

Oman's population surpasses 5m mark

The population of the Sultanate of Oman reached 5,083,300 as of July 10, according to a report from National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The report, released on the occasion of World Population Day, shows that Omani nationals make up 57 per cent of the population, with a total of 2,897,436 individuals. Expatriates account for the remaining 43 per cent, totalling 2,185,864 individuals. The report shows that the number of expatriate males is higher than Omani males by about 4.8 per cent. **DETAILS P2**



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OMAN SAIL MAINTAINS EXCELLENT FORM AT ARAB GAMES IN ALGERIA



P13

DUALISATION OF KEY SALALAH ROAD TO SUPPORT TOURISM, ECONOMIC GROWTH



P18

HEALTH ENTHUSIASTS HEAD TO MALLS FOR WALKS



MUSCAT

HM SENDS GREETINGS TO MONTENEGRO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Jakov Milatovic of the Republic of Montenegro on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Milatovic and his country's people. — ONA

RO 60M FOR OMAN'S FIRST VACCINE FACTORY

Opal Bio Pharma Company celebrated laying the foundation stone for the second phase of the first Omani factory for biological medicines and vaccines in Oman. To be establishment with an investment RO 60 million, the plant will come up on a 37,000 sqm site at Khazaen Economic City. Its construction will be completed in two years. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. Sa'ad bin Moosa al Junaibi, Chairman of Opal Bio Pharma Company, said the factory will place Oman on the global vaccines production map and offers the country an opportunity to export medical drugs to other countries of the world. **DETAILS ON P13**

MoSD LAUNCHES CHILDHOOD CENTRES

The Ministry of Social Development on Wednesday launched a project titled "integrated early childhood development centres". A centre under this theme provides educational, health and rehabilitation services to segments of society in one geographical location. It focuses on early detection of people with disabilities, lending support for multiple intelligence segments and providing institutional monitoring for the age groups of 3 months to 6 years. The project is the outcome of cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University and the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) office in Muscat. The project provides care services for children with internationally approved standards and methodologies that consider national privacy. **SEE ALSO P2**



TAQAH CASTLE REOPENS TO PUBLIC

Coinciding with the khareef Dhofar season, Taqah Castle in Dhofar Governorate has opened its doors to the public following an extensive restoration and maintenance project. This remarkable restoration project, undertaken by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is considered a revered historical landmark, erected in the 19th century under the reign of Sultan Taimour bin Faisal al Said (1913-1932), and served as the administrative hub for the region. Entry to this historical castle is free, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Taqah's heritage. Opening hours are from 9 am to 4 pm and on Fridays from 8 am to 11:30 am. **SEE ALSO P3**

Abbas pays first visit to Jenin in decade

RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visited the West Bank city of Jenin for the first time in 10 years, a week after the end of Israel's biggest military operation in the area in 20 years. Abbas laid a wreath at the graves of several victims, according to Palestinian news agency Wafa on Wednesday.

At least 12 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were killed. During his visit, Abbas also intended to assess the progress of the city and refugee camp's reconstruction after the Israeli military operation, Wafa said. Although Abbas' Palestinian Authority is responsible for Jenin, the Israeli military recently said that the authority had lost control of the city and is not taking sufficient action against activities. The area is known as a stronghold of Palestinians.

Experts suspect that Hamas, which rules in the Gaza Strip,



Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas during a landmark visit to the Jenin camp, north of the occupied West Bank. — AFP

plans to replace Abbas' ailing authority in the West Bank. His visit is seen as a sign of asserting his presence and regaining control over the area.

It is only his second visit to Jenin since taking office in 2005, with his last visit occurring in 2012.

Many Palestinians are highly dissatisfied with Abbas' leadership. Israel's army initiated one of the largest military operations in the West Bank last week, with over 1,000 soldiers entering Jenin and targeting the Palestinians with airstrikes. — dpa **SEE ALSO PAGE 6**

2022-23 GED results today

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 12

The Ministry of Education has released the results of the general education diploma exams and their equivalents for the first round of the academic year 2022-2023.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, has approved the general indicators for the exam results, which are as follows:

The General Education Diploma (Formal) saw 51,010 male and female students who appeared for the exams, with a success rate of 82.64 per cent.

The General Education Diploma for Private Schools (Bilingual) had 1,386 applicants, with a success rate of 91.89 per cent.

