

Nakheel Oman Development Company, the largest producer of dates in the Sultanate of Oman, is setting up a major date farm at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate, which is set to be the biggest wholly-organic date cultivation project of its kind in the country. Covering an area of around 5 million square metres, the farm currently hosts around 34,000 palm trees of the premium khalas, fard, and majdoul varieties. When fully cultivated, the farm will boast a total of around 100,000 trees. **DETAILS ON P13**

SUNRISE - 05:46 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:28 AM

DHUHR - 12:12 PM

ASR - 03:39 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:33 PM

ISHA - 07:46 PM



27 RESCUED
IN A WADI IN
WILAYAT OF IBRA

SEARCH STILL ON
FOR FIVE OTHER
MISSING PEOPLE

SCHOOL BUILDING
IN AL MUDHAIBI
FULLY INUNDATED

WEATHER
TO SUBSIDE BY
THURSDAY

PEOPLE SHOULD
AVOID CROSSING
WADIS

12 DEAD, INCLUDING 9 STUDENTS, IN FLOODS



Students being rescued from a bus stuck in flood waters.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Authorities have recorded 12 deaths, including two citizens and nine students as their vehicles were washed away in a wadi in Samad al Shaan, in addition to an expatriate. The search is still on for five others, including students, in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi.

Earlier, police aviation carried out an operation to rescue two people after a

vehicle carrying a group of students drifted in a flowing wadi in Samad Al Shaan. The other missing students were rescued and transferred to Ibra Referral Hospital.

As several governorates witnessed torrential rains on Sunday morning, there were few instances of school buses with students getting stranded in flowing water or flash floods.

The rescue teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department Authority (CDAA) in Al Sharqiyah North

No classes today

The Ministry of Education announced the suspension of classes in schools on Monday in all government, private and foreign schools in the governorates of Muscat, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and Al Batinah South due to the current weather condition (heavy rains). Study will be online through available means and classes will resume on Tuesday.

Governorate rescued 27 people after a school bus got stuck in a wadi in the Wilayat of Ibra.

In a separate incident, 21 students were rescued after their school bus got stuck in flowing waters in the Wilayat of Nizwa.

The Rawdha School building in Al Mudhaibi was inundated with rainwater as Wadi Samad al Shan was flowing at dangerous levels. Several people have been stranded inside the school, while vehicles in the parking lot drifted away.

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said that most governorates in the Sultanate of Oman are likely to experience rainfall due to the impact of the current weather condition. Nasser bin Said al Ismaili, Acting Director of the Weather Forecast Department and the Early Warning System at the CAA, said that rains will cover the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, Al Batinah South and Al Batinah North. **TURN TO P4**



People gather around a destroyed building targeted by Israeli air strikes on the village of Nabi Sheet in the Baabl bek district in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley on Sunday. – AFP

Oman calls for restraint to spare region from war

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman affirmed that it is following up, with great concern, the developments of the military escalation in the region and its serious repercussions.

Oman called for self-restraint to spare the region and its peoples the risks of war. Oman stressed its position calling for adherence to international laws. It underlined the necessity of the UN Security Council's assuming its responsibility

towards maintaining international peace and security.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Sunday, Oman reiterated the necessity of imposing an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. It also stressed the need to open up humanitarian corridors to deliver relief aid to all parts of the Gaza Strip without obstacles.

Meanwhile, Russia said on Sunday it was extremely concerned by Iranian strikes on Israel and called

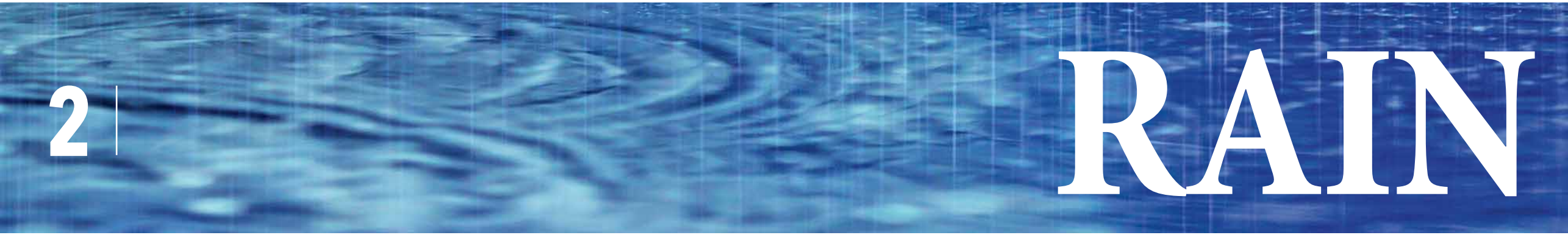
on all parties to exercise restraint, but said tensions would remain high until the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians was resolved.

Iran struck Israel to avenge a suspected Israeli strike on the Iranian embassy compound in Syria on April 1 that killed top Revolutionary Guards commanders and followed months of clashes.

"We express our extreme concern over another dangerous esca-

lation in the region," Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement on the Iranian attacks. "We call on all parties involved to exercise restraint."

Russia noted that Tehran had said the attack was made within the right to self defence after Israel's strike on the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus that Moscow condemned. Russia did not condemn the Iranian strikes on Israel. **SEE ALSO P6**



MONDAY | APRIL 15 | 2024

NCEM begins to tackle weather condition



Between 7 am and 11 am, National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre's operations unit received more than 25 reports on Sunday. — ONA

MUSCAT: The National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM) is following up reports issued by the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre about the current weather condition in the Sultanate of Oman.

Lt Col Mohammed bin Salam al Hashami, Official Spokesman (Media Centre) of the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, affirmed the activation of the centre's sectors and subcommittees in the governorates coming under the impact of the weather condition.

In a statement, Lt Col Al Hashami said that between 7 am and 11 am the centre's operations unit received more than 25 reports. The reports referred to vehicles being drifted by flood waters, people getting stranded in malfunctioning vehicles and gushing flood waters hitting some residences and shopping areas.

Lt Col Al Hashami added that the centre also received a report stating that some pupils and their teaching staff got stranded when a flash flood from Wadi Samad Al Shan suddenly surged into their school (Al Rawda School for Basic Education) in Al Ghazl area in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi. He added that field teams immediately embarked on an operation to rescue the stranded, with support from the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Oman Police.

Lt Col Al Hashami pointed out that various sectors affiliated to the NCEM mobilised their teams, each operating from its own site, to deal with the weather condition.

Lt Col Al Hashami cautioned members of the public against any attempts to cross wadis (valleys) and advised all to stay away from dangerous places, including ponds. He added that information about the weather condition should be taken from official sources. — ONA





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Watch your children, CDAA tells parents

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Civil Defence and Ambances Authority (CDAA) has sounded caution to safeguard children against drowning as heavy rains and adverse climatic conditions are forecast for Monday.

This comes in the wake of the recent incident in which two children drowned after a boat capsized at Khasab in Oman Saturday afternoon.

“Watch out for your children during the adverse weather conditions as most deaths are caused by drowning which is the second major reason behind deaths,” a spokesperson from the CDAA said.

The deceased were identified as four-year-old Hamiz and seven-year-old Haizam, children of Vallil Vadakkethodukayil Lukhmanul Hakeem and Muhsina, who sustained minor injuries in the accident in Musandam Governorate.

Sources from Khasab told the Observer that the family hailed from Pullaloor near Narikuni in Kozhikode and had planned to fly home on Monday for vacation.

The CDAA representative further said that most drownings happen in water clogs and overflowing wadis while home swimming pools too contribute to casualties among children aged 1–4.

“About 40 per cent of drownings among children aged between 5-14 occur in natural water, and about 30 per cent occur in swimming pools. More than half of fatal and nonfatal drownings among people 15 years and older occur in natural waters like wadis, beaches and other natural water clogs.”

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says that there are an estimated 236, 000 drowning deaths worldwide in a year making the third leading cause of unintentional injury death and it accounts for 7 percent of all injury-related deaths. And in a year, injuries account for almost 8 percent of total global mortality.

In Oman, such deaths reached 211 or 1.42 per cent of total deaths and the age adjusted Death Rate is 4.91 per 100,000 of population ranking Oman to be number 26 in the world as more than 500 drowning incidents were reported in Oman in 2021, a recent statistics has revealed.



Rescue operations underway



Students being transported to a gathering point at the Dannine Boys Council for parents to collect them to their homes

ILL-FATED FLOODS LEAVE PEOPLE STRANDED

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

MUSCAT: The flash floods due to heavy rains that lashed several governorates of the country turned out to be fateful, especially for children.

At the time of writing this report, authorities recorded twelve deaths, including two citizens and six students as a result of their vehicles got stuck in a wadi in Samad al Shaan, in addition to an expatriate.

Right from the morning, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) was involved in rescuing people stranded in vehicles, including school buses, in various parts of the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

The CDAA in Muscat Governorate safely rescued two people after their vehicle was impounded in the wilayat of Qurayat.

The CDAA in Al Sharqiyah North carried out the evacuation and transfer of 93 people from

two schools in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi.

The rescue teams of CDAA in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate transferred 1,200 people from a school in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi after the rainwater level rose.

Search also continued to rescue people stranded in two vehicles in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan.

The CDAA responded to a report of the detention of a vehicle with five people in it in a wadi in Ibra and rescued them safely.

The CDAA in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate safely rescued a person after his vehicle was stuck in a wadi in the Wilayat of Izki while CDAA in Muscat Governorate safely rescued a person after his vehicle was stranded in a wadi in the Wilayat of Al Amerat.

Public reactions to the incidents on Sunday were extreme for letting students venture out in dangerously flowing wadis and for not making adequate

decisions to ensure that they were safe either in schools or at home.

“The concerned authorities should answer questions on why studies were not suspended and the lives of these students saved,” said a citizen.

“We demand that those responsible be held accountable for its recklessness and endangering the lives of students, teachers, bus drivers, and parents of students,” said a relative of one of the missing parents.

A furious post said, “Each directorate should have the authority to approve and suspend school hours according to the local conditions. People have a right to react in a way they would in such cases.”

A ROP spokesman told the Observer, “We are still actually carrying out our duty, trying to monitor the weather forecast and the rainfall. We received many reports of flash floods and flowing wadis and we continue to deal with the situations as they arise.”

4

RAIN ALERT

MONDAY | APRIL 15 | 2024

12 DEAD,
INCLUDING
9 STUDENTS,
IN FLOODS

FROM P1

He added that expected rains would range from 30 mm to 120 mm in most governorates, and that the rains are likely to be heavy, accompanied by thunders, active downward winds and hailstones.

Al Ismaili said that rains are expected in the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah South, Al Batinah North, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Sharqiyah North, in addition to the northern parts of Al Wusta Governorate.

He added that the weather condition will be begin to subside and later dissipate between Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

Al Ismaili said that, earlier in the day on Sunday, the CAA

broadcast message via cell phones to alert members of the public about the weather condition. The messages, sent in various languages, gave the names of the areas that were scheduled to receive heavy rains. He added that, whenever deemed necessary, such messages will be broadcast any time to spread public awareness about the weather condition.

Al Ismaili advised members of the public to be more careful during rainfall.

“People should avoid crossing wadis or staying in low-lying areas or venturing out into the sea due to the fact that the persistent winds might cause sea waves to rise,” he said. Al Ismaili also stressed the need to follow up weather alerts issued from time to time by the CAA.

With inputs from ONA



MUSCAT: Authorities have recorded 12 deaths, including two citizens and nine students as their vehicles were washed away in a wadi in Samad al Shaan, in addition to an expatriate. The search is still on for five others, including students, in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi. The rescue teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department Authority (CDAA) in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate rescued 27 people after a school bus got stuck in a wadi in the Wilayat of Ibra.



IS POST-RAMADHAN DEPRESSION A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 14

Many citizens are suffering from a state of depression after the end of the month of Ramadhan and Eid al Fitr holidays.

Depression comes from changing the lifestyle that a person has become accustomed to during a certain period and entering a state of emptiness, which leads to these changes making them feel bored and monotonous after engaging in performing many favourite activities.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, said that the holy month of Ramadhan

provides the fasting Muslim with an opportunity to strengthen faith, get detoxed from unhealthy habits, and reflect on his or her life in general.

He said that the shorter working hours and the extended prayers and reading of Quran enhance spiritualities and fasting in general teaches self-control. “Therefore, it is understandable that some of us experience low mood after Ramadhan. Although it is not officially classified as a type of depression and the symptoms may not be severe enough to require intervention from mental health professionals, it can make us feel upset and may stop us from



Some people feel depressed after Ramadhan because they miss the social vibes and having evening meals with their friends and families

enjoying Eid,” he said.

There are several explanations for such negative feelings. “We get depressed because we leave the new daily routine that we developed during Ramadhan, and

our eating habits, sleeping time, and social life changes. Sometimes our body clock gets disturbed because of sleep changes, and this leads to stress and anxiety until we can get back on track,” Dr Hamed

said.

He added that some people feel depressed after Ramadhan because they miss the social vibes and having evening meals with their friends and families, which strengthen bonds and end any grudges while others feel frustrated as they go back to unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol or excessive eating.

HOW TO AVOID POST-RAMADHAN DEPRESSION

First, we need to live in the moment and make the most of Ramadhan and don't spoil it by worrying about how you will cope after it is gone.

Second, keep up with the good habits you developed during Ramadhan, like reading the Quran, praying on time, and being kind to others. Making these habits a part of your daily routine is likely to strengthen your spirituality.

Third, fill your time with activities that benefit both your body and soul. Learn new things, volunteer, or pursue your hobbies. It is scientifically proven that helping others makes us happier and gives us a sense of purpose.

Fourth, set aside time for regular exercise because it has a positive effect on both your mind and body.

Ansab-Jifnain road construction begins

KHALIFA BIN ALI AL
RAWAHI

MUSCAT, APRIL 14

The implementation of the Al Ansab-Al Jifnain road project began on Sunday.

Excavating, road grading and land preparation phases got under way as well as laying drainage pipes and setting up road protections in certain spots.

The RO 53 million road project involves converting the existing roundabouts into bridges and tunnels and the construction of three lanes in each direction.

