

HM, UK PM discuss ties in phone call

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a phone call from Keir Starmer, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK). During the phone call, His Majesty the Sultan congratulated Keir Starmer on the occasion of his appointment as the new prime minister in his country. He wished the PM success in performing his duties. The conversation dealt with the strong bonds between the two countries and touched on ways to develop and consolidate bilateral relations in various spheres. His Majesty the Sultan and the British PM exchanged views about a set of regional and international issues of common concern. — ONA

SUNRISE - 05:30 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:05 AM
DHUHR - 12:18 PM
ASR - 03:39 PM
MAGHRIB - 07:01 PM
ISHA - 08:21 PM



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PHILIPSEN SPRINTS TO STAGE 16 WIN ON TOUR DE FRANCE, POGACAR RETAINS LEAD



P13

IGC UNVEILS NEW GAS APPLICATION PORTAL FOR OMAN CUSTOMERS



P20

FROM MUSANDAM TO THE ROOFTOP OF AFRICA



STAFF REPORTER MUSCAT, JULY 16

The death toll from a shooting near a mosque in Al Wadi Al Kabir on Tuesday has risen to nine including a policeman. The Royal Oman Police said three attackers were also killed. There were 28 people from various nationalities who were injured in the attack, the police said.

“The Royal Oman Police and the military and security services have completed the procedures for dealing with the shooting incident that occurred in the Wadi Al Kabir area in the Muscat Governorate,” the police statement said. “Investigations into the incident are ongoing,” it said.

Among the injured were policemen and personnel of CDAA (Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority).

“ROP offers condolences and sympathies to the families of the deceased, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. ROP also extends appreciation for the national efforts and cooperation of citizens and residents, which resulted in containing the situation,” it added.

ROP stresses the need to get information from official channels and to ignore non-reliable sources.

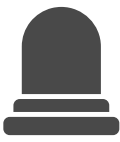
In his post on X, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, said, “My heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the families of all who lost their lives in the brutal attack last night, including one gallant officer of the Royal Oman Police, and wishing a speedy recovery to those injured.”

Pakistan Embassy in Muscat also issued an official statement saying, “Pakistan

ROP SAY PROBE CONTINUES



KILLED IN AL WADI AL KABIR SHOOTING


5
PEOPLE LOSE LIVES


1
POLICEMAN MARTYRED


3
GUNMEN KILLED


28
INJURED

strongly condemns the stardly attack that resulted in multiple casualties including two deaths of Pakistani nationals.”

The embassy said they are in contact with Omani authorities for the identification and repatriation of the mortal remains of the two Pakistanis who lost their lives in the attack. It has also opened a helpline.

“We are heartened that the government of Oman has neutralised the attackers. Pakistan has offered all possible assistance to Omani authorities in the investigation and to bring to justice those responsible for the heinous attack,” the embassy said.

Indian Embassy in Muscat too issued a statement saying, “Following the shooting incident reported in Muscat, Foreign Ministry of Sultanate of Oman has informed that one Indian national has lost his life and another is injured.”

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was “deeply saddened by the attack.” In a statement on X, he said: “Pakistan stands in solidarity with the Sultanate of Oman and offers full assistance in the investigation.”

Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman, Nasser Kanani, condemned the shooting as a “divisive” act.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health activated its emergency response to the shooting incident. The ministry along with the University Medical City, CDAA and private health institutions deployed staff to treat injured victims.

Khoula Hospital has been supported by over 50 medical staff from the Royal Hospital and the University Medical City.

KHAREEF DHOFAR GETS GREEN WHEELS

Oman launched its first electric public bus in Salalah on Tuesday.

REPORT ON P2



ISRAEL BOMBS GAZA AFTER US CRITICISES HIGH CIVILIAN TOLL



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house in the central Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — Reuters

GAZA STRIP: Authorities in Gaza said dozens of Palestinians were killed on Tuesday in three separate strikes, as Israel pounded the territory despite renewed US criticism of the high civilian toll.

Gaza civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said the three air strikes killed at least 44 people and wounded dozens within an hour across the war-ravaged Palestinian territory. Israel said it carried out two of the strikes.

The health ministry said a strike on a fuel station in Al Mawasi in southern Gaza killed 17 people, and the Palestinian Red Crescent said a separate strike at almost the same time on the UN-run Al Razi School in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed five people. The civil defence agency

said the third strike was on a gathering of people near a roundabout in northern Gaza. It did not give a precise toll breakdown.

Hours earlier, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told two senior Israeli officials of Washington’s “serious concern” following deadly Israeli strikes in Gaza, his spokesman said.

The Israeli military said its aircraft struck about “40 terror targets” in Gaza, including “sniping posts, observation posts, Hamas military structures, terror infrastructure, and buildings rigged with explosives”.

Palestinian Red Crescent medics said they recovered four bodies from a house outside the southern city of Khan Yunis and another from Nuseirat camp.

SEE ALSO P5

Oman, Tanzania sign air services agreement

DAR ES SALAAM: Oman’s Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) signed bilateral air services agreement (BASA) with the United Republic of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam on Tuesday.

The agreement was signed by Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the CAA, and Prof Makame Mbarawa, Minister of Transport in Tanzania. The ceremony was attended by diplomats and officials from the two countries.

This agreement was an update of an agreement signed by the governments of the two countries in 1982. The updated agreement, based on the principles of open skies between the two countries, provides for the operation of any number of direct flights between



Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the CAA, and Prof Makame Mbarawa sign BASA in Dar es Salaam on Tuesday. — ONA

the two friendly countries. It also seeks to organise operational and technical aspects in a manner that serves the two countries’

common interests.

The agreement consists of 24 articles and a special annex on the schedule of air routes

The updated pact, based on the principles of open skies, provides for the operation of any number of direct flights between the two friendly countries

between the two countries. The articles comprise economic provisions to realise operational cooperation that enables designated airline companies to operate flights for the transport of passengers and freights and enable the two countries to enter into cooperative arrangements and code shares on flights operated by each other’s carriers. — ONA



Mwasalat launches Oman’s first electric public bus

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Oman's first electric public bus hit the roads on Tuesday in presence of a large number dignitaries from Oman and public transport experts from several parts of the world.

The launch of Mwasalat electric bus was strategically planned during the UITP Mena conference titled ‘Smart transportation for sustainable cities’, which saw attendance of more around 300 international participants, including stakeholders, in Salalah.

UITP (Union Internationale des Transports Publics) is International Association of Public Transport and a passionate champion of sustainable urban mobility.

The event was organised under the auspices of HH Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment.



The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is committed to working alongside stakeholders and partners to develop and implement innovative solutions



The national and international delegates witnessed the launch of the first electric public bus in Oman, as a high level discussion on the importance of smart public transport system, put emphasis on fast, safe and efficient urban mobility to ensure global sustainability.

In his keynote address, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), called the event a significant milestone in the

Sultanate of Oman’s collective efforts to shape a sustainable future for public transportation across the Mena region.

“The ministry recognises the vital role the public transportation plays in achieving sustainable mobility. We are committed to working alongside stakeholders and partners to develop and implement innovative solutions. This includes actively supporting the adoption of green technologies, such as electric buses and renewable energy sources,

within our public transport systems. We are also fostering the development of intelligent transport systems that leverage data and technology to optimise routes, improve efficiency, and provide a seamless passenger experience,” he said.

The Mena region, he said, was experiencing rapid urbanisation, and the demand for a robust and sustainable public transportation network would continue to rise.

Badar bin Mohammed al Nadabi, CEO of Mwasalat, affirmed his commitment

for the better future of public transportation in the region.

“At Mwasalat, we are committed to playing a leading role in this transformation. We are actively investing in green technologies, such as electric buses and renewable energy sources, to minimise our environmental footprint. We are also embracing intelligent transport systems that leverage data and technology to optimise routes, improve efficiency, and enhance the passenger experience,” he said.

Mohammed Mezghani, Secretary-General, UITP, Burssels, Belgium, said Public transports are key to global sustainability.

“More public transport, less fatalities, as this mode is safe, environment friendly, healthy, creates jobs, helps economy and its ultimate gainers are the people... This is a win-win situation for all, because an investment of \$1 in public transport generates \$5 in the economy,” he said.

Commenting on the role of UITP, he said, “With more than 1,900 members across 100 countries, UITP has been active in the Mena region for many decades, growing our presence to reflect this innovative, progressive region. The UITP Mena Division has always remained committed to the importance of international collaboration, and the positive outcomes of sharing knowledge and experience among all Mena region members.”

NOT IDLE UNTIL THE IDEAL JOB: GRADUATES

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Graduates of today are not waiting for the ideal job; instead, they are building on their work experience and bringing in income.

The Observer spoke to different individuals who are building up their time and experience instead of sitting at home and waiting for a job offer.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Oman’s system of higher education currently includes, in addition to government educational institutions, 27 private universities and colleges with an enrolment of some 35,000 students. Each year, more graduates enter the job market.

Sameera al Aghbari, a graduate in English Literature, is currently handling sales and customer services at a popular bakery. She is enthusiastic and energetic while dealing with her customers, but when asked about her ideal job, her quick answer is ‘teaching’.

Although she graduated two years ago, she has been busy. She first worked on a contract basis promoting products, and when that was over, she acquired her current job. She has a goal she



shared enthusiastically: “I want to earn and save to study ‘Teaching Methods’ at the University.”

Omar al Dhafari, a graduate in Mechatronics Engineering from Sultan Qaboos University, said, “I graduated from Sultan Qaboos University at the beginning of 2023. I am a job-seeker.” Omar did not wait around either. “I worked in a Medical coordination office for treatment abroad. The job title was Public Relations, but I did different jobs there. I worked as a driver, a representative, a translator for weekly articles, an advertisement designer, and a data entry person.”

Marwa al Hassani, a graduate in accounting, got involved in pottery during her waiting period. Today, she has teamed

up with a business partner and opened a shop at Bahla Fort.

Not all situations have been easy. Another graduate tried a hand at food delivery in a company and found the experience not very positive due to rude customers. However, he has now secured a job related to his profession. The jobs in between not only provide income but also teach many lessons, say the skilled job-seekers.

“It is in my character to enjoy what I do. As a graduate in English literature, I love to read novels and poems. I am passionate about teaching. I have been waiting for so long to be a teacher. But there is a one-year course I need to take, and that is why I am working to save up for the course. I want to be

independent and not trouble my family,” she explained. The current job in customer services has taught her many things in just four months, she said.

“I learned how to talk to people and, most importantly, how to deal with angry people. Show your mercy, that’s it. Calm them down and do not argue,” she pointed out.

Omar reflected, “My English has become better, my interpersonal and communication skills have improved, and I have learned more about how to use programs like Excel.”

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation conducts the graduate survey, which, according to the minister in a report by Oman News Agency, constitutes the first building block for aligning higher education outcomes with the needs of the labour market.

The Higher Education Graduates Survey is expected to serve several parties, including policymakers, decision-makers, higher education institutions, employers, and students expected to enrol in higher education institutions. But the current trend among graduates is to be proactive and take up whatever opportunities they get while waiting for the right break.

MISFAT AL ABRIYEEN RECEIVES OVER 50,000 VISITORS IN FIRST HALF OF 2024



Misfat Al Abriyeen offers a unique blend of natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural heritage. – ONA

AL HAMRA: Misfat Al Abriyeen village in the Wilayat of Al Hamra in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, has seen a remarkable surge in tourist numbers attracting more than 50,000 local and foreign visitors in the first half of 2024.

As one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in the governorate, Misfat Al Abriyeen offers a unique blend of natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural heritage. This charming village stands out for its diverse attractions, which include stunning landscapes, ancient monuments and traditional architecture.

Among the highlights of Misfat Al Abriyeen are the historic Rogan Castle, built over a millennium ago during the Persian period, and Bayt

Al Baytain, a well-preserved 500-year-old building that reflects the village’s rich history. Visitors are also captivated by the Misfat Al Abriyeen Falaj, an intricate irrigation system that has been irrigating the village’s terraced farms for centuries.

The village is also home to six traditional guest houses which cater to the growing number of tourists and enhance the visitor experience. These tourism developments have contributed to Misfat Al Abriyeen’s recognition as one of the World Tourism Organization’s ‘Best Tourist Villages’ in the inaugural edition of the awards in 2021. This accolade highlights the village’s dedication to preserving its cultural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism.

— ONA

‘UPGRADE projects to contribute to technological landscape’

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

In the wake of their recent recognition at the UPGRADE programme 2024, three pioneering startups that are lauded for their innovation and potential impact stated that they are set to redefine their respective industries and contribute significantly to Oman’s technological landscape.

DroneLens Innovators, a team from the Military Technological College, developed an autonomous drone integrated with AI for real-time aircraft defect analysis. The team members include Luqman al Dhafari, Munthir al

Aamri, and Salah al Thuhli.

Their technology enhances operational efficiency and safety while reducing maintenance costs. The team has achieved significant milestones including securing a Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) BFP RG project and presenting their findings at three international scientific conferences.

Luqman al Dhafari articulated their future plans, stating, “Our next plan is to develop our drone to reach higher efficiency so it will be capable of doing the tasks that we planned to do.”

Pure Bar Tech, formed by students from the National



These projects highlight Oman’s commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship among its youth, paving the way for sustainable economic growth and technological advancement.

University’s College of Engineering, specialises in producing eco-friendly Green Aluminium (Greenilium) from local environmental waste.

The team members are Al



Yaqeen al Souti, Ahmed al Awadi and Reem al Qasabi. They utilise AI equations in their production line to eliminate hazardous chemicals found in commercial

aluminium, aiming to lead the global aluminium market. “We plan to cooperate with many countries and bring our project to further levels,” Al Yaqeen al Souti said.

GreenSensors, comprising students from the National University of Science and Technology, International Maritime College Oman, developed a low-cost, eco-friendly microbial fuel cell (MFC) biosensor for real-time monitoring of industrial wastewater plants.

The team members are Maira al Qaidi and al Hanoof al Housni. Their innovation aims to enhance water quality monitoring in smart cities

and support sustainable urban development. “We plan to cooperate with many countries and bring our project to further levels,” Maira stated.

Dr Salah al Zadjali, Director General of Research Programmes and Capacity Building at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation emphasised the comprehensive support provided by the UPGRADE programme.

“Basically, we put these new startups into incubators to help them grow and develop. We also provide them with practical training, as well as with consultation services,” he stated.



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Ajwaa Al Ashkharah Festival thrills visitors

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The Second Ajwaa Al Ashkharah Festival, organised by Al Sharqiyah South Governorate in collaboration with various government and private entities, continues to draw large crowds at Al Ashkharah Public Park. The festival has been met with enthusiastic public turnout, particularly over the weekend, as visitors flocked to enjoy the diverse and brilliantly presented events and activities.

The festival's programme features a wide range of cultural and entertainment segments and competitions, which have garnered significant audience interaction and admiration. Highlights include the Al

Ashkharah Football and Beach Volleyball League draw, marking the start of one of the region's most anticipated sporting events.

The festival stage hosts a variety of interactive performances, including comedy segments, a storyteller's segment, theatrical shows by the Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan troupe, bubble shows, puppets, cartoon characters, circus shows, artistic performances, laser shows, and paragliding displays that adorned the skies of Al Ashkharah.

The theatre at Al Ashkharah Public Park showcases several marine folklore arts, such as Medima, Choubani and Al Bahri, performed by the "Sawt Al Nahham" Folklore Arts Band. Poetry evenings, featuring well-known Omani poets like Mutaib



The festival's programme features a wide range of cultural and entertainment segments and competitions, which have garnered significant audience interaction

al Sharari, Nasser al Ghailani and Nasser al Kasbi, have also attracted a large audience of poetry enthusiasts.

The festival's activities, which continue throughout the event, include recreational, heritage, cultural and sports programmes,

encouraging anglers.

Other interactive competitions, such as cooking Al Arsi Al Jaalani, a traditional dish of rice, meat and salt served on special occasions, add to the atmosphere of fun, joy and excitement.