The Technical General Education Diploma of the Royal Guard of Oman Technical College (Bilingual) had 54 applicants, with a 100 per cent success rate.

The General Education Diploma and Islamic Sciences had 115 applicants, with a success rate of 98.25 per cent.

The General Education Diploma (Special Education) had 62 applicants, with a 100 per cent success rate.

The results will be available from 4 pm today July 13, through the SMS service provided by Omantel, Ooredoo, and Vodafone.

Applicants can check their results by sending a text message with their seat number to the number 90200. The results will also be available on the educational portal of the Sultanate of Oman.

To ensure a well-managed examination process, the Ministry has taken all necessary measures to conduct the exams in a calm and comfortable educational

FOR RESULTS SEND SMS TO

90200

QUOTING SEAT NUMBER

51,010

MALE, FEMALE STUDENTS APPEARED

62

STUDENTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION, PASS WITH 100% SUCCESS

58

CASES OF VIOLATIONS REGISTERED



environment. A total of 360 examination centres were set up across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Unfortunately, there were 58 violations of the regulations for administering the exams and their equivalents.

The Ministry has investigated each case and taken appropriate measures, as per Ministerial Resolution No 588/2015, which includes penalties for violating the exam rules. **TURN TO P3**

EU Parliament passes nature law after political backlash

BRUSSELS: The European Parliament on Wednesday voted to pass a fiercely contested law to restore degraded natural ecosystems, salvaging the environmental measures that centre-right lawmakers had campaigned to kill off.

European Union lawmakers adopted the legal proposal with 336 votes in favour, 300 against, and 13 abstentions. Lawmakers and member countries will now negotiate the final text, aiming for a deal before EU Parliament elections in 2024.



Members of the European Parliament react as they take part in a voting session on EU nature restoration law during a plenary session at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France. — AFP

“We have won. It is a social victory: for scientists, for young people, for a lot of companies and businesses, for the agricultural sector”

CESAR LUENA
Prliment's lead negotiator

“We have won. It is a social victory: for scientists, for young people, for a lot of companies and businesses, for the agricultural sector,” Cesar Luena, the parliament's lead negotiator on the law, told reporters after the vote.

The decision came after months of political campaigning that exposed deep divisions among EU countries and lawmakers over the proposal, with government leaders warning that Europe is pushing through too many environmental laws as part of its overall green agenda.

The European People's Party (EPP), the EU Parliament's biggest lawmaker group, led a campaign to reject the plan on the grounds it would harm farmers and endanger food security.

“It's an empty win,” said Manfred Weber, chair of the EPP group. “We can only be successful on the green deal if we unify, this is obviously not the case with this bad piece of legislation.”

The legislation will require countries to introduce measures restoring nature on a fifth of their land and sea by 2030. — Reuters



OMANI POPULATION SHOWS SLIGHT GENDER GAP: NCSI

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 12

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) announced on Wednesday that the population of the Sultanate of Oman has reached 5,083,300 as of July 10, 2023.

The NCSI's report, released on the occasion of World Population Day, shows that Omani nationals make up 57 of the population, with a total of 2,897,436 individuals.

Expatriates account for the remaining 43 per cent, totalling 2,185,864 individuals.

The report shows that the number of expatriate males is higher than Omani males by about 4.8 per cent.

Among the expatriate population, males constitute 35 per cent (1,702,905.5 individuals) while females make up 9.5 per cent (482,913.5 individuals).

Among the Omani population, there is a slight difference in the number of males and females in



which males constitute 28.7 per cent (1,458,907.1 individuals) and females make up 28.3 per cent (1,438,573.9 individuals).

The report also shows that the population of Oman is growing

at a rate of 1.49 per cent per year. This growth is being driven by both natural increase (births over deaths) and net migration.

The NCSI's report provides valuable insights into the

demographic makeup of Oman whose information can be used to inform government policies and programmes, as well as to help businesses and organisations better understand the market.

Early childhood project to provide rehabilitation services

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development on Wednesday launched a project titled 'Integrated early childhood development centres'.

A centre under this theme provides educational, health and rehabilitation services to segments of society in one geographical location.

It focuses on early detection of people with disabilities, lending support for multiple intelligence segments and providing institutional monitoring for the age groups of 3 months to 6 years.

The project is the outcome of cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office in Muscat.

