from Oman.

Following meticulous inspections, Saada Hospital has surpassed the Ministry of Health's stringent quality standards, ensuring adherence to robust medical guidelines and regulations.

This accomplishment showcases the hospital's strong commitment to delivering exceptional healthcare facilities and services to Suhar and North Al Batinah community.

Kalat al Balushi, Chairman of Aman Healthcare and CEO of Oman Investment Corporation



SAOC, expressed his delight at the opening of Saada Hospital: "With this launch, we can offer world-class facilities to enhance healthcare delivery for women and children in our society. I am especially grateful to our investors,

lenders and stakeholders, whose unwavering support has made the hospital's vision a reality."

Subba Rao Rajavarapu (Raj), CEO of Saada Hospital, remarked, "Our dedication is showcased through the tireless

efforts of our exceptional staff, who strive to deliver unmatched medical expertise, top-notch care, service excellence, and a team of highly skilled doctors. We are committed to meeting the unique healthcare requirements of Oman's expecting mothers, women and children."

Dr Khalid al Balushi, HR Director of Saada Hospital, expressed, "The launch of Saada Hospital signifies a remarkable breakthrough for Oman's healthcare sector. By upholding uncompromising standards of quality, excellence and patient-centric care, the hospital is poised to revolutionise healthcare services nationwide."

O Bunkering launches operations at Khasab Port

MUSCAT: Oman-based bunker trading company O Bunkering has announced that it is expanding its operations to the Port of Khasab, where it has been appointed as an official physical supplier of bunker services.

Due to its strategic location, the Port of Khasab is an attractive setting for ferry operations, cruise vessels, and international freight and cargo.

This new agreement with

Hutchison Ports Sohar, the company responsible for the management and operations of the Port of Khasab, significantly extends O Bunkering's reach within Oman and the broader maritime sector, cementing its reputation as a reliable and trusted provider of high-quality marine fuels, said O Bunkering.

In its new role at the Port of Khasab, O Bunkering will bring its comprehensive range



of bunker services to a larger clientele, offering both local and

international customers access to competitively priced, high-quality,

and sustainable marine fuels.

Ali bin Amur al Shibani, CEO of O Bunkering, said: "O Bunkering's appointment as an official bunker supplier at the Port of Khasab reflects our commitment to the growth and diversification of Oman's maritime industry.

"This strategic move not only strengthens our footprint in the region, but also enhances the port's competitiveness."

This latest agreement ensures

that the Port of Khasab is well-equipped to meet the increasing demand for high-standard bunker services, vital for the operations of the many vessels that use the port.

Additionally, it reaffirms O Bunkering's dedication to the implementation of environmentally conscious practices, in line with the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) decarbonisation targets.

GCC’s healthcare industry: Advancements and growth potential



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region has witnessed remarkable advancements in its healthcare industry over the past decade.

With a growing population and increasing demand for quality healthcare services, the GCC countries have made significant investments to enhance their healthcare infrastructure, attract skilled professionals, and adopted innovative technologies.

The governments of GCC nations have allocated substantial funds for healthcare development. For instance, Saudi Arabia has earmarked over \$160 billion for its healthcare sector by 2030 accounting for 60% of all of the healthcare expenditures in the GCC, with \$36.8 billion already spent in 2022 on both healthcare and social development.

United Arab Emirates invested

\$2.2 billion in healthcare infrastructure in 2022. These investments aim to improve healthcare access and quality, expand specialised services, and promote medical research and innovation. Health expenditure per capita of United Arab Emirates increased from 743 US dollars in 2001 to 2,192 US dollars in 2020 growing at an average annual rate of 6.18%.

The GCC region has embraced healthcare technology, with electronic health records (EHRs) becoming prevalent. In Qatar, approximately 90% of healthcare facilities have adopted EHR systems, facilitating seamless information exchange and improving patient care.

Furthermore, the use of telemedicine has seen rapid growth, with the UAE witnessing a 900% increase in teleconsultations in 2021 alone.