The media committee stated that the festival features daily permanent activities and additional daily sports competitions, children's theatre, a heritage corner, electronic and electrical games and interactive characters. These activities are announced daily on the forum's social media accounts.

The committee has prepared extensively through ongoing meetings since its formation by the office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah South. They developed the festival's visual identity,

designed posters for social media, and created a detailed media work plan to evaluate daily activities and visitor feedback.

The committee has also coordinated with various media outlets to cover the event, receiving full cooperation in broadcasting the festival's happenings.

The festival serves as a recreational outlet for visitors from both Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and other governorates. It also holds economic and developmental significance, contributing to economic diversification and enriching the tourism sector.

This is particularly important during the summer, as tourists flock to Al Ashkharah and the coastal areas.

Impetus on better air freight for fish and food

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

As part of the ongoing efforts to implement executive plans for operational governance committees, a workshop was held under the National Employment Programme recently to enhance the efficiency of air freight for fish and food products at Salalah Airport.

Organised in collaboration with various government and private entities, the workshop focused on improving the air freight processes for fish and food products.



The workshop focused on improving the air freight processes for fish and food

The initiative is part of the National Employment Programme's efforts to activate executive plans for the employment governance committees in the agriculture, fisheries, water resources, and transportation and logistics sectors.

Participants included representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture,

Fisheries and Water Resources, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher). The goal was to leverage Oman's advanced logistics infrastructure to boost fish and food exports and discuss employment opportunities for Omani youth.

Key topics covered in the seminar included an analysis of the current state of air freight and food export, with a particular focus on shipping chilled fish from Oman via airports. Proposals were made to enhance food and fish exports through airports, and interactive discussions were held to identify challenges and potential solutions.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of providing necessary support for this critical sector.

The National Employment Programme aims to foster consensus among stakeholders and strengthen cooperation between air transport companies, thereby improving the efficiency of air freight for fish and increasing Omani exports to global markets.

This initiative is a crucial step in a long-term strategy to enhance the infrastructure and develop logistical services at Salalah Airport, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

The vision seeks to position Oman as a global logistics hub. These efforts are expected to boost fish exports, generate higher revenues, create new job opportunities and enhance the connectivity between different transportation modes, linking the food security and transportation and logistics sectors.

PDO warns of fake recruitment agency

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has issued an alert regarding a fraudulent recruitment agency, InfoJobsGulf, which is falsely advertising job vacancies at PDO.

PDO, a leading oil exploration and production company in the Sultanate of Oman, has confirmed that these advertisements are illegitimate and have no affiliation with the company.

In an official statement, PDO emphasised, "We reiterate that all recruitments at PDO are conducted solely through the official oil and gas jobs website: www.petrojobs.om."



This notice aims to protect the public from potential scams and ensure that job-seekers to rely only on verified and official channels for employment opportunities at PDO.

Oil tanker capsizes off the coast of Duqm

The Maritime Security Centre has reported that an oil tanker flying the Comoros flag has capsized 25 nautical miles southeast of Ras Madrakah, Wilayat of Al Duqm.

Search and rescue efforts are being conducted for the 16-person crew of the capsized tanker flying the flag of the United Comoros.

The incident has triggered a coordinated search and rescue operation involving relevant authorities.

Further updates on the situation are expected as efforts



continue to ensure the safety of the crew and mitigate any potential environmental impact.

Haboot: A celebration of Dhofar's poetic legacy

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 16

The inaugural Haboot folk art competition, held in Dhofar Governorate recently, served as a testament to the Sultanate of Oman's unwavering dedication to safeguarding and fostering its authentic folk heritage, while simultaneously nurturing a burgeoning generation of poetic virtuosos.

The competition witnessed a remarkable turnout of gifted

Omani poets, each vying for recognition with their original creations steeped in the rich tapestry of Haboot folk art.

The diversity and richness of their contributions served as a vibrant testament to the enduring power and depth of this ancient artistic expression. Salem bin Ali al Maashani, a poet of singular talent, emerged victorious in the competition, having secured the highest accolades from both the judging panel and the enthusiastic public vote.



Salem bin Ali al Maashani, a poet of singular talent, emerged victorious in the competition

Al Maashani's artistry shone brightly, manifest in his ability to weave verses that resonate deeply with the audience, capturing the very essence of the time-honoured Haboot tradition.

The cultural event was organised by the Dhofar Centre for Culture, Heritage and Creativity, which has established its prowess in orchestrating exceptional cultural events. These events serve as a potent catalyst for the flourishing of the cultural movement within the country. Also playing an important

role was the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in championing Omani folk arts and elevating the stature of Omani folk poetry, particularly the esteemed Haboot tradition.

The Haboot competition served not only as a platform for celebrating the past, but also as a potent force nurturing poetic talent, encouraging innovation and fostering artistic contributions across the spectrum of cultural endeavours.

The competition garnered an

overwhelming response from the public, with the total number of votes surpassing an impressive 1.3 million. This unprecedented outpouring of support highlights the profound resonance the competition struck with audiences.

Further underscoring the significance of the competition, the prize pool for the winners amounted to a substantial RO 100,000, reflecting deep appreciation for the art of Haboot poetry and the organisers' commitment to recognising poets.



GOOD NUTRITION CRUCIAL FOR THE FIRST

1000

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The first 1,000 days of a baby's life, including the nine months spent in the womb, are crucial for optimal nutrition. This period offers a significant opportunity to support children's health and development through proper diet.

Good nutrition is fundamental to maintaining health and combating diseases. Brain development begins at conception, with brain cells starting to grow early in pregnancy. Recognising this is vital to ensuring that children receive the nutrition essential for their health.

A research team led by Dr Vidya Seshan from the College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University has reviewed and analysed studies on the impact of a mother's diet on the future eating habits of her children.

Their research indicates a strong link between a fetus's exposure to food flavours in the womb and the child's later food preferences. Exposure to flavours via the mother's diet during pregnancy, and through breast milk and weaning foods postpartum, shapes a child's dietary patterns.

"Notably, fetuses begin to swallow amniotic fluid around 12 weeks of gestation and by 28 weeks, they develop a strong sense of smell. This early exposure to flavours can be foundational in establishing healthy eating habits later in life," says the study.

Also, the first 1,000 days are critical in forming the basic structure of a child's body. During this time, parents can influence their child's nutrition by providing

a varied and balanced diet. After this period, children often become more selective about their food, focusing on specific foods for a time before moving on to others.

A European study found that maternal nutrition during pregnancy and a child's diet in the early years significantly affect cognitive and behavioural development. Vitamins like folic acid, omega-3 fatty acids, proteins and micronutrients such as iron and iodine were shown to influence children's cognitive, emotional and behavioural outcomes.

The mother's diet has a profound impact on a child's early nutritional tendencies. Improving the nutritional status of children and adolescents through micronutrient supplements can enhance their intelligence scores. Good eating habits support optimal mental and behavioural performance, helping students focus better and reducing classroom disruptions.

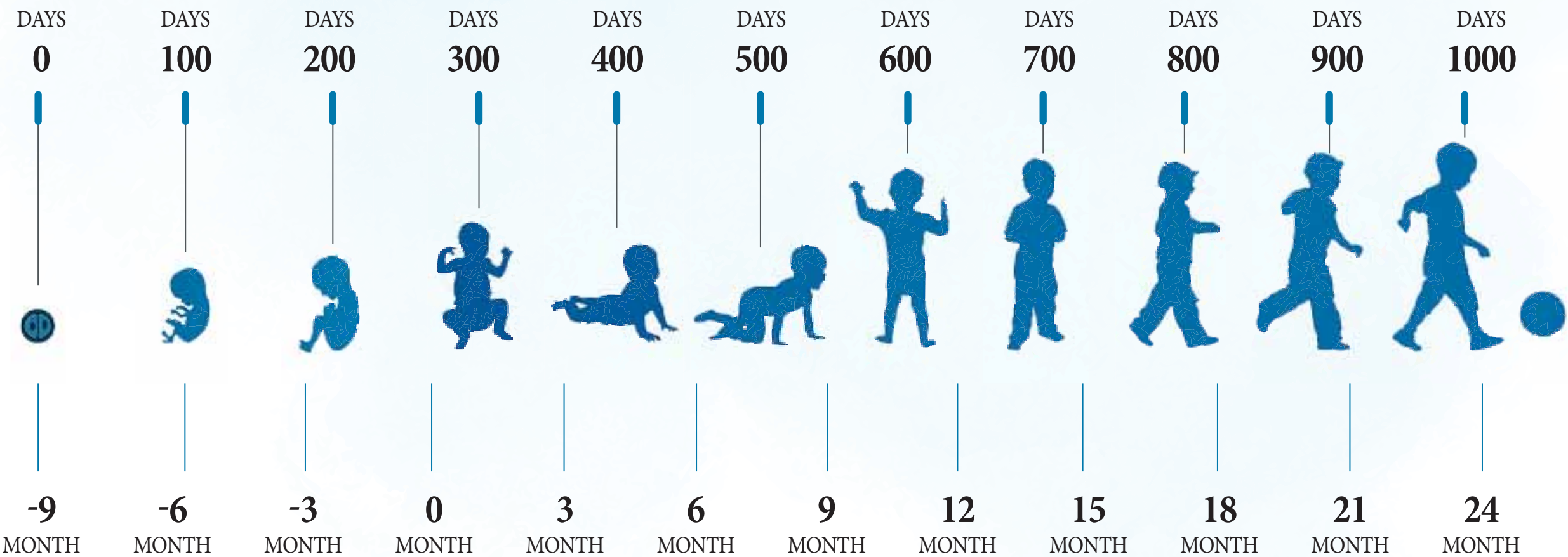
A mother's primary goal is to provide the best care for her child, and early nutrition plays a key role in this. Proper nutrition enhances a child's ability to fight infections and reduces disease risk. Additionally, children who receive good early nutrition are less likely to experience speech delays and more likely to grow and gain weight healthily.

Malnutrition can delay intellectual and physical development, increase susceptibility to obesity and slow disease recovery. Therefore, providing a balanced and healthy diet for children has long-term positive effects on their health and performance.

DAYS OF A BABY'S LIFE



MALNUTRITION CAN DELAY INTELLECTUAL AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT, INCREASE SUSCEPTIBILITY TO OBESITY AND SLOW DISEASE RECOVERY





A Palestinian scavenges for usable items at a dump site, in Gaza. – Reuters

Waste crisis deepens Gazans misery

GAZA: Bulldozers plough through piles of waste, but angry residents find little relief as their children sift through garbage on Gaza's streets in a growing sanitation crisis that's adding to the misery of war.

"We can't sleep, we can't eat, we can't drink, the smell is killing us," said Ahmed Shaloula, one of many displaced Palestinians, who is from Gaza City and lives in Khan Yunis.

Palestinians have faced one crisis after another since the conflict erupted between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas in October. Aside from Israeli air strikes, shelling and a ground offensive, Palestinians are crippled by shortages of food, fuel, water, medicine and functioning hospitals.

Garbage is piling up in the impoverished enclave — one of the world's most densely populated places — which has been reduced mostly to rubble. At night, people stay awake fighting mosquitoes and some are catching diseases like scabies, Shaloula said.

"We are calling on the municipality of Khan Yunis to

remove the waste."

But the call for government services is wishful thinking in Gaza after nine months of war, which erupted when Hamas attacked Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 people captives, according to Israeli tallies. Israel responded with an offensive that has killed more than 38,000 people, according to Gaza health authorities.

Khan Yunis is the second-largest city in Gaza, home to 2.3 million people. Damage from the war and a shortage of fuel have created a waste problem, said Omar Matar, the official responsible for the removal of solid waste at Khan Yunis Municipality.

"The piling up of waste has led to bad smells, spread of insects and rodents in addition to the leakage of liquids from the waste to the underground water reservoir," he said.

The reservoir is the main source of drinking water for residents of Khan Yunis. Clean water is unavailable in most of Gaza.

— Reuters

Israeli strikes kill at least 57

GAZA: Israeli strikes hit several parts of the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, and Palestinian health officials said at least 57 people were killed in Israeli bombardments of southern and central areas.

The Palestinian group Hamas has accused Israel of stepping up attacks in Gaza to try to derail efforts by Arab mediators and the United States to reach a ceasefire deal. Israel says it is trying to root out Hamas fighters.

In Rafah, a southern border city where Israeli forces have been operating since May, five Palestinians were killed in an airstrike on a house, Gaza health officials said. In nearby Khan Yunis, a man, his wife, and two children were killed, they said.

Later on Tuesday, an Israeli airstrike on a car killed at least 17 Palestinians and wounded 26 others in Khan Yunis in southern Gaza, the officials said.

The airstrike hit near a tented area housing displaced families in Attar Street in the humanitarian-designated area of Al Mawasi, the health ministry said.

Footage showed residents carrying bodies of the dead and wounded on donkey carts and in rickshaws to hospitals.

"The car was targeted, the blood was splashing, and shrapnel hit our tents and martyrs were left on the



Palestinians react following an Israeli strike on a UN school sheltering displaced people, in Nuseirat. – Reuters

The airstrike hit near a tented area housing displaced families in Attar Street in the humanitarian-designated area of Al Mawasi

street. We screamed: 'We need an ambulance'. We put (the casualties) on carts and rickshaws and the ambulance came after a while," said eyewitness Tahrir Matir, who lives in a tent nearby.

In the historic Nuseirat camp in central Gaza, at least four Palestinians were killed in separate shelling and aerial strikes in central Gaza, medics

said. An Israeli airstrike killed four in Sheikh Zayed in northern Gaza, they said.

Hours later, an Israeli air strike on a UN-run school that housed displaced families in the Nuseirat camp killed 23 people and wounded many others, health officials said.

Among those killed was local journalist Mohammad Meshmesh, taking the number of journalists killed in the conflict to 160, the Gaza government media office said.

At least 38,713 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's retaliatory offensive since then, Gaza health authorities said in

their latest update on Tuesday.

Relatives visited Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al Balah in central Gaza to say farewell to relatives before funerals. "We're exhausted, we're devastated, we are extremely tired, our patience is over," said elderly Palestinian Sahar Abu Emeira.

"Whether Hamas or the others (Israel) they need to agree as soon as possible."

Efforts to end the conflict stalled on Saturday after three days of negotiations failed to produce a viable outcome, Egyptian security sources said, and after an Israeli strike killing 90 people. — Reuters

US voices concern to Israeli officials over civilian toll

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told two top Israeli officials on Monday of US concerns over the number of civilian casualties in recent Israeli bombardments of the besieged Gaza Strip, his spokesman said.

The Israeli military has launched several deadly attacks in recent days including on a refugee camp and multiple UN-run schools where civilians were sheltering.

In response, Hamas said it was pulling out of ceasefire negotiations, causing prospects for a truce and captives release deal to dwindle further.

Blinken received two

influential Israeli officials — Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi — "to express our serious concern about the recent civilian casualties in Gaza."

Casualties "still remain unacceptably high. We continue to see far too many civilians killed in this conflict," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters.

Journalists reported sirens wailing and women screaming as children were pulled bloody and unmoving from the wreckage in Al-Mawasi, which Israel had declared a "safe zone".



Palestinian Civil Defence members inspect a damaged house that was hit in Israeli bombardment on Khan Yunis. – AFP

The Israeli military said the bombardment targeted two people — the head of Hamas's military wing, Mohammed Deif, and his close associate Rafa Salama who the army said was killed.

A Hamas official said on Sunday that Deif was "well and directly overseeing" operations, though doubts remained.

The two Israeli officials told Blinken that "they do not have certainty yet" about Deif's fate, according to Miller.

The bilateral discussions also focused on a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, humanitarian aid for Gaza and post-war plans, he said.

The visit comes several few days before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to address the US Congress on July 24.

"We continue to hear from Israel directly that they want to reach a ceasefire and that they're committed to the proposal that they put forward," Miller said.

