

Holy Prophet Hijra holiday on July 7

Muscat: Sunday (July 7) has been announced as an official holiday for employees of the public and private sectors on the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary and the advent of the new Hijri year 1446 AH. The Ministry of Labour pointed out that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday – if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work provided they compensate the workers for the holiday.

SUNRISE - 05:24 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 03:57 AM
DHUHR - 12:16 PM
ASR - 03:34 PM
MAGHRIB - 07:03 PM
ISHA - 08:25 PM



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FRANCE EDGE
TENSE CLASH WITH
BELGIUM TO REACH
QUARTER-FINALS



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OIL PRICES
LIFTED BY
SUMMER
DEMAND HOPES



P20

BURGHAM:
A UNIQUE MUSICAL
INSTRUMENT THAT
AGES OVER 150 YEARS



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLES
EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent condolences to Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, on the death of Sheikha Sahera Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to Shaikh Mishal and the deceased's family. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience.

HM RECEIVES THANKS
FROM JORDAN KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a cable of thanks from King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of Jordan in response to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of his accession to the throne anniversary. King Abdullah II expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments which reflect the strength of relations binding Oman and Jordan. He also prayed to Allah to protect His Majesty and for the Omani people to achieve aspirations of further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

HM CONGRATULATIONS
TO AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNOR-GENERAL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of congratulations to Sam Mostyn on the occasion of her swearing-in as the new Governor-General of Australia. His Majesty expressed his sincere congratulations and best wishes to Sam Mostyn for success in leading the Australian people to further progress and prosperity and for the friendly relations between the two countries to develop and grow.

PACT TO DEVELOP MAJLIS AL JINN CAVE SIGNED



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism signed on Monday a usufruct agreement with OMRAN Group to develop Majlis Al Jinn Cave in the Wilayat of Qurayat, the Governorate of Muscat. Report on P3

Council and Shura hold joint session

MUSCAT: The State Council and Majlis Ashshura on Monday held a session during which they discussed reports field by their respective committees on articles of dispute. The disputed articles figured in draft bills of Bank Deposits Protection Law, The Law Regulating Trade in Wildlife and The Media Law. The joint session was held in implementation of Article (49) of the Law of the Council of Oman, said Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

Khalid bin Ahmed al Saeedi, Secretary-General of the State Council, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the “Joint Committee” (comprising members from both sides) reached full consensus about the draft bill of the “Bank Deposits Protection Law”, with 11 articles passed in one go,



without objection by the members.

He added that the members voted ‘for’ the opinion of the Joint Committee on the draft bill of “The Law Regulating Trade in Wildlife” by a rate of 90 per cent. As for the draft bill on “The Media Law”, areas of dispute were cleared and the two sides reached 100 per cent consensus ‘for’ the opinion of the Joint Committee, Al Saeedi affirmed.

Temperature
to hit 50°C

MUSCAT: Temperature may reach 50 degree Celsius for the next three days in the Sultanate of Oman. The Oman Meteorology Office has issued a warning that mercury may touch hit 50°C range in desert regions and parts of the Sea of Oman.

Marmul and Al Jazir recorded 46.5°C.

In light of this extreme heat, meteorologists are urging employers to modify outdoor working schedules and ensure that regular breaks are provided, especially during peak heat periods.

Sunstroke, heat exhaustion, and other symptoms associated with high temperatures are common, especially since many jobs and field activities require workers to be exposed to sunlight and high temperatures.

Citizens and residents are also advised to take necessary precautions to stay safe during this period. Key recommendations include:

Hydration: Drink plenty of

Maqshin and Haima have recorded the highest temperatures at 47.2°C and 47°C, followed closely by Hamra Al Duru at 47°C. Marmul and Al Jazir recorded 46.5°C

water throughout the day to prevent dehydration.

Limit outdoor activities: Avoid strenuous outdoor activities during the hottest parts of the day.

Seek shade and cool areas: Whenever possible, stay in shaded or air-conditioned environments.

Wear loose clothing: Opt for lightweight, loose-fitting, and light-coloured clothing.

Use sunscreen: Protect your skin from harmful UV rays by applying sunscreen with a high SPF.

In terms of current conditions, Maqshin and Haima have recorded the highest temperatures at 47.247°C, followed closely by Hamra Al Duru at 47°C.

Israel trains guns on Khan
Younis and Rafah



People stand near buildings destroyed in an Israeli strike, in Khan Younis on Monday. – Reuters

displacement of residents.” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s spokesman said “it just shows yet again, that no place is safe in Gaza, more efforts need to be made to protect civilians.”

“It’s another stop in this deadly circle of movement that the population in Gaza has to undergo on a regular basis,” added the spokesman, Stephane Dujarric.

Since launching its ground offensive in Gaza on October 27, Israeli forces progressively moved south in the Palestinian territory, seeking to destroy Hamas battalions, though fighting has restarted in the north.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 37,900 people, mostly civilians, according to data from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. – AFP

Nasa recognition for Oman astronomers

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In a rare achievement for the Oman Astronomical Society (OAS), Nasa (The National Aeronautics and Space Administration) of the US has granted recognition to the OAS documentation of the recent aurora borealis. The milestone is the result of efforts of a team of astrophotographers from the OAS following the northern lights on the night of May 12, when a strong solar storm hit the Earth.

The team took pictures of the dancing ribbons of lights over Jabal Sarat in the Western Hajar Reserve, and later contacted specialists at the US space agency to confirm that this celestial event was the first scientific documentation of this phenomenon in the skies of the Sultanate of Oman.

Abdulwahab bin Sulaiman al Busaidy, Omani stargazer and Board member of the OAS, said that this rare recognition is a major milestone in the ambitious plans of the Sultanate of Oman for space. “This recognition is a great motivation for Oman’s ambitious space plans. We have the system, people and determination



Aurora borealis over Jabal Sarat

and it is just a matter of time before we could touch the skies.” The pictures were successfully captured by Qasim bin Hamed al Busaidy, Vice Chairman of the Community Communication Committee at the OAS, and Ali bin Rabia al Kindi, an astronomical photographer.

Later, Issa bin Salem al Shaikh, the founder of the ‘Nasa in Arabic’ initiative and a member of the OAS Board, got in contact with Nasa and submitted it to Aurorasaurus, a citizen initiative to observe northern lights, to validate the report. Later, the entry was examined by

Michael Theusner, a Nasa collaborator for astrometry and star fields who noted that the time when the red glow (to the North from Oman) maximised corresponds to the southernmost extent of the aurora over Europe.

“Coinciding with the solar activity in recent periods, the Earth recorded one of the strongest solar storms in approximately 21 years, which affected the Earth at a scale of G5 on May 10-12,” said Ishaq bin Yahya al Shuali, a member of the OAS and a PhD student in astronomy and space sciences.



Majlis Ash'shura Office reviews government replies

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura Office on Monday reviewed the response of the Council of Ministers on a query about some airports in the Sultanate of Oman.

The response included the views of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, including a briefing about procedures pertaining to the three airports of Sohar, Al Duqm and Salalah, the total cost of the airports and future plans for the management of the facilities.

This was unveiled at



The meeting was chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura. — ONA

the Majlis Ash'shura's 12th regular session of the first annual convening during the Majlis's 10th

Term (2023-2027). The meeting was chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of

the Majlis Ash'shura. The Majlis Ash'shura Office also reviewed other government replies

to a number of follow-up queries filed by the Majlis Ash'shura's members.

— ONA



FOREIGN MINISTER BIDS FAREWELL TO JORDANIAN AMBASSADOR

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister on Monday received Amjad Kuhawi, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the Sultanate of Oman to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. During the meeting, Al Busaidy expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the ambassador in boosting bilateral relations, wishing him success in his future endeavours. — ONA

NO MATERNITY AND PATERNITY LEAVE FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS



BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 1

Maternity and paternity leave stipulated in Social Protection Law will come into force on July 19. The leave is applicable to all Omanis and non-Omanis whether they are contract, temporary or training employees in public and private sectors.

The provisions are not applicable to domestic workers like maids, cooks, drivers and other who work in households.

Malik al Harthy, Director-General of Benefits at the Social Protection Fund (SPF), said, "The decision was issued to clarify the provisions for non-Omanis working and to clarify the groups who benefit from the leave."

A person who works with a commercial registry is covered by the decision. The provision is not applicable for self-employed Omanis and Omanis working abroad.

Radhya al Mahrouqi, Director-General of Contributions, said: "The employer must pay SPF one per cent one per cent of the monthly wage for the provision of maternity and paternity leave.

The maternity leave insurance branch is responsible for the total contributions of the insured male and female workers.

The social protection system is moving forward with expansion of social protection to cover all working groups, including citizens and residents, consistent with decent and sustainable living for all, providing appropriate social protection against potential risks such as illness, old age, disability and death."

The Social Protection Fund called on all employers to update the data on the wages of Omani and non-Omani workers with the competent authorities to ensure the provision of decent, fair, and adequate social protection for various segments of society.

52 students to learn Arabic at summer course for non-natives

MANAH: The fifth summer session of the 2023-2024 academic year commenced on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers in Manah, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

This course has attracted 52 students from various institutions, including the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Culture in Washington, the Omani-British Friendship Society, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of the Comoros, South Korea, Japan and France.

The introductory programme for the students included meetings with the teaching and administrative staff, as well as the supervisors of the cultural programme.

An introductory tour of the institute's facilities showcased the services available to students, followed by a detailed visual presentation about Oman's rich civilisation, culture and people.

The presentation highlighted the elements that make Oman a prime destination for learning the Arabic language and provided

general guidelines and tips for the students to integrate and communicate effectively with the local community through trips, visits and various events.

During this seven-week course, students will immerse themselves in studying the Arabic language and its various skills. The programme also includes numerous lectures, cultural evenings, educational trips to historical and natural sites, Arabic calligraphy lessons, art workshops and a language partner programme.

Affiliated with the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science at the Diwan of Royal Court, the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers is a renowned cultural institution.

The centre offers an accessible pathway to learning Arabic, taught by highly qualified Omani teachers. The institute serves as a bridge for cultural and civilisational exchange between the Omani people and the world, promoting Omani culture and heritage globally. — ONA

Taqah Sports Club, OWA host AI training course

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 1

The Taqah Sports Club's Cultural Committee, in collaboration with the Wilayat of Taqah's Omani Women's Association, recently hosted a training course titled "How to Use Artificial Intelligence and Chat GPT."

Held under the auspices of Khalid bin Ahmed bin Ali Tabook, Director of the Social Development Department, the event aimed to empower participants with the knowledge and tools to navigate the emerging



Taqah Sports Club and OWA hosted course on 'How to Use AI and Chat GPT'

world of AI.

Dr Taha Abdel Aal, a distinguished AI expert, led the session, focusing on equipping attendees with practical skills for both personal and professional use. This initiative aligns with

the Committee's commitment to fostering community development through technical expertise.

Ahmed al Maashani, Chairman of the Committee, emphasised the event's significance as the first of many such endeavours. "We're

a dedicated team that strives to identify initiatives that benefit our region," he said.

"By expanding educational opportunities through workshops and courses, we aim to cultivate a more informed and culturally enriched society."

Dr Abdel Aal elaborated on the workshop's objectives, which included introducing AI fundamentals, exploring its diverse applications, and providing hands-on training with user-friendly tools like Chat GPT, Midjourney and Google AI Experiments.



Summer session begins at the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers

A day of fitness, fun for elderly women in Al Dakhiliyah

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JULY 1

More than 100 elderly women gathered with enthusiasm and excitement at the Nizwa Sports Complex to build new friendships and share stories among them.

The Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, in collaboration with the Ihsaan Association, Al Dakhiliyah branch, organised the event which on Monday was designated as an open sports day for older women as part of the Summer Sports 2024 activities.

The activities varied and included physical fitness exercises, entertaining games, breathing and

relaxation techniques, traditional Omani folk songs and storytelling sessions.

Eman bint Said bin Ahmed al Daihaniyah, member of the media committee in the Summer Sports 2024 in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said: "This event is part of the broader Summer Sports 2024 programme, which has been organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth annually since 2006 to engage the community in sports activities during the summer months. The programme aims to fill free time with sports activities that benefit the participants, such as refining their talents in various sports, enhancing their physical well-being, and fostering social connections to



The programme is applied across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with various departments and regional directorates participating

empower them as contributors to community development."

In Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, initiative programmes included nine sports days, volunteer and awareness initiatives, and three sports convoys in Samayil, Bidbid, and Manah. Activities also



encompass sports training centres for age groups from six to 16 years in various sports programmes such as swimming, football, handball, equestrian, and fitness programmes. Additionally, sports days are open to male and female employees in government agencies.

"In regards to Monday's event, the goal of holding the Open Sports Day for older women is to involve the largest possible number of segments of society. We do not want to neglect the elderly segment, so we always give them a share of our programmes. This event

is designed to offer them a break from their daily routines and create an entertaining day for them to participate in," Eman said.

Sameera bint Salim bin Said Ambusaidi, a member of the Ihsaan Association branch in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said: "Through this initiative, we decided to target the mothers of the wilayats of Samayil, Bidbid and Izki to give a great opportunity for a larger number of elderly people affiliated with the association to participate and benefit more from the sports programmes implemented. The recreational program has been well-received by mothers, who have enjoyed it far from their usual atmosphere."



USUFRUCT SIGNED TO DEVELOP MAJLIS AL JINN CAVE

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Monday signed a usufruct agreement with OMRAN Group to develop Majlis Al Jinn Cave in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Governorate of Muscat.

The usufruct entails the establishment of a tourism and environmental project that will

activate the cave's components by providing special protection tools for adventurers and service facilities.

It was signed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and Dr Hashel bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group.



As per the usufruct, OMRAN Group will undertake the operational aspects of the project, as well as employ and train trainers.

OMRAN Group will ensure that wildlife is preserved inside the cave and the surrounding areas. It will also cooperate with specialised operators

to develop a sustainable and long-term plan to activate the location.

It is worth noting that Majlis Al Jinn Cave's floor area is as big as 58,000 square metres. Its capacity stands at 4 million cubic metres with a length of 310 metres and a width of 225 metres. — ONA

Ban on single-use plastic bags comes into effect

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Environment Authority's ban on single-use plastic bags that are less than 50 microns thick came into effect on Monday. This follows Order No. (8/2024) issued on January 24, 2024, which came after studies by EA in coordination with relevant government and private agencies.

A decision was taken in order to preserve Oman's environment as these bags are disposed of wantonly due to their light weight and take thousands of years to decompose.

The first phase will include the pharmacies, hospitals and clinics sector from July 1, 2024. The second phase will be on January 1, 2025 and includes fabric stores, textiles, clothing stores, tailoring stores, eyeglasses stores, retail stores, mobile phone maintenance, watches selling and maintenance stores, furniture, furnishings and household supplies stores.