The project comes in response to the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to implement an additional package of the development projects in Muscat Governorate during the five-year development plan (2021-2025). It is expected to be completed in 36 months.

The Al Ansab-Al Jifnain road is one of the vital road projects aimed to ease the traffic flow, boost development activities between the governorates of



The project comes in response to the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to implement an additional package of the development projects in Muscat



Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North, and reduce the traffic on Al Rusayl-Muscat

expressway. In addition, the road would shorten distances and serve adjoining urban

installations and quarters aligned to the road. The project involves the construction of a new road with three lanes in each direction starting from the Falaj Al Sham area in the Wilayat of Bausher up to the intersection of Nizwa road in the Al Jifnain area in the Wilayat of Al Seeb with a total length of 15 km. It includes the construction of 4 intersections with bridges and tunnels, an intersection in the Al Awabi area including the construction of a flyover with three lanes in each direction with a signallised intersection underneath. Besides, an intersection will be set up before the cement factory and the existing roundabout will be replaced by a bridge with traffic signals and a tunnel for the main road with three lanes in each direction.

An intersection will come up at the entrance to Al Misfat Industrial area by constructing a bridge with three lanes in each direction and an intersection with traffic lights below. Also under construction at the Al Jifnain area is an intersection with a three-lane flyover and traffic lights underneath.

PREMIERE OF LA BOHÈME MOVIE AT ROHM KICKS OFF PUCCINI CELEBRATION

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will host the regional premiere of the award-winning film *La Bohème*, directed by esteemed Italian filmmaker Mario Martone, on April 23.

The event has already sparked significant interest in Oman as it sold-out in less than a week since its announcement on the ROHM website.

This screening will mark the beginning of three weeks of activities leading up to the highly anticipated co-production of Puccini's timeless opera *La Bohème*, presented by ROHM in collaboration with Monte Carlo Opera on May 16 and 18. The film will be introduced by a word from the production team of RAI.

The screening of *La Bohème* represents a notable milestone for ROHM as it integrates film screenings into its educational activities, in line with its core mission of enhancing accessibility to the performing arts for a wider audience.

Martone's film has garnered international acclaim, earning the Grand Prix at the Golden Prague Festival for its innovative approach, blending film and stage



The screening of *La Bohème* represents a notable milestone for ROHM as it integrates film screenings into its educational activities. – ONA

performances seamlessly. An international sensation, the film was screened across the world including in Australia, Portugal, Italy, France, the Czech Republic, and Finland.

The Movie Night at ROHM kick-starts three weeks of educational activities surrounding Puccini's masterpiece, culminating in the opera's staging on May 16 and 18, 2024.

— ONA

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees in Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/3	Organizing a national symposium for governorate development	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	22/4/ 2024

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: [www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
 + 96824402200

A helping hand for Palestine

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman Charitable Organisation, which supports various initiatives worldwide besides local programmes to support the needy, received financial aid from the Dawoodi Bohra community during the Eid holidays, according to the spokesperson of OCO.

During the Eid festivities, a section of the society joined hands with the rest of the world to generate funds for the Palestinians where the people don't have food or clothes for celebrating the Eid.

“Our support is for Palestine's future and with hope of building bridges and basic infrastructure. We, the Dawoodi Bohra Community in Oman, came together and handed over financial aid to the Oman Charitable Organisation on the first day of the Eid,” a representative said.

Each member of the community came forward with contributions within their budget and pooled in funds and handed over to the OCO prior to Eid in order for it to reach Gaza on time.

“We send tonnes of relief goods by air which comprise food, baby food, clothes, blankets and the like besides money for the Palestine society a part of Oman's charity initiatives,” OCO spokesperson further said.



During the Eid festivities, a section of the society joined hands with the rest of the world to generate funds for the Palestinians

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees in Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/4	Request for Proposal (RFP) for Range of Fortinet Products Subscription-Renewal and Preventive Maintenance	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	26/5/ 2024

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: [www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

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etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
 + 96824402200



Displaced Palestinians take the coastal Rashid road to return to Gaza City. – AFP

Iran warns Israel, global powers urge restraint

GAZA: Iran warned Israel and the United States on Sunday of a much larger response if there is any retaliation for its mass drone and missile attack on Israeli territory overnight, as Israel said “the campaign is not over yet”.
The threat of open warfare erupting between the arch Middle East foes and dragging in the United States has put the region on edge as Washington said America did not seek conflict with Iran but would not hesitate to protect its forces and Israel.
Iran launched the attack over

a suspected Israeli strike on its consulate in Syria on April 1 that killed its top commanders and followed months of clashes between Israel and Gaza regional allies triggered by the war.
However, the attack from hundreds of missiles and drones, mostly launched from inside Iran, caused only modest damage in Israel as most were shot down.
An Air Force base in southern Israel was hit, but continued to operate as normal. There were no other reports of serious damage.
“We intercepted, we repelled,

An Air Force base in southern Israel was hit, but continued to operate as normal. There were no other reports of serious damage
together we shall win,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.
Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said despite thwarting the attack, the military campaign

was not over and “we must be prepared for every scenario”.
Israel’s Channel 12 TV cited an unnamed Israeli official overnight as saying there would be a “significant response” to the attack.
Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian said Tehran had informed the United States its attack on Israel would be “limited” and for self defence.
Global powers Russia, China, France and Germany as well as Arab states Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates urged

restraint.
“We will do everything to stop a further escalation,” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters during a visit to China.
Iran’s mission to the United Nations said its actions were aimed at punishing “Israeli crimes”, but that it now “deemed the matter concluded”.
Iranian army chief of staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri warned on television that “our response will be much larger than tonight’s military action if Israel retaliates against Iran” and

told Washington its bases could also be attacked if it helped Israel retaliate.
US President Joe Biden has pledged “ironclad” support for Israel, but did not announce any military response on Saturday night, saying instead he would coordinate a diplomatic response with other Western leaders.
Analysts debated how far Iran’s attack was calibrated to cause genuine devastation in Israel, or to save face at home after vows of revenge while avoiding a major new war. — Reuters

Talks continue over stalled Gaza truce

GAZA: Israel and Palestinian movement Hamas have accused each other of undermining negotiations for a truce in Gaza and a captive release deal, although the talks have not collapsed.
Without explicitly rejecting the draft deal, Hamas reiterated its long-standing demands for a permanent ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, which Israeli officials have repeatedly opposed.
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has instead reiterated his determination to launch a ground invasion of Rafah, the last city in Gaza yet to face such a fate and which Israel insists is Hamas’s last major holdout.
On Saturday, Netanyahu accused the Palestinian group of being the “only obstacle” to a deal that would free the captives still held by Gaza groups.
“The cabinet and the security forces are united in their opposition to these unfounded demands,” he said, adding that Hamas “has refused any deal and any compromise proposal”.
On Sunday, Israel’s Mossad spy agency said in a statement released by Netanyahu’s office that Hamas had rejected the proposal, and said it “proves” that Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar “does not want a humanitarian deal and the



Children walk with other displaced Palestinians as they pass through Nuseirat, Gaza. – AFP

return of the captives”.
Despite the apparent gulf between the two sides, the talks, mediated by Egypt, the United States and Qatar, are ongoing in the Egyptian capital.
“The negotiations are not at a standstill” but the mediators will have to go back to the drawing board, said Hasni Abidi of CERMAM, a Geneva-based think tank specialising in the Mediterranean and the Arab world. A framework being circulated in Cairo would halt

fighting for six weeks and see the exchange of about 40 captives for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, as well as more aid deliveries into the besieged Gaza Strip.
A source said that, ultimately, later stages of the ceasefire would see all captives released, Israel withdrawing all its forces from Gaza, the lifting of the siege and the reconstruction of the territory.
However, so far every attempt to negotiate a durable ceasefire in the six-month-long war has failed.
In November, a seven-day

truce enabled the exchange of 80 captives for 240 Palestinian prisoners, as well as 25 captives freed outside of the truce mechanism.
The war broke out with Hamas’s October 7 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people, according to Israeli figures.
Israel’s retaliatory attack has killed at least 33,729 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the territory. — AFP

Palestinians bury settler attack victim in West Bank

WEST BANK: A funeral was expected on Sunday for a man Palestinian officials say was killed by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank.
Hundreds of Israeli settlers backed by occupation forces raided nearby Palestinian villages, torching cars and homes, and left at least two villager dead and dozens wounded.
The attacks escalated in multiple villages on Saturday after an Israeli body was found near the Malachei Hashalom settlement outpost.
The mayor of nearby Palestinian village Al-Mughayyir, Amin Abu Alyah, said that “dozens of settlers” had attacked it and burnt “everything they find in front of them. They burnt a house, a bulldozer and a number of vehicles.”
Journalists reported Jewish settlers, who were part of a search

party for the Israeli Achimeir, firing shots and torching homes and cars while residents responded by throwing stones.
One Palestinian, Jihad Abu Alia, was killed in the violence, with his funeral held on Saturday, while 25 were wounded, the Palestinian health ministry said.
Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Mustafa condemned the attacks and urged the authorities to help the people of Al-Mughayyir.
The violence spread to other parts of the West Bank, with Suleiman Dawabsha, the mayor of Duma near Nablus, saying that Israeli troops and settlers had set fire to more than 15 houses and 10 farms in his village. In Baytin, a village east of Ramallah, a Palestinian teenager, aged 17, was killed, the health ministry said. The funeral was expected to take place on Sunday. — AFP



Relatives mourn during the funeral of Omar Hamed, who was killed during clashes with Israeli settlers, Ramallah. – AFP



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In brief

KABUL



HEAVY RAIN AND FLASH FLOODS KILL 33 IN AFGHANISTAN

At least 33 people have been killed over three days of heavy rains and flash flooding in Afghanistan, the government's disaster management department said on Sunday.

"From Friday onward, because of the rains there were flash floods which caused high human and financial losses," department spokesman Janan Sayeq said.

Most casualties were from roof collapses while some 600 houses were damaged or destroyed and around 2,000 acres of farmland "flooded away", Sayeq said.

Some 20 of the nation's 34 provinces were lashed by the heavy rains. — AFP

CHITTAGONG



SOMALI PIRATES FREE SHIP AFTER OWNERS PAY RANSOM

Somali pirates freed a Bangladesh-flagged cargo vessel and its 23 crew early on Sunday after sackloads of US dollars were air-dropped to them in ransom. The bulk carrier MV Abdullah was transporting more than 55,000 tonnes of coal from Maputo when it was seized by dozens of pirates around 1,000 kilometres off the Somali coast a month ago.

Negotiations for the ship's release were led by Meherul Karim, CEO of its owners KSRM. "The pirates called us when they reached near the Somalia coast". "He communicated with us till we finalised the negotiation," he added. — AFP

WASHINGTON



US TO ANNOUNCE ADDITIONAL \$100 MN IN AID TO SUDAN

The United States said on Sunday it will announce an additional \$100 million in aid to respond to the conflict in Sudan, according to a statement, as Washington seeks to spur international response ahead of Monday's anniversary of the war.

US Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power in the statement said the additional funding would go toward emergency food assistance, nutrition support and other life-saving aid. Power is also set to call on the warring parties to stop hindering humanitarian access. — Reuters

Germany's Scholz kicks off a three-day China trip



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visits a research project on the monitoring of water quality in Chongqing, China. — Reuters

BERLIN: Chancellor Olaf Scholz kicked off a three-day tour of China on Sunday to shore up ties with Germany's top trade partner and address rifts over issues including Chinese trade practices and its support for Russia.

The chancellor's longest visit to any state since taking office is likely to be overshadowed by Iran's attack on Israel, and it is also being watched for how much Germany backs the European Union's probe into Chinese state subsidies for electric vehicle makers.

Scholz, who is travelling with several German CEOs, started his trip in the southwestern megacity of Chongqing.

He will also go to Shanghai and Beijing where he is set to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang.

Upon arrival, Scholz was kept informed of developments in the Middle East on the flight, government sources said.

German officials said Beijing could play a positive role in

cooling the rapidly escalating tensions in the Middle East.

China played a mediating role between Iran and Saudi Arabia last year, and Reuters reported China had asked Iran to help rein in attacks on ships in the Red Sea by the Yemenis, or risk harming business relations with Beijing.

On Sunday, Scholz visited German auto supplier Bosch's hydrogen fuel cell plant in Chongqing, putting in the spotlight on an area of rising tensions.

The EU is carrying out several probes into whether Chinese green tech exports like battery EVs that it says have benefited from state subsidies and which could harm local producers.

Scholz is also expected to address China's support for Russia. German officials on Friday bluntly said Beijing's support and exports to Russia were enabling Moscow to wage a war of aggression in

Germany will supply a US-made Patriot air defence

system and air defence missiles to Ukraine at a "critical time" as Kyiv struggles to defend its energy system from Russian bombardment, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Saturday.

A German government spokesperson said in a statement that the two leaders discussed measures to further strengthen Ukraine's air defence.

Germany will hand over the Patriot system immediately and it will be in addition to air defence systems that were already delivered and planned, the defence ministry said in a post on X.

Russia has staged three massive airstrikes on power stations and substations in recent weeks, prompting Kyiv to issue desperate appeals for supplies of high-end air defences.

"Germany will deliver an additional Patriot air defence system to Ukraine," Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on X.

— Reuters

Vigil held for victims of Sydney mall attack

SYDNEY: An evening vigil was held on Sunday for the six people killed in a knife attack at a busy Sydney shopping centre, which police said was carried out by a local man with a history of mental illness.

Mourners gathered in silent reflection outside the Westfield mall in Bondi Junction, which had been packed with weekend shoppers when 40-year-old itinerant Joel Cauchi went on a stabbing rampage on Saturday.

Police said five women and a Pakistani security guard were killed in the attack, which lasted for about half an hour, until a solo policewoman tracked down Cauchi and shot him dead.

Inspector Amy Scott was hailed by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese as a "hero" who "no doubt" had "saved lives through her action".

Among Cauchi's victims were a designer, a volunteer surf lifesaver, the daughter of an entrepreneur, and a new mother whose nine-month-old baby is still in hospital with serious stab wounds.