The United States has strongly defended Israel since the October 7 attacks, in which 1,195 people were killed, based on Israeli figures. During the attack, the Palestinians seized 251 captives, 116 of whom are still in Gaza including 42 the military says are dead. — AFP

WAR DOUBLES ELDERLY SUFFERING



An old woman reacts as behind her injured victims disembark from a cart as they arrive for treatment at Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis. – AFP



هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation



NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation, Oman (The Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred upon it under Article (4) of the Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated by Royal Decree (No. 78/2004) (the Sector Law), intends to grant Sembcorb Jinko Shine SAOC (SJSC) .(Prospective Licensee) a Generation Licence (Renewable Energy) (the Licence) to authorize the Prospective Licensee to undertake the regulated activity of the Generation of electricity from its Production Facilities located in Wilayat Manah, Ad Dakhiliyah Governorate, with a maximum Production Capacity of (500MW) and to be procured by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company S.A.O.C (OPWP). In this regard, the Licence shall be effective from the grant date and continue for a period of twenty-five (25) years, unless revoked in accordance with the provisions of the Licence or the Sector Law. The draft Licence is available for review at the offices of the Authority at the address mentioned below.

Any person who has any objection to the grant of the Licence shall submit details of their objections to the Authority within 28 days from the date of publication of this Notice pursuant to the provisions of Article (102) of the Sector Law.

Any objection submitted after the period stipulated in this Notice will not be considered. Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

The Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center | Muscat Hills | Airport Heights | Block No 9993 |
Building No. 95 | First Floor.

Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, Al Khuwair | P.O. Box 954, Postal Code 133
email: enquiries@apsr.om
Tel: +96824609700
Fax: +968 24609701



KIGALI: Rwandan President Paul Kagame was gearing up on Tuesday for a fourth term after winning a thundering 99.15 per cent of votes according to partial results from an election where only two challengers were allowed to run against him.

The outcome of Monday's poll was never in doubt, with Kagame ruling the small African nation with an iron fist as de facto leader then president for three decades.

Partial results issued by the election commission seven hours after polls closed showed that Kagame had won 99.15 per cent of the vote — even more than the 98.79 per cent he got in the last poll seven years ago.

Democratic Green Party candidate Frank Habineza

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could only muster 0.53 per cent and independent Philippe Mpayimana 0.32 per cent, according to the results issued with 79 per cent of ballots counted.

In an address from the headquarters of his ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the 66-year-old thanked Rwandans for giving him

RWANDA'S PAUL KAGAME WINS
FOURTH PRESIDENTIAL TERM

another five years in office. "The results that have been presented indicate a very high score, these are not just figures, even if it was 100 per cent, these are not just numbers," he said. "These figures show the trust, and that is what is most important," he added. "I am hopeful that together we can solve all problems."

With 65 per cent of the population aged under 30, Kagame is the only leader most Rwandans have ever known.

The bespectacled 66-year-old is credited with rebuilding a traumatised nation after the 1994 genocide.

Over nine million Rwandans — including two million first-time voters — were registered to cast their ballot, with the presidential race being held simultaneously as legislative elections for the first time.

In Kigali's Nyabugogo market, shoppers were upbeat and unsurprised by the result.

"The reason he gets such high votes, which should be 100 per cent, is because Rwandans love him," pensioner Frederick Bayingana said, listing Kagame's accomplishments in providing "development", "drinking water" and "security".

Full provisional results are due by July 20 and definitive results by July 27. "In general, the electoral process happened in a safe and transparent atmosphere for Rwandans living abroad and at home," the National Electoral Commission said. — AFP



People queue before casting their ballots during the presidential election at the GS Kagugu polling centre, in Kinyinya, July 15. — Reuters

Sudan's warring parties continue talks

GENEVA: Talks between a UN envoy and delegations from both warring parties in Sudan are continuing in Geneva this week, focused on humanitarian aid and protecting civilians, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

War has raged since April 2023 between the Sudanese regular army under Abdel Fattah al Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, led by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's personal envoy for Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, invited delegations from the army and the RSF for talks which began on Thursday.

The discussions are taking place under the so-called



People set up their tents at a camp for internally displaced Sudanese from Sennar state, in Gedaref city, in Sudan. — AFP

proximity format, whereby Lamamra is meeting separately with each delegation at a time, in different rooms. The two delegations are not scheduled to meet each other.

Lamamra and his team had several interactions with both delegations throughout the

weekend, UN spokeswoman Alessandra Vellucci told a media briefing.

"The teams engaged intensively on the two key items discussed during these talks: humanitarian assistance and protection of civilians," she said. "The discussions are continuing this week."

No end date has been scheduled.

The two delegations are comprised of senior representatives of the warring parties and include humanitarian, security and military experts. The talks are in Geneva, with some taking place at the UN's Palais des Nations headquarters.

Despite being present in the Swiss city, one side did not show

up for Thursday's first day of discussions, though the UN did not say which party. However, both parties are now engaging with Lamamra, the former Algerian foreign minister.

The conflict in Sudan has left tens of thousands dead and displaced more than 10 million people, according to the United Nations.

A recent UN-backed report said nearly 26 million people, or slightly more than half of the population, were facing high levels of "acute food insecurity".

Shible Sahbani, the World Health Organization's representative in Sudan, said there were "a few promising signs" emerging from Monday's talks in Geneva. — AFP

Kenyan police fire tear gas as rallies kick off

NAIROBI: Police fired tear gas at dozens of demonstrators in Kenya's capital Nairobi on Tuesday, as scattered rallies across the country called for embattled President William Ruto to step down.

Activists led by young Gen-Z Kenyans launched peaceful rallies a month ago against deeply unpopular tax hikes but they descended into deadly violence last month, prompting Ruto to drop the planned increases.

Although street protests have eased since dozens of people were killed and parliament stormed in late June, demonstrators are still demanding the president's resignation, with Tuesday's rallies using the "RutoMustGo" hashtag.

There was a heavy police presence in Nairobi's central business district while young people armed with clubs stood guard outside their businesses, a journalist said.

"Why are they tear gassing us," Josephat Gikari said, shortly after police fired on protesters in the city centre. "We are not armed, we are only carrying a



A police officer kicks away a tear gas canister during anti-govt protests in Nairobi. — AFP

flag", the 35-year-old said. "We are peaceful, we should be left to hold our demonstrations and we are not relenting," added Gilbert Mutembei, as he waved a "RutoMustGo" placard.

In addition to withdrawing the finance bill containing the proposed tax hikes, Ruto dismissed almost his entire cabinet last week and has promised more changes as he grapples with the most serious crisis of his near two-year presidency. — AFP

DHAKA

Bangladesh orders school closures after protests

Bangladesh ordered every high school, Islamic seminary and vocational institute in the country to close indefinitely on Tuesday, an official said, after violent student protests left at least six people dead.

"All high schools, colleges, Islamic seminaries and polytechnic institutes will be shut down until further order, considering the security of the students," education ministry spokesman M. A. Khair said.

Rival student groups marched in



several key locations around the capital Dhaka, some throwing bricks at each other, with traffic in the city of 20 million almost ground to a halt. The clash also resulted in 400 injured. — AFP

KABUL

Death toll in east Afghanistan rains rises to

The death toll from heavy rains in eastern Afghanistan rose to 47 on Tuesday, a local official said, with 350 injured by the deluges. Intense storms lashed eastern Nangarhar, sweeping away trees and collapsing the buildings.

Saifullah Khalid, head of Nangarhar's disaster management authority, confirmed the updated toll and said some 400 homes had also been demolished by the torrent.

The tragedy comes after flash floods in May killed hundreds



and swamped swathes of agricultural land in a country where 80 per cent of people depend on farming to survive. Afghanistan is particularly exposed to the effects of climate change. — AFP

ISLAMABAD

Eight Pakistan troops killed in suicide attack

Eight Pakistani troops were killed when a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-packed vehicle into an army enclave, the military said on Tuesday.

A group of 10 members launched the attack on Monday in the western city of Bannu but were prevented from breaching an area housing military facilities, armed forces staff and their families, the army said.

The attackers rammed an "explosive laden vehicle" into a wall on the perimeter of the



area, killing eight soldiers and paramilitary troops, it added. All 10 gunmen were killed in the ensuing battle in the city near the border with Afghanistan, the military said. — AFP



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In brief

■ LONDON



UK LAUNCHES ARMED FORCES REVIEW AFTER NATO SUMMIT

Britain on Tuesday launched a review of its armed forces, with the former Nato chief leading the evaluation.

The assessment, ordered by Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer less than a week after he returned from a Nato summit, will set out a path to increasing defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP.

The Ministry of Defence said the Strategic Defence Review would begin work “immediately in recognition of the urgency of the threats facing the UK”, and aim to deliver a report in the first half of 2025.

The review will be headed by George Robertson, a former UK defence secretary. — **AFP**

■ ATHENS



GREECE RESTRICTS OUTDOOR WORK AS TEMPERATURES SOAR

Greece has ordered some businesses not to let their employees perform heavy outdoor duties during afternoon hours this week as the country sizzles in yet another heat wave.

Builders, food delivery riders, couriers and shipwrights are among those having to pause work from midday till 5 pm from Tuesday to Friday as the mercury is expected to reach 42-43 Celsius in parts of Greece, the labour ministry said.

Greece has repeatedly seen high temperatures and hundreds of wildfires have broken out, fanned by strong winds, following the warmest winter on record that scientists link to climate change. — **Reuters**

■ BERLIN



GERMANY BANS RIGHT-WING MAGAZINE AND SEARCHES PROPERTIES

Germany banned the right-wing Compact magazine on Tuesday, accusing it of being a “mouthpiece of the right-wing extremist scene” and inciting hatred of Jews and foreigners.

The Compact had been working against the constitutional order and ordered property searches in four states.

“This magazine incites hatred against Jews, people with a history of migration and our parliamentary democracy in an unspeakable manner,” Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said.

Faeser has described right-wing as the greatest threat to German democracy as mainstream politicians struggle. — **Reuters**

EU ministers warn Hungary over Ukraine aid

BRUSSELS: EU finance ministers chastised Hungary on Tuesday, warning Budapest during angry exchanges in Brussels that aid to Ukraine must remain a priority during its presidency of the bloc.

Hungary has left its EU counterparts seething after Prime Minister Viktor Orban visited Russia's Vladimir Putin this month.

Brussels already hit back on Monday at Budapest by saying that top European Commission officials will not travel to the country for meetings during its six-month EU presidency.

The anger was still bubbling as some 20 finance ministers slammed Budapest at their regular meeting in Brussels on Tuesday.

“I’m both angry and quite sad about the start of the Hungarian presidency,” said Swedish Finance Minister Elisabeth Svantesson. “That Mr Orban went to Putin and Moscow is an insult not only to Ukraine but to all other 26 member states.”

German minister Christian Lindner said that Hungary’s presidency had kicked off with “freelance diplomacy that was greeted with great disappointment”.

“In Ukraine, the peace and freedom of the whole of Europe are being defended. Hungary should know who its real friends are,” he said.

Orban enraged his fellow leaders by jetting to Moscow on July 5, as part of what he described as a “peace mission” over the war in Ukraine.

The nationalist leader’s trips also took him to Kyiv, Beijing and to America to visit former US president Donald Trump in Florida.

Hungary’s EU counterparts were infuriated that Orban appeared to use the position of the

In Ukraine, the peace and freedom of the whole of Europe are being defended. Hungary should know who its real friends are

CHRISTIAN LINDNER
German finance minister

EU’s rotating presidency to add weight to his overseas trips.

The six-month presidency passes between the EU’s member states and does not mean the holder represents the entire bloc.

Hungary’s Finance Minister Mihaly Varga on Tuesday presented to his counterparts Budapest’s seven priorities during its time at the helm.

But maintaining the 27-nation bloc’s strong support for Ukraine was noticeably not on the list — drawing criticism from others.

“We stay strongest when we’re united especially on our support to Ukraine and this has to stay on the top of our agenda,” said Dutch minister Eelco Heinen.

Varga in response said only that Hungary was “ready to ensure the opportunity for a regular exchange of views on the economic and financial impact of the war in Ukraine”.

The EU has staunchly opposed Russia’s war, slapping 14 rounds of unprecedented sanctions on Moscow and giving Ukraine tens of billions of euros in assistance.

But Hungary has repeatedly stalled the efforts to punish the Kremlin and to aid Ukraine in its fight against the attacking forces. — **AFP**



A funeral procession leaves St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv. — **Reuters**

Trump appears at Republican convention, names Vance as VP

MILWAUKEE: Donald Trump made a triumphant entrance during the first night of the Republican National Convention, receiving a raucous ovation from the party faithful two days after a would-be assassin’s bullet grazed his right ear.

Trump walked into the Fiserv Forum in downtown Milwaukee with a thick bandage over the ear as the crowd chanted “Fight! Fight! Fight!” and pumped their fists, a reference to his reaction in the moments after he was wounded.

The former president mouthed the words “Thank you” and

settled into a box with some of his children and US Senator J.D. Vance, Trump’s choice for running mate announced earlier in the day.

Trump is due to formally accept the party’s nomination in a prime-time speech on Thursday and will face Democratic President Joe Biden in the Nov. 5 election.

Vance, 39, was a fierce Trump critic in 2016 but has since become one of the former president’s staunchest defenders, embracing his false claims that the 2020 election was marred by widespread fraud. Vance is

deeply popular with Trump’s core supporters, but it remains to be seen whether he can broaden the ticket’s appeal. He shares Trump’s aggressive approach to politics.

Soon after Trump’s afternoon announcement, Vance emerged on the convention floor with his wife Usha, shaking hands with and hugging delegates who swarmed the couple. He is scheduled to address the convention on Wednesday.

Opinion polls show a close race between Trump, 78, and Biden, 81, though Trump leads in several swing states that are likely to decide the election. — **Reuters**



Republican presidential nominee and former US president Donald Trump and Republican vice presidential nominee J.D. Vance shake hands, at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee. — **Reuters**



(From Centre-L) France’s Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, France’s President Emmanuel Macron and France’s first lady Brigitte Macron applaud past during the Bastille Day military parade along the Avenue Foch in Paris. — **AFP**

PM Attal to take caretaker role in deadlocked France

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron to accept the resignation of the French government, but ask Prime Minister Gabriel Attal to head up a caretaker administration for now, cabinet sources said.

French politics have been in gridlock since an inconclusive snap election earlier this month, with parties in the National Assembly scrambling to put together a governing coalition and no successor to Attal in sight.

Macron made the announcement on Tuesday at the first cabinet meeting since his allies got roundly beaten in the snap parliamentary election he called to “clarify” the political landscape.

Macron told the ministers that he would accept Attal’s resignation “at the end of the day”, but asked him to stay on

“for some weeks”, probably until after the Paris Olympics, which open on July 26.

This gives political parties more time to build a governing coalition after the July 7 election runoff left the lower house without an overall majority.

A broad alliance called the New Popular Front (NFP) which includes Socialists, Communists, Greens and the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) won the most seats, with 193 in the 577-strong lower chamber. Macron’s allies came second with 164 seats and the far-right National Rally (RN) third with 143. The divided NFP alliance has been scrambling to come up with a consensus candidate for PM. However, internal conflicts have thwarted all efforts to find a personality able to survive a confidence vote in parliament. — **AFP**

Oman: A country of peace and tranquillity



Musallam al Maani

The author is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

Oman has long been delineated as a country of peace unvarying in aspect. A country that is free from disturbance and turmoil, Oman both have a state of security and order at the political level and the freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts at the personal level. Modern Oman has never been troubled by conflict, a condition of civil unrest or insurrection, or commotion. Instead, Oman has always played the role to soothe and bring comfort, solace, or reassurance to the peoples of the region and world. Omanis live in harmony with each other and with others. There are no sectarian disputes nor are there religious conflicts between the different Islamic schools of thought or adherents of other faiths and religions. While it is difficult to influence Omanis to change their opinions on faith and religion, they are always tolerant and willing to accept the beliefs, feelings, habits, and behaviours of other peoples and cultures as legitimate even when they differ from their own ones. Omanis are well known for their humbleness in

manner. Their acts conform at all times to a standard of right behaviour. They are not haughty, nor are they arrogant and assertive. While they uphold the highest moral standards, Omanis have never shown, and will never show, an attitude of superiority and contempt for people or things perceived to be inferior. Omanis are proud of having an inherited, established, and customary pattern of thought, action, and behaviour within their society. They always assert and teach their children a conception of right behaviour, which they pass from one generation to another. Young Omanis are brought up to respect elderly, show hospitality to guests, never raise their voices in the presence of seniors, and show affinity, association, and relationship between themselves as members of the society wherein whatever affects one similarly affects the others. They do not behave with poor manners or a lack of courtesy. When outsiders visit Oman, they can feel from the moment they step out of the airplane how peacefulness prevails over every corner of the country. They are greeted hospitably and with

courtesy and cordiality by the Omani police officers, who in fact reflect the genuine traits of Oman and Omanis without having a worthless imitation passed off as genuine. If you ask visitors, they would tell you that they do not feel that they are in a foreign country, but rather as if they were in their home country. Having said that, Oman is protected by a highly trained police corps and a strong army equipped with the latest weapons and armament. The security and armed services of Oman are sufficient to deter those who would ever think that they could harm the well-being and tranquillity of the country with all necessary measures to guard against espionage, sabotage, crime, attack, etc. Omanis as ever stand behind their wise leadership with utmost dedication and sincerity, out of their concern for the safety of their land and nation. We are all behind the rightful endeavours of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. May Allah grant him the power and farsightedness in leading the country to prosperous future for Omanis and for those who reside in Oman.

