

National Award for Research

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation invited interested competitors to contest for the 2024 National Award for Research. Applicants may contest for the 11th edition of the award from May 12 until July 11, the ministry said. The award seeks to encourage researchers to conduct high-standard scholarly research studies that deal with national priorities and publish them in specialised journals. **DETAILS ON P4**

SUNRISE - 05:26 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:03 AM

DHUHR - 12:08 PM

ASR - 03:31 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:46 PM

ISHA - 08:04 PM



VISIT EXPLORES AREAS OF EXISTING COOPERATION

HM begins state visit to Kuwait today



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will pay a state visit to the State of Kuwait on Monday, during which he will meet Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait.

A statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect says: “In affirmation of the deep-rooted and fraternal relations biding the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state visit to Kuwait with effect from Monday, during which he will meet Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait. The visit stems from distinguished relations between the two sides. It also reflects the keenness of the two countries’ leaderships to push the joint cooperation towards wider horizons. The visit will explore areas of the existing cooperation between the two countries in various spheres and means of promoting them to serve interests and aspirations of the Omani and Kuwaiti peoples.”

Speaking about the visit, Jassim al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in a statement to Oman News Agency, underscored the significance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s visit to the State of Kuwait.

Al Budaiwi said, “This visit would boost the historical ties and relations between Oman and Kuwait, serving as a step to broaden strategic partnership. It reflects our mutual commitment to expanding cooperation and integration.” “The visit marks a significant milestone in the Gulf integration process, driven by the collective determination of Gulf leaders to pursue a shared vision for the security and prosperity of our peoples,” he stated.

ECONOMIC TIES

The Omani-Kuwaiti Joint Committee contributed to expanding the scope of cooperation between the two countries in many fields of economics, trade, education, scientific research, youth, civil service, environment and other various development fields. It also created trade and investment exchange, as represented by the signing of many agreements and memoranda of understanding in various fields.

In addition to the joint cooperation, there is direct coordination at the highest level between the two sides in multiple fields, including at the level of the GCC.

The evolving economic and trade relationship between Oman and Kuwait reflects their shared commitment to fostering growth and prosperity for both nations. **SEE ALSO P2 AND 3**



Brazil rain death toll reaches 143

RIO DE JANEIRO: The death toll from heavy rains in Brazil’s Rio Grande do Sul state rose to 143, the local civil defence government body said on Sunday, up from 136 in the previous day, while another 131 people remain unaccounted for.

On Saturday evening the government announced around 12.1 billion reais (\$2.34 billion) in emergency spending to deal with the crisis that has displaced more than 538,000 people in the state, out of a population of around 10.9 million. With this new money, more than 60 billion reais in federal funds has already been made available to the state, said the federal government in a statement on Saturday.

Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said the state will rebuild what was destroyed.

“We know that not everything can be recovered, mothers have lost their children and children have lost their mothers,” said Lula on social media X, in a statement to mark Mother’s Day.

On Saturday, US President Joe Biden issued a statement, saying that his administration is in contact with Brazil’s government to provide assistance.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the people impacted by this tragedy and the first responders working to rescue and provide medical care to families and individuals,” said Biden. – **AFP**

■ UNDERWATER MILITARY MUSEUM



The Ministry of Defence in collaboration with the Environment Authority is setting up an underwater museum by sinking decommissioned military hardware at Al Dimaniyat Islands Nature Reserve off the coasts of Al Seeb and Barka. This will also serve as an artificial reef to create an appropriate environment for coral reefs. – **ONA**

US to probe possible international law violations by Israel in Gaza Strip

WASHINGTON: The government of the United States said on Sunday it intends to conduct further investigations following the publication of a report on possible violations of international law by Israel.

“So we have a number of incidents that we continue to look at, to try to get the best possible assessment,” said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on US television on Sunday.

“Given the totality of what we’ve seen in terms of civilian suffering, in terms of children, women, men caught in this crossfire and a number of instances where Israel has not acted in a manner that’s consistent with international humanitarian law,” Blinken said.

However, “this is an extraordinarily complex military environment,” which is why it is not possible to make a final assessment, Blinken said.

Blinken was essentially echoing what the US State Department had previously conveyed in a report to the US Congress. The report stated that the US government believes it is possible that Israel may have violated international humanitarian law with weapons provided by the US in the Gaza

Strip. Due to the situation in the war zone, it is difficult to assess individual incidents or make conclusive findings.

At the beginning of February, President Joe Biden demanded written assurances from foreign governments that military aid from the US does not violate international law. Critics complained that the US government was now shirking a clear judgement.

Meanwhile, a conference of international donors in Kuwait pledged over \$2 billion in aid to Gaza as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an “immediate” ceasefire.

The conference, organised by the International Islamic Charitable Organisation (IICO) and UN humanitarian coordination agency OCHA, said the funds would be dispersed over two years, with the possibility of an extension.

The initiative is designed “to mobilise efforts to support life-saving humanitarian interventions in the Gaza Strip, and to support the prospects for early recovery for the population”, IICO general manager Bader Saud al Sumait said. **SEE ALSO P6**



A displaced Palestinian man pushes children in a trolley as they make their way towards Gaza City on Sunday. – **Reuters**



OMAN-KUWAIT TIES SET TO USHER IN A NEW ERA OF GROWTH

THE TWO COUNTRIES SHARE SIMILAR VISIONS AND GOALS AS THEY WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF DEVELOPMENT BASED ON ‘OMAN VISION 2040’ AND ‘KUWAIT PLAN 2035’

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT, MAY 12

The relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait are characterised by sincere brotherhood and cooperation. The highlight of Oman-Kuwait relations is the keen sense of brotherhood and mutual respect shown by the leaderships and people of both countries.

There is no doubt that these relations will become stronger and usher in a new era with the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Kuwait on Monday, as the visit represents an affirmation of the depth of ties between the leadership of the two brotherly countries and their people.

The discussion is expected to focus on ways of expanding frameworks to support and enhance the progress of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the most prominent issues of common interest, and the latest regional and international developments.

The Omani-Kuwaiti Joint Committee contributed to expanding the scope of cooperation between the two sister countries in many fields of economics, trade, education, scientific research, youth, civil service, environment, and other various development fields. It also created trade and investment exchange, as



represented by the signing of many agreements and memoranda of understanding in various fields.

In addition to the joint cooperation, there is direct coordination at the highest level between the two sides in multiple fields, including at the level of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, where citizens are treated. Each Gulf country treats the citizens of that country with regard to

education, healthcare, ownership, and transportation.

The evolving economic and trade relationship between Oman and Kuwait reflects their shared commitment to fostering growth and prosperity for both nations. The largest energy project in the region, the Duqm Refinery Project, a joint venture equally shared between Oman and Kuwait, exemplifies the depth of the fraternal

relations between the two countries.

The project aligns with Oman's strategy to enhance the value of oil and gas by converting crude oil into fuel products and petrochemical materials, boosting exports, and balancing payments.

The depth of the trade ties is evident from the keenness shown by the private sectors in the two countries to establish more partnerships, particularly

through small and medium-sized enterprises, in line with the visions of Oman and Kuwait.

When it comes to resolving regional or international crises and disputes, the leadership adopts a very diplomatic approach by respecting the sovereignty and independence of the states involved and adhering to the rules of law and international conventions.

The two countries also shared similar visions and goals. The two countries work together towards the realisation of a two-pronged approach to development based on Oman Vision 2040 and Kuwait Plan 2035.

The Oman Vision 2040 is its gateway to overcome challenges, keep pace with regional and global changes, generate and seize opportunities to foster economic competitiveness and social well-being, stimulate growth, and build confidence in all economic, social, and developmental relations nationwide.

With Kuwait Plan 2035, the Kuwaiti leadership aims to transform Kuwait into a financial and commercial hub for the region by the year 2035. To achieve this, the new national development agenda seeks enhanced competitiveness, increased productivity of the workforce, and reform of the oil-based political economy towards a knowledge economy driven by the private sector.

Kuwait journalists, citizens express happiness over HM's visit

KUWAIT: A number of Kuwaiti citizens and media professionals expressed their happiness over the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the State of Kuwait.

Mohammed Abdullatif al Bahar, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) for Arab Affairs, said that the visit of His Majesty the Sultan to the State of Kuwait has a great importance in terms of place and time. His Majesty is a dear guest of his brother HH Shaikh Meshal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait.

He added that over the decades, the State of Kuwaiti and the Sultanate of Omani maintained special relations based on the ties between the two leaderships and the two brotherly peoples that are deeply rooted in history. This is in addition to the consensus and conformity of visions regarding various issues and their common keenness to further



The streets of the Kuwaiti capital were decorated with the flags of the Sultanate of Oman to celebrate the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik reflecting the depth of fraternal bonds. — ONA

enhance relations.

Al Bahar stressed that the visit of His Majesty the Sultan to Kuwait represents an addition to an already advanced relations between two countries at both the official and popular levels and will mark a

milestone in the history of the Kuwaiti-Omani relations.

Dr Noura Abdullah, a Kuwait journalist expressed her happiness and pride over the Royal visit of His Majesty the Sultan, to the State of Kuwait, stressing the depth of the

political and social relations between the two brotherly countries since ancient times and their continuation at the present time as an example to follow.

She said that the visit addresses many important files and common

issues between the two brotherly countries and discusses regional and international issues of common interest.

Hani al Awad, a Kuwait journalist said that the Kuwaiti and Omani peoples believe that the visit of His Majesty the Sultan to the State of Kuwait will enhance areas of economic on top of the existing investments between the two countries most importantly the Duqm Refinery in the Sultanate of Oman.

The streets of the Kuwaiti capital were decorated with the flags of the Sultanate of Oman to celebrate the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik reflecting the depth of fraternal bonds.

The Sultanate of Oman and the sisterly State of Kuwait are linked by robust, well-established relations based on strong foundations of understanding, mutual respect, sincere cooperation as well as common interests. — ONA



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‘HM’s visit marks milestone in Gulf integration process’

THE EXCHANGES BETWEEN OMAN AND KUWAIT NOT ONLY STRENGTHEN DIPLOMATIC TIES BUT ALSO PAVE THE WAY FOR ENHANCED ECONOMIC COOPERATION

THE VISIT WILL EXPLORE AREAS OF THE EXISTING COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IN VARIOUS SPHERES AND MEANS OF PROMOTING THEM



HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK’S VISIT TO THE STATE OF KUWAIT PIVOTAL MOMENT IN STRENGTHENING THE UNITY AMONG GCC COUNTRIES

THE VISIT SERVES AS A STEP TO BROADEN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP REFLECTING MUTUAL COMMITMENT TO EXPANDING COOPERATION

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Jassim al Budaiwi, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in a recent statement to Oman News Agency, underscored the significance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq’s visit to the State of Kuwait. The meeting between the two leaders is seen as a pivotal moment in strengthening the unity among GCC countries, and reinforcing the principles of



integration among Gulf nations. Al Budaiwi said, “This visit would boost the historical ties

and relations between Oman and Kuwait, serving as a step to broaden strategic partnership. It reflects our mutual commitment to expanding cooperation and integration.” “The visit marks a significant milestone in the Gulf integration process, driven by the collective determination of Gulf leaders to pursue a shared vision for the security and prosperity of our peoples”, he stated. Al Budaiwi also highlighted Kuwait’s Emir Shaikh Meshal Al

Ahmad al Sabah’s visit to Oman, particularly the inauguration of the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries. He said that this event has reflected the bilateral relations, particularly the joint economic collaboration between the two sisterly nations. The exchanges between Oman and Kuwait not only strengthen diplomatic ties but also pave the way for enhanced economic cooperation, fostering a promising future for the Gulf region, he commented.



Oman, Kuwait foster noticeable growth in economic relations

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait have fostered strong ties in many areas, including finance and investment and have consolidated a robust partnership in the process.

Economic and trade relations between the two countries are experiencing significant growth and collaborative efforts. The commitments between the countries are driven by their leaderships resulting in signed agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoU).

This brotherly bond has resulted in cooperative ventures. Inauguration of the Duqm Refinery during the visit of Prince Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, to Oman last February, is one such example.

The successful launch of this strategic project not only augments bilateral cooperation but also holds promise for broader collaboration within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), fostering development and economic initiatives crucial for global energy stability.

Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Head of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, emphasised the significance of the Duqm Refinery in realising national priorities outlined in the ‘Oman 2040’ Vision, particularly in advancing economic and developmental objectives.

Positioned to become a cornerstone of industrial and economic growth, the refinery is poised to transform Duqm into a key hub, offering manifold opportunities for both direct and ancillary projects.

The private sectors of both nations are actively seeking to capitalise on burgeoning investment prospects across promising sectors, endeavouring to deepen mutual collaboration to serve shared interests.

Hebah Abbas, Technical Adviser and Chairwoman Sustainability Committee Kuwait Water Association, underscored the multi-faceted and resilient nature of the economic and investment ties between Kuwait and Oman.

“The economic and investment relationship between Kuwait and Oman is multifaceted and robust, focusing on collaboration across several key sectors and both countries are at pivotal stages in their economic transformations,

with Oman’s “Vision 2040” and Kuwait’s “New Kuwait 2035” looking to innovate and diversify away from oil dependence. The Duqm Refinery project not only strengthens the economic ties but also plays a crucial role in both countries’ economic diversification plans,” she said.

“This visit is more than a formality; it is a vivid reminder of the power of longstanding diplomatic ties and their ability to foster regional stability and collective prosperity. As such, it should be seen as a beacon for future cooperation, not just between Oman and Kuwait but for the entire Gulf region,” she added.

Furthermore, the visit underscores the enduring strength of diplomatic relations, serving as a testament to the potential for regional stability and collective prosperity through continued cooperation. Both countries, as significant oil producers, are increasingly pivoting towards renewable energy projects while concurrently enhancing bilateral trade through streamlined customs procedures and reduced barriers.

Statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) highlight the increasing trade exchange between Oman and Kuwait, with trade volumes steadily rising over the past five years. The substantial investments of the Kuwaiti private sector in Oman underscore the depth of economic cooperation between the two nations, reflecting a commitment to mutual growth and prosperity.

The Duqm Refinery project stands as a symbol of the profound fraternal ties between Oman and Kuwait, epitomising one of the region’s largest energy endeavours. It not only diversifies investment exchanges but also paves the way for expanded investments across various sectors. Both countries are poised to further bolster partnerships through small and medium enterprises, aligning with the visions of Oman and Kuwait, as they strive to elevate bilateral trade to new heights.

With the inauguration of the Duqm Refinery and petrochemical industries, Oman advances its strategy of enhancing the value of its oil and gas resources, bolstering exports and the balance of payments. This milestone marks a significant stride towards economic prosperity, underpinned by the enduring partnership between Oman and Kuwait.



MoHERI announces start of National Award for Research

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) on Sunday invited interested competitors to contest the 2024 National Award for Research. Applicants may contest this 11th edition of the award from Sunday May 12 until July 11, the ministry explained.

The award seeks to encourage researchers to conduct high-standard scholarly research studies

that deal with national priorities and publish them in specialised journals. The award lends support to scholars, researchers and innovators and motivate them to conduct sound research that provides practical solutions to national and global challenges.

The award also seeks to develop research talents, enhance awareness about the importance of scholarly research and support the publication



The award seeks to encourage researchers to conduct high-standard scholarly research studies that deal with national priorities

of national research papers in highly-rated scientific journals.

The National Award for Research falls in two categories: (1) The Best Published Research that is submitted by holders of the doctorate (PhD) in the medical field or its equivalent (senior consultants, specialists and other seniors); and (2) the Best Published Research submitted by junior researchers (who do not hold a PhD).

— ONA

Al Rustaq Wildlife Reserve a magnet for adventure tourism lovers



AL RUSTAQ: Al Rustaq Wildlife Reserve in Al Batinah South Governorate is a magnet for tourists and adventure enthusiasts alike. It boasts amazing natural components such as mountains, valleys, water bodies and dense trees on the banks of the valleys and that makes it an ideal place for ecotourism.