As night fell on Sunday, a group of about 40 people from a local association placed flowers on the ever-growing pile outside the shopping centre.

They remembered 30-year-old Faraz Tahir, who had been

working as a security guard when he was stabbed.

They stood for a minute of silence with their hands clasped, heads bowed and eyes fixated on the flowers.

Australians are still coming to terms with an attack that shattered a city better known for its famed beaches and laid-back bars and restaurants.

On any given weekend the Westfield shopping centre is packed with people shopping for clothes or groceries, with families grabbing a bite to eat or a movie.

Health officials said it would take many eyewitnesses a lifetime to come to terms with what they saw and felt.

New South Wales police Assistant Commissioner Anthony Cooke said there was no evidence that Cauchi was "driven by any particular motivation, ideology or otherwise". Police said he was diagnosed with a mental health issue at age 17.

New South Wales premier Chris Minns flew back from Japan on news of the attack. He said it had been "incredible to see complete strangers jump in, run towards the danger for their own lives in harm's way to save someone that they've never met before". "We've got some wonderful people in our city," he said. — AFP



Australian PM Anthony Albanese (C) stands with officials as they prepare to leave flowers outside the Westfield Bondi shopping mall in Sydney. — AFP

Modi's BJP promises India common civil code

NEW DELHI: India's ruling party on Sunday pledged to introduce a new common civil code for the country, calling it a crucial step for gender equality, a week before a general election in the world's most populous nation.

Nearly a billion Indians will vote to elect a new government in six-week-long parliamentary polls starting on April 19, the largest democratic exercise in the world.

Many analysts see Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election under his nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) banner as a foregone conclusion.

The BJP launched its manifesto on Sunday, wading into a polarising debate by reaffirming its stand on a uniform civil code (UCC), which would standardise laws for personal matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance.

The party "believes that there cannot be gender equality till such time Bharat adopts a uniform civil code, which protects the rights of all women", the manifesto said, using Modi's preferred name for the country.

India's 1.4 billion people are subject to a common criminal



Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, PM Narendra Modi and President of the Bharatiya Janata Party J. P. Nadda display copies of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election manifesto for the general election, in New Delhi. — Reuters

law, but rules on personal matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance vary based on the customary traditions of different communities and faiths. Many right-wing politicians, jurists and reformists have described these custom-based codes as regressive and have lobbied for a code that

would apply to all Indians equally. The 76-page manifesto pitched to women voters by pointing out it had protected them from the practice of instant divorce.

Over the last decade, India's opposition parties have struggled to compete with the BJP's nationalist appeal, and the

manifesto cover was emblazoned with a tagline of "Modi ki Guarantee" or "Modi's guarantee".

The party's sweeping popularity has also been driven by economic growth -- India is the world's fastest-growing major economy, with its GDP overtaking that of former coloniser Britain under

Nearly a billion Indians will vote to elect a new government in six-week-long parliamentary polls starting on April 19, the largest democratic exercise in the world

the BJP's watch — and a raft of targeted welfare programmes.

The party said it would maintain its focus on those if voted back for the next five years, reiterating its commitment to free ration and electricity initiatives, while promising continued funding for a popular cash handout programme for the country's farmers. It also vowed to expand a free government-backed healthcare scheme for senior citizens and build more affordable houses.

"In the next five years, we will take our nation into the top 3 economies of the world," Modi said, adding it would "launch a final and decisive assault against poverty". — AFP

How teaching history helps in critical thinking



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

The recent opening of Fort Al Mirani to the public has created much interest in the rich history of Muttrah and Muscat and the successive groups of traders who have visited, worked and formed part of the rich tapestry of the land.

Teaching this history through personal tours of historical sites has many proven benefits, including developing critical thinking skills among young learners.

Research on the teaching of history suggests that it helps in training students to use primary sources like manuscripts and other documents like letters, treaties and other written material in the original.

It also helps to cultivate historical inquiry. This can be done by asking questions like why, how, and even exploring alternative histories.

History teaches empathy. We understand the pressures of people in the past, the challenges they faced and the various inventive ways in which they solved the challenges of their times.

In fact, history ticks all the boxes of education. It engages the students, makes them curious about

the past and provides opportunities to apply their learning on aspects of the future.

Writer and philosopher George Santayana once said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.

This of course applies to nations as well as individuals. Learning about the past is the best way to future-proof ourselves.

Unfortunately, the study of history is facing many challenges: in a world of rapid changes and fleeting attention span, as it is seen as an unnecessary discipline that does not lead to good careers.

It is also seen as nothing more than a combination of dates and place names that are difficult to memorise — that is the stuff of all our school memories.

The biggest culprit here is the traditional way in which history is taught across the world. A combination of big names and a few years means nothing to a schoolchild who is already busy memorising other material.

History should be made interactive, collaborative, more enjoyable for students to be engrossed in it.

HISTORY TEACHES EMPATHY. WE UNDERSTAND THE PRESSURES OF PEOPLE IN THE PAST, THE CHALLENGES THEY FACED AND THE VARIOUS INVENTIVE WAYS IN WHICH THEY SOLVED THE CHALLENGES OF THEIR TIMES

School field trips are the answer to many of these challenges. There is no doubt that a visit to Al Mirani Fort, for example, will make the history of the place come alive with imaginary people, markets, their interactions in local and foreign languages.

It will re-kindle the imagination of youngsters with what the place along the Fort would have looked like, what the people would have worn, and even what animals could be seen in the market and nearby.

All this could be re-enforced with readings to make learning pleasurable and informative.

Today, when rote learning is a thing of the past, there is no reason why history should remain locked in the pages of old books.

There are a number of other sources: maps, old instruments of navigation, oral stories and songs, even dresses and weapons that can be used to share stories of the past with children for whom history has become a subject to be avoided.

Vising historical places adds another layer of learning that will help students to visualise the glory of the past and imagine their future.

South Africa’s fragmented opposition jostles for visibility

ZAMA LUTHULI

On a stretch of grass doubling as a parking lot in an impoverished Johannesburg township, a group of party activists chanted “we need new leaders!” timidly followed by a couple of dozen onlookers.

“Rise Songezo, Rise!” they continued before introducing Songezo Zibi, the head of Rise Mzansi — a small party among a cohort of new groups competing in an increasingly fragmented opposition camp ahead of South Africa’s general elections on May 29.

Unusually for a political leader, the former journalist then made his pitch promising nothing at all.

“I’m not going to lie and say to you... we are going to solve all your problems. It’s not going to happen,” Zibi told would-be-voters during a canvassing exercise in Eden Park, south of Johannesburg, on Friday.

The low-key strategy is a result of broad disillusionment with politics after three decades of African National Congress (ANC)-rule. Thirty years after the former liberation movement won the first democratic elections, South Africa remains the world’s most unequal nation, suffering from high unemployment, rampant crime, widespread corruption and a stagnant economy.

“People don’t want to vote. They’ve given up on politics,” Zibi, wearing a white shirt, trainers and jeans, said on Friday. At the last elections in 2019, only 49 per cent of those of voting age showed up on election day.

“This is a big moment where it is possible to get a new leadership in South Africa, not just one leader, but a new cohort of leaders, who are going to refresh government and politics and do things differently,” Zibi said.

“The problem is trust. People are not actually expecting a miracle. They want to know whether you told (them) the truth or not”

With down-to-earth policies including cracking down on corruption and reducing wasteful expenditures such as officials’ outsize security details, the 48-year-old’s approach has certainly convinced donors.

Founded only last year, Rise Mzansi raised almost 17 million rand (\$900,000) between October and December last year — more than any other party, according to electoral authorities. Persuading voters has proven harder.

“I am not really yet convinced,” said Lindiwe Dlamini, 27, unemployed. — AFP



Peter Hutchison

The writer is UK news and politics reporter at AFP

Sunak in ‘doom loop’ as UK stares at election



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak records a statement inside 10 Downing Street in central London, Britain, on Sunday. — AFP

He’s failed to meet key pledges, hit an opinion poll low, and even cramped the style of a popular Adidas shoe.

Britain’s beleaguered Conservative leader Rishi Sunak appears destined to lose a looming general election.

Two tax cuts and a slightly improving economy have failed to boost Sunak’s political fortunes, while criticism from ex-prime minister Boris Johnson and speculation over Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage’s intentions are adding to his woes. Political scientist Rob Ford reckoned Sunak has been left looking “hapless” in the face of seemingly unstoppable political momentum away from his ruling Tories.

“When the herd moves, it moves. There’s not much you can do,” he said.

Sunak, 43, has yet to announce the date of the election. He is expected to call it for October or November but is legally allowed to wait until January at the latest.

Surveys overwhelmingly show that Britons want an end to 14 years of Tory rule, and nothing that Sunak has done since he became PM 18 months ago appears to be changing their minds.

A YouGov poll released this month found that the Conservatives would win just 155 seats in the UK parliament, down from the 365 that they won under Johnson at the last election in December 2019.

Keir Starmer’s opposition Labour Party would win 403 seats, the same survey found, leading to a whopping 154-seat majority. “Right now, it’s very difficult to see how the Conservatives remain in government after the next election simply because of the scale of shift they need,” said Keiran Pedley, director of politics at polling firm Ipsos.

Sunak succeeded Liz Truss in October 2022 after Tory MPs forced her out following a disastrous 49 days in office, during which her mini-budget spooked financial markets, sank the pound and sent mortgage payments skywards.

She had followed Johnson, who himself had been defenestrated by colleagues following a series of scandals, including over illegal parties in Downing Street during Covid-19 lockdowns. While the turmoil of the two previous administrations has

hamstrung Sunak, political analysts say he has also contributed to his own plight by falling short on promises and failing to connect with voters.

Despite promising to, he has not stopped migrants arriving from France on small boats. National Health Service

SUNAK IS STRIVING TO REVIVE HIS PARTY’S FORTUNES, TRAVERSING THE COUNTRY TO MEET VOTERS AS RUMOURS SWIRL THAT A DISASTROUS SHOWING IN LOCAL ELECTIONS ON MAY 2 COULD SPARK A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE.

waiting lists are higher than when he took office. Economic growth is stagnant, although inflation has more than halved. Sunak has also tried a number of leadership and policy resets that have fallen flat, including watering down carbon net zero commitments in a pitch to motorists and recently talking about extremism.

The rightward tilt comes as the fringe Reform UK party threatens to deprive the Conservatives of key seats, particularly if Farage stands for them as he has teased.

“(Sunak has) been trying to find this magic wand or silver bullet to turn things around but at the moment none of it seems to be moving the dial,” Pedley said.

An Ipsos poll published in March found that 58 per cent of voters view the Conservatives unfavourably, the highest percentage in this parliament. Only 19 per cent view them favourably.

The survey gave Sunak a net favourability rating of minus 38, the lowest of any politician included.

Critics often accuse the wealthy ex-financier of being out of touch with average Britons.

“He is a combination of being rather awkward and nerdy, and then if challenged he always sounds really irritable,” Ford, politics professor at Manchester University, said.

Sunak is striving to revive his party’s fortunes, traversing the country to meet voters as rumours swirl that a disastrous showing in local elections on May 2 could spark a leadership challenge.

He can’t seem to catch a break, though.

Last week, Johnson slammed Sunak’s proposed comprehensive smoking ban as “nuts”, while Sunak’s spokesperson had to deny that the PM was preparing to run an AI fund in the event of election defeat.

Sunak even offered a “fulsome apology to the Samba community” after photographs of him wearing the Adidas trainers sparked headlines like: “Eight trainers to wear now that Rishi has killed Sambas.”

“There’s a kind of a doom loop that politicians can get into where they’re unpopular,” explained Ford.

“The media know they’re unpopular so everything they do is reported negatively, which further reinforces their unpopularity.”

Political observers say polls usually narrow as voting day nears and suspect liberal Conservatives might ultimately stick with the party to reduce the size of a Labour win and ensure the Tories are an effective opposition.

Which role you play on stage?

Acting, as a performance art, is basically pretending to be someone else other than yourself. It is well known that when acting, actors and actresses become characters using their facial expressions, vocals, emotions and body language to bring the character to life. The most difficult part is bringing all these characters in front of a TV screen or direct audience of a staged show or a play!

Acting is an interesting skill, but it is not an easy one that anybody can perform. Perhaps, acting on TV is easier than acting on stage where actors and actresses could interact with the audience. In acting, an actor is supposed to act as if there is no one around, but only him and other actors. In fact, that is what makes acting so attractive and thrilling; you get to break all your own rules and act as someone else!

It has been said that acting is a sport; how is that possible? On stage, the actor must be ready to move like a tennis player on his toes. His concentration must be keen, his reflexes are sharp; the body and mind are in top gear, the chase is on. Acting is an energy by itself! In a theatre, people pay to see energy on stage. If you can do all of this, then you can be a good actor!

Are you a good actor or a potential one who could bring a different personality on stage other than him?! If you have interest and passion to be an actor, then it is just a matter of acquiring relevant skills. Acting requires a number of skills including a well-developed imagination, emotional competence, physical expressivity, vocal projection, clarity of speech and the ability to interpret drama.



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

and acting is part of their day-to-day life. For them, acting is life, acting is entertainment, acting is escaping their own personality! As William Shakespeare stated, “All the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players”.

Reflecting on acting, life is like a play in the theatre; you play your role with other people of different characters on stage. However, representing people of diverse attitudes, morals and objectives in life, all actors are not all honest and professional. There are those who try to break you down and others who spark your inspiration to be a better person. However, you should be thankful to both as all are trying to show you exactly who you want or do not want to be! As Mahatma Gandhi advised, “You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty. Honest differences are often a healthy sign of progress.” Everyone has to take part in the play of life, in which all play with actors and actresses of different intentions, mindsets, attitudes and principles.

Life, as a play, doesn’t matter how long it lasts, but how well it was played. Probably, it is time now for some people to experience theatre and find out who they are and discover who they could become afterward!

Although good characters by nature remain the same, one should be very careful from the bad ones. While acting do not let other actors ever break your soul; always stand on your own feet and stand up for yourself. Hold on your head high, smile and stand your own ground.