PSYCHOLOGISTS CONCERNED WITH STUDYING THE IMPACT OF THE WEATHER ON HUMAN BEHAVIOUR SUG

Self-censorship: how Russians talk about Ukraine

Euphemisms to talk about the dead, military jargon, patriotic poems and self-censorship: two and a half years of fighting in Ukraine have had an impact on Russian language and literature. On February 24, 2022, President Vladimir Putin announced a “Special Military Operation” — referred to by its Russian acronym as “SVO”. The abbreviation has become ubiquitous in Russia — repeated by political and military officials, used on social networks, in books and on illuminated billboards on the side of the road of the Russian capital. The use of the word “war” was initially completely banned and punishable with a prison sentence. It has re-appeared in official language, even from Putin, but only to describe what he says is a war instigated by Ukraine and the West against Russia. Nina Popova, a pro-government author who is also the deputy head of the Russian Writers’ Union, uses the word without batting an eyelid. Her organisation, a propaganda tool during the Soviet era, oversaw the publication in June of an anthology of poems entitled “For Our Friends” celebrating the courage of Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine. Popova recited some of the poems at a recent book fair on Red Square. She said the appearance of patriotic poems and songs shows that the conflict in Ukraine “is starting to take on a sacred dimension”. That status has long been occupied by the “Great Patriotic War” — the Russian name for World War II which Putin places at the heart of his rhetoric on Russian greatness and regularly compares to the “SVO”. An example of the omnipresence of the “SVO” acronym is its use in the form of word play in the slogan “Join our people!” plastered across the country to encourage Russians to join the army. The slogan, which evokes the spirit of “brotherhood”, really “captures the mood of the moment” which is about “coming together”, Popova said. When a war drags on it becomes about “avenging fallen comrades”, said a linguist. “We no longer understand why we are fighting, what we want to obtain. But we understand that our guys are here and the other guys are there,” she said. The change is significant from 2022 when official rhetoric promised a quick victory against Ukraine. Several euphemisms are used in Russian to refer to losses, including “200s” to refer to military deaths or “300s” for injuries. — AFP

Climate change and sustainability



Dr Khalfan Hamed al Harrasi

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges we face today, and it requires all of us to work together to make a positive impact and secure a sustainable future. The harmful effects of climate change on our environment are apparent, emphasising the need for immediate action. Burning fossil fuels and deforestation are the main drivers of climate change, leading to various environmental disruptions with far-reaching consequences. One of the most noticeable signs is the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, heatwaves, droughts, and floods. These events endanger human lives and infrastructure and contribute to food and water shortages, displacement, and economic instability. Furthermore, the warming planet is causing polar ice caps to melt rapidly, resulting in rising sea levels that threaten coastal communities worldwide. Small island nations are especially vulnerable, facing the possibility of disappearing beneath the waves. Ecosystems are under immense strain, with coral reefs dying due to ocean acidification, forests being consumed by wildfires, and numerous species facing extinction as their habitats disappear. Government policies play a crucial role in fighting climate change by creating frameworks and rules that promote sustainable practices. Carbon pricing, which includes carbon taxes and cap-and-trade systems, helps to consider the environmental costs of carbon emissions and encourages businesses and individuals to reduce their carbon footprint. More than 40 countries have put some form of carbon pricing in place, generating significant revenue that can be used for sustainable initiatives. Incentives for renewable energy, like tax credits, subsidies, and feed-in tariffs, help to boost the development and use of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. In 2022, renewable energy capacity grew by over 260 gigawatts, thanks in large part to government incentives and supportive policies. International agreements, like the Paris Agreement, are a way for countries to work

together to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and keep global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015 and signed by 196 countries, showing an international commitment to tackling climate change. However, making these agreements work can be tricky due to challenges with enforcement, political will, and the varying abilities of countries to meet their commitments. Even with these challenges, there are several obstacles to implementing climate policies. Economic factors, political opposition, and the need for countries to work together can slow things down. For instance, while carbon pricing is effective, it can be challenging to implement because of concerns about economic competition and the potential impact on low-income households . BY PICKING PRODUCTS WITH LOWER ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, SUPPORTING ECO-FRIENDLY COMPANIES, AND CONSUMING LESS, WE CAN CREATE A DEMAND FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS AND PRACTICES. It is promising to see how corporations are stepping up to promote environmental sustainability through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and sustainable business practices. Companies are getting on board with sustainability frameworks like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) to measure and report their environmental impact. Take Unilever, for example. They have set a goal to achieve net-zero emissions by 2039 and are making commendable efforts like sourcing 100 per cent renewable electricity for their operations and cutting back on plastic packaging. Then there is Patagonia, known for being super environmentally conscious. They donate 1 per cent of their sales to environmental causes, invest in renewable energy projects,

and encourage a circular economy by promoting the use of used products and repairs instead of buying new items. Small changes in our daily lives can make a big difference in the fight against climate change. For example, reducing our energy use, choosing sustainable transportation, and cutting down on waste all add up to have a considerable impact. If one in ten Americans switched to a plant-based diet, it could cut greenhouse gas emissions by 2.5 per cent. Our choices as consumers are important. By picking products with lower environmental impact, supporting eco-friendly companies, and consuming less, we can create a demand for sustainable products and practices. Educational programmes and awareness campaigns also play a significant role by giving us the information and resources we need to make sustainable choices. Research has shown that these kinds of efforts make a difference in how people think and act regarding sustainability. Technological innovation is a crucial tool in our fight against climate change. Investing in research and development, fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and government, and promoting the widespread adoption of sustainable technologies can accelerate the transition to a climate-friendly and low-carbon future. This emphasis on technological innovation can instil a sense of hope and optimism in the audience about our ability to combat climate change. Tackling climate change and looking after our environment requires a team effort involving the government, businesses, and all of us. Government policies like carbon pricing and renewable energy incentives are important, but they need to be implemented and supported by other countries. Companies can make a big difference through corporate social responsibility and sustainable business practices. However, they need to watch out for pretending to be green when they are not; they need to focus on long-term sustainability. Each of us can make an impact through education and involvement in our communities. When we all work together, we can make the world more sustainable for everyone.

Printed books in the digital age

This is the era of digital entertainment. Everything for our pleasure is readily available at our fingertips. So are digital books. They have transformed our reading taste in far more ways than simply quelling the bedside lamps.

No doubt, with digital books, we can read with ease, as they allow so many things that printed books do not. They are convenient, flexible, and cost less than print materials. Not only this, we can carry a whole library of books in our pocket.

Many providers of e-books allow their readers to customise the font size, line spacing and background colour to make reading more comfortable. Also with browsers, we can easily obtain the answers to our questions.

However, there are still people who find joy in turning the pages of a book. I believe it doesn't sound like a big claim, but it's not an exaggeration as well!

For me, like many of my peers, there is something so comforting about a physical book. There is also something different about reading it compared to a screen. It's much more tactile. Those of us who have been used to reading books cannot be fully satisfied with e-reading.

I say it because I love the feel of a book in my hands and breathing in the musty smell of its well-loved pages! No doubt, the experience of physical connection with books is very personal and real. For many of us who have lived in the time of "paper reading", tangible books continue to stand relevant.

This doesn't mean that I am against what is digital. I love it from the bottom of my heart. But reading



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

FOR ME, LIKE MANY OF MY PEERS, THERE IS SOMETHING SO COMFORTING ABOUT A PHYSICAL BOOK. THERE IS ALSO SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT READING IT COMPARED TO A SCREEN. I BELIEVE IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE A BIG CLAIM, BUT IT'S NOT AN EXAGGERATION AS WELL

a book on a device doesn't give me the feeling that I am beginning the journey of reading. It's no sentiment, but the pleasure of flipping a page while reading a paperback will be missing on a device.

Nothing can beat the feeling of holding a book, turning the pages with a sip of your coffee, and reading gently by touching the words as if they touch your beautiful mind! After all, you never have to worry about your book running out of battery, unlike an iPad.

Printed books have been around for centuries, and they're still hanging in there, despite the fact that people are constantly trying to replace them with those fancy e-books. When it comes to book collections, they will contribute to our next generation as they will manifest our identity.

I grew up in a remote village in the south Indian state of Kerala, where many teens and youth who did not have any other ways to pass time, found their way to the library. This was the space where many, like me, learned the joy of reading. This was also a place where everyone would gather for discussions and celebrations.

Let me say that time was when libraries were second home to us. They inculcated a reading habit in us. Unfortunately, our society today is drifting away from reading to simply viewing a screen, due to which students are losing creative and analytical abilities.

The only hope for those who love reading books are libraries, which are living spaces, humming with the silence of many readers. And each time, researchers predicted the demise of printed books, thankfully, that has not happened yet.

TESTING FOR SAFETY



A municipal employee takes samples of water from the River Seine near the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics Games in Paris. – Reuters

Unity in diversity: The tapestry of faith and citizenship

Religions converge through our shared humanity, and from this shared humanity, the concept of citizenship emerges. Citizenship honours a person's right to choose their faith and practice their rituals. Simultaneously, it ensures that everyone enjoys equal rights and responsibilities.

This principle applies not only to diverse religions, but also to various sects within a single religion, such as Islam. Islam encompasses numerous sects with differing beliefs, practices, and interpretations. Despite these differences, these sects concur on the fundamental principles of Islam. This diversity enriches and variegates the Islamic community.

A national state, with its unified vision, perceives religious or sectarian diversity not as a problem but as a source of richness and diversity. It safeguards the individual's right to their beliefs, freedom of religion and rituals, along with their freedom of thought and criticism. The state regards each person as a citizen with an independent identity. Citizenship fosters a sense of belonging if it values individuals and ensures equality for all, upheld by laws that protect everyone without discrimination.

Within the national state, there is ample room for scientific criticism, which stimulates inquiry, questioning and correction while respecting others' rights to their beliefs and rituals. However, this space contracts for those who seek to foment conflicts to exclude others, imposing guardianship and relegating them to a lower class of citizenship. Such discrimination breeds tension and negative effects when the



Badr al Abri

The writer focuses on reconciliation and understanding, and is the author of The Jurisprudence of Extremism

THE EXCLUSIONARY MINDSET REMAINS WIDESPREAD WITHIN MANY ISLAMIC SECTS. WERE IT NOT FOR SOME POLITICAL LEADERS WHO CHAMPION OTHERS' RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF BELIEF AND PRACTICE, WE WOULD WITNESS EVEN MORE SECTARIAN CONFLICTS

state's authority wanes.

Citizenship values individuals and contributes to the group's worth without allowing the group to dominate the individual. This means it does not exclude or erase others. Citizenship begins with the individual's humanity and extends to their religious, sectarian, cultural and social affiliations. In this way, every person in the state feels a true sense of belonging, finds protection, and works for the state's prosperity and stability, rather than merely being a statistic. Discrimination based on identity and affiliation undermines the stability of nations, leading to conflict and division.

Thus, contemporary religious discourse must be refined to embrace diversity, accept, and respect others. It should distinguish between personal beliefs and practices and the freedom of others to hold their own beliefs and practices. Religious discourse should start from a broad perspective, encompassing lower affiliations, and thereby refining its message.

This does not preclude the practice of criticism and the elucidation of one's own beliefs and rituals. However, inciting hostility against those who are different, and relying on central authority to exclude them, implants the notion that excluding others is necessary. This can lead to real exclusions, such as administrative exclusions, verbal violence, and even physical violence, all in the name of religion.

At the close of the 20th century,

many Arab countries were torn apart by sectarianism, resulting in disintegration and ruin. Gradually, the intellectual community began to realise the dangers of sectarian discourse and its detrimental impact on social peace and national unity.

Today, some individuals seek to resurrect those dark times through social media by promoting sectarianism and insulting others for political gain. This is perilous if not addressed by wise individuals before it spreads. The sectarian war in Lebanon, over three decades ago, left the country devastated to this day.

I had hoped that these

experiences would lead to moderation and acceptance within religious and sectarian groups. However, the exclusionary mindset remains widespread within many Islamic sects.

Were it not for some political leaders who champion others' rights and freedoms of belief and practice, we would witness even more sectarian conflicts. The situation deteriorates if the state supports exclusionary fundamentalist ideas while suppressing moderate voices within Islamic sects.

Another grave threat to social peace and sectarian stability is the organised proselytising of

sectarian beliefs and the misuse of public funds for this purpose. I do not see the benefit of such efforts when most people share common beliefs and practices. The greatest danger is external support for sectarian proselytising, creating loyalties outside the state. Religious discourse should focus on human rights from a citizenship perspective, shared values and ethics, rather than proselytising and excluding others based on minor interpretive differences.

The original version of this article was published in Arabic in the print edition of Oman newspaper on July 16. Translated by Badr al Dhafari



Religious discourse should focus on human rights from a citizenship perspective, shared values and ethics, rather than proselytising and excluding others based on minor interpretive differences.

sport

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Al Khatri trains hard in Italy for Paris Olympics



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Oman's shooter Said bin Ali al Khatri, will make his debut at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games later this month in the men's trap shooting event. Al Khatri is among four confirmed national squad members who will represent the Sultanate of Oman in this prestigious sporting event, including sprinters Ali al Balushi, Mazoon al Alawi, and swimmer Issa al Adawi.

The 39-year-old shooter aims for a strong performance at the Olympic Games despite the expected tough competition. He will compete in the men's trap shooting event. The trap Qualification on day one will take place on July 29 at Chateauroux Shooting Center, with the final qualification round held on July 30 at the same venue.

"The national shooting team athlete Said al Khatri, accompanied by his coach Luca Marini, is currently in Italy for an overseas camp. The camp began on July 7 and will run until July 18. This camp is part of the shooter's preparations for the Paris Olympic Games, alongside a series of domestic camps held earlier," Saud al Abadi, the administrator of the national shooting team, told *Oman Observer*.

"Since we received the confirmation of his international card invitation to the Olympic

Games participation quite late, we could not stay for a longer period at the external preparatory camp. However, we managed to organise one abroad preparatory camp for 11 days under the direct supervision of coach Luca Marini. This participation is very crucial for the shooter Said al Khatri as we are looking for a positive outcome from this attendance at the Olympics such as gaining more experience and competing against world-ranking shooters," he concluded.

The national shooter Said al Khatri won first place at the Amir Kuwait International Shooting Championship in 2023 in Kuwait. The event featured participation from many shooters representing different countries worldwide.

The official Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the Paris Olympics will be led by Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, OOC Chairman, and Taha al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, along with some officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and OOC. Oman's chef-de-mission will be Ali al Busafi, while Amir al Zeidi will accompany the team as a physiotherapist. The OOC will unveil further details on Oman's participation at the Olympic Games in Paris on Thursday through a press meet at the OOC headquarters.