The project provides care services for children with internationally approved standards and methodologies



that consider national privacy. It comprises programmes within a holistic framework for all sectors, notably social upbringing of children and monitoring the stages of child growth and development.

The project also seeks to raise public awareness about standards of healthy nutrition and mechanisms for the detection of early childhood problems, besides providing innovative educational services that appeal to different age groups.

The project's launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

— ONA

Land transport projects in Al Dakhiliyah reviewed

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, JULY 12

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, met with Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, to discuss and review projects for the design, implementation, maintenance and land transport in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Rania al Muqbali, Head of the Roads Construction Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, reviewed the results of the construction of the Rusayl-Bidbid dual road, as the completion rate reached 66.64 per cent until June 2023.

She also talked about the Seih Qutna road works project in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and the project to design and implement the remaining works on Al Ainiyah road in the Wilayat of Samayil. This project hopes to be presented



in the coming days. The Karsha-Ezz-Adam road project has also recently been completed and opened to traffic.

During the meeting, they reviewed investment projects in the governorate, including an alternative road project linking South Al Batinah with Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. This project has the aim of facilitating access to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar without the need for four-wheel drive vehicles, which will contribute to tourism promotion.

An initial feasibility study for the road was completed in

coordination with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. This resulted in the identification of two road options. A proposal to implement it as an investment or development project is being studied.

At the end of the meeting, the under-secretary affirmed his happiness to move forward towards the implementation of the 32-kilometre Jabal Shams road project as part of the tourism link initiative that the ministry is developing. The tender documents have been prepared and uploaded to the system in preparation.

SMEDA announces initiative to boost SME sector

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) announced an initiative to present an integrated package of benefits, discounts and special offers presented by public and private sector institutions and companies to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that obtain the Entrepreneurship Card.

The initiative aims to enhance the activity and sustainability of the SME sector by providing various incentives, facilities and services that meet the needs and requirements of entrepreneurs at competitive and reduced prices. These institutions aim to promote this vital sector in the Sultanate of Oman and its rapid spread.

There are 37,489 SMEs that obtained the active entrepreneurship card until the end of 2022 in the various



governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative targets the sectors of industry, tourism, education, sports, finance and insurance, and maintenance, in addition to information and communication technology, health and beauty, logistics, innovation and entrepreneurship, restaurants and cafes, and other sectors.

SMEDA launched a Mazaya initiative to provide offers and discounts (product or service) with a discount starting from 20

per cent for SMEs that obtain an active entrepreneurship card. Also, Market With Us initiative offers a 20-per cent discount on services that include managing social media accounts, photography, launching products or services, coordinating with social media celebrities for coverage and advertisements.

The offer is activated through showing the entrepreneurship card and communicating with the company directly and will continue until December 30.

In legal solutions, 50 per cent discount is on offer for services represented in legal advice, criminal cases, commercial cases, rental cases, Sharia cases, international cases and civil cases. The offer is activated by showing the entrepreneurship card and communicating with the company directly, and the offer continues until December 31 of the current year.

Omani-French relations to explore newer avenues

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Omani-French relations, which have been several centuries old and are characterised by positivity and mutual respect, are to expand further beyond horizons, according to the ambassador of France to the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking at the event that marked 51st anniversary of France's diplomatic presence in Oman, Véronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to Oman, ahead of Bastille Day, the national day of France celebrated on July 14, said the two countries are exploring newer ways of enhancing the relations.

"Oman and France hold strong relations that trace back to hundreds of years. We have been working to deepen our



partnership and our military and security cooperation is growing, thanks to Oman's strategic location and French military presence in the region and the Indian Ocean," she said.

Nearly 75,000 French tourists visit Oman annually, which places

France among the top European visiting nations.

"We are also attracting more Omani students through successful scholarship programmes, notably for doctors and we are working with Oman's Ministry of Education to scale up

the teaching of French in Omani public schools," she added.

She highlighted the strong ties between France and Oman especially in heritage and tourism fields. She also noted that Oman is a privileged partner for France within the Gulf region with a

longstanding partnership.

She highlighted the growing ties in many business fields, especially in renewable energies and clean hydrogen where French companies are newly operating in Oman.

Salim bin Mohammed al

Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, as well as senior Omani civil and military officials, heads of foreign diplomatic missions, and other distinguished guests were in attendance at the celebrations held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat.