The Directorate of Environment in Al Batinah South Governorate follows up and monitors the reserve to reduce violations that threaten the reserve and its wildlife as well as preserve its natural beauty.

Stretching on an area of 254 square kilometres, Al Rustaq Wildlife Reserve is home to 6 species of wild mammals namely the endangered Arabian ibex, the mountain fox, the lynx, the white-tailed mongoose and the hedgehog. Besides, there are 15 species of wild birds including eagles and ospreys and other bird species that live in mountains.

— ONA



Stretching on an area of 254 square kilometres, Al Rustaq Wildlife Reserve is home to 6 species of wild mammals.

— ONA

MAJLIS ASH'SHURA, ARAB PARLIAMENT DISCUSS WAYS TO ENHANCE COOPERATION

MUSCAT: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura, on Sunday received Adel Abdulrahman al Asoomi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament, who is currently on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, Al Maawali stressed the importance of roles undertaken by the Arab Parliament in consolidating parliamentary diplomacy and supporting joint Arab action. He commended the Parliament's support for Arab issues at regional and international parliamentary events.



The two sides discussed ways to develop cooperation in a way that serves the common interests. — ONA

He also stressed Oman's keenness to participate in the activities of the Arab Parliament. In this context, he said that the existing cooperation between the Council of Oman and the Arab Parliament stems from a desire to activate joint Arab action and the role of parliamentary diplomacy.

For his part, Al Asoomi expressed appreciation for Oman's balanced stands on Arab issues and its support for peaceful coexistence and its permanent stance in backing the Palestinian cause at regional and international meetings.

Al Asoomi valued Oman's active participation in the activities of the Arab Parliament. He underlined the high level of Majlis Ash'shura's participation in improving the performance of the Arab Parliament.

Al Asoomi pointed out that Oman achieves the goals of parliamentary diplomacy through the active participation of the Council of Oman in different events of the Arab Parliament. In particular, he underlined the prominent contributions of the Majlis Ash'shura in upgrading the performance of the Arab Parliament.

State Council Chairman receives Arab Parliament delegation

MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council affirmed the keenness of the Sultanate of Oman in actively participating in deliberations and activities of the Arab Parliament through its different committees.

This was stated when Al Khalili received on Sunday Adel Abdulrahman al Asoomi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament and his accompanying delegation.

The Chairman of the State Council, commended the important roles undertaken by the Arab Parliament in promoting the joint Arab action and its contributions to international parliamentary forums. He wished the Arab Parliament success in its efforts to realise more achievements in terms of strengthening Arab solidarity.

Al Khalili highlighted the existing cooperation between the Council of Oman and the Arab Parliament, which comes within the framework of strengthening joint Arab action.

For his part, the Speaker of the Arab Parliament stressed the support and role of the Sultanate of Oman and its active participation in various parliamentary activities, in addition to the role of the State Council and its appreciated contribution to improving the performance of the Arab Parliament. — ONA



Regular monitoring and support boost SMEs

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The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are witnessing steady growth in the Sultanate of Oman due to close monitoring and regular inspection by the competent authorities.

In course of monitoring, Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, made field visits to various creative craft projects across Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. These visits are aimed to closely monitor project progress, offer support and inspire artisans with more resources.

In 2023, the Authority received a total of 2,064 craft support applications from across the Sultanate of Oman. This support extended to 597 craftsmen benefiting from training programmes, along with over 529 individuals availing themselves of marketing services tailored for craftsmen.

One noteworthy project in the Wilayat of Bidiyah is 3D pillar Endeavor, which applies CNC

technology for wood manufacturing. Abdullah bin Amer al Hajri, the project's proprietor, explained to the visiting team how this technology empowers craftsmen to channel their creativity, fashioning intricate woodwork via computer-guided precision, yielding exquisite artistic pieces and opulent keepsakes. ArtHorizon Foundation, managed by Dr Salman al Hajri, offers bespoke artistic consultations and digital printing services. The project impressed the visitors.

Equally impressive for the SME visiting team was Hussein al Darushi Foundation for Handicrafts (Froned Illuminations) in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid.

This workshop specialises in crafting palm fronds into innovative handicrafts, actively training Omani female artisans in advanced palm frond techniques, with a view towards supplying both domestic and international markets with refined products.

The visit also encompassed Muayyad al Rashidi's woodwork project in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid, a home-based enterprise licenced for



Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, made field visits to various creative craft projects across Al Sharqiyah North Governorate to closely monitor project progress and offer support.

artisanal endeavours. Al Rashidi's focus on local tree woodwork yields contemporary, innovative artistic creations. Equally, Rabei al Maskari's al Mandoos craft project in the Wilayat of Ibra, supported through the craft assistance programme, showcased a range of products such as wooden boxes and frames crafted from local materials.

Meanwhile, craftsman Mohammad Bani Araba's workshop in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen demonstrated inventive use of palm waste, crafting contemporary products. Recognising their potential, the Authority plans to include these products in promotional materials and marketing outlets.

Looking ahead to 2024, the Authority is committed to furthering creative craft industries by integrating modern technologies and innovative machinery. The forthcoming National Center for Creative Craft Industries in Sultan Haitham City, spanning 10,000 square meters, is poised to become a pivotal hub, embodying cultural richness, diversity and the latest technological advancements in craft production.



NATIONAL CAMPAIGN RAISES AWARENESS ON TSUNAMI PREPAREDNESS

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, MAY 12

In a concerted effort to enhance community flexibility and preparedness, the National Awareness Campaign on Climate Hazards and Tsunami Waves kicked off in Al Batinah North from Sunday and will last until May 15.

The campaign is mainly organised by the Civil Aviation

Authority, represented by the National Multi Hazard Early Warning System, the National Center for Emergency Management, the Ministry of Information, the Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the offices of the Governors. It aims to build a robust understanding of climate-related risks and emergency response capabilities.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, emphasised the recent challenges faced by Oman, especially Al Batinah North, due to the recent weather conditions and exceptional climate events. These events resulted in significant human losses, extensive damage to infrastructure such as roads, lighting poles, and essential services.

Shaikh Al Kindi highlighted

the necessity of the campaign in light of Oman's vulnerability to tropical hurricanes and tsunami waves due to its geographical location overlooking the Arabian Sea.

He stressed the importance of raising awareness and fostering a culture of preparedness within the community to effectively respond to such emergencies, to reduce human and material losses.

An essential aspect of the

campaign was showcasing strategies to reduce the impact of emergencies and promote safety protocols during crisis situations.

Key stakeholders and experts such as Nasser al Ismaili from the Civil Aviation Authority were instrumental in familiarising participants with operational procedures. Through comprehensive presentations and discussions, attendees gained insights into effective emergency

response mechanisms and safety measures critical for protecting lives and property.

By fostering a culture of awareness, preparedness, and collaboration, the campaign emphasises the collective commitment towards building a resilient society capable of effectively navigating and reducing the risks and the challenges appearing due to natural disasters.

Dakhiliyah approves development projects worth RO 5 million

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MAY 12

A meeting of the Fifth Al Dakhiliyah Tenders Committee for the year 2024 was held on Sunday morning to award tenders for developmental projects in the municipal sector worth RO5,245,832.

The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah and Chairman of the Committee, in the presence of committee members.

This comes within the framework of the efforts exerted by the governorate to develop and improve municipal services in all governorates, contributing to their advancement and benefiting the community.

The projects include the establishment of Nizwa Public Park and the design and implementation of internal roads in Izki, Samayil and Bidbid, with a total length of 16.4 kilometres. This is in addition to paving works for some industrial layouts totalling 10 kilometres. They include Al Handhali Industrial Layout in Adam, Shafi Industrial Layout in Izki, and Thumayd Industrial Layout in Bidbid.

Consultancy services for the design and supervision of the work for some industrial layouts, totalling 10 kilometres, were awarded including the streets of Wadi Ghul Road and the commercial area in Al Hamra which were also contracted.

The projects also included the supply of lighting poles on the Adam-Sinaw Road in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (first phase) and the supply of anti-virus software for information systems management.

The design of Nizwa Public Park that include amenities such as children's playgrounds, sports facilities, picnic and fitness areas, and places for investment projects is also on anvil. It features a lake, a fountain, and a market for producers. In addition, there is a 'picnic forest' that includes platforms and benches for families and houses in trees for children to create a natural atmosphere that simulates the forest, providing a calm and comfortable environment for park visitors.

The design also included an educational medical garden that includes medicinal plants that serve the educational aspects of the community and students.



The projects include the establishment of Nizwa Public Park and the design and implementation of internal roads



Minister of Education meets British American School officials

MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, received in her office on Sunday Craig Williamson, Director of the British American School, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting comes with the aim of discussing ways to enhance joint educational cooperation. During the meeting, a number of educational topics related to granting professional licences to teachers, the equivalency of the international diploma certificate, and other topics related to the educational process were discussed.

Supreme Judiciary Council holds meeting

MUSCAT: The Supreme Judiciary Council on Sunday held its second meeting for 2024 under the chairmanship of Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the council.

The meeting discussed the efforts exerted towards the success of preparing the long term strategic plan 2024-2040

for the Supreme Judiciary Council and the first operational plan 2024-2030.

The meeting also discussed several topics on the agenda, including matters related to judicial work in courts and proposals of laws and regulations of relation to the council's purviews, among other topics.

— ONA



The meeting discussed the efforts exerted towards the success of preparing the long term strategic plan 2024-2040. — ONA

Budding scientists sweep awards with eco-friendly solutions

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
SALALAH, MAY 12

In line with the principles of Oman Vision 2040, some student innovators from Salalah clinched top honours at the prestigious Innovation Vision competition outshining 48 competing teams in the fields of environmental conservation and business insight.

The two winning teams demonstrated dedication to innovation and sustainability, striving to refine their technologies for maximum impact. Through collaboration with stakeholders and a relentless pursuit of excellence, these budding scientists are paving the way for a greener and more sustainable future for Oman and beyond. Their competitive journey began with over 50 teams

from academic and industrial backgrounds vying for recognition in the competition, which was a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, the Governor's Office in Dhofar, and Salalah Free Zone.

Through a rigorous selection process, 20 teams with promising ideas advanced to the second round, where they underwent meticulous evaluations to scrutinise the value of their inventions. Ultimately, only 10 teams were selected to progress further.

Finally, two teams from Dhofar University clinched the top honours showcasing exceptional talent in environmental conservation and business acumen. The Bioplastics and Rebactose teams — both from the Department of Chemical Engineering at Dhofar University



The journey began with over 50 teams from academic and industrial backgrounds vying for recognition in the competition

— were selected by the experts drawn from respective areas.

The teams worked under the guidance of Dr Mazhar ul Islam in the Biochemical Engineering Laboratory with co-supervision provided by research associates Dr

Khalid bin Mohammed Koofan. They introduced a groundbreaking product called Bacterial Cellulose (BC). Derived from biological synthesis using accessible resources like food and industrial waste materials, BC boasts a wide range of applications, from medical items to eco-friendly clothing. With a steadfast commitment to sustainability, the Rebactose team aims to tackle environmental challenges while promoting economic viability. Other members of the Rebactose team included Munira bint Said bin Masoud al Amriyah, Ruiya bint Mohammed bin Al Mahandis Alyafaiyah, Fatima bint Ahmed bin Saif Habis, Aisha bint Ahmed bin Ibrahim bin Mohammed, and Fatima bint Thamir bin Omar al Ibrahim. Meanwhile, the Bioplastics team,

comprising Mazoona bint Ali Ba Lahaf and Shaima bint Hamed bin Salim al Aamriyah, focused on developing biodegradable alternatives to conventional plastics.

In the team were Muna bint Ahmed Habis, Wafa bint Ahmed Jaboob, Naema bint Mohammed Bawazir, Taif bint Mohammed Bawazir, Khaloud bint Mubarak al Saidiyah, and Gareeba bint Musallam bin Ahmed al Mashaniyah. By harnessing starch from local plants, algae, and waste materials, they successfully created a versatile bioplastic suitable for food packaging and beyond. Their efforts not only align with Oman Vision 2040 but also underscore the importance of utilising locally available resources to foster self-sufficiency and promote a circular economy.



Protesters wave Palestinian flags and brandish a smoke flare during a Pro-Palestinian demonstration on Waterloo Bridge, in London, on May 11. — AFP

Fighting rages across Gaza as death toll tops 35,000

RAFAH: Israel struck Gaza on Sunday and troops were battling militants in several areas of the Palestinian territory, where the health ministry said the death toll in the war had exceeded 35,000 people.

More than seven months into the Gaza war, UN chief Antonio Guterres urged “an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the unconditional release of all captives and an immediate surge in humanitarian aid” into the besieged Gaza Strip.

“But a ceasefire will only be the start,” Guterres told a donor conference in Kuwait. “It will be a long road back from the devastation and trauma of this war.”

As Egyptian, Qatari and US mediation efforts towards a truce appeared to stall, US President Joe Biden said on Saturday a

Correspondents, witnesses and medics said Israeli air strikes pounded parts of northern, central and southern Gaza during the night and into Sunday morning

ceasefire could be achieved “tomorrow” if Palestinian groups released the captives held in Gaza since the October 7 attack that sparked the conflict.

Correspondents, witnesses and medics said Israeli air strikes pounded parts of northern, central and southern Gaza during the night and into Sunday morning.

In Rafah, Gaza’s southernmost city which sits on the border with Egypt, the Kuwaiti hospital

said on Sunday it had received the bodies of “18 martyrs” killed in Israeli strikes over the past 24 hours. The health ministry in the territory said that at least 63 people had been killed over the last 24 hours, bringing the overall death toll from Israel’s bombardment and offensive in Gaza to at least 35,034 people, mostly women and children.

Israel defied international opposition this week and sent tanks and troops into eastern Rafah, effectively shutting a key aid crossing.

On Saturday, the Israeli military expanded an evacuation order for eastern Rafah and said 300,000 Palestinians had left the area. Palestinians in Rafah, many of them displaced by the fighting elsewhere in the territory, piled water tanks, mattresses and other belongings onto vehicles and

prepared to flee again.

Israel began what it termed a “limited” operation in Rafah this week, while the international community has repeatedly condemned the possibility, long-threatened by the Israeli government, of a full-scale ground invasion of the city.

Protests against the war spread to Saturday’s Eurovision Song Contest in Sweden, where thousands rallied outside the Malmö Arena condemning Israel’s participation.

Meanwhile, in Tel Aviv on Saturday, Israeli protesters again took to the streets to pressure their government to do more to reach a truce and captives release deal. The rally came hours after Palestinian movement Hamas’s armed wing said that an Israeli-British man Nadav Popplewell, had died in captivity. — AFP

Full-scale Rafah attack cannot take place, says UN rights chief

GENEVA: A full-scale Israeli assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah “cannot take place”, the UN human rights chief insisted on Sunday, saying it could not be reconciled with international law.

All eyes have been on Rafah in recent weeks, where the population had swelled to around 1.5 million after hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled fighting in other areas of the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military on Saturday expanded an evacuation order for eastern Rafah and said 300,000 Palestinians had left the area.

“The latest evacuation orders affect close to a million people in Rafah. So where should they go now? There is no safe place in Gaza,” Volker Turk, the UN high commissioner for human rights, said in a statement. “These exhausted, famished people, many of whom have been displaced many times already, have no good options.

He said a full-scale offensive could have a “catastrophic impact... including the possibility of further atrocity crimes.”

“I can see no way that the latest evacuation orders, much less a full assault, in an area with an extremely dense presence of civilians, can be reconciled with the binding requirements of international humanitarian law and with the two sets of binding provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice.”

Volker said he was deeply distressed by fast-deteriorating conditions in Gaza, saying the latest evacuation orders had triggered “massive displacement of an already profoundly traumatised population”.