Furthermore, artificial

intelligence (AI) and machine learning applications are being leveraged to enhance diagnostics, drug discovery, and personalised medicine, opening up new avenues for growth and innovation.

These technologies enhance healthcare delivery and empower patients to access medical services remotely.

GCC countries have become attractive destinations for medical tourism. In 2020, Dubai welcomed over 350,000 medical tourists, while Oman has witnessed a steady increase in medical tourists, particularly from neighbouring countries.

The GCC’s reputation for high-quality healthcare, advanced infrastructure, and competitive pricing has positioned it as a global medical tourism hub.

Collaborations with international healthcare providers and institutions have further enhanced the region’s reputation

and capabilities.

The GCC governments have recognised the importance of preventive and primary healthcare in promoting population well-being. Initiatives such as mandatory health screenings and wellness programmes have been implemented across the region.

For instance, Bahrain launched a national health survey targeting non-communicable diseases, aiding in early detection and preventive measures. These efforts are aimed at reducing the burden on hospitals, improving overall health outcomes, and achieving cost savings in the long term.

The healthcare industry in the GCC presents lucrative opportunities for investors and industry players. The pharmaceutical market in the GCC is expected to reach \$20.5 billion by 2025, driven by factors such as increasing chronic diseases and a rising elderly population.

The medical device market is also flourishing, with projections of reaching \$9.5 billion by 2025. Moreover, the demand for healthcare IT solutions, healthcare infrastructure development, and healthcare professional training and education is on the rise, creating avenues for collaboration and investment.

The Gulf countries import over 80% of their drugs from Western countries, indicating high demand and potential commercial success in the pharmaceutical market.

The healthcare industry in the GCC region is experiencing remarkable advancements and holds immense growth potential.

With substantial government investments, technological innovations, a thriving medical tourism sector, and a focus on preventive and primary healthcare, the GCC countries are well-positioned to become regional leaders in healthcare excellence.

China stares hard at its own lost decade

YAWEN CHEN

China has good reason to hold back on unleashing big stimulus. The central bank has made small cuts to interest rates as everything from credit growth to exports disappoint.

Cutting aggressively as global interest rates rise would put too much pressure on the yuan but policymakers in the world’s second largest economy are evidently uncomfortable with this year’s underwhelming 5% growth target.

For President Xi Jinping, it’s a hard choice between short term gains and his long-term ambition to rebalance the economy.

The central government in Beijing has room to act; its leverage is just 21% of GDP as of March, per the National Institution for Finance and Development.

One idea it is considering is to issue about \$140 billion of special treasury bonds outside the annual budget to help crank up investment in infrastructure, according to the Wall Street Journal. It has issued these instruments only thrice in history, the last batch at the height of the pandemic in 2020. Yet flashing such a high-profile card with no glaring crisis would set an unwelcome precedent.

Even if it does issue such bonds, funds may be indirectly used to help poorer provinces repay debt. They are squeezed because land sales accounting for nearly a third of fiscal revenue continue to fall. Only a fifth of local government financing vehicles (LGFVs) which collectively owe some \$9 trillion in borrowings can pay their short-term debt, Rhodium Group estimates.

Defaults of these would likely be unacceptable to

Beijing.

Other potential levers would require authorities to take a leap of faith, such as cash handouts to households, a measure they worry would encourage laziness; or would come at the cost of reversing Xi’s flagship policies aimed at capping debt at local governments or in the property sector, which drives a quarter of GDP.

Unwinding those measures risks speculators betting on houses again and local officials building more subways and roads that generate miserable returns.

Worse, China’s housing glut and population decline make past stimulus strategies harder to justify this time around. Yet doing too little may prove costly too. After Xi’s successive crackdowns and Covid-19, Chinese faith in the economy is shaken. Price growth for new homes, already tightly regulated by the government, moderated to 0.1% on an annual basis in May from a 13% peak in 2016.

Those who thought property was a one-way winning bet are rushing to pay down mortgages. With industrial profits plunging, companies are exhibiting similar conservatism; private-sector investment fell in the year to May from the same period last year.

