

HM greets Duke of Luxembourg

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to His Royal Highness Duke Henri, Grand Duke of Luxembourg on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the Grand Duke wishing him good health and long life and further progress and prosperity for the people of Luxembourg. – ONA

SUNRISE - 05:21 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 03:54 AM
DHUHR - 12:14 PM
ASR - 03:32 PM
MAGHRIB - 07:02 PM
ISHA - 08:24 PM



MUSCAT

OMAN WELCOMES ARMENIA'S RECOGNITION OF PALESTINE

The Sultanate of Oman welcomed the decision of the Republic of Armenia to recognise the sisterly State of Palestine, expressing its positive appreciation for the decision. In a statement, the Foreign Ministry urged the countries of the international community to follow suit in order to preserve the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state in a way that enhances all efforts supporting the two-state solution and achieving a lasting peace in the region. — ONA

FIRST-EVER FILM CITY PROJECT WITH RO 12M INVESTMENT

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has unveiled plans for the launch of a 'Film City' project with an investment value of RO 12 million, based on the outcomes of Creative and Cultural Workshops held earlier in March. According to Nader al Rawahi, a delegate from Oman Vision 2040 Follow-up Unit, the project is expected to provide more than 100 job opportunities for Omanis and aims to produce and export films. DETAILS ON P13

DHOFAR CALLING

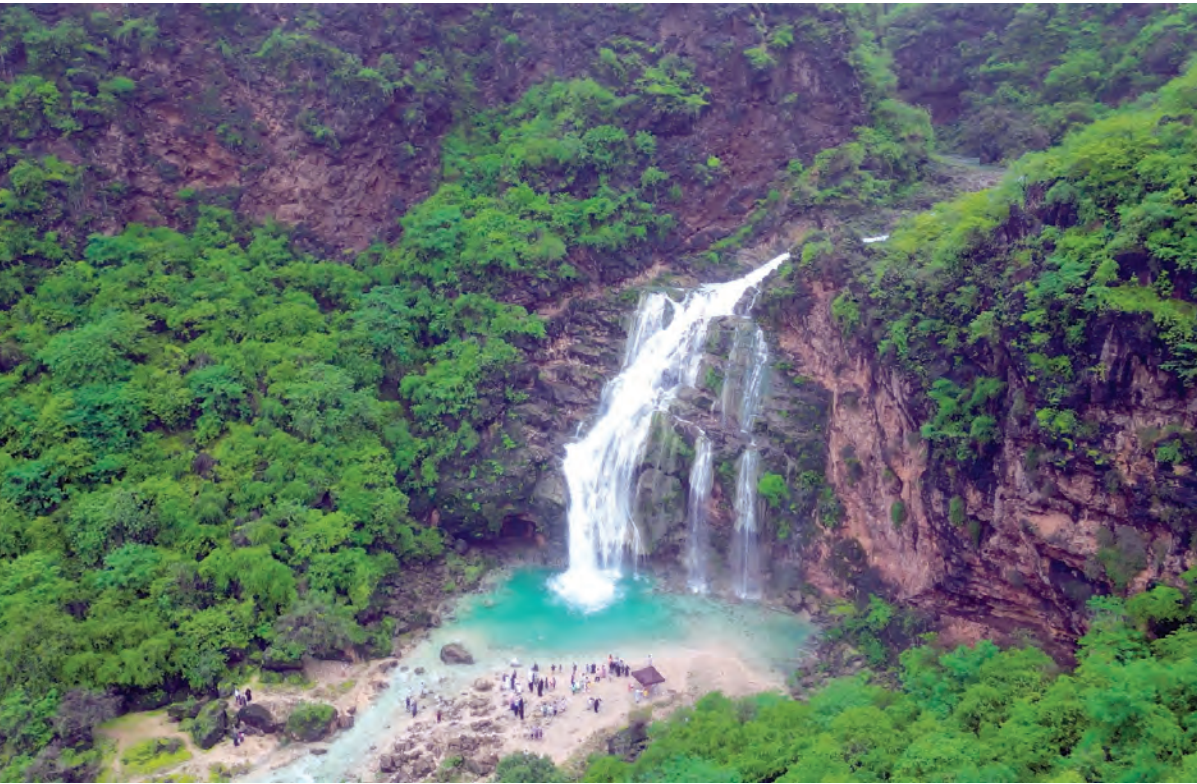
QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 22

Dhofar Governorate has lined up an exciting and diverse spread of activities and events as part of this year's Khareef Dhofar season, which began on June 21 and will continue for a record 90 days until September 20.

This year, exceptional events and global happenings will converge with the cool weather and stunning nature to create a unique tourism experience.

An overview of the khareef extravaganza awaiting tourists was shared during a press conference organised via the interactive digital platform (Ayn) of the Ministry of Information on Saturday.

HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, stated that Dhofar Governorate ushered in the unique Khareef Dhofar season on June 21 in keeping with longstanding practice every year. The governorate, he noted, is the ideal tourism destination in light of its wonderful weather, stunning



natural landscapes, exceptional events and diverse environments, including marine, coastal and mountainous, in addition to its rich cultural and historical heritage.

The Khareef Dhofar season is ideal for families and individual tourists alike, as was evident from the wide visitors responses witnessed last year. Nearly one million visitors travelled to

Dhofar during the 2023 holiday, he said, stressing the importance of enhancing the role of tourism in driving economic growth and contributing to empowering Omani entrepreneurs. An

ambitious plan has been put in place to enhance and develop many tourist sites, such as developing natural panoramas, improving waterfronts and enhancing water springs, all while taking into account environmental sustainability.

HH Sayyid Marwan said this year's festival is notable because it spans a total of 90 days, giving visitors a longer opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the governorate and its various activities and events.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, presented the most important events of the Khareef Dhofar season 2024, which will be distributed in several existing and new sites; to provide an opportunity for citizens, residents and visitors to experience new exciting and thrilling experiences. Events will be themed around five main pillars: environment and public health, youth, children, culture and arts. SEE ALSO P2

Egypt to prosecute travel agents for 'fraudulent' Haj trips: Government

CAIRO: Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly on Saturday ordered 16 tourism companies stripped of their licences and referred their managers to the public prosecutor's office for illegally facilitating pilgrims' travel to Mecca, the cabinet said.

The order came after various countries reported more than 1,100 deaths, many attributed to high heat, during this year's Haj.

Arab diplomats said earlier this week that Egyptians accounted for 658 deaths, 630 of them unregistered pilgrims.

"The prime minister has ordered the licences of these



Departing pilgrims shade themselves with umbrellas as they walk past buses in Saudi Arabia's holy city of Mecca. — AFP

companies to be revoked, their managers to be referred to the public prosecutor and the imposition of a fine to benefit the

families of the pilgrims who died because of them," the Egyptian cabinet said in a statement.

It said the rise in the deaths of unregistered Egyptian pilgrims stemmed from some companies which "organised the Haj programmes using a personal visit visa, which prevents its holders from entering Mecca" via official channels.

On Friday, a senior Saudi official defended the Gulf kingdom's management of the pilgrimage.

Haj permits are allocated to countries on a quota system and distributed to individuals via a lottery. — AFP

Plans to launch new low-cost airline under assessment: CAA

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman is planning to launch a new low-cost airline and interested companies have time till the first week of August to express their interest in obtaining operating licence from the Sultanate of Oman.

Apart from plans for developing six new airports, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) also seeks to encourage more airlines to operate from the country in the future.

Speaking to the Observer, Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said, "What was announced is an Expression of Interest (EoI) and we are waiting for feedback from the interested



Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri

parties. We will then assess the appetite of the sector and decide accordingly on the next step. Interested parties have time until August 5 to respond."

Al Abri added that the civil aviation sector in the country in general is a safe place for investment and this will be actively promoted to attract more airlines to the country.

According to market sources, EoI is an initial step in the tendering process by organisations to survey the market. It is a pre-tender document to screen potential bidders. It may noted that the CAA announced its intention to license a new low-cost airline, which created a buzz as the Sultanate of Oman already has a budget airline, which started in 2017, while the national airline, Oman Air, has been undergoing a restructuring programme.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, too, recently acknowledged that much more is needed to provide connectivity to tourists wishing to come to the Sultanate of Oman directly from their countries.



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Khareef Dhofar 2024: Celebrating culture, sports and entertainment

QASIM AL MASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 22

Khareef Dhofar season 2024 will be celebrated at various sites in the governorate, including the wilayats of Thamrait, Taqah, Mirbat and Sadah, with a focus on diverse cultural, commercial and entertainment activities. Specialised international exhibitions will also be held at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

According to Ammar bin Obaid Ghawas, Director of Events and Awareness Department at Dhofar Municipality, youngsters will have the opportunity to take part in a variety of new and diverse events across sports, recreation and entertainment.

Itin Square will host a range of brand-new games that are different from previous years, in addition to a theatre equipped with the latest technologies that will showcase numerous international performances. Visitors will also enjoy dazzling lighting shows, laser fountain shows and drone shows, which are the largest this year in terms of number and duration.

Commenting on the popular appeal of last year's festival, he said that events sites attracted between 400,000 and 800,000 visitors each. More than 150 events were staged last year, distributed across arts, sports, culture, heritage and entertainment. This time around, as many as 180 events will be held around Dhofar, he said.

Importantly, young Omani



entrepreneurs and SMEs have been invited to make the most of the opportunity to participate in this year's festival, said Dr Al Ghassani. Last year, around 1,733 individuals and SMEs, in addition to 334 companies, took part in various khareef activities.

With the allocation of more sites this year, young entrepreneurs and SMEs can choose from a list of 500 different opportunities and activities to benefit from economically and commercially during the holiday – an initiative that will create temporary income earning opportunities for thousands of young people, he said.

Sports activities will be varied to suit varied interests. For the first time, Salalah Public Park will host an endurance sports event, which will take place weekly. In addition, several sports pitches will be allocated for sports events during the khareef season. The Salalah International Cycling Tour

will return in a more distinguished format after being officially registered and approved by the International Cycling Federation to include four stages with the participation of more than 100 cyclists from different countries.

Fans of motorsports from all age groups will be treated to the Oman Automobile Association's events, characterised by speed and competition. These events will be held at the 'Celebrations Square'. The Dhofar International Drag Race championship will also witness wide participation from the GCC countries at Al Damar Beach in the Wilayat of Mirbat. The traditional weapons shooting competition will be the largest this year in terms of prize value and the number of local and Gulf participants.

Among the most important events is 'Kiddy Time' in Uqad Public Park, designed to amaze children. International animated

shows and beloved children's characters will also be part of it. Spaces have also been allocated in Salalah Public Park for weekly sports events dedicated to children of different age groups.

Entertainment options will be complete with the Uptown Entertainment City, featuring many electric and air games that suit different age groups.

Complementing the site is a modern and fully serviced recreational outlet with an aesthetic design that provides walkways and green spaces.

The 'Return to the Past Village' will contain many events and activities that simulate the different environments of Dhofar including urban, rural, Bedouin, marine and agricultural. It will also present a new cultural and heritage experience by hosting Omani wilayats from outside the governorate for the first time, namely Suhar, Nizwa and Sur. The experience will be expanded in future seasons to include other wilayats from all over the country.

The village will reflect Oman's rich cultural and civilisational heritage through an arts and events square and various traditional markets with live performances and arts that embody Omani culture.

There will also be many cultural events in the various wilayats which aim to highlight the national identity and attract tourists and introduce them to the unique Omani culture through specialised exhibitions, conferences, awareness workshops and theatrical performances.

MAJLIS ASH'SHURA TO DEBATE DRAFT LAWS TODAY

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura will hold a regular session today to discuss a number of draft laws referred by the government.

The council's standing committees have studied and hosted the relevant authorities to listen to their views and observations on the draft laws. The council's ninth and eleventh regular sessions will be held on Sunday and Wednesday June 23 and 26.

This includes discussing the report of the relevant interim committee on the job-seekers file, the vision of the Economic and Financial Committee on the draft agreement to be signed between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Cyprus for the avoidance of double taxation, and a draft agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding joint administrative

assistance in the field of customs.

The two sessions will see discussion on a number of reports of the standing committees regarding expressed desires referred to them by the council's office for study including the report of the Health and Social Committee on the expressed desire regarding the services provided to children in social care centres in the Sultanate of Oman, the report of the Economic and Financial Committee on the expressed desire regarding the work of Credit Oman, as well as the report of the Food and Water Security Committee on the expressed desire regarding the status of the state fisheries companies.

Tomorrow (Monday), the Majlis Ash'shura will host Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, to deliver her ministry's statement.

OMSB grooms highly qualified medical cadres

MUSCAT: Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiyah, Executive President of Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB), said that the Board will carry on implementing strategic healthcare projects.

In order to achieve these objectives, the OMSB is currently implementing 31 projects and initiatives that are included in the annual plan.

This is in addition to a number of initiatives related to the outputs of the Human Resources Lab in coordination with the Ministry of Health and a number of relevant authorities.

The OMSB's strategic plan includes 5 projects that aim to upgrade medical education and raise the levels of professional competence of health practitioners.

Work is underway on the medical training and health innovation development project which aims to embrace innovative tools and programmes to develop medical education and training.

Also under implementation is the National Examination Centre project which aims to provide professional classification exams for health practitioners as well



as exams for specialty and fellowship programmes.

The OMSB has projects that aim to adapt medical specialties with the needs of the health sector and develop the advanced medical education system.

The OMSB currently has 20 specialised training programmes namely: histopathology, anaesthesia, clinical biochemistry, dermatology, emergency medicine, family medicine, general dentistry, general surgery, haematology, internal medicine, microbiology, neurology, obstetrics and gynaecology, ophthalmology, oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthopaedics, ENT surgery, paediatrics, psychiatry and radiology. — ONA

CAPTURING EID AL ADHA TRADITIONS

Reinildo van Heuven Dernison, a Dutch neuro-psychotherapist and cognitive behavioural therapist, has captured enchanting images during Eid Al Adha. Having resided in Oman for eight years, she explored the vibrant regions of Bidiyah, Al Hamra and Wadi Al Arbaeen. Reinildo's camera chronicled the traditional method of henna preparation, a practice that remains deeply rooted in Omani culture and particularly fascinated her. She photographed Omani girls preparing and applying henna, marvelling at this art form that beautifully intertwines tradition and creativity. Invited by Omani families and visiting guesthouses, she also documented horse races and the vibrant family moods during the celebrations.

Her lens also captured Al Ardha performances and the bustling traditional markets in Bidiyah. Here, children spend their pocket money on small treats, while snacks and coffee are generously offered. Reinildo's pictures provide a captivating glimpse into these rich cultural traditions.



Photographs by Reinildo van Heuven Dernison



Back to work amidst scorching heat following Eid break

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After a long nine-day holiday for Eid Al Adha the entire country will return to work on Sunday amidst scorching heat in most parts of the country, barring the Dhofar Governorate.

Places such as Haima reported 46.9°C, Ibri 47.8°C, Al Amerat 46.9°C and Fahud 48.8°C during the last 24 hours, while Duqm 26.9°C, Al Ashkharah 26.2°C, Ras Al Hadd

25.6°C and Dhalkout 23.7°C reported the lowest temperatures during the same period.

Several citizens and vacationers returned to the capital to report to work from villages on Saturday evening.

While the khareef season officially started in the Dhofar Governorate, several visitors from Muscat said that the temperatures were slightly moderate compared to other parts of the country at the time.

"Naturally, temperatures are



expected to come down with occasional rains in the coming days, but otherwise it was bearable and relatively pleasant compared to the heatwave that is witnessed in the capital and other neighbouring cities."