He said the towns supposed to receive those displaced from Rafah had already been “reduced to rubble”. Turk also voiced concern at reports of indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza.

He said a full scale offensive on Rafah “cannot take place” and called on all states with influence to do everything in their power to prevent it.

He also called on Israel and Palestinian armed groups to agree a ceasefire, and for all hostages to be released immediately.

Gaza’s bloodiest-ever war began following October 7 attack on Israel that resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, according to Israeli official figures. — AFP



A woman and boy walk with belongings past barbed-wire fences as they flee from Rafah. — AFP

Desperate Rafah residents flee ‘hell’ of Israeli onslaught

RAFAH: War-weary Gazans flooded towards coastal areas of the Gaza Strip’s southern city of Rafah on Sunday, fleeing heavy bombardment in eastern zones after Israel ordered them to evacuate.

“We endured three days that can be considered hell,” said Mohammed Hamad, a 24-year-old resident of eastern Rafah who was among the 300,000 Palestinians that Israel says have fled the fighting. Despite international opposition to any major military operation in Rafah, Israel has shifted its focus to the heavily populated area in what it says is an effort to destroy the last bastion of Palestinian groups.

Eastern parts of the city have been heavily bombarded in recent days, according to witnesses,

as Israel sent tanks and ground troops into the areas in “targeted raids”.

“They were among the worst nights for us since the beginning of the war,” Hamad said from Al Mawasi, an area Israel has designated a “humanitarian zone” despite aid groups warning that it is unprepared for such an influx.

Rafah’s population had swelled to around 1.4 million after hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled fighting in other areas of the Gaza Strip and sought shelter there during more than seven months of war. “They started by distributing flyers in the morning, and immediately began brutal artillery and aerial bombardment without giving people a chance to organise their belongings properly,” Hamad said.



Displaced Palestinians flee in a vehicle as they flee Rafah, after Israeli forces launched a ground and air operation. — Reuters

Photographers saw dozens of families loading furniture and household items on trucks and fleeing from Rafah, many heading for Khan Younis, the main city in the south of the Palestinian territory. Many people, especially women and children, lingered on streets outside their homes before moving out.

Israeli forces on Tuesday seized and closed the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing into Egypt — through which all fuel passes into Gaza.

Umm Mohammed Al Mughayyir said she has had to move her family seven times to escape the fighting. “We have reached a point where we wish for death,” she said. “We have people with special needs, elderly individuals, and children. — AFP



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In brief

■ JAKARTA



AT LEAST 34 KILLED IN INDONESIA FLASH FLOODS, 16 MISSING

At least 34 people were killed and 16 more were missing in western Indonesia after flash floods and cold lava flow from one of the archipelago's most active volcanos damaged homes, roads and mosques.

Hours of heavy rain caused flooding in two districts — Agam and Tanah Datar — in West Sumatra province, threatening thousands after it swept ash and large rocks down Mount Marapi. “Until now our data shows that 34 people died: 16 in Agam and 18 in Tanah Datar. At least 18 others are injured. We are also still searching for 16 other people,” West Sumatra spokesman Ilham Wahab said. — **AFP**

■ ISTANBUL



GREEK PREMIER TO VISIT TÜRKIYE IN QUEST FOR BETTER RELATIONS

Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis will be received on Monday in Ankara by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in the latest sign of warming relations between the Nato neighbours.

On Sunday, Erdogan said talks would focus on “resolving problems” between the two neighbours. “It falls to us to calm relations between the two countries ... to ensure that peace and tranquillity reigns forever on both sides of the Aegean Sea,” the Turkish leader said.

Türkiye and Greece have struggled to cooperate on migration. The seas around both countries are used by migrants trying to reach Europe. — **AFP**

■ WARSAW



FIRE DESTROYS ONE OF BIGGEST SHOPPING CENTRES IN WARSAW

A massive fire that broke out on Saturday night in a shopping centre in Warsaw almost completely destroyed the place, authorities said. Nobody was hurt during the fire.

The Marywilka 44 with almost 1,400 commercial units - including many kiosks - was among the biggest shopping centres in Warsaw. It was owned and managed by Mirbud.

“Almost 100 per cent of it was burned. The fire is being extinguished and this will take many hours, perhaps several hours,” Mariusz Feltynowski, commander-in-chief of the State Fire Service told a news conference. — **Reuters**

Russia captures four villages in Ukraine

MOSCOW: Russian troops seized another four villages - Hatyshche, Krasne, Morokhovets, Oliinykove - in Kharkiv region in Ukraine, Russian Defence Ministry said on Sunday.

Russia launched a new assault from its territory into the northern Ukrainian region of Kharkiv on Friday, threatening to open a new front in the 27-month war. Moscow said on Saturday it had captured five villages, while Kyiv said it was repulsing the attacks and battling for control of the settlements.

Ukraine's military chief said on Sunday his country's forces were facing a difficult situation in fighting in the Kharkiv region, but that they were doing all they could to hold the line.

“Units of the Defence Forces are fighting fierce defensive battles, the attempts of the Russian attacks to break through our defences have been stopped,” Syrskyi wrote on the Telegram app.

“The situation is difficult, but the Defence Forces of Ukraine are doing everything to hold defensive lines and positions, (and) inflict damage on the enemy,” he added.

Ukraine is currently on the defensive against Russia, which has a significant advantage in manpower and munitions.

Kyiv says several months of



People remove debris while searching for survivors following the collapse of a section of a multi-story apartment block, in the city of Belgorod, Russia. — **Reuters**

delays by the US Congress to vote through a massive aid package have cost it on the battlefield. It now hopes significant quantities of the newly approved assistance will arrive quickly to shore up the defence effort.

“The enemy is conducting their actions on two fronts... they

are trying to widen the front,” military spokesperson Nazar Voloshyn said on Ukrainian television on Sunday.

He said the main thrusts of Russia's attack were aimed at the towns of Vovchansk and Lyptsi.

Lyptsi is about 20 km from the outskirts of Kharkiv, Ukraine's

second-largest city. In 2022, Russian forces reached the city's suburbs before being driven back to the border.

Voloshyn urged residents to stay calm, saying that Russia was waging an information campaign to sow panic alongside its military assault.

The situation is difficult, but the Defence Forces of Ukraine are doing everything to hold defensive lines and positions, and inflict damage on the enemy

OLEKSANDR SYRSKYI

Ukraine's military chief

“The population should remain calm... the defence forces are holding the lines, the situation is under control,” the spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, At least seven people were killed and 17 injured when a whole section of a Russian apartment block collapsed after it was struck by a Soviet-era missile launched by Ukraine and shot down by Russia, Russian officials said.

In one of the deadliest attacks to date on the region of Belgorod, Ukraine launched what Russian officials said was a massive missile attack with Tochka ballistic missiles and Adler and RM-70 Vampire (MLRS) multiple launch rocket systems. — **Reuters**



Protesters march during a rally against the controversial “foreign influence” bill in Tbilisi on May 11. — **AFP**

Thousands of Georgians prepare for new rally

TBILISI: Georgian protesters prepared to stage a late-evening rally, vowing not to give up their fight against the ruling party's Russian-styled “foreign agent” bill, a day after a massive protest in Tbilisi.

Demonstrations have gripped the tiny Caucasus country for weeks over the bill, dubbed the “Russian law” as it mirrors repressive legislation used by the Kremlin to silence critics.

Powerful billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream party have said NGOs are a threat to Georgian sovereignty.

In a shock move in early April, Georgian Dream brought back the bill a year after a huge backlash forced authorities to drop it.

It requires NGOs receiving at least 20 percent of foreign funding — encompassing virtually all of the sector — to register as agents of “foreign influence.”

Protesters say the bill proves

the government is derailing Georgia's long-held ambition of joining the EU, supported by the vast majority of the population.

The protests, led mostly by students and Gen Zs, are heavy in anti-Kremlin rhetoric, with thousands carrying EU and Georgian flags.

As tens of thousands descended onto Tbilisi's Europe Square on Saturday evening, speakers called on them to also gather at 10 pm the next day outside parliament.

Ruling party MPs are aiming to vote the bill through on third reading this week. The stand-off over the bill has created one of the most unpredictable and tense political moments in Georgia in recent years.

Neither the protesters or the government appear ready to back down, with tensions running high.

Authorities also look intent on passing the bill through, with

officials in recent days making scathing statements against protesters on social media.

Leading NGO activists have over recent days reported being harassed by unknown people, with some having their homes and office plastered in posters that read “foreign agent.”

Saturday's protest was peaceful, but police had violently dispersed protesters in late April.

Many expect a crackdown if protesters try to stay outside parliament at night. Georgian Dream has portrayed the bill as being about “transparency” -- saying it is merely an administrative issue.

But the NGO sector, the opposition and protesters say the government's true aims are about control and getting rid of critical voices.

They also say the bill is timed to prepare ground for an autumnal election. — **AFP**

Brazil authorities warn of more floods, landslides

PORTO ALEGRE: New rains in waterlogged southern Brazil are expected to be heaviest between Sunday and Monday, authorities have warned, bringing fresh misery to victims of flooding that has killed 136 people so far. State authorities warned late on Saturday of the risk of further rising waters and landslides.

“We are still experiencing an emergency situation,” Rio Grande do Sul Governor Eduardo Leite said in a video on Instagram.

Heavy rains last week caused rivers in the agricultural state to overflow, leaving 806 injured and 125 missing in addition to those killed, the civil defence agency said.

“Many people see the rain and are traumatised. We've seen how scared people are,” said Enio Posti, a firefighter in Porto Alegre, capital of stricken Rio Grande do Sul state.

Of the more than two million people affected by the flooding, more than 537,000 have been forced from their homes with 81,000 in shelters.

More than 92,000 homes were damaged or destroyed by the floods, according to the National Confederation of Municipalities.

UN experts and the Brazilian government blame climate

change and the El Nino weather phenomenon for the inundation.

US President Joe Biden said in a statement that he was “saddened by the loss of life and devastation caused by the flooding”, adding that Washington was “working to provide necessary assistance” in coordination with Brazilian authorities. Residents were told to stay away from flooded areas, with dangers including electrocution by downed power lines. In the flooded streets of the Sao Joao neighbourhood, volunteers and firefighters worked in heavy rain, bringing supplies to residents on jet skis and inflatable boats. Volunteers were taking pets to shelters, with veterinarians treating those with medical needs.

Military and other security forces were also part of relief efforts. Almost two tons of food and supplies have been distributed by the federal government, in what President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva called “the largest movement of donations ever recorded in the history” of Brazil.

The federal government this week promised some \$10 billion for reconstruction in Rio Grande do Sul, which is experiencing its worst ever climate disaster.

— **AFP**



View of a cemetery destroyed after floods in Mucum, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil. — **Reuters**

People who handwrite have a cognitive advantage



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

It is a common remark we come across these days: “My handwriting is becoming worse every day”, or “I’ve forgotten how to use a pen,” almost half in jest. Writing with one’s hand is becoming a dying art today.

This is unfortunate because research suggests that handwriting actually has more advantages than just improving the design on paper. It actually develops our cognitive skills, especially thinking, organisation and creativity.

Millennials and Gen Zs probably find it strange, but it was only a decade ago that cursive writing was encouraged.

Young kids practiced writing on four-lined paper and would even have handwriting tests and competitions. All that is a thing of the past, going by latest classroom practices. But even today, research suggests that handwriting should be encouraged because it develops many skills.

There are actually neurological benefits to writing by hand. According to researchers, tracing the letters of the alphabet by hand leads to better recognition and retention of the letters and words. This leads to better memory which helps in literacy.

The same is true of adults and adult learners in higher education. Handwriting notes makes it easier to remember content, make connections between phrases and understand a concept better.

This also makes sense when taking notes because we write what we want to and how we want to — including flowcharts, bullets, short forms and doodles.

All these are unique characteristics which help us to process information and make connections in a way that make sense to us.

Today, younger learners are typing entire papers with their laptops or tablets, falling back on the digital systems to autocorrect and suggest synonyms or even alternative sentences.

Clearly, this is doing little to the processing capacities of the individual who has outsourced drafting, correcting and formatting to a technological source.

Research on brain imaging suggests that handwriting is actually quite a complex process involving specific parts of the brain coordinating with muscles of the hand to create shapes that make sense. Just holding a pen involves thoughts and

MILLENNIALS AND GEN ZS PROBABLY FIND IT STRANGE, BUT IT WAS ONLY A DECADE AGO THAT CURSIVE WRITING WAS ENCOURAGED

choices of angle, pressure and direction.

We can see young children learn to make such choices, even if unconsciously.

All this is lost when writing on a screen. Although it does involve pressing the right buttons or the right part of the screen, there are no other choices involved, and thus, no further learning to do.

Insisting on handwriting is not just a nostalgic gesture. Moving with the times is important and making use of technology is the only way to stay relevant, but that does not always mean discarding older habits completely.

Handwriting is a valuable skill that goes beyond putting pen to paper — it involves cognitive abilities and also reveals and develops one’s personality. The process of writing helps us to clarify ideas, make connections and even come up with original thoughts.

It is imperative that educational institutions, especially at the primary level, be aware of such research and encourage teachers and parents to give children opportunities to handwrite in class and at home so that we don’t just allow the process of learning to be taken over by a machine.

Why German politicians are facing growing violence

SARAH MARSH AND KATE ABNETT

The black-clad attackers beat up Matthias Ecke so badly as he put up posters in Dresden that he needed surgery. In Nordhorn, a man threw eggs at a lawmaker then punched him in the face. In Berlin, a pensioner hit a senator on the head with a bag.

Just three of the assaults that German politicians have suffered over the past week as campaigns get under way for European Parliament and district council elections.

Tensions have always risen ahead of votes. But something has shifted, say parties and analysts. Assaults causing physical injury have surged — 22 on politicians so far in 2024, compared with 27 for all of 2023, the Federal Criminal Police Office said this week. The atmosphere has also changed, coarsened by the all-out shouting matches stoked by social media and the divisions and rhetoric of populist politics.

“We are observing an affective polarisation. When dissenters become ‘enemies,” said Stefan Marschall, a political scientist at the University of Duesseldorf. Reuters spoke to a dozen politicians who described physical and verbal attacks. One of the main risks, most said, was that the hostile climate would scare off candidates or campaigners and ultimately skew the outcome of elections.

“It makes you feel you are not wanted here and should disappear,” said Michael Mueller, a candidate for the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) in district elections in the eastern state of Thuringia. Attackers set his house on fire after he organised a protest against extremism in February.

“Giving up is now an option, although I would have never have thought it before.”

Overall, verbal and physical attacks on politicians in Germany have more than doubled since 2019, according to government data. The party that has come off the worst is the Greens, the junior partner in Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s coalition. Its members reported 1,219 incidents last year, up sevenfold from 2019. Second on that count is the resurgent far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party with 478 incidents, then Scholz’s SPD on 420.

Members of the SPD, the Greens and other parties closer to the centre of the political spectrum blamed the overall souring of the mood and rise in confrontations on AfD rhetoric.

“If you have politicians that officially (say) ‘let’s hunt them down... words shape actions,” said Niklas Nienass, a member of the European Parliament for the Greens. — AFP

The erosion of international law



Karim Easterbrook

The writer is former School Principal Cambridge UK

The word desuetude is a legal term which comes from the Latin desuetudo meaning “the condition of not being in use or practice.” It refers to laws which haven’t been repealed and may still be on a nation’s statute book. These laws, owing to their long and continued non-use render them invalid. By invalid I mean that the courts will no longer punish the transgressors. Another reason for using this legal term desuetude in relation to a law is if there has been a notorious violation of the statute for a long time.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 on which international law was originally based were introduced above all to protect innocent victims of armed conflicts. The need for the Conventions followed on from the heinous crimes committed by the Nazis during World War 2. In 1998 the Rome Statute was introduced and 60 countries signed up to it. This Statute was behind the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002. Its purpose was to investigate and then, with sufficient evidence available, prosecute war criminals.