Dr Mohammed bin Majid al Kasbi, Director of the Department of Chemicals and Waste Management at the Environment Authority, said: "The importance of this decision comes in preserving the environment and protecting wildlife. This is also in line with the Oman Vision 2040 to manage plastic products and their waste."

This decision is in line with the direction of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and relevant international agreements such as the Stockholm Convention and



The Consumer Protection Authority recently issued a notice confirming its keenness to monitor the markets to avoid raising prices of environmentally-friendly bags

Article 3 of the decision imposes a fine of not less than RO 50 and not more than RO 1,000 on anyone who violates the provisions of the decision, and the fine is doubled in the event of a repeat violation

the Basel Convention. Oman and other countries have taken action to get rid of the plastic pollution epidemic.

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event of a repeat violation.

The Consumer Protection Authority recently issued a notice confirming its keenness to monitor the markets to avoid raising prices of environmentally-friendly bags and confirming the availability of reusable cheaper green alternatives like paper and cloth.

SAUDI MILITARY DELEGATION VISITS JOINT STAFF COLLEGE

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Command and Staff College of the National Defence University at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Monday visited the Joint Command and Staff College. The visiting delegation was headed by Air Commodore Misfer bin Said al Shamrani, Commander of the KSA's Command and Staff College.

Upon the guests' arrival at the college, they were greeted by Brigadier Saif bin Hamad al Yousifi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College.

During the visit, the guests watched a presentation about the Joint Command and Staff College and its curricula. They also toured the college's facilities and departments.

Meanwhile, a delegation from the Command and Staff College of the National Defence University at Saudi Arabia (KSA) also visited the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies. The visiting delegation was headed by Air Commodore Misfer bin Said al Shamrani, Commander of the Command and Staff College.

Upon the guests arrival at the academy at Bait Al Falaj they were greeted by Air Commodore Abdullah bin Faiz al Dhafri, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs of the academy. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters related to academic and training fields.

— ONA

National Museum marks historic Omani-Somali relations

MUSCAT: The National Museum on Monday organised a cultural programme to celebrate historic Omani-Somali relations.

The programme included the presentation of a series of research papers. The first paper titled 'Historical Relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Somalia' was presented by Abdulwahab bin Suleiman al Busaidy, a researcher in Omani-Somali relations' history.

The paper discussed similarities between Oman and

Somalia from various aspects, highlighting their strategic locations and citing historical sources that document their relations. Additionally, the paper focused on current trade relations between the two countries.

Moreover, the second paper touched on the significance of trade relations between Oman and Somalia. It was presented by Counsellor Bashir Sheikh Mahboub, Acting Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

The paper discussed positive developments achieved by the Somali government in political, economic, and security spheres, as well as the importance of Somalia joining the East African Community, the largest trading bloc in that region. The paper also highlighted the importance of East African ports for bilateral trade between East Africa and Oman, contributing to economic growth. The paper also provided statistics reflecting the trade relationship between the two countries. — ONA



The programme included the presentation of a series of research papers. — ONA

Contest unleashed to design monument depicting Sur

SUR: The Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South on Monday announced a competition to design a monument that documents Sur as Arab Tourism Capital 2024. The contest is open for Omani youths specialised in architecture, design, modern arts, urban planning and civil engineering, as well as those who possess the skills needed for the topic of the competition.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, said that the announcement of the competition affirms the governorate's keenness on encouraging innovation and creativity among young people.



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He added that the selection of "Sur as Arab Tourism Capital" inspires the implementation of more projects and initiatives to develop the tourism sector.

Al Maawali pointed out that the competition's supervising committee prepared a technical guide comprising the terms to be met when designing the monument. In the first round, the names of 10 participants will be announced as qualifiers for the second round in which the jury would assess the projects, said Al Maawali. After that, the top three competitors would be felicitated as winners of the competition, he added.



DURING THE SEASON,
CDAA INTENSIFIES SAFETY
AWARENESS EFFORTS BY
ADOPTING AN INTENSIVE
AWARENESS PLAN THROUGH ALL MEDIA
AND DISTRIBUTING AWARENESS
BROCHURES AMONG ALL
SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY

TRAVEL ADVISORY FOR DHOFAR



Familiarise
yourself with
rest points,
vehicle service
stations



Plan your
trip to
include rest
breaks



Conduct
vehicle
inspection and
maintenance

Follow safety
procedures if
vehicle overheats
or when refuelling



Avoid using
mobile phones
while driving, or
overtaking



Adhere to traffic
rules, legal speed
limits, and correct
lanes



Use hazard lights,
call emergency
number (9999)



Know emergency
numbers, locations of
Civil Defence and
ambulance points

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Saud Bahwan Automotive Unveils Toyota's Stylish Next-Gen All-New Prado in Oman



Mr. Shunsuke Chijiwa,
H.E. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Humaidi and
Mr. Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan



Customers Viewing the All-new Prado



The All-New Prado

Saud Bahwan Automotive recently hosted an exclusive event at the Grand Millennium Hotel to launch the highly anticipated all-new Toyota Prado. His Excellency Ahmed Mohammed Al-Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, graced the occasion as the Guest of Honour. The event also had Mr. Shunsuke Chijiwa, Group Manager, India and Middle East Division, Toyota Motor Corporation as the special guest alongside distinguished guests from various sectors.

The evening commenced with special highlights about the all-new Toyota Prado. The Toyota Prado is a legend in its own right. Its legacy, which began over seven decades ago with the introduction of the Toyota BJ, is marked by outstanding rough-road driving performance and ruggedness, famously demonstrated by reaching Mount Fuji's sixth station at an altitude of 2,700 meters. Since then, the Prado has become synonymous with unparalleled off-road capability, inspiring performance, and legendary dependability. In Oman, its popularity continues to soar. With each new introduction, the Prado not only proves its prowess but also solidifies its place among true off-road enthusiasts. Today, the all-new Prado features a striking retro design, exhilarating performance and unmatched capability.

The all-new Prado builds on its legacy of strength and reliability, blending the legendary Land Cruiser DNA with modern technologies to enhance both off-road and everyday performance. The vehicle continues to uphold Toyota's global reputation for providing dependable transportation capable of tackling the toughest conditions.

Toyota's mission for the Prado has been to ensure safety and reliability in even the harshest environments. Customer experiences worldwide

have contributed to refining the Prado's reliability, durability, and rough-road capabilities.

The all-new Prado retains its robust body-on-frame construction and adopts Toyota's GA-F platform, significantly enhancing off-road performance. It is also designed for easy manoeuvrability and comfort in conventional on-road driving, showcasing Toyota's commitment to practicality and customer needs. This is the first Prado to feature an electric power steering (EPS) system, reducing kickback on rough surfaces and providing smoother, more direct steering and easier manoeuvrability at all speeds. The all-new Prado will be available with a choice of 2.4 Litre Turbo Petrol and 2.8 Litre Turbo Diesel engines, paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission.

The interior offers seven-seat configurations, designed to evoke the strength and functionality of a true off-roader. The all-new Prado is equipped with the latest Toyota Safety Sense systems within a comprehensive Toyota T-Mate package of advanced safety features and technologies, reducing the burden on the driver.

The all-new Toyota Prado is now on display at all Saud Bahwan Automotive showrooms.

As Khareef season unfolds, the Dhofar Governorate transforms into a bustling destination, attracting tourists from both within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad. Travellers should be prepared for the influx of visitors and plan accordingly to fully enjoy the unique autumn atmosphere.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) confirms its readiness to serve visitors to the governorate and strengthen its current centres in the governorates of Dhofar, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, and Al Wusta) with manpower and machinery, in addition to deploying seven points on the roads leading to the governorate.

But it is necessary to ensure a successful and safe trip to adhere to some important basics and guidelines before and during the trip.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, represented by the Roads Department in Al Wusta Governorate, has made continuous efforts to raise its readiness for the season. Bakhit bin Salem al Awaed, Director, Roads Department in Al Wusta Governorate, says, "The department is working to remove sand from the roads leading to Dhofar Governorate such as the Adam-Thamrait road, Sinaw-Duqm-Hasik road, Al Ashkharah-Mahout road, in addition to Mahout-Al Zamaim road."

The Director of the Roads Department also confirmed that the department continuously carries out periodic maintenance work for all road networks in the governorate by installing and changing many indicative and directive regulations on all roads in the governorate.

Realising the importance of following safety instructions before travelling is a way to maintain safety and the safety of others. This should be at the forefront of your priorities while planning and preparing trips to Dhofar Governorate.

Make sure to familiarise yourself with the rest points and vehicle catering service stations on your itinerary. Choose an appropriate time to move and stop for a rest if you feel tired and exhausted, and adhere to safety rules. The first step towards safety and

security measures before the trip is to conduct a comprehensive inspection and maintenance of the vehicle.

This will ensure the safety of its parts, and equipping it with the necessary tools such as a trimming rope and a small first aid bag, and making sure that there is a fire extinguisher that it is in working condition.

It is necessary to study the route of the trip by identifying the locations of rest points and oil stations along the road. Also one must know the emergency numbers and the locations of the Civil Defence Authority and ambulance points spread on the route to Dhofar Governorate.

Traffic safety is very important, especially with the peak traffic density during Khareef season. Everyone must follow traffic rules, adhere to correct lane, legal speed, and avoid using mobile phones while driving, and avoid overtaking from the shoulder of the road.

During the trip, vehicles must be stopped in case the engine overheats, in addition to adhering to security and safety procedures while refuelling, such as turning off the engine.

It is also important to adhere to wearing seat belts for all passengers and place children in the safety seats allocated to them inside the vehicle. Furthermore, focusing on the weather conditions while driving, and in the event of a sudden weather change, commit to reducing the vehicle speed, avoiding excessive speed, and adhering to the speed limit for each road.

During traffic accidents, stop your vehicle away from the accident, use the vehicle's dual traffic lights to alert other vehicles, and call for help at the emergency number (9999).

Safe access to Dhofar Governorate also requires safety measures. Upon arriving at your residence, if you smell a gas leak at your place of residence, open the doors and windows, do not use any heat source, and move family members outside, while closing the gas cylinder valve if possible.

During the season, CDAA intensifies safety awareness efforts by adopting an intensive awareness plan through all media and distributing awareness brochures among all segments of society.



Workshop outlines features of ‘Public Policy Guide’

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Economy on Monday held an introductory workshop on the guide designed for preparing public policies. The workshop was attended by representatives of 46 institutions.

The ‘Public Policy Preparation Guide’ provides policymakers with a road map for drafting public policies in Oman.

It covers the stages of preparing, analysing, implementing, reviewing and

assessing public policies.

These steps are based on a professional reference that responds to principles, methodologies, technical tools and frameworks necessary for ensuring the soundness, applicability and effectiveness of public policies.

The guide addresses public sector senior managers and experts tasked with developing and designing policies, in addition to researchers, analysts, public policy pioneers and all



The Ministry of Economy held an introductory workshop on the guide designed for preparing public policies

those interested in the process of public policy-making.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, stressed the significance of professionally devising public policies in a manner that keeps pace with rapid developments in economic, social, political and security domains in countries around the world.

The overall objective of government institutions (when drafting public policies) is to improve the economy, enhance performance, channel development efforts and achieve balance, sustainability and optimisation of resources and capabilities, the minister explained. For their part, specialists at the Ministry of Economy made a visual presentation to introduce the rationale of public policy, as well as salient features and methodologies of writing the script of public policy, the cycle of its endorsement and models of the ‘policy paper’. — ONA

Wadi Darbat’s new cabins to suit all budgets

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 1

Tucked away in a part of khareef-bound Dhofar Governorate, Wadi Darbat unfolds its beauty just east of Wilayat of Taqah. This verdant valley winds its way through the landscape, culminating in a meeting with Khor Rori and the Arabian Sea.

Wadi Darbat stuns visitors with its breathtaking scenery. A verdant carpet of diverse trees and shrubs unfolds, dominated by towering sidr trees. Freshwater springs bubble up from the earth, feeding sparkling lakes and waterways that weave through the valley.

Following heavy rains, a seasonal waterfall bursts forth, cascading down 100 metres and adding a touch of magic to the valley. During the khareef, Wadi Darbat transforms into a captivating masterpiece. Rainwater spills from the mountains, forming picturesque waterfalls that plunge from impressive heights.

Wadi Darbat boasts not only dense vegetation and pristine surroundings but also a natural spring and hidden caves. Studies suggest that the water-filled chambers of Teeq Cave are fed by the valley’s own waters.



Delightfully designed and equipped cabins on the banks of Darbat Lake



rich biodiversity. It’s a perfect haven for nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers.

Overlooking the scenic setting, Darbat Cabins has unveiled its revamped design for the 2024 season.

Said al Maashani, founder, says, “We are delighted to announce the opening of nine new cabins at our project in the coming days. These new cabins are designed to suit all budgets and offer stunning views of Darbat Lake, making them an ideal retreat for relaxation and enjoying the scenic beauty.”

He further added: “While we’ve maintained the stunning waterfront location, we’ve broadened our offerings to welcome a wider range of guests.”

Inspiration for the Darbat Cabins came from the project founder’s extensive travels. “My journeys across many countries exposed me to a wealth of ideas and cultures,” he explained. “The concept of cozy cottages lining a beautiful waterfront perfectly suited a destination like Darbat, so I decided to bring that vision to life here.”

Al Maashani expressed his appreciation to Dhofar’s government departments for their support in launching this project.

For an optimal experience, plan your visit to Wadi Darbat between July and September. During these months, mild weather prevails, allowing you to fully appreciate the valley’s splendour. The cascading waters of Wadi Darbat, also known as ‘Jaafar’, are a major tourist draw. Visitors flock to witness the waterfall’s beauty, especially when it connects with Khor Rori and the historic port of Samharam.

Wadi Darbat offers a unique experience, combining stunning scenery, seasonal waterfalls, and

CBO issues govt treasury bills worth RO 15m

MUSCAT: The total issuance of Government Treasury Bills amounted to RO 15 million. The value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 3 million, for a maturity period of 28 days.

The average accepted price reached RO 99.640 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.640 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.69286 per cent and 4.70981 per cent, respectively.

Whereas, the value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 12 million, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO 98.732 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 98.730 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.08476 per cent and 5.15005 per cent, respectively.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 6 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 6.50 per cent.— ONA

Global Shapers Muscat, YUZU honour Eco-Champions

MUSCAT: The Global Shapers Community Muscat, in collaboration with YUZU Agriculture, hosted the Earth Guardians awards ceremony at the Intercity Hotel Muscat recently. The event celebrated the creativity and commitment of young environmental champions through an interschool sustainable scarecrow competition.