While office goers return to work, a large chunk of expatriate families have gone on annual vacations, with schools closed during the summer holidays.

Most expatriates with school-going children have tagged their

vacation with annual leave to avail themselves of a lengthy break, according to HR managers of some private sector companies.

Several citizens who have been exploring foreign trips to cooler places cited various challenges.

"Several countries in Europe have become expensive due to taxes and inflation. Some countries are also witnessing temperatures, that are very high compared to their usual levels," said Hassan, an IT manager who plans to travel abroad next month.



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MoHUP, ICC conduct workshops on new building codes

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The International Code Council (ICC) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) kicked off a series of workshops in Muscat.

The project focuses on safety standards, sustainability, and technology integration, with the entire endeavour slated for completion by early 2026. The three-day workshop aims to eventually develop six comprehensive building codes tailored specifically to address the unique needs of Oman.

Oman's adoption of new codes, based on the 2021 International Codes (I-Codes), will raise

standards and promote best practices nationwide. This ensures citizen safety and positions the country as a leader in construction safety and sustainability.

The first series of workshops brought together key stakeholders, including designated government officials, design professionals, and industry experts.

The ICC and MoHUP focused on topics surrounding project scope, findings from the ICC's exploratory trip, research, local construction practices, and regulatory systems.

The sessions fostered deep discussions and identified key gaps, concluding with strategic recommendations for Oman building code enhancements.



The first series of workshops were held over three days in Muscat in May.

This collaborative effort ensures that the forthcoming codes will be comprehensive and reflective of Oman's future aspirations.

Building on the ICC's 2021 International Codes (I-Codes) as a foundation allows for an open,

consensus-driven approach to code development. However, the success of their adaptation in Oman depends on active involvement from local stakeholders.

Through this series of comprehensive workshops, Oman

towards achieving the goals of the development of the Oman building codes. The insights and expertise provided by ICC are invaluable as we strive to elevate the standards of safety, sustainability, and innovation in our construction industry."

Hamid Naderi, senior vice president of product development at ICC, underscored ICC's dedication to the project, saying, "Our objective is to develop building codes that address the unique needs of Oman while setting new standards for safety and resilience in the region. The active engagement and feedback from Omani stakeholders during this workshop are vital to our success."

Iranians in Oman can e-vote at Embassy on June 28

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Iranian citizens living in the Sultanate of Oman can vote in the upcoming presidential elections at the Iranian Embassy, according to a statement issued by the diplomatic mission in Muscat.

The embassy has announced its readiness to hold e-voting facility and urged the citizens of Iran residing in the Sultanate of Oman to take part in it on Friday, June 28, from 8 am to 6 pm at its premises.

"We, at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Muscat invite all Iranian citizens residing in the Sultanate of Oman to participate widely in the upcoming presidential elections and to practise their term in shaping the future of the country as we are ready to receive voters to cast their votes in the ballot box for these elections at the embassy," a representative of the mission said.

It was stated in the official statement No. (1) for the Organisation Committee for the Fourth Iranian Presidential Elections at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Muscat that this embassy will open its doors for the presidential elections during the aforesaid date and timing.

All Iranian citizens those who are residing or visiting the Sultanate of Oman who are over 18 years of age, and who were born before June 28, 2006, can make use of this facility to participate in these elections by producing their proof of birth date and national identity card.



RNO celebrates World Hydrography Day

MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman, represented by the Omani National Hydrographic Office, celebrated World Hydrography Day, observed annually on June 21.

The occasion highlights Oman's commitment to maintaining its distinguished position in the field of hydrographic services. By adopting the latest international technologies and practices, Oman ensures the highest levels of navigational safety in its waters.

This year's theme, 'Hydrographic Information — Enhancing Safety, Efficiency, and Sustainability in Marine Activities,' emphasises the optimal investment in both technical and human resources to boost hydrographic capabilities globally. It aims to provide cutting-edge technologies for professionals involved in marine data collection and management, as well as the production of navigational publications.

The theme also underscores



RNO celebrated World Hydrography Day on June 21

the importance of creating a conducive training environment that equips technicians with the necessary skills to stay abreast of advancements in hydrographic sciences.

This aligns with the ambitious goals set by the International Hydrographic Organisation, fostering close cooperation between the public and private sectors, and establishing strategic partnerships with government agencies, academic institutions, and private companies

specialising in marine technology.

Maritime navigation is rapidly evolving, significantly enhancing the role and importance of hydrographic information. Digital navigation, a major transformation in this field, utilises advanced technology to improve navigation operations.

It provides accurate and effective information, including marine data, electronic charts, and navigational references. Additionally, autonomous shipping, which relies on smart

technology, represents a pivotal shift by enabling ships to operate automatically without direct human intervention.

The International Hydrographic Organisation has introduced a comprehensive model of global hydrographic data known as S-100 to meet future demands for digital services and products.

The Omani National Hydrographic Office plans to launch this service in 2026. Visitors to Omani waters will then be able to access updated and accurate information through map display devices on ships, featuring multiple layers such as electronic maps, hydrographic data, sea currents, and weather conditions at sea.

In line with the digital transformation and knowledge revolution, the Omani National Hydrographic Office is also developing a website to facilitate access to hydrographic services for Omani waters. — ONA

Indian Embassy in Muscat celebrates International Day of Yoga

MUSCAT: The Embassy of India in Muscat, in association with the Indian School Muscat, celebrated the 10th International Day of Yoga which saw the participation of 2,000 people from all walks of life taking part.

As part of the celebrations, a common Yoga Protocol was conducted. This year's theme, 'Yoga for Self and Society,' reflects the impact yoga has on both individual well-being and societal harmony.

Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in his keynote address, highlighted the essence of yoga

in today's context. He said: "Yoga not only enhances personal health and well-being but also strengthens the social fabric by promoting unity and harmony." The Ambassador also expressed his gratitude to all participants, yoga organisations, sponsors, and volunteers who contributed to the success of the event.

In the lead-up to the International Day of Yoga, the Embassy launched the 'Marhaban Yoga: Health, Harmony, and Healing' initiative in April 2024. Under this initiative, more than 30 yoga events were conducted by the Embassy in association



The Embassy of India in Muscat celebrated the 10th International Day of Yoga.

with various yoga organisations in Oman over two months.

These events took place across the country, catering to people of all ages, from children to the elderly. The sessions focused on diverse themes such as health, harmony, healing, peace, mindfulness, and well-being, promoting the benefits of yoga for everyone.

A flagship curtain-raiser event was conducted in Salalah, which stood out among the series of events organised under Marhaban Yoga. It drew over 300 participants, including several Omani dignitaries, with Jamal al

Moosawi, Secretary General of the National Museum of Oman, participating as the guest of honour.

This series of events, built on the success of previous initiatives such as the Oman Yoga Yatra in 2022 and the Muscat Yoga Mahotsav in 2023, all aimed at popularising yoga throughout Oman.

The popularity of yoga as a health discipline continues to grow in Oman, attracting a wide range of practitioners who embrace its benefits for physical health, mental clarity, and emotional stability.





Emergency members and residents gather around the carcass of a car at the site of an Israeli strike in al-Khiyara town, in Lebanon. — AFP

Guterres warns of Lebanon tensions leading to war

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that he is profoundly concerned by escalating tensions between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah and that UN peacekeepers are working to calm the situation and prevent miscalculation.

"One rash move - one miscalculation - could trigger a catastrophe that goes far beyond the border, and frankly, beyond imagination," he told reporters. "Let's be clear: The people of the region and the people of the world cannot afford Lebanon to become another Gaza."

Hezbollah has been firing rockets at Israel in solidarity with its Palestinian ally Hamas since the Gaza war erupted in October, forcing tens of thousands to flee homes in Israel, where political pressure is building for tougher action.

Tens of thousands of Lebanese have also fled their homes following Israeli strikes in south Lebanon.

Iran's mission to the United Nations said on Friday that Hezbollah has the capability to defend itself and Lebanon against Israel, warning that "perhaps the time for the self-annihilation of this illegitimate regime has come."

"Any imprudent decision by the occupying Israeli regime to save itself could plunge the region into a new war," Iran's UN mission posted on X.

A UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL, as well as unarmed technical observers known as UNTSO, have long been stationed in southern Lebanon to monitor hostilities along the demarcation line between Lebanon and Israel, known as the Blue Line.

"UN peacekeepers are on the ground working to de-escalate tensions and help prevent miscalculation," Guterres said.

"The world must say loudly and clearly: immediate de-escalation is not only possible - it is essential," he said. "There is no military solution." — **Reuters**

ISRAELI BRUTAL STRIKES KILL AT LEAST 42 IN GAZA



Palestinians search for casualties at the site of Israeli strikes on houses, at Al Shati refugee camp in Gaza City. — Reuters

CAIRO: At least 42 people were killed in Israeli attacks on districts of Gaza City in the north of the Palestinian enclave on Saturday, the director of the government media office said.

One Israeli strike on houses in Al-Shati, one of the Gaza Strip's eight historic refugee camps, killed 24 people, Ismail Al-Thawabta said. Another 18 Palestinians were killed in a strike on houses in the Al-Tuffah neighbourhood.

The Israeli military released a brief statement saying: "A short while ago, IDF fighter jets struck two Hamas military infrastructure sites in the area of Gaza City." It said more details would be released soon.

Palestinian groups did not comment on the Israeli claim to have hit its military infrastructure. It said in a statement the attacks targeted the

On Saturday Israeli forces bombed several areas from air and the ground, forcing many families living in areas described as humanitarian-designated zones to leave northwards

civilian population and vowed in a statement "the occupation and its Nazi leaders will pay the price for their violations against our people."

Footage obtained by reporters showed dozens of Palestinians rushing out to search for victims amid the destroyed houses. The footage showed wrecked homes, blasted walls, and debris and dust filling the street in Shati refugee camp.

Israel's ground and air campaign in Gaza was triggered

when Palestinian groups stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 captives, according to Israeli tallies.

The offensive has left Gaza in ruins, killed more than 37,400 people, of whom 101 were killed in the past 24 hours, according to Palestinian health authorities, and left nearly the entire population homeless and destitute.

More than eight months into the war, Israel's advance is now focused on the two last areas its forces had yet to seize: Rafah on Gaza's southern edge and the area surrounding Deir al-Balah in the centre.

Residents said Israeli tanks deepened their incursion into western and northern Rafah areas in recent days. On Saturday Israeli forces bombed several areas from air and the ground,

forcing many families living in areas described as humanitarian-designated zones to leave northwards.

The Israeli military said forces continued "precise, intelligence-based" targeted operations in Rafah, killing many Palestinian gunmen and dismantling military infrastructure.

On Friday, the Gaza health ministry said at least 25 Palestinians were killed in Mawasi in western Rafah and 50 wounded. Palestinians said a tank shell hit a tent housing displaced families.

The Israeli military said that the incident was under review. "An initial inquiry conducted suggests that there is no indication that a strike was carried out by the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) in the Humanitarian Area in Al-Mawasi," it said. — **Reuters**



Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani

Qatar working to 'bridge the gap' for a ceasefire

MADRID: Qatar said that it was pursuing efforts to "bridge the gap" between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and release Israeli captives held there. The Gulf country, the United States and Egypt, have been engaged in months of negotiations for a ceasefire in the Mideast war that erupted on October 7.

There has been one seven-day pause in November which led to the release of more than 100 captives. Efforts since have been deadlocked.

"We have continued our efforts without interruption over the last few days," Qatar's Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani told a news conference in Madrid with Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares. "There have been several meetings with the Hamas leadership to try to bridge the gap between the two parties and reach an agreement that will lead to a ceasefire and the release of the Israeli hostages," he added.

The talks are based on a plan US President Joe Biden laid out on May 31 calling for an Israeli withdrawal from "major population centres" in Gaza and a six-week ceasefire, which could be extended if negotiators need more time to seek a permanent deal.

"Efforts are continuing, but so far we have not reached a formula that we feel is the most appropriate and closest to what has been presented," the Qatari prime minister said.

"As soon as this is done, we will communicate with the Israeli side to try to bridge the gap and reach an agreement as quickly as possible," he added.

Palestinian movement Hamas was open to "any document or initiative that ensures the foundations of the resistance's position in ceasefire negotiations."

It has insisted on the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and a permanent ceasefire before the release of all captives sought by Israel. — **AFP**

Food piles up at crossing as aid agencies say unable to work

TEL AVIV: Days after Israel announced a daily pause in fighting on a key route to allow more aid into Gaza, chaos in the besieged Palestinian territory has left vital supplies piled up and undistributed in the searing summer heat.

More than eight months of war, sparked by October 7 attack on Israel, have led to dire humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip and repeated UN warnings of famine with outside aid severely restricted.

Desperation among Gaza's 2.4 million population has increased as fighting rages, sparking warnings from aid agencies that they are unable to deliver aid including vegetables. Israel says it has let supplies in and called on agencies to step up deliveries.

"The breakdown of public order and safety is increasingly endangering humanitarian workers and operations in Gaza," the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, also known as OCHA, said in a briefing late on Friday.

"Alongside the fighting, criminal activities and the risk of theft and robbery has effectively prevented humanitarian access to critical locations."

A deputy UN spokesman this week said the crossing "is operating with limited functionality, including because of fighting in the area."

Israel's coordinator for civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories, known as COGAT, said on Thursday "the content of 1,200 aid trucks awaits collection by UN aid agencies", saying a lack of distribution was responsible.

Earlier in the week, COGAT spokesman Shimon Freedman told reporters at the crossing the daily pause on a southern road into Gaza was designed to allow the UN "to collect and distribute more aid" alongside an Israeli military presence.

He said most of the aid had not moved because "organisations have not taken sufficient steps to improve their distribution capacity".



A girl sits as Palestinians gather to receive food, amid shortages of aid supplies, in Khan Younis. — Reuters

Desperation among Gaza's 2.4 million population has increased as fighting rages, sparking warnings from aid agencies that they are unable to deliver aid

Aid agencies have instead pointed to Israel's offensive on the southern city of Rafah, which pushed out more than a million people and closed a border crossing with Egypt, as a deepening humanitarian crisis hampered relief efforts.

The United States also sanctioned an extremist Israeli group last week, accusing it of blocking convoys and looting and burning trucks trying to deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

And the UN food agency has said its aid convoys have been looted inside Gaza by "desperate people". As both sides stall, it is the civilians in Gaza who are paying the price. — **AFP**



Russian strikes damage Ukrainian power facilities

KYIV: A new barrage of Russian missiles and drones damaged energy facilities in southeastern and western Ukraine on Saturday, wounding at least two energy workers and forcing record electricity imports, officials said. National grid operator Ukrenergo said equipment at its facilities in the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region and Lviv had been damaged in the second large Russian air attack this week.

Two workers in Zaporizhzhia were taken to hospital for treatment, it said. The Russian strikes also hit a gas infrastructure facility in the west of the country, the energy ministry said. “After eight massive attacks by the enemy on the power system since March, the situation in the energy sector remains difficult,” it added in a statement.

Russia’s Defence Ministry said its forces had used long-range missiles fired from aircraft and ships, and drones, to strike ammunition depots and energy facilities that it said supported military production.

Ukraine’s navy said it was the first time since Moscow launched a full-scale attack of Ukraine in February 2022 that Russian forces had launched missiles from the Sea of Azov rather than the Black Sea. “This is an important turning point, because they use it, considering it a safer water area



A serviceman of the Ukrainian Armed Forces fires a 2S1 Gvozdika self-propelled howitzer towards Russian troops, near the town of Chasiv Yar in Donetsk region. — Reuters

than the Black Sea,” Ukrainian Navy spokesperson Dmytro Pletenchuk told local television. Ukraine’s air defence shot down 12 of 16 missiles and all

13 drones launched by Russia, the air force said. The air alerts in Ukrainian regions lasted for several hours in the middle of the night.