On May 24, 1999 Slobodan Milošević, the former President of Serbia, was indicted for war crimes during the Kosovo War. He was hunted down at the bequest of the US and brought to face trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY.)

On March 17, 2023 the ICC issued warrants of arrest for President Vladimir Putin and Ms Maria Lvova-Belova. It is alleged that Putin and Lvova-Belova, the Russian Commissioner for Children’s Rights, unlawfully transferred children from Ukraine to Russia. President Putin has described his indictment as meaningless and his description, if he means by this that no court will ever be in a position to punish him even if he’s guilty, has some justification.

As we wait with bated breath for the ICC to decide whether or not to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and members of his government for war crimes one has to wonder whether any court or any institution which has no power to force the implementation of their judgements and which appears to be highly selective when choosing



Israeli military vehicles roll near the border with the Gaza Strip on Sunday, amid the ongoing conflict. – AFP

AS OF 2013 ISRAEL HAD VIOLATED 28 RESOLUTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL. THESE RESOLUTIONS ARE MEANT TO BE LEGALLY BINDING ON MEMBER STATES

who to indict, serves any purpose and consequently whether their laws have become obsolete. Netanyahu has described the ICC investigations into allegations against him and members of his government as “outrageous.” It would appear that more than a few US Senators have brought pressure to bear on the ICC not to indict Netanyahu by sending warning letters to its members.

Even with the best will in the world it is difficult not to regard what is happening in Gaza as anything else but genocide and both the Rome Statute and the Geneva Conventions would appear to support the indictment of Netanyahu and his government. Netanyahu has labelled the possibility of being served with an arrest warrant an “antisemitic hate crime” and asked the “leaders of the free world to stand

firmly against the ICC’s outrageous assault on Israel’s inherent right of self-defence”

The White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre stated “we’ve been really clear about the ICC investigation, that we don’t support it, we don’t believe that they have the jurisdiction,” On this basis shouldn’t one question the jurisdiction of the ICC to issue warrants of arrest for President Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova or anyone for that matter?

Finally let us look briefly at the United Nations. There are 193 countries who are members of the UN and yet only one of the five permanent members (US, UK, France, Russia, China) are needed to veto any resolution calling for a ceasefire in Palestine or anywhere else or to bring the perpetrators of war crimes to justice.

As of 2013 Israel had violated 28 resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. These resolutions are meant to be legally binding on member states. Western nations are often keen to promote Representative Democracy as the best political model available. When one UN member can block the judgement of the other 192 UN member-States this can hardly be called representative or democratic. The UN needs to be truly democratic if it is to serve any purpose in protecting defenceless people from war crimes.

Pursue the challenging...

Everyone strives to become a better version of himself. This requires continuous self-development, which is important to discover one's internal secrets, potentials and talents. Personal development is a constructive way for people to evaluate their skills and qualities, and set their life goals in order to realise and maximise their potential and the would-be efforts. This kind of art improves identity and attitudes, develops abilities and potentials and builds human capital overall.

One should believe in the significance of self-development as it guides people to set their principles. Simply, it is another way of road mapping the way to the future. Likewise, personal development enhances one's quality of life and contributes to understanding one's interests, dreams and aspirations. In fact, it goes beyond being just a source of reviving one's spirit and energy.

Usually, people have different ways to develop themselves, some of which are reading books, attending course or even learning form self and others' experiences. Therefore, what is really thrilling about personal development is the return value, which is limited not only to self-help, but it extends to developing others too in roles such as of those teachers, guides, counsellors, managers or life coaches.

In fact, developing one's own personality to discover hidden capabilities marks a significant recharge, which is needed by all. This will help lifting up one's charisma and values instead of just being the same person for ages.

However, along the journey of self-development, one will be coming across different challenges. Though, the journey is very rewarding as the saying goes, "What doesn't kill you; makes you strong".

Challenges, often, merge to test our capabilities of patience and persistence, but successful people never surrender. There are some key pillars required for those intending to get acquainted with self-development and making



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ONE SHOULD BELIEVE IN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT AS IT GUIDES PEOPLE TO SET THEIR PRINCIPLES

achievements. It is very important for one to have a positive personal intention as a first step towards self-development. One should believe in the power of change, which is highly required to amend and develop one's life norms for better.

One should have a wake-up call every now and then to work on discovering themselves and start self-development. Regardless of the way you choose to develop yourself, just think of what you want to achieve. It is not always what matters the duration of time you spend in achieving your dreams or making a success, but your sincerity in making them come true.

You just take all the time you need to for the journey even if it requires a couple of years or attempts to reach the destination! As it was said that a dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work. One should not give up on a dream no matter what it takes. It has been attributed that success comes only to those who believe in their dreams. It is all about keeping hope alive and being focused.

With hope and persistence, dreams, ambitions and achievements could be made possible. You should not think of being someone else to be successful and achieve what you have planned for.

All that you need to do is to believe in yourself first, discover yourself and bring out all the talents and competencies you have inside. Never ever think that it would be a difficult task to accomplish, although it is not easy too. You need to work smart and not hard and eventually with strong self-confidence and persistence, your dreams will become a reality someday for sure.

Albert Einstein advised, "A person who never made a mistake; never tried anything new." Accordingly, remember that every time you tear a sheet off a calendar, you present a space for new ideas and progress in your life. Also, with every new day comes a new challenge, so never say die to challenges no matter how big or small they are. Just regard them as steps towards achieving success!

UNDER THE UMBRELLAS!



Riders wait for the start of the 9th stage of the 107th Giro d'Italia cycling race, 214 km between Avezzano and Naples, on Sunday in Avezzano. – AFP

Don't fret about green subsidies

A trade war over clean technologies is brewing. The United States and the European Union, worried that Chinese subsidies threaten their green industries, have warned that they will respond with import restrictions. China, in turn, has lodged a complaint at the World Trade Organization about discriminatory provisions against its products under US President Joe Biden's landmark climate legislation, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

On a recent trip to China, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen warned China directly that the US would not stand by in the face of China's "large-scale government support" for industries such as solar, electric vehicles, and batteries. Reminding her audience that the US steel industry had previously been decimated by Chinese subsidies, she made clear the Biden administration's determination not to allow green industries to suffer the same fate.

China has scaled up its green industries with mind-boggling speed. It now produces nearly 80 per cent of the world's solar PV modules, 60 per cent of wind turbines, and 60 per cent of electric vehicles and batteries. In 2023 alone, its solar-power capacity grew by more than the total installed capacity in the US. These investments were driven by a variety of government policies at the national, provincial, and municipal levels, allowing Chinese firms to travel rapidly down the learning curve to dominate their respective markets.



Dani Rodrik

Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is President of the International Economic Association

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD STOP DECRYING EACH OTHERS' GREEN INDUSTRIAL POLICIES AS NORM VIOLATIONS OR DANGEROUS TRANSGRESSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL RULES

But there is a big difference between solar PV cells, electric vehicles, and batteries, on one hand, and older industries such as steel and gas-powered cars. Green technologies are crucial in the fight against climate change, making them a global public good. The only way we can decarbonise the planet without undermining economic growth and poverty reduction is to shift to renewables and green technologies as rapidly as possible.

The case for subsidising green industries, as China has done, is impeccable. Beyond the usual argument that new technologies provide know-how and other positive externalities, one also must account for the immeasurable costs of climate change and the huge prospective benefits of accelerating the green transition. Moreover, because the knowledge spillovers cross national borders, China's subsidies benefit not only consumers everywhere, but also other firms along the global supply chain.

Another powerful argument follows from second-best reasoning. If the world were organised by a social planner, there would be a global carbon tax; but, of course, there is no such thing. Although a variety of regional, national, and subnational carbon-pricing schemes do exist, only a tiny share of global emissions is subject to a price that comes close to covering the true social cost of

carbon. Under these circumstances, green industrial policies are doubly beneficial — both to stimulate the necessary technological learning and to substitute for carbon pricing. Western commentators who trot out scare words like "excess capacity," "subsidy wars," and "China trade shock 2.0" have gotten things exactly backwards. A glut in renewables and green products is precisely what the climate doctor ordered.

China's green industrial policies have been responsible for some of the most important wins to date against climate change. As Chinese producers expanded capacity and reaped the benefits of scale, the costs of renewable energy plummeted. In the space of a decade, prices fell by 80 per cent for solar, 73 per cent for offshore wind, 57 per cent for onshore wind, and 80 per cent for electric batteries. These gains underpin the creeping



China has lodged a complaint at the WTO about discriminatory provisions against its products.

optimism in climate circles that we might just be able to keep global warming within reasonable bounds. Government incentives, private investment, and learning curves proved to be a very powerful combination indeed.

With the IRA, America already has its own version of China's green industrial policies. The law provides hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to facilitate the transition to renewables and green industries. While some of the tax incentives do favour domestic producers over imports (or are available only with stringent sourcing requirements), these blemishes must be seen in the context of the political compromises needed to ensure the legislation's passage. They may be a small price to pay for what many analysts view as a climate-policy "game changer." Countries have other interests besides the climate, of course. They can harbour

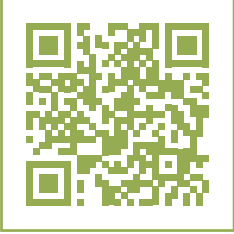
legitimate concerns about the consequences of other countries' green-industrial policies for jobs and innovative capacity at home. If they judge that these costs outweigh the climate and consumer benefits, they should be free to impose countervailing tariffs on imports, as trade rules already allow. It would be better for the world overall if they didn't react that way, but nobody can or should stop them.

In fact, before globalisation and the tightening of trade rules went into overdrive in the 1990s, it was not uncommon for countries to negotiate informal arrangements with exporters as a way to moderate import surges and keep exporters reasonably happy. Recall the Multifiber Arrangement for garments in the 1970s, and the voluntary export restrictions for autos and steel in the 1980s. While economists decried these schemes as protectionist, such arrangements did little damage to the world economy. They essentially acted as safety valves: by allowing pressure to escape, they helped keep the trade peace.

What governments should not do is decry green industrial policies as norm violations or dangerous transgressions of international rules. The moral, environmental, and economic arguments favour those who subsidise their green industries, not those who want to tax others' production.

Sport

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Oman football U-17 to camp in Uzbekistan, U-19 in Iraq

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

The Oman Football Association (OFA) announced that Oman under-17 football team will have an abroad camp in Uzbekistan during May 16 to 23. While the national under-19 football team will head off to Iraq for an external preparatory camp from May 26 to June 6. The national teams committee at OFA approved the warm up plan for the national junior teams as they will have a major assignments in the coming period.

The nearest overseas preparatory camp will be for Oman under -17 football team who managed to earn the silver medal in their recent participation at the Gulf Youth Games which hosted in UAE during April 16 to May 2, after an impressive performance. Oman junior team, coached by Anwar al Habsi, will aim for an outstanding show as they will have many other assignments in the near future represented by the AFC Asian U17 Cup qualifiers in October. The AFC U17 Asian Cup will be held in April 2025, while the qualifiers draw will take place in June. The hosts of the finals will be unveiled in June too. In the qualifiers, the topper of the groups besides the best four second placed teams in all the groups will advance to the finals along with the host country.

It is expected Oman team will play some friendly games during their camp in Uzbekistan and these matches will unveil the team's readiness and harmony for the forthcoming events.

Oman U17 team includes:

Ahmed al Omrani, Fahad al Mashaykhi, Ziyad al Mataani, Osama al Maamari, Qais Ameen, Ali al Awaini, Riyadh al Tarshi, Mudathir al Batrani, Muath al Hinai, Yazen al Khadli, Abdullah al Saadi, Al Yazen al Balushi, Firas al Saadi, Al Waleed al Braidee, Aseel al Habsi, Sulaiman al Mahruqi, Ali al Shizawi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Tamimi, Sulaiman al Kharousi, Al Hassan al Qasmi and Mohammed al Mashaykhi.

On the other hand, Oman Under-19 football team will have comprehensive training session in Iraq. The planned external camp is part of the long term plan for the team to take part in the West Asian Championship which will be held in Saudi Arabia in the middle of the this year. Then, the team will take part in the AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers in September, while the finals of 2025 AFC U20 Asian Cup is scheduled to take place in February 2025.

The team, which is coached by Ahmed al Alawi, concluded in beginning of May an overseas camp in Manama which run for five days. During the camp in Manama city, the national team will played two friendly games against Bahrain. The first match ended for Bahrain 2-0 while the following game finished by a goalless draw. Ahead of Bahrain camp, the team went to Kuwait in last March for another camp. During the camp in Kuwait, The junior team had played two games against the hosts. Oman won the first match 3-1 and the second match 1-0. The junior Red Warriors goals were netted in the opening match by Masoud al Bahri, Fahad al Mukhaini and Al



Hussain al Qasmi, while Abdullah Faris scored for Kuwait. Al Qasmi scored the only goal in the second match.

Omansquad: Majid al Farsi, Ghassan al Masrouri, Al Haitham al Shukaili, Rabee al Sunaidy, Mohammed al Balushi, Rashad al Dheen, Omar al Shatri, Said al Ghanbousi, Jawad al Azri, Mohammed al Maqbali, Al Harith al Mashaikhi, Yassar al Balushi, Al Hussain al Qasmi, Ayoob al Busaidy, Oadi al Manwari, Mohannad al Saadi, Yousef al Shabibi, Abdulaziz al Ghilani, Fahad al Mukhaini, Shihab al Mukhaini, Suhaib al Kharousi, Abdullah al Maamari and Ziyad al Jaalani.

Oman Sail to welcome 13th Mussanah Race Week



MUSCAT: Oman Sail's Mussanah Race Week will return for their 13th edition from October 1 to 8, as the event brings together sailors from across the globe in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6 and ILCA 7 classes, as well as the para inclusive RS Venture Connect class. The event will host by the Barceló Mussanah Resort and is open to male and female sailors of all nationalities.

Competition will be held over 12 races in each class, with no more than three per day. Racing will take place following three practice days on October 4 to 7. Prizes will be awarded for the overall top three in each class, as well as the Junior top three for sailors under the age of 12, and the girls top three, as well as the overall team racing competition.

Ahmed al Qasmi, Head of Sailing at Oman Sail, said, "Mussanah Race Week is one of the highlights

in our sailing calendar and we are delighted to bring the event back to the Barceló Mussanah Resort this year. During a career in sailing, it is very likely that the sailors will race together many times, so it is beneficial for the young athletes to meet, interact and learn from each other at Mussanah Race Week. We look forward to welcoming a diverse fleet of sailors in all of the event classes."

Shaima al Asmi, Mussanah Race Week Project Manager, added, "The waters of Barceló Mussanah Resort offer excellent sailing conditions and the chance to learn new skills, make new friends and compete in a world class environment. We are also very pleased to be able to support sailors of all abilities with Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7 and RS Venture Connect races all being held again this year. Sailing

is a sport for everyone, and we are very excited for what promises to be another exceptional edition of Mussanah Race Week."

Oman Sail's Mussanah Sailing School at the Barceló Mussanah Resort was recently named a Category A High Performance Centre by the Asian Sailing Federation. Visiting sailors, as well as Omani participants, will have the opportunity to train and sail at the same venue where Asia's best sailors will hone their skills in preparation for some of the world's highest profile events. Mussanah Race Week has always been about more than just racing and this year will be no exception. On the final practice day there will be a BBQ night for all competitors, staff and families to experience Omani hospitality and build a sense of camaraderie that will transcend the sport.

Chelsea clinch win with two late strikes

ANDY JALIL
NOTTINGHAM, MAY 12

CHelsea emerged victorious, 3-2, in a match of much significance for both sides. With two games remaining, Nottingham Forest, although defeated, should still avoid relegation after Luton suffered defeat against West Ham while Chelsea's hopes of European competition next season remain alive.