The double whammy of depressed consumption and investment is raising fears of long-term stagnation similar to Japan’s “lost decade” in the 1990s following a real estate crash, when annual economic growth averaged just 1%.

Beijing has tighter administrative controls and it can probably avoid a sudden property price correction or messy bursting of debt bubbles.

Yet without action China risks slowly slipping into the same outcome. —Reuters

Defaulting on Africa’s future



MASOOD AHMED

The author is President of the Center for Global Development.

In 2017, the International Monetary Fund categorised 15 Sub-Saharan African countries as being in debt distress or at high risk of it. Since then, economic shocks induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, dramatic spikes in food and fuel prices owing to the Ukraine war, and the rising dollar have exacerbated the crisis.

But, even as 23 countries in the region now face unsustainable debt burdens, very few have defaulted. Only two states – Ghana and Zambia – stopped servicing their external debts, while three others have sought to restructure their obligations – Chad, Ethiopia, and Malawi.

Why has the predicted wave of defaults not materialised? Did the initial assessments exaggerate the risks? Have these countries and their creditors found some way to ease the pain of unsustainable debt?

As cheerleaders of economic development in Africa, should we celebrate, or at the very least, relax a little? On the contrary, there is ample reason to worry.

Even after G20 countries provided temporary debt relief, and the IMF issued \$650 billion of special drawing rights (SDRs), the Fund’s reserve asset) to unlock extra liquidity, African governments have had to slash their already meager spending on health, education, and public investment in order to pay their external creditors.

To avoid debt default, African finance ministers are defaulting on their obligations to future generations. In Kenya, debt-



service costs tripled in the last six years and now account for nearly 60% of public revenue. Over the same period, development spending, including on education and health, was halved, and some ministries are in arrears. As the chief economic advisor to the Kenyan president tweeted, “Salaries or default? Take your pick.”

In Sierra Leone, one of the world’s poorest countries, real (inflation-adjusted) public spending per person is expected to be 20% lower this year than in 2015. On the other hand, debt-service payments have more than doubled over the same period. In the four years before its default, Zambia cut public spending by 20%. These are not isolated cases.

Today, 20 low- and lower-middle-income countries are spending more than a quarter of government revenue on external debt service, and these costs will rise further next year, when Eurobonds issued by African governments hit a wall of maturities.

Most of these countries are also paying substantial amounts to service domestic debts that helped finance the fight against Covid-19. And all of them are underspending on health and education – essential building blocks to equip their young people for a better future.

When faced with the choice between servicing external loans

and funding much-needed social programmes, policymakers almost always opt to pay creditors. After all, a default has deep and lasting financial consequences. A country that cannot repay its debt to international creditors loses the ability to borrow from capital markets for five years.

Moreover, it can take many months before a low-income economy that has defaulted sees any relief, owing to problems with the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments, or support from international institutions like the IMF.

Default also has a human cost. Poverty levels spike by 30% immediately after a default and remain elevated for a decade, infant deaths rise by 13%, and surviving children face shorter life expectancy, according to a World Bank study.

Any government contemplating a default may also face profound political consequences. A finance minister is 33% more likely to be replaced in the year after a default, which is commonly viewed as an admission of failure by fellow policymakers and the public at large.

Moreover, the international forums where sovereign-debt restructuring occurs have subtle and not-so-subtle ways of reminding government officials of their irresponsibility.

No wonder the beleaguered

finance minister postpones a default long past the point where the country would benefit from a preemptive restructuring of its external debt obligations. Such costs may explain why so few countries have defaulted, even under extreme fiscal pressure.

But they do not address the long-term price that Africa, and the world, will pay for a generation of under-educated children with poorer health outcomes – the African workforce of tomorrow. The fundamental problem is that many of these countries need affordable and predictable financing to sustain economic- and social-development programmes.

But the international financial institutions and OECD countries that traditionally offered cheap funding have pulled back over the past decade, and have been replaced by more expensive commercial lenders and newer bilateral creditors.

Although the international community should do everything in its power to improve and streamline the sovereign-debt restructuring process, the real solution is to ensure that debt-distressed African countries have adequate financing to invest in health, education, and critical infrastructure.