The ceremony was inaugurated by HH Sayyidah Basma al Said. Students from grades 6 to 9 showcased their innovative scarecrows, crafted from upcycled materials and integrating art and science within a circular approach, accompanied by compelling climate-themed stories.

The top honours went to Team ‘Pedro vs Pests’ from Ahmad bin Majid International Private School, clinching first place, followed by Team ‘Queen Bee’ from A’soud Global School in second and Team ‘The Inventors’ from Ahmad bin Majid International Private School securing final spot.

Additional category



The Global Shapers Community Muscat, in collaboration with YUZU Agriculture, hosted the Earth Guardians Awards Ceremony.

recognition included Best Storyline awarded to Team ‘Jackie Skellington’ from The Sultan’s School and Best Digital Storytelling awarded to Team ‘Gambilo Family’ from Ahmad bin Majid International Private School.

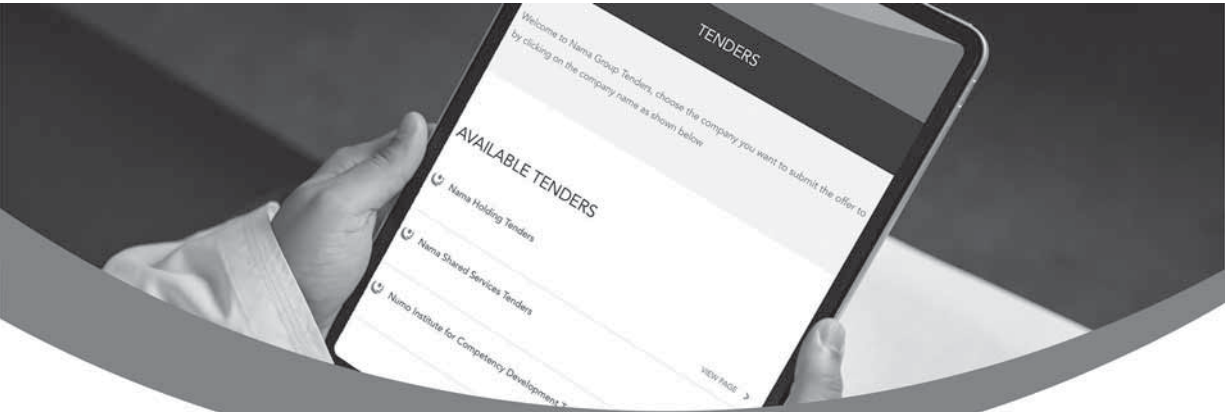
Rumaitha al Busaidy, Vice-President, Environmental Society Oman (ESO) and Global Shaper Muscat Alumni, in her speech emphasised the importance of youth empowerment in fostering proactive resilience and impact.

Fahad al Abri, founder of Move Green, captivated with his original composition ‘Matloob Lil Adala’, advocating for collective action in

environmental preservation.

About the initiative, HH Sayyidah Basma said, “The dedication and creativity shown by Oman’s youth truly reflect their commitment to building a more sustainable future.”

Samiya Sheikh, Curator & Earth Guardians Lead at GSC Muscat Hub, said that they were pleased to see the initiative sparking a grassroots movement in Oman, addressing challenges such as excessive consumption and pollution while promoting a compassionate and sustainable mindset. “We remain committed to nurturing change-makers and contributing to a greener nation, aligning with ‘Oman Vision 2040’ and the SDGs,” she added.



TENDER

Nama Shared Service invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2024/002	IT Hardware and Software Support Services AMC	08 July 2024	22 July 2024	OMR 100/- (Plus VAT amount: 105 OMR)

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded on the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees is to be done online through the link available on the website. The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be made before 3.00 pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal no later than 3.00 pm, time of the Sultanate of Oman, on Monday 22 July 2024.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception area.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person’s name and the company details.



Nama Holding
Muscat, Shatti Al Qurum, In Beach One Building
3rd Floor, Units 305 & 307
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Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 211
E-Mail: Nawahel.AJunaibi@Holding.nama.om



TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS



Israel strikes Gaza as Palestinian groups claim rocket barrage



A Palestinian boy hugs a woman as she speaks to a girl while sitting on the balcony of a home damaged in Israeli bombardment, in Khan Yunis. — AFP

GAZA: Israeli forces struck southern Gaza’s main city Monday after a rocket barrage claimed by Palestinian groups, and as shelling and fighting raged on across the besieged Palestinian territory.

The Israeli military said that about “20 projectiles were identified crossing from the area of Khan Yunis” in a rare salvo after nearly nine months of devastating conflict.

The rockets were aimed at Israeli communities near the Gaza border and were fired in retaliation for Israeli “crimes... against our Palestinian people”, said Al Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad which has fought alongside Hamas movement. Most launches were intercepted, the Israeli military said, reporting no casualties and saying artillery was “striking the

Witnesses and the civil defence agency reported Israeli air strikes including in the southern Rafah area and the central Nuseirat refugee camp

sources of the fire”.

Elsewhere in Gaza, witnesses and the civil defence agency reported Israeli air strikes including in the southern Rafah area and the central Nuseirat refugee camp.

Witnesses reported constant Israeli tank fire in Gaza City’s Shujaiya district where battles raged for a fifth day, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged Israeli forces were engaged in a “difficult fight”. The military said troops “eliminated

numerous gunmen” in raids in Shujaiya, where air strikes also killed “approximately 20”. Israeli forces were also operating in Rafah and in central Gaza, a statement added.

Netanyahu, who recently declared that the “intense phase” of the war was winding down, said on Sunday troops were “operating in Rafah, Shujaiya, everywhere in the Gaza Strip”.

The war started with Hamas’s October 7 attack on southern Israel which resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, based on Israeli figures. Palestinians seized 251 captives, 116 of whom remain in Gaza including 42 the army says are dead. Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 37,900 people, mostly civilians, according to data from the health ministry in Gaza.

Months of on-and-off talks

towards a truce and captives release deal have made little progress, with Hamas saying on Saturday there was “nothing new” in a revised plan US mediators presented late last month.

The United Nations and relief agencies have voiced alarm over the dire humanitarian crisis and threat of starvation the war and Israeli siege have brought for Gaza’s 2.4 million people.

Israel’s ground operation in Rafah since early May has led to the closure of a key aid crossing, and a US-built temporary pier meant to facilitate humanitarian shipments was again removed from the Gaza coast over the weekend because of high seas. The war has also led to soaring tensions on Israel’s northern border with Lebanon, where the army has traded fire with the Hezbollah movement. — AFP

Raid kills woman and child in West Bank

NUR SHAMS: Palestinian officials said an Israeli raid on Monday killed a woman and a child in a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, where a Palestinian was killed the day before.

The Israeli military, whose forces struck the same refugee camp on Sunday, did not immediately comment on the latest deaths.

The Palestinian health ministry said in a statement that the woman and the child were killed in Nur Shams camp, near the northern West Bank town of Tulkarm.

Four other people were wounded by Israeli “live fire”, it said. A journalist saw Israeli armoured vehicles enter the camp on Monday.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it was handling three injuries from the raid. The camp has seen increased violence in recent weeks.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad

group said on Sunday that a commander from its armed wing was killed by a drone strike inside the camp.

The Ramallah-based health ministry said five others were wounded in the strike, including two who were in critical condition.

In April, a two-day Israeli raid left 14 people dead in Nur Shams, the Palestinian Red Crescent said at the time.

Already soaring violence in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, has further surged since the Israeli invasion in Gaza broke out on October 7.

The Hamas attack on southern Israel that sparked the war resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, according to a tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel’s retaliatory campaign in the Gaza Strip has killed at least 37,900 people, mostly civilians, according to data provided by the health ministry in the Palestinian territory. — AFP



A man throws a bucket of water to douse a fire in a building that was heavily damaged during an Israeli army raid on the Nur Shams camp. — AFP

A LIFE STRUGGLE IN WAR



A Palestinian man holds his children as he walks next to buildings destroyed in an Israeli strike, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

Al Shifa hospital chief says tortured

DEIR EL-BALAH: The head of the Gaza Strip’s biggest hospital said on Monday after being freed from more than seven months of detention that he had been “tortured” by Israel.

Al-Shifa hospital director Mohammed Abu Salmiya was among dozens of Palestinians released and returned to Gaza for treatment, according to Israeli authorities.

Abu Salmiya said he and other prisoners were put through “severe torture” in Israeli prisons, after being detained since the October 7 cross-border attacks.

“Several inmates died in interrogation centres and were deprived of food and medicine,” according to Abu Salmiya, who said he still had a broken thumb.

“For two months no prisoner ate more than a loaf of bread a day,” he added. “Detainees were subjected to physical and psychological humiliation.”

The medical chief said no charge had ever been made against him.

Israel’s Shin Bet intelligence agency said it had decided on the release with the Israeli military “to free up places in detention centres”.

The agency said it “opposed the release of Palestinians” who had taken part in attacks on Israeli civilians “so it was decided to



Al-Shifa hospital director Mohammed Abu Salmiya, makes a statement after his release, at Nasser hospital. — AFP

free several Gaza detainees who represent a lesser danger”.

However commenting on X, formerly Twitter, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir called Abu Salmiya’s release “with dozens of other terrorists” a “security abandonment”. Israeli forces detained Abu Salmiya during one of a number of raids on Al-Shifa.

Israel’s military has accused Palestinian groups of using

hospitals in the Gaza Strip as a cover for military operations. It has raided Al Shifa and other hospitals, and says it has found tunnels and other infrastructure. The groups deny the allegations.

Al Shifa hospital has been reduced to rubble by successive raids since Israel launched its assault on Gaza after the October 7 attacks.

After crossing back to Gaza near the city of Khan Yunis, five

“
Several inmates died in interrogation centres and were deprived of food and medicine. For two months no prisoner ate more than a loaf of bread a day

**MOHAMMED
ABU SALMIYA**

Al-Shifa hospital director

detainees were admitted to Al Aqsa hospital and the others were sent to hospitals in Khan Yunis, a medical source said.

A correspondent at Deir Al Balah saw some detainees in emotional reunions with their families. Abu Salmiya was not the only top medical practitioner detained.

The Gaza European hospital in Khan Yunis said the head of its orthopaedic unit, Bassam Miqdad, was among those freed on Monday.

In May, Palestinian rights groups said a senior Al Shifa surgeon had died in an Israeli jail after being detained. The Israeli army said it was unaware of the death. — AFP



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In brief

■ HELSINKI



FINLAND APPROVES DEFENCE TREATY WITH THE UNITED STATES

The Finnish Parliament on Monday unanimously approved a defence pact with the United States, which will allow enhanced US military presence and storage of defence material in Finland. The Defence Cooperation Agreement(DCA) had been signed by the Finnish government in December. Aimed to strengthen Finland's security and defence capabilities, the agreement comes after the Nordic country joined Nato in April 2023.

The deal gives the US access to 15 military bases in Finland and enables the presence and training of US forces, and prepositioning of defence material in Finland. — AFP

■ SEOUL



NORTH KOREA FIRES TWO SHORT-RANGE BALLISTIC MISSILES

North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles but one launch failed, South Korea's military said on Monday, a day after Pyongyang warned of "fatal consequences" following major joint exercises in the South. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the military had detected two launches.

"The short-range ballistic missile launched at around 05:05 flew approximately 600 km," officials said.

JCS spokesperson Lee Sung-jun said the second missile appeared to fly abnormally in an early stage of flight, adding that if it had exploded in mid-air, debris could have landed over North Korea. — AFP

■ ATHENS



GREEK FIRES NEAR ATHENS BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL

Forest fires that raged in the outer suburbs of Athens over the weekend have been brought under control. Authorities carried out evacuations and a 45-year-old man died of cardiac arrest while trying to flee the flames in Stamata.

By Monday, the fires had all been brought under control. "There is no longer an active front, the fires were contained by firefighter supports on Sunday, by water bombers and helicopters, who fought in very dangerous conditions," he said.

He added that the fact that winds had eased had helped control the majority of fires across the country. — AFP

Macron bids to prevent far-right takeover

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron and his allies were on Monday battling to prevent the far right from taking an absolute majority and control of government in a historic first after his gamble on early elections backfired.

The far-right National Rally (RN) party of Marine Le Pen won a resounding victory in the first round of the polls on Sunday, with Macron's centrists trailing in third behind a left-wing coalition.

But the key suspense ahead of the second round on July 7 was whether the RN would win an absolute majority in the new National Assembly, enabling it to form a government and make Le Pen's protege Jordan Bardella, 28, prime minister.

Most projections published by French polling organisations showed the RN falling short of an absolute majority, but the final outcome remains far from certain.

A hung parliament could lead to months of political paralysis and chaos — just as Paris is preparing to host the Olympic Games this summer, and while France on the international stage takes a prime role in backing Ukraine against the Russian attack.

French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, who is likely to be forced to resign after the second round, warned that the far right was now at the "gates of power".

The RN garnered 33 per cent of the vote, compared to 28 per cent for the left-wing New Popular Front alliance, and more than 20 per cent for Macron's centrist camp, according to preliminary results.

Most projections published by French polling organisations showed the RN falling short of an absolute majority, but the final outcome remains far from certain

But with less than 100 seats being decided outright in the first round, the final composition of the 577-seat National Assembly will only be clear after the second phase.

The second round will see a three-way or two-way run-off in the remainder of the seats to be decided, with Macron's camp hoping that tactical voting will prevent the RN winning the 289 seats needed for an absolute majority.

The French stock market, which had been under considerable pressure in June amid the political uncertainty, also rallied in early trading on hopes the RN would not win an absolute majority.

Macron in a written statement urged a "broad" coalition against the far right in the second round, amid controversy among supporters over whether they should tactically vote for the left where needed in the second round. "The extreme right at the threshold of power," read Monday's headline in daily Le Monde. Late on Sunday police said some 8,000 left-wing supporters thronged the Place de la Republique in central Paris to denounce the prospect of the far right taking power. — AFP



A barricade burns as protesters demonstrate against the French far-right Rassemblement National (National Rally - RN) party, following partial results in the first round of the early 2024 legislative elections, at the Place de la Republique. — Reuters

Kyiv dismisses reports on bolstering troops near Belarus

KYIV: Ukraine's border guards dismissed claims from Belarus that it was reinforcing troops on their mutual border, describing the reports as an information operation from Minsk with Moscow's support.

Belarus, a close Russian ally that has provided support for Moscow's 28-month full-scale war in Ukraine, said last week that Kyiv was bolstering its forces along the frontier. The Kremlin said on Monday the report was a cause of concern. "It is not the first time Belarus offers information about Ukraine presenting a threat and strengthening itself," border guard spokesman Andriy Demchenko told Ukrainian TV. "This is another part of

the information operation conducted by Belarus with support by Russia."