Chelsea manager, Mauricio Pochettino, was delighted with the return to fitness of Reece James who came on as a 79th minute substitute and provided an excellent assist for Chelsea's winning goal, said: "It was massive. We all love him and hopefully he can be fit to have the chance of making the Euros. "We have one more week to work with him but he's doing well in the training sessions. There are two big games left so he has time to work."

With constant speculation on his future, Pochettino insisted he still wants to stay at Chelsea. "I never said I'm not happy. I have one year left (on contract) but I always think long term. We want to make the owners happy, the players happy and of course the fans happy. I'm responsible for that. So, to clarify, if the owner is happy then I think we can continue. There is nothing negative, all positive."

Chelsea struck early with Cole Palmer the architect of their 8th minute goal. His marvellous pass opened up the Forest defence and Mykhailo Mudryk raced to the ball to finish first time past Matz Sels.

Forest, who had missed a chance before Chelsea scored, didn't wait long for the equaliser. It came in the 16th minute from a free-kick taken by Morgan Gibbs-White to the far post which Willy Boly headed into the bottom corner. Chelsea put more pressure on the opposition in the second half but it was the home side that shot into the lead. Prior to that a shot from Gibbs-White hit the post and Chris Wood missed an easy chance from the rebound.

Forest were again unlucky when Callum Hudson-Odoi hit the cross bar but in the 74th minute, their hopes of a possible win were raised with their second goal. This time Hudson-Odoi having received a lovely pass from Gibbs-White, put in a curling right-foot shot which found its way just inside the far corner.

Chelsea pressed hard looking to equalise with much of the action taking place in Forest's half and parity was restored with ten minutes remaining when Raheem Sterling, on as substitute, slid into the box and drove inside the far post.

A drawn game would not have had much benefit for either side, Chelsea in their quest for Europe and Forest in their aim to ensure Premier League football next season. But just two minutes after the equaliser, James delivered a pin-point cross to the far post for Nicolas Jackson to head into the net.

Forest manager, Nuno Espirito Santo, whose side should be safe from relegation said: "I think it's not over yet. I have seen things happen in football so we cannot relax yet. I'm disappointed to lose the game and not be able to give our fans a victory. We are frustrated.

"We allowed Chelsea in with bad defending, we were not in the right positions. We switched off and in two minutes the game went away so there were a lot of lessons for us."



Chelsea's Reece James celebrates after the match. – Reuters

OOC takes part in Olympic Council of Asian meeting in Bangkok



MUSCAT: Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) participated in the 43rd General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asian, which was held on Saturday, in the Thailand capital, Bangkok, with the participation of 45 Asian National Olympic Committees. OOC was represented at the meeting by Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishri, OOC Secretary-General, Saif bin Spaa al Rashidi, a member of the Board of Directors, and Mohammed al Rahbi, OOC Executive Director.

A series of constitutional reforms were voted on the meeting, aligning with the Olympic Charter of IOC while maintaining

the independence and Asian characteristics of the Olympic Council of Asian. Thus, NOCs approved all amendments to the system in light of the presented proposals. Additionally, the Council honoured several sports figures who have rendered distinguished services to Asian sports. Furthermore, praise was given during the meeting to the success of Hangzhou, China, in organising the 19th Asian Games in 2023, distinguished in all aspects, and the organising committee received recognition from the Olympic Council of Asian.

The meeting witnessed presentations from

organising committees for upcoming Asian sports events, as well as a review of the latest developments related to hosting the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games to be held in November of this year in Bangkok and Chonburi, and the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, China, in February 2025, and the Asian Youth Games to be held in September 2025 in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. In addition to the Asian Games to be hosted by Nagoya, Japan, in 2026. Before the end of the meeting, financial reports and the report of the financial auditors were reviewed, and all matters presented at the meeting were approved.

Al Harthy upbeat despite SPA retirement after contact

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS: FIA World Endurance Championship LMGT3 class racer Ahmad al Harthy says he remains upbeat and very positive despite an enforced early exit from this weekend's 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps, the result of contact from one of the Hypercar class entries 90 minutes into the race.

Carrying high hopes into race three of the 2024 season, after qualifying a season-best second on the LMGT3 grid in the No.46 BMW M4 GT3, the Omani stayed in the podium battle during the first hour of racing in Belgium on Saturday, and looked well placed.

Holding fourth position after the first round of pit-stops, Al Harthy settled in to the race again and sought to look after the car and Goodyear tyres as much as possible ahead of the upcoming stints for team-mates Valentino Rossi and Maxime Martin.

Maintaining his focus on the strategy in order to minimise degradation of the tyres, the Omani firmly stuck to the plan while also remaining competitive in the top four of LMGT3. Roughly halfway through the second hour of action, though, he was powerless to prevent his enforced retirement.

As he approached Fagnes, Al Harthy's involvement in the encounter ended prematurely after the BMW was hit by the No.38 Team JOTA Porsche 963 Hypercar – a consequence of contact between the Porsche and another of the Hypercars.

Simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, Al Harthy was



justifiably devastated to post the entry's first non-finish of the FIA WEC season. He does, though, remain very positive having exceeded expectation in qualifying and knowing a strong result was all-but assured.

Despite this weekend's non-finish, the No.46 trio remain fourth in the LMGT3 points standings and OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman supported Al Harthy says the team is fired-up to hit back strongly at the next event – the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans.

AHMAD AL HARTHY:
"I'm obviously really disappointed not to be able to finish the race. We started the race in a very strong position, we knew we had to save the tyres for the two hours I was supposed to be in the car and we had a specific strategy for that – to reduce tyre degradation. We were holding our position in the top four or five, and that was a good place to be with our strategy for the remainder of the race.
"We were running our own race and unfortunately, when I had about nine laps to go before the

second pit-stop, two Hypercars made contact and that resulted in them ending our race – there was nothing I could do to avoid it. This is racing, things like this happen, and with our experience we know how to get back and be stronger for the next round.

It's the big one next for the FIA World Endurance Championship – the crown jewel of the 2024 calendar, the 24 Hours of Le Mans. The event will run from Wednesday, 12th June, with the race itself beginning on Saturday, 15th June.

FIA World Endurance Championship LMGT3 Driver Standings (after Rd3)
1st Aliaksander Malykhin / Joel Sturm / Klaus Bachler, 72pts
2nd Augusto Farfus / Darren Leung / Sean Gelael, 37pts
3rd Alex Riberas / Daniel Mancinelli / Ian James, 37pts
4th Ahmad Al Harthy / Maxime Martin / Valentino Rossi, 36pts
5th Clement Mateu / Erwan Bastard / Marco Sorenson, 30pts.

Chennai beat Rajasthan to boost IPL play-off hopes



CHENNAI: Skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's unbeaten 42 and three wickets by Simarjeet Singh helped holders Chennai Super Kings move closer to an IPL play-off spot with a win over Rajasthan Royals on Sunday.

Five-time champions Chennai restricted Rajasthan to 141-5, a total they overhauled with five wickets and 10 balls to spare in their last home game at MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Chennai moved to 14 points and third place with seven wins in 13 matches. Sunrisers Hyderabad, also on

14, slipped to fourth, while Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants remain close with 12 points each. Rajasthan remain second in the 10-team table led by Kolkata Knight Riders, who are the only team to have already qualified for the play-offs. The top four teams will make the play-offs with the final on May 26 in Chennai.

"Very normal to keep thinking about the qualification at this stage. The conversations we are having is to control what we can do," Rajasthan skipper Sanju Samson said.

"At the team brief, I will probably ask them to continue the process and hoping to get on the better side next game."
Gaikwad anchored Chennai's tricky chase as they lost wickets at regular intervals including when Ravindra Jadeja was called out for "obstructing the field".

Jadeja was sent back by Gaikwad while attempting a second run and he changed direction on the pitch when the throw from wicketkeeper Samson hit his hand and the third umpire ruled him out after an appeal from the opposition. – AFP

Arsenal grind out Man Utd win to go top of the Premier League

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom: Arsenal kept their Premier League title dreams alive by ending an Old Trafford hoodoo to grind out a 1-0 win at Manchester United on Sunday to move back top of the table. Leandro Trossard scored the only goal on 20 minutes as Arsenal won for just the second time in 17 games away at United to go a point clear at the summit.

Manchester City still have the destiny of the title in their own hands as the defending champions have two matches left to Arsenal's one.

However, the Gunners kept the pressure on Pep Guardiola's men ahead of their tricky trip to Tottenham on Tuesday.

Defeat further dented United's chances of competing in Europe next season.

Erik ten Hag's men showed more spirit than in a dismal 4-0 defeat to Crystal Palace on Monday, but have now won just one of their last eight Premier League games.

United remain eighth in the table, three points adrift of both Newcastle, who they face on Wednesday, and Chelsea.

Arsenal have been in scintillating form in 2024 to remain in the race for their first league title in 20 years.

Mikel Arteta's men have won 15 and drawn one of their 17 league games since the turn of the year.

But Arsenal were far from their flowing best as the expected onslaught of an injury-ravaged United never materialised under unusually stifling heat in England's north-west.

The manner of defeat at Palace had increased the scrutiny on United boss Ten Hag.

He made three changes to the team swept aside at Selhurst Park as Scott McTominay, Sofyan Amrabat and Amad Diallo came in.

The Dutchman's options were again hamstrung by a lengthy list of absentees with captain Bruno Fernandes among those sidelined and a bench littered with youngsters. But his decision to retain Casemiro as a makeshift centre-back after his woeful showing against Palace will become another stick to beat the beleaguered coach with.

The Brazil captain was dropped from their squad for the Copa America in midweek due to his terrible form. After United had managed to keep the free-scoring visitors at bay for the opening 20 minutes, Casemiro was culpable for the opening goal.

The 32-year-old was laboured in pushing up from a United goal-kick to play Kai Havertz onside and Trossard then stole in on the blind side of Casemiro to tap in the German's cross.

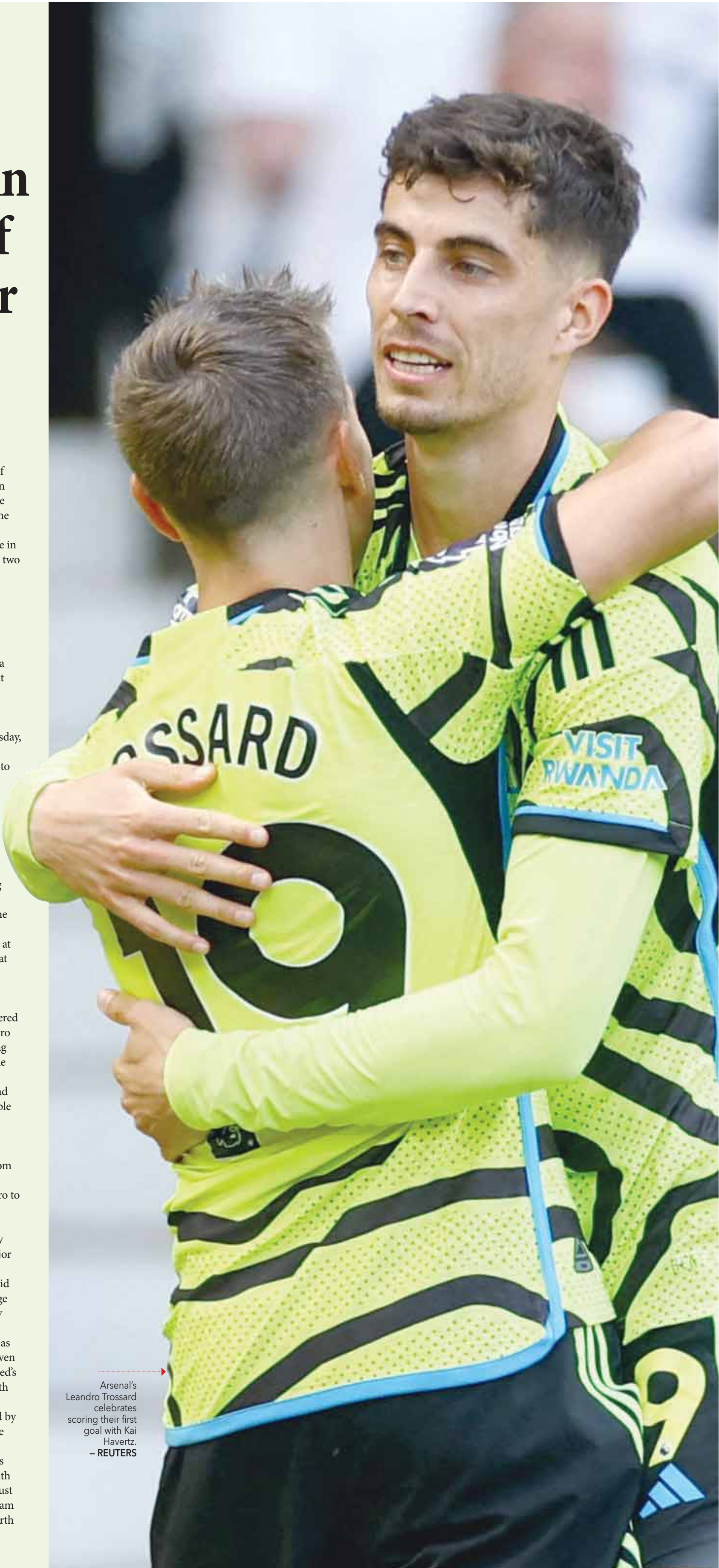
United's new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe was in attendance at Old Trafford rather than at Wembley to see the club's women pick up their first ever major trophy in the FA Cup final.

The work that lies ahead of Ratcliffe has been laid bare in recent weeks, but the home side did manage to keep the majority of the 74,000 crowd onside by taking the game to Arsenal after the break.

Arsenal, though, were rarely seriously troubled as they held out for a sixth clean sheet in their last seven away league games. Alejandro Garnacho was United's one live wire but smashed into the side-netting with his best chance to equalise.

Gabriel Martinelli and Declan Rice were denied by brilliant Andre Onana saves to prevent Arsenal the second goal they craved to avoid a tense finale.

The visitors desperation to see the game out was evident as Martinelli took the ball to the corner with 10 minutes of the 90 still to play. But Arsenal did just enough to ask the question City, who host West Ham on the final day of the season after their visit to north London in midweek. — AFP



Arsenal's
Leandro Trossard
celebrates
scoring their first
goal with Kai
Havertz.
— REUTERS



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Oman exports 78.83 million oil barrels by end of March 2024



Total oil exports increased by 3.7 per cent by end of March 2024.