Oman thrash India, fall to Jordan at Asian handball tourney



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Oman lost the second match against the host Jordan 22-30, after thrashing India 40-25 in the first match at the 18th Asian Youth Handball Championship in Princess Sumaya Handball Hall in Al Hussein Youth City in Amman, which will continue until July 25.

The Omani team started with a high-pressure style from the beginning and opened the scoring in the second minute. Jordan responded quickly through Ahmed al Attar and Bashar

Obeidat, to make the score 2-1 in Jordan's favour. After several accurate passes and tight tactics, the national team managed to equalise in the fourth minute, and the excitement continued between the two teams until the score reached 6-6 in the tenth minute.

Jordan returned to score the go-ahead goal again through a quick counterattack, but Oman's Al Warith responded by scoring the equaliser quickly after exploiting a Jordanian defensive error. The Omani pressure continued, and player Mamoun al Housni managed to score the

go-ahead goal in the 15th minute after a powerful shot from a long distance, to make the score 8-7. Jordan came back to equalise after an organised attack, then took a two-goal lead due to their superiority in counterattacks and accurate passes. Oman narrowed the gap through Mohammed al Mahrami by scoring a wonderful goal from a tight angle, but Jordan added two more goals through player Ali Jeaarah from the penalty spot and his teammate Sufyan Abu Rumaan, to end the first half with Jordan leading 15-11.

In the second half, Oman started with a goal to reduce the deficit, as Al Warith al Mandhari managed to score after a great individual effort. The two teams exchanged goals, and Mamoun al Housni and Al Warith al Mandhari shone in scoring goals with accuracy and skill, while Jordan's players tried to respond through the flanks and depth, led by Ahmed Al-Attar and his teammates, who succeeded in penetrating the Omani defence. After ten minutes of the second half, Jordan was leading 19-15, then widened the gap to six goals

(21-15) thanks to their collective performance and defensive organisation.

Omani players' attempts to reduce the deficit continued through the moves of Al Warith al Mandhari and Mamoun al Housni, but the Jordanian defence and goalkeeper were an impenetrable wall in front of the successive attacks. Ahmed Al Attar and Sufyan Abu Rumaan stood out for Jordan, scoring consecutive goals thanks to their coordination and cooperation in quick counterattacks. On the other hand, Oman missed several

chances to reduce the deficit, as Jordan's goalkeeper saved them brilliantly. To make the score 26-18 in Jordan's favour after half an hour of the second half.

Omanis tried to come back in the match by scoring a goal from player Hamad Bait Sbeeh, but the Jordan players continued to score goals, maintaining their lead until the final whistle. The match ended with Jordan winning over our national team by a score of 30-22.

Oman will qualify for the second round if Jordan beat India in the next match.



20 sailors take part for summer camp in Ras Al Hadd

MUSCAT: Twenty members of Oman Sail’s national sailing team will take part in a month-long summer training camp in Ras Al Hadd as they prepare for a busy winter season on the water. Training focuses on three classes – Optimist, ILCA 4 and ILCA 6 – with expert coaches on-site to guide the young sailors to the next level of their development.

Oman Sail aims to maximise the impact of the specialised training and give sailors in each class the opportunity to new tactical and technical elements of sailing ahead of their next regatta. Training began in Ras Al Hadd on July 16 and runs through until August 15, under the guidance of Sultan al Zadjali, Oman Sail’s Assistant Youth Head Coach.

Abdulaziz al Shidi, Oman Sail’s Acting Director of Sailing, said, “Regular training camps are the ideal way to ensure sailors approach competition in the best physical and mental condition. We are always looking for continuous improvement and this is also a chance to teach new skills, work on any areas of weakness and test their abilities

in new conditions – such as those found in Ras Al Hadd. There is a busy winter season ahead, with the Oman National Sailing Championships and Mussanah Race Week, so we are looking forward to making progress as a team ahead of these important events.”

Sultan al Zadjali, Oman Sail’s Assistant Youth Head Coach, added, “Specialised training camps with access to our highly-qualified group of coaches allows the young sailors to focus on preparing for the upcoming regattas. We have a strong squad of sailors and a busy season approaching, so being able to head to Ras Al Hadd ahead of these events is part of our efforts to perform at our very best.”

The Oman National Sailing Championships gets underway from September 18 to 22. This is followed by Musannah Race Week from October 1 to 8, where Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, and the para inclusive RS Venture Connect class sailors from around the world head to Oman for the 13th edition of the event.



Support of fans important in football matches



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

In every art or sport, there exists a supportive and interested audience that appreciates the efforts of talented individuals, be they artists or athletes. This appreciation motivates them to continue evolving and improving, recognising the significance of their contributions in reality. Art without an audience is considered neglected and marginalised, leading those who create it to feel frustrated, a sentiment also shared by athletes. The greater the number of fans and supporters, the higher the athletic productivity, often resulting in exceptional performances.

Sporting fans are the primary support for every team, encompassing players, administrators, and coaches. They provide the team with the spirit needed to enhance athletic performance, fostering enthusiasm each time players hear their encouraging chants, thereby boosting energy levels during matches. However, Oman’s stadiums face a significant lack of spectators, with varying levels of attendance across different matches.

Juma bin Rashid al Rasbi, an administrative member of “Support Your Team,” considers the audience as the “12th player” on the field, playing a crucial role in the stadium. Encouraging links generate significant interaction and contribute to boosting players’ morale, pushing them to exert maximum effort on the field. They represent genuine support and motivation for the teams, enhancing their

performance and concentration during matches, directly impacting the team’s results on the field.

Nevertheless, there is a notable disparity in the number of spectators between non-professional local tournaments and professional leagues. The former witnesses relatively large crowds due to their fervent support for the teams, reflecting their deep-rooted attachment to clubs since childhood.

The feeling I experience on the field while playing and having the audience in the stands is indescribable. The audience constitutes the team’s primary support and an integral part of its sporting identity and spirit.

In conclusion, players and fans share this unique experience that enhances competitive spirit, transforming football into more than just a game but a part of the sporting and social fabric of local and global communities.

Khamees al Hashmi says, “Fan support is a fundamental pillar for the team and a crucial incentive for its players, enhancing their performance and inspiring them to deliver their best. We have witnessed an increase in the number of spectators during local tournaments, driven by their passion for the teams and their continuous support, reflecting their deep-seated connection to the clubs since childhood and their renewed interest.” The sensation I feel on the field during play and the presence of the fans in the stands cannot be adequately described in words. The fans are the team’s primary support, constituting an inseparable part of its sporting identity and spirit.

MBAPPE SAYS PLAYING FOR REAL MADRID WILL COMPLETE CHILDHOOD DREAM

MADRID: France forward Kylian Mbappe said on Tuesday he was so convinced he would one day play for Real Madrid that he began taking Spanish classes at school.

“Since I was a child, I knew my destiny was to play for Real Madrid,” Mbappe said at a Bernabeu stadium packed with fans, many of them wearing replica shirts with his name.

The 2018 World Cup winner arrived at a press conference later clutching a model of the Bernabeu stadium he said he’d been given as an eight-year-old.

He surprised journalists by speaking in near flawless Spanish, which he said he had begun learning at school and



Mbappe during first press conference of Real Madrid. – AFP

then continued to practise with Spanish-speaking managers such as Luis Enrique and Mauricio Pochettino at Paris St Germain because he knew he would need to speak it one day

at his dream club.

“I wasn’t the best at school but I had this dream of playing for Real Madrid and I knew that speaking the language would help me adapt,” he said.

Real Madrid announced in June that Mbappe was joining the LaLiga side as a free agent on a five-year contract, ending a transfer saga that had rumbled on for several years.

The club had courted Mbappe in the past but failed to land the player, who signed a contract extension with PSG in May 2022 when the Spanish club had a bid rejected. Mbappe was met on stage at the unveiling ceremony by compatriot and former Real Madrid player and manager Zinedine Zidane, who in 2012 had invited Mbappe to visit the club when he was 13-years-old, a visit that he described as an important moment in his life.

— Reuters

Nadal warms up for Olympics with doubles win in Bastad

BASTAD: Rafa Nadal warmed up for his bid for another Olympic medal at the Paris Games with a doubles win at the Swedish Open in Bastad on Monday as the Spaniard returned to competition for the first time since May.

The 22-times Grand Slam champion teamed up with Norwegian Casper Ruud to record a 6-1 6-4 win over second seeds Guido Andreozzi and Miguel Reyes-Varela on the Swedish clay.

It was Nadal’s first appearance at the ATP 250 event since winning the singles as a 19-year-old in 2005.

Nadal elected to skip Wimbledon to prepare for the Olympics on the clay courts of Roland Garros where he has won a record 14 French Open singles titles.

“Personally, I am happy and I think it was a good match. We played quite well in the first time we



Spain’s Rafael Nadal in action. – AFP

played together and I’m happy to be back here after almost 20 years,” the 38-year-old said on court.

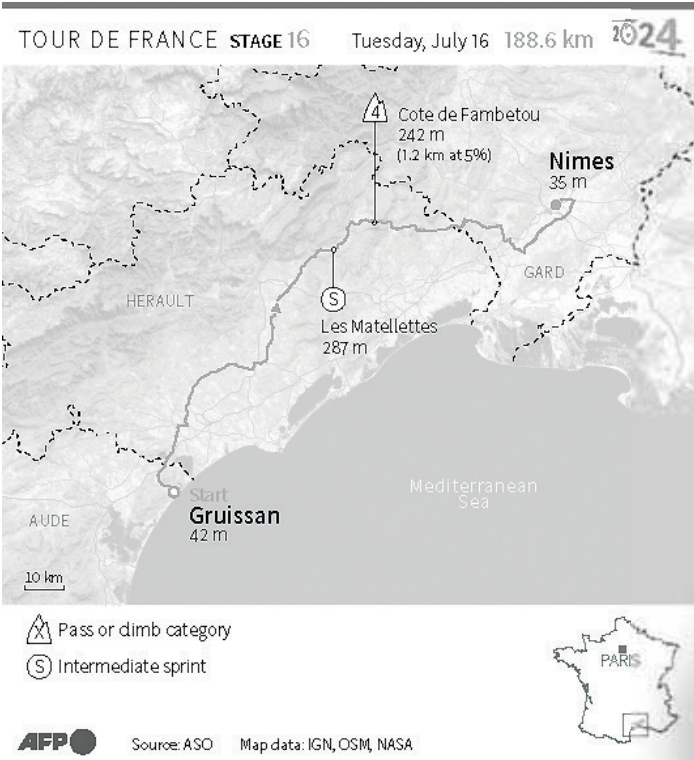
“I have great memories from this place from 2003, 2004 and 2005, so I am enjoying this week and hopefully can keep going.”

Nadal is also entered in the singles at Bastad and is drawn to play Leo Borg, the son of Swedish great Bjorn Borg, in the first round.

Nadal, who won an Olympic singles gold medal in 2008 and a doubles gold in 2016, will team up with French Open and Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz in the doubles at Paris.

His doubles match on Monday was halted twice due to rain delays, prompting a light-hearted jibe from Ruud, the world number nine in singles. “He is getting old so I’m not sure how his body feels when he has to stop and start all the time, but he did well,” said the Norwegian.

— Reuters



PHILIPSEN

SPRINTS TO STAGE 16 WIN ON TOUR DE FRANCE, POGACAR RETAINS LEAD

FRANCE: Jasper Philipsen sprinted to victory as his team Alpecin-Deceuninck timed their lead-out to perfection on Tuesday's 16th stage of the Tour de France, a 189-km flat ride from Gruissan to Nîmes.

The win was Philipsen's third on the Tour this year after victories on stages 10 and 13 while green jersey holder Biniam Girmay, who has also won three stages, crashed in the final 2 km.

Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar retained his yellow jersey with a lead of three minutes and nine seconds over Jonas Vingegaard in the general classification while Remco Evenepoel remains over five minutes behind.

Alpecin-Deceuninck controlled the sprint as the riders moved up to the front to set up the victory for Philipsen and it worked to perfection as Mathieu Van der Poel's textbook lead-out allowed his Belgian team-mate to win comfortably.

"I'm really happy after such a team effort. It's always nice when you can win together and that's what we did today, definitely," Philipsen said.

"I didn't see the crash (involving Girmay). We were trying to position ourselves and focus on our own lead-out. I hope everyone is OK.

"I was feeling good,

I had a good rest day (on Monday), my shape improved during the Tour. So I was confident if we could line it up good today, we could go for the win. It's a difficult level, so three wins is good. We can be proud."

Philipsen crossed the line ahead of Phil Bauhaus, Alex Kristoff and Sam Bennett.

Girmay eventually got back on his bike as his team-mates helped him across the line. But the Eritrean saw his lead in the sprint standings reduced to 32 points.

While there are no more flat stages on the Tour, the green jersey is still very much up for grabs with intermediate sprints in the next five stages.

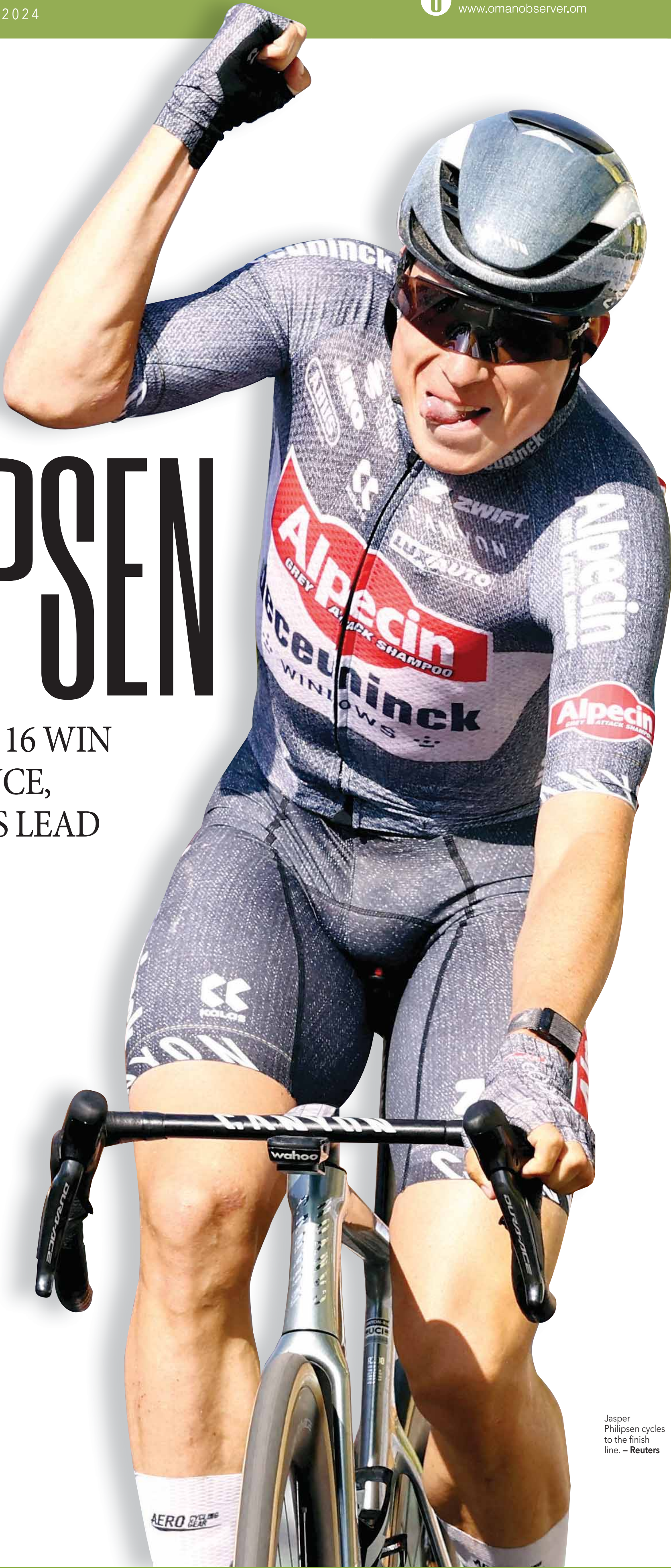
"Everything is possible. He (Girmay) is climbing really well," Philipsen added.