He said the border remained a concern, and Ukraine was strengthening it with engineering while maintaining the necessary number of troops to prevent any provocations.

He also said that Belarus had been conducting military exercises since June 21, and that blaming Ukraine for friction at the border could be aligned with those drills.

On Sunday, the Belarus Defence Ministry claimed it had information showing Ukraine had been moving troops, weapons, and military equipment to the border, in particular in Zhytomyr region.

Minsk also said its own forces had deployed additional air defences to protect the border area from drones, after claiming to have shot down a Ukrainian quadcopter earlier last week.

The Ukrainian military said on Monday it had repelled Russian attacks near Novooleksandrivka and Spirne in the eastern Donetsk region a day after Russian forces claimed control of the two villages.

The eastern Pokrovsk front, which includes Novooleksandrivka, remained the site of the fiercest fighting, with 42 assaults repelled out of a total of 142 battles over the past day, the military said.

— Reuters



Ukrainian service members prepare to fire towards Russian troops, at a position near a front line in Donetsk region. — Reuters



Members of the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment arrive ahead of Hurricane Beryl at Tobago's A.N.R. Robinson International Airport in Crown Point, Trinidad and Tobago. — AFP

‘Extremely dangerous’ Hurricane Beryl hurtles towards Caribbean

TOBAGO: Hurricane Beryl barrelled across the Atlantic Ocean towards the Caribbean's Windward Islands as an "extremely dangerous" storm on Monday, threatening to devastate communities with floods, storm surges and life-threatening high winds, officials said.

Locals boarded up shops, stocked up on food and filled their cars with petrol as the storm approached. The prime minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonsalves, said he was expecting a natural disaster that could continue for days. It was an unusually fierce and early start to this year's Atlantic hurricane season - the earliest Category 4 storm on record, according to National Hurricane Center data on Sunday.

Beryl had weakened earlier on Monday to Category 3 and then picked up again to 4 on a five-point

scale, packing maximum sustained wind speeds exceeding 193 kmph, with some higher gusts, about 180 km southeast of Barbados, the NHC said.

It would likely bring catastrophic winds and a storm surge early on Tuesday in the Windward Islands, it said. "Beryl is expected to remain an extremely dangerous major hurricane as its core moves through the Windward Islands into the eastern Caribbean," the NHC warned. It advised people in the storm's path to take heed of authorities' advice on evacuations and preparedness.

Hurricane warnings were in effect for Barbados, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and Tobago. A tropical storm warning was issued for Martinique and Trinidad, with storm watches for parts of the Dominican Republic and parts of Haiti. — Reuters

A city of accolades with room for growth



Muscat was recently rated among the cleanest cities and beautiful in the world, which for us the citizens and residents is not any number but a fact that we can be always be proud of.

As we gracefully accept international accolades through rankings and reports, one cannot ignore some of its critical grey areas.

The capital of the Sultanate of Oman is also one of the safest places in the world for both residents and tourists.

Muscat, today, has ingredients expected of any modern-day urban landscape such as a cosmopolitan population, green cover, cleanliness, smart infrastructure, tourism attractions, and one of the finest airports in the region.

The city is also known for relatively limited traffic woes and road pollution as studies claim that one can reach the most important hubs of the capital within 15 to 25 minutes.

According to the Numbeo Pollution Index

which assesses a range of pollution-related characteristics such as air and water pollution, waste management, hygienic conditions, light and noise pollution, green areas, and overall comfort with pollution levels, Muscat has an impressive score of 36.2.

The report demonstrated the commitment of the Muscat authorities to encouraging a safe and environmentally responsible way of life for both locals and tourists.

Muscat also scores high in purity and cleanliness categories on air quality, drinking water quality and accessibility, garbage disposal satisfaction, quiet and no problem with night lights, and quality of green and parks, among others.

Muscat leads in the region with efforts to improve recycling programmes, lower carbon emissions, and support green initiatives.

It may be noted that the government has embarked on the development of new smart townships such as Downtown Al Khuwair, Sultan

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Haitham City, and Yiti, the Sustainable City, among others.

Despite being home to landmarks such as the Muttrah Souq, the cruise terminal, the Al Alam Palace, and the National Museum, a lot more can be done to improve avenues and basic facilities at tourist places.

While the Muscat Metro project has made good progress and its development is expected to be in parallel with that of the Sultan Haitham City, in particular, the public transport still cannot be called dependable as per international standards.

The same can be said of the taxi services despite key improvements in recent years.

It must be astonishing that the city does not have a decent water park despite being subject to above-moderate temperatures in most parts of the city.

So, while we can accept praise, we must just not stop here and relax but rather innovate more ideas to further make the city more attractive.

UK leaders avoid climate change in election campaign

As Britain's general election nears, the campaign trail has been dominated by issues such as immigration, the health service and a major insider betting scandal. But one thing that has barely been discussed is the climate, according to data from the audience strategy consultancy AKAS shared.

Britain's parties hold a range of positions on net-zero, but several key climate terms have gained little attention in election-related media coverage, according to AKAS' UK General Election Impact Tracker which analysed terms using the GDELT monitoring tool.

"Climate" was mentioned in 8 per cent of British media's general election articles in the campaign up to June 30, compared to 17 per cent in the 2019 election. Two per cent of articles included the term "climate change" compared to 10 per cent in 2019.

"Neither of the main parties, I think, wants to talk about it because they don't feel they have a particularly strong case," said Bob Ward, policy and communications director at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The two largest British parties, the Conservatives and Labour, have largely placed their campaign focuses elsewhere.

Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak watered down key climate policies last year, referencing potential backlash to net-zero, while Keir Starmer's Labour opposition scaled back its proposed green investment plans, blaming the economic downturn.

Scientists have warned the world needs to speed up efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7F), when several dangerous climate tipping points could be crossed, such as ice sheets melting and coral reefs disappearing.

"We have got to have much stronger action on climate change from whoever is in government after the 4th of July," said Ward.

"We're now at such a critical point it's just unthinkable that it won't be a major part of government."

Richard Addy, co-founder of AKAS, said that the downturn in climate election coverage reflected a number of factors, including reduced cross-party consensus on the need for action compared to 2019, when former Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson was vocal in support.

Another potential factor which Addy said could be contributing to the lack of climate discussion is the emerging "greenlash" narrative, which he believes may have suppressed climate change debates. — Thomson Reuters Foundation



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More taxes mean less productivity

There is a thought-provoking saying about balancing work, income, and progress that states, "there is no taxation without representation."

Estonia, a nation with a similar population to the Sultanate of Oman and global leader in the digital economy offers an excellent success story with around 97 per cent tax compliance.

This success story, which I witnessed first hand with fellow National Leadership and Competitiveness Program (NLCP) colleagues as a part of Oxford University's Said Business School Programme, would not have been possible without the innovative fairness and transparency of Estonian tax authorities.

A successful tax system shows taxpayers publicly accessible platform dashboards where all the public services that their money funds.

We can witness an even better success story here in the Sultanate of Oman by alignment with 'Oman Vision 2040' pillars, therefore embracing fairness and transparency in applying the upcoming Personal Income Tax, currently under discussion by the Majlis AshShura.

One of the most insightful and beneficial ways to look at the long-term impact of taxes on the society is revisiting the views of esteemed socio-economic scholars, such as the founder of the socio-economic studies, known in Arabic as Alomran, AbdulRahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD).

It is also beneficial to revisit the advantages and disadvantages of personal income taxes, alongside examining both local and global best practices.

Taxation without meaningful representation has historically led to significant negative consequences.

This concept, which means imposing taxes on a population without their direct, fair and transparent participation or consent in the decision-making process, has sparked significant historical events.

The American Revolution, for instance, was largely driven by British colonists' frustration with being taxed by a parliament in which they had no representatives.

Similarly, the French Revolution saw the common people burdened with taxes while the nobility and clergy were

largely exempt, leading to widespread unrest and eventual upheaval. These examples illustrate how crucial representation is in ensuring fair and effective taxation systems.

What does Ibn Khaldun say about taxes and productivity?

Ibn Khaldun, the renowned 14th-century historian and sociologist, provides insightful perspectives on taxation. He argued that excessive taxation can discourage economic activity, leading to a decline in overall productivity, competitiveness and state revenue.

According to Ibn Khaldun, moderate and fair taxation is essential for encouraging trade, industry, and agriculture.

High tax rates, he believed, reduce the incentive for individuals and businesses to work and invest, ultimately harming the economy.

This principle remains relevant today, suggesting that careful consideration is necessary when designing tax policies to avoid stifling economic growth.

PERSONAL INCOME TAXES, WHEN IMPLEMENTED EFFECTIVELY, CAN OFFER SIGNIFICANT ADVANTAGES AND ARE A MAJOR SOURCE OF REVENUE FOR GOVERNMENTS

ADVANTAGES

Personal income taxes, when implemented effectively, can offer significant advantages. They are a major source of revenue for governments, enabling the funding of essential public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

A progressive income tax system, where higher earners pay a larger percentage of their income, can help reduce income inequality and provide a more equitable distribution of resources.

Additionally, personal income taxes can act as automatic stabilisers during economic downturns, as tax revenues decrease when incomes fall, helping to mitigate the impact of economic recessions.

DISADVANTAGES

However, there are also notable disadvantages to personal income taxes. Collecting these taxes requires substantial administrative efforts, including filing, processing, and auditing, which can be costly and time-consuming. Individuals and businesses may face high compliance costs, including time spent on tax preparation and money spent on professional services.

High personal income tax rates can also discourage work, savings, and investment, potentially slowing economic growth and reducing overall productivity. Furthermore, higher tax rates can incentivise tax evasion and avoidance, leading to a loss of revenue and an unfair burden on compliant taxpayers.

BEST PRACTICES

Successful examples of personal income tax systems around the world provide valuable lessons. In countries like the United States, Germany, Sweden, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, progressive income tax systems fund a wide range of public services and social welfare programmes. These countries have managed to balance the need for revenue generation with economic competitiveness by implementing fair and efficient tax systems. These examples show that while personal income taxes can support robust public services and social safety nets, careful design and implementation are crucial to maintaining economic vitality and competitiveness.

In conclusion, increasing taxes, particularly personal income taxes, can have significant implications for our economic competitiveness. While they are essential for funding public services and promoting social equity, excessive taxation can discourage economic activity and reduce overall productivity. Historical examples and insights from scholars like Ibn Khaldun highlight the importance of fair, transparent and moderate taxation.

Examining successful tax systems globally provides valuable lessons on balancing the need for revenue with maintaining a competitive economy.

As Oman considers implementing personal income tax, these insights underscore the importance of careful and thoughtful tax policy design to ensure sustainable economic growth and competitiveness.

A national security perspective

Since His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik took office, his commitment to addressing employment issues and job-seekers, ensuring a decent life for citizens, and enhancing the social protection system nationwide has been evident.

In his speech on January 11, 2022, he noted, “We are encouraged by what has been accomplished in the employment file despite the difficult stage.”

Later, on November 18, 2023, during the annual session of the Council of Oman, he emphasised “linking education curricula to the requirements of economic growth.”

On February 28, 2024, he met with representatives from the private sector and SMEs, stressing “the importance of a robust partnership between the government and private sectors to establish projects and investments that contribute to economic diversification, GDP growth, and job opportunities for citizens.”

The issue of job-seekers, in its national, economic, and security dimensions, is paramount. Efforts to replace expatriates with Omanis in various sectors have seen remarkable successes in some areas while others lag. This requires a realistic and transparent assessment.

Notably, the military and security services have achieved significant success in job localisation, particularly within the SAF and the ROP, continuously attracting Omani graduates with efficiency and professionalism.

In 2024, Oman needs a ‘revolutionary’ vision that transforms the employment landscape, moving beyond conventional approaches. We need broad national discussions involving government units, the Majlis Ash’shura, the private sector, and others. While acknowledging past efforts amidst financial and economic challenges, new strategies are necessary to address this issue comprehensively.

I propose a comprehensive ‘government summit’ involving all stakeholders: the Council of Ministers, military and security agencies, private sector, business leaders and academic institutions.

This summit should include accomplished Omanis working abroad to discuss the employment challenges,



Yahya Al Awfi

I PROPOSE A COMPREHENSIVE ‘GOVERNMENT SUMMIT’ INVOLVING ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND SHOULD INCLUDE ACCOMPLISHED OMANIS WORKING ABROAD TO DISCUSS THE EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES, LABOUR MARKET IMBALANCES, MINIMUM WAGE ISSUES

labour market imbalances, minimum wage issues, and the impact of merging the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Civil Service.

It should also address economic openness, foreign investment’s role in job creation, and investment in Omani human capital. Until now, we are still grappling with basic questions like the real number of job-seekers and the definition of middle and senior jobs. Official statements, despite good intentions, often miss the mark.

Furthermore, relying solely on the Ministry of Labour for employment solutions is unrealistic. The core issue is economic. We need to involve external experts from prestigious universities and international consulting firms to enrich the dialogue on employment, economy, labour market and investment in human capital.

Integrating the private sector’s role with ‘Oman Vision 2040’ goals is crucial, and we should learn from international experts like McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group, and Bain & Company.

A well-prepared ‘government summit’ can revitalise the employment issue, placing it within its appropriate national framework. While recognising the importance of financial prudence, the aspirations of our people towards a prosperous future must not be solely dictated by numbers and budgets. Efforts to expand economic diversification and generate job opportunities must challenge conventional economic views and drive real achievements.

Thanks to the Royal directives, the Omani government has significantly controlled state finances, with hopes for major economic victories.

Current efforts to attract foreign investment and support SMEs are substantial, but unless the Omani economy can create ample job opportunities for citizens, the questions of employment will remain pressing.

We need to accommodate the annual influx of graduates from prestigious universities into meaningful jobs, addressing the limited opportunities in both government and private sectors reliant on government spending.

(The original version of the article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on July 1, 2024)

Translated by Badr Al Dhafiri

INDONESIAN POLICE DAY



Indonesian police personnel as part of a UN peacekeeping force shout slogans during a ceremony commemorating the 79th Indonesian Police Day in Jakarta. – AFP

Self-care in managing stress and anxiety

In an era of continuous societal pressures and constant demands, mental health has emerged as a crucial concern. The prevalence of stress and anxiety highlights the necessity for heightened awareness and proactive measures to foster self-care.

With the complexities of modern life, prioritising mental well-being is more imperative than ever.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” and this wisdom holds true in mental health as much as it does in physical health.

Statistics from the World Health Organization reveal that depression and anxiety disorders affect over 264 million people worldwide, with numbers steadily increasing.

In Oman, a recent study highlighted that approximately 20 per cent of the population experiences symptoms of anxiety and depression at some point in their lives (Al Mawali et al, 2023).