MUSCAT: The total amount of Oman's oil exports until the end of March 2024 reached approximately 78.838 million barrels based on an average price of \$79.7 per barrel, with oil exports accounting for 86.7 per cent of the total oil production of 90.885 million barrels. Preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that total oil exports increased by 3.7 per cent by the end of March 2024 compared to the end of March 2023, reaching a total of 76.042 million barrels. The total production of crude oil decreased by 7.7 per cent to reach 69.571 million barrels by the end of March 2024, while the total production of petroleum condensates increased by 4.6 per cent, registering 21.313 million barrels. The average daily oil production reached 998,700 barrels by the end of March 2024. China topped the list of countries importing oil from Oman with total exports reaching 77.337 million barrels, an increase of 10.8 per cent compared to the end of March 2023, followed by Japan with 1.500 million barrels, a decrease

of 33.9 per cent. On the other hand, the total local production and import of natural gas reached 13.169 million cubic metres by end of March 2024, an increase of 1.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2023, which recorded 12.931 million cubic metres. Statistics showed that industrial projects accounted for 9.2 per cent of the uses of natural gas in Oman by end of March 2024, reaching 8.807 million cubic metres. The total use of natural gas includes: oil fields (including losses and metre differences and contraction factors), which reached 2.550 billion cubic metres, power generation stations (including gas consumption at Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Defence) reached 1.745 billion cubic metres, and industrial zones (including industrial areas, Oman Mining Company, and Oman Cement) reached 66.200 million cubic metres. The associated natural gas production, inclusive of imports, reached 10.475 billion cubic metres, while the non-associated production reached 2.694 billion cubic metres. — **ONA**

Nama PWP signs RO 125m deal for Ghubrah 3 desalination plant

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) — Oman's single buyer of output from power generation and water desalination projects — in a groundbreaking development for Oman's water sector, has solidified a major agreement valued at RO 125 million for the construction of the Ghubrah 3 desalination plant. This vital project, with a projected production capacity of 300,000 cubic metres per day, represents a cornerstone in the country's quest for enhanced water security and sustainable infrastructure. The Ghubrah 3 desalination plant — which is set to be the largest desalination plant in Oman — encompasses a land area of 70,400 square metres. The plant is expected to commence operations in Q1 of 2027 and will be accompanied by associated projects including a 45,000-cubic-metre potable water reservoir. Utilising Reverse Osmosis technology, the Ghubrah 3 desalination plant exemplifies Oman's commitment to sustainable water management and infrastructure development in alignment with the national objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the signing ceremony between Nama Power and Water Procurement Company and a consortium of three highly regarded local and international companies marked a significant milestone in the water industry landscape of Oman. The alliance signifies a strategic partnership aimed at fostering innovation, driving economic



Eng Abdulaziz bin Said al Shidhani (seated, right), Chairman of the Board of Directors of Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, signs the agreement with Marta Verde, Chairperson of the Capital Desalination Company and CEO of GS Inima.

THE GHUBRAH 3 DESALINATION PLANT – WHICH IS SET TO BE THE LARGEST DESALINATION PLANT IN OMAN – ENCOMPASSES A LAND AREA OF 70,400 SQUARE METRES.

growth, and meeting the ever-growing demands for water and electricity in the region. Eng Abdulaziz bin Said al Shidhani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, affirmed the company's unwavering commitment to addressing the burgeoning water and energy needs of Oman through strategic investments and cutting-edge projects. "The Ghubrah 3 desalination plant exemplifies our dedication to ensuring a sustainable and reliable water supply for our communities," stated Eng Al Shidhani. "By leveraging the latest technologies and fostering collaboration with industry leaders, we are poised to

achieve new milestones in water production and energy efficiency." The Capital Desalination Company, consisting of GS Inima, Jemaih Energy and Sogex Company, will oversee the construction of the Ghubrah 3 desalination plant, bringing together a wealth of experience and expertise in water purification and desalination technologies. Marta Verde, Chairperson of the Capital Desalination Company and CEO of GS Inima, expressed enthusiasm for the project's potential to drive positive change in Oman's water landscape. "Our consortium is dedicated to delivering efficient, sustainable solutions that will bolster water security and promote environmental stewardship," remarked Marta Verde. "We are honoured to contribute our expertise and innovation to the Ghubrah 3 desalination plant, a project that holds immense promise for the future of water production in Oman."

Dr Suhaib Abudayyeh, CEO of Sogex Oman, echoed the sentiments of optimism and progress, emphasising the transformative impact of the Ghubrah 3 desalination plant on Oman's efforts to enhance water security and sustainability. "This project represents a testament to the successful collaboration between public and private sectors in driving innovation and addressing critical water challenges," noted Dr Abudayyeh. "The alliance's collective experience and dedication to excellence will pave the way for operational efficiency and cost-effective water production, benefitting the people of Oman and the broader community." With a steadfast focus on sustainability and environmental responsibility, Nama Power and Water Procurement has positioned itself as a key player in Oman's transition to renewable energy sources and carbon neutrality.

Investments in Oman's AI sector projected to reach \$250m

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

The volume of investment inflows into the Artificial Intelligence (AI) sector in Oman is expected to reach \$250 million, according to Dr Ali bin Amer bin Ali al Shaithani (pictured), Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology. In a recent interview featured in SQU's Tawasil publication, Dr Al Shaithani revealed that

the ministry is in the process of launching a programme to support AI-enhanced economic activities in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy. The programme, according to the Under-Secretary, is expected to attract AI investments valued at \$250 million and boost the country's score in the Government AI Readiness Index. Additionally, he shared that the ministry is in the process of drafting a national programme to train young people in the field of AI in line with the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan



Haitham bin Tarik. "His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, in an address to the Council of Oman last year, issued a directive to prepare a national programme for AI and empower and train young people to seize the opportunities offered by the ICT sector. "Accordingly, the ministry hastened to prepare this programme, which is ready and pending final approval." Dr Al Shaithani also revealed that the ministry is planning to deploy AI and "smart city technologies" in Sultan Haitham City, following an agreement

with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. In 2022, the ministry launched the executive programme for AI and advanced technologies under the umbrella of the National Programme of Digital Economy — a programme aimed at increasing the digital economy's contribution to the local GDP. Earlier this year, ministry officials revealed that the country has attracted \$78 million (RO 30 million) worth of investments in the field of Artificial Intelligence due to the growth of start-ups in the sector.

Lulu ‘Mango Mania’ lures lovers of the juicy delight

MUSCAT: Lulu Hypermarket Oman has launched the ‘Mango Mania’, a delectable occasion for mango lovers from every corner of the country to unite and revel in the succulent glory of this juicy golden fruit.

The mango festival will be held from May 11 to May 18, 2024 across all Lulu stores in Oman as a celebration of the goodness of the King of Fruits.

The event, which was inaugurated by Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, on May 11, 2024, will showcase some of the sweetest, juiciest mangoes brought in from all over the world. The yearly event is an attraction for both locals and expatriates alike to indulge in the flavours of the best mangoes.

Speaking on the occasion, the ambassador underscored the importance of the annual Lulu Mango Mania festival. He



Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman inaugurating the Mango Mania at the Lulu Hypermarket, Avenues Mall, Bausher in the presence of Yusuff Ali M A, Chairman and Managing Director of Lulu Group, Ashraf Ali M A, Lulu Executive Director, Ananth A V, Lulu Oman Director, Shabeer K A, Lulu Oman Regional Director and other officials.

expressed his sincere appreciation to Lulu for curating a selection of over 75 distinct varieties of mangoes, aptly named the “King of Fruits,” for the customers. The ambassador further remarked on the widespread appreciation for Indian mangoes amongst Lulu’s clientele, highlighting their prominent position on customer palettes. He concluded by warmly acknowledging the presence of Yusuff Ali M A, Chairman and Managing Director of Lulu Group.

“We see ourselves as a responsible entity, and that means offering not just a wide range of products, but also offering a dynamic and engaging shopping experience. Strategic promotions and events like ‘Mango Mania’ are key to achieving this.

We’re confident these initiatives will drive high customer involvement, and we’re showcasing a wide selection from across the world,” Yusuff Ali M A,

told reporters at the inauguration of ‘Mango Mania’ festival.

Be it just a juicy slice, or blended into a refreshing smoothie, or incorporated into decadent mouth-watering desserts, the ‘Mango Mania’ is the perfect opportunity for customers to relish some of the special mango treats in the hot food, bakery, sweets and pickles section. Special mango delicacies, pickled mangoes, as well as mango preserves, smoothies, pulps, juices, jellies, and jams will also be available during the promotion.

For this year’s fest, Lulu has stacked up its aisles with a wide range of juicy and scrumptious mangoes from several countries, namely India, Yemen, Thailand, Spain, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Indonesia, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, and Uganda. Locally grown mangoes from Oman will also be part of the event.

Meethaq Islamic Banking wins GIF Market Leadership Award for 2024



Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Corporate Banking.

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, has been honoured with the esteemed Global Islamic Finance (GIF) Award for Market Leadership in recognition of its unwaveringly committed stance of advancing the Islamic Banking landscape within the Sultanate of Oman.

This accolade underscores Meethaq’s continuous dedication to providing top-tier Sharia-compliant services and products to its diverse customers, comprising both individuals and institutions. Since the inception of Meethaq, it has remained steadfast in its pursuit of excellence, consistently raising the bar in providing innovative financial solutions tailored to the evolving needs of our customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Corporate Banking, expressed his delight about receiving this prestigious award, stating: “We are immensely pleased to receive this recognition, which serves as a testament to Meethaq’s enduring journey of accomplishments.

We extend our gratitude to the GIFA team for acknowledging Meethaq’s market leadership position in the Sultanate of Oman’s market.

Meethaq remains dedicated to delivering unparalleled value propositions and services that align with the evolving needs of our esteemed customers. We also extend our sincere appreciation and support to all our valued customers for their confidence and belief in Meethaq.”

BankDhofar customers express their delight with Dhofar-Pay

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has recently launched Dhofar-Pay, an innovative mobile payment service. Customers can simply tap their mobile to make transactions easily without the need for a physical debit card, offering a seamless payment experience.

The bank’s customers expressed their satisfaction with Dhofar-Pay’s security, convenience and ease of use. They activated the service through the bank’s application without any difficulty. The overall experience was described as ‘smooth’.



Ahmed bin Abdullah al Mashaykhi



Aisha bint Abdullah al Hamdaniyah

CONVENIENCE OF PAYMENT
Ahmed bin Abdullah al Mashaykhi activated Dhofar-Pay service without hesitation upon its launch. He considers it a service that provides him with convenience in eliminating the need to carry a wallet while shopping.

He said: “I learned about Dhofar-Pay service through WhatsApp groups and social media posts. The process of activating the service was very easy without assistance of any of my relatives or friends, taking just a few minutes.”

SAYING GOODBYE TO WALLETS
Aisha bint Abdullah al

Hamdaniyah said: “I no longer need to carry my wallet everywhere. All I have to do is to tap my smartphone on the POS machines at various outlets while shopping. The process is easy and convenient.”

Al Hamdaniyah learned about Dhofar-Pay through BankDhofar’s account on X platform, and quickly activated it for an exceptional shopping experience. She also confirmed that the process of activating

this service is smooth, easy and uncomplicated.

FAST ACTIVATION PROCESS
Amjad bin Saif al Zakwani believes that Dhofar-Pay service makes life easier and more flexible in today’s fast-paced world, as no need to present a plastic debit card when shopping.

Pointing out that he had learned about Dhofar-Pay service through X platform and activated it with ease without assistance as the process of activating Dhofar-Pay is straightforward”, he said.

HIGH SECURITY
Asim bin Said al Maamari praised the high security of Dhofar-Pay service, emphasising that the service cannot be used without unlocking the mobile device. This insures protection in case of phone loss. “If a customer loses his mobile phone with his debit card details stored in it, he shall not worry much about anyone using the bank’s card for unauthorised transactions,” he stated.

Al Maamari learned about Dhofar-Pay service through WhatsApp application, and did not hesitate for a moment to activate it, as he said: “The process is very easy, and I did not seek aid of a relative or friend to activate it.”



Oman Broadband, Bahrain Network sign pact for Knowledge Exchange Programme

MUSCAT: In line with their continuous efforts to support and develop the telecommunications sector, Bahrain Network (BNET), the national broadband service provider in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and Oman Broadband Company, a leading provider of wholesale broadband infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman, have announced the signing a cooperation agreement to establish a Knowledge Exchange Programme.”

This collaborative initiative aims to foster the exchange of expertise and best practices in the telecommunications sector between the two organisations.

BNET and Oman Broadband will facilitate employee exchanges, enabling staff members to visit each other’s facilities and share insights on network operations, technology advancements, and strategic planning.

Sultan bin Ahmed al Wahaibi,

CEO of Oman Broadband added, “The partnership with BNET presents a significant step forward in our efforts to promote knowledge exchange and collaboration across the GCC region.

By sharing best practices, we can contribute to the overall growth and development of the telecommunications sector in the Gulf.

We look forward to working closely with BNET and leveraging the expertise of our combined teams to deliver exceptional value to our stakeholders.”

Alhogbani Aldoseri, BNET CEO commented, “By exchanging knowledge and expertise with a leading regional player like Oman Broadband, we can further strengthen our capabilities and contribute to the development of the telecommunications sector in both Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman.”

All-new 2024 Kia Sorento now in Oman

MUSCAT: The all-new 2024 Kia Sorento is one of the much awaited Kia models in Oman. The all-new Sorento with its impressive profile, build quality and performance is designed to make lasting impressions.

The all-new Sorento is a perfect companion for adventure enthusiasts looking forward to escaping the city’s routine with a drive by the country side. Equipped with the advantage of space and comfort, the Sorento packs more punch with its impressive features that offer owners and families alike several opportunities to realise their desires.

The 2024 Kia Sorento is designed to draw attention with its stylish LED headlamps, LED rear combination lamps, LED front and rear fog lamps and LED daytime running lights.

The Sorento’s 19-inch machine finished alloy wheels and panoramic roof, give it a style statement that makes the bold SUV a completely desirable model.

The 2024 Sorento’s front design, has a strong yet sensual look emphasising its pronounced look and stance. The hood sculpted with a stronger sense of volume provides an upscale SUV image.

The three-dimensional radiator



grille and Kia’s next-generation signature vertical Star-map DRL graphics emphasise the progressive and high-tech SUV image. The rugged and confident front mask with a skid plate that harmonises with the boldly proportioned wide bumper

design. A wide & technical-shaped rear skid plate in harmony with black cladding realises a solid SUV presence. A new star-map graphic that connects the two vertical tail lamps reinforces the new Kia design identity. The 2024 Sorento interior

is spacious, appealing and emphasises wideness with a horizontal layout. The interior includes a high-tech image through a panoramic curved display and a switchableKeyboard.

Info/Climate switchable control provides convenient and efficient usability by applying Info/Climate switchable controller.

The all-new 2024 Kia Sorento can be experienced at any Kia showroom. Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

FSQC to take measures following 'BonTum' mayonnaise contamination reports

ZAKIYA AL HUSSAINI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Following reports of food poisoning incidents associated with 'BonTum' mayonnaise, the Food Safety and Quality Centre (FSQC) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Oman has confirmed that the product is exclusively distributed within the country of origin.

After contamination was detected in the mayonnaise due to the presence of 'Clostridium botulinum' bacteria, the FSQC stated that necessary measures will be implemented to prevent its entry through border crossings.

In an online statement, the FSQC emphasised, "In our commitment to ensuring consumer safety, the centre reaffirms that the product is only available in its country of origin, and it takes all necessary precautions to prevent its importation into the country."

Furthermore, the FSQC announced its collaboration with municipal authorities across all governorates and the Consumer Protection Authority to ensure that markets remain free of BonTum mayonnaise. Hence, consumers are urged to refrain from purchasing the product until further notice.

Salalah Port braces for 25 per cent drop in container volumes due to Red Sea crisis

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Port of Salalah, the leading transshipment and logistics gateway of the Sultanate of Oman, has warned that ongoing disruptions in the Red Sea could pull down container throughput volumes by about a fourth for the remainder of 2024.

However, top officials have stressed that efforts are underway to mitigate the impacts of the crisis on the port's performance, notably in the form of alternative routing options and multi-modal cargo solutions.

Now into its sixth month, the Red Sea crisis was triggered by Ansar Allah protesting Israel's genocidal assault on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. By targeting merchant ships carrying cargoes to and from Israeli ports, the Ansar Allah blockade has caused a significant redirection of maritime traffic in the Red Sea, culminating in far-reaching global trade and transport repercussions.

"The ongoing disruptions in the Red Sea are having a significant impact on global container transport, and consequently, our operations in Salalah are also being affected. Major customers have adjusted their networks, rerouting eastbound services to Cape of Good Hope



Multi-modal solutions to offset impacts from Red Sea blockade.

or implementing suspension of some services," commented Braik Musallam al Amri, Chairman of Board of Directors, Salalah Port Services Co SAOG.

"Forecasts for the remainder of 2024 indicate a sustained decrease in overall container volume, estimated at -20-25 per cent driven by transshipment volume, as the resolution of the ongoing crisis remains uncertain.