The lights dim, the audience settles, the curtain rises, preparation comes to execution and a story comes to life. The curtain is up and you are on stage now, so get out there and give it your best shot!

LIFE, AS A PLAY, DOESN’T MATTER HOW LONG IT LASTS, BUT HOW WELL IT WAS PLAYED

READY... STEADY... GO



A performer prepares for the parade during the Kamakura Festival in Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture in Japan on Sunday. – AFP

Will Cambridge support free speech?

Nathan Cofnas is a research fellow in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge. His research is supported by a grant from the Leverhulme Trust. He is also a college research associate at Emmanuel College. Working at the intersection of science and philosophy, he has published several papers in leading peer-reviewed journals. He also writes popular articles and posts on Substack.

In January, Cofnas published a post called “Why We Need to Talk about the Right’s Stupidity Problem.” No one at Cambridge seems to have been bothered by his argument that people on the political right have, on average, lower intelligence than those on the left.

Some people at Cambridge were, however, very much bothered by Cofnas’s February post, “A Guide for the Hereditarian Revolution.” To follow Cofnas’s “guide,” one must accept “race realism”: the view that heredity plays a role in the existing social and economic differences between different demographic groups. Only by challenging the taboo against race realism, Cofnas believes, can conservatives overcome “wokeism,” which he sees as a barrier to understanding the causes of inequality and to allowing people to succeed on the basis of merit.

If Harvard University admitted students “under a colour-blind system that judged applicants only by academic qualifications,” Cofnas asserted, Black people “would make



Peter Singer

The writer is Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, is Founder of the nonprofit organisation The Life You Can Save

THE UNIVERSITY IS INVESTIGATING NATHAN COFNAS, A RESEARCH FELLOW WHO PUBLISHED A BLOG POST ADVOCATING “RACE REALISM”

up 0.7 per cent of Harvard students.”

He also wrote that in a meritocracy, the number of black professors at Harvard “would approach 0 per cent.”

That post gave rise to a petition from Cambridge students demanding that the university dismiss Cofnas. The petition currently has about 1,200 signatures.

On February 16, the Master of Emmanuel College, Doug Chalmers, responded to the protests by saying that the college is committed to “providing an environment that is free from all discrimination.” The relevance of this comment is unclear; although there are many statements in Cofnas’s post that one can reasonably object to, it does not advocate racial discrimination. Importantly, though — or so it seemed at the time — Chalmers added that the college is also committed to “freedom of thought and expression,” and he acknowledged Cofnas’s “academic right, as enshrined by law, to write about his views.”

On the same day, Professor Bhaskar Vira, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education at Cambridge, issued a brief statement that began: “Freedom of speech within the law is a right that sits at the heart of the University of Cambridge. We encourage our community to challenge ideas they disagree with and engage in rigorous debate.”

He then made the obvious point that “the voice of one academic does not reflect the views of the whole university community,” adding that many staff and students “challenge the academic validity of the arguments presented.” His statement concluded by seeking to reassure students who were “understandably hurt and upset” by Cofnas’s views that “everyone at Cambridge has earned their place on merit and no one at this University should be made to feel like this.”

There was no suggestion, in the statements made by Chalmers or Vira, that either Emmanuel College or the University of Cambridge was considering dismissing Cofnas. Yet, in the

face of continuing protests, both the college and the university bowed to the pressure and began their own inquiries, as did the Leverhulme Trust. The university’s inquiry and that of the Trust are, at the time of writing, ongoing, but on April 5 Cofnas received a letter notifying him that Emmanuel College had decided to terminate its association with him.

In justifying that decision, the letter informed Cofnas of the views of a committee that had been asked to consider his blog.

“The Committee first considered the meaning of the blog and concluded that it amounted to, or could reasonably be construed as amounting to, a rejection of Diversity, Equality,

and Inclusion (DEI and EDI) policies... The Committee concluded that the core mission of the college was to achieve educational excellence and that diversity and inclusion were inseparable from that. The ideas promoted by the blog therefore represented a challenge to the college’s core values and mission.”

These sentences imply that at Emmanuel College, freedom of expression does not include the freedom to challenge its DEI policies, and that challenging them may be grounds for dismissal. That is an extraordinary statement for a tertiary institution to make. It is even more surprising given that the adoption of DEI policies is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Emmanuel College’s decision does not prevent Cofnas from continuing to hold his research fellowship in the Faculty of Philosophy. But that would cease to be the case if the university inquiry were to reach the same conclusion as the college. The academic world will be watching what happens. Were the University of Cambridge to dismiss Cofnas, it would sound a warning to students and academics everywhere: when it comes to controversial topics, even the world’s most renowned universities can no longer be relied upon to stand by their commitment to defend freedom of thought and discussion.



Some people at Cambridge were, however, very much bothered by Cofnas’s February post.

sport

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OMAN ATHLETES ALL SET FOR GCC YOUTH GAMES

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 14

Oman’s national teams began their preparation to compete in the first edition of GCC Youth Games, which will be hosted by the UAE from April 16 to May 2.

Oman U-17 football team arrived in Abu Dhabi on Sunday, and went through a training session at Shaikh Zayed Cricket Stadium, under national coach Anwar al Habsi, during which he conducted light training ahead of the first test against the host UAE on Tuesday. The technical meeting will be held on Monday for all teams participating in the tournament.

All the participating (U-17) teams including from Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman arrived in Abu Dhabi.

Meanwhile, the Taekwondo national team conducted a training session in Fujairah before the start of the competition on Tuesday. The technical meeting will also be held on Monday to distribute competition’s weights, approve the final list of participants, and review the competition requirements and rules.

Oman’s swimming team entered a close camp in Buraimi until April 24, after they completed the training



Oman athletes all set for GCC Youth Games

programme at the swimming pool of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bousher under the supervision of coach Amer bin Ruqayh and his assistant Ayman bin Hamad al Kulaibi. The training witnessed the selection of the final squad that will represent Oman in the tournament.

The teams list includes the swimmer Mohammed al Farsi, who will participate in 50m and 100m freestyle, 100m and 50m backstroke. Mohammed al Wahaibi will compete in 50m freestyle, 50m medley

and 50m butterfly. Meshal al Shaibani, will participate in 50m freestyle, 50m and 100m breaststroke, 50m butterfly. Meshal al Kulaibi, in the 100m freestyle, 50m butterfly, 100m butterfly, and 50m freestyle. Hilal al Mashari, in 100m,50m and 200 backstroke. Ibrahim al Wahaibi in 1500m, 800m and 400m freestyle and 200m butterfly. Hussein Taha in 400m medley, 50m, 100m and 200m breaststroke. Ali al Hassani in the 200m, 400m, 800m and 1500m freestyle.

Omani national athletics

team has completed their preparation camp with 25 male and female players, eight male and female players will present Oman in various athletics competitions including speed, medium and long competitions, jumping and throwing. The team’s delegation is scheduled to arrive in Dubai on Monday.

The team includes Desam al Dalhami, who will participate in 100m and 200m. Ahmed al Jabri in the 100, 200 and relay. Moayad al Badri in the 400 m and the relay. Mansour al Farsi in the 800 and 1500 m and the relay. Al Harith al Jabri in 1500m and 3000m. Al Yakhan al Abdali in high and long jump and relay. Al Ayham al Fadili in the long jump and relay. Mohammed bin Salah in a hammer competition. Azza al Hanaiya in 100 and 200 meters. Samar al Yarubia in 100m and 200m. Ghaya al Saadi in the 400m. Kaltham al Jabri will participate in the discus and hammer throw.

The Olympic Committee of Bahrain announced its participation in the first GCC Youth Games in the UAE with a delegation of 197 people, including 122 male and female players competing in 17 games. While Saudi Arabia is participating with 178 players (145 males and 33 females) competing in 20 games.

Seeb look to dominate as Omantel league gets underway

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 14

Omantel League clubs are set to face off in the crucial week 17 matches on Monday, which will play a significant role in determining the league title’s fate. Seeb aims to maintain the lead against Al Wahda.

Seeb, currently leading the league with 44 points, will face Al Wahda, who are in 12th place with 10 points, in a crucial match to maintain their top spot. With an 11-point lead, Seeb needs to win just two of the remaining five matches if Al Nahda wins both of their games. However, if Al Nahda draws their next match and Seeb wins, Seeb will be officially declared champions.

Al Rustaq seeks to climb the table against Ibri

In the second match, Al Rustaq, who are in 9th place with 18 points, will play host to Ibri, who is in 6th place with 21 points. Al Rustaq will be looking for a win to snatch the 8th spot, while Ibri will be aiming to maintain their position and continue chasing Al-Nasr.

Three remaining exciting

matches are scheduled to take place on Tuesday. Al Shabab, who are in 7th place with 19 points, will take on Dhofar, who are in 8th place with the same number of points, in a tough challenge against. Both teams will be aiming to secure the points and climb to 6th place.

The 17th round will also see other exciting matches, including Oman, who are in 4th place with 26 points, facing Al Nasr, who are in 5th place with 22 points. Oman will be looking to improve their poor results in recent rounds to maintain their fourth position. Al Nasr, on the other hand, will be entering the match to win and continue chasing Oman and potentially snatch a spot in the top four.

The round will conclude with Bahla, who is in 11th place with 14 points, facing Sur, who is in 10th place with 12 points. Bahla will be entering the match with positive results and will be looking to win and escape the relegation zone. Sur, on the other hand, will be aiming to win and avoid the relegation zone.



FIBA Selects Oman to Implement Girls’ Basketball Project

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 14

The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) has selected the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Basketball Association (OBA), to implement the girls’ basketball project under the slogan “Her World Her Rules” as part of the projects adopted by the international federation. The OBA succeeded in joining this project within the framework of its interest in women’s sports and promoting sports among girls by creating a package of programmes that

contribute to the advancement of girls’ basketball.

Hiba bin Saeed al Naabi, Member of the Board of Directors of the OBA and Chairwoman of the Women’s Committee at the Association, said: “The girls’ basketball project “Her World Her Rules” is one of the most famous initiatives of the International Basketball Federation in girls’ basketball. The project aims to spread the game of basketball among women and girls and thus increase the base of practitioners of the game through various activities that are implemented in partnership



with national federations. The Sultanate of Oman has been chosen as one of the destinations for implementing the project and the media marketing campaign for this global initiative for the year 2024.”

“ The programme targets school girls aged between 6-15 years and also mothers who will support these girls to complete their journey in the world of basketball. The family and guardian are the first supporters and foundation for female players to continue practicing basketball. She explained that the project came

to overcome the difficulties and challenges facing the spread of the game among girls, including the lack of a local league at the school or club level for girls, making it difficult to practice the game, in addition to the lack of local and international competitions and participations.” She added

The OBA will implement four festivals for girls within the framework of its approved plan to implement the project, starting in May and continuing until November 2024. The target is to reach 300 girls during programme period from the project campaign.

MAN CITY GO TOP AFTER THRASHING LUTON, SPURS CRASH

LONDON: Champions Manchester City turned up the heat on their Premier League title rivals with a 5-1 home win over relegation-threatened Luton Town to move top of the table on Saturday.

With Arsenal and Liverpool both playing on Sunday, City marched above them with a rampant display to move to 73 points from 32 games. Arsenal (71) host fourth-placed Aston Villa while Liverpool (71) welcome Crystal Palace.

It was a statement win by City in their chase for an unprecedented fourth successive English title and more evidence that any team finishing above them will have to be near-perfect between now and the end of the season.

Tottenham Hotspur's hopes of finishing fourth and ensuring a Champions League berth were dealt a blow as they were hammered 4-0 at Newcastle United who moved into sixth place to boost their own European hopes.

Manchester United dropped

to seventh as they drew 2-2 at Bournemouth in the late kickoff, Bruno Fernandes twice equalising to earn his side a point.

At the bottom, Brentford eased away from trouble with a 2-0 home win against Sheffield United for whom time is running out.

Nottingham Forest missed the chance to do the same as they were held to a 2-2 draw at home by Wolverhampton Wanderers. Forest are in 17th place, one point above third-from bottom Luton Town and six ahead of 19th-placed Burnley who drew 1-1 at home to Brighton and Hove Albion.

City needed 65 seconds to go ahead against Luton with Erling Haaland's wayward volley smashing into the face of Luton's Daiki Hashioka and into the net.

Luton hung in grimly but Mateo Kovacic's strike made it 2-0 before Haaland converted a penalty for his 20th league goal of the season.

Jeremy Doku and Josko Gvardiol were also on target for City, with Ross Barkley grabbing

a consolation for Luton.

PRESSURE ON

"The only way is to win our games and put the pressure on. Luton is a difficult game, okay we scored five goals. This is the only message we can do," City manager Pep Guardiola said.

Tottenham could have moved three points above Villa in the scrap for fourth place but were blown away by a clinical Newcastle who struck twice in two first-half minutes as Alexander Isak and Anthony Gordon punished poor defending.

Isak made it 3-0 to take his league tally for the season to 17 and Fabian Schar added a fourth late on.

Tottenham dropped to fifth below Villa on goal difference.

"Newcastle were good, credit to them, I thought they were really good today. We just didn't really get a grip of the game at all," Spurs manager Ange Postecoglou said.

Manchester United allowed Bournemouth 20 goal attempts and were lucky to trail only 2-1



Manchester City's Jeremy Doku in action with Luton Town's Cauley Woodrow. — REUTERS

at half-time to Dominic Solanke's 17th league goal of the season and an effort by Justin Kluivert after Fernandes had equalised with a volley.

Fernandes netted a second-half penalty to make it 2-2 but United could not snatch a first win in four league games and stayed 10 points behind fourth-placed Aston Villa.

"The second half was much better, the good thing is we fought back twice," manager Erik Ten Had said.

Brentford moved up to 14th

as Thomas Frank's side ended a winless run of nine Premier League games thanks to an own goal by Sheffield United's Oliver Arblaster and Frank Onyeka's first for the club.

Matheus Cunha scored twice for Wolverhampton Wanderers in his first start for two months to deny Forest a vital three points in their bid to stay up.

Cunha gave Wolves the lead with a superb solo goal, before the excellent Morgan Gibbs-White equalised on the stroke of half-time and Danilo put Forest

in front.