"I hope he's OK after the crash because he doesn't deserve to lose like this. I will try whatever I can because the hard stages are to come."

Britain's Mark Cavendish, who has won a record 35 stages on the Tour in his career, finished 17th in potentially his final sprint stage.

Wednesday's stage 17 is a 178-km ride from Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux to Superdevoluy.

— Reuters



Jasper Philipsen cycles to the finish line. — Reuters





سہلناھا لک لتستمع بالحصول على بطاقة ائتمانية

حد أدنى للراتب 250 ر.ع لا حاجة لرسالة تعيين الراتب إعفاء من الرسوم السنوية لأول ستة قديم الآن

بنك ظفار BankDhofar

نطبق الشروط و الأحكام





OMAN'S GDP REACHES OVER RO 9.5 BILLION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's gross domestic product (GDP) at constant prices rose by 1.7 per cent at the end of the first quarter of 2024, totalling RO 9.537 billion, up from RO 9.373 billion in the same period of 2023.

Preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information revealed that crude oil activities fell by 3.3 per cent, registering RO 2.554 billion, while natural gas activities increased by 3 per cent, reaching RO 437.100 million.

Non-oil activities saw a 4.5 per cent rise, amounting to RO 6.803 billion by the end of the first quarter of 2024, compared to RO 6.511 billion at the same time in 2023.

Industrial activities recorded RO 1.988 billion in the first quarter of this year, up from RO 1.881 billion in the first quarter of 2023. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing activities totalled RO 219 million, while service activities were valued at RO 4.596 billion. – ONA

Oman launches first phase of combating hidden trade

MUSCAT: Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) on Tuesday announced the implementation of the first phase of the decision to combat hidden trade in Muscat Governorate, Al Batinah South Governorate and Dhofar Governorate.

“Seeking to combat the hidden trade activities in Oman and limit its economic repercussions on business owners and the community, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announces the first phase of implementing the resolution to combat hidden trade, provided



that inspections of commercial activities are included in the first phase the governorates of Muscat, Al Batinah North and Dhofar,” a statement from the ministry said.

To report cases of hidden trade, call 80000070 or info@tejarah.gov.om

Al Saqri highlights Oman’s digital transformation at United Nations session

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, chaired discussions on Oman's pivotal role in advancing sustainable development in the Middle East during the session on “Sustainable Development Goals Policies in the Arab Region,” on July 15, organised by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) at the headquarters of the Permanent Mission of the Sultanate of Oman in New York.

In his address, Dr Al Saqri emphasised Oman's commitment to keeping pace with the rapid global development of advanced technologies and their applications, particularly artificial intelligence, to open new horizons for the future economy and economic diversification.



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri
Minister of Economy

Dr Al Saqri highlighted Oman's strategic goals in digital transformation, noting that the national digital programme aims to build and develop a thriving digital economy and provide a safe and advanced infrastructure that supports digital government, digital business and digital society.

He stressed that Oman's adoption of digital transformation is a foundation for driving development and is integral to its national strategies and legislation, ensuring alignment with global advancements in research, innovation and advanced technologies.

The Minister pointed out that Oman ranked among the best countries in the Internet speed index in 2023, a testament to its progress in digital infrastructure.

He outlined key initiatives under Oman's digital transformation strategy, which include enhancing the digital society with the goal of contributing 10 per cent to the GDP by the end of Oman Vision 2040, integrating artificial intelligence in school education and developing major cultural centres into smart cities.

Further initiatives include the National Digital Economy Programme, which encompasses e-commerce, cybersecurity, digital government transformation, digital industries and infrastructure, artificial intelligence and advanced technologies.

The Oman Technology Fund ranks first in the Middle East and North Africa among venture capital funds specialising in bold capital investments.

There is also a Centre of Excellence for Advanced

Communication Technologies and Internet of Things (IoT), a strategic plan for the Judicial Council, and a unified municipal system for Muscat Municipality.

The National Digital Health Strategy leverages industrial revolution technologies such as virtual medicine, artificial intelligence and big data for efficient and quality healthcare outcomes.

Technology is also being used in environmental monitoring to develop techniques for reducing emissions and improving energy efficiency.

The innovation platform ‘Innovate Oman’ provides a comprehensive digital platform for innovative activities, maximising scientific research outputs and knowledge production for economic returns.

Oman is expanding strategic agreements with companies like Oracle and establishing investment funds in Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies.

The Government Digital Transformation Program includes over 30 projects and initiatives, such as digital access policies and launching electronic services like the authentication system, litigation portal, Royal Oman Police application and Shifa application.

Additionally, an environmental monitoring database has been established. Dr Al Saqri concluded by reaffirming Oman's commitment to sustainable development goals and its proactive approach to leveraging technology for national growth and prosperity.

IGC unveils new gas application portal for Oman customers

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The wholly government-owned Integrated Gas Company SAOC (IGC), currently the sole aggregator and supplier of natural gas to Oman's ever expanding portfolio of customers, has announced the launch of a dedicated online portal for the handling of all gas requests.

The new ‘Gas Application Portal’, incorporated into the company's official website (<https://www.igcoman.om/>), is now online, said IGC in a post on Sunday, July 14, 2024.

“All natural gas requests will

now be centrally processed only via the Gas Application Portal,” IGC, a subsidiary of the Ministry of Finance, said. The online facility enables users to, among other things, submit requests for natural gas; manage current requests, receive feedback, and check the status of active applications; and receive and manage related Natural Gas Sale Agreements (NGSAs).

The activation of the digital portal builds on IGC's role as the ‘Shipper’ of natural gas, a prerogative vested until last year with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.



As sole ‘shipper’ of natural gas, IGC presently supplies gas as fuel and feedstock to as many as 130 customers across Oman.

This is in addition to the company's broad mandate to manage allocations, assets, rights and obligations as well as

purchase, sale, transportation, import, and export of natural gas and its related products.

As the sole Shipper presently, IGC buys gas from an array of gas producers and sells it to as many as 130 consumers distributed across the length and breadth of Oman.

Transportation and distribution of the gas is handled by OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the sole owner and operator of the country's roughly 4,000-kilometre-long National Gas Transportation Network (NGTN).

An estimated 39.4 billion cubic metres (BCM) of gas was supplied

to IGC's diverse customer base, comprising plants for LNG, power generation and water desalination, oil and gas and industrial and commercial (for example, petrochemical, fertiliser, aluminium and steel plants), as well as manufacturing clusters and other end-users.

All of these volumes were procured from six gas producers: Petroleum Development Oman, BP Oman, Dolphin Energy, Oxy, OQ Exploration & Production (OQ EP) and ARA Petroleum. Together, they fed 39.8 BCM of gas into OQGN's network that year.

Bank Muscat clinches digital bank award from MEED

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision and recognition of its commitment to providing the best digital banking services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has recently been awarded the Best Digital Bank in Oman at the coveted MEED Global Excellence Awards.

These awards recognise the leading banking institutions for their excellence in the digital banking sphere across the region and which stand out in terms of providing customers with innovative banking solutions that aim to enhance customer experience and facilitate their access to various services and facilities.

Bank Muscat's selection came after a robust evaluation process and discussions with experts in the field worldwide. At a grand ceremony held in Dubai, Mohammed bin Sultan al Habsi, the representative of Bank

Muscat's office in UAE, received the award on behalf of the Bank. The event was attended by officials representing major institutions and companies across the Middle East and the world.

Speaking on this honouring achievement, Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager, Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are pleased about winning the Excellence Award for the Best Digital Bank in Oman category. This recognition underscores the Bank's commitment to satisfying the current needs of customers.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to MEED for honouring Bank Muscat with this prestigious award.

Highlighting the Bank's pioneering role in digital banking, Bank Muscat has set and developed a strategic plan to implement modern technological advancements and global digital



trends aiming to foster a digital society and better serve customers through the launch of innovative

projects and initiatives." Al Raisi added: "Currently, customers rely on the Bank's

digital platforms, including its Mobile Banking App, that enable seamless, smooth, and rapid

access to banking services.

Bank Muscat will continue to exert more effort to improve its offerings and facilities to enhance the banking experience of customers, thus, meeting their aspirations and needs.

We would like to deliver our thanks to Bank Muscat's customers for their continuous trust in the digital services and solutions provided to them."

From his side, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, commented: "Recognising Bank Muscat with this coveted global award reflects its commitment to strategically implementing technological advancements to serve customers throughout the Bank's digital evolution journey.

The Bank continuously strives to enhance its suite of banking services and facilities through its digital platforms as well as branch network."



DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum celebrates first anniversary

MUSCAT: In the heart of the city, DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum has spent the past year crafting moments of luxury, warmth and comfort for each guest who walked through its doors.

As we celebrate our first anniversary, we reflect on the journey that brought us here and look forward to the opportunities ahead. We commemorate this milestone with gratitude to our guests, our team members' dedication to service, and our promise of continued excellence in hospitality.

Rami Farhat, General Manager, says, "Our journey over the past year has been nothing short of remarkable. We are incredibly proud of our team's dedication and the unwavering support from our guests and partners. Each recognition reaffirms our commitment to providing exceptional experiences and exceeding expectations."

Over the past year, the hotel made sure to have a positive impact on the local community, hence we took part in various activities such as

visiting to support children with disabilities, participating in Earth Week through garbage removal at the beach, gift-giving at Dar Al Hanan (Home Away from Home) by Oman Cancer Association, as well as taking part in the grocery donation for World Food Day 2023 Inter-hotels challenge, and joining the friendly competition at HORECA 2024.

"To commemorate the hotel's anniversary, we are pleased to announce our special promotions. We have great offers for room rates, promotions on gym memberships, and the Collective Cafe. As we celebrate our first anniversary, we extend our deepest gratitude to our loyal guests, dedicated team members, and supportive partners.

Your trust and enthusiasm have fuelled our journey, and we are excited for the future as we strive to deliver exceptional service and unforgettable stays at DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum. Here's to continuing our legacy of excellence and hospitality in the years to come," Farhat added.

ELEVATE YOUR DRIVING EXPERIENCE WITH LINCOLN'S LATEST SUMMER OFFER

MUSCAT: Indulge in the exquisite timeless elegance and refined craftsmanship of Lincoln's premium SUV range.

Experience Lincoln's latest summer promotion with additional service and registration incentives across Lincoln models.

New Lincoln Owners can now benefit from upgraded service of up to 100,000 km and free first-year registration. The offer is valid from June 2 to August 1, 2024.



Head to the Lincoln dealership in Muscat (Wattayah) to experience outstanding designs and performance-oriented vehicles. Owning a Lincoln is a premium-power experience.

The new offer entitles customers to additional service benefits and a registration fee waiver for the first year. A Lincoln representative commented. "We aim to enhance the luxurious ownership experience.

Customers can benefit from our exclusive after-sale service and state-of-the-art service facilities by trained professionals," he further added. Lincoln's premium range includes the Nautilus, Aviator, Corsair and Navigator. Select from a range of powerful SUVs, built with premium craftsmanship, high-technology safety and

connectivity features.

The Lincoln is the perfect choice for a summer getaway with family and off-roaders.

Embark on the next road trip in the 5-seater mid-size Nautilus powered by a turbocharged 2.0-litre engine that produces 250 horsepower and 380 Nm torque mated with an 8-speed automatic transmission.

The engine is exceedingly fuel-efficient and delivers optimal power output.

Elevate the experience with seamless connectivity with Android Auto Play and Apply Car play compatibility, wireless charging options, smart exit and entry systems, powerful LED headlamps with AHS, front-rear and side airbag protection, anti-lock braking system and a plethora of other features.

The Navigator powered by a twin-turbo V6, 3.5L GTDI engine that produces a thrilling 440 horsepower and 691 Nm of torque and paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift paddle activation.

Easily switch between driving modes with a beautiful animation display, ambient lighting and daytime running LED lights.

Command the road with Lincoln's 22" polished aluminium wheels and the night-time illuminated Lincoln logo to set off a journey of a lifetime.

The Lincoln Aviator, a mid-sized 4x4 makes a bold presence with an inspiring design and sleek profile. The Aviator offers premium capability in a three-row 7-seater setting.

Under the hood, the Aviator is powered by a twin-turbocharged

3.0-litre V6 engine paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission.

It delivers an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration.

The Lincoln Aviator offers an engaging driving experience with Lincoln Drive Modes' five signature settings — Normal, Conserve, Excite, Slippery and Deep Conditions.

Equipped with Lincoln Co-Pilot 360, an integrated driver-assist technology, includes Evasive Steering Assist, Reverse Brake Assist, Active Park Assist Plus and Adaptive Cruise Control with Traffic Jam Assist.

Traffic Jam Assist combines Stop-and-Go, Lane Centring and newly developed Speed Sign Recognition to provide a seamless journey experience.

Charm Thai to host exquisite royal feast and pairing menus

MUSCAT: Charm Thai at Crowne Plaza Muscat, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre(OCEC) is set to host two extraordinary culinary events this July: A Royal Feast Menu on July 19 and a Grape Pairing Menu on July 25.

These special events promise to deliver an unparalleled dining experience, showcasing the finest in Thai cuisine.

Charm Thai at Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC is a gastronomic oasis that invites food enthusiasts to embark on an authentic Thai culinary adventure.

The award-winning Charm Thai restaurant offers a captivating journey through the rich and diverse flavours of Thailand, promising to immerse foodies in a consummate gastronomic experience.

Royal Feast Menu
On July 19, Charm Thai will host

a Royal Feast Menu that promises an extraordinary family-style dining experience. Guests will be treated to a variety of traditional Thai dishes, starting with an array of delightful starters.

The menu includes Goong Sa-Rong, which features crisp-fried prawns wrapped in yellow noodles, and Jang Ron Pla, red curry marinated hammour cakes with coconut flakes.

Additionally, Tung Thong offers root vegetable money bags with shiitake mushrooms, Saku Sai Gai provides steamed sago seed with minced chicken, and Nua Yang Nam Jim presents char-grilled beef striploin with e-san sauce.

For the main course, diners can savour Ped Obb Nam Pong, a 24-hour Thai herb marinated and slow-roasted whole duck.

This exquisite dish is complemented by several



delectable sides, including Chu-Chee Goong Nang, red curry jumbo prawns with Kaffir lime, and Gai Phad Mad Ma-Moung, wok-fried

chicken and cashew nuts.

Also, on offer are Phad Ka-Na Hed Hom, stir-fried broccoli and shiitake mushrooms in oyster

sauce, Phad Thai Goong Yai, stir-fried rice noodles with prawns, tamarind sauce, and roasted nuts, and Kao Suay, steamed jasmine rice.

The meal concludes with a delightful dessert of Thai exotic fruit salad and Thai sticky rice with sweet mango and coconut rice balls.

Grape Pairing Menu
On July 25, Charm Thai will offer a sophisticated Grape Pairing Menu, designed to highlight the harmony between exquisite Thai dishes and grapes/beverages.

The evening begins with Goong Thod Phuket, a crisp-fried jumbo prawn wrapped in rice vermicelli served on a Thai spiced exotic fruit salsa, paired with Spain.

The second course features Aok Ped Yang, char-grilled marinated duck breast served on a bed of King Asparagus and drizzled with Tamarind sauce, paired with New

Zealand. This is followed by Gai Tom Kra-Ti, a tender chicken breast stewed in coconut milk and young galangal, paired with Australia.

For the main course, guests can choose between Nua Ko-Rat Yang Prick Thai, char-grilled Angus beef with green curry baby potatoes and Isaan dressing, or Pla Thod Prick Gaeng, crisp-fried seabass fillet served with creamy red curry sauce on a bed of som tum.

Both dishes are paired with New Zealand. The dessert, Mamuang Nam Dok Mai-Katisod, a brule'd coconut and mango galette served with coconut gelato, is paired with a refreshing Mango Cooler.

Food tasting event
Charm Thai at Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC invited journalists and influencers for an exclusive food tasting event, showcasing their Royal Feast and Grape Pairing menus.



Sustainable fish feed initiative launched in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, JULY 16

A feasibility study on using Azolla as a raw material for fish feed in Oman has been launched through a significant initiative by the Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC).