The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated mental health challenges, amplifying stressors and magnifying feelings of uncertainty and isolation (Mindfulness, 2023).

This situation reminds us that “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link,” emphasising the need to address mental health comprehensively.

In response to this growing crisis,



Dr Khalfan al Harrasi

The author is an academic

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATES, PSYCHOLOGISTS, AND WELLNESS EXPERTS ARE LEADING THE CHARGE, CHAMPIONING SELF-CARE STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE STRESS AND ANXIETY

societal attitudes towards mental health are shifting.

More individuals recognise the importance of destigmatising discussions about mental well-being and embracing self-care practices as essential components of overall health.

Mental health advocates, psychologists, and wellness experts are leading the charge, championing self-care strategies to mitigate stress and anxiety (Role of Resilience, 2023).

“It takes a village” to support those dealing with mental health issues, reflecting the collective effort needed to drive change.

Dr Emily Thompson, a clinical psychologist specialising in anxiety disorders, underscores the significance of self-care in maintaining psychological resilience.

“Self-care is not indulgence; it’s a necessity,” she asserts. “Engaging in activities that promote relaxation, such as mindfulness meditation, exercise and hobbies, can significantly alleviate symptoms of stress and anxiety.”

Indeed, studies indicate that mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) can reduce anxiety levels by up to 58 per cent

and depression by up to 40 per cent (Mindfulness, 2023).

Remember, “a stitch in time saves nine,” and early intervention through self-care can prevent more serious issues later on.

Research supports the efficacy of self-care interventions in enhancing mental well-being.

A study published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology found that individuals who practiced regular self-care reported lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to those who neglected self-care activities.

Additionally, cultivating a strong support network and seeking professional guidance through therapy or counselling can empower individuals to navigate their mental health journey. “No man is an island,” and having a support system can make a significant difference in managing mental health.

“Many hands make light work”; thus, societal institutions also play a pivotal role in fostering environments conducive to mental well-being.

Schools, workplaces and healthcare systems increasingly implement initiatives to promote mental health awareness and

provide accessible resources. In Oman, the Ministry of Health has been actively promoting mental health through various programmes and awareness campaigns.

Mental health days, flexible work arrangements and employee assistance programmes are becoming commonplace in corporate settings, signalling a shift towards a more compassionate approach to mental health management.

Despite progress, challenges persist in dismantling entrenched stigmas and barriers to mental health care.

Cultural norms, systemic inequalities and financial constraints continue to hinder access to resources and perpetuate misconceptions about mental illness.

Addressing these systemic issues requires a multifaceted approach, including advocacy, policy reform and community engagement. “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” so systemic change takes time and sustained effort.

It’s crucial to address systemic factors that impact mental health outcomes. Structural inequalities, including socioeconomic

disparities, racial inequities and limited access to healthcare, significantly influence mental well-being.

Marginalised communities often face heightened barriers to mental health care, exacerbated by discrimination and cultural stigma.

“A rising tide lifts all boats,” and improving access to mental health care for the most vulnerable benefits society as a whole.

Prioritising equitable access to mental health services and implementing culturally competent care initiatives are essential steps.

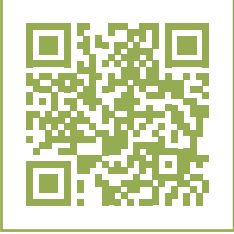
This includes funding community-based organisations, expanding mental health coverage under healthcare plans and increasing the diversity of mental health professionals to better reflect the communities they serve.

Integrating mental health education into school curricula can help destigmatise conversations about mental illness and equip young people with essential coping skills.

Early intervention and support can prevent long-term mental health challenges and encourage proactive help-seeking.

sport

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AL ZUBAIR TEAM EARN GOLD CUP AT CROWDSTRIKE 24 HRS OF SPA

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (BELGIUM): The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed quartet of Oman's Al Faisal bin Khalid al Zubair, Austrian Dominik Baumann, Canadian Mikaël Grenier and Swiss team debutant Philip Ellis finished the demanding CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa in seventh overall and claimed a stunning outright victory in the Gold Cup category on Sunday.

After starting the second round of the 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup from fourth place in the Gold category, the team managed its strategy to perfection with heavy rain dampening spirits during the night session.

Grenier drove the final stint and stayed clear of any late trouble to take

the chequered flag well clear of Gold Cup runners-up Saintéloc Racing after 477 laps of racing on one of Europe's most demanding race circuits.

The Comtoyou Racing Aston Martin Vantage AMR GT3 Evo, crewed by Mattia Drudi, Nicki Thiim and Marco Sorensen, claimed a dramatic outright victory after a stationery Lamborghini blocked access to the pit lane for over a minute and dropped the long-time leading AF Corse Ferrari down to an eventual second place when Alessandro Pier Guidi was obstructed from entering the pits.

Al Faisal said: "It was a great race. We were not sure how it was going to be initially. We had a strong driver line-up and a team package to really come with

something strong. We were very happy with how everything turned out. We kept it clean with no track limits and all my team-mate were quick in the race.

GOLD CUP WINNERS

"The most important thing was to bring back the win but also not only finishing as Gold Cup winners but also seventh overall out of 66 cars was something special and something to be very proud of. To do this under the Omani flag was something I was very happy to do. For what we have done in the past few years this was definitely at the top of the list. It was such a hectic race. It is the 100th edition and that makes it more special. The drivers and the team did an amazing job."

Sixty-six cars lined up for the start

of the centenary edition of the 24-hour classic and Baumann finished the opening lap in 11th place and fourth in the Gold category behind Glenn Van Berlo, Jim Pla and Arjun Maini.

Eighty per cent of the track had been resurfaced before the race and it gave for better grip on the dry surface, as Baumann maintained his position through the first half an hour of the race before pitting after 40 minutes and climbing a place to 10th once his rivals had followed suit. Baumann then moved up to ninth shortly before the first hour mark.

Al Zubair took over for stint number two and maintained ninth and moved up to third in the Gold Cup. The crew climbed to eighth through the four-hour

mark but dropped back to 22nd and second in the Gold category through one-quarter distance.

They were back up to 11th overall and leading the Gold section after midnight during the night session and maintained that position before day break with heavy rain and a lot of standing water on the track forcing the safety car to take to the circuit for over two and a half hours.

As the race entered its 15th hour, the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew had climbed to eighth and a comfortable lead in the Gold category. At three-quarter distance, after 18 hours of racing and 335 laps, they were classified in sixth overall, well clear of their closest Gold rivals and sandwiched between two Pro Cup cars.

Red Warriors train for Fifa World Cup 2026 qualifier

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 1

The Oman national football team will travel on Tuesday to Spain as part of their actual technical preparations to secure a historic spot in the forthcoming qualification of AFC Asian Qualifiers which will lead to road to Fifa Word Cup 2026 that will kick off in September.

Oman football coach Jaroslav Silhavy will aim to achieve the dream of the Omani fans as everyone is optimistic after the draw declaration last week. Oman National football team were drawn in a balanced group when they were grouped alongside with South Korea, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Kuwait in group B.

Oman will commence their



campaign in the Asian qualifiers with an away match against Iraq in Basra city on September 5, before hosting South Korea in a key game on September 10. Then, Red Warriors will have a gulf match against Kuwait on October 10 in Muscat and it will be followed by Jordan clash on October 15 in Amman city. The first leg matches will be concluded with a match against Palestine on November 14.

Group B will comprise from AFC Asian Cup champions Qatar beside the top seeds Iran, Uzbekistan, United Arab Emirates, Kyrgyzstan and North Korea. The tough challenge will be in group C which is comprised from Asian heavyweights Japan, who are seeking to qualify for the Fifa World Cup 2026 for the eighth consecutive time,

Australia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, China and Indonesia.

The first two toppers from each of the three groups will secure direct spots at the Fifa World Cup 2026, while the third and fourth placed teams from each group, six in total, will progress to the AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26 Playoff, to be contested in two groups of three teams in a single round robin format, with both group winners qualifying for the global showpiece. The two second-placed finishers from the Playoff will face off in a home and away tie to earn the right to reach the Intercontinental Playoff and vie for the final available berth. The Qualifiers games will kick off on September 5 with the final round of matches scheduled for June 10, 2025.

Ecuador reach Copa quarters, Mexico out after 0-0 draw

GLENDALE, Arizona: Ecuador secured a place in the Copa America quarter-finals on Sunday after grinding out a 0-0 draw with Mexico, who bowed out of the tournament after finishing third in Group B.

Ecuador, who are looking to reach their first semi-final since hosting the event in 1993, face defending champions Argentina in the quarters, while group winners Venezuela, who beat Jamaica 3-0, take on Canada.

Ecuador finished level with Mexico on four points but progress to the last eight thanks to a superior goal difference.

“We would like to have a little bit more control,” Ecuador coach Felix Sanchez told reporters.

“It’s a very young squad, as I said, and we actually need to be able to overcome these situations in these matches. We know that even if you obtain the results you want, you need to be self-critical and continue improving.”

Mexico manager Jaime Lozano is likely to face increased scrutiny after they scored just one goal in their three group matches.

Lozano, Mexico’s third head coach in the last two years, also faced criticism after their 2-0 loss



Ecuador starting XI against Mexico before the game at State Farm Stadium – USA TODAY Sports

to the United States in the 2024 CONCACAF Nations League final, and defeats in two recent friendlies, including a 4-0 thrashing by Uruguay.

“Whenever an objective is not meant, there is certain discomfort

and doubts, that’s only natural, no matter who’s here,” Lozano said.

“But the players kept believing until the very end, that’s not easy. It’s not easy to play that strong union and the commitment that they showed ... over the whole

tournament.

“That decision (about my future) is not up to me.”

In a physical first half, Mexico attacked with real intensity as they sought the win they needed but lacked quality on the ball and failed

to record a shot on target.

Lozano’s side continued to push after the break and full-back Gerardo Arteaga created a good opportunity after a powerful run into the box, before being denied by a last-ditch tackle from Felix Torres.



Alan Franco celebrates advancing to the next stage. – AFP

Winger Julian Quinones tested Ecuador goalkeeper Alexander Dominguez with a long-range effort in the 65th minute. Dominguez kept out Quinones’ shot with a diving save, with Mexico’s Santi Gimenez blasting the rebound off the post from a tight angle.

As Mexico threw bodies forward in their search for a winner, Ecuador increasingly posed a threat on the counter-attack and in the 68th minute Enner Valencia forced a save from Julio Gonzalez with a dipping strike.

Mexico were then awarded a penalty in the seventh minute of stoppage time when Torres appeared to bring down Guillermo Martinez but the decision was overturned after a VAR review. — Reuters

Masirah claim top two spots in Chess Club Championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 1

The Masirah Club, teams (A) and (B) achieved first and second place, respectively, while the Quriyat Club secured third place in the Chess Clubs Championship 2024 for age groups. The event was held at Al Amal Club under the auspices of Khalid al Shaibi, President of the Oman Fencing Committee, in the presence of Ahmed al Balushi, President of the Oman Chess Committee.

After competitions that witnessed a lot of excitement and rivalry, Khalid al Shaibi honoured the winners. The final results were as follows: Masirah Club team (A) won the championship title and the gold medals. Masirah (B) secured second place and the silver medals. While Qurayat Club team (A) achieved third place and the bronze medals. Salalah Club team (A) finished fourth, and Seeb Club secured fifth place.

On the individual tables, the results were as follows on the fifth table, Sultan al Jabri from Masirah Club achieved first place. His teammate Mohammed al Muqbali secured second place, and Anas al Balushi from Qurayat Club won third place.

On the fourth table, Shihab al Jabri from Masirah Club achieved first place, Hamza al Salmi from

Nakhl Club secured second place, and Yusuf al Maawali from Qurayat Club won third place.

In the third table competition, Duaa al Muqbali from Masirah

Club achieved first place, Dawood al Shamli from Nizwa Club secured second place, and Mohammed al Balushi from Masirah Club won third place.



Eighty-five players from 11 clubs participated in the championship, distributed over five age categories

In the second table competition, Qusay al Wardi from Masirah Club won first place, Firas al Lawati from Masirah Club secured second place, and Mohammed al Mahrooqi from Salalah Club won third place.

On the first table, Mohammed al Riyami from Salalah Club achieved first place, Mohammed al Riyami from Masirah Club secured second place and Ammar al Hatmi from Al Salam Club won third place.

Ahmed al Balushi, President of the OCC, said “The championship was successful and witnessed strong competitions in which the teams were able to overturn the general ranking. The age group championships are considered a fundamental base for building and discovering talented players. The levels we saw in the chess championship are a good indicator of the clubs’ interest in chess, especially for the youth and junior stages.”

Eighty-five players from 11 clubs participated in the championship, distributed over five age categories: under 8 years, under 10 years, under 12 years, under 14 years and under 16 years, representing 17 teams from 11 clubs. The championship was held in a Swiss system of 7 rounds with a time control of 60 minutes plus a 30-second increment per move.



Wany's Biniam Girmay celebrates winning stage 3. – REUTERS

Eritrean Girmay wins Tour de France stage as Carapaz takes race lead

TURIN: Eritrea’s Biniam Girmay became the first Black African rider to win a stage on the Tour de France when he prevailed in a reduced bunch sprint at the end of the third stage on Monday.

Girmay, who was already the first Black African to win a grand tour stage at the 2022 Giro d’Italia, timed his effort to perfection to beat Colombian Fernando Gaviria and Belgian Arnaud de Lie, second and third respectively.

Richard Carapaz took the overall lead, becoming the first rider from Ecuador to wear the yellow jersey, which he snatched from the shoulders of Tadej Pogacar on added places without time differences.

Pre-stage favourite Jasper Philipsen of Belgium was involved in a huge crash with 2.3 km left of the stage.

Pogacar, as well as defending champion Jonas Vingegaard, were unaffected as Carapaz fought his way to the front of the peloton to make sure he would claim the yellow jersey.

In a very nerry sprint, Girmay was close to the safety barriers but kept his cool to give his Intermarche-Wanty

team their first victory on the Tour.

“To be part of the Tour de France is already incredible. I was dreaming of taking part and now I can’t control my emotions,” a teary-eyed Girmay said.

“With my first Tour last year, I acquired experience and I manage everything better. Winning today is unbelievable.

“To be honest, when I went to the Giro I knew I had the level to fight for the win but for the Tour I was thinking I would have to wait 2025, 2026. To win a stage where all the best sprint specialists are present is unbelievable.”

With no champagne on the podium, Girmay was unlikely to suffer the same fate as on the 2022 Giro when he had to pull out of the race after a Prosecco cork flew into his eye on the podium.