A mistake by goalkeeper Matz Sels, however, allowed Cunha to earn his side a point.

Burnley will also rue a missed opportunity as they were held 1-1 by Brighton — an embarrassing own goal by goalkeeper Arijanet Muric costing them the three points.

Substitute Josh Brownhill put the home side ahead but Burnley's joy was short-lived as Muric allowed a Sander Berge back pass to roll under his foot.

— Reuters

Madrid see off Mallorca to stay on title course

MADRID: Aurelien Tchouameni's long-range strike earned Real Madrid a 1-0 victory over Mallorca on Saturday that kept them eight points clear of Barcelona at the top of La Liga ahead of the upcoming Clasico.

The France midfielder, who is suspended for the second leg of Madrid's Champions League quarterfinal away to Manchester City next week, scored three minutes into the second half with a deflected 25-metre drive.

Jude Bellingham rattled the crossbar in the first half with a rasping effort from just outside the area as coach Carlo Ancelotti reshuffled his attack with Wednesday's trip to England in mind, leaving out Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo. Tchouameni's third goal of the season put Madrid ahead, with Brahim Diaz denied a second by the legs of Mallorca goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic and Fede Valverde's attempt cleared off the line. Vinicius appeared off the bench for the last 30 minutes



Real Madrid Vs Real Mallorca match in the Spanish football league. — AFP

but Rodrygo and Toni Kroos were unused substitutes after a thrilling 3-3 draw with City in Tuesday's first leg.

Sergi Darder's spectacular

dipping shot forced a flying stop from Andriy Lunin as Madrid extended their unbeaten league run to 25 games, keeping Barcelona a safe distance behind

ahead of next week's Clasico in the Spanish capital.

"It's a very important victory, which brings us closer to the title. We're on a good run and now we're going to think about Wednesday, that we have time to recover well and try to do our best," said Ancelotti.

FANTASTIC FELIX

Barcelona, who are desperately trying to force their way back into the title race, matched Madrid's result with a 1-0 win of their own at third-bottom Cadiz.

Joao Felix's clever overhead late in the first half secured the points as coach Xavi Hernandez made sweeping changes to the team that beat Paris Saint-Germain 3-2 in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal. The Basques play Villarreal on Sunday.

Atletico won the home leg of their European tie 2-1 on Wednesday and visit Dortmund for the second leg on Tuesday.

— AFP

Christie takes Asia badminton crown

SHANGHAI: Indonesia's Jonatan Christie clinched the Badminton Asia Championships crown on Sunday, seeing off Li Shi Feng in two sets in China.

Christie defeated home favourite Li 21-15, 21-16 in the tournament finale in the Chinese city of Ningbo.

Earlier China's Wang Zhi Yi swatted aside compatriot Chen Yu Fei 21-19, 21-7 to claim the women's singles title.

Wang's victory came after world number one, South Korean An Se-young, was dumped out in the quarterfinals on Friday by China's He Bingjiao.

An, the top seed in Ningbo, will

still be favourite to win gold at this summer's Paris Olympics but she has been struggling with a knee injury.

The men's doubles title was claimed on Sunday by Chinese pair Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang, who dispatched Malaysian duo Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin 21-17, 15-21, 21-10.

South Korean partners Baek Ha-na and Lee So-hee took the women's doubles title by beating China's Zhang Shu Xian and Zheng Yu 23-21, 21-12.

The prestigious annual tournament was the final chance for Asian players to seal a spot at the Olympics. — AFP



Jonatan Christie reacts after a point during his men's singles final match. — AFP



Australia's Marsh returns home following injury

NEW DELHI: Delhi Capitals all-rounder Mitchell Marsh has returned home after suffering a hamstring niggle in the Indian Premier League (IPL) in a major headache for Australia ahead of the T20 World Cup in June.

The 32-year-old, who is widely expected to captain Australia in the showpiece event in the US and West Indies, sat out Delhi's last two IPL games against Mumbai Indians and Lucknow Super Giants. A team

source confirmed Marsh has returned home but would not rule out the all-rounder's chances of returning to the league yet.

Delhi are currently ninth in the 10-team league with two wins from six matches.

Punjab Kings, who are one place above Delhi, have their own injury issues with skipper Shikhar Dhawan likely to miss their next two games with a shoulder injury. In Dhawan's absence, Sam Curran led the

side in their three-wicket loss to Rajasthan Royals on Saturday night. "Having an experienced opener, somebody like Shikhar, who has experience of playing on such wickets, becomes extremely crucial," Punjab coach Sanjay Bangar said after their fourth defeat this season.

"We have to wait and see how he responds to the treatment.

"At the moment, it seems that he could be out of action for at least seven to 10 days." — Reuters

OVA all geared up to host West Asian U-18 volleyball qualifiers



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 14

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Volleyball Association (OVA), is gearing up to host the West Asian U-18 qualifiers from May 8 to 13 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The event will act as qualifiers for the 15th Asian Men's U-18 Volleyball Championship which will be hosted in Bahrain at Manama City from July 28 to August 4. Four teams will vie for direct tickets from West Asian zone to the Asian event including Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Oman.

Oman team will aim to reach the Asian event for the first time in history with its team that is comprised of many potential players who can deliver top technical performance. Oman U-18 volleyball team will take part in the GCC Youth Games which will begin on Tuesday in UAE and will run until May 2. Volleyball competitions will start on April 20 as the national team will play three matches in the opening day in different timing sessions as they will take on UAE, Kuwait and Qatar on April 20 while they will conclude group matches by a game against Bahrain on April 25.

The coaching staff headed by coach Islam Mohammed and his assistant Tamer Abdul Rasoul will eye on capitalising the maximum technical output from this essential gulf event ahead of the West Asian assignment. The team will play four crucial matches which will be enough for the coaching staff to have a better view on the team and the players' technical performance and levels. Recently, the national U-18 volleyball team had a joint camp with the national senior volleyball team in Sohar. The camp had featured from several training sessions and some warm up matches against the senior team.

Khushi, Ilyas lead Oman to dominant win over Cambodia in ACC Premier Cup

MUSCAT: In a display of formidable batting prowess and masterful spin bowling, Naseem Khushi and Aqib Ilyas propelled Oman to a commanding 63-run victory against Cambodia at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in a rain-shortened Group B match of the ACC Premier Cup at the Oman Cricket Academy ground on Sunday. With back-to-back victories Oman, captained by Zeeshan Maqsood, are top of the table on better net run-rate (+2.129) than UAE (+1.642), who too have four points from two wins.

After two games each by the five teams in the group, Kuwait have two points while Bahrain and Cambodia have yet to open their accounts.

Despite a delayed start and a truncated game reduced to 11 overs per side due to inclement weather, Oman asserted their dominance early on.

Opting to bat first after winning the toss, they posted a challenging total of 154/6, with Khushi leading the charge with a scintillating innings, supported by valuable contributions from Ayaan Khan, Khalid Kail, and Rafiullah.

In reply, Cambodia faced an uphill task chasing a target of 155 runs. Despite a promising start from their openers, they faltered against the spin of Aqib Ilyas, who claimed a mesmerising hat-trick and finished with figures of 4/17 to be adjudged the player of the match.

Skipper Luqman Butt fought a lone battle for Cambodia with an unbeaten 41, but lacked support from his team-mates as Oman's bowlers kept a tight rein on the scoring.

Cambodia openers, Uday Hathinjar and Ram Sharan, began well but Mehran Khan claimed his first of the two victims as



Mohammed Naseem - Oman

he sent back Sharan. Butt and Hathinjar then steadied the ship but Mehran castled latter in the fifth over with Cambodia 41/2.

It was the next over that derailed the chase as Ilyas picked his hat-trick. Off the fourth delivery, he had Vimukthi Viraj caught by Kashyap Prajapati. The next ball, he clean bowled Etienne Beukes, and off the final ball also cleaned up Sharwan Godara to leave Cambodia reeling at 44/5 in the sixth over.

Maqsood then removed Lakshit Gupta in the next over as the team struggled and ended up at 91/7.

Earlier, opting to field first after winning the toss, Cambodia hoped to capitalise on the overcast conditions and made a perfect start as Oman opener Kashyap Prajapati was dismissed in the first over.

Khushi and No.1 batter Ilyas then stitched a first-wicket stand as Oman scored 40 in the powerplay (three overs).

Khushi led the charge with a scintillating innings, reaching his fifty off just 22 balls and equalling his career-best T20I score of 69 off just 27 deliveries in the process. His belligerent knock was peppered with six sixes and six boundaries.

Ayaan Khan (16 off 7 balls, 2x6), Khalid Kail (19* off 9 balls, 2x4, 1x6), and Rafiullah (23 off 8 balls, 2x4, 2x6), who played cameo innings, helped the hosts put up a challenging total.

Oman's next challenge awaits against UAE on Monday, with the victor poised to secure the group's top spot.

Meanwhile, Nepal leads Group A with four points from two matches.

Brief scores: Oman 154/7 in 11 overs (Naseem Khushi 69, Ayaan Khan 16, Khalid Kail 19*, Rafiullah 23; Sharwan Godara 2/25, Utkarsh Jain 2/26, Vimukthi Viraj 2/32) beat Cambodia 91/7 in 11 overs (Luqman Butt 41*; Aqib Ilyas 4/17, Mehran Khan 2/10).

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MSX upcoming workshop on ESG 30 metrics offers sustainability reporting insights



NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 14

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) presents a comprehensive workshop on the MSX ESG 30 metrics, scheduled for May 7th and 8th, 2024, at the Novotel from 8 am to 2 pm each day. This masterclass offers an opportunity for professionals and organisations to deepen their understanding of sustainability reporting and its impact on the environment, society, and corporate governance.

The workshop is designed to guide participants through the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standard for sustainability reporting, alongside a detailed examination of MSX ESG 30 metrics. Attendees will gain valuable knowledge in navigating the ESG disclosure requirements specific to the Muscat Stock Exchange and measuring key environmental, social, and governance performance indicators.

Participants will have the opportunity to learn how to effectively communicate their organisation's sustainability journey and its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The workshop aims to provide a thorough grounding in the definition and calculation methods of the 30 ESG metrics, equipping attendees with the ability to quantify their greenhouse gas emissions confidently.

Sustainability reporting professionals will share their insights, offering interactive learning and hands-on practice to ensure attendees fully grasp the material. Through expert feedback and in-depth discussions, participants will emerge with a comprehensive understanding of the key ESG factors essential for MSX and beyond.

The workshop presents a valuable opportunity for those involved in sustainability reporting or looking to enhance their knowledge and practices in this critical area. By attending, professionals can stay ahead of regulatory and reporting requirements, ensuring their organisations are well-positioned to navigate the evolving landscape of ESG disclosures.

Nakheel Oman adds organic date production to its portfolio



Organic date farm in the Wilayat of Ibri

MUSCAT: Nakheel Oman Development Company, the largest producer of dates in the Sultanate of Oman, is setting up a major date farm at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate, which is set to be the biggest wholly organic date cultivation project of its kind in the country.

Covering an area of around 5 million square metres, the farm currently hosts around 34,000 palm trees of the premium Khalas, Fard and Majdoul varieties. When fully cultivated, the farm will boast a total of around 100,000 trees.

Distinguishing the farm from the numerous other plantations overseen by Nakheel Oman are the wholly organic farming

methodologies employed by the company in the cultivation of dates at Ibri. The farm is tended without the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides or genetic modifications of plants, thereby contributing to the production of the highest quality and most popular dates.

Eng Salim bin Saif al Abdali of Nakheel Oman said organic farming constitutes an important addition to the company's cultivation portfolio. The Ibri farm also houses organic pollinators that are used to pollinate palm trees during the pollen season, he noted. According to Eng Masoud bin Saeed al Hinai, Supervisor of the organic farm, the Ibri facility employs modern irrigation and

pollination techniques to enhance productivity, farming efficiency, conservation of water, and harvests. Drones are also deployed to complement pollination, thereby contributing to quality cultivation and harvests, he said.

Al-Hinai pointed out that the farm uses groundwater for irrigation. Divided into scores of plots of 100 trees each, the farm is irrigated based on the actual requirements of each plot taking into account the age of the tree and time of year.

Cultivation began in 2020, with around 218 tonnes of dates harvested during the last season, he said, adding that the project will also contribute to Oman's food security goals.

Nakheel Oman represents a partnership of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj) and Oman National Investments Development Company (Tanmia). Last year, the company brought into operation a major dates processing plant with a capacity of 86,000 tonnes per annum.

Under an agreement signed with the Diwan of Royal Court, Nakheel Oman is also procuring all of the date output of the many plantations set up under the One Million Date Palms Project for a period of 30 years. The output is being processed at the Nakheel Oman's Nizwa plant for the production of date products, derivatives, fodder and other commodities. (ONA)

GFOW kicks off Social Protection Law Programme



MUSCAT: The General Federation of Oman Workers, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and the Oman Chamber of Commerce, commenced the initial phase of its on-site programme aimed at familiarising individuals with the Social Protection Law and Labour Law provisions in the Muscat governorate. The programme was inaugurated by Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas.

The initiative, spanning multiple days, seeks to bolster awareness regarding these legal frameworks, reinforce work ethics and negotiation values, and identify challenges encountered by labourers in adhering to the regulations. Additionally, it aims to spotlight exemplary practices enhancing compliance with these laws, while providing workers with practical tools and skills to navigate evolving labour market dynamics.



Nabhan bin Ahmed al Batashi, Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Workers.

Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Workers, Nabhan bin Ahmed al Batashi highlighted the programme's role in clarifying recent amendments to labour laws, particularly concerning occupational health, injury compensation, and sick leave administered through the Social Protection Fund.

He also noted ongoing collaboration between the Ministry of Labour, the Federation, and the Chamber of

Commerce to finalise regulatory updates for approval by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs.

The programme encompasses several key areas, including social insurance under the Social Protection Fund, wage regulations, legal frameworks for economic terminations, and essential provisions concerning Omani employment, contracts, working hours, vacations, safety protocols, peaceful strike regulations, penalties, and dispute resolution mechanisms.