Ukraine’s energy ministry said the strikes meant the country would import a record 33,559 megawatt hours (MWh) of power on Saturday. The government

would also have to expand by several hours scheduled electricity cut-offs across the country. At the bombed power facilities

National grid operator Ukrenergo said equipment at its facilities in the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region and Lviv had been damaged in the second large Russian air attack

in Zaporizhzhia and Lviv, firefighters fought to put out fires and repair squads raced to fix the damage, regional officials said. Lviv’s regional governor, Maksym Also in the west of Ukraine, in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk, the strikes damaged a building of an oil and gas university and 14 other commercial and residential buildings, the mayor said. Moscow has said airstrikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure were in retaliation for Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian territory. Since March, Russian forces have intensified their bombardments of Ukraine’s power system, knocking out about half of the country’s available generating capacity and causing an energy crunch that has led to increasingly frequent blackouts. In the capital Kyiv and other cities, the hum of private generators can be heard constantly despite lower levels of electricity consumption during the summer. — Reuters

Outrage as UK hard-right leader says West provoked Ukraine war

LONDON: Nigel Farage, leader of Britain’s anti-immigration Reform UK party, faced strong criticism on Saturday after saying that the West provoked Russia’s attack of Ukraine.

In an interview with the BBC on Friday, Farage said “we’ve provoked this war”, while adding that “of course” it was Russian president Vladimir Putin’s “fault”.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told reporters that Farage’s claim was “completely wrong and only plays into Putin’s hands”, likening the comments to “appeasement”.

Labour leader Keir Starmer, who looks set to take Sunak’s job after an election next month, said Farage’s comments were “disgraceful”.

“Anyone who is standing for parliament ought to be really clear that Russia is the aggressor”, he told reporters on the campaign trail.

Farage — a former European Union parliamentarian who has



Britain’s Reform UK Party Leader Nigel Farage gestures, during a campaign event in Blackpool, Britain. — Reuters

tried and failed to run for the UK parliament seven times — is seeking a seat from Clacton in east England in a general election next month.

Farage’s comments met with outrage across political parties on Saturday. Interior minister James Cleverly criticised Farage for “echoing Putin’s vile justification

for the brutal attack of Ukraine.”

Former Conservative defence minister Tobias Ellwood called the comments “shocking” in the Daily Telegraph newspaper, adding that British wartime leader Winston Churchill “will be turning in his grave”.

Labour’s defence spokesman John Healey called the comments “disgraceful” and said his stance made him “unfit for any political office in our country”.

The opposition Liberal Democrat party leader Ed Davey adding that he did not “share any values” with Farage.

Russian media, however, was more enthusiastic about Farage’s interview. A newsreader on the Channel One Russian state media said on broadcast that Farage was “an experienced politician who follows the moods of the electorate”. The channel added on Twitter that he was among the European politicians “showing enlightenment and sanity”. — AFP

CHINA, FRANCE LAUNCH SATELLITE TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE UNIVERSE



A Long March 2-C rocket carrying a satellite jointly developed by China and France, lifts off from a space base in Xichang. — AFP

XICHANG: A French-Chinese satellite blasted off on Saturday on a hunt for the mightiest explosions in the universe, in a notable example of cooperation between a Western power and the Asian giant. Developed by engineers from both countries, the Space Variable Objects Monitor (SVOM) is carrying four instruments — two French, two Chinese — that will seek out gamma-ray bursts, the light from which has travelled billions of light years to reach Earth.

The 930-kilogramme satellite “successfully” took off around 3:00 pm aboard a Chinese Long March 2-C rocket from a space base in Xichang, in southwestern Sichuan province, China’s National Space Administration said.

Gamma-ray bursts generally occur after the explosion of huge stars — those more than 20 times as big as the sun — or the fusion of compact stars. The extremely bright cosmic beams can give off a blast of energy equivalent to more than a billion suns. Observing them is like “looking back in time, as the light from these objects takes a long time to reach us”, Ore Gottlieb said, an astrophysicist at the Flatiron Institute’s Center for Astrophysics in New York. The rays carry traces of the gas clouds and galaxies they pass through on their journey through space — valuable data for better understanding the history and evolution of the universe. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

SEOUL

US carrier arrives in S Korea for joint drills

A US aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea on Saturday for a joint military drills aimed to better counter North Korean threats, Seoul’s navy said. “The US Navy’s aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt... arrived at the Busan Naval Base on the morning of June 22,” the South Korean Navy said in a statement. Its arrival “demonstrates the strong combined defence posture of the South Korea-US alliance and their firm resolve to respond to the escalating threats



from North Korea,” it added. The carrier’s visit comes around seven months after another US aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, came to the South. — AFP

ATHENS

Greece battles wildfires fanned by gale winds

Hundreds of firefighters struggled to contain wildfires fanned by gale force winds on two Greek islands and in other parts of Greece, as authorities warned a high risk of new blazes. More than 30 firefighters backed by two aircraft and five helicopters were battling a wildfire burning on the island of Andros in the Aegean. “More firefighters (are) expected on the island later in the day,” an official said, adding there were no reports of damage or in-



juries. Meteorologists say the latest fires are the first time that the country has experienced “hot-dry-windy” conditions so early in the summer. — Reuters

NAIROBI

Second man dies in Kenya during large protests

A 21-year-old protester died after being hit by a tear gas canister during protests in Kenya this week, a human rights commission official said on Saturday, in the second fatality resulting from the youth-led demonstrations. According to a Kenya Human Rights Commission official, 21-year-old Evans Kiratu was “hit by a tear gas canister” during the demonstrations. “He was rushed to hospital around 6:00 pm (1500 GMT) on Thursday...and died there,” Er-



nest Cornel said, a spokesman at the Kenya Human Rights Commission. The rallies began on Tuesday, with protesters calling for a national strike on June 25. — AFP

Trump has eroded Biden’s edge in cash battle



Shane Goldmacher

The writer is a national political correspondent for The New York Times, covering the 2024 campaign



Theodore Schleifer

The writer covers campaign finance, focusing much of reporting on billionaires and their influence in American politics

The combination of Trump’s improved fundraising and Biden’s heavier spending on advertising this spring appears to put the two sides on a path to enter the summer relatively close to financial parity.

Former president Donald Trump outraced President Joe Biden for the second consecutive month in May, outpacing his successor by roughly \$81 million in donations over the last two months as he rode a surge of financial support after his felony conviction.

Less than two months after Biden’s shared operation with the Democratic National Committee had a roughly \$100 million cash advantage over Trump and the Republican National Committee, the situation is now reversed, according to the two campaigns.

Biden entered June with \$212 million on hand combined with the party. The Trump operation and RNC had \$235 million, the campaign said.

Trump’s joint operation had outraced Biden’s by \$141 million to \$85 million in May, after bringing in \$25 million more than the Biden team in April.

Trump’s principal campaign committee also had more cash than Biden’s: \$116.5 million to \$91.6 million, according to Federal Election Commission filings.

The full accounting of both sides’ finances will be made public in federal filings next month. But the combination of Trump’s improved fundraising and Biden’s heavier spending on advertising this spring appears to put the two sides on a path to enter the summer relatively close to financial parity.

“Yes, Trump is raising a lot more money now, and that should scare people,” said Brian Derrick, a strategist who founded a Democratic fundraising platform called Oath. “But at the end of the day, Biden has the funds that he needs to run a really strong campaign.”

Trump has narrowed the gap by bringing in a deluge of online donations after his criminal conviction in New York on May 30. In the minutes after the verdict, guilty on 34 felony counts, contributions came in so fast that they briefly overwhelmed the Republican Party’s online donation portal, WinRed.

The Trump campaign has said it raised \$53 million online in the first 24 hours and \$70 million in the first 48 hours after the verdict. The conviction uncorked a gusher of mega-donations, too, including a \$50-million contribution from reclusive billionaire Timothy Mellon to a pro-Trump super PAC the day after the verdict.

At the conclusion of the Republican primary race, the Biden campaign and its allies had argued that for all of the president’s electoral vulnerabilities — nagging inflation, poor approval ratings, lingering concerns about his age — one clear advantage would be cash.

Even if that edge has since evaporated, the Biden campaign says it used its early financial lead to build out a political infrastructure in battleground states that will pay dividends in November. On Thursday, the campaign announced that it had hired its 1,000th staff member across 200 offices in those states.

While Trump’s path to the Republican nomination was hardly bruising, he emerged from the primary race in relatively poor financial shape compared with Biden’s operation, which had been squirrelling away money for nearly a year.



Former president Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, during a campaign rally at the Racine Festival Park in Racine.

Biden had consolidated his party’s biggest donors. Trump had not done so on his side.

But that slow start also gave Trump much more room to grow. In the weeks after he dispatched Nikki Haley, his final Republican rival, Trump bundlers described an almost furtive effort to get back into his good graces.

A fundraising dinner at Trump’s Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, in mid-February, a few weeks before Haley’s exit, served as an important inflection point as Trump fundraisers signalled to wavering donors that the time for indecision was coming to a close. A fundraising dinner hosted by John Paulson, a hedge-fund billionaire, raised \$50 million, the campaign has said. And in just the last month, well-to-do holdouts including Blackstone co-founder Stephen A. Schwarzman have signalled that they plan to support Trump.

Wrapping up the nomination also allowed Trump to form a joint fundraising committee with national and state Republican parties, a seemingly technical step that meant he could suddenly raise hundreds of thousands of dollars more from each donor. Biden had been raising money in those larger increments for many months.

Online contributions will be increasingly crucial

going forward because the campaigns cannot tap their largest donors for repeat contributions. And Trump’s base appears to have been highly animated by his conviction. His campaign said one-quarter of the contributors in May were new.

The question for Trump is how many of those people become repeat contributors. The Biden campaign has aggressively cultivated online recurring contributors, a group that accounted for \$5.5 million in April and more than that in May, though the campaign did not provide a specific figure.

So far, Biden has enjoyed a tremendous advertising advantage over Trump.

From the beginning of the year through this month, Biden’s operation had aired or reserved roughly \$35.4 million in the top six battleground states. Trump’s operation had aired essentially nothing in those states, about \$60,000 in ads, according to records from AdImpact, a media tracking firm.

Democratic fundraisers for Biden said that they expected Trump to eventually catch up and had received such guidance explicitly from Rufus Gifford, the campaign’s top fundraising official, at recent briefings.

How AI is revolutionising drug development



Steve Lohr

The author is a New York Times reporter, covering technology, the economy and work

The laboratory at Terray Therapeutics is a symphony of miniaturized automation. Robots whirl, shuttling tiny tubes of fluids to their stations. Scientists in blue coats, sterile gloves and protective glasses monitor the machines.

But the real action is happening at nanoscale: Proteins in solution combine with chemical molecules held in minuscule wells in custom silicon chips that are like microscopic muffin tins. Every interaction is recorded, millions and millions each day, generating 50 terabytes of raw data daily — the equivalent of more than 12,000 movies.

The lab, about two-thirds the size of a football field, is a data factory for artificial-intelligence-assisted drug discovery and development in Monrovia, California. It’s part of a wave of young companies and start-ups trying to harness AI to produce more effective drugs, faster.

The companies are leveraging the new technology — which learns from huge amounts of data to generate answers — to try to remake drug discovery. They are moving the field from a painstaking artisanal craft to more automated precision, a shift fueled by AI that learns and gets smarter. Just as popular chatbots like ChatGPT are trained on text across the Internet, and image generators like DALL-E learn from vast troves of pictures and

videos, AI for drug discovery relies on data. And it is very specialised data — molecular information, protein structures and measurements of biochemical interactions. The AI learns from patterns in the data to suggest possible useful drug candidates, as if matching chemical keys to the right protein locks.

Because AI for drug development is powered by precise scientific data, toxic “hallucinations” are far less likely than with more broadly trained chatbots. And any potential drug must undergo extensive testing in labs and in clinical trials before it is approved for patients.

Companies like Terray are building big high-tech labs to generate the information to help train the AI, which enables rapid experimentation and the ability to identify patterns and make predictions about what might work.

Generative AI can then digitally design a drug molecule. That design is translated, in a high-speed automated lab, to a physical molecule and tested for its interaction with a target protein. The results — positive or negative — are recorded and fed back into the AI software to improve its next design, accelerating the overall process.

Companies like Terray, Recursion Pharmaceuticals, Schrödinger and Isomorphic Labs are pursuing breakthroughs. But there are, broadly, two



Workers at Terray Therapeutics in Monrovia, companies like Terray are building big, high-tech labs to help train artificial intelligence to produce more effective drugs.

The companies are leveraging the new technology, which learns from huge amounts of data to generate answers, to try to remake drug discovery

different paths — those that are building big labs and those that aren’t.

Last month, Google DeepMind and Isomorphic announced that their latest AI model, AlphaFold 3, can predict how molecules and proteins will interact — a further step in drug design.

Terray, like most of the drug development start-ups, is a byproduct of years of scientific research combined with more recent developments in AI.

Terray is concentrating on developing small-molecule drugs, essentially any drug a person can ingest in a pill like aspirin and statins.

Terray has partnership deals with Bristol Myers Squibb and Calico Life Sciences, a subsidiary of Alphabet, Google’s parent company, that focuses on age-related diseases. The terms of those deals are not disclosed.

To expand, Terray will need funds beyond its \$80 million in venture funding, said Eli Berlin, Jacob Berlin’s younger brother. He left a job in private equity to become a co-founder and the start-up’s chief financial and operating officer, persuaded that the technology could open the door to a lucrative business, he said.

Terray is developing new drugs for inflammatory diseases including lupus, psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis.

A leg to stand on



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@ alsinawi

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

Dr Oliver Sacks is a British neurologist who wrote a series of books on some of the mysterious workings of the human brain capturing the experiences of his patients compassionately and sympathetically.

In his book titled ‘A Leg to Stand On,’ he writes about his own experience as a patient receiving medical care after falling while hiking in a mountain in Norway when he was in his early forties.

Dr Sacks described his feelings of pain, fear, and helplessness lying in a small-town hospital away from home. In his book, he writes “I went through what I thought would be my last day on earth.”

After the operation, he felt that his leg was alien to his body and outside his control. He disagreed with the surgeon who told him that his symptoms were a type of hysteria.

Dr Sacks, now a patient himself, had to experience what many people go through when their psychological state is affected by their physical condition. He interacted with his colleagues who treated him as a patient and his experience in the

medical field influenced his recovery and acceptance of care from another doctor.

The book explores the relationships between doctors and patients and the various ethical issues in patient care.

From my personal experience as a psychiatrist, I have treated some fellow doctors who suffered from various mental illnesses. Some avoid seeking psychiatric consultation due to the stigma associated with mental illness and the fear of being told, ‘You are a physician and should be able to heal yourself.’

Unfortunately, some doctors harbour a kind of hostility toward psychiatric medication and hesitate to start it even after lengthy discussions.

I remember one doctor who suffered from severe depression that affected his work and caused him to lose confidence in his medical skills. He experienced insomnia for several days, lost his appetite, and showed signs of sadness and misery.

I explained the diagnosis and treatment plan, but he sought consultations from many psychiatrists despite my clarification that the medication takes time to be effective.

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His condition gradually improved, he regained his energy and confidence, and his smile returned. I have learned a lot from treating colleagues. I learned that once they come for a consultation, our relationship shifts from colleagues to doctor and patient. This awareness is crucial for the success of the therapeutic relationship and setting boundaries.