Girmay’s win is something of a watershed moment for cycling’s most famous race. Only two other African riders, both white - Robbie Hunter and Daryl Impey of South Africa - had previously won stages on the Tour.

— Reuters





UEFA
EURO2024
GERMANY



France edge
tense clash
with Belgium
to reach
quarter-
finals

DUSSELDORF, Germany: Jan Vertonghen's late own goal took France into the quarter-finals of Euro 2024 on Monday as they edged Belgium 1-0 in a tense tie in Düsseldorf.

France had dominated the last-16 clash but their profligate finishing looked set to force extra time until they finally found a way through with five minutes left.

Substitute Randal Kolo Muani collected the ball inside the Belgian penalty area and hit a shot that was going wide until a deflection off the unfortunate Vertonghen took it past goalkeeper Koen Casteels.

The lucky break sent the 2022 World Cup runners-up into a last-eight tie in Hamburg on Friday as they remain on course to become European champions for the third time.

France are yet to score from open play in four matches at the tournament — captain Kylian Mbappe netted once from a penalty against Poland, while their other two goals came from opposition defenders.

Crucially, however, they are rock solid in defence, having conceded only one goal, from a penalty, so far.

Their back line was outstanding against Romelu Lukaku and his fellow attackers, and Belgium bow out after what will go down as a disappointing tournament for them.

Both of these sides were looking for revenge, in Belgium's case for their 1-0 defeat against France in the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup, a result that still hurts six years on.

France, meanwhile, had a point to prove at the Euros after going out in the last 16 three years ago on penalties to Switzerland, a deeply disappointing result in between runs to consecutive World Cup finals.

The French were widely seen as the favourites to win this tournament before arriving in Germany, but they were below par during the group phase.

The broken nose suffered by Mbappe in their opening game against Austria did not help, and the uncertain form of Antoine Griezmann has been a problem too.

Griezmann was dropped for the last group match against Poland but returned here in one of two changes, with Marcus Thuram also coming in as wingers Ousmane Dembele and Bradley Barcola made way.

Forwards struggle to impress - Meanwhile Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco's reaction to his own side's unconvincing displays in the group stage was striking.

Yannick Carrasco and Lois Openda were given starts to provide as much attacking threat as possible in support of Lukaku, while skipper Kevin De Bruyne played a more withdrawn role.

The hope, for the neutrals at least, was that so much attacking talent would lead to an open game full of goals, but the reality was rather different.

Belgium were happy to sit back and thwart France, and did not test opposition goalkeeper Mike Maignan at all in the first half.

France had lots of the ball, yet often looked untidy, imprecise and rather flat, with Griezmann appearing lost on the right wing.

But they had chances in the first half, with Thuram heading just wide from Jules Kounde's inviting cross just after the half-hour mark and Aurelien Tchouameni twice firing off-target.

Real Madrid midfielder Tchouameni then tested Casteels with a deflected long-range strike as France upped their game at the beginning of the second half.

Mbappe accelerated inside and smashed a shot just over, and there was a sense a goal might be coming.

France's Randal Kolo Muani celebrates scoring their first goal with teammates. — Reuters



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Contract farming poised for strong growth in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 1

Hundreds of Omani farmers are benefiting from contractual arrangements that enable their farm produce — primarily wheat, dates, and cow and camel milk — to be procured by government-backed food sector companies.

Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj), the food sector development arm of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), also foresees the potential for contract farming to encompass locally cultivated vegetables and fruits — a move that will potentially benefit thousands of Omani growers across the country.

Currently, taking the lead in partnering with Omani farmers are three Nitaj subsidiaries — Nakheel Oman Development, Oman Flour Mills, and Al Moroof Dairy, according to Mohammed bin Suleiman al Harthy, CEO — Nitaj.

“Our commitment extends beyond internal improvements to actively engage and strengthen our role within the local community. Nitaj implemented contract farming, a cooperative



Contract farming is helping Omani producers of dates, wheat, and fresh cow & camel milk earn sustained incomes for their produce.

model with local farmers that not only utilises their products but also supports their enterprises.

This approach has been successfully integrated into several of our operations, including Nakheel Oman Development, Oman Flour Mills, and Al Moroof Dairy, benefiting from local resources like dates, Omani wheat, and fresh cow

and camel milk from Dhofar’s pastures,” Al Harthy stated in Nitaj’s 2023 Annual Report.

Al Moroof Dairy, owned 59% by Nitaj, has nearly doubled to 933 the number of Omani livestock farmers that it currently contracts with for the procurement of their cow and camel milk produce.

The company has reported

a 31% increase in the farmers joining its cow milk collection network in Dhofar Governorate last year, lifting milk production by 10.8%.

Camel milk producers joining the network jumped 159% last year, boosting camel milk collections by nearly 106% in quantity.

According to Nitaj, contract

farming has spurred the growth of the local agricultural and farming economy in the governorate, while helping boost the livelihoods of local communities.

It has also contributed to a sustainable market for livestock farm produce, with the accent on product quality and hygiene.

Oman Flour Mills, an

CONTRACT FARMING HAS SPURRED THE GROWTH OF THE LOCAL AGRICULTURAL AND FARMING ECONOMY IN THE GOVERNORATE, WHILE HELPING BOOST THE LIVELIHOODS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

affiliate of Nitaj, has contracted with a total of 63 farmers in 2023, representing a 156% increase over the previous year. As part of its commitments to this partnership, the company has allocated parcels of land in Al Dhahirah Governorate, among other locations, for the production of local wheat.

It is also supplying farmers with harvesting tools, while also expanding the capacity of silos in Muscat and Dhofar governorates.

Nakheel Oman Development Company, owned 57% by Nitaj, is expanding its local resource base by tying up with date farmers — an initiative designed to ensure a reliable source of income for producers, strengthen food security around date production, and open up new international markets for Omani date produce.

Oil prices lifted by summer demand hopes



A man fills a car with petrol at a gas station in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: Oil prices rose on Monday, helped by expected peak summer consumption and Opec+ production cuts, though gains were capped by rising output from other producers and the potential for economic volatility resulting from a changing political landscape.

Brent crude futures rose 54 cents, or 0.64%, to \$85.55 a barrel by 1105 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were up 49 cents, or 0.6%, at \$82.03.

Both contracts gained about 6% in June, with Brent settling above \$85 a barrel in the past two weeks after the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and its allies, a group known as Opec+, extended most of its deep oil output cuts well into 2025.

That led analysts to forecast supply deficits in the third

quarter as transportation and demand for air-conditioning during the summer eat into fuel stockpiles.

On Friday the Energy Information Administration reported that oil production and demand for major products rose to a four-month high in April, supporting prices.

“Demand indicators look solid, especially in the all-important US market, and peak refinery demand for crude is now firmly in place and should last through August,” JPMorgan analysts wrote in a client note.

Hopes of an interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve and rising geopolitical concerns in Europe and between Israel and Lebanon’s Hizbullah have also kept a floor under prices, IG analyst Tony Sycamore said in a note.

— Reuters

OIA’s strategies drive Oman’s economic growth and diversification

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 1

The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) is significantly advancing Oman’s economic diversification and growth through its strategic investments. By allocating resources to both domestic and international markets, OIA is not only boosting the local economy but also securing financial reserves for future generations.

At the heart of OIA’s domestic strategy is the National Development Fund (NDF), which oversees more than 160 companies across over 10 sectors. This diverse portfolio includes financial instruments like sukuk, treasury bills, bonds, and deposits.

By investing in a wide range of assets, the NDF aims to support key sectors in Oman, ensuring sustainable economic growth and stability. This approach helps manage risks and improve returns, thereby enhancing the nation’s economic resilience

Last year, the NDF’s assets grew to about RO 12.175 billion, with profits exceeding RO 1.200 billion and an investment return of 11.5%. This contributed RO 800 million to the general budget and increased capital investment



A notable addition to OIA’s portfolio is the Future Fund Oman, with a capital of RO 2 billion to be utilised over five years.

spending on projects to RO 2.1 billion, surpassing the target of RO 1.9 billion. Six major national projects were completed with a combined investment of over RO 4 billion.

Internationally, OIA’s Future Generations Funds (FGF) are crucial for securing Oman’s financial future. The FGF includes over 60 direct investments across various sectors and more than 185 investment funds, covering private equity, real estate, venture capital, and infrastructure.

The fund also holds deposits, treasury bills, bonds, and stocks

in global markets. This extensive international investment network not only generates significant returns but also fosters international partnerships and attracts foreign investments, integrating Oman further into the global economy.

A notable addition to OIA’s portfolio is the Future Fund Oman, launched on January 17, 2024, with a capital of RO 2 billion to be utilised over five years. This fund is aimed at accelerating the growth and diversification of the Omani economy.

Importantly, 10% of the

Future Fund Oman is allocated to small and medium-sized enterprises (7%) and startups (3%), demonstrating OIA’s commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship. The remaining 90% is invested in local projects, ensuring that the fund’s resources contribute directly to Oman’s economic development.

Last month, OIA announced that its assets have grown by more than RO 1 billion, reaching a total on RO 19.240 billion. Moreover, its profits surpassed RO 1.7 billion with investment return of 9.95 per cent.

Bank Muscat wins best CX innovation award

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was crowned with the Customer Experience Innovation Award at the CX Live Awards Show Middle East 2024, in recognition of its efforts in providing a distinctive experience to its customers through applying a comprehensive approach aimed at providing the best services to cater to their needs and aspirations.

Mohammed bin Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the Bank, during a glorious ceremony held in Dubai in the presence of a number of prominent industry figures from the Middle East and the world.

The award reflects Bank Muscat's commitment to providing high-quality services and products to valued customers, whether through the Bank's branches spread all over the country or through Mobile Banking and Internet Banking services.



Customer satisfaction is a key focus of the Bank's business as it is always keen to listen to customers' suggestions and opinions, aligning with its vision and strategy while ensuring a unique and distinctive service.

Bank Muscat is also committed to developing its traditional and digital channels to enhance financial inclusion and improve

the customer experience.

It always gives priority to data protection and privacy through controlling the collection and use of data, ensuring confidentiality, information security support.

Bank Muscat strives to enhance its digital channels to deal with customers' feedback efficiently.

These channels encompass Internet and Mobile Banking

services, help desks, call centre and website.

Bank Muscat has a dedicated team working under the Customer Experience Department which is aimed to support the Bank's strategy of fostering a customer-centric culture by ensuring aligning its activities with the Bank's values, strategic pillars and vision.

The department has a comprehensive workforce dedicated to overseeing all customer touchpoints and continuously enhancing the overall customer experience.

By working on customer journey mapping, the department adopts proactive approaches to anticipate customer needs and close any experience gaps through quick wins, ensuring a seamless and satisfying banking experience.

The Bank also runs a robust Voice of the Customer (VOC) programme, gathering valuable insights to drive continuous improvements and innovation.

Extensive collaboration is carried out between key departments within the Bank, ensuring that customer-centric decisions are at the forefront of all strategic initiatives as well as product and service design.

Through a comprehensive approach, the work teams not only support the Bank's strategic goals but also build strong, lasting relationships with customers, thereby driving customer satisfaction and loyalty.



Ooredoo launches OneScreen interactive touchscreens

MUSCAT: Ooredoo launches OneScreen interactive touchscreens that foster dynamic learning environments at schools and offices in Oman where everyone can collaborate and contribute seamlessly. OneScreen is a comprehensive technology provider based in the United States that is known for its customised interactive whiteboards, video collaboration, security, and AI applications for education and corporate clients.

The solution is backed by Starlink; a strategic solution partner of OneScreen in Oman working exclusively with Ooredoo for project design, delivery and after-sales support.

OneScreen distinguishes itself by providing advanced interactive touchscreens and sophisticated software solutions with unique, user-centric features that stand out.

These touchscreens enhance personalisation for each user, facilitating seamless integration with Google and Microsoft accounts through Single Sign-On. This feature allows users to effortlessly access their preferred tools, including the Microsoft 365 suite and various educational applications.

Said bin Sadiq al Lawati, Director of Business Marketing and ICT Solutions at Ooredoo, said, "We are committed to leveraging innovative technologies to upgrade the worlds of our customers across all sectors; this includes improving aspects of collaboration experiences in the classroom at schools and the conference room at the office."

Boost your business with Aamali+: Omantel's comprehensive solution for SMEs registered in Riyadh

MUSCAT: Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Oman registered with Riyadh now have a game-changing solution at their fingertips to propel their businesses forward.

Omantel is thrilled to introduce Aamali+, an all-inclusive bundle designed to enhance business efficiency and foster growth.

Aamali+ is tailored to meet the diverse needs of SMEs, offering a comprehensive suite of essential services all in one package. From fast fibre Internet connectivity to advanced communication tools and productivity-boosting solutions.

Key features of Aamali+ include:

- **High-Speed Internet:** Benefit from lightning-fast fibre Internet to keep your business

connected around the clock.

- **Mobile PBX:** Seamlessly manage your calls and stay in touch with clients and colleagues on the go.

- **Marketing SMS:** Launch targeted SMS campaigns and leverage location-based options to reach your audience effectively.

- **Microsoft 365:** Enhance productivity with access to a suite of powerful tools and applications.

- **Domain Name & Webhosting:** Establish a unique online identity with a .om domain, showcasing your brand to the world and host your website with reliability and security, ensuring a seamless online presence for your business.

All these essential services come together in one



comprehensive package, starting from just RO 30.

Omantel has succeeded, through the integration of its operations, processes, and extensive expertise in the field

of communications and digital technology, in establishing its position as a leading telecommunications company within the Sultanate of Oman and beyond.

Sidrah 3.0 launches to unleash entrepreneurial spirit among Omani women

MUSCAT: Sidrah 3.0, the third edition of the leadership programme for Omani women, has launched, bringing with it much excitement and promise.

Building on the achievements of the last two years, where 106 women reached new heights in their professional journeys, Sidrah 3.0 aspires to shape entrepreneurial mindsets that resonate with Oman's evolving socio-economic landscape.

Co-designed and co-run by Lahunna Oman and Outward Bound Oman, Sidrah 3.0 welcomes a diverse group of young women aged 20-35 from across the Sultanate of Oman, including job-seekers, young professionals and entrepreneurs all united to learn, lead and innovate. This two-phased programme is crafted to endow participants with the entrepreneurial acumen, resilience, and leadership qualities essential for



shaping the next generation of trailblazers and business leaders. Through a blend of experiential learning, interactive workshops, mentorship, community building, and personalised coaching, Sidrah 3.0 kindles a lifelong passion

for learning and growth, and forms a supportive community who will brighten Oman's future with their purpose and grit. Over the 3-month programme, participants will be immersed in simulations and role-plays

which are designed to heighten self-awareness, perseverance, and effective collaboration. This holistic approach aims to release their sense of higher purpose and shape service-oriented mindsets, so they can make a meaningful

Unlock rewards with NBO's new 'Spend & Earn' campaign



MUSCAT: Continuing its commitment to reward loyal customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced the launch of its new 'Spend & Earn' campaign for Badeel Prepaid Multi-Currency Travel Card during the summer travel season.