This initiative operates through four stations. The inaugural station in Muscat targets workers' unions and human resources representatives from various private sector companies in Muscat, Al Batinah South and Al Sharqiyah South governorates. Subsequent stations focus on additional governorates and sectors, with the goal of ensuring comprehensive coverage and engagement. — ONA

Money Market fund registers strong performance

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat Money Market Fund, registered a strong performance with net annual returns of 5.20 per cent realised for investors by the end of February 2024. With Assets Under Management (AUM) at over RO 91 million at the end of February 2024, the Fund retains its top position as the largest open-ended mutual fund in Oman. The superior performance and growth in the Fund's assets are also a recognition of the popularity of the Fund amongst investors.

The fund offers an attractive cash management tool for investors to invest their short-term cash surpluses at an attractive return with relatively low risk. The current annualised rate of return on the Fund exceeds 5 per cent (as of February 29, 2024), which is higher than the interest rates typically available on alternatives that provide short to medium term investment opportunity with relatively low risk. Accordingly, investors can benefit from higher returns on their cash surpluses by investing in the Bank Muscat Money Market Fund. As of February 29, 2024, the Fund's returns across various periods are as follows: 5.20 per cent for one month, 5.19 per cent for three months, 5.12 per cent for six months, and 4.89 per cent for



The current annualised rate of return on the Fund exceeds 5 per cent.

twelve months.

The Fund offers daily liquidity with one day minimum holding period, i.e., the investment period can be as short as one day. Further, investors have the flexibility to withdraw their investments, fully or partly, together with returns earned for each day of their investment in the Fund and the

total proceeds of their investments would be credited in their bank account within two days from the date of submission of the redemption request. Investors can subscribe to the Fund with a minimum subscription amount as low as RO 500 per transaction for both individuals and institutions investors. Further, the Fund does

not charge any subscription or redemption fees and it has had a track record of consistent performance for more than 11 years.

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund predominately invests in deposits and fixed-income instruments of leading financial institutions in Oman and GCC region and its investments are

primarily held in Omani Rials or US Dollars. The Fund is regulated by the Capital Market Authority and is an open-ended fund with its Net Asset Value (NAV) being published on a daily basis on Bank Muscat's website as well as Muscat Stock Exchange's website, so that investors can track the value of their investments on a

regular basis.

The Fund provides the added facility of convenient sweep-in and sweep-out from investors' bank accounts with Bank Muscat. This enables investors to invest and redeem from the Fund in a simple way, through an email instruction to the Fund's designated team. During 2023, the Fund was also made available on Bank Muscat's Internet Banking and Mobile Banking (IBMB) platforms — another first in Oman, making it convenient for Bank Muscat's customers to subscribe into and redeem out of the Fund by using their existing IBMB platforms. Alternatively, application forms can be downloaded from bank website or can be obtained from the Fund's Investor Servicing Desk which can be contacted at 24768064.

Bank Muscat's Asset Management business has a proven track record of successful operations for almost 30 years and today the business is the largest asset manager in Oman and one of the leading asset managers in the GCC region, with approximately US\$ 2.9 billion of AUM. It offers tailored investment solutions across asset classes including equity, fixed income, real estate and private equity investments.

Race for AI isn't zero-sum, says Amazon cloud boss

SAN FRANCISCO: As Google races with Microsoft and OpenAI to create world-changing generative artificial intelligence, some critics see Amazon as lagging behind.

"I respectfully disagree" with that viewpoint, said Adam Selipsky, Amazon's cloud chief, in an interview with AFP.

Tech giants like Microsoft, Google and Meta have made headlines talking about their own foundational models, or those of their close partners, that are key to AI and its ability to produce written works, images, videos or even computer code from simple user prompts.

But "there is simply not going to be one model to rule them all," argued Selipsky.

AWS, Amazon's industry-leading cloud branch, is already seeing customers "needing multiple models for multiple different use cases," he explained.

He cited the capabilities of various AI models available on the AWS Bedrock platform, such as Meta's Llama and Claude from Anthropic, as well as some from Mistral in France and Amazon's own Titan brand.

Generative AI is regarded in Silicon Valley as poised to revolutionise the way people get jobs done.

And cloud computing companies, which have massive computing power, troves of data and AI expertise, now host generative AI models. They are in a prime position to capitalise on the new technology — but they have a lot to lose if they don't cough up the latest innovations.

25 YEARS OF AI

A pioneer of e-commerce, Amazon also dominates the cloud. AWS had 31 per cent of the cloud computing market at the end of 2023, according to Stocklytics.

But rivals Microsoft and Google are gaining ground with their cloud businesses, with 24 per cent and 11 per cent market share respectively.

Thanks to a \$13 billion investment in ChatGPT-maker OpenAI, Microsoft is "in the driver's seat" of an ongoing cloud revolution, according to Wedbush analyst Dan Ives.

Microsoft and Google compete with their in-house, AI-infused digital



Dilip Kumar, Vice President of Amazon web services answers questions. — Reuters

assistants to help with creating content — emails, presentations, ads — and applications (especially chatbots).

AWS is less known to the public and its digital assistant Alexa is not yet as conversational as ChatGPT.

But Amazon has been in the AI business for more than 25 years, said Selipsky. "If you go back to personalisation on the retail website in 1998 — we called it personalisation, but it was AI." The Seattle firm has long had thousands of people working on the technology and has pivoted some of them to the new frontier of generative AI, Selipsky said.

"We've moved rapidly on new generations of our (AI) chips like Trainium, and building Amazon Bedrock, and getting it adopted quickly and coming out with exciting applications on top of the models, like Amazon Q," an AI assistant, he said.

Selipsky, who took command of AWS in 2021, replacing Andy Jassy, who stepped into the chief executive role vacated by founder Jeff Bezos, was confident Amazon would remain a leader in cloud computing.

CLIENTS EYE AI PROGRAMS

As proof, he points to AWS customers and partners, including Nvidia.

The high-profile chipmaker recently announced it is building a "supercomputer" on AWS using Nvidia's own high-performing processors, the

ultra-sophisticated and coveted GPUs.

Most notably, Amazon has invested \$4 billion in Anthropic, an OpenAI rival that is also backed by Google. The start-up will use AWS and its Trainium chips to build AI models and help "improve our technology," said Selipsky. When asked about exciting aspects of generative AI, Selipsky cited examples of ramped up productivity for its clients.

AWS user pharmaceutical giant Pfizer estimates that it will launch more powerful drugs faster, achieving as much as a billion dollars in annual savings due to AI, according to Selipsky.

Airlines and other industries are already using generative AI to power chatbots that interact with customers.

And while chatbots can make mistakes, companies reason that "human beings don't give 100 per cent accuracy either," Selipsky said. "And in many cases, the models are actually outperforming the accuracy and the usefulness of live agents." AWS cut hundreds of jobs this month, particularly in sales and marketing, to better focus on AI and other priorities.

But Selipsky was adamant that AI has not replaced any of the cloud platform workers.

"AWS has thousands of job postings online today, and yesterday, and the day before, and we will also have (them) tomorrow," he added. — AFP

Tejarah Talks digs into Economic Gardening

KEY FOCUS: NURTURING AND CULTIVATING
STAGE II OMANI COMPANIES

MUSCAT: Organised by Oman Business Forum in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), Tejarah Talks will host a session titled "Economic Gardening: Nurturing & Cultivating Second Stage Companies," 7:30pm Tuesday, April 30, 2024, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Economic Gardening was first pioneered in Littleton, Colorado in the late 1980s where it focused on providing strategic information to help local second-stage businesses grow and create jobs. It emphasised technical assistance like market and industry intelligence, search engine optimisation and social media marketing which enabled growth-oriented companies with between 10 to 99 employees make strategic decisions. The success seen in Littleton, with a 71% increase in employment and a tripling of the city's sales tax revenues without resorting to incentives or tax breaks has led to the adoption of similar Economic Gardening programmes across the US and Europe.

As an example, Florida's GrowFL initiative has created in excess of 10,000 new jobs, contributing over US\$900 million to the state's economy, increasing state and local tax revenues by nearly US\$82 million. GrowFL's cost efficiency has also been highlighted, showing that for every dollar of public investment there was a return of US\$9.

Sowing the seeds for discussions between panellists Pankaj Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Co-operation, MoCIIP; Hussain al Lawati, CEO, Development Bank; and Masoud al Rawahi, Co-founder & Partner, Phaze Ventures will be moderator Jamal al Asmi, Executive Producer, RealityCG.



Pankaj Khimji

According to Maymuna al Adawi, Director, Oman Business Forum & PPP Office, MoCIIP and Tejarah Talks organiser: "Given the success of Economic Gardening programmes elsewhere we're looking forward to discussing its application in Oman and how it could support the ambitions of local companies that have the potential to scale-up, create jobs and enhance our global economic standing." The MoCIIP Director added: "As we work towards building a more prosperous business ecosystem, the insights shared during the Tejarah Talks session will be invaluable. Indeed, engaging with and investing in local enterprises not only fuels entrepreneurship, innovation and economic growth but also fosters a sense of community and sustainability. If you are a business owner, policymaker, academic or simply curious about second-stage company development please come along. Tejarah Talks is open to all and always free-of-charge." Tejarah Talks is generously sponsored by Jindal Shadeed, Nortal, Apex TransGulf Manufacturing and MHD and supported by Invest Oman Lounge, OCEC, JW Marriott and OmanFM.



In brief

■ LONDON

OIL PRICES SURGE
AMID IRAN'S ATTACK
ON ISRAEL

Oil prices are expected to rise following Iran's attack on Israel, with concerns of further escalation driving market volatility. The attack, a retaliation for a suspected Israeli strike on its consulate in Syria, has raised fears of a wider regional conflict. Last week, Brent crude reached \$92.18 a barrel, the highest since October, supported by concerns over potential disruptions in supply from the region. However, the duration of the price surge will depend on Israel and the West's response, as well as developments in the Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant portion of global oil consumption passes daily. Additionally, the Biden administration's stance on Iranian oil exports, ahead of the upcoming presidential election rematch with Donald Trump, adds another layer of uncertainty to the market. — **Reuters**

BITCOIN DOWN
BY 7.9% TO \$61,842

Bitcoin fell 7.9% to \$61,842 at 21:00 GMT on Saturday, losing \$5,308 from its previous close. Bitcoin, the world's biggest and best-known cryptocurrency, is down 16.2% from the year's high of \$73,794 on March 14. Ether, the coin linked to the ethereum blockchain network, fell 9.18% to \$2,930 on Saturday, losing \$296.1 from its previous close. — **Reuters**

■ ARGENTINA

ARGENTINA INFLATION
SLOWS IN MARCH

Consumer price increases in Argentina slowed for a third consecutive month in March to 11 per cent, data showed on Friday, but annual inflation still remains sky-high at more than 287 per cent. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase for March was lower than the 13.2 per cent rise registered in February and 20.6 per cent the month before, according to the INDEC statistics agency. For the first quarter of 2024, inflation came in at 51.6 per cent. Self-described "anarcho-capitalist" President Javier Milei had said this week any rise of around 10 per cent for the month of May would be "a hell of a goal." In December, the month he took office, the CPI leapt by 25.5 per cent, provoked by Milei's devaluation of the peso by more than 50 per cent. Milei, vowing to halt Argentina's economic decline, has taken a number of steps to slash public spending, winning the approval of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and securing a budget surplus for the first time in 12 years. He halted state subsidies for fuel and transport, cut tens of thousands of public service jobs and scrapped hundreds of rules in a bid to deregulate the economy. His efforts have hit Argentines hard, with the price of bus tickets almost tripling and aid cut to thousands of soup kitchens as poverty hit a level of nearly 60 per cent and disposable income shrunk. — **AFP**

Liquidation of OMPET
completed: OQ GroupCONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT. APRIL 14

The liquidation of Oman International Petrochemical Industries Company (OMPET), set up more than a decade ago to produce polymer-based plastics at Sohar Industrial Port, has been completed, according to OQ Group, a key stakeholder in the proposed venture.

The development, coming nearly five years after the formal scrapping of the project, was announced by OQ — the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman — in its 2023 financial results released last week.

OMPET was established in 2012 as a joint venture of Oman Oil Company (as OQ was known then), LG Corporation and Takamul Investment Co (also a subsidiary of OQ Group). Production capacity was envisaged at 1.1-million tonnes/year of Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA), the main raw material for polyethylene terephthalate (PET), a polymer used extensively in the global packaging industry.

The project, estimated to cost around \$600 million at the time, was proposed to be built adjacent to the aromatics plant of OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries (OQ — RPI), the paraxylene output of which would serve as feedstock for the OMPET venture.

In an update on the abortive venture, OQ said: "The Group owned 20% of the share capital of OMPET. This company was incorporated in 2013 and engaged in manufacturing PTA and PET products. As at 31 December 2019, the Board of OQ SAOC (parent company) reviewed the project status for OMPET and decided to withdraw this project, since the project was not economically viable. Based on the Board decision, the liquidation process of OMPET was completed during 2023." Significantly, the OMPET liquidation was one of several structural changes reported by OQ Group across



OQ EP divested 40 per cent of its working interest in Block 60 last year

its expansive portfolio of wholly-owned companies, joint ventures, associate companies and subsidiaries during 2023.

Notable was the partial divestment by OQ Exploration & Production (EP), the upstream energy arm of OQ Group, in two onshore hydrocarbon blocks during the year. Following a farm-out agreement, OQ EP divested 40% of its working interest in the producing Block 60 to Medco Energi Oman Block 60 Limited, Oman Branch and Medco Daya Oman Block 60 Pte Ltd, Oman Branch for a consideration of RO 400.8 million.

OQ EP reached a similar farm-out deal with MedcoEnergi Oman Block 48 Limited, Oman Branch and Medco Daya Oman Block 48 Pte Ltd, Oman Branch, covering 40% of its working interest in Block 48 for a consideration of RO 11.5 million.

Also during the year, OQ Group sold a 49% stake in Abraj Energy Services, a leading drilling services contractor, as part of the

latter's public listing. Abraj was formally listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on March 14, 2023 with total issued share capital of 377.4 million shares representing 49% shares from the share capital. OQ Group retains the balance 51%.