When I am on leave, I inform my patients that they should consult another doctor or go to the emergency department if needed. I have also realised that other doctors don’t always know the details of psychiatric treatment, just as my knowledge of various physical treatments may be outdated since each of us focuses on our speciality.

So, when explaining psychiatric medication I use the same amount of information even when my patient is also a doctor. I have also learned that recovery from mental illness is a unique experience that can change a person’s perspective towards others, making them more compassionate and more aware of others’ suffering, refraining from judging or belittling their struggles, and instead trying to help and guide them to consult specialists in the field.

A guide to French political fashion

DAPHNE ROUSSEAU

France is in the midst of two of its favourite pastimes: political turmoil and fashion week — two worlds that increasingly collide.

Fashion writer Marc Beauge, who has advised at least one president, walked through the evolving style rules for French politicians.

For male politicians, he said, a simple uniform has become dominant: a navy blue suit — fitted and generally a little too slim — with a white shirt and thin tie.

“It signals respectability, authority and above all a lack of ostentation. It’s middling quality and can’t be accused of elegance,” said Beauge.

This is particularly popular among centrists and social democrats, and is the go-to look for President Emmanuel Macron, even though practically no one in France wears such outfits in the street or office anymore — least of all the start-up crowd Macron favours.

The president has changed styles since calling the snap election last week, however — to funereal black suits.

“There’s no more blue and grey,” said Beauge. “It’s a way of showing the gravity of the moment.”

Women politicians have largely abandoned the neat designer outfits of the past in a bid to look less elitist.

“It’s always the same trouser-and-jacket combos that ensure no sexist commentary, but which risk making them invisible,” said Beauge.

Socialist Segolene Royale, once known for her preppy Chanel tweeds, headbands and knee-length skirts, went decidedly more demure by the time she was running for the presidency in 2017.

When Bauge was summoned to the Elysee Palace by then-president Francois Hollande for style advice in 2014, his instruction was “neither too chic nor too redneck.”

Once popular with presidents, Rolex watches have been dumped.

All remember the spectacular gaffe by a close advisor to then-president Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009, who said, in the midst of an economic crisis: “If you don’t have a Rolex by the time you’re 50, then you’ve clearly failed in life.”

While the centrists seek neutrality, the political extremes are always making clear statements, said Beauge.

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen, whose National Rally (RN) has been surging in polls, ordered her deputies to wear sharp suits and ties after the last legislative elections in 2022.

It was part of a strategy to make the party seem a natural part of French institutions rather than a radical fringe.

“The idea is that RN deputies must be better dressed than the average French person,” Beauge said. — AFP

What Ukraine has lost

MARCO HERNANDEZ,
JEFFREY GETTLEMAN,
FINBARR O'REILLY
AND
TIM WALLACE

Iryna Hrushkovska’s grocery store is just a hole in the ground now, and her house a pile of rubble — the seventh from the corner. The whole neighbourhood is an eerie grid of nothing, much like the rest of Marinka, the city where she was born and raised.

“If I shut my eyes, I can see everything from my old life,” says Hrushkovska, who is 34. “I can see the front gate. I can walk through the front door. I can step into our beautiful kitchen and look into the cupboards.”

“But if I open my eyes,” she says, “it’s all gone.”

Few countries since World War II have experienced the level of devastation visited on Ukraine in a little over two years of full-scale war. But it’s been impossible for anybody to see more than glimpses of it. It’s too vast. Every battle, every bombing, every missile strike, every house burned down, has left its mark across multiple front lines.

Drawing on a detailed analysis of years of satellite data, The New York Times was able to establish a record of each town, each street and each building that has been struck. The result is the first comprehensive picture of where the Ukraine war has been fought and the totality of the destruction.

The scale is hard to comprehend. More buildings have been destroyed in Ukraine than if every building in Manhattan were to be levelled four times over. Parts of Ukraine hundreds of miles apart look like Dresden, Germany, or London after World War II, or the Gaza Strip after half a year of bombardment.

To produce these estimates, the Times worked with two leading remote sensing scientists, Corey Scher of the City University of New York Graduate Center and Jamon Van Den Hoek of Oregon State University, to analyse data from radar satellites that can detect small changes in the built environment.

More than 900 schools, hospitals, churches and other institutions have been damaged or destroyed, the analysis shows, even though these sites are explicitly protected under the Geneva Conventions.

Few places have been as devastated as Marinka, a small town in eastern Ukraine.



A heavily damaged classroom at a school in Vilkhivka, Ukraine, east of Kharkiv. – NYT

Comprehensive School No 1, where so many young Ukrainians learned to write their first letters, has been blown apart. The Orthodox cathedral, where couples were married, has been toppled. The chestnut-lined streets where generations strolled, the milk plant and cereal factory where people

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worked, the Museum of Local Lore, the Marinka Region Administration Building, go-to shops and cafes — all landmarks for generations — have been reduced to faceless ruins.

The damage runs into the billions, but the true cost is much higher. Marinka was a community. Marinka was living history. Marinka was a wellspring for families for nearly 200 years. Its erasure has left people feeling lost.

Before everyone fled, when a strong wind came from the west, the people in Marinka used to do something slightly provocative: They would tie a yellow and blue Ukrainian flag to a helium balloon and float it across the nearby front line to land somewhere in Russia-controlled territory.

“True Ukrainians lived here,” said Hrushkovska’s mother, Hanna

Horban. “They worked in the fields and factories, they created their future and the future of their children. They lived under a Ukrainian sky, free and our sky.”

Reminiscing about her old town makes her eyes well up. Sometimes, she says, she sees Marinka in her dreams.

It’s the same for many others. A young Ukrainian woman in Berlin recently opened a photo exhibition on Marinka. Videos have surfaced on social media featuring photos of prewar Marinka with sad music playing in the background.

Some of Marinka’s displaced people have chosen to hang together in another town, Pavlograd, 100 miles away.

In many ways, the story of this one town — its closeness, its vulnerability and its ruin — is the story of this war and perhaps all wars. Marinka started out as a farming hamlet, founded in 1843 by adventurous peasants and Cossacks from the Eurasian steppe. Legend has it that it took its name from the founder’s wife, Mariia.

By the early 20th century, this entire swath of eastern Ukraine transformed. Iron and coal were discovered, in a region soon to be called the Donbas, and the city of Donetsk became an industrial hub. Marinka, about 15 miles away, shifted from a quiet farming town to a busy suburb.

By the mid-1960s, it had a coal mine, a milk factory, a tire factory, a bread factory and soon a museum, a public sauna and two public pools.

“Marinka was blooming,” said Horban, who was also born there.

— The New York Times

Defy the intolerance of youth

What is it about this younger generation? They question everything! Even when they don't have an answer, or an alternative opinion, they still question everything. But most of all, they don't know how to do anything scholastic or academic, and the teaching profession wants to know why?

Why, when kids come to school at the age of five or six, unable to write even their own name and address, it's somehow the teacher's fault if the child can't write 'War and Peace,' by the end of their first year in school? Why the kids can't read even the most basic of primers, yet again, they will be expected to be top of the class in English, during the same academic year? And why they can tell you how much, or how many, of anything is anything. They can't read an analogue clock, a timetable, or a calendar, don't know the alphabet, can't have a meal without crisps, and drink too much fizzy, because their general behaviour is far from admirable!

Are parents really doing enough with their kids?

It's clear that societies have changed beyond recognition during the last fifty years, and that for most families, the demand is for both parents have to work to maintain their families, to survive. This, of course has consequences, in that the parents are not around when their infants and children at home immediately after school, and probably too exhausted after their work day, to give them the interactions they need. I'm absolutely certain that the parents don't love their kids any less, but there is just so much pressure on them.

What we must understand however, is that throughout infancy, the average infant asks about 40,000 questions ranging from the name of, or simple facts about an object, progressing to explanations in late infancy. During that period, their synapses, or neuron connections, equate to



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three times more than the number found in an active adult's brain. That's a crazy number, but reflects the number of times an infant asks "Why?" or "But why?" Those not being confused understanding, but the fact that we adults are usually answering the wrong questions. It is a fine line isn't it?

On balance, as a parent, you can't keep your mouth shut when things need to be said. You do need to read those bedtime stories, play snakes and ladders, be a good listener and question answerer. You need to be what they need for tomorrow, next month, next year, and beyond. Most parents will disappoint their children, but that goes with the territory. We all have quite inflexible expectations of our kids, our relationships with them, and will find it difficult to bend to meet their needs. But really, neither did our parents... yet I feel we were better prepared for what lay ahead.

Now that maybe because there were fewer options then, and maybe more societal structure, with more restrictions, a kind of progressive '1984?' Despite 'hacks' being thrown in our faces for almost all we do, whether it's Facebook, X, or Instagram... there are no hacks for parenting.

There's no easy way, easy answer, or short-cut, but, if you feel like you are being a 'bad' parent, you can take comfort in the fact that young Kevin's Mum, in 'Home Alone,' never realised her son was missing until she was halfway to Paris!

By comparison to infants and children, the 'WHY?' that echoes incessantly throughout young people's environments, demonstrate a fragile desire to know everything, whilst being reluctant to be taught, and even more reluctant to learn. There appears, not just alive and well, but absolutely thriving across the pre-teen and teen education sector, an entitlement to knowledge, but with minimal teaching and learning involved. Is it just laziness, or maybe a sense of entitlement?

WE ALL HAVE QUITE INFLEXIBLE EXPECTATIONS OF OUR KIDS AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM, AND WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BEND TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

KING CHARLES LEADS



Britain's King Charles during the Royal procession ahead of the Royal Ascot races. – Reuters

What climate-vulnerable developing countries need right now

A problem as unprecedentedly large and destructive as climate change demands bold new thinking and urgent action. Yet since the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's attack of Ukraine, geopolitical tensions have dominated the global agenda, hindering collective efforts to address this existential challenge.

Anticipating what lay in store for their countries, African finance ministers came together during the pandemic to call for a \$100 billion stimulus package to weather the shock.

Four years later, however, net financial flows to developing countries have turned negative – meaning more money is being paid out to lenders in mostly rich countries than is coming in – owing to spiralling debt-service costs, higher interest rates, and the lack of additional external financing options. It is now crucial that existing pledges – such as the €150 billion EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package – be implemented fully to support African countries.

US President Joe Biden and Kenyan President William Ruto acknowledged these challenges in their Nairobi-



Mia Amor Mottley

The writer is the Prime Minister, Finance Minister of Barbados



Wale Edun

The writer is Finance Minister of Nigeria and Chair of the African Governors Forum at the World Bank

Washington Vision statement last month, when they committed to ensuring that "high ambition countries don't have to choose between servicing their debts and making necessary investments in their futures."

The Biden administration recognises that positive net financial flows are critical to supporting countries in responding to the climate crisis and building low-carbon energy systems.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently reminded us, there is an 80 per cent chance that the global average temperature will temporarily rise by more than 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels in at least one of the next five years.

The battle to keep global warming below the threshold established by the Paris climate agreement will be won or lost in the 2020s. The necessary investment and innovation need to be happening now.

Countries like Nigeria and Sierra Leone are developing green growth plans and launching investment packages focused on renewables

and climate-resilient infrastructure; and Barbados has just introduced its own 2035 investment plan to achieve prosperity and resilience. But these efforts all require financing.

The Bridgetown Initiative's proposals for reforming the global financial architecture can drive the kinds of changes we need. The G20 has already responded by seeking a wealth tax that could unlock around \$250 billion in new finance, and we could mobilise up to a trillion dollars more in low-cost lending by leveraging multilateral development banks' (MDBs) balance sheets. Moreover, with climate clauses added to debt contracts, developing countries can preserve the fiscal space they need to respond to major climate shocks.

But we must do more. In May, the International Monetary Fund's board approved the use of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs, the IMF's unit of account) as hybrid capital, which will allow MDBs to expand their balance sheets. That is a good start, but G20 countries must commit the SDRs needed to capitalise on this financial

innovation. We also must ensure that concessional finance continues to flow to the most vulnerable and climate-afflicted countries. One-third of the countries eligible for support from the World Bank's International Development Association are now poorer than they were on the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic.

IDA countries have significant economic potential. They account for about 20 per cent of global production of tin, copper, and gold; most are well-positioned to take advantage of solar energy; and many possess deposits of minerals essential for the energy transition. But they are energy-poor and will need technical and financial support to provide electricity to 300 million people who lack it, as envisioned by a new programme launched by the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

To achieve an ambitious replenishment of the IDA fund later this year and unlock \$120 billion in grants and loans to make this possible, World Bank shareholders must step up with new resources.

Middle-income countries – especially the Vulnerable 20 – also urgently need more access to grants and long-term capital. Small island developing states should not be penalised for good performance by being forced to "graduate" from the IDA. That will put them at the mercy of capital markets when they still need quick, affordable finance to build resilience and maintain insurance against persistent climate shocks. The IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust has demonstrated the necessary sensitivity toward vulnerable low- and middle-income countries' need for long-term, affordable finance. But more of these kinds of facilities – and related mechanisms, like guarantees – are needed to accelerate progress over the coming decade.

We must continue to reduce the cost of capital for all countries seeking to invest in the energy transition. Our own countries face a premium when borrowing on capital markets, partly because credit rating agencies do not fully account for the conditions we face.

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Oman junior team qualify for Asian Hockey Cup finals



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Oman national junior team qualified for the Asian Hockey Cup Finals after clinching the fifth-place at the Men's Junior AHF Cup 2024. They secured their spot with a thrilling 5-3 victory over Indonesia in the fifth-place play-off match held in Singapore on Saturday.

Oman team controlled the course from the beginning to take the lead in the eighth minute of the first half from a penalty kick successfully executed by Aiman Madit. But the Indonesian team quickly returned to the match, after Wibowo Arthur scored the

equaliser in the 12th minute from a penalty kick. The first half ended in a positive draw 1-1.

In the second half, the national team continued its pressure on Indonesia's goal, by organising its offensive and defensive lines and was able to add three more goals, as Aiman Madit scored a second goal in the 16th minute from a penalty kick. After that, the pressure on the Oman team players continued, as player Hasni al Hussaini was able to add the third goal in the 22nd minute. Then the brilliant Aiman Madit returned to score the team's fourth goal and his third personal goal in the match in the 23rd minute, so the excitement continued until the

end of the second half when the Oman team players were able to finish with a score of 4-1.

The Omani team entered the third half to maintain the score, while the Indonesian team tried to reduce the difference, and was able to score a single goal from a penalty kick executed by Raditya Derangga in the 34th minute. After that, the pressure on the Indonesian team players continued, but the Oman defences were able to prevent all chances, and the half ended with Oman lead 4-2.

At the beginning of the fourth half, the Indonesian team was able to reduce the difference by scoring the third goal in the 49th minute through player Wibowo Arthur.

The pressure continued on our national team's goal, and from a quick rebound, player Hasni al Hussaini was able to score the fifth goal in the 56th minute.

Talal Mohammed was named the Player of the Match. He expressed his delight after the award ceremony, saying, "We achieved a tough victory, as the match intensified in the final minutes. But thanks to the players' fighting spirit, we managed to win and qualify for the Asian Cup Finals. This achievement is a great motivation for us to continue developing and achieving more success in the future. We promise the fans to deliver positive results in upcoming tournaments."



Royal Cavalry qualifies for World Endurance Cup

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

Royal Cavalry knight Hussein bin Ali al Farsi passed the stages of the French Compile Race organised by the International Equestrian Federation.