If they must continue paying their creditors, at least it won’t be at the expense of Africa’s future.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalfalla al Butaidi, and Chairman of the Supreme Court Sheikh Al Mubarak bin Ahmad bin Al-Hadi took the oath of office at Al Rashid Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world." He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability. — OMA

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamed al Wubshi, who stepped his car to scare away a group of people at a highway in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his view, Hamed said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

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CULTURE

Aerial photo shows an image created by growing different varieties of rice in a paddy in Shenyang, China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

The balti dish was first created in Birmingham in 1975. The authentic balti is cooked using vegetable oil, not ghee, in a specially designed bowl made of pressed carbon steel.
— AFP



FASHION

British supermodel and singer Naomi Campbell poses for a photocall at the Louis Vuitton Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show, as part of the Paris Fashion Week, central Paris.

— AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Karan Deol (R) and actress Drisha Acharya pose at their wedding reception ceremony in Mumbai.
— AFP



MUSIC

US singer Alecia
Beth Moore Hart
aka Pink (P!nk)
performs on stage
at the Paris La
Defense Arena, in
Nanterre, western
Paris. — AFP

art & life

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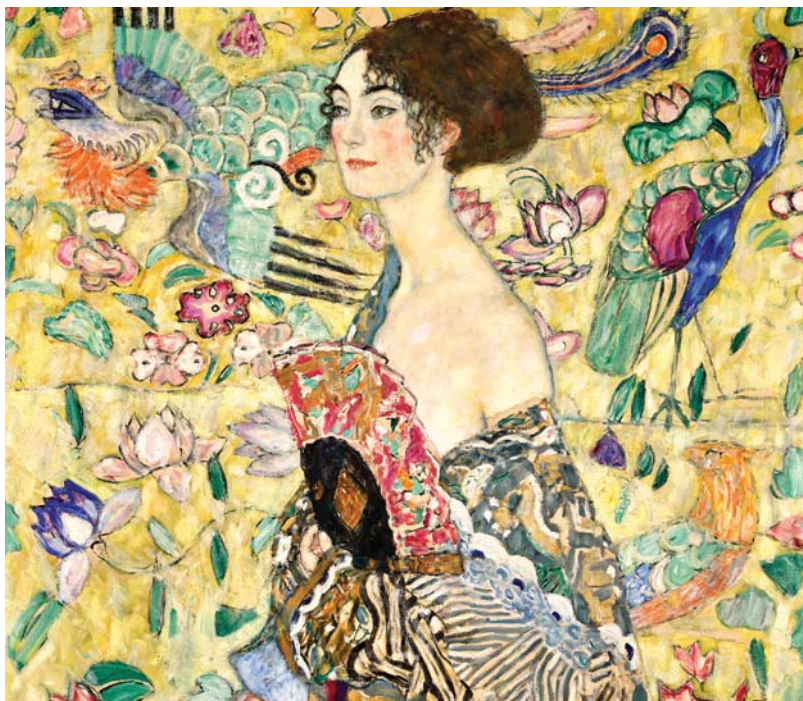


**Defying odds
to pursue her
passion for
film-making**

Despite lacking the support, Buthaina bint Nasser bin Saif al Kindi, an Omani film production student, remained steadfast in her decision to follow her passion. Many people tried to dissuade her claiming that a film production major would not lead to a successful future. However, she refused to give up on her dreams

ART

'Lady with
a Fan'
headed to
auction with
\$80 million
price tag



Lady with a Fan

The last-ever portrait Austrian artist Gustav Klimt painted before he died is headed for auction next week, with a price estimate of \$80 million.

"Dame mit Fächer" ("Lady with a Fan") — a portrait of an unnamed woman — was still on an easel in Klimt's studio when the painter died in February 1918.



Gustav Klimt

It leads Sotheby's Modern & Contemporary Evening Auction on June 27 in London, with a price estimate of around 65 million pounds (\$80 million). That price

tag makes it "the most valuable ever to have been offered at auction in Europe," according to Sotheby's.