Likewise, OQ Group sold a 49% stake in OQ Gas Networks as part of an IPO that resulted in the formal listing of the latter on the MSX on October 24, 2023, with total issued share capital of 2,122 million shares representing 49% shares of the share capital.

Earlier in the year, OQ Group's investment in Vale Pelletizing Company LLC, which operates a major iron ore pelletising plant at Sohar Port, was disposed of by exercising the put option for a consideration of RO 48.138 million.

Additionally, in 2023, OQ Group sold its 30.4% investment in Gulf Energy Maritime PJSC (GEM), a maritime transportation company, for RO 23.5 million.

Thawani
amongst 50 top
fintech companies
in MENAMAJID AL AMRI,
CEO of Thawani

Thawani, an Omani fintech company, has secured its place as the fortieth top financial technology company in the Middle East according to the 2024 rankings released by Forbes Middle East. Notably, it is the sole Omani company to feature on the list.

Majid al Amri, the Founder and CEO of Thawani Technologies, expressed pride in the company's achievement, emphasising that it reflects their relentless dedication to advancing financial technology services in Oman and the wider region. He highlighted Thawani's distinction as Oman's pioneering fintech company, offering intelligent, user-friendly, and swift payment solutions across various financial sectors, catering to both businesses and individuals.

Al Amri underscored Thawani's pivotal role in spearheading digital transformation within the region's financial services sector. Through their innovative applications facilitating secure and rapid financial transactions, the company has earned widespread acclaim and emerged as the premier electronic platform for completing financial transactions in Oman. Thawani also holds the distinction of being the first payment service provider licensed by the Central Bank of Oman, contributing significantly to shaping regulatory frameworks for the fintech sector and supporting startups and SMEs in entering this domain.

Forbes Middle East's selection criteria for the top 50 fintech companies considered factors such as funding from investors and venture capital firms, transaction volumes via digital channels in 2023, application downloads and active user numbers, service impact on consumers and businesses, operational presence across multiple countries, and growth and expansion achieved over the past year. Thawani's inclusion underscores its significant contributions and achievements within the rapidly evolving fintech landscape of the Middle East.

Wall St week ahead surging energy shares growth

NEW YORK: US energy shares are soaring as investors benefit from rising oil prices and a stronger-than-expected economy, while seeking to protect their portfolios from a feared resurgence of inflation.

The S&P 500 energy sector is up about 17% in 2024, roughly doubling the broader index's year-to-date return. Its gains have accelerated in recent weeks, making it the S&P 500's best performing sector in the past month.

One key driver is the price of oil: US crude has risen 20% year-to-date due to an unexpectedly strong US economy and worries over a broadening Middle East conflict.

Some investors also believe rising energy shares could hedge against US inflation. Consumer price rises have proven more stubborn than expected this year, threatening to restrain the broader stock rally by undermining expectations for how much the Federal Reserve will cut rates in 2024.

"If inflation is going to pop up again... the hedge is to have some

commodities exposure," said Ayako Yoshioka, senior portfolio manager at Wealth Enhancement Group.

The portfolios she manages have been overweight in energy stocks, including those of oil majors Exxon Mobil and Chevron, as she noted more disciplined capital spending by energy companies.

Among the top energy sector performers so far this year were Marathon Petroleum, up 40%, and Valero Energy, up 33%.

The economy will be in focus in the coming week as first-quarter earnings season heats up, with reports from Netflix, Bank of America and Procter & Gamble. Monthly US retail sales out on Monday will offer a view into US consumer behaviour, on the heels of another stronger-than-expected inflation report last Wednesday.

Energy stocks have risen as a US equities rally has broadened beyond the growth and technology companies that led gains last year. Investors' appetite for non-commodities-related sectors could

A trader operates on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) trading floor in New York City. — **Reuters**

take a hit, however, if inflation expectations keep rising and worries about a hawkish Fed grow.

Inflation fears have made markets more turbulent in recent weeks. Outside of equities, concerns over rising consumer prices have lifted gold, a popular inflation hedge, to record highs. Energy stocks were also thriving outside the US.

Shares of miners, steel firms and

other commodity-linked companies have risen along with energy stocks.

"Investors are looking at the world and they're seeing that the economy really isn't slowing down much... at a time when there are various concerns over bottlenecks regarding supplies of commodities, especially oil," said Peter Tuz, president of Chase Investment Counsel Corp.

Energy shares fell nearly 5% in

2023, while the broader S&P 500 gained 24%. But their inflation hedging credentials received a boost in 2022. That year, the S&P 500 energy sector jumped about 60%, providing a bright spot in a stock market that plunged as the Fed raised interest rates to fight inflation that had reached 40-year highs.

Strategists at Morgan Stanley and RBC Capital Markets in the past week reiterated their bullish calls on energy shares. In a note, RBC's Lori Calvasina cited heightened geopolitical risks and a "growing acceptance of the idea that the economy is actually quite strong." Analysts are also noting comparatively low valuations. The S&P 500 energy sector trades at 13 times forward 12-month earnings estimates compared to nearly 21 times for the overall S&P 500, according to LSEG Datastream.

Oil prices could take a hit if Middle East tensions ease, or if global growth starts to wobble, potentially clouding the outlook for energy shares. — **Reuters**

What overcapacity? China says its industries are simply more competitive



KEVIN YAO
Joe Cash and Ellen Zhang

THE last day of US Secretary Janet Yellen’s trip to China coincided with the strongest retort yet from Beijing officials over her claims that China is flooding global markets with cheap goods, particularly in the new green industries.

As Yellen laid out plans to formalise dialogue with China over excess industrial capacity in electric vehicles (EVs), solar panels and batteries, saying Washington would not accept US industry being “decimated”, the Chinese finance ministry issued a statement saying it had already “fully responded” to her concerns.

Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, at a roundtable meeting with Chinese EV makers in Paris on Monday, said US and European assertions of excess capacity were groundless, adding China’s rise in these industries was driven by innovation and complete supply chain systems, among other factors.

China’s latest response, analysts say, centres on the idea that its production system is simply more competitive, a sharp change in tone from only a month ago when officials including Premier Li Qiang sounded their own warnings on overcapacity. The strong pushback from Beijing contrasts with the generally warm interactions between Yellen and Chinese officials during her trip, leaving the two largest economies further apart on the hottest dispute in global trade, which could add to tensions.

“They cannot win the race, so they try to slow it down,” said Li Yong, chief researcher at D&C Think, a Chinese think-tank, referring to the West’s rhetoric on overcapacity. “We just do our things, they can do whatever they want — the knife is in their hands.”

Both sides believe they have solid, data-supported arguments not to back down. The core criticism coming primarily from

Washington and Brussels is that state-led support for manufacturers, coupled with depressed domestic demand, is pushing excessive Chinese supply onto global markets.

This drives down prices.

Consequently, it threatens US and EU firms which survive on profits rather than what Western officials argue is a drip-feed of state resources in China. And, it can complicate longer-term investment decisions.

While China denies subsidies and points to US and EU government programmes to support their own industries, its critics take a wider view of state support that incorporates cheap loans, land use, huge infrastructure investment and other benefits that span across a fully-integrated supply chain.

EU trade officials have singled out the huge resources redirected by China’s state-dominated financial system from the ailing property sector to its sprawling

manufacturing complex, as Beijing looks for other economic growth drivers.

For its part, China says industrial overcapacity is not unique to the world’s second-largest economy.

“The so-called ‘overcapacity’ is a manifestation of the market mechanism at work, where supply-demand imbalance is often the norm,” vice finance minister Liao Min told local media.

“This can occur in any market economy system, including in the United States and other Western countries, where it has happened multiple times in history.”

Industrial capacity utilisation in China is lower than in the United States or Europe, but not by much. Also, China asserts supply and demand should be viewed from a global perspective, particularly given Western criticism focuses on industries key to climate goals for the entire planet. — **Reuters**

Nonsense and bad rules persist in banking



ANAT R ADMATI
The writer is Professor of Finance and Economics at the Stanford Graduate School of Business

IN December, the CEOs of the eight largest banks in the United States participated in a three-hour posturing session before the Senate Banking Committee. It was a disheartening display that showcased the toxic blend of politics and asinine rhetoric that often characterises discussions about banking.

Much of the hearing focused on proposed banking regulations known as the “Basel 3 Endgame.” Claiming to “translate” the potential implications of this complex topic “for the average American,” Republican Senator Tim Scott stated that the proposed rules would lead to “fewer dollars to lend to Americans.” Bankers and several senators, including Scott, argued that by keeping a portion of the banks’ money “on the sidelines,” these regulations would prevent poor people from achieving the American Dream.

But these threats often originate from falsehoods, such as Scott’s suggestion that capital is something banks cannot use. In reality, as Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown noted, “Absolutely nothing in these rules would stop banks from making loans.” Instead, they would simply require banks to rely more on their own equity and less on borrowing to finance loans and investments. As the late US Federal Reserve Chair Paul Volcker famously observed, there is a lot of “bullshit” in the debate about capital requirements.

Prudent banks insist on borrowers having “skin in the game” when they lend, yet vehemently oppose regulations aimed at reducing their dangerous reliance on borrowing. Banks’ aversion to equity funding and addiction to borrowing enables them to shift costs and risks to others, ultimately benefiting at public expense. They often get away with it by keeping politicians and the public confused.

Shortly after the 2007-09 financial crisis, I realised that crucial policy decisions were being influenced by nonsensical analysis, impenetrable jargon, fallacious and misleading arguments, and inappropriate uses of mathematical models. As a result, opportunities to improve the banking system were constantly overlooked. By sowing confusion and leveraging their influence over politicians, regulators, lawyers, and economists, bankers have corrupted the mechanisms by which rules are formulated and enforced.

The 133,000-word “Basel 3 Endgame” adjusts a complex system of “risk weights” by trying to calibrate the rules. Banks have weaponised the complexity of the proposed rules, threatening to reject certain loans. In fact, with the debt subsidies we all provide them, they will take risks, chase outsize returns, and endanger us.

Over the past 14 years, I have consistently challenged the fallacies, irrelevant facts, and myths propagated by numerous bankers, policymakers, and economists. In November 2010, I helped organise a letter by 20 banking and finance scholars warning that the proposed Basel 3 reforms were grossly inadequate. I also debunked JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon’s misleading claims about the Basel 3 rules in an open letter to the JP Morgan Chase board of directors and criticised Dimon for implying that what benefits large banks automatically benefits America. Recognising the importance of countering bankers’ obfuscation, the German economist Martin Hellwig and I published the book *The Bankers’ New Clothes: What’s Wrong with Banking and What to Do about It* in 2013. ©Project Syndicate, 2024

‘Climate-controlled’ sausage? Courts crack down on ‘Greenwashing’



SOMINI SENGUPTA
The author is an international climate reporter on the New York Times climate team.

A “climate-controlled” sausage. New trousers labelled “recycled.” A “sustainable” airline ticket. More and more, big brands are using taglines like these to cater to their green-minded customers. And more and more, they are under fire from courts and regulators for making climate promises they can’t keep.

Researchers at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment last year identified “an explosion of ‘climate-washing’ cases,” using existing national laws and regulations. Between 2020 and 2022, the most recent year for which statistics are available, the number of cases challenging the “truthfulness of corporate climate commitments” more than doubled, their tally found.

This year, this dynamic is playing out in several countries.

In Denmark, a national court in March told Danish Crown, the country’s biggest pork producer, that it’s misleading to label its pork “climate-controlled,” though it declared that it’s fine to assert that Danish pigs “are more climate friendly than you think.”

In Britain, also in March, the Competition and Markets Authority, a regulatory agency, looked into the climate claims of several fast-fashion brands and concluded that it’s misleading to stamp a green leaf on a product and call it “recycled,” without specifying how much of its content is actually recycled.

A Dutch court prohibited KLM from using the slogan “fly responsibly” in its advertisements.

And in New York state, Attorney General Letitia James sued the meat multinational JBS for making “sweeping representations” about neutralising



Demonstrators protest during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland, Britain. — **REUTERS**

its emissions in the coming years, but offering “no viable plan.”

These cases reflect how campaigners are using an ever-wider range of national and international law to slow down climate change. They have sued governments for failing to protect their citizens’ constitutional rights to life, and occasionally won, as in a case in Germany. They’ve used human rights law to challenge governments, most recently winning a case at a regional European court. They’ve sought to leverage international treaties, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to force governments to rein in emissions. Complaints against alleged greenwashing are now gathering steam.

Another database, maintained by the Columbia University Law School’s Sabin Center for Climate Change Law since 2011, found that among climate cases filed against private entities, the largest number of cases — a total of at least 77 — alleged misleading advertisements.

These complaints also reflect a business imperative. Companies selling everything from toothpaste to soup are trying to meet changing consumer demands.

In the United States, sales of consumer products that are labelled green or sustainable are growing twice as fast as those that are not, according to research from New York University’s Stern School of Business, with younger and wealthier consumers more likely than others to buy those products.

“This is a market opportunity, and companies should figure out how to make claims authentically,” said Tensie Whelan, director of NYU’s Center for Sustainable Business.

The lawsuits can be a double-edged sword. They can hold companies to account, but they can also make companies trying to cut their emissions reluctant to market themselves as such.

“The easiest thing for companies is to say, ‘I just won’t say anything about it anymore or I’ll downplay what I do because that minimises the risks,’” said Branda Katan, an attorney who represented KLM in court in the Netherlands.

JBS, the world’s biggest meat producer, is among the most closely watched of these cases in the US. Responding to the latest complaint by James’ office, JBS told *The New York Times* that it disagreed with the allegations and that it would “to help feed a growing population while using fewer resources and reducing agriculture’s environmental impact.”

The press spokesperson for Danish Crown did not return an email asking for a response to the court ruling in Denmark. On its website, it explains that “climate-controlled” refers to the measures taken by pig farmers to reduce emissions from their operations.