The race was held for a distance of 140 km, among male and female knights from various countries on Saturday.

Al Farsi previously passed the stages of the French Saumur Race, which was organised by the International Equestrian Federation for a distance of 160 km. As a result, rider Hussein al Farsi will qualify for the World Endurance Cup Championship, which will be held next September in France.

Also, five of Royal Cavalry riders have qualified for the World Endurance Cup in France, who will represent the Sultanate of Oman during the next World Cup.

Rider Mahmoud bin Marhoon al Foori qualified on the horse back *Dalila*, rider Hesham bin Saleh al Farsi on the horse back *Belxima*, rider Ahmed bin Salem al Hamdani on horse back *Kasbah* and jockey Saleh bin Salem al Balushi on horse back *Astiq*.

With this qualification, Dr Sarhan bin Salem al Zaidi, Director-General of the Royal Cavalry, said: "Qualifying for the World Endurance Cup in France is an achievement added to the successive achievements of the Royal Cavalry at the international level, which came with the high interest and continuous support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the sound directives from Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of Royal Court Affairs.

This is also in addition to plans and goals drawn up by the specialists of the Royal Cavalry to ensure qualification and competition in the upcoming World Endurance Cup in France, where the Royal Cavalry will have the honour of representing Oman in this global forum.

Al Zaidi explained that, "The work plan for qualifying was launched after the World Endurance Cup competitions in Abu Dhabi, which included participation and competition with a group of riders and horses in a number of international races organised by the International Equestrian Federation in various countries of the world, where the riders participated in several qualifying races.

This was made possible due to the hard work of the riders and the technical and administrative staff."

OMAN HOPE DENTED IN OLYMPIC GAMES

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

Oman spikers' hope was dented by China team to reach the Olympic Games in Paris this summer. Both Oman teams A and B suffered a defeat against China teams. Oman team A comprised from the pair Haitham al Shraiqi and Ahmed al Hosni suffered to a 2-0 loss against China team A comprised from Wu Jiaxin and Walkejiang Mutailipu. Both sets ended for China players at: 21-17 and 21-17.

In the other match, Oman team B pair Hood al Jalboubi and

Mazin al Hashmi received a 2-0 defeat against China team B. The first set finished at 21-19 after a thrilling game while the Chinese players sealed their victory in the deciding set after they secured a 30-28 win to move into the next stage of the qualification.

Earlier on last week, Oman qualified for the AVC Continental Cup Finals after beating Thailand at the Asian Volleyball Confederations (AVC) Beach Volleyball Continental Cup Semifinals at Ningbo Banbianshan Beach Volleyball Centre in Ningbo, Xiangshan, China. Hood



al Jalboubi and Mazin al Hashmi outclassed Pithak Tipjan and Poravid Taovato by 2-1 in the final

clash. The sets ended at 21-18, 18-21 and 11-15. Earlier, Hood and Mazin stunned Kazakhstan's

Aldash and Gurin by 2-0. Both sets ended at 16-21. They also managed to edge Kazakhstan's

second pair Yakovlev and Bogatu by 2-1. The sets finished at 14-21, 21-19 and 10-15 in the thrilling match. Oman's second pair Haitham al Shraiqi and Ahmed al Hosni suffered a 2-1 loss against Thailand's Pithak Tipjan and Poravid Taovato. The sets ended at 21-17, 20-22 and 20-18

The beach volleyball competition in the Olympic Games will take place at Champ-de-Mars Park, France, during July 27 to August 10 in the exceptional setting of a temporary outdoor arena with a gross capacity of more than 14,000 seats.



Taher al Barwani during the meeting in China

ORSC takes part in the General Assembly

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC) member, Taher bin Taghlib al Barwani, took part in the General Assembly meeting of the Asian Squash Federation which was held recently in China. The meeting addressed several topics related to the continental development of the Squash. Also, the meeting addressed the upcoming calendar of the Asian squash events and tournaments beside highlighting the opportunities provided for various countries to compete for the honour of hosting these events. The meeting also included the review of initiatives that aim for further development of squash on a continental level.

The representative of ORSC commented on Asian participation, "We were very pleased to attend this important annual meeting of the Asian continent. The meeting included discussions and reviews of various topics including the mechanism for selecting players to participate in future Olympic editions for squash. The participating federation or local committee must be affiliated with the International Squash Federation to compete in the Olympics. Furthermore, officials and representatives from the Asian Squash Federation emphasised the necessity of forming the West Asian Squash Federation, which would manage the competitions and tournaments in this region. This federation could hold regional qualifiers, with the successful teams then advancing to compete at the Asian level," he said.

Al Harthy forces out of 24 hrs after incident

LE MANS: Sensational driving, an excellent strategy and great pace in both dry and wet conditions weren't enough for Ahmad al Harthy, Maxime Martin and Valentino Rossi to realise their dream of LMGT3 victory in this year's 24 Hours of Le Mans — a luckless excursion in the wet leading to retirement on Sunday, June 16.

As the twice-round-the-clock race at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France neared the end of its ninth hour, at around 00.45hrs on the Sunday morning, Omani racer Al Harthy — producing an impressive performance on slick Goodyear tyres on a wet track — unfortunately came to grief at the Dunlop Chicane.

Losing grip on a tricky wet patch, the No.46 BMW M4 pitched off the circuit and into the gravel, the front-left of the car making contact with the barriers on the outside. With the car beached in the gravel trap, retirement was all-but instantaneous as a dejected Al Harthy radioed to the team.

The disappointment for Al Harthy and team-mates Martin and Rossi was heightened as the performance of all three Team WRT drivers had been exceptional from the moment the lights went out at 16.00 local time on Saturday, in round four of the FIA World Endurance



Championship.

Martin, who had to settle for 12th fastest in qualifying after being baulked on his best lap by one of the Hypercar class entries, began the race in the No.46 and maintained position initially before starting to move up the

LMGT3 order. At the end of the opening hour he held eighth place and as the race entered hour three the squad held fifth, with Al Harthy at the wheel for his first race miles of the event.

The Omani, supported by key partners OQ, Oman Ministry

of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman, soon broke into the LMGT3 podium placings and at the end of hour three Al Harthy was second in class and driving faultlessly. Midway through the fourth hour he took the lead of LMGT3 and

following a Full Course yellow period the Omani continued to head the way.

Next it was the turn of MotoGP legend Rossi to get behind the wheel of the BMW for the first time in the race and he maintained the class lead as evening became night with a superb drive, much to the delight of the hundreds of thousands of spectators. Al Harthy was back in the car in hour eight and under Safety Car conditions he held second position.

With rain starting to lash down at Le Mans, but with certain parts of the lengthy 13.6-kilometre track very wet and others drier in the unseasonably cold conditions, the teams and drivers were placed into a great quandary over whether to try and stay on slick tyres or switch to wet-weather rubber.

Running just outside the podium placings as the race passed midnight local time, the decision was made for Al Harthy to remain on slicks and he expertly kept the BMW at a competitive pace. While initially losing ground to those electing to stop for wets, if the Omani could mitigate the time difference on his slick rubber, as the track started to dry he would be in the perfect position to move back through.

OAA gears up to host motorsports during Khareef

SALALAH: The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) has announced the much-awaited return of motorsports at Khareef Dhofar from June 21.

This premier event promises an exhilarating Khareef season in Dhofar, offering to motorsport buffs of all ages.

The Karting Circuit Experience returns to Khareef Dhofar this year and is designed to be an unforgettable adventure. This activity allows participants aged five and above to test their mettle on a state-of-the-art go-karting circuit.

The OAA offers a diverse fleet of karts, including Rt8, Dino, Baby Kart, and Double Seater models. This ensures a fun and secure experience



for everyone, fostering a spirit of friendly competition and adrenaline-pumping excitement.

The Karting Circuit Experience was held at the

Salalah Celebrations Square from 4 pm to 11 pm.

For those who thrive in the virtual realm, the OAA presents the Digital Motorsports event. This section provides an

immersive environment for participants to compete in virtual racing competitions.

The event features cutting-edge driving simulators and activity allows motorsport enthusiasts to hone their racing skills on a virtual track, offering the exhilarating experience of motorsport competition in a digital format.

Digital Motorsports was held at the Salalah Celebrations Square, digital room at the evening hour timings.

International Driving License Service

Adding to the overall convenience, the OAA will establish an International Driving Licence issuing section at the Salalah Celebration

Square. This service streamlines the process for visitors seeking to obtain their international driving permits, further enhancing their Dhofar Khareef experience.

The event was held at the Salalah Celebrations Square on Friday.

The return of Motorsports during the Khareef Dhofar Festival promises to be a attraction this Khareef season.

The OAA looks forward to welcoming motorsport enthusiasts from across the region and offering them a unique and unforgettable experience filled with exhilarating competition, cutting-edge technology, and unparalleled convenience.

Marsa crown Strike Oman 3x3 Basketball tournament

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Marsa team was crowned the champion of the Strike Oman 3x3 Basketball Tournament after defeating Free Palestine team with a score of 16-15. The tournament, which included 8 teams, was organised by Oman Basketball Association, represented by the 3x3 Basketball Committee. The event was held at the Strike Oman Hall at the Oman Automobile Association.

The teams were divided into groups and the tournament was played in a single round-robin format followed by a knockout stage, the top two from each group were qualified for the knockout stage, the winners played for the title, and the



losers played for third place.

After the conclusion, Eng Khalfan al Naabi, President of the Oman Basketball Association, crowned the



winning teams. The results were as follows, Marsa team which consisting of Said al Saadi, Mahmoud al Suli, and Bassam al Busaidy received gold

medals and a financial prize. Free Palestine team, consisting of Osama al Riyami, Rashid al Zahaibi, Ayman al Mahrami, and Suhail al Busaidy, won

silver medals. While PBL team won bronze medals.

Eng Khalfan al Naabi, expressed his admiration for the high technical levels displayed

during the 3x3 basketball championship matches during the summer of 2024 season. Al Naabi praised the exciting and fair competition witnessed in the championships, which resulted in the victory of club teams and national teams in the first and second places.

Al Naabi stressed that these tournaments provide real opportunities for competition and friction between players, and contribute to their continued giving and development of their levels.

He revealed that the association organised seven 3x3 basketball championships during the current year, to spread the game and provide a suitable environment for players to practice the game continuously during the league break.

Schick rescues Czechs in 1-1 draw with dogged Georgia



Patrik Schick (R) controls the ball before scoring first goal. – AFP

HAMBURG, Germany: European Championship newcomers Georgia held the Czech Republic to a 1-1 draw on Saturday, taking a shock lead through a Georges Mikautadze penalty before an equaliser off the chest of Patrik Schick.

Saba Lobjanidze could have won it for Georgia at the death but blazed his shot over the bar after a breakaway and both sides, with one point from two games, need a win in their final Group F match to progress to the knockout stages.

In an intense and entertaining game at Hamburg's Volksparkstadion, Mikautadze sent Czech goalkeeper Jindrich Stanek the wrong way with his spot-kick in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time after a handball by Robin Hranac.

The 23-year-old Mikautadze's second goal of the tournament sent Georgia's white-bedecked fans into ecstasy.

The goal came against the run of play after the Czechs had dominated, with Schick having two efforts well saved, Vaclav Cerny scuffing the ball when it looked easier to score, and Adam Hlozek having a goal disallowed for handball.

SCHICK SCORES THEN INJURED

Schick got the goal the Czechs deserved, however, in the 59th

In an intense and entertaining game at Hamburg's Volksparkstadion, Mikautadze sent Czech goalkeeper Jindrich Stanek the wrong way with his spot-kick in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time after a handball by Robin Hranac

minute, steering the ball in with his chest after Ondrej Lingr's glancing header from a corner bounced off the post.

In a concern for the Czechs' next game against Türkiye, Schick - joint top scorer with five goals at the last Euros - limped soon after his goal.

Portugal and Türkiye were playing later in Dortmund in Saturday's other Group F game. As in their opening match against Türkiye, Georgia relied on stout defending and counter-attacks against the Czechs, who are ranked 40 places higher.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia - nicknamed "Kvara-dona" by fans in comparison with Argentina's great Diego Maradona - was a constant threat while Anzor Mekvabishvili squandered a great chance on the break to give Georgia a 2-0 lead. — Reuters



Otar Kakabadze (down) fights for the ball with David Jurasek. – AFP



Germany's Alexander Zverev reacts after the winning. – AFP

Hurkacz ousts Zverev to reach Halle final

HALLE WESTFALEN, Germany: Second-seeded German Alexander Zverev fell in straight sets to Pole Hubert Hurkacz in the semi-final of the Halle grass-court tournament on Saturday. Hurkacz won through 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 in one-hour, 33-minute and will next play either world number one Jannik Sinner or China's

Zhang Zhizhen for the title in the pre-Wimbledon warm-up. The fifth-seeded Pole, winner in Halle two years ago, will bid to win his second title of the season after on clay at Estoril in April. "I'm really confident on my serve," said Hurkacz who fired 17 aces including 13 in the first set and saved all four break points he faced. "It needed to be really good,"

said Hurkacz after his first win over Zverev in four meetings, most recently a three-set defeat in the United Cup final, a mixed team event before the Australian Open in Sydney. "That match that was a little bit sitting in the back in my mind," said Hurkacz. "I was like, okay, not today. "He is such a good competitor and is playing good tennis,

reaching the final at the French (Open) and playing at a really high level." The 27-year-old Hurkacz will aim to clinch his ninth ATP Tour title. "I really love grass," said Hurkacz, the 2021 Wimbledon semi-finalist. "The surface suits my game and the atmosphere here, having the full crowd is incredible." — AFP



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Plan for launch of first-ever Film City project with RO 12 million investment

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) has unveiled plans for the launch of a ‘Film City’ project with an investment value of RO 12 million, based on the outcomes of Creative and Cultural Workshops held earlier in March.

According to Nader al Rawahi, a delegate from Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit to the Ministry, the project is expected to provide more than 100 job opportunities for Omanis and aims to produce and export films. The project is one of the three proposed outcomes of the workshop, which has a



His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, at the Creative and Cultural Workshops held last March.

total investment value of RO 15.4 million. The other two projects include a park “Ibda’a Park/ Creativity Park” which will aim to attract Omani creators with

an investment value of RO 2.2 million, and another project “Yaj” which will aim to boost Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE tourism) in the country in collaboration with an Italian firm, valued at RO 1.1 million. Additionally, officials shared that the workshops identified eight ready-to-launch projects with an investment value of RO 19 million. Officials shared that those opportunities will be unveiled shortly along with all relevant details, as well as approvals and locations for their implementation.

In a statement to ONA, Eng Aisha bint Mohammed al Saifiyah, Deputy Head of the National Programme

for Investment and Export Development (Nazdahir), stated, “The primary objective behind this initiative is to enable creative industries to stand on its own feet as it represents a promising sector.”

Additionally, the deputy head revealed that the programme is currently developing larger-scale projects and investment opportunities within the field. Earlier this year, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth published a roadmap that detailed the current status of the creative industries in Oman.

Despite having a global value of \$985 billion, the local contribution of the creative market remains unknown.

Samayil Industrial City signs pact to set up pharmaceutical manufacturing plant

MUSCAT: Samayil Industrial City, an affiliate of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), recently sealed a deal with Global Health Ambassadors Company to establish a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant.

The project, to be situated in the medical investment zone within the industrial city, will span over 10,000 square metres with an investment exceeding RO 13 million.

This initiative reflects Madayn's commitment to adhering to global standards, with the city being divided into various industrial sectors such as food, iron, aluminium, furniture, plastics, petrochemicals, marble, warehouses, support services, and building materials.