This SME empowerment programme, part of the Zubair Corporation, has facilitated a landmark agreement between Tuhlub, a participant in its Direct Support Programme (DSP), and the Leaders Consultancies and Development Centre. This collaboration aims to explore the potential of Azolla in enhancing food security within the Sultanate of Oman.

Azolla, an aquatic fern and small leafed floating plant, is known for its high protein content, essential amino acids and mineral richness. Its utilisation in the feed industry offers several advantages, such as availability, cost-effectiveness and sustainability.

Azolla can serve as a valuable



This collaboration aims to explore the potential of Azolla in enhancing food security within the Sultanate of Oman.

replacement for costly protein sources like fish oil and fish meal, depending on the feeding behaviours of the fish species.

This initiative underscores the Zubair Corporation's dedication to sustainability. The Zubair EDC has elevated standards for its DSP initiative, recognising members who demonstrate exceptional dedication and follow the centre's

recommendations.

Projects must exhibit strategic planning and in-depth feasibility studies, emphasising a commitment to best business practices supported by Zubair EDC.

Ali Shaker, Head of Business Development and Partnerships at Zubair EDC, stated, "This feasibility study agreement

showcases our commitment to supporting DSP members in exploring innovative solutions that can boost food security in Oman. We are eager to see the study's outcomes and hope the Tuhlub project sets a precedent for sustainable initiatives, inspiring future generations towards innovative, sustainable business models aligned with

Oman Vision 2040. We also extend our gratitude to Ominvest for their ongoing support of young entrepreneurs and sustainable business practices in Oman."

Zubair EDC has been actively assisting Tuhlub in various business development areas, recently helping secure multiple research bodies for the comprehensive feasibility study on Azolla in fish feeding.

Zaher al Alawi, CEO of Tuhlub, said, "This feasibility study is a vital step in innovating sustainable practices in the fish feed industry. With Zubair EDC's support and the expertise of Leaders Consultancies and Development Centre, we are optimistic about discovering new methods to enhance food security in the Sultanate of Oman."

Ominvest, the sponsor of the DSP's Tuhlub project, has a longstanding commitment to supporting youth and SMEs, fostering entrepreneurship, and achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Waleed bin Nasser al Yarubi,

Chief People, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Officer, remarked, "We believe in the potential of our youth and the importance of supporting SMEs to drive innovation and economic growth. This feasibility study on Azolla-based fish feeding exemplifies our commitment to fostering sustainable and impactful ventures."

Leaders Consultancies and Development Centre, known for extensive agricultural services, will execute the study. Their expertise in plant and animal production, farm management and agricultural extension makes them well-suited for this critical research.

Eid al Shukaili, Manager of Leaders Consultancies and Development Centre, added, "We are excited to collaborate with Zubair EDC and Tuhlub on this groundbreaking feasibility study. Our experience positions us well to explore Azolla's viability as a sustainable fish feed component, potentially revolutionising the industry."

Oman oil price drops to \$83.81 per barrel

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman oil for next September delivery reached \$83.81 per barrel. On Tuesday, the price of Oman oil witnessed a decrease of 77 cents compared to Monday with \$84.58.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery this July reached \$83.89 per barrel, down \$5.41 compared to the price for delivery last June.

Meanwhile, international oil prices declined more than 1 per cent on Tuesday on worries of a slowing Chinese economy crimping demand and despite a growing consensus the US Federal Reserve could begin cutting its key interest rate as soon as September.

Brent futures were down \$1.31, or 1.54 per cent, to \$83.54 a barrel at 1317 GMT, while US WTI crude was down \$1.41, or 1.72 per cent, to \$80.50.

The weaker Chinese economic data "cast some doubts on whether market participants are being overly optimistic"



regarding China's oil demand outlook, IG market strategist Yeap Jun Rong wrote in an e-mail.

The world's second-largest economy grew 4.7 per cent in April-June, official data showed, its slowest rate since the first quarter of 2023 and missing a 5.1-per cent forecast in a Reuters poll. It slowed from the previous quarter's 5.3 per cent expansion, hamstrung by a protracted property downturn and job insecurity.

"Its 2Q GDP and retail sales figures had surprised on the downside by a significant margin, while anticipation for stronger stimulus measures at the Third Plenum may face the risk of disappointment." — **Agencies**

Abraj Energy Services commences operations of second rig in Wafra oil field

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 16

Abraj Energy Services announces the successful and early commencement of operations for its second drilling rig in the Wafra oil field.

This achievement, following final acceptance from multiple inspecting authorities, marks a pivotal step in Abraj's strategic expansion into the Kuwaiti market, solidifying its standing as a premier provider of oil and gas services in the region.

This latest deployment is part of a comprehensive contract with Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) and Saudi Chevron, showcasing Abraj's unwavering commitment to delivering top-tier, efficient drilling services.

The mobilisation of the first rig in March 2024 set a high bar for excellence, and the early commencement of this second rig underscores Abraj's



The new 1,500 HP fast-moving drilling rig represents one of the most advanced rigs in operation today.

operational prowess and ability to meet the stringent standards of its trusted partners.

The new 1,500 HP fast-moving drilling rig, equipped with cutting-edge AI drilling technology, represents one of the most advanced rigs in operation.

Its automated rig package ensures safe and optimal

performance, enabling Abraj to provide efficient, reliable and secure drilling operations, thereby setting a new industry benchmark.

"We are thrilled to commence operations with our second rig in the Wafra oil field ahead of schedule," said Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy

Services.

"This milestone is a testament to our team's dedication and expertise in delivering superior drilling services. Our collaboration with KGOC and Saudi Chevron highlights our commitment to operational excellence and our ability to support our clients in achieving their production goals."

The final acceptance of the second rig signifies the culmination of rigorous preparation and close collaboration between Abraj and its clients.

This successful deployment enhances Abraj's operational footprint in Kuwait and demonstrates its capability to execute complex projects efficiently and safely.

The early commencement of the second rig mirrors the success of the first, highlighting the team's exceptional efficiency and dedication.

IMF maintains 2024 global economy growth forecast

WASHINGTON: The IMF held its global growth expectations for 2024 steady in a report on Tuesday even as it cut forecasts for the United States and Japan, while warning of inflation risks and trade tensions ahead.

The International Monetary Fund expects the world economy to grow 3.2 per cent this year, unchanged from its April forecast, according to its World Economic Outlook update.

"Global activity and world trade firmed up at the turn of the year, with trade spurred by strong exports from Asia, particularly in the technology sector," said the fund.

For 2025, it expects global growth of 3.3 per cent. But even as many countries saw better growth

than anticipated in the first three months this year, the IMF flagged what it called notable surprises in Japan and the United States.

The Washington-based lender also cautioned that upside risks to inflation have increased, with services prices holding up disinflation.

This increases the prospect of interest rates staying elevated for longer, "in the context of escalating trade tensions and increased policy uncertainty."

An area of concern is trade and industrial policy, with countries potentially adopting measures that impact the global economy's integration, said IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas.

Asked if risk assessments



Cranes and containers are seen at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, California. — Reuters

have shifted after the attempted assassination of former US president Donald Trump, the Republican Party's nominee in November's election, Gourinchas

noted the fund will consider its implications.

While world growth appears stable, the IMF has lowered projections for the United States

CHINA AND INDIA ARE EXPECTED TO POWER ACTIVITY IN ASIA – WITH CHINA'S 2024 FORECAST REVISED UP TO 5.0 PER CENT ON A PRIVATE CONSUMPTION REBOUND AND STRONG EXPORTS.

and Japan.

US growth in 2024 was downgraded to 2.6 per cent, 0.1 percentage points below April's forecast, due to a "slower-than-expected start to the year," said the fund. Japan's economy was seen expanding 0.2 percentage points less than expected, by 0.7 per cent this year.

This was mainly thanks to temporary supply disruptions and weak private investment in the first quarter. The euro area meanwhile

is showing signs of recovery, with relatively strong services activity, Gourinchas said, although manufacturing shows weakness.

China and India are expected to power activity in Asia — with China's 2024 forecast revised up to 5.0 per cent on a private consumption rebound and strong exports.

India, meanwhile, is set to grow 7.0 per cent, partly on better prospects for consumption.

Gourinchas also flagged risks to China stemming from weak confidence and unresolved property sector problems.

Should domestic demand weaken, China would rely more on the external sector — a situation that countries like the United States are pushing back against. — **AFP**

Revolut says most scams originate on social media

Revolut, the global neobank and financial technology company with headquarters in London, reports that its branch in Ireland finds that most scams reported to them start on three social media platforms. Almost 55% of scam cases in the second half of last year came through Facebook, Instagram and X. Revolut wants the government to take “urgent measures to stop fraud at source”, and for tech and telecoms firms to be held liable for scams that result in customers losing money. According to the fintech, a further 6.8% of scam cases in the second half of last year originated from telecoms — phone calls, e-mails or SMS messages. This meant, overall, close to 86% of all scams originated from



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

either social media or telecoms. General manager of Revolut’s Irish branch, Maurice Murphy, said: “Revolut has more than 2.5 million customers in Ireland and as a regulated financial institution, we place great emphasis on protecting them from malicious scams. Through our continued data analysis, it has become increasingly clear that social media platforms, in particular, as well as phone calls and SMS messages are the primary originator of scams”. He added: “We are committed to preventing scams through our continued analysis, fraud-prevention methods, and collaboration with the broader industry, but there is no denying this is an issue that also needs to be tackled at source. We have a team of 2,500

people dedicated to preventing fraud 24/7, (but) we believe banks and financial institutions should be the last line of defence, not the only line of defence.” According to a return on the Lobbying Register, Revolut asked for government action on the issue at a recent meeting between one of its senior officials and an assistant secretary in the Department of Finance. The digital bank’s global head of government affairs, Adam Gagen, said there was a need for “urgent measures to stop fraud at source”, in relation to fake phone calls, texts and websites. Gagen told the department official that Revolut would like to see heightened national and EU-level fraud responses, including “requiring” tech and telecoms firms to stop the fake tests and calls.

Revolut also wants these firms to be “held liable” for financial frauds that are enabled by fake messages, according to the return on the Lobbying Register. Asked to clarify Revolut’s position, Murphy said: “Revolut’s data clearly highlights that online platforms and telecoms companies need to be part of the solution to prevent fraud at source. “Therefore, we believe that online platforms and telecoms companies should take an active role when fraud originates on their platforms to help prevent innocent victims from facing the financial and emotional impact of this devastating crime.” Revolut has said most scams reported to it in the UK started on Meta’s social media platforms, which include WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, and the

trend is similar across Europe, with 61% of scams starting on one of Meta’s sites. Gagen has posted on LinkedIn that Revolut believes the UK government needs to create a real incentive for change “by forcing Big Tech platforms to help directly reimburse customers who are scammed through their platforms.” Head of UK government affairs at Revolut, Rory Tanner, has said: “We need a ‘polluter pays’ policy, where the company that enables the fraud is directly involved in financially sharing the liability for reimbursing victims.” According to the most recent figures from ComReg, the telecoms regulator, there are about 365,000 cases of fraudulent scams a year, with the quantifiable harm being conservatively estimated at 300 million euros a year.

China holds conclave to strategise on economy

Xi Jinping, China’s leader, and 370 or so other Communist Party officials will assemble in Beijing, away from the public eye, to review a plan intended to shake the world’s second-biggest economy out of its malaise. Xi will sit in the front of a conference hall — most likely in the Jingxi Hotel, a 60-year-old institution with Soviet-style architecture — and the party loyalists arrayed before him are near certain to acclaim his plans during the four-day meeting. The real test may come later, as any changes in policy or ideology filter through the layers of government. Success or failure will largely turn on whether Xi is able to win renewed confidence from the wider Chinese population, as well as foreign investors who have grown disenchanted with his policies.

China’s businesses and consumers have suffered in recent years through stumbling growth, a property sector meltdown and a blight of debt among local governments. Foreign companies have recoiled from a market they once clamored to enter. “A lot of uncertainty feeds into very low consumer sentiment, very low investor sentiment,” Bert Hofman, a former World Bank country director for China, said in a talk this month about the meeting. “This is a point in time where China needs to show its cards.” Party leaders are orchestrating the conclave — a so-called Third Plenum of the Central Committee — as a stage to promote strategies for what Xi calls “high quality” growth. In recent history, Third Plenum meetings, named for their place in the five-year cycle of committee sessions, were when Chinese leaders such as Deng Xiaoping ignited enthusiasm for their modernisation goals. China has many, many factories. It is building even more. Provincial governments and national ministries have been rushing for months to announce how they want to carry out Xi’s latest economic slogan: harnessing “new quality



CHRIS BUCKLEY

The author reports on China and Taiwan for The New York Times from Taipei, focused on politics, social change and security and military issues.



KEITH BRADSHER

The author is a business and economics reporter and the Beijing bureau chief of The New York Times.



An assembly line for Chinese electric vehicle (EV) maker Zeekr at a plant in Hangzhou Bay, China. —The New York Times

productive forces” to achieve more sustainable growth. In practice, that has meant building factories. China already produces almost a third of the world’s manufactured goods, but is making a further push. Among its plans, China intends to deploy more robots and other means of automation to offset a shortage of workers willing to toil in factories. The solar panel, electric car and battery industries, all favoured by the government these days, are replacing older industries more closely tied to the real estate sector, including steel and cement manufacturing. Xi is talking up the private sector. Will companies believe him? While Xi’s enthusiasm for high-tech growth is clear, he has been ambivalent about the role of foreign firms and China’s own private businesses. They will look for new incentives or assurances when the Central Committee meeting unveils the party’s goals. “The real question is to what degree does this Plenum shift the balance between the state and the market,” said Neil Thomas, a fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute. Reviving private-sector enthusiasm may not be easy.