Airlines have become a popular target of greenwashing lawsuits. An advocacy group filed a complaint against more than a dozen airlines for allegedly

breaching European Union consumer protection laws, arguing that the offer of offsets are misleading because the emissions savings from offsets are “uncertain.” (An airline industry group responded to the complaint by saying that “while offsets currently play a role, their significance will diminish” as airlines develop more efficient fleets and develop alternatives to jet fuel, a heavy pollutant.)

Meanwhile, three separate cases are pending in US courts, against three different airlines over their use of terms like “carbon-neutral” and “sustainable.”

Energy companies are a relatively new target. In Canada, a climate advocacy group called Client Earth filed a complaint in April against FortisBC for its advertising campaign promoting what it calls “renewable natural gas,” or the methane that is captured from livestock farms and landfills. Lawyers with Stand Environmental Society, an advocacy group, argue that the ads are deceptive, since most of the gas supplied by FortisBC to its customers in British Columbia for home heating comes from fossil fuels, while a small share comes from the gas captured from landfills and farms.

FortisBC issued a statement saying it disagrees with the plaintiffs’ allegations. “FortisBC takes climate change very seriously and is taking action to help B.C. meet its climate goals,” the statement read. — **NYT**

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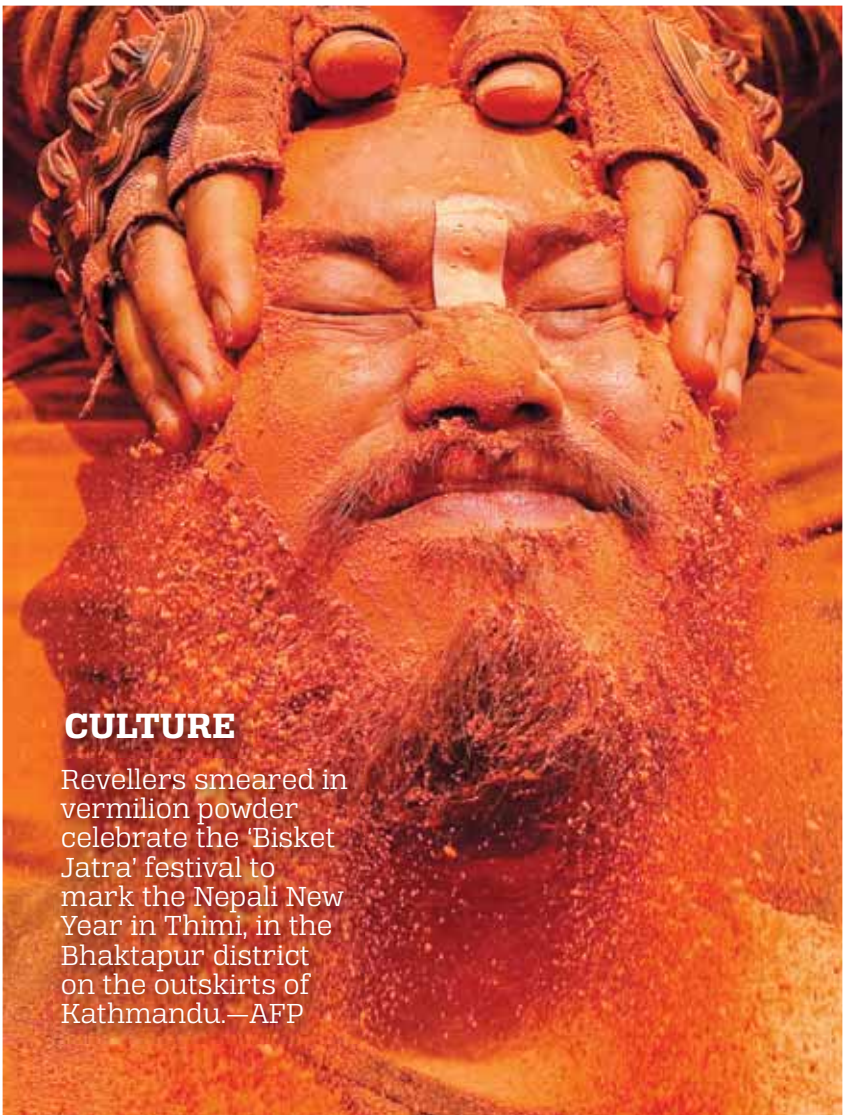
FASHION

US fashion designer Willy Chavarria arrives for the second annual GQ Global Creativity awards at WSA in New York. — AFP



MUSIC

Damon Albarn of Blur performs at the Coachella Stage during the 2024 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival at Empire Polo Club in Indio, California. —AFP



CULTURE

Revellers smeared in vermillion powder celebrate the 'Bisket Jatra' festival to mark the Nepali New Year in Thimi, in the Bhaktapur district on the outskirts of Kathmandu. —AFP



DINING

"Artichoke from Provence and lovage juice" dish of three Michelin-starred French chef for "La Table du Castellet" Fabien Ferre (unseen), at his restaurant in Le Castellet, southern France. — AFP

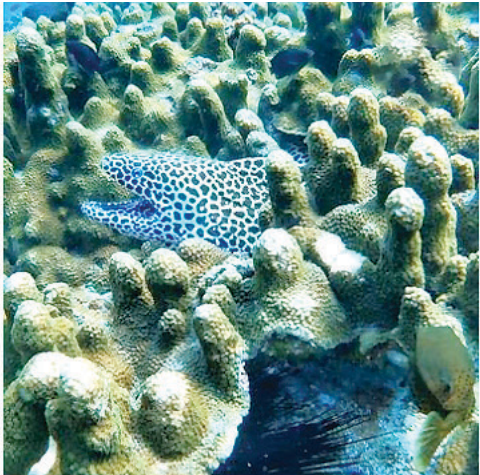
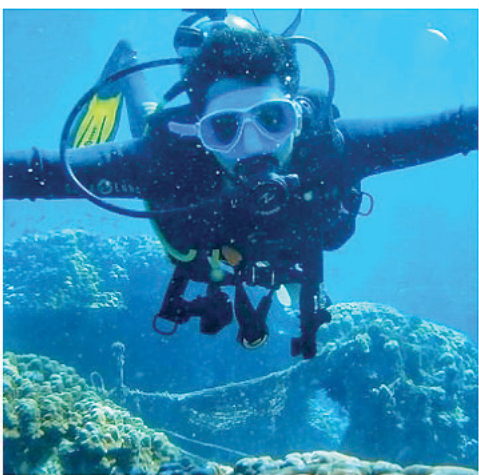


TRAVEL

People travel in a boat in floodwater from the overflowing Nerl River in front of the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl off the settlement of Bogolyubovo in the Vladimir region. — AFP

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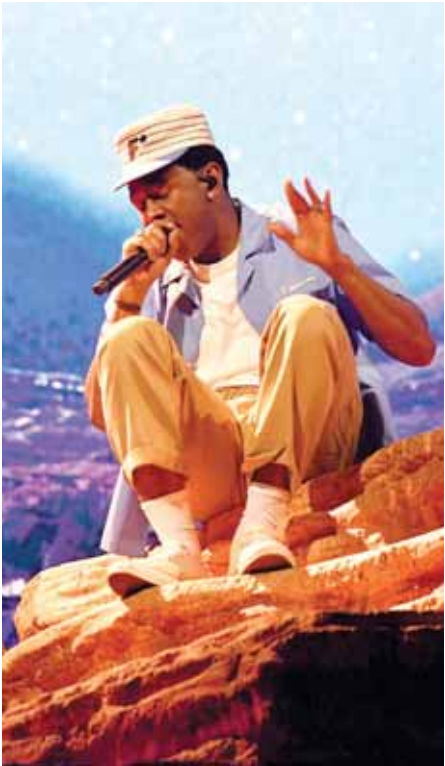


ENTERTAINMENT

Coachella heavy on indie rock nostalgia, Taylor Swift buzz

COACHELLA DAY TWO was heavy on alt-rock throwbacks including a highly anticipated No Doubt reunion, but it was Taylor Swift – who wasn't on the lineup and didn't perform – creating buzz on Saturday. Her mere presence at the mammoth festival in the California desert set the Internet alight, after she made a much-speculated appearance...as a fan, canoodling and dancing with beau Travis Kelce as Bleachers performed a rollicking set. The rock band Bleachers is fronted by

Jack Antonoff, Swift's friend and longtime producer. Kelce's blocking skills came in handy as the 6'5" (1.96 meters) NFL tight end did well to obscure his wildly famous girlfriend from view, as the couple enjoyed the show from just offstage. Still, an AFP journalist saw the lovebirds twirling and singing along during the performance of Antonoff, who's co-written and produced several of Swift's albums. Fan videos quickly started circulating online. Swift's cameo comes less than a week before her forthcoming album, "The Tortured Poets Department," drops on April 19. Shortly after the Bleachers set Swift and Kelce were caught by fan cameras as they stood in the VIP section for a blazing performance from Ice Spice, the Bronx rapper who collaborated on a remix of Swift's "Karma." The crowd went berserk when Ice Spice shouted out her megastar pal -- but the rapper performed "Karma" on her own with a backing track, giving Swift the chance to watch a rendition of her own song from the vantage point of the crowd. The 34-year-old billionaire is currently on break from her blockbuster Eras tour. Some fans had speculated Swift might join friend and fellow Antonoff associate Lana Del Rey, who headlined Friday's open-



ing night. There's always next weekend, which is essentially a repeat of the first three days of the festival but usually includes a few shake-ups. Tyler, the Creator was the top-billed act on Saturday, bursting onto the stage in flames from inside a camper van that was parked in a set mimicking a desert mountain scene. The eccentric performer – who sported both Palestinian and Congolese flag pins – invited a number of special guests including Kali Uchis, Childish Gambino and ASAP Rocky. Doja Cat is on deck to headline on Sunday. ALT-ROCK ROOTS AND PARIS HILTON Coachella started as a rock festival but in recent years it's leaned increasingly into pop, rap and the Latino megastars who rule the streaming charts. But Saturday's lineup offered a portrait of nostalgia: No Doubt – the group fronted by Gwen Stefani – played together for the first time in 15 years. Stefani, 54, bounded across the stage boasting the vocals of her youth, leading the crowd in singalongs of the group's classics including "Just A Girl" and "Don't Speak." English rockers Blur also took the stage, while stoner reggae rock group Sublime --

the 1990s act beloved for hits including "Santeria" – drew throngs of fans to the main stage for a sunset performance featuring the late frontman Brad Nowell's son Jakob leading the way. Vampire Weekend made a last-minute return to the desert, having last performed there more than a decade ago. The veteran indie rockers whose hits including "Cape Cod Kwassa Kwassa" were brought in just last week, and frontman Ezra Koenig, who sported a striped Pogue's sweatshirt, told cheering fans he'd been leaning back sipping ranch water – a cocktail of seltzer, tequila and lime – in Texas when he got a text asking if they'd come on board. The group just released their fifth album, "Only God Was Above Us," and played a mix of fan favourites and new work, including a 15-minute honky tonk mash-up. They also randomly brought Paris Hilton onstage to play a quick round of cornhole – a popular North American bean bag-based lawn game – as part of a giveaway of chocolate for front-row fans. "I haven't played this game since 'The Simple Life,'" the cowboy-hat wearing socialite and reality TV icon quipped, a referencing to the cult mid-2000s series she starred in with Nicole Richie. "Make some noise for 'The Simple Life!'" yelled Koenig to laughs and applause. — AFP

Future of Africa's flamingos threatened by rising lakes: study

THE LAKES WHERE Africa's flamingos congregate in spectacular numbers are producing less food for the iconic birds as their water levels rise, researchers said on Friday, threatening the survival of a much-loved species.

Three-quarters of the world's lesser flamingos live in East Africa and more than a million birds at a time can gather at lakes in huge "flamboyances" for feeding and courtship.

But as these lakes expand to record highs, scientists have discovered they produce less of the unique algae upon which flamingos rely, putting at risk a species already in decline.

This is driving the distinctive, pink-plumed birds away from their usual habitats into unprotected areas in search of food, said Aidan Byrne, lead author of the research.

"They might be able to move elsewhere, but they could be lost from the region that

lakes.

Byrne and other researchers wanted to study the impact that had on biodiversity and found a "massive decline" in concentrations of the very algal blooms upon which flamingos survive.

Earlier studies had looked at the problem but its extent was not known until now, he said.

"We were surprised at the scale of the changes, and how much the flamingo habitats are threatened," he said.

Erratic and extreme rainfall predicted for East Africa in future would only make the problem worse and "increase the threat to the species within the region", he added.

The study, published in the journal Current Biology, is the first to use satellite imagery to observe all 22 of the soda lakes that host flamingos across the East African region.

This was combined with climate records and bird observation data over more than 20 years.

The sharpest drops in algae concentrations were observed in Kenya, including at Nakuru, one of the most important flamingo feeding lakes in Africa known for hosting million-strong "flamboyances".

It expanded by roughly 90 per cent between 2009 and 2022 while algal concentration halved.

Lake Bogoria and Lake Elmenteita, also tourist magnets for their brilliant flamingo displays, experienced steep declines as well.

And where algal blooms declined, so too did flamingo numbers, Byrne said, putting in doubt revenue from tourism as well.

Flamingo habitats in East Africa are protected whereas outside these ranges monitoring would be difficult and other threats -- including from humans -- could emerge, he said.

"They're just such an iconic species that are unique to these environments. If they're lost, it would be devastating," Byrne said. — AFP



they're currently in at these key feeding lakes," said Byrne, a PhD student jointly supervised by King's College London and the Natural History Museum.

Flamingos use their specialised beaks to feed on a particular type of algae that exists in salty, alkaline waters known as soda lakes.

These lakes are concentrated in Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia and despite being harsh landscapes, certain species -- including the flamingo and the algae they feast on -- have adapted to thrive there.

ICONIC SPECIES

But the lakes have risen to levels not seen in decades, driven in part by increased rainfall linked to climate change over the catchment areas.

This has greatly diluted the alkalinity and salinity of the water at these soda

THREE-QUARTERS OF THE WORLD'S LESSER FLAMINGOS LIVE IN EAST AFRICA AND MORE THAN A MILLION BIRDS AT A TIME CAN GATHER AT LAKES IN HUGE "FLAMBOYANCES" FOR FEEDING AND COURTSHIP.