The success of this venture has prompted Madayn to replicate this model across all its new industrial cities. — **ONA**

Private bank deposits in Oman increase by 9.7%



MUSCAT: By the end of March 2024, private deposits with commercial banks in the Sultanate of Oman saw a robust increase of 9.7%, reaching RO 16.491 billion, up from RO 14.629 billion during the same period in 2023.

The Central Bank of Oman's monthly statistical bulletin provided a detailed breakdown of these deposits.

Term deposits stood at RO 5.430 billion, savings deposits at RO 5.442 billion, and demand deposits at RO 4.846 billion.

Additionally, deposits in Omani Rials totalled RO 14.427 billion, while foreign currency deposits were valued at RO 2.604 billion.

Key banking indicators for Omani commercial banks as of March 2024 revealed that the ratio of total cash and clearing to deposits in Omani Rials was 6.7%, while the ratio of total cash and clearing to total deposits stood at 5.5%.

The ratio of total loans to deposits reached 100.2%, illustrating a fully utilised loan-to-deposit capacity.

The bulletin also highlighted that deposits in foreign currency accounted for 17.2% of total deposits, and foreign assets represented 11.6% of total loans and 13.2% of total assets. Foreign liabilities constituted 10.3% of total liabilities, indicating a well-managed foreign exposure.

Other noteworthy ratios included private demand deposits, which made up 30.7% of total private deposits, and the ratio of capital and reserves to total deposits, which stood at 22.3%.

Furthermore, allocations and retained interest formed about 5.9% of total credit. — **ONA**

Musandam Governorate transforms with infrastructure, tourism projects underway

MUSCAT: The Musandam Governorate is experiencing a significant transformation with numerous infrastructure and tourism projects underway.

These developments aim to attract tourists globally and boost local and foreign investments. Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, highlighted the urban development in residential areas and city centres, mentioning that various projects are at different stages of completion or consultation.

The governorate has effectively utilised its allocated RO 20 million from the Governorates Development Programme for the current five-year plan.

One key project is the multi-purpose fishing port in Dibba, which is 75% complete and expected to finish by mid-next year.

This port, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, is anticipated to spur economic development in the governorate.

The Dibba-Lima-Khasab road project, initiated earlier this year, has progressed significantly, with over 55 kilometres of the preliminary road constructed. This road is crucial for facilitating traffic and boosting tourism within Musandam Governorate.

For the new Khasab Airport, several tenders related to soil, wind, and design consultancy studies have been awarded by the Civil Aviation Authority. The



One key project is the multi-purpose fishing port in Dibba, which is 75% complete and expected to finish by next year.

airport, with a capacity of about 500,000 passengers, is expected to be operational during the eleventh five-year plan.

At Khasab Port, a company is currently investing in and managing the port facilities, preparing feasibility studies scheduled to conclude by October 2024.

A long-term management agreement will be signed if the studies prove economically viable. In tourism, investment lands in Bukha, Madha and Dibba have been assigned to various investors.

The Omran Group is redeveloping a resort in Dibba, and construction at “Ras Al Amud Resort” in Khasab is progressing well. Additionally, a Club Med resort is set to be

completed in 2028 in Khasab.

The development of waterfronts in coastal states and Lima Province is also underway.

The Khasab (Bassa Beach) waterfront is 95% complete, expected to be fully ready by August. In Dibba, the waterfront is 50% complete, while Buja's waterfront is over 40% finished. The Lima district waterfront is currently in the design stage.

Recognising the environmental richness of Musandam, especially its marine areas, a royal decree established the National Natural Park Reserve.

This initiative defines areas of high and low environmental sensitivity, guiding environmentally friendly investments that do not harm

natural resources or marine life.

The governorate collaborates with the Environment Agency to develop legislation, identify best practices, and manage the reserve's environmental and tourism sectors.

Community participation is a priority, with the Governor's Office and various government institutions engaging citizens, youth, and the private sector through sessions and dialogues. Improved digital communication has enhanced this interaction.

Musandam International Investment Company, a local community entity, is making significant investments, employing local people, and adding value through its operations in various sectors, including industry,



The governorate has effectively utilised its allocated RO 20 million from the Governorates Development Programme for the current five-year plan

SAYYID IBRAHIM AL BUSAIDY
Governor of Musandam

contracting, fish farming and retail.

The establishment of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority branch and the opening of a business centre last May provide emerging investors with an encouraging environment for growth. This initiative has spurred economic activity in the governorate.

In the health sector, Khasab Hospital and Madha Hospital are in the final stages of internal preparations and are expected to open within the current five-year plan, enhancing healthcare services in the region. — **ONA**

Al Wusta Governorate leads Oman in fish production

MUSCAT: The Al Wusta Governorate has emerged as the leading governorate in the Sultanate of Oman in fish production as per the 2022 statistics, with a production of approximately 250,000 tonnes, accounting for 36 per cent of the total production. The value of this production exceeds RO 100 million.

Dr Ali bin Abdullah al Alawi, Director General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Wusta Governorate, affirmed the government's keen interest in the fisheries sector in the region due to the job opportunities it offers in marine fishing and related industries.

By the end of 2023, the number of registered fishermen in the governorate exceeded 4,800, alongside 201 fishing boats and 530 fish transport and marketing vehicles. Additionally, there are 149 artisanal fishing vessels.

Al Alawi revealed that the establishment of the multifaceted marine fishing port in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm (SEZAD) includes facilities for maintaining commercial, coastal, and artisanal fishing vessels, as well as fishing factories, fish selling facilities, and a centre for training and qualifying fishermen.

The construction of paved roads to serve fish transport vehicles has also been completed. The fishing port, covering an



With a production of approximately 250,000 tonnes, this accounts for 36 per cent of the total production in Oman.

area of 7.5 square kilometres, and the fish and food industries complex, with an equivalent area, are poised to become major economic drivers in the region, attracting local and international companies specialised in fishing and related industries.

The fish and food industries zone, positioned near the “multi-purpose” marine fishing port in SEZAD, holds promise as an investment area to enhance the value of the fish landing in the port.

Currently, the zone houses several specialised factories for fish canning, fish oil production, and similar activities, with the capacity to accommodate around 60 facilities focused on the fish and food industries sector.

In the Central Governorate, there are a total of 61 factories, encompassing fish freezing and packaging, canning, fish powder and oil production, drying and ice production activities.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

(MoAFWR) is set to implement various plans and projects to bolster the sector and support fishermen in the near future.

These initiatives include the establishment of value-added factories like fish canning facilities, the enhancement of the fish market in the Wilayat of Mahout, the development of the fishing port in the Wilayat of Mahout and the expansion of the fishing port in Al Lakbi, in the Wilayat of Al Jazir. Additionally, the ministry aims to set up fish collection centres

in Haitam and Ras Madrakah in Duqm, and launch multiple fish farming projects in the Wilayat of Al Jazir.

Al Alawi highlighted that the total investment value of the ongoing and completed projects has exceeded RO 162 million.

The ministry is also eyeing fish farming projects valued at over RO 770 million, which are expected to commence in the upcoming period. Al Alawi revealed that the ministry has introduced a range of investment opportunities in



The ministry has introduced a range of investment opportunities in fish farming projects in Al Wusta Governorate

DR ALI AL ALAWI
Director General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

fish farming projects in Al Wusta Governorate.

These opportunities encompass the cultivation of white Indian shrimp in the Wilayat of Mahout, white-legged shrimp in the Wilayat of Al Jazir and Bar Al Hikman and Omani semolina. In addition, there are plans for fin fish (pigeons) farming in SEZAD and a shrimp farming project in the Ras Madrakah area in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, which have been presented on a development platform.

135 nationalities invest in MSX; foreign investment at 19 per cent

MUSCAT: Statistics from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) reveal that investors from 135 nationalities are involved in the market, with foreign investment accounting for 19 per cent.

The MSX is actively working to attract more investors by offering a comprehensive database on listed companies, raising awareness about investment opportunities, diversifying investment tools, and promoting transparency and disclosure among public joint stock companies.

The exchange also encourages government and family businesses to transition to private joint stock companies.

Oman's capital market offers several advantages for foreign investors, such as low tax rates, unrestricted capital and profit transfers, and a stable exchange rate of the Omani rial (RO) against the US dollar.

Foreign investors can invest in MSX-listed shares or investment funds without prior permission.

Additionally, an independent supervisory body ensures a fair and stable market, protecting investors' rights and maintaining high levels of transparency and integrity.

Most public joint stock companies on the MSX allow up to 100 per cent foreign investment. Statistics show that foreign investments are mainly in the industrial and services sectors at 15.8 per cent and 15.7 per cent, respectively.

Gulf investors prefer the services and financial sectors at 15.4 per cent and 8.5 per cent, respectively.

Arab (non-Gulf) investments



Oman's capital market offers several advantages for foreign investors, such as low tax rates, unrestricted capital and profit transfers, and a stable exchange rate of the Omani rial (RO) against the US dollar.

are focused on the financial sector at 3 per cent, while local investments dominate the financial sector at 87.6 per cent, the industrial sector at 75.6 per cent, and the services sector at 67.7 per cent.

The first half of this year saw an increase in trading volume and value. By May, trading value reached RO 517 million, a 38.4 per cent increase from RO 373.5 million in the same period last year. The number of traded securities rose to over 3.1 billion, compared to about 1.4 billion last year.

Executed transactions increased from 96,000 to over 106,000. This growth aligns with the improved national economy

and increased confidence in government measures to reduce public debt, boost spending on essential services, and launch infrastructure projects that support local and foreign private sector investments.

The market value of public joint-stock companies listed on the MSX grew by RO 448.5 million this year, reaching RO 9.416 billion by the end of May, compared to RO 8.967 billion at the end of last year.

This represents 38.5 per cent of the total market value of securities listed on the exchange, which rose to RO 24.478 billion by the end of May, gaining over RO 676 million from last year.

The market value is spread

across closed companies at RO 10.7 billion, the bond and sukuk market at RO 4.362 billion, and public joint-stock companies at RO 9.4 billion.

The main index of the MSX rose to 4,845 points by the end of May, increasing by 331 points.

This rise supports investor optimism in the MSX's growth potential, especially with the Oman Investment Authority planning to offer several companies for public subscription in the current and coming years.

Successes in IPOs like Abraj Energy Services and OQ Gas Networks last year have attracted more investors to the exchange and enhanced liquidity.

Residential real estate prices in Oman decline in Q1 2024

MUSCAT: Residential land prices have driven a 2.6% decline in the general index of residential real estate prices in Oman during the first quarter of 2024, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Breaking down the numbers, the residential land price index fell by 0.9%, the apartment price index plummeted by 17.3%, and the villa price index saw a modest increase of 0.8%.

Meanwhile, the price index for other homes dropped by 4.3%.

Comparing to the fourth quarter of 2023, the overall residential real estate price index decreased by 2.9%. Specifically, the residential land price index dipped by 0.8%, apartment prices decreased by 14.8%, villa prices by 2.1%, and prices for

other homes saw an 11.3% reduction.

At the governorate level, most areas experienced a decline in residential land values in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

Muscat Governorate saw a 5.5% reduction, Dhofar Governorate 5.1% and Musandam Governorate a significant 15.7% drop.

Other decreases were recorded in Al Buraimi (5.4%), Al Batinah South (0.4%), Al Sharqiyah South (2.4%), and Al Dhahirah (8.3%).

Conversely, some governorates witnessed an increase in residential land values. Al Dakhiliyah Governorate's index rose by 7.5%, Al Batinah North by 11.2%, Al Sharqiyah North by 1.4% and Al Wusta by 8.1%.

— ONA



Comparing to Q4 2023, the overall residential real estate price index decreased by 2.9%.



German economy minister says EU open for talks on China tariffs



SHANGHAI: Germany's Economy Minister Robert Habeck (pictured) said during his visit to China on Saturday that the door of the European Union is open for discussions regarding EU tariffs on Chinese exports.

"What I suggested to my Chinese partners today is that the doors are open for discussions and I hope that this message was heard," he said in his first statement in Shanghai, after meetings with Chinese officials in the morning in Beijing.

Habeck's visit is the first by a senior European official since Brussels proposed hefty duties on imports of Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) to combat what the EU considers excessive subsidies.

Habeck said in Shanghai that until November, there is time for a dialogue between the EU and China on tariff issues, and that he believes in open markets but that markets require a level playing field.

The EU provisional duties are set to apply by July 4, with the investigation set to continue until November 2, when definitive duties, typically for five years, could be imposed.

"This opens a phase where negotiations are possible, discussions are important and dialogue is needed," Habeck said.

— Reuters

Oman's old airport terminal to make way for mixed-use commercial hub

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

Plans for the redevelopment of the old terminal at Muscat International Airport open up a sprawling 50,000 sqm site for investment in an upscale multipurpose commercial hub that will contribute to the capital city's economic development.

Interested developers have until July 9, 2024 to submit Expressions of Interest (EoIs) to affirm their keenness to participate in a competitive process leading to the award of a contract for the redevelopment, operation and management of the old airport terminal.

Overseeing the revamp is Oman Airports Management Company (Oman Airports), an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA). A conceptual plan of the site presented to interested bidders envisions a complex of five different components, covering a gross floor area of over 50,000 sqm that is offered up for redevelopment.

The biggest of these components is a 24,000 sqm area that is proposed to be developed into a mixed-used commercial area



Elements of the façade of the Old Airport Terminal building will be incorporated into the revamped project.

A CONCEPTUAL PLAN OF THE SITE PRESENTED TO INTERESTED BIDDERS ENVISIONS A COMPLEX OF FIVE DIFFERENT COMPONENTS, COVERING A GROSS FLOOR AREA OF OVER 50,000 SQM THAT IS OFFERED UP FOR REDEVELOPMENT.

featuring retail and F&B elements. A second area of around

14,000 sqm is envisioned for redevelopment into a Business Hub that will incorporate, among other elements, a museum dedicated to the aviation sector. Furthermore, a 20,000 sqm open area is tipped to host an outdoor exhibition site, while an expansive parking area is proposed to be developed into a multi-storey parking building.

As for the area that currently

houses the old Control Tower, Oman Airports has left it to the selected bidder to come up with proposals for its redevelopment. Importantly, in light of the historical significance of the old terminal, Oman Airports has mandated that the façade of the building be retained as much as possible.

Inaugurated in 1973, the old terminal has played a pivotal part

in the country's aviation history and modernisation up until 2018, when the new terminal building was launched.

Furthermore, given its proximity to key landmarks connected by well-developed road networks, the redevelopment will be a prestigious addition to the city's urban landscape.

Located at the intersections of Sultan Qaboos Highway and Muscat Expressway, the project enjoys easy access to, among other landmarks, Muscat International Airport, Airport Heights, Madinat Al Irfan, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, and a number of luxury malls and hotels.

Consequently, its location will be advantageous for investors, retailers, high-end tenants and real estate developers, it is pointed out.

Additionally, under the Greater Muscat Master Plan, one of the main stations of the future Metro line is anticipated to come up virtually on the doorstep of the old airport terminal, ensuring steady traffic and footfalls to the site.

A site visit for the interested bidders is scheduled to take place on June 27, 2024.

MoHUP, ICC conduct workshops on new building codes

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

Following the agreement signed in February 2024 to enhance building safety and construction standards in Oman, the International Code Council (ICC) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) have kicked off a workshop series in Muscat in May, according to a release.

The project focuses on safety standards, sustainability, and technology integration, with the entire endeavour slated for completion by early 2026. This three-day workshop aims to eventually develop six comprehensive building codes tailored specifically to address the unique needs of Oman.