The first 250 winning cardholders get a chance to receive a cashback of RO 50 when they spend RO 500 or more in a month until September 4, 2024.

This exciting new offer provides attractive cashback rewards and doubles the rewards on international transactions, reflecting NBO's dedication to innovation and customer satisfaction.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Retail Products at NBO, said: "At National Bank of Oman, we are committed to providing novel solutions that meet the ever-changing needs of our customers. Our 'Spend & Earn' campaign gives our customers access to a host of exclusive perks that simplify their financial journeys.

What sets it apart is its exclusivity, as we are the sole provider of this innovative multi-currency prepaid card in the market and is available for all residents in Oman. Whether travelling for work or leisure, NBO's Badeel Multi-currency Travel Card offers a safe, easy, and cashless way to carry multiple foreign currencies in a single card.

With this card, travellers can easily manage their finances, avoid currency exchange hassles, and enjoy peace of mind with enhanced security features making it their perfect travel companion."

German inflation slows more than expected



A general view of a fruit and vegetable stand on a weekly market in Berlin, Germany. — Reuters

FRANKFURT: Germany's inflation rate slowed more than expected in June, official data showed on Monday, in welcome news for the European Central Bank following last month's first interest rate cut since 2019.

Inflation in Europe's biggest economy edged back down to 2.2 per cent from a year ago, preliminary data from federal statistics agency Destatis showed.

The decline comes after one-off factors saw consumer prices rise by 2.4 per cent in May, the first increase in six months. Analysts surveyed by FactSet had expected the inflation figure to stay unchanged in June.

"The ups and downs continue — yet the overall trend is moving in the right direction," said KfW chief economist Fritzi Koehler-Geib. German energy prices fell by 2.1 per cent year-on-year in June,

compared with a decline of 1.1 per cent in May.

Food inflation accelerated by 1.1 per cent in June, while prices for services rose by 3.9 per cent, unchanged from May. Germany's June data will likely be cheered by European Central Bank policymakers after they began reducing interest rates last month in the face of steadily falling euro zone inflation.

The rate cut lowered the ECB's closely-watched deposit rate from a record four per cent to 3.75 per cent. But ECB chief Christine Lagarde warned that there was still a "long way to go until inflation is squeezed out of the economy".

ECB officials have since been at pains to temper expectations of another reduction in borrowing costs at their July meeting, saying there was no "pre-determined" rate path. — AFP

Global factory activity has mixed performance in June, PMIs show

LONDON: Manufacturing activity in Europe suffered a setback last month but Asian factories enjoyed solid momentum, offering policymakers some hope the region can weather the hit from soft Chinese demand, surveys showed.

The downturn in Europe was widespread, with Italy the only big player not to see a fall in its Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) despite manufacturers largely cutting prices.

HCOB's final euro zone manufacturing PMI, compiled by S&P Global, fell to 45.8 in June from May's 47.3. It has been below the 50 mark separating growth from contraction for two years. "What looks like the green shoots of recovery seem to be diminishing. We can't take a recovery for granted," said George Moran at Nomura.

Germany's factory sector, which accounts for about a fifth of Europe's biggest economy, experienced a retreat, while in France the manufacturing recession deepened.

France's far-right National Rally party scored a historic win in parliamentary elections on Sunday, stoking risks of a crisis in the euro area even as other political parties rushed to build a united front to block its path to power.

In Britain, which holds a national election on Thursday,



Employees work at the main assembly line at a car plant in Iwaki city, Fukushima prefecture, Japan. — Reuters

manufacturing growth slipped in June from May's 22-month high as ongoing disruption to shipping in the Red Sea led to lower demand from overseas customers.

A euro zone index measuring output, which feeds into a composite PMI due on Wednesday that is seen as a good gauge of economic health, sank from May's 49.3 to a six-month low of 46.1, albeit just ahead of the 46.0 flash estimate.

A new orders index in the currency union dropped to 44.4 from 47.3, despite factories cutting prices charged for a

fourteenth month.

But cost pressures weighed on manufacturers in countries like Japan, where a weak yen is boosting the price companies pay for fuel and raw material imports.

China's Caixin/S&P Global manufacturing PMI rose to 51.8 in June from 51.7.

It marked the fastest clip in more than three years and exceeded market forecasts of 51.2.

The private-sector reading followed official PMI data on Sunday showing China's manufacturing activity fell for a second month in June and services activity slid to a five-

month low.

The surveys demonstrate how Chinese firms are ramping up production despite weak domestic demand, which Beijing has failed to reverse with a rescue package for an ailing property sector.

In a sign Asia is benefiting from solid global demand, South Korea's factory activity growth quickened in June to the fastest in 26 months on surging new orders, its PMI showed.

Factory activity also expanded in June at a faster pace than in May in Vietnam and Taiwan, other surveys showed. — Reuters

China poised for record July soybean imports on low prices

BEIJING: China is likely to import record volumes of soybeans in July, drawn by lower prices and the prospect of Donald Trump returning as president and reigniting trade tensions between Beijing and the US, which was once China's top supplier of the oilseed.

The world's biggest soybean importer has booked higher volumes in recent weeks, traders and analysts said.

"Chinese soybean importers are buying larger volumes as they are trying to protect themselves as much as they can from a possible increase in US tariffs if there is a trade war after US elections," said Vitor Pistoia, an analyst at Rabobank in Sydney.

However, the impact of any trade escalation is likely to be muted for Chinese soybean buyers

given the plunge in market share for US beans that was triggered during Trump's presidency.

Trump administration tariffs on Chinese goods provoked retaliation from Beijing including a 25% duty on US beans, which forced oilseed processors to seek alternative South American cargoes, slashing US soybean exports to China to 16.6 million metric tonnes in 2018, from 32.9 million tonnes in 2017.

While the US and China signed a deal in January 2020 in which Beijing committed to buying more US agricultural products including soybeans, the US has ceded market share as ample supplies of cheaper Brazilian beans became entrenched in China.

Last year, Brazil accounted for 70% of China's soybean imports, while the US share was 24%,



A worker inspects soybeans during the soy harvest near the town of Campos Lindos, Brazil. — Reuters

even though US beans are no longer subject to additional duty. Chinese buyers have booked around 12 million-13 million

tonnes of soybeans for July arrival, according to two Singapore-based traders and two analysts in China, compared with 9.73 million

tonnes shipped in the same month a year ago.

China's soybean imports hit a monthly all-time high of 12.02 million tonnes in May 2023. "Just looking at the demand in China, purchases for July would have been 10 million tonnes if there was no fear of trade war," said one of the traders, declining to be named because he was not authorised to speak to media.

Soybeans are crushed to make soymeal, a protein-rich ingredient for feeding animals, and soyoil, used in cooking. China's soybean crush margins are negative in the spot market but are likely to recover in the coming months with expectations of ample animal feed demand, traders said.

For now, oilseed crushers in the processing hub of Rizhao are

losing 198.37 yuan (\$27.29) per tonne.

Low prices are a key driver of China's purchases, with benchmark Chicago soybean futures dropping to their lowest level since 2020 on Monday on expectations of plentiful world supplies.

Global soybean production is expected to hit an all-time high of 422.26 million metric tonnes in 2024/25, up from 395.91 million tonnes produced in the current marketing year, according to US Department of Agriculture estimates.

The bulk of China's buying is from Brazil. "Brazilian beans are cheaper and the demand from Chinese buyers is strong," said Rosa Wang, an analyst at Shanghai-based agro-consultancy JCI. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

Gold prices rise as US treasury bonds yields fall

US Gold prices inched higher on Monday as Treasury yields edged lower, while investors await economic data and comments from Federal Reserve officials through this week for clarity on the US central bank's timeline on interest rate cuts.

Spot gold was up 0.2% at \$2,324.36 per ounce. US gold futures also edged 0.2% higher to \$2,336.70.

Spot silver rose 0.1% to \$29.55 per ounce, platinum was down 0.2% at \$990.30 and palladium



lost 0.1% to \$947.50.

Powell is likely to stick to a data-dependent stance, so should payrolls later this week come in softer, it could again lift gold prices," UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo said. — ONA/Reuters

BRUSSELS

EU set to charge Meta over 'pay or consent'

The European Union is set to charge Facebook parent Meta with breaking the bloc's landmark digital rules, the Financial Times reported on Monday, citing people with direct knowledge of the matter.

The European Commission, said the binary choice breaches the bloc's Digital Markets Act which seeks to rein in the power of Big Tech, as it sent its preliminary finding to Meta.

Meta launched the no-ads subscription service for



Facebook and Instagram in Europe last November, saying users who consent to be tracked get a free service which is funded by advertising revenues or pay not to have their data shared.

— Reuters

LONDON

UK manufacturing sector grows again in June

The UK's manufacturing sector grew for the second consecutive month despite rebounding cost inflation and "weak" exports, according to new data.

Activity in the sector grew last month on the back of growing new orders, but there was a slight slowdown against the previous month.

The closely watched S&P Global/CIPS UK manufacturing PMI survey hit a reading of 50.9 for June, dipping from a 22-month high of 51.2 in May.



S&P said the broad picture was positive, with output and new orders both rising, but employment fell, delivery times lengthened and manufacturers' input costs rose at the fastest pace since January 2023. — dpa

Manage your portfolio by diversification



R MADHUSOODANAN
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The writer is a former SBI and Financial Planner resident in Oman

How to plan and manage one's finances is very important. It is a fact that even among well-educated people, lack of financial literacy is relatively on the higher side.

The primary goal of financial planning vary from individuals but generally for purchase of a house/flat, children education/marriage, meeting contingencies, retirement planning etc. The time horizon also varies from short-term to long-term. To achieve the primary goal of investment, one

has to start early investments, at regular intervals, and a reasonably fair amount based on the capacity to save and invest.

Return, safety, and liquidity are the most important factors one has to keep in mind while constructing an investment portfolio. This is popularly known as the 'Magic triangle of investment'. Generally speaking, return is inversely related to safety and liquidity.

INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND DIVERSIFICATION

Diversification is a sound principle of Investment. It is akin to the old saying, "Don't put all of your eggs in one basket." The role of diversification of assets while building an investment portfolio cannot be overemphasised.

The purpose of portfolio diversification is to derive a better risk adjusted return than of a single asset class. Various assets class include risk-free investments like Government Securities, deposits with Banks and Financial institutions, FDs of Joint stock companies, Corporate Bonds and debentures, Stock

markets, Mutual funds, Insurance, Commodities including Gold, real estate, crypto etc.

The rate of return, level of safety of investment and how fast the asset can be converted into cash should an exigency arises without loss of value etc vary from assets to assets. Therefore building a suitable portfolio with a judicious mix of different classes of assets at right proportion is very critical for achieving the primary goal of financial planning.

TYPES OF INVESTORS

Though there are various types of investors, for better understanding, investors can be broadly classified into three categories. This classification is done based on the risk appetite, growth prospects, time horizon and liquidity needs.

Aggressive: Suitable for youngsters and those newly started earning. This group aim a rapid growth and high returns on their portfolio As such the risk tolerance will be higher. Often invest in fast-growing companies and new geographical markets and industries. Their focus will

be on emerging markets and speculative ventures with a rapid growth and high returns.

The time horizon will be longer, allowing for recovery from market volatility.

An investment basket with an asset allocation of say 75% -80% in equities, particularly large caps and fast-growing high beta stocks , 10-15% in long-dated debt securities, and say 10% in commodities and real estates can be termed as an aggressive investor.

Conservative: Ideal for investors above the age of 50 and pensioners and those who focus on steady and reliable income. They are risk averse. They heavily depend on regular and fixed cash flows to meet their routine requirements.

They may also need quick cash to meet. Unforeseen expenses. The primary goal of this group is stability and preservation of wealth.

The class of investments include short and medium term government securities, Bank Deposits, top-rated corporate

bonds and corporate FDs, and stocks of lower beta blue-chip companies, gold, ETF etc.

In short a dynamic portfolio is required which will adjust the portfolio weights based on market conditions.

Moderate investors: This group aims at a balanced strategy. A hybrid of aggressiveness and conservatism. The risk appetite is moderate and they opt for a combination of debt and high-performing equity. The overall return on the portfolio averages and can be consistent even in adverse times. This group of investors prioritises capital preservation and growth.

Typically the portfolio consists of 60% in equity or equity oriented funds and 40% in debt or fixed income securities. This is ideal for long-term goals with managed risks.

CONSTRUCTION OF PORTFOLIO

How to construct an ideal portfolio is million-dollar question. Often the investors are confused in this matter. Again the mix of the portfolio among

different class of assets viz fixed-income, equity and equity-oriented stocks and commodities, real estate etc to be decided.

This depends on the objectives of investment keeping in mind the risk tolerance and liquidity requirements. In the absence of a fair understanding of financial planning, it is better to seek the advice of an experienced and qualified financial advisor or wealth manager.

Managing the portfolio is not an easy task. A periodical review of the performance of the asset to be conducted and churning is to be done wherever required.

Therefore one need to feel confident in the competency of his financial planner who can deliver your goal efficiently.

It is nevertheless to say that like any other professional, financial planner also charges a fees for their services. It is justified if the portfolio is giving a better than expected growth and return. It is to be remembered that building a diversified portfolio can be easier in theory than in practice.

Changing landscape of the world financial order



MUBEEN KHAN

The author is a Muscat-based chartered accountant and researcher.

It was year 1573 when Spanish Empire started large scale minting of silver pesos from a Sierra de la Plata (mountain of silver) discovered in their prized possession of South American land.

In the year 1581 the Ming Dynasty of China started asking silver for its exports of tea, silk and much sought after Chinese porcelain.

The challenge to the West was similar at the time that the Chinese were so self-sufficient that nothing could be exported to China to match with imports, so massive amounts of the Spanish Silver Peso also known as 'real de a ocho', were needed to settle trade with China, eventually transforming the Spanish Silver Peso into a global trade currency.

British efforts in 1792 to convince Chinese Ming rulers to accept the barter of goods and not insist on silver in return for their exports went in vain and finally the 1842 Opium War could only convince the Chinese otherwise.

The gold-backed British Pound thereafter replaced the silver Spanish Peso and dominated world trade till the year 1944 when the Bretton Woods System was finalised on warships during World War II.

This effectively led to the adoption of the gold-backed US Dollar as the world's reserve currency, which was further cemented by the Saudi Petro Dollar deal of 1974 after the US Dollar was made a fiat currency

in the wake of the 'Nixon Shock', which removed the gold peg to the US Dollar on August 15, 1971. This arrangement appears to have come to an end in June 2024 after 50 years.