"It shows Klimt at the very height of his creative prowess, drawing on imagery from Asia of which he was obsessed," Helena Newman, chairman of Sotheby's Europe and worldwide head of impressionist and modern art, told Reuters, referring to depictions of a phoenix, lotus flower and other elements in the painting.

"It's very rare for a Klimt painting of this quality and caliber of a portrait of a woman to come to auction."

Last offered for sale in 1994, the painting is one of a small number of Klimt's portraits in private collections, according to the auction house.

Other artworks being offered in the sale include Lucian Freud's painting "Night Interior" (8 million-12 million pounds), a portrayal of his friend Penelope Cuthbertson, a rare self-portrait by Leonor Fini (400,000-600,000 pounds) and a painted bronze bust by Alberto Giacometti, "Buste de Diego au col roulé" (4 million-6 million pounds), among others.

— Reuters



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By Fatima Al Marshoudi

Buthaina bint Nasser bin Saif al kindiyah, an Omani film production student at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM), is making waves in the world of filmmaking with her talent and dedication. Despite facing challenges and naysayers, Buthaina's passion for film has propelled her forward.

Buthaina's journey in film began during her high school years when she discovered her love for creating videos. With her own YouTube channel at just 14 years old, she honed her skills in filming and editing, laying the foundation for her future aspirations in the field of film production.

While UWM does not offer a specific major in film-making or film studies, the university's Department of Film, Video, Animation, and New Genres within the Peck School of the Arts provides a comprehensive education in the various aspects of film and video production. Buthaina found her niche in the programme, which offers a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree with a focus on film production.

Despite lacking the support, she desired to pursue her studies, Buthaina remained steadfast in her decision to follow her passion. Many people tried to dissuade her, claiming that a film production major would not lead to a successful future. However, she refused to give up on her dreams and pressed on, determined to prove them wrong.

Buthaina's dedication paid off when her documentary film, "Wa Lahum Hayah" which means and they have life, garnered attention and acclaim at multiple film festivals. The university recognised her talent and granted her a scholarship to complete her studies, easing her financial burden. As she was studying on a government scholarship, she also received an award of money for her achievements.

"Wa Lahum Hayah" was nominated as one of the best documentaries at the Alabama Film Festival's "Black Warrior Film Festival 2022", and went on to win the Best Documentary Film at the "Aks Festival" in Oman. The film's success is a testament to Buthaina's storytelling abilities and her skill in capturing compelling narratives on screen.



Filming "Wa Lahum Hayah" posed unique challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. With remote learning in effect, accessing equipment became more difficult compared to normal times when the university provided everything needed for filming. Nevertheless, Buthaina persevered and managed to create a captivating documentary despite the limitations.

Buthaina's accomplishments have opened doors of opportunity for her

to collaborate with major companies and engage in professional training. Her talent and success in the film industry have garnered recognition and respect, paving the way for a promising future in the field she loves.

Buthaina expressed resilience in the face of criticism and opposition encountered within the film-making



ART

Lost Rembrandt portraits to be sold after 200 years

AS FAMILY HEIRLOOMS go, it doesn't get much better than a pair of Rembrandt portraits that the world had forgotten about for 200 years.

A British family "rather casually enjoyed" the oil paintings by the 17th century Dutch master until an expert from Christie's auction house spotted them. Now the last pair of Rembrandt portraits to remain in private hands are set to fetch between £5 million and £8 million when they go under the hammer at Christie's in London next month.

"I first encountered these pictures a few years ago on a routine valuation and was stopped in my tracks," Henry Pettifer, International Deputy Chairman of Old Master Paintings at Christie's, said as the paintings went on display in Amsterdam.



"I was really staggered to discover that the pictures had never really been researched and never been addressed in any of the literature on Rembrandt over the course of 200 years."

The 20-centimetre high (eight-inch) oval portraits, believed to date from 1635, depict an elderly plumber named Jan Willemsz van der Pluym and his wife Jaapgen Carels.

The couple, painted in an unusually intimate style for Rembrandt, were friends of the artist's family and hailed

from his hometown of Leiden in the Netherlands.