Oman's adoption of new codes, based on the 2021 International Codes (I-Codes), will raise standards and promote best practices nationwide. This ensures

citizen safety and positions the country as a leader in construction safety and sustainability.

The first series of workshops brought together key stakeholders, including designated government officials, design professionals, and industry experts.

Over the informative three days, the ICC and MoHUP focused on topics surrounding project scope, findings from the ICC's exploratory trip, research, local construction practices, and regulatory systems. These sessions fostered deep discussions and identified key gaps, concluding with strategic recommendations for Oman building code enhancements.

This collaborative effort ensures that the forthcoming codes will be comprehensive and reflective of Oman's future aspirations. Building on the ICC's 2021 International Codes (I-Codes) as a foundation allows for an open,



The project focuses on safety standards, sustainability, and technology integration, with the entire endeavour slated for completion by early 2026.

consensus-driven approach to code development.

However, the success of their adaptation in Oman depends on active involvement from local stakeholders. Through this series

of comprehensive workshops, Oman is customising the I-Codes to suit its unique needs, ensuring widespread support and effective implementation.

Highlighting the significance of

the workshop, Dr Hanan al Jabri, Adviser for Urban Planning at MoHUP, said: "This workshop is a crucial step towards achieving the goals of the development of the Oman building codes.

The insights and expertise provided by ICC are invaluable as we strive to elevate the standards of safety, sustainability, and innovation in our construction industry."

Hamid Naderi, senior vice president of product development at ICC, underscored ICC's dedication to the project, saying, "We are honoured to work with MoHUP on this transformative initiative. Our objective is to develop building codes that address the unique needs of Oman while setting new standards for safety and resilience in the region.

The active engagement and feedback from Omani stakeholders during this workshop are vital to our success."

Reliability test run of Barka V desalination plant completed

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

In a significant achievement for the water infrastructure sector, GS Inima announced that the Barka V desalination plant has successfully completed its Desalination Plant Reliability Test Run, including the final Performance Test, nine days ahead of the contractual schedule.

The plant demonstrated its ability to meet the total contracted water capacity of 105,000 metres³ per day, marking a pivotal milestone for the project.

Situated in South Al Batinah Governorate, the Barka V desalination plant will yield 100,000 metres³ per day of premium drinking water, benefiting



The plant demonstrated its ability to meet the total contracted water capacity of 105,000 metres³ per day, marking a pivotal milestone for the project.

THE PLANT DEMONSTRATED ITS ABILITY TO MEET THE TOTAL CONTRACTED WATER CAPACITY OF 105,000 METRES³ PER DAY, MARKING A PIVOTAL MILESTONE FOR THE PROJECT

approximately 800,000 residents in these densely populated regions.

This development is poised to significantly enhance the water supply in these areas, ensuring a steady and reliable source of potable water.

The Barka V Independent Water Project (IWP), designed to produce 100,000 cubic metres³ per day

(equivalent to 22 million imperial gallons per day), is spearheaded by GS Inima Barka V Desalination Co SAOC, a subsidiary of the Spanish multinational water infrastructure firm GS Inima Environment.

Headquartered in Madrid, GS Inima Environment was chosen by Oman's Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) to implement the project under a Build-Own-Operate (BOO) model. This model encompasses a 20-year operational period starting from mid-2024.

The total investment for the Barka V IWP is estimated at around \$138 million.

This project is the fifth in a series of phased water projects located in a cluster at Barka in Al

Batinah South Governorate.

Utilising advanced reverse osmosis (RO) technology, the Barka V plant will replace older, less efficient desalination plants that were previously integrated with power generation units.

The successful early completion of the reliability test run not only underscores GS Inima's commitment to operational excellence but also highlights the company's capability in delivering critical infrastructure projects ahead of schedule.

This achievement is expected to bolster GS Inima's reputation in the global water infrastructure sector and demonstrate its proficiency in managing large-scale projects in challenging environments.

A rollercoaster ride of price volatility, ETF adoption, and energy concerns



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

Bitcoin's energy consumption has always been a point of contention, with its vast network of miners demanding substantial computational power. Recent trends suggest that Bitcoin's power usage may be on the rise, not just due to mining, but also from increased network activity.

Bitcoin's blockchain bandwidth usage recently surpassed 90 per cent for the first time since its halving event in April. This surge is mainly attributed to the adoption of new token standards like Runes and BRC-20, which have triggered a huge number of transactions. While the rise in Bitcoin's network activity shows its growing adoption, it also raises concerns about its environmental impact. Bitcoin mining already consumes a considerable amount of energy, and increased network activity could worsen this issue. Interestingly, back in 2018, there were dire predictions about Bitcoin's energy consumption exceeding that of the entire world by 2021. However, these predictions have failed to materialise. This is largely due to the evolution of mining equipment towards greater efficiency and the increasing

adoption of renewable energy sources in mining operations, proving that the initial forecasts were overly pessimistic and failed to account for technological advancements and shifts in energy sources within the industry. Exploring more energy-efficient mining practices and developing solutions to optimise network activity helps the long-term sustainability of Bitcoin. Meanwhile, during the past few days Bitcoin's price dropped below \$64,000, triggering a wave of liquidations in the crypto market. Over \$27 million worth of Bitcoin long-positions were liquidated within 24 hours, with the total liquidations across the cryptocurrency market exceeding \$132 million. This sharp price correction has sparked a debate among investors about the future direction of Bitcoin. Bearish analysts point to on-chain data suggesting that

some large Bitcoin holders have been liquidating their positions, signalling a potential downward trend. However, bullish investors argue that the current dip is a healthy correction before Bitcoin potentially targets the \$100,000 mark. All price speculations have to be taken with a pinch of salt, as I heard all sort of wild numbers being thrown around over the past few years. What seems certain is that the interest in Bitcoin has not faded, on the opposite, the traditional finance seems more and more eager to get "a slice of the cake". VanEck, a global asset manager, recently listed Australia's first Bitcoin ETF (VBTC) on the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX), growing the demand for cryptocurrency investments in the Asia-Pacific region. This launch follows the rollout of six Bitcoin and Ethereum ETFs

in Hong Kong in April, further solidifying the region's embrace of digital assets. The interest in Bitcoin ETFs in Australia is evident, with VanEck's survey revealing that three-quarters of financial advisers in the country have received inquiries about Bitcoin from their clients. Additionally, a third of these advisors are considering adding Bitcoin ETFs to their clients' portfolios if they become available on the ASX. On its debut trading day, the VBTC ETF traded 96,476 shares, generating a trading volume of \$1.3 million (A\$1.9 million). While this is much lower than the debut trading volumes of spot Bitcoin ETFs in the United States, VanEck remains optimistic about the ETF's potential for growth in Australia, citing strong interest from both retail and professional investors.

The enthusiasm for crypto ETFs is not limited to Australia. Hong Kong, for instance, became the first Asian jurisdiction to launch spot ETFs for both Bitcoin and Ether in April. While the initial market response to these ETFs was lukewarm, it's important to note that the Hong Kong market is considerably smaller than the US market, where Bitcoin ETFs have seen large inflows. While Singapore maintains a cautious stance on crypto ETFs, other countries in the region are gradually opening up to these investment vehicles. Thailand, for example, recently approved its first Bitcoin ETF, which is exclusively available to institutional and wealthy investors. Malaysia, although not yet offering spot ETFs, has also entered the digital asset investment space with a fund targeting Bitcoin, Ether, and blockchain companies.

Trillionaire club throws an indulgent theme party

ROBERT CYRAN

The trillionaire club is growing quickly. Six years ago, Apple became the charter, opens new tab member, not long before oil titan Saudi Aramco publicly debuted with a 13-digit market capitalisation. Few would have predicted five more inductees so soon, and investors are nudging even more companies to join. Chipmaker Broadcom is riding an artificial intelligence wave just like Nvidia, Microsoft, Amazon.com, Alphabet and Meta Platforms. Eli Lilly is on its way thanks to the anti-obesity craze. Hyped megatrends sparking giddy valuations, however, will inevitably lead to disappointment. Broadcom, under boss Hock Tan, has been expanding by acquisition. It bought several rivals before paying almost \$70 billion last year for cloud-computing software developer VMware. The deals have enabled it to slash costs and raise prices. The \$839 billion company's total return for shareholders, including reinvested dividends, has been an eye-popping 3,200 per cent over the past decade. Its AI-linked chips also have started to draw comparisons to Nvidia, which just overtook Microsoft as the world's most valuable company and whose \$3.3 trillion market cap exceeds the entire Russell 2000 Index. Lilly, at \$847 billion, is cashing in on the surging desire for weight-loss medications. Its Zepbound molecule, also used to treat diabetes, generated \$5.3 billion of revenue last year. The only limitation now is production, as the market it shares with Novo Nordisk rumbles toward \$100 billion annually by 2030, according to Goldman Sachs analysts. The doubling of Broadcom's and Lilly's market values in a year makes thematic investing seem easy and the somewhat arbitrary expectations fun. Even Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate is on track to be part of the group, boosted by its large holding of Apple stock. It's easy to forget that fibre optics and Dow 10,000 hats were all the rage in 1999, and darkly ironic a decade later. Both the chipmaker and the drugmaker also face valid questions about whether their valuations reflect overly excessive growth projections. Lilly trades at 18 times anticipated revenue for the next 12 months, or more than 3 times peer Merck's multiple, based on LSEG data. Its patent protection will eventually lapse, however, and rivals could roll out better therapies even sooner. Broadcom's stock trades at 32 times estimated earnings, or twice its 10-year average. Its most recent quarterly revenue increased just 12 per cent from a year earlier after excluding VMware's contributions; semiconductor sales grew 6 per cent. Other companies built around buying and cutting, such as cheese-and-ketchup purveyor Kraft Heinz, have struggled to sustain the business model. It all makes the four-comma theme party look indulgent. — Reuters

Opportunity Oman: Nurturing the SME ecosystem for economic growth



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Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in driving economic growth and development across the globe. Countries like the United States, Germany and India have demonstrated the power of SMEs in fostering innovation, generating employment and contributing significantly to their respective economies. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, Oman stands out for its commitment to nurturing a robust SME ecosystem. Oman's SME landscape has witnessed remarkable progress in recent years. The number of SMEs registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) surged by 30 per cent, reaching 135,064 by the end of 2023, compared to 104,141 in 2022. Among these, approximately 29,000 enterprises hold the entrepreneurship card (Riyada), accounting for 22 per cent of the total registered SMEs. SMEs in Oman have made substantial contributions to the economy, driving business growth, trade development, and job creation. The government recognises the immense potential of SMEs and has implemented various initiatives to support their growth and success. Oman's Vision 2040 recognises the crucial role of SMEs in achieving economic diversification and

sustainable growth. The vision sets clear targets for increasing the contribution of SMEs, enhancing their competitiveness, and creating a conducive business environment. The success of Oman's economic diversification strategy is directly linked to the development and growth of the SME sector. Oman's private sector is made up of three main parts: large family businesses, government and semi-government companies, and SMEs. Among these, SMEs, especially micro-enterprises, make up the biggest part of the private sector. These smaller businesses play a critical role in transforming Oman's economy. However, the dominance of large family businesses and government-linked companies across various sectors has made it difficult for SMEs to grow and thrive. To tackle these challenges and encourage the participation of all private sector players, especially SMEs, the government of Oman take deliberate action and implement a comprehensive policy framework. This includes breaking the monopoly of large family businesses and government companies, creating a level playing field that gives all companies equal opportunities for growth and success, regardless of their size. The government put in place mechanisms to support SMEs

through targeted incentives, making it easier for them to participate in government procurement and tenders, and promoting local content. Attracting local and foreign investments and encouraging new business models, such as community-based SMEs in different governorates, is also important. These deep strategic interventions are necessary to empower SMEs as key players in Oman's private sector, building their capabilities to become leaders in the nation's journey towards becoming a developed country. To foster an entrepreneurial mindset and equip entrepreneurs with the skills they need, Oman has invested in entrepreneurship education and implemented policies to create market opportunities for SMEs. The In-Country Value (ICV) programme requires large companies, especially in the oil and gas sector, to prioritise local procurement and partnerships with SMEs. This initiative has opened up new avenues for SME growth and development. Despite the progress made, there are still challenges in Oman's SME ecosystem. Access to financing, particularly for early-stage startups, remains a hurdle. Improving the regulatory environment,

simplifying business registration processes, and promoting a culture of entrepreneurship are ongoing priorities for the government. Looking to the future, there are many opportunities for SMEs in Oman to thrive. Key sectors such as technology, manufacturing, tourism, and logistics present enormous potential for SME growth. The government's continued support, together with private sector participation, can unlock new investment opportunities and take the SME ecosystem to new heights. In conclusion, Oman's commitment to developing a vibrant SME ecosystem is clear through initiatives like Riyada, funding programmes, entrepreneurship education, local content policies, and free zones. The oil and gas sector, along with sector holding companies, has played a crucial role in supporting SME development. As Oman continues to invest in SME growth, in line with its Vision 2040, it is well-positioned to create a resilient, diversified, and innovation-driven economy. The success of SMEs is directly linked to achieving Oman's economic diversification goals, and with the right support and collaboration, they can become the backbone of the nation's sustainable growth and prosperity.

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A general view as a racegoer takes a photograph of the parade ring ahead of the days races in London. - Reuters



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An envelope containing a Postal Vote for the upcoming UK General Election is posted in Birkenhead, north west England. - AFP



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Switzerland's Nikita Ducarroz in action during the women's park final of the Olympic Qualifier Series 2024. - Reuters



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Woman cools off with water during a heat wave in Naples, Italy. - Reuters



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Dancers Sophia Salingaros, Swathi Jaisankar, and Netra Easwaran perform at the 10th International Day of Yoga event on the North Lawn at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York City. - Reuters

art & life

SUNDAY | JUNE 23, 2024 | DHUL HIJAH 16, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER

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‘Nature’s mirror’: Climate change batters Albania’s butterflies

Bright yellow, black, red and blue, Alexanor butterflies once fluttered abundantly on southwestern Albania’s flowery slopes. **P19**

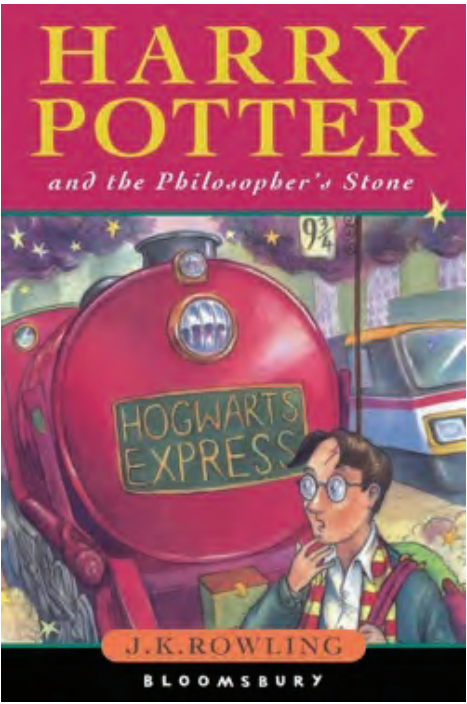
Original ‘Harry Potter’ cover art to go under hammer

The original watercolour illustration for the first edition of “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” — the book that introduced the world to the young bespectacled wizard — will go up for auction in New York on Wednesday.

The work by Thomas Taylor, who was just 23 years old in 1997 when he painted the iconic image of the young boy with the lightning bolt scar and the round glasses, is expected to fetch from \$400,000 to \$600,000 at Sotheby’s.