I believe that the world is again standing at a crossroads similar to 1581. Many countries are struggling to export to China, but self-sufficient China floods the world with goods and services.

Beijing once again holds the key to world trade and is in a position to decide which world trade settlement will dominate the world now.

An alternative world trade settlement system seems to be on the horizon. BRICS might come up with its own currency and settlement system which is speculated to be backed by gold. The sudden 40% jump in gold prices in the last two years and 20% since February 2024 itself indicates that somewhere someone is piling up a mountain of gold to steer the new world financial order and a reset appears imminent.

The business world must watch this development closely and take measures to survive the potential turmoil which the transition might cause.

The almost zero-interest rate that became fashionable after the 2008 financial crisis and the greedy expectation of negative interest rates are things of the past and I believe that rising interest rates won't come down but rather will increase further for the foreseeable future.

The world will be looking at China and India as they are becoming the new centres of innovation and surplus production.

These two countries with almost 40% of world's population are the new powerhouse of the world economy and they stand together at BRICS notwithstanding their political differences. Let us hold our collective breath and witness when the world transits from one financial order to another.

How South Korea broke the development mould



KEUN LEE

The author is distinguished professor of Economics at Seoul National University, a fellow at CIFAR, an editor at Research Policy, and the author of Innovation-Development Detours for Latecomers: Managing Global-Local Interfaces in the De-Globalisation Era (Cambridge University Press, 2024)

South Korea is one of just a few countries ever to transform itself from a low- to high-income economy, and the only country to go from a recipient of aid from the OECD's Development Assistance Committee to a DAC donor. It achieved this not by blindly following a pre-designed development path, but by taking the right detours.

There is no shortage of narratives purporting to explain South Korea's development success, but most have serious flaws. For example, some scholars assert that, from the start, South Korea enjoyed important advantages, especially physical infrastructure and human capital that had been built up under Japanese colonial rule.

But most of South Korea's infrastructure was destroyed during the Korean War. Moreover, the Japanese colonial government offered Koreans only a primary education, and just 47% of Korea's children were actually enrolled.

It was not until after the end of colonial rule in 1945 that primary-school enrolment surged, reaching 82% in



People pose for photographs on a sunny spring day at a Han river park in Seoul, South Korea. – Reuters

1949, with primary education becoming compulsory in 1950.

As many African countries can attest, beginning one's development journey after decades of colonial rule and years of civil war is hardly advantageous.

South Korea did not even have any commodities to export after the war, as all the minerals on the Korean Peninsula were located in the North.

And it faced severe food shortages, which left it dependent on food aid from the US throughout the 1950s and the 1960s. When Park Chung-hee's military government seized power in 1961, it had to prioritise feeding the population over advancing industrialisation.

To that end, the government instituted a dual-price policy for grain, purchasing it from farmers at high prices and selling it to consumers for low prices.

This represented a sharp reversal of the government's approach during the 1950s, when it set food prices low in order to keep it accessible and limit inflation – an approach that reduced weakened farmers' incentive to improve productivity. The government

also developed a new high-yielding rice variety, which it launched in 1972.

South Korea's military government intervened in the economy in other ways, too.

In fact, though some scholars view South Korea's economic miracle as a kind of vindication of the so-called Washington Consensus, the truth is that the government took a measured approach to financial and trade liberalisation.

Notably, one of Park's first acts after taking power was to nationalise commercial banks, in order to cope with the extreme scarcity of capital that resulted from low domestic savings

The benefits of rapid financial and trade liberalisation, as the Washington Consensus prescribes, have tended to be short-lived or to follow stop-and-go cycles in developing economies, because the private sector lacks the capabilities it needs to keep up.

For example, in some African countries, such as Uganda, commercial and foreign banks charge very high interest rates that undermine critical investment in domestic manufacturing capabilities and

encourage capital flight.

But in South Korea, banks were privatised only after the government had spent nearly two decades keeping interest rates low, thereby stimulating investment, and making sure that savings were being channelled toward boosting the manufacturing sector's capacity.

This contributed to such strong income growth that, despite suppressed interest rates, the domestic savings rate soared from 9% of GDP in the early 1960s to approximately 30% in the mid-1980s.

South Korea took a similarly judicious approach to trade liberalisation. When a country liberalises trade, local firms must be able to compete with foreign companies. If they cannot, foreign firms could establish monopolies or destroy the local industrial base unless the government implements protective measures.

In South Korea, that protection came in the form of very high tariffs on consumer goods, aimed at allowing the export industries of the future to flourish before they were subjected to excessive foreign competition.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

This picture shows the newly-released Pentax 17 half-frame film camera at the Pentax Club House in Tokyo.

ACTOR

British actor Jamie Campbell Bower attends the US premiere of "Horizon: An American Saga Chapter 1" at the Regency Village Theatre in Westwood, California.



CLIMBING

Switzerland's Jonas Utelli competes during the final of men Lead competition for the IFSC Climbing World Cup in Innsbruck, Austria.



FILM

French director and producer Claude Lelouch poses for a photo at the Hermitage Hotel during the 10th edition of La Baule Film and Music Festival, in La Baule-Escoublac, western France.



MUSIC

Mexican singer Luis Miguel performs on stage at the Olympic stadium in Seville during his Spanish tour.

art & life

TUESDAY | JULY 2, 2024 | DHUL HIJJA 25, 1445 AH

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Burgham: A unique Musical Instrument that ages over 150 years

It's about 150 years old and has been passed down from generation to generation. Its estimated price is about RO 5,000 due to its rarity... P20

ROHM stages Animal World – Wild on Stage! as summer camp finale

STAFF REPORTER

SINCE JUNE 23RD, the Royal Opera House Muscat has been leading its annual summer camp, with this year's theme centred around the Animal World. This exciting initiative features seven dynamic workshops that will culminate in a spectacular performance titled Animal World – Wild on Stage!

Children aged 7 to 14, living in Muscat, have the chance to participate in workshops including Drama, Singing, Circus, Theatre-Dance, Drums, Props and Technology. These sessions are taught by an impressive lineup of international and local edu-

cators under the guidance of the director, Alessandra Premoli. Experts from Italy and Morocco are leading the music, circus, and dance theatre workshops, while local educators such as YouThinkers for Drama, Tunes for Drums, and Mohamed al Sulaimi for Technology bring their expertise to the remaining workshops. In collaboration with Be'ah - Oman Environmental Services Holding Company, the Props workshop aims to educate children about recycling and the environmental impact of our actions, aligning with the overarching theme of respect for nature. Partnering with Oman's leading environmental company underscores the importance of providing children with quality workshops led by trained experts. As the director of this year's summer camp, Alessandra

Premoli, explains: "We are in the second week of our workshops, and it has been wonderful to see the children quickly grasping new skills and deepening their understanding of theatre. Working with children from various ages and backgrounds has been an enriching experience. This year's theme, focusing on the animal world, has captured their imaginations and provided an engaging educational journey. I am looking forward to the final performance on July 4." The culmination of two-week programme will be a grand performance on July 4 at 5 pm Directed by Alessandra Premoli and the educators, Animal World – Wild on Stage! will showcase the talents and creativity of the children, developed through their participation in the workshops. Photos by Khalid Al Busaidi





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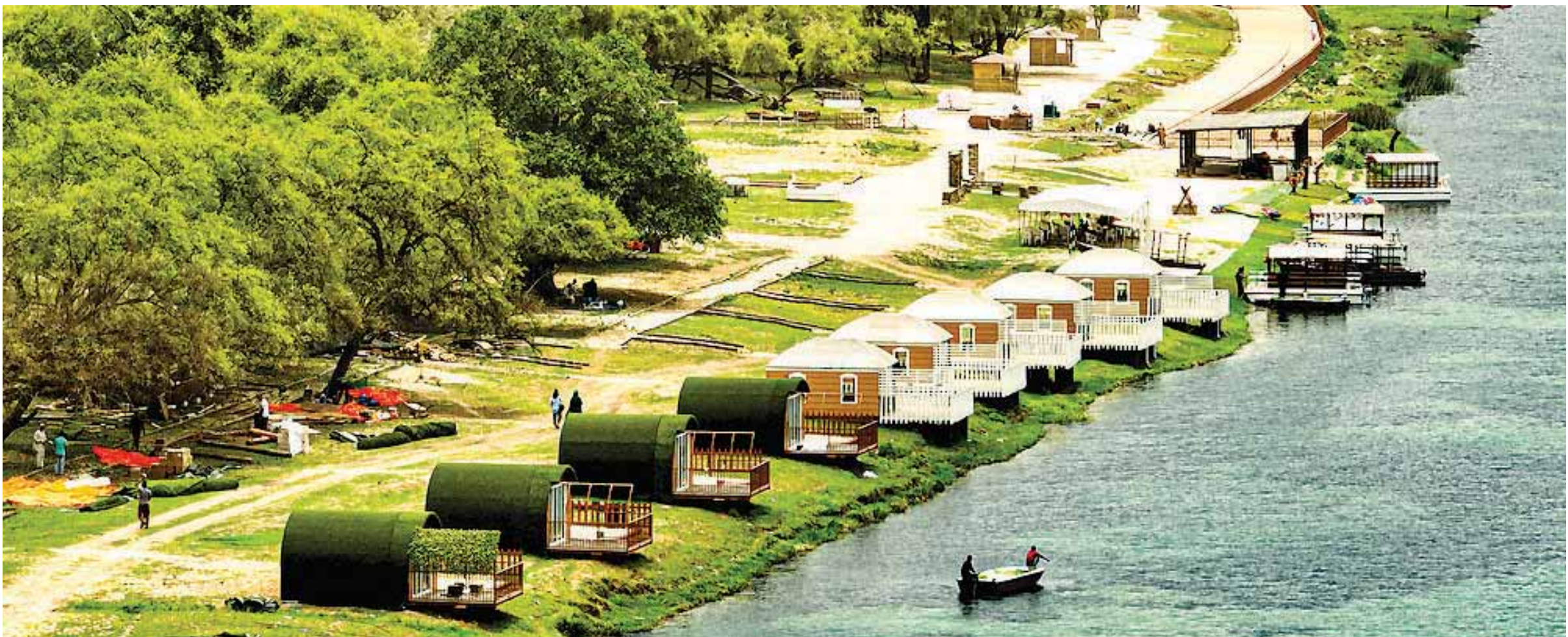
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Lush green and pristine nature at Ain Darbat

THE AIN DARBAT (Darbat spring), located to the east of the Wilayat of Taqah on the main road leading to the Wilayat of Mirbat is known for its picturesque sceneries, pristine nature and lush forests. Cactus jujube and coconut trees can be seen upon descending into the valley.

Ain Darbat is one of the best-known water springs of Dhofar Governorate. Its waterfalls

keep flowing for several months providing large quantities of water and replenishing groundwater reserves in the governorate.

Wadi Darbat is a huge natural garden interspersed with waterfalls, lakes, mountains and caves with fossilised limestone deposits in the ceilings and floors. Besides, it has various types of wildlife and green plains. In khareef season, a waterfall is formed in the valley that

reaches a height of about 100 metres on a beautiful and quiet mountain slope that flows towards the north.

Visitors and tourists can have a look at Darbat Falls from the main road when it is flowing and when the water level rises in Darbat valley, the spring bursts especially in the occasion of heavy downpours. — ONA



PIECE OF HISTORY

NAPOLEON PISTOLS UP FOR AUCTION

TWO PISTOLS THAT Napoleon Bonaparte once intended to use to kill himself are up for auction this weekend, expected to reach up to 1.5 million euros, the auction house said on Monday.

The richly decorated guns inlaid with gold and silver feature the engraved image of Napoleon in full imperial pomp.

They are said to have almost been used to end the French ruler's life in 1814 when he was forced to give up power after foreign forces defeated his army and occupied Paris.

"After the defeat of the French cam-



paign, he was totally depressed and wanted to commit suicide with these weapons but his grand squire removed the powder," auctioneer Jean-Pierre Osenat said.

Napoleon instead took poison but vomited and survived, and later gave the

pistols to his squire to thank him for his loyalty, Osenat added.

They are expected to fetch 1.2-1.5 million euros (\$1.3-1.6 million) at Sunday's auction in Fontainebleau, south of Paris.

Memorabilia of the emperor is extremely sought-after among collec-



tors.

His famous black cocked hat with its blue, white and red trimmings sold for 1.9 million euros in November.

Upon his abdication, Napoleon went into exile on the island of Elba off the coast of Italy.

He would soon grow bored and make a dramatic return to France, only to have his career definitively ended when he was defeated by the British at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, dying in exile on the island of St Helena six years later.

— AFP

BURGHAM

A UNIQUE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT THAT AGES OVER 150 YEARS

Arwa Al Hashimi
Photos by Riyadh Al Hinai

Oman has long been a home for unique and various arts that form a significant part of the Omani culture. Omanis usually use their art to evoke all forms of joy and happiness in celebrating various occasions, especially Eid and weddings. These arts include Razfa, Razha, Aazi and many others.

What distinguishes Omani art is that it has contributed significantly to the field of musical instruments. Omanis own some of the rarest instruments, with which they play the most beautiful melodies, some of which are used exclusively for special art forms. One such instrument is the "burgham", a traditional musical instrument made from the horns of ibexes or Arabian oryx. It is exclusively used in Al Razha which is a folkloric art where men stand in two rows facing each other and repeating specific poems. Most of the poems are about praise and pride. It is also used in Al Aazi where singers gather in a closed circle led by a poet holding a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left. He walks while reciting or chanting a poem, shaking his sword with each pause in the recitation, sending the blade into a trembling, thunderous shake. Those arts are especially common in the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Dhahirah and Muscat.

Frankly, the burgham is not a melodic instrument, and due to its manufacturing characteristics, it only produces one or two notes. The sound is produced by pressing the lips against a small hole near the narrow end of the horn where the air moves through the instrument.

Unfortunately, the instrument is no longer manufactured now due to the ban on using the Arabian Oryx horn in any traditional industries and we only have a few of it in Oman.

One of which is owned by the people of Balad Sait village in Bahla. It is kept in a special bag made of leather to preserve it and the village shaikh is responsible for it.

Said al Hinai, a member of Bab Al Sabah band shared that the Burgham they have is the only piece in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. It's about 150 years old and has been passed down from generation to generation. Its estimated price is about RO 5,000 due to its rarity.

He also shared that this piece of Burgham is only and exclusively used by Bab Al Sabah folkloric band which is registered with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

He concluded, "It is a real pleasure for me and my band to take the responsibility of preserving our cultural and material heritage through art which is the source of joy and happiness for all nations."