However, gate volume is not expected to be impacted except for longer transit times faced by customers and limited space

availability," Al Amri stated in the Chairman's Message accompanying the Q1 2024 report on the port's financial performance.

During the first quarter, Salalah Port posted a 17-per cent slump in container volumes to 878K TEUs, down from 1.056K TEUs in the corresponding quarter of 2023.

The decline was attributed largely to the Red Sea crisis, but also partly to capacity constraints at the Container Terminal linked to an ongoing upgrade project. Significantly, mitigation

initiatives are underway to "minimise the gap created by the decline in transshipment volume", according to port officials.

In anticipation of the Ansar Allah blockade dragging on for the rest of the year, Port of Salalah has unveiled multi-modal service options designed to provide a viable alternative to the costly and lengthy re-routing of traffic around the Cape of Good Hope.

In one such multi-modal solution, the port is offering Beneficial Cargo Owners (BCOs) and shipping lines "cost-effective

and fast alternatives" between Asia the United States East Coast and European destinations.

"From the Port of Salalah, an in-transit overland route by truck connects to Jeddah located in the safer mid-point of the Red Sea in Saudi Arabia. The overland route takes approximately 4-5 days.

"From this point the journey can continue by container vessel through the Suez Canal to Europe or the US East Coast reducing the overall transit time under to current routing," the port explained in a press statement.

For time-sensitive cargo into and out of Europe, Salalah Port is offering a sea-air option.

"Upon discharge in the Port of Salalah, cargo is transferred to either Salalah or Muscat airports or even Jebel Ali depending on availability of airlift capacity and connections.

"Salalah Airport offers state-of-the-art airfreight infrastructure, the ability to handle both narrow- and wide-body aircraft, and sufficient spare handling capacity," it stated.

The new multi-modal service, it further noted, reduces transit times by an estimated 20-40 per cent compared to traditional east-west trade routes and could deliver a cost saving of 10-20 per cent compared to a pure air-freight solution.

Oman Post, Asyad Express to showcase advanced logistics

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Oman Post and Asyad Express, part of Asyad Group, will showcase advanced logistics and postal capabilities at the Seamless Middle East 2024 Exhibition, which will be held in Dubai from May 14 to 16.

This participation is in line with the ongoing efforts to expand Oman Post and Asyad Express global footprint and enhance the reach of the services across international markets.

Aiming to be one of the leaders in providing courier and postal services in the region, Oman Post and Asyad Express will showcase its state-of-the-art Fulfilment Centre, cutting-edge warehousing solutions, efficient in-house customs clearances, other value added services and diverse postal services and innovative solutions for individuals and corporates.

Meeting with peers and



like-minded professionals from the Middle East will provide the opportunities to enhance and strengthen the company's strategic partnerships.

The exhibition serves as a fruitful avenue for networking with industry leaders and stakeholders, attracting a wide array of e-commerce providers and retailers.

With over 800 speakers, the event will delve into the latest trends, market disruptions, and technologies shaping the payments, fintech, retail, e-commerce and logistics landscapes. Exclusive sessions will be held on Global Digital Commerce, the Intelligent Market, CX & Engagement and Conversational AI.

Development Bank's lending portfolio reaches RO 245.8 million

MUSCAT: The Development Bank's lending portfolio recorded a growth of 4 per cent during the first quarter of this year compared to its size at the end of December 2023, reaching approximately RO 245.8 million.

Statistics issued by the bank indicated that the number of loans approved by the bank in Q1 2024 amounted to 1,499 loans, worth RO 33.6 million, an increase of 26 per cent compared to Q1 2023.

The statistics showed that loan approvals during Q1 2024 were 136 loans in Muscat Governorate worth RO 11.1 million, 182 loans in Dhofar Governorate worth RO 3 million, and 215 loans in Al Batinah North Governorate worth RO 3.5 million.

Al Batinah South Governorate 136 loans worth RO 3.5 million, in Al Dhahirah Governorate 127 loans worth RO 1.1 million, 58 loans worth RO 1.5 million in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, 93 loans in Al Wusta Governorate worth RO 2 million, and in Musandam Governorate 82 loans worth RO 700,000. In Al Buraimi Governorate there were 44 loans worth RO 600,000, in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate 88 loans worth RO 1.2 million, while in Al Sharqiyah South



Governorate the number of loans reached 338 loans worth RO 5.4 million.

The number of loans in the agriculture and livestock sector reached 245 loans worth RO 4.1 million, in the fisheries sector 600 loans worth RO 6 million, in the industrial sector 292 loans worth RO 12.3 million, and in the mining sector 3 loans worth RO 200,000.

The other loans were distributed among the educational, health, tourism, professional and public services sectors, with a total of 359 loans worth RO 11 million. — ONA

Intaj Suhar signs key partnerships for moulds manufacturing

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Aligned with the efforts of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) to support local industries and maximise local value addition, Intaj Suhar — affiliated to the Industrial Innovation Academy — has signed cooperation agreements with Muna Noor Plastic Industries, Areej Vegetable

Oils and Derivatives, Techno Plastic Industry, and National Aluminium Products Company.

The agreements aim at enhancing cooperation between Intaj Suhar and the companies in the fields of mould manufacturing, precision components manufacturing and reverse engineering.

Eng Majid al Hinai, General Manager of Intaj Suhar for Advanced Manufacturing, stated, "The agreements are poised to



Eng Majid al Hinai of Intaj Suhar signing the agreements with representatives of local manufacturing units.

play a key role in enabling and supporting the local factories and companies in manufacturing cost effective moulds for production processes, thereby reducing production costs incurred by importing such moulds from overseas markets."

The company currently comprises three main units, namely, Plastic Technology and Moulds Manufacturing Centre, Advanced Manufacturing Centre, and a

unit for reverse engineering and machinery.

The objectives of Intaj Suhar include developing technological skills and capabilities; prototyping, product and tools designing and manufacturing; advanced training and HR development; enhancing ICV and promoting economic diversification; fostering job creation; and providing opportunities for the SMEs in the industrial sector.

Hafeet Rail: Oman’s gateway to global trade



AHMED AL RAIISI

The author, backed by over 16 years of experience in economics and business strategy, combines his academic background in economics with practical experience in data analysis, project management, and consulting to create clear and engaging economic articles.

The Hafeet Rail project, emblematic of a robust Oman-UAE collaboration, is poised to transform Oman’s logistics and trade framework. More than just shortening the travel time between Suhar and Abu Dhabi, it represents a strategic advance, bolstering Oman’s role as a critical trade hub in the region. Strategically positioned near the Strait of Hormuz and boasting the state-of-the-art Port of Sohar, Oman enjoys considerable logistical benefits. Hafeet Rail will leverage these advantages by significantly reducing transportation times across the Oman-UAE corridor. This enhancement is vital for the swift delivery of time-sensitive products from the UAE, including fresh produce and high-value manufactured goods, thereby enhancing Oman’s

attractiveness as a trade partner. Connecting to the extensive UAE rail network, Hafeet Rail will provide Oman access to a vast Gulf region market, facilitating smoother distribution channels and reducing reliance on maritime routes through the Strait of Hormuz, known for their susceptibility to disruptions. The investment in Hafeet Rail, along with the port infrastructure enhancements, entails a substantial financial commitment. However, the expected economic returns are substantial, especially with advancements in automation and port operations designed to ensure seamless transitions of cargo between rail and sea. **Economic ripple effects** The broader economic impact of Hafeet Rail extends beyond direct financial gains. The project is anticipated to catalyse a ripple

effect across various sectors of the Omani economy: **Local businesses:** Improved transportation logistics will lower the cost of moving goods, benefiting local manufacturers and retailers by reducing input costs and enhancing the competitiveness of domestic and international Omani products. **Tourism and services:** Enhanced connectivity will likely boost tourism, as easier access to different regions promotes travel and exploration. The service industry, particularly hospitality and retail, stands to gain from increased visitor numbers and spending. **Urban development:** The areas surrounding the new rail stations may see significant urban development, with increases in real estate values and the emergence of new commercial and residential projects. **Economic impact and growth**

projections Comparing Hafeet Rail with similar infrastructure projects worldwide provides insights into its potential economic impact: Kenya’s Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway boosted Kenya’s GDP by about 1.5 per cent by enhancing transport efficiency, although it required supportive economic policies to realise full benefits. Morocco’s Tangier-Casablanca High-Speed Rail, launched in 2018, contributed to a 2-per cent rise in Morocco’s GDP by improving connectivity and reducing travel times, significantly benefiting the tourism and service sectors. East African Railway Masterplan is projected to uplift regional GDP by up to 5 per cent, driven by extensive infrastructure development and regional integration. From these examples, Hafeet Rail could increase Oman’s

GDP by 2-4 per cent. This projection assumes that the project will not only enhance logistics and trade, but will also integrate seamlessly with ongoing economic reforms and infrastructural improvements. **Conclusion** Hafeet Rail marks Oman’s steadfast commitment to economic diversification and long-term prosperity. By investing in this transformative infrastructure and focusing on technological advancements in port operations, Oman is poised to reinforce its position as a central player in global trade dynamics. This initiative will open new economic pathways, decrease dependency on the Strait of Hormuz, and improve supply chain resilience, setting a course for a prosperous economic future in Oman.

Boeing’s problems rattle US aviation regulator as well

ELODIE MAZEIN

The US Federal Aviation Administration, sharply criticised after the crashes of two Boeing planes in 2018 and 2019, is again being dragged into a maelstrom surrounding the major American aerospace manufacturer. The dramatic mid-flight blowout on January 5 of a fuselage panel on an Alaska Airlines plane precipitated the departures of a series of top Boeing officials — including CEO Dave Calhoun, who is set to step down at year’s end — and the reduced production of the 737 MAX. But as Boeing faces multiple inquiries and audits in the United States and abroad, it has repeatedly assured critics that it is working “with full transparency and under the oversight” of FAA regulators. And the FAA, which itself has seen four bosses come and go since August 2019, has been unable to evade a share of the responsibility. “The FAA has to be held accountable as well,” said Senator Richard Blumenthal, who heads a subcommittee investigating Boeing’s safety practices. After the panel incident in January, the agency dispatched a team to inspect Boeing factories, and gave the firm 90 days to provide an “action plan” to address several problem areas. “I think the FAA is doing the best that they can and that they have greatly improved their surveillance of Boeing” since the 2018 and 2019 crashes off Indonesia and in Ethiopia, which killed 346 people, said Jeff Guzzetti, an aviation consultant and former head of the agency’s investigation division. “But they did fail to catch production problems,” he said, noting that for decades the FAA relied on manufacturers themselves to “self-report problems.” The FAA, short on money and personnel, has long delegated the job of quality assurance to pre-approved

employees of the airplane manufacturers. That creates “a conflict of interest,” said Hassan Shahidi, president of the nonprofit Flight Safety Foundation. “There needs to be a shift where the FAA has more direct responsibility for oversight,” he said. Like Guzzetti, he said he has seen some improvement but believes the FAA must dispatch more of its own inspectors — and not delegate so much regulatory authority to manufacturers. “This is going to take some time and it will need vigilance,” Shahidi added. But the agency “is on the right track now,” said Richard Aboulafia, managing director of the AeroDynamic Advisory consultancy. “It’s nothing that can’t be corrected with additional oversight and resources,” he said. Those resources depend directly on the US Congress, and the Senate on Thursday approved a “record” amount of agency funding for the next five years. “We need to show (the public) that we are asking for, implementing and holding accountable the FAA to a gold standard for safety,” said Senator Maria Cantwell, who chairs the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. The “record” level of financing, Cantwell added, would allow the FAA to step up inspections. It still needs House approval before President Joe Biden can sign it into law. Industry shortages of qualified personnel, from mechanics to engineers, were made worse by the pandemic, affecting every stage of manufacturing — from supply procurement to production and maintenance. “It’s difficult to recruit and retain good craftsmen, even for Boeing,” Guzzetti said. And the FAA has specifically struggled to fill its hiring needs because workers can find higher pay and better benefits in the private sector. — AFP

The Omani tax system: Balancing the imperatives of growth and equity



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of Oman Observer’s Business section

The Sultanate of Oman uses a prudent tax structure that promotes economic expansion while raising revenues for the state. Oman does not currently impose personal income tax on its citizens or expatriate residents, in contrast to many other countries outside of the GCC. For individuals, this means that their salaries, earnings, and other sources of income are tax-free. Hydrocarbon export earnings, customs duty, corporate income tax, and the recently enacted Value Added Tax (VAT) and Excise Tax are the main sources of revenue for the government. Value Added Tax is a wide tax that was introduced in April 2021 and is typically applied at a rate of 5 per cent to the majority of goods and services. This tax’s total impact on consumers is lessened since it is imposed throughout the supply chain without being compounded. Oman recognises the value of essentials and exempts over 400 items, including food, from value-added tax. Furthermore, there are no taxes on healthcare, education, or other essential services. This all-encompassing strategy protects necessary products and services while guaranteeing that the tax burden is allocated equitably. Oman uses targeted excise tax in addition to VAT on particular products that can be harmful to



health. Usually, these goods are tobacco products, sugar-filled beverages, and other items seen to be harmful to the general public’s health. The excise tax’s main goal is to reduce the use of certain products, which will improve society’s health. This fee is borne by the final customer, who is influenced to make healthier choices while making purchases. Corporate income tax is also imposed by Oman on the earnings of businesses that are registered there. This tax does not directly affect individuals; it only applies to revenue-generating businesses. Nonetheless, since a percentage of business profits goes towards paying taxes, corporate income tax may have an indirect impact on investor returns. The idea of imposing a personal income tax in Oman has spurred discussion across the country. Amidst the government’s efforts to diversify revenue sources and reduce dependence on fluctuating oil prices, some people have been voicing apprehensions regarding equity, cost-effectiveness, and possible economic consequences. One effective instrument for ensuring Oman’s future prosperity might be a carefully thought-out individual income tax. But following this route

necessitates striking a careful balance between resolving obstacles and optimising advantages. The proposed tax’s stated objectives are praiseworthy. By diversifying its revenue sources, the government would be less dependent on oil prices and be able to continue paying public services. Progressive taxation, in which the wealthiest pay a higher proportion of taxes, may encourage social stability and income parity. Furthermore, tax money might be used to fund the development of infrastructure, which is essential to a healthy economy. Subsidised goods and services have the potential to reduce financial burdens for persons with lower incomes, hence promoting a more egalitarian society. The particular tax system will be important. All earners pay the same rate under a flat tax, which is simple but not progressive. Fairness is enhanced by a progressive system, which has higher rates for the wealthiest. However, deciding on the right income bands and tax rates necessitates a strong administrative framework. Like other countries, Oman will probably have difficulties putting an individual income tax

into effect. It can be challenging to ascertain a person’s overall income. To stop rampant tax evasion, the government must invest in effective tax assessment and collection methods. High tax rates may also deter international investment and skill, endangering Oman’s ability to thrive economically over the long run. Notwithstanding these obstacles, a number of suggestions can maximise the efficiency of a system of personal income taxes. By introducing the tax gradually, modifications based on experience are possible. Establishing modest tax rates at first can reduce initial disruptions and foster public trust. Future changes to Oman’s tax structure can be informed by observing the tax regimes of other Gulf nations. Low-income earners’ exemption from tax computations guarantees that the system will continue to be equitable. Effective communication and public trust are essential for individual income taxation to be successful. Open communication on the advantages and resolution of issues will promote public support. Trust that tax money is being used wisely is increased by openness in tax collecting and expenditure. Ensuring an equitable and effective system also deters tax avoidance, maximise collected income. For Oman, enacting an individual income tax might be a game-changer. This strategy has the potential to produce a more affluent and fair future by advancing social justice, diversifying government revenue, and fostering infrastructure development. However, the effectiveness of the tax depends on a well-thought-out system that addresses possible issues and builds public trust. Oman can effectively negotiate this delicate balancing act by placing a high priority on fairness, openness, and long-term economic growth.