Taylor was working at a children’s bookstore in Cambridge, England, when he was tapped by publisher Barry Cunningham at Bloomsbury to paint the image for J K Rowling’s book, which was to be released in London on June 26, 1997.

He was one of the first people to read the book, getting an early copy of the manuscript to inform his artwork,



according to Sotheby’s books specialist Kalika Sands.

“So he knew about the world before anybody else and it was really up to him to think of how he visualised Harry Potter,” Sands told AFP.

Rowling and Taylor were unknown when the book was released, and few expected it would become a global phenomenon. Only 500 copies of the first edition were printed, and 300 of them were sent to libraries, according to Sotheby’s.

But the book soon became a runaway bestseller.

Twenty-seven years later, the so-called “Potterverse” features Rowling’s seven original books, a blockbuster film franchise, a critically acclaimed stage play and video games.

More than 500 million copies of the books have been sold in 80 languages.

“It’s exciting to see the painting

TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS LATER, THE SO-CALLED “POTTERVERSE” FEATURES ROWLING’S SEVEN ORIGINAL BOOKS, A BLOCKBUSTER FILM FRANCHISE, A CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED STAGE PLAY AND VIDEO GAMES

that marks the very start of my career, decades later and as bright as ever,” Taylor, now a children’s book author and illustrator, said in a statement released by Sotheby’s.

“As I write and illustrate my own stories today, I am proud to look back on such magical beginnings,” Taylor said.

The first time the illustration was offered at auction at Sotheby’s in London in 2001, it only fetched £85,750 — but only four of the books had been published at that time.

The illustration is part of a collection of manuscripts and rare book editions going up for sale that also features works by some of literature’s great heavyweights, including Edgar Allan Poe, F Scott Fitzgerald, Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. The collection belonged to surgeon Rodney Swantko, who died in 2002 at the age of 82. — **AFP**



ECOLOGY



RESEARCHERS SAY 58 OF ALBANIA'S 207 BUTTERFLY SPECIES ARE AT RISK. SCIENTIFIC STUDIES HAVE MEASURED THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON BUTTERFLY POPULATIONS, THOUGH RESEARCHERS ALSO CITE OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

University of Tirana students during a butterfly observation outing in Zvernec.

BRISEIDA MEMA

Bright yellow, black, red and blue, Alexanor butterflies once fluttered abundantly on southwestern Albania's flowery slopes. Now, like many related species, scientists say they are disappearing due to human impacts, including climate change.

Increasingly absent from the picturesque district of Zvernec, the Alexanor is one of 58 of the Balkan country's 207 butterfly species that researchers say are at risk.

"Sensitive to changes, they are a true mirror of the conditions of the ecosystem in which they live," said Anila Paparisto, an entomologist at Tirana University.

In Zvernec, Paparisto leads a team of researchers and students working to identify the country's remaining butterfly species along with those that

are now extinct.

Numerous scientific studies have measured the impact of climate change on butterfly populations, though researchers also cite other environmental factors.

They blame a combination of rapid urbanisation, pesticides and warming temperatures for the decrease.

"Human activity and climate change have had major impacts on nature," said biology student Fjona Skenderi, who was helping conduct research in Zvernec.

In the nearby Divjaka Natural Park, Albanian agronomist Altin Hila points to the disappearance of the Giant Peacock Moth and the Plain Tiger as another worrying sign.

"It's a disaster marked by climatic disruptions, an early spring and excessively high temperatures in January and February," explained Hila, who is also a passionate collector and oversees a butterfly museum in Divjaka.



Altin Hila, an agronomist and owner of a private museum for butterflies, with an emperor moth larva.

"It encouraged the eggs to hatch and the butterfly larvae to grow, but in April the temperatures were too low" for them to survive, he added.

The butterflies' decline also affects other species.

"It will impact the entire food chain and biodiversity, which is also essential for humans,"

Paparisto said.

"When there are fewer butterflies, you expect... the butterfly effect."

Like large swaths of Albania, coastal areas near Zvernec have become increasingly overrun with resorts and apartment blocks, built with little oversight.

Scientists say the rapid urbanisation in the area, along with overfishing and climate change, has also played a part in the dramatic drop in migratory bird populations.

And while some butterfly populations are in decline, other similar species are prospering — to the detriment of the environment.

The arrival of a non-native moth through imports of ornamental plants from China has ravaged more than 80 per cent of Albania's boxwood forests since 2019, according to experts.

"It is very aggressive, it can reproduce three to four times a year, and it is a real misfortune which reduces entire

areas to nothing," said forest engineer Avdulla Diku.

With their distinct neon green and black bodies, the larvae are easily spotted when clinging to the boxwoods' leaves and stems.

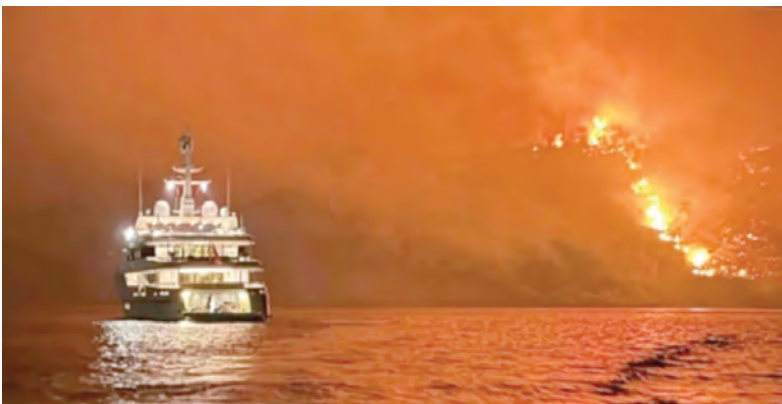
On the road along Lake Ohrid to Pogradec in northwestern Albania, the once vibrant green rows of boxwoods are reduced to husks after being devoured by the moths' larvae.

"It is a firm reminder of the fragility and subtle balance of the environment in which we live," said Sylvain Cuvelier, an entomological researcher who co-authored the first Albanian butterfly atlas.

"It is obviously urgent to unite our efforts to find solutions, to rethink in depth our use of natural resources and the way forward for the protection and restoration of our environment." — AFP

TRAGEDY

Fireworks on yacht set fire to forest on Greek island



SPARKS from fireworks set off from a yacht off the coast of the Greek island of Hydra set fire to the island's only pine forest, Greek media reported on Saturday.

The perpetrators on the yacht tried to extinguish the initial flames, but then called the fire brigade and fled the scene.

The area is inaccessible, meaning the firefighters can only extinguish the fire from the air and from the sea and have not yet managed to get it under control.

The mayor of the island was furious about the incident in a television interview. Regardless of the

central authorities, the island community itself will also report those involved, he said.

According to the fire brigade, a total of 64 forest and bush fires broke out in Greece within 24 hours. An area in the north-west of the Peloponnese peninsula was particularly problematic on Saturday. The situation there was still under control, but strong winds were expected by midday, the ERT broadcaster reported, citing the authorities. Seven villages had already been evacuated. Firefighters and volunteers have been battling the flames all night.

Arsonists are rarely caught, but sometimes the authorities are lucky. For example, a man was recently detained after being recorded by several video cameras as he set a fire east of Athens, which took two days to extinguish.

The penalties for deliberate or negligent arson were significantly increased in Greece last year. In addition to fines in the five-figure range, prison sentences of up to 10 years can now even be imposed for negligent arson. The risk of forest fires in Greece remains high in several regions throughout the weekend. — dpa

TOURISM

Tourists barred from Capri island after cut to water supply



TOURISTS have no longer been allowed to go ashore on the popular Italian Mediterranean island of Capri since Saturday morning after a cut to its water supply.

The ban follows a fault in the water pipe that supplies Capri with water from the mainland, which means the island's supply has collapsed.

At present, only Capri residents are allowed to enter the island, according to an order issued by the mayor. In this emergency situation, Capri has no water supplies that can meet the needs of residents and tourists, the mayor said. At present, the water supply is still guaranteed in most parts of

the island in the Gulf of Naples, but this is only from local water reservoirs, which are in danger of running out without supplies from the mainland.

This emergency situation would be exacerbated by the daily influx of thousands of tourists, the mayor's order continued. In isolated areas in the west of Capri, there is already no more water.

At the harbours on the mainland, the halt in tourist arrivals had immediate consequences. Following the mayor's order, ticket sales for the ferries were cancelled immediately, the ANSA news agency reported.

Ships that had already left for

Capri were asked by the authorities to return. Long queues formed at the ticket counters in Naples and Sorrento.

On Thursday, the main water pipeline in the municipality of Castellammare di Stabia in the southern Italian region of Campania broke down. The pipeline supplies Capri and the Sorrento peninsula.

Although the repair work had been completed on schedule, technical problems had occurred again, according to the water supplier Gori. As a result, the water supply is still interrupted. Work is continuing to rectify the problems and restore the supply. — dpa



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SUNDAY | JUNE 23 | 2024

Fans queue prior to the concert of US singer and songwriter Taylor Swift as part of her 'Eras Tour' at Wembley Stadium, west of London. — AFP

CULTURE

Swift's Eras Tour expected to give London economy £300m boost

Taylor Swift fans are expected to boost the London economy by £300 million (\$381 million) when they descend on the British capital for the US superstar's record-breaking Eras Tour, according to a new report.

The singer-songwriter, 34, who played a three sold-out shows at London's Wembley Stadium from Friday, before she returns to the venue for five nights in August. London is hosting more Eras Tour shows than any other city in the world, with nearly 640,000 people expected to attend across the eight dates.

To celebrate her arrival in the capital, murals, a special Tube map, a Taylor trail and a series of events have been created to entertain the Swifties.

Wembley Park is hosting two new public artworks including a large mural on the Spanish Steps, which are being temporarily renamed the "Swiftie Steps."

The steps, which connect Wembley Stadium and the OVO Arena Wembley, will feature Auras created by artist Frank Styles which have been compiled digitally from more than 30 separate physical paintings.

Below the steps will be the Ready For It mural painted by Mur Walls & HUMOR which features a portrait with lyrics interwoven across the artwork.

A Taylor trail launching on Friday will celebrate places across the capital that are referenced in her music, with venues displaying vinyl stickers in their windows to welcome fans.

Notable locations on the trail include the West End, Soho, Bond Street, Camden Market, Highgate, Hampstead Heath, Vauxhall, Shoreditch, Hackney, Brixton and Kentish Town.

Fans will be able to access the trail through QR codes at participating venues and on the Visit London website, which has created



Fans arrive to attend the concert of US singer and songwriter Taylor Swift as part of her 'Eras Tour' at Wembley Stadium, west of London. — AFP

'THE ERAS TOUR HAS BROKEN RECORDS AND CREATED HUGE EXCITEMENT SO I'M DELIGHTED THAT TAYLOR SWIFT HAS CHOSEN TO PERFORM MORE NIGHTS IN LONDON THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD'

**SADIQ KHAN
MAYOR OF LONDON**

a guide to the many events taking place across the city including brunches, singalongs and quizzes.

Transport For London (TfL) has also reimagined the Tube map in the singer's honour, with each line named after a different album and drawn in colours to match, while stations will be named after songs.

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan said: "The Eras Tour has broken records and created huge excitement so I'm delighted that Taylor

Swift has chosen to perform more nights in London than anywhere else in the world.

"Her eight performances will bring nearly 700,000 fans from across the country and beyond to Wembley Stadium, providing a huge boost to our hospitality industry and further proof that London is the greatest city in the world to watch live music."

Swift kicked off the UK leg of her mammoth, billion-dollar Eras Tour

earlier this month at Murray field Stadium in Edinburgh where she delivered three dazzling shows.

She later took her show on the road to Liverpool, where she played three nights in a row at Anfield Stadium, followed by one date at the Principality Stadium in Cardiff.

The tour, which takes fans on a journey through the different musical stages of her career, has been a juggernaut.

The 640,000 fans set to attend the Wembley shows are estimated to spend an average of £471 when they come to the capital, according to a report by the Greater London Authority.

The estimated £300 million total boost to London's economy was calculated using data from UK Inbound's Tourism Statistics for 2018, which showed that each domestic and international tourist to the UK generated about £396 to the UK economy that year, with the individual spent figure then adjusted to bring it in line with inflation.

Britain's Prince William posed for a photo with US music star Taylor Swift and two of his children, Charlotte and George, at the first night of Swift's Eras tour in London on Friday.

A photo posted on Kensington Palace's X social media feed with the caption "Thank you @taylorswift13 for a great evening!" showed William smiling as Swift took a selfie with him and the children. William celebrated his 42nd birthday on Friday.

Swift also posted a different photo of her with the royals and her partner Travis Kelce with the message: "Happy Bday M8! London shows are off to a splendid start".

Ahead of the first of her eight shows at London's Wembley Stadium, the city published a special version of its distinctive London Underground map to mark the occasion, and the "Changing of the Guard" ceremony at Buckingham Palace featured a military band rendition of one of her songs.

— dpa/Reuters

FASHION



Vogue editor Anna Wintour arrives for the 77th Tony Awards at Lincoln Center in New York. - AFP

Paris mega-party mixes fashion and sport

Vogue World, one of the major fashion events of the year, hits Paris on Sunday, bringing together top French designers for a rare joint show themed around the Olympics.

The event, to be attended by 500 hand-picked guests in the glitzy Place Vendôme, comes midway through Paris Fashion Week's menswear and haute couture shows.

Here's what we know about the event in this summer's Olympic host city.

Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour said back in February that the outdoor show will be "a mixture of fashion show, entertainment and performances... and a few surprises."

The date was not chosen at random, June 23 being International Olympic Day.

The idea is to match different sports — such as cycling, gymnastics, tennis, taekwondo and breakdancing — with eras of French fashion since 1924, the last time the Games were held in Paris.

There have been two Vogue World events in the past — a New York street fair in 2022, and a homage to London's theatre scene in 2023.

With Vogue's magazine business struggling to stay relevant in the online world, Wintour is looking to entertainment spectacles to keep the brand alive.

Front row tickets for the New York event cost \$3,000. Prices have not been revealed for this week's show.

The guest list is also a secret, but the promotional video features top models Gigi Hadid and Kendall Jenner, and actress

IT IS A RARE MOVE FOR LABELS TO PRESENT FASHION SHOWS ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER, BUT THE EVENT WILL SEE ALMOST ALL THE BIG NAMES OF FRENCH FASHION AT ONCE

Isabelle Huppert, trying their hands at several sports.

Most of the 500 seats are reserved for A-listers, with the proceedings hosted by British model and actor Cara Delevingne, and directed by Sam Wrench, who has overseen Taylor Swift's Eras Tour.

It is a rare move for labels to present fashion shows alongside each other, but the event will see almost all the big names of French fashion at once: Balenciaga, Balmain, Chanel, Courreges, Dior, Fursac, Givenchy, Hermes, Jacquemus, Jean Paul Gaultier, Lacoste, Lanvin, Louis Vuitton, Marine Serre, Rabanne and Saint Laurent.

Pharrell Williams, hip-hop mogul and creative director for Louis Vuitton, told the press conference in February: "Taking over the Place Vendôme I have to say is pretty legendary."

He added that the show would spotlight "true French style — what we see on the podium, what we see in the boulevards — in an inclusive spirit."

Place Vendôme, home to the French justice ministry, was an ideal location for the organisers since it is also known as the heart of high-end jewellery in Paris.

But police were reportedly less keen given that central Paris is already facing considerable congestion as a result of preparations for next month's Games.

Vogue World hopes to ease the burden by offering a one-million-euro donation to a charity, French Popular Relief, which tackles poverty and discrimination. — AFP