Casually enjoying

An ancestor of the current owners bought the paintings at auction at Christie's in 1824, where they were listed as Rembrandts, and they have remained in the same collection ever since.

"They've been sitting quietly and enjoyed by the owner's family over the course of two centuries... rather casually enjoying them very much," said Pettifer.

After spotting them, "forensic" work began on verifying that they were genuine.

"Essentially the pictures were unknown, initially to be treated with a great deal of caution, but obviously needed to be examined and researched in great detail," he said.

The auction house enlisted help from art experts, including from Amsterdam's famed Rijksmuseum.

"We were fortunate enough that they had their scientific team really very carefully look into them for nearly two years," Christie's expert Manja Rottink said.

Experts looked at the line of ownership of the paintings, which are mentioned in an inventory of the oldest daughter of the portrait subjects, said Rottink, the senior international specialist of old master paintings at Christie's. — **AFF**

DISCOVERY

Stonehenge-like 4,000-year-old sanctuary discovered in Netherlands

ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAVE discovered a 4,000-year-old sanctuary made up of ditches and burial mounds in the central Netherlands that they believe may have served a similar purpose to Stonehenge.

Like the famous stone circle in southern England, the sanctuary — which was as big as at least three soccer fields and built with soil and wood — was built to align with the sun on the solstices. The archaeologists also discovered offerings, including animal skeletons, human skulls and valuable items such as a bronze spearhead, at the spots where the sun shone through the openings, according to a statement from the municipality of Tiel, a town around 70 km (45 miles) east of Rotterdam where the site was excavated.



"The largest mound served as a sun calendar, similar to the famous stones of Stonehenge in England," said the statement.

"This sanctuary must have been a highly significant place where people kept track of special days in the year, performed rituals and buried their dead. Rows of poles stood along pathways used for processions."

While excavating the site in 2017, archaeologists also discovered several graves. One grave was of a woman buried with a glass bead from Mesopotamia, present-day Iraq.

It's the oldest bead ever found in

the Netherlands and researchers said it proved people of this area were in contact with people almost 5,000 km away.

The archaeologists took six years to research more than a million excavated objects dating from the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages.

After the excavation was finished, the site was covered again to allow construction work.

Some of the discoveries will be showcased in a local museum in Tiel and in the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities. — **Reuters**



FASHION

Five trends from Milan men's fashion week



MEN'S FASHION WEEK wraps up in Milan on Tuesday last week after five days of catwalk shows presenting the luxury market's Spring-Summer 2024 collections. Here are the top five trends.

SHORT SUITS

Gone are traditional jacket and trouser suits. Instead, shorts are paired with wide, double-breasted blazers or slim-fitting jackets, worn with or without a tie. Valentino is crazy about them, and offers them in cotton or leather, loose- or close-fitting, but always elegant. Prada's shorts have darts and are a perfect fit, while Billionaire prefers them in Hawaiian mode, adorned with palm trees. Indian brand Dhruv Kapoor dares to bare with an ultra-short version in black cotton or denim,



with an exposed zip. But spoilsport Giorgio Armani, 88, issued his own rule on shorts during fashion week, saying that "Bermuda shorts mean being on a beach or out and about for the holidays."

"And above all you have to have good legs! In the meantime, shorts are for sport, and that's that", said the Italian master of minimalism.

MINI SKIRT, MAXI EFFECT

For the more daring, Charles Jeffrey Loverboy offers a sparkling blue mini-skirt with a flashy belt revealing hairy legs, also suitable for XXL sizes. Or a low-waisted fluorescent green tutu which reveals a flash of red underpants. Dhruv Kapoor has a full skirt to below the knees or worn over trousers, matched with flat sandals and an ultra-long belt with



straps skimming the ground. Fendi, which deserted the catwalks of Milan to have its models strut in a leather workshop outside Florence instead, offers a work kilt in the form of an ultra-short skirt in brown or greige leather, to slip over trousers or shorts.