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ANIMAL PLANET

Abundant food found in landfills combined with warmer weather caused by climate change are leading the vast majority of storks to skip this arduous journey and stay year-round in Portugal. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Finnish visual artist and DJ Teemu Keisteri, also known as Windows95man and representing Finland with the song "No rules!", performs during the final of the 68th Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) 2024 in Sweden. —AFP



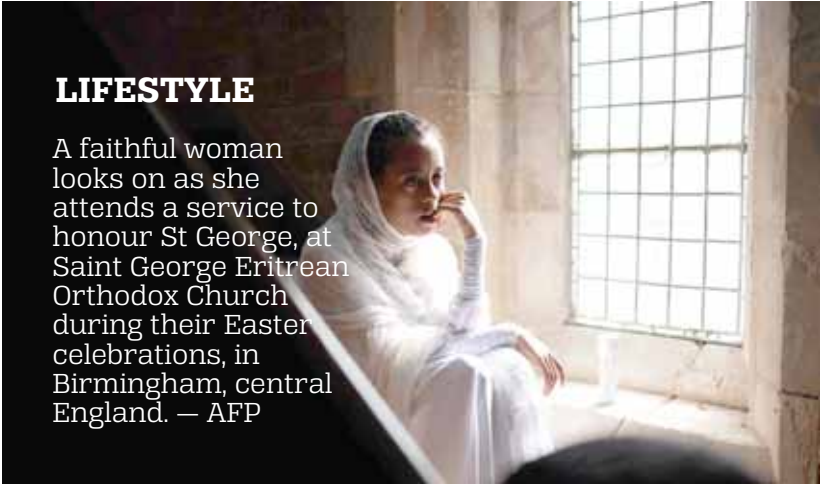
ENTERTAINMENT

The pop singer-songwriter Bashar Murad decided to run at Eurovision qualifications representing Iceland as he couldn't enter the song contest as a Palestinian candidate. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by Colombian designer Monica Fonnegra as part of the Createx fair in Bogota. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A faithful woman looks on as she attends a service to honour St George, at Saint George Eritrean Orthodox Church during their Easter celebrations, in Birmingham, central England. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | MAY 13, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 5, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



BRIDGING NATIONS
AWARD WINNERS
DEMONSTRATE ART
AND ADVOCACY

Spearheaded by Madeleine ImKey, "Bridging Nations" which celebrated art and advocacy for sustainable development through a competition focused on the UN's SDGs wrapped up recently. Launched in Oman, the event showcased remarkable talent, emphasising interculturality, inclusivity, and the power of creativity... P20

ENTERTAINMENT

Katy Perry
fools
Internet
with fake AI
photos of
Met Gala

US SINGER KATY Perry said even her own mother was fooled by AI-generated fake images she posted on Tuesday of herself pretending to attend the Met Gala in New York.

"Couldn't make it to the MET, I had to work," the "Firework" singer wrote to her 207 million followers on Instagram. But two photos with it appear to show Perry on the famous steps of the Metropolitan Museum, which hosted the glitziest fashion night of the year on Monday. One had her wearing a huge floral dress, while a second had her in a warrior-style bronze bustier and grass petticoat. She put her location as "Metaverse", but many online fans failed to pick up on the fact that Perry was not actually present. The image even fooled Perry's mother. The singer shared an exchange in which her mum wrote: "Didn't know you went to the Met." Perry responded: "lol mom the AI got you too, BEWARE!" Other fakes also emerged of the evening, including images of singer Rihanna and actor Selena Gomez. Although AI has often been used to



create images of celebrities, some are now embracing the technology themselves. Earlier this year, British singer-songwriter FKA Twigs revealed she had built a deepfake version of herself. It "is not only trained in my personality, but also can use my exact tone of voice to speak many languages," she said in a statement. "I will be engaging my 'AI twigs' later this year to extend my reach and handle my online social media interactions, whilst I continue to focus on my art from the comfort and solace of my studio," she added. In January, a fake pornographic image of superstar Taylor Swift was viewed 47 million times on X in half a day before being removed by the platform. The following month, 20 internet giants including Meta (Instagram, Facebook) and X committed to deploying technologies to more effectively identify and report content generated by AI. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Scientists win World Food Prize for work on Global Seed Vault

SCIENTISTS GEOFFREY HAWTIN and Cary Fowler, who on Thursday received the prestigious World Food Prize for "their work to preserve the world's heritage of seeds", are on a mission. Their vocation is to safeguard as many seeds as possible so that one day the world can benefit from their genetic characteristics. Their work is all in the name of protecting global food security. Hawtin and Fowler helped set up a world reserve of seeds dug into a glacier on the Norwegian archipelago Svalbard in the Arctic — where 1.25 million samples are now stored for preservation in the cold.

It was for this work they were named the 2024 winners of the World Food Prize, awarded to individuals who have increased the quality, quantity, or availability of food worldwide. The goal is always to conserve as many agricultural seeds as possible, 75-year-old British-Canadian agronomist Hawtin said. "What actually changed a little bit since it opened in 2008 is the material going into it," he said. After mainly collecting seeds from "domesticated" plants like wheat and barley, the reserve is now welcoming more wild species that are more or less related to

cultivated plants. The latter mainly "have genes that are particularly interesting with climate change", he said. **- COUNTLESS EXPERIMENTS -** The domestication of plants is "the result of thousands of years and countless experiments," said Fowler, a 74-year-old American seed specialist and the US Special Envoy for Global Food Security. It would be "arrogant" to think that current genetic engineering tools, even the most sophisticated, could reproduce those experiments, he added. That would be "a more expensive way of getting the diversity that we already have contained in the seeds in the seed banks". Hawtin said that while gene editing had a huge role to play, the "problem is what to edit". "There are tens of thousands, if not more, genes that in some way or another affect the plant's response to just the climate change, which could be heat, which can be cold, which can be drought, which can be flooding," he said. He said he doubted that even artificial intelligence could allow "the full level of understanding" needed for such an approach. He nevertheless predicts the rise of digital seed banks where more and more information detailing the genetic characteristics of plants will be stored.

- SAVED IN SYRIA - Both men began their careers in the 1970s. The aim then was not yet to adapt to climate change but to produce as much wheat, maize and rice as possible. "There were famines in Ethiopia and in India and, most of the concern then was for filling people's stomachs," Fowler said. To achieve this, experts at the time recommended concentrating on seeds with the highest yields and making massive use of fertilisers and pesticides. Since then, they have understood the importance of developing more durable agricultural systems and enlarging the range of crops grown, said Fowler. As the Special Envoy for Global Food Security, he promotes the use of traditional crops in Africa. Often neglected by research programmes in favour of corn, wheat and rice, they are potentially more nutritious and better adapted to the environment. Hawtin began his career in the Middle East, meeting with farmers and collecting vegetable seeds in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Lebanon and Jordan and then cross-referencing them. Not wanting to just throw them away, he started to keep them.

- SEED BANKS 'CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE' - Three decades later, the war in Syria forced the Aleppo seed bank, where the agronomist had once worked, to "evacuate" its samples with urgency. Many of them went to the Svalbard seed bank. Some, including vegetable seeds collected by Hawtin and his team, have already been withdrawn from the reserve to join collections in Morocco and Lebanon. "Two weeks ago, I was in Morocco, and I saw some of that material being planted out in the fields in Morocco and being tested for resistance to drought," Hawtin said. The fact that the global reserve was used up so quickly leaves the scientists with a hint of bitterness. "It's like an automobile insurance policy. You never want to be in a situation where you have to use it," Fowler said. "I'm sorry to say it, but I think there will be more situations of conflicts around the world and of natural disasters with, unfortunately, seed banks getting caught in the middle," he added. The World Food Prize, worth \$500,000, was set up in 1986 by Dr Norman E. Borlaug who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work in global agriculture. It is presented every year in Iowa, the United States. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Backstage artisans keep Moulin Rouge kicking

EVEN WITH THE FAMOUS sails of its windmill gone, the Moulin Rouge never lets up: twice a night, 365 nights a year, in a whirlwind of feathers, rhinestones and sequins. The sails of the 135-year-old cabaret in the Montmartre district of Paris collapsed last month — the cause remains unknown. But with some 1,700 spectators still coming every evening, the show must go on. And while the 60-strong troupe of "Doriss Girls" — named after legendary choreogra-

pher Doris Haug — get all the attention, creating and maintaining their costumes is another huge and highly skilled job. The show has daunting annual requirements: nearly 1,000 tailor-made outfits each requiring up to 250 hours of assembly, 800 pairs of shoes, and not forgetting the three kilometres of ostrich-feather boas. The clacking of sewing machines backstage is a near-constant soundtrack before and after — and sometimes during — shows. "We are on every evening. The costumes wear out... But the show must always be the same, at the highest quality," the cabaret's general director, Jean-Victor Clerico, 38, said. In the same family for four generations, the Moulin Rouge started buying up small artisan workshops in the 2000s — partly experts in featherwork and embroidery — that were struggling to survive in modern-day Paris. "These artisans are a living heritage that risked disappearing, and they are essential for the show," said Clerico. "It was the duty of the Moulin to perpetuate their existence and allow the transmission of their knowledge to younger generations," he added.



Mine Verges, 88, a costume designer since the 1960s, was one of the first to come under the Moulin's umbrella. Her workshop supplies and maintains the troupe, as well as many other clients. "The most complicated costumes are those of the cabaret. Everything must be much more solid than normal clothing, and

when there are feathers, it must above all be pleasant for the dancers," she said. "Le Moulin was the first cabaret with whom I worked and it will be the last," she said, adding that she was pleased her savoir-faire will be passed down. **- FEATHERWORK -** Supplier to haute couture houses such as Hermes and Louis Vuitton, Maison Fevrier was set up in 1929 and is the last featherwork workshop in the heart of Paris. Its "plumasserie" (fine feather work) has been officially recognised as a "living heritage" by the French government. It became part of the Moulin family in 2009 and handles some three tonnes of ostrich, pheasant and rooster feathers

for the cabaret each year. Embroidery is handled by Atelier Valentin using the ancestral technique of Luneville crochet and chain stitch. "The marvellous has always fascinated me. There is no limit to what you can embroider: sequins, pearls, rhinestones, repurposed metal pieces... The only imperative for a stage costume is to be strong," said its director, Caroline Valentin, whose other clients include the Paris Opera, Disney, Givenchy and the Academie Francaise. Shoes are another integral part of the show, especially for the energetic high-kicking antics of the Can-Can that conclude every evening. Clairvoy, a cobblers founded in 1945, has been part of the Moulin's operation since 2007. Nicolas Maistriaux, 45, and his team make the troupe's shoes, taking up to 60 hours to assemble each pair, not counting their maintenance and renewal when the dancers' heels wear them out. Kylie Minogue also called on Maison Clairvoy for her recent tour. "Our jobs are rewarding beyond anything," said Valentin. "We have the absolutely immense chance to create beauty... That's what artistic craftsmanship is all about." — AFP



BRIDGING NATIONS AWARD WINNERS DEMONSTRATE ART AND ADVOCACY

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The inaugural edition of the Bridging Nations with Interculturality, Inclusivity and SDGs initiative, founded by Madeleine ImKey, delegate and ambassador of the French Academic Society of Arts-Sciences-Lettres, culminated in a celebration of art and advocacy for sustainable development. The competition centred around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), saw remarkable talent emerge, with a focus on themes such as quality education and zero-hunger.

Held in Oman and generously sponsored by Oxy Oman, the initiative's grand finale took place at the French Embassy in Oman, where the gold and silver medalists were announced. Among the esteemed winners, Emerson Sumaong and student Khadija bint Khudadat al Balushiyah claimed two gold medals for their depiction of SDG 4, Quality Education. Meanwhile, Fatima al Busaidy and her student, Zaina bint Hamoud al Wahaiyah, were awarded two Silver medals for their representation of SDG 2, Zero-Hunger.

The ceremony, hosted by French Ambassador Veronique Aulagnon, welcomed Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, as the Chief Guest. In her opening remarks, Ambassador Aulagnon underscored the crucial role of culture in fostering cooperation and highlighted France's commitment to cultural exchange. She also emphasised the economic significance of the creative industry, recognising its potential for driving growth and innovation.

The French Academy recognised the participants' accomplishments by presenting certificates to all the students, acknowledging their valuable contributions to the cultural landscape. The World Health Organization office in Oman joined in the celebration by presenting gifts to all the students, symbolising a collective endorsement of creativity, education, and cross-cultural collaboration.

The President of the French Academy, Fernand Girard, said, "Our society has been distributing these

medals and diplomas for the last 109 years. Other medals and awards will be presented at the Grand Award Ceremony at the Grand Salon Opera in Paris on October 6th. The friendly, cultural, and institutional exchange that has taken place between us qualifies us as responsible inhabitants of our global village."

The 17 paintings were moved from the French Embassy to Muscat Airport on Thursday, where it hosted the participants and displayed the paintings. The Guest of Honour, HH Sayyidah Afra bint Talal al Said, inaugurated the exhibition with Saud bin Nasser al Hubaishi, Chief Operations Officer of the Muscat Airport. Salsabeel bint Badr al Busaidiyah, in her opening address on behalf of Oman Airports, said, "This initiative, which embodies the essence of interculturality and inclusivity, has not only brought together diverse communities but has also celebrated the boundless creativity of the children of Oman and our fellow artists."

At Oman Airports, we recognise the importance of fostering an environment that embraces diversity and promotes inclusivity. The "Bridging Nations" project exemplifies our commitment to creating a world where every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents."

At the event, the audience was treated to a piano recital by the world-renowned Maestro Alexey Botvinov. Revered as the foremost interpreter of Rachmaninov's works in contemporary times, Botvinov's captivating performance celebrated his mastery of the piano.

Botvinov is also renowned for his role in curating the prestigious Odessa Classics festival, drawing thousands of music enthusiasts annually.

Madeleine ImKey explained that the artworks were judged on criteria such as Collaborative Process, Creativity, Technical Skill, and Impact, the quality of the 17 paintings impressed the expert jury, comprising curators, French authorities, and the President of the Academy in person.

"It is notable to observe that both winning teams comprised students from an association for the visually

impaired, highlighting the exceptional creativity and capability present within every individual.

The jury was particularly impressed by the quality of the artwork, and other teams closely followed in the rankings, demonstrating the high standard of creativity and execution across the board. I now invite all artists, those who participated in the project and all the other artists in search of international recognition from one of the most prestigious art Academies, to contact us and prepare their portfolios within the next month for the academy to assess their work and grant them their appropriate medal," said Madeleine.

"Wherever there is art, there is peace," said Emerson, who won the gold medal, adding, "Creating art with Khadija was truly wonderful and unforgettable. She's a bright student, though she struggles with colours. We used her favourite, green, a lot. I let her explore different materials to make the process enjoyable. The ideas in the painting were all hers; I just helped put them together. She is independent and knows what she wants."

Khadija drew a home, a tree, a cat, and a cat house, all from her dreams. She even taught me some Arabic words. She shared stories about a talking bird at home, which inspired our main subject. Understanding each child's nature is crucial; they are all unique. Learning should be fun and tailored to them." Emerson had his own unique experience, "Because Khadija has trouble with colours and eyesight, we used more textures. We experimented with shells, feathers, wood, Legos, and fishbones. I enjoyed the process as much as she did. I gave her a shell with her portrait and the bird; she loved it. The next day, she surprised me with a portrait of myself, touching my heart. When she said she wanted to paint together again, it melted my heart. Khadija is a wonderful soul, and I'm thankful for this experience." Fatima al Busaidy expressed her thoughts in sign language on how much she enjoyed the process of interpreting Sustainable Development Goal 2 with Zaina bint Hamoud al Wahaiyah. Sustainable Goal 2 is about creating a world with no hunger by the year 2030.