Regulatory crackdowns bruised China’s tech giants and other private firms, leaving investors doubtful about whether Xi saw a place for them in his plans. “Xi can talk a big game about making life easier for foreign investors and private firms,” Thomas said, “but if they don’t see anything change on the ground, then it’s all for naught.” What will it take to get Chinese consumers to start spending? Xi’s hopes for an economy built on artificial intelligence and automation will have a shaky foundation unless China can deliver more opportunity and certainty to workers and farmers. Without improved welfare, health coverage and old-age care, many Chinese people will remain reluctant to spend more and save less. China’s leaders have recognised the consumption problem for decades. But for all of China’s economic advances, including its recent push in electric cars, many people still earn and spend little. One outcome is that China relies heavily on overseas markets for sales, generating tensions with countries that absorb the surges of exports. Several years ago, Xi promised to give priority to “common

prosperity” — narrowing China’s wealth gap — and the theme may return at this week’s meeting. Zhang Bin, an economist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who briefed Xi in May, wrote recently that the government should make “promoting social justice” a pillar of policy. But municipal officials, especially in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, have long-resisted a crucial measure that would help level the social field in China: pulling down barriers to household registration, or Hukou, that make it hard for rural migrants to settle permanently in many cities, or even for urban residents to move between cities. Can Xi fix China’s shaky fiscal plumbing? China’s success in building infrastructure over the past three decades was underpinned by an unusual funding structure that is now losing steam. Finding a replacement, in a country where many are averse to paying taxes, is one of the party’s biggest challenges. Fixing the fiscal plumbing is not easy. Many Chinese people bought into real estate, seeing it as one of the few safe investments available to them, and they resist the idea of a nationwide property tax. For now, the Ministry of Finance has been helping indebted local governments borrow more money. Possibilities for a longer-term solution include the national government sharing more revenues from various taxes, possibly including levies on gasoline or tobacco. ‘Great expectations’ for changes are unlikely to be fulfilled. When the meeting ends on Thursday, the party leadership will issue a communiqué summarising its decisions. If past meetings are any guide, any detailed proposals will be made public only days later. Xi has been here before. He started a detailed programme for reforms at a Third Plenum in 2013, but by many measures the promised economic and social changes remain incomplete. This time, experienced economists are tempering expectations of big changes in course from Xi. “Many people have great expectations for the Third Plenum, looking toward another wave of reforms and major moves,” Yao Yang, a professor of economics at Peking University, said in a speech to Chinese business executives last month. “I want to tell you all that’s taking a lot for granted.” — The New York Times

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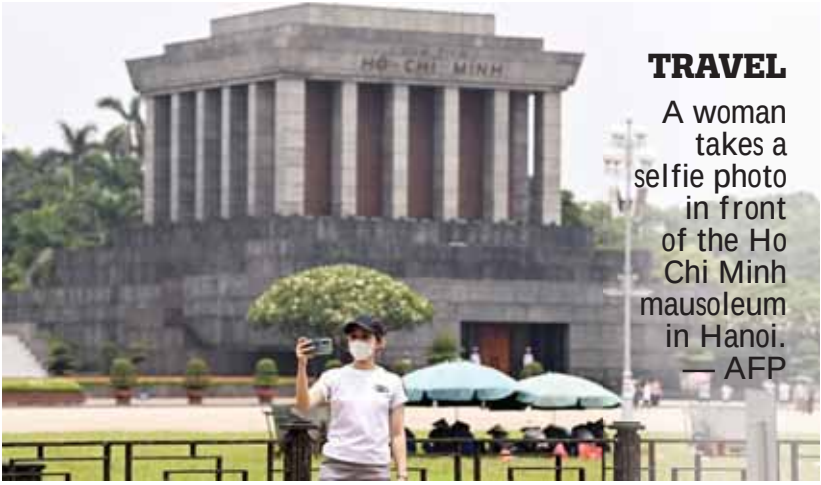
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TRAVEL
A woman takes a selfie photo in front of the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum in Hanoi. — AFP



LIFESTYLE
A family rides a bike along a street amid rainfall in Chandigarh. — AFP



MUSIC
US musician Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band perform during their 2024 World Tour at the Strawberry Arena in Stockholm, Sweden. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
The three-day festival celebrates the best in anime, animation, cosplay, gaming, comics, music, and more, Miami Beach. — AFP

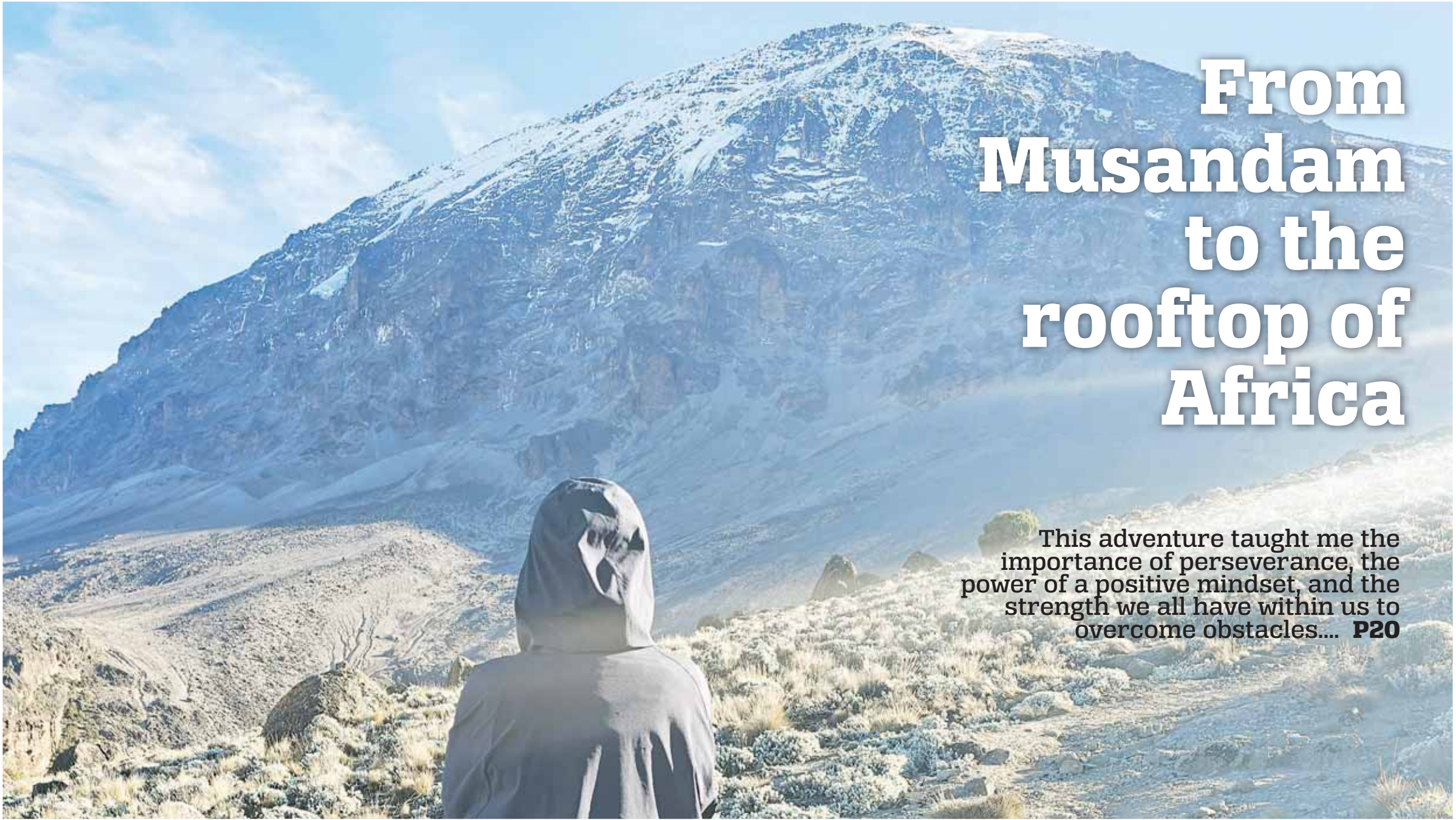


ART
A man draws a painting to sell as he receives orders at his home in Jelekong, West Java. — AFP

art & life

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From Musandam to the rooftop of Africa

This adventure taught me the importance of perseverance, the power of a positive mindset, and the strength we all have within us to overcome obstacles.... **P20**

Webb telescope reveals wild weather on cosmic brown dwarfs

THE WEATHER REPORT is in for the two brown dwarfs — celestial bodies bigger than a planet but smaller than a star — closest to us. It is inclement, to put it mildly: blazingly hot, with a toxic chemical cocktail swirling in the atmosphere and clouds of silicate particles blowing around like a Saharan dust storm. Researchers have used James Webb Space Telescope observations to conduct detailed examinations of the atmospheric conditions on brown dwarfs, specifically a pair that orbit each other around six light years from Earth, quite close by cosmic standards. A light-year is the

distance light travels in a year; 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km). The Webb data provided a three-dimensional look at how the weather changed over the course of a brown dwarf's rotation — the larger of the two taking seven hours and the smaller five hours — with multiple layers of clouds found at different atmospheric depths. Both have atmospheres dominated by hydrogen and helium, with trace amounts of water vapour, methane and carbon monoxide. The temperature at their cloud tops was about 1,700 degrees Fahrenheit (925 degrees Celsius), similar



to a candle flame. "In this study, we created the most detailed 'weather maps' for any brown dwarf to date," said astronomer Beth Biller of the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Astronomy, lead author of the study published on Monday in the scientific

journal Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society. Brown dwarfs are neither a star nor a planet, but something in between. They give off their own light thanks to their sheer heat — "just like you would see embers in a fire glowing red because of how hot

they are," Biller said. It was that light that the researchers observed with Webb. Unlike stars, brown dwarfs do not have nuclear fusion occurring at their core. "Like planets, but unlike stars, brown dwarfs can also have clouds made out of precipitates in their atmospheres. However, while we have water clouds on Earth, the clouds on brown dwarfs are much hotter and likely made up of hot silicate particles — kind of like a very hot Saharan dust storm," Biller said. The current scientific thinking is that brown dwarfs form from large clouds of gas and dust like stars do, but fall short of mass sufficient to ignite nuclear fusion. Their composition is similar to gas giant planets like Jupiter, our solar system's largest planet. Their mass is up to 80 times greater than Jupiter's. By comparison, the sun's mass is about 1,000 times greater than Jupiter's. The two brown dwarfs examined by Webb formed about 500 million years ago.

Each has a diameter comparable to Jupiter's. One is 35 times more massive than Jupiter, and the other 30 times. Webb discerned how their light varied as different atmospheric features rotated in and out of view. "The fast rotation of both objects helps to drive their weather patterns, and if you could actually directly see the cloud-top structure, you probably would be able to see bands and vortices, like the Great Red Spot, as you do on Jupiter," Biller said. "In the future, similar techniques could be used to study weather on potentially habitable exoplanets," Biller added, referring to planets beyond our solar system. Brown dwarfs are relatively common. About 1,000 are known, compared to more than 5,000 known exoplanets. Webb examines the cosmos mainly in the infrared, while its Hubble Space Telescope predecessor does so primarily at optical and ultraviolet wavelengths. — Reuters



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Taylor Swift
even larger
than life ahead
of German leg
of Eras Tour



A huge acrylic portrait of Taylor Swift is being created in the western German city of Gelsenkirchen, hosting three shows on the pop superstar's record-breaking Eras Tour. The artwork will be 90 square metres in size and three-dimensional – depending on the perspective, it will seem like Swift is jumping out of the ground toward the viewer. It took artists Vanessa and Lydia Hitzfeld four days to paint the artwork in the centre of Gelsenkirchen. Vanessa specialises in 3D Street art and has been painting projects with her mother Lydia for several years. "What particularly appeals to me is that you can use it later. It's not hanging in some gallery or someone's home, it's out in public," said Vanessa. "And people

have fun with it." Getting into the painting is expressly encouraged. Fans can stand on the painting at various points and take photos with Swift's likeness. In addition to the musician's face, the three-dimensional painting will also show many details associated with her and her music, such as butterflies, symbolising her debut album, Swift's lucky number 13, and a snake, which stands for her sixth studio album "Reputation." The picture should be ready on Tuesday evening, just in time for the first concert. The US singer will play three shows in Gelsenkirchen on July 17, 18 and 19. The city is expecting to host around 200,000 fans, according to spokesman Markus Schwardtmann. Further German shows will then follow in Hamburg and Munich. — dpa

The line
blurs
between
exclusivity
and
accessibility



COUTURE WEEK IN Paris is a reminder that the clothes many people consider to be the most splendid in the world are accessible to only a select few with means and connections. That doesn't mean the shows are not fun to see. This year's events, in late June, were full of thrills, thanks partly to presentations by designers Robert Wun; Nicolas Di Felice, who developed the newest Jean Paul Gaultier couture collection; and Daniel Roseberry of Schiaparelli, whose collection showed off his eye for timeless silhouettes and resplendent details. Another standout was Thom Browne, who used lighter fabrics to create intricate pieces that seemed practical and breathable – two words not often used to describe couture. Outside the shows, the style in the crowds was a mix of formal attire and street wear. Sartorially, it has become harder to tell the difference between fashion superfans (students, bloggers) and industry fixtures (editors, A-listers). The former group, largely because of technology, has greater access to the type of holy-grail clothes that were once primarily the domain of the latter. That might seem at odds with the premise of exclusive events like couture week. But in my opinion, the more people who look fabulous, the better. — NYT



From Musandam to the rooftop of Africa

SHEIKHA AL SHEYADI

In Swahili, 'Pole Pole' means 'slowly, slowly'. It is a phrase every climber on Mount Kilimanjaro becomes intimately familiar with. This simple yet profound philosophy guided me on my seven-day journey from the rugged terrain of Musandam, Oman, to the peak of Africa's highest mountain.

As a solo female Omani traveller, this adventure was not just about reaching the top, but also about preparation, determination and experiencing the beauty of the world.

Preparations in Musandam Governorate

Moving to Musandam Governorate last February for work, I found myself surrounded by its rugged beauty and unique landscapes. This region became my training ground, preparing me for the arduous climb ahead. The best training for me was climbing the zigzagging mountain staircase located in Khor Sham. For three months, I took a local boat from Khasab Port to Khor Sham, where I would tackle over 1,000 steps multiple times a week, with temperatures reaching 40 degrees Celsius. This rigorous routine built the strength and endurance I needed for Kilimanjaro. The steep and rocky terrain of Musandam mirrored many of the challenges I would later face on Kilimanjaro. The strenuous climbs in Musandam Governorate toughened my legs and lungs, making me resilient and prepared for the trek.

Mountain staircase

The mountain staircase is located between Khor Sham and Khor Najd, linking the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. It was created with the aim of allowing visitors to enjoy a hiking experience that extends over approximately a thousand steps. The stairs were constructed using

materials from nature, as mountain rocks were used in construction. From the top of the summit, where comfortable seating is available, one can see both sides of the sea, offering a majestic panoramic view from a height of 420 metres where the sea and the mountains blend. The staircase is illuminated at night with lights powered by solar panels and protective barriers made of wood and ropes were placed along the walkway.

Learning from others

In addition to my physical training, I also prepared by watching numerous videos from different bloggers who had climbed Kilimanjaro. For over four months, I immersed myself in these videos, learning from the experiences of those who had succeeded and failed. Despite this extensive preparation, I quickly realised that nothing can truly capture the experience until you live it yourself.

The journey begins

When I arrived in Tanzania, the adventure truly began. At the airport, the driver from the tour company greeted me warmly and emphasised the importance of a positive mindset for summiting Kilimanjaro, despite never having climbed himself. His words resonated as I began my journey. At the hotel, I met my guide, William, who asked if I needed to rent any equipment. I had everything except a jacket, poles and a sleeping bag which were crucial for the cold nights ahead. William's experience and knowledge were invaluable as we began our ascent.

The Climb

The ascent commenced through dense forests and rugged terrain, each step bringing me closer to the summit. Navigating changing landscapes and challenging altitudes, I encountered moments of fatigue and uncer-



tainty. Each day presented new challenges, but the support from William, the porters and the chef made all the difference. The porters carried heavy loads, setting up camps and preparing meals. The food was simple but nourishing: soups, pasta, rice and fresh fruits and vegetables which kept us fuelled for the strenuous days ahead.

Summit Night

Summit night was the most challenging part of the climb. Despite all my preparation, nothing could have fully prepared me for the altitude sickness I experienced. I couldn't sleep and suffered from headaches, nausea, and shortness of breath. At around 11 pm, the team provided me with biscuits and tea, but I was too sick to eat. I layered up with four layers of pants and

seven layers on top to brace against the cold.

As we climbed, the night was lit by the headlamps of countless climbers, all striving for the same goal: the Uhuru Peak. People sang to keep their spirits up, and guides encouraged their teams to keep moving. It was a surreal and awe-inspiring experience.

Nearing the summit

During the climb, my guide William often asked, "What is your name?" to check if I was okay. Although I was very sick from the altitude, I smiled and answered, "My name is William, today!" which was his name. This moment of humour helped keep our spirits high.

William's encouragement and support were invaluable, especially during breaks to catch my



breath and replenish with hot water amidst frozen water bottles. As I neared Stella Point (5,756m), just before Uhuru Peak, one of the guides spoke to William in Swahili, asking if I was okay.

He then came to me and said, "Imagine climbing Kilimanjaro as eating an elephant, and you've finished the whole elephant. All you have left is the tail." This motivating message gave me the push I needed, even though I was struggling to concentrate because of the altitude sickness.

Reaching the summit

Despite the physical and mental challenges, I finally reached the summit. The views of the glaciers were breathtaking, and the view of Kenya from the peak was a sight I will never forget. The sense of accomplishment was

overwhelming, knowing that I had pushed myself to my limits and succeeded.

After celebrating at the summit, we began our descent, feeling proud and exhausted.

Reflection

Looking back, the rigorous terrain in Musandam Governorate played a crucial role in my preparation for Kilimanjaro. The beauty and challenges of Musandam Governorate not only helped me physically but also mentally prepared me for the journey. This adventure taught me the importance of perseverance, the power of a positive mindset, and the strength we all have within us to overcome obstacles. By sharing my story, I hope to inspire others to pursue their dreams, no matter how daunting they may seem.