THE RETURN OF THE TIE

Ties make a big comeback. At Dolce & Gabbana, they are narrow and discreet, in a vintage 1950s style. Valentino innovates with a grey wool jumper with an almost imperceptible incorporated tie, while Armani and Fendi go with casual-chic scarves, tied around the neck.

FREE THE TORSO

Waistcoats are worn without shirts, including at the very classic



Armani, while at Dsquared2 models go bare-chested, with just a pearl necklace.

Etro offers colourful poncho-style capes that leave chests and navels bare, while at Dolce & Gabbana, shirts and tunics are translucent, even transparent, while some trousers reveal legs underneath.

SHOW-STOPPING BAGS

Bags are a must: black, yellow, apple green or bright red, tiny or voluminous, discreet or flashy. At Fendi, they range from woven baskets all the way to trompe-l'oeil toolboxes. The luxury house's iconic "Baguette" bag has also been brought up to date, while Prada highlights its leather bags, "unexpectedly soft to the touch", in black, grey, khaki, red and purple. — AFP

LIFE AT THE ACADEME



DR ZAINAB AL AJMI

Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs)

THE WAY STUDENTS spend their time outside the classroom significantly shapes their achievements in lifelong learning. Afterschool learning time, which is called Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) provides quality experiences with skills development beyond the classes. Typically, the importance of ELOs programmes appears during the summer break which presents a valuable opportunity for students to explore and enrich new interests. Expanded Learning Opportunities as described in the Expanded Learning Opportunities Guide (2018), refer to the various programmes offered by schools and community-based organisations to provide enriching experiences for young individuals. These experiences take place after-school and during the summer. ELO programmes encompass a range of activities such as clubs, field trips, and tutoring programmes, aiming to foster skill development through hands-on and experiential learning. What's more, by students engaging in these diverse and captivating learning experiences, they have chance to cultivate essential social competencies (e.g., self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and social skills).

On the other hand, (20%) of student's time is spent in school. However, the remaining (80%) of their time holds significant potential to acquire new skills. It's crucial to recognise that how students and youth choose to spend this substantial portion of their time can have a profound impact. This presents a valuable opportunity to utilise that time effectively, offering support for their academic and social development. In their meta-analysis of the research literature about afterschool, Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) found that "... participants demonstrated significant increases in their self-perceptions and bonding to school, positive social behaviours, school grades and levels of academic achievement, and significant reductions in problem behaviours." Moreover, "there were significant increases in youths' self-perceptions, bonding to school, positive social behaviours, school grades, and achievement test scores. Significant reductions also appeared for problem behaviours" (Lauer & Smith, 2011).

Based on the findings from the aforementioned research, Lauer and Smith (2011) propose several strategies for expanding learning opportunities through community Learning Centers, as follows: 1. Align in-school and out-of-school learning: Afterschool and summer learning programmes can do what they do best — offering homework help and hands-on, fun activities — in service to the same standards and objectives that students are expected to meet during school time. 2. Identify and respond to individual learning needs: A key aspect of focusing on out-of-school-time activities is individual students' learning needs. Afterschool and summer programmes can usually accommodate more intensive interventions for striving readers — interventions that give striving readers more learning time in more individualised settings outside of the school-day classroom — and can be especially effective in stemming summer learning loss. 3. Partner with families: Afterschool and summer programme staff often have more opportunities than school-day staff to interact and develop positive relationships with families. Additionally gathering information about students' interests, coordinating services, and connecting families to each other for support. 4. Partner with community groups and organisations, and treat school, home, and community as a unified system: Unlike any other major education initiative, the 21st-century community learning centres require school-community partnerships, family engagement, and varied engaged learning opportunities for young people.

In summary, one benefit of ELOs is that they can help students enhance important skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. These skills are essential for success in work, and life. Another benefit of ELOs is that they can introduce students to careers and help them build relationships with mentors and professionals in their areas of interest. This can be particularly important for students who may not have access to these resources otherwise. As a result, when initiating an ELOs programme its needful to prepare one to two specific goals to concentrate on.

Dr Zainab al Ajmi is very passionate about the growth of the education system in Oman and wants the country to produce globally competitive workforce. Her column tackles movements and developments within the education sector.

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