Dhofar Municipality issues regulations for setting up caravans during Khareef

AHMED AL KAABI
SALALAH, JULY 12

Dhofar Municipality has announced the establishment of stringent requirements for organising mobile homes, commonly known as caravans, during the Khareef season in Salalah. The move comes as a result of recognising the significance of orderly caravan arrangements and the provision of designated areas.

The conditions outlined by the municipality encompass several crucial aspects. Caravans owners are required to obtain permits before setting up their caravans.

Erecting fences or berms is strictly prohibited, as is the use of loudspeakers, lasers and upward-facing lights. Furthermore, it is mandatory to equip the caravans with adequate safety and security measures throughout the authorised period.

Moreover, caravans owners must adhere to the designated location specified by the competent authority in the municipality.

In the event of a request for relocation, the competent authority should be contacted for proper guidance. It is also essential to maintain the cleanliness of the assigned site during the permit period. Additionally, the use of mobile toilets is only permitted if they meet sanitary requirements. Organisers are strictly prohibited from transferring or assigning the permit to other individuals.



Among the conditions applicable to caravan owners during the autumn period in Salalah is the obligation to pay the prescribed fees, amounting to RO 35. Additionally, a refundable insurance fee of RO 50 is required, which will be reimbursed upon the conclusion of the authorised period.

To ensure compliance, the municipality has imposed a fine of RO 100 for any violation of the established conditions and regulations. In case of repeated



violations or failure to adhere to the necessary requirements, immediate removal will be enforced, with the municipality bearing no responsibility towards the cost.

Dhofar Municipality urges all caravan owners to strictly follow these requirements and maintain a harmonious coexistence with the surrounding environment and fellow residents. By organising caravans in accordance with these regulations, residents and visitors alike can enjoy a safe and enjoyable autumn experience.

Global Village in Salalah to enrich visitors from July 15

MUHAIRA AL BALUSHI
SALALAH, JULY 12

The Global Village, scheduled to take place from July 15 to August 31 at Salalah Grand Mall, is a unique gathering that brings together continents and nations in a single location. It serves as a showcase for architectural and real estate designs.

This event involves nations from around the world and can be described as a miniature marketplace offering delicacies and items representative of each country and continent.

In the Global Village, visitors can explore diverse tastes and experiences.

The venue is organised in a way that accommodates various activities, exhibitions and shopping opportunities, allowing people to indulge in a virtual tour of different countries all in one place. Live performances and events such as backpacker shows are also featured in the Global Village.

What sets this event apart is its ability to provide a condensed experience of travelling the world in a single day, complete with delectable food, adventurous and sporting shows, captivating fireworks displays, and the opportunity to shop for products from various countries. Additionally, visitors can enjoy breathtaking views, theatrical performances, and dine in restaurants..



2022-23 GED results today

FROM PAGE 1
The violations included cases of mobile phones and smart digital watches being seized at 9 cases, possession of unauthorised materials in 43 cases, disregard for regulations within the examination centres in about 5 cases, and one case of impersonation. Penalties for the violators varied, ranging from deprivation of exam results for the specific subject in which the violation occurred, allowing it to be submitted in the second round, to cancelling the results of all subjects in some cases. The case of impersonation was referred to the Public Prosecution.

The Ministry is committed to reducing exam violations and has implemented measures to strengthen exam management controls. This includes increased oversight through visits by technical committees to exam centres.

For those who wish to request a re-correction of their examination books, they can submit an application through the educational portal of Oman. The applicant must fill out the designated form and then visit the Directorate General of Education in their respective governorate to complete other administrative procedures. The application process will be open from July 14 to July 20.

No applications will be accepted after this period, and the Ministry will ensure the rights of the students.

Applicants can only apply for re-correction for a maximum of three academic subjects. The application must be made within a week from the date of the announcement of the results.

Neither the student nor their guardian has the right to view the examination book. The Ministry forms committees to review the correction of the requested books and will inform the applicant of the results once the committees complete their work.

TENDER BOARD AWARDS PROJECTS WORTH RO 68M

MUSCAT: The Tender Board on Wednesday held its 4th meeting of the year under the chairmanship of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Chairman of the Tender Board.

During the meeting, the Tender Board awarded projects and additional tasks related to development projects to the tune of more than RO 68.8 million.

The awarded tasks included



24 projects, most importantly the implementation and management of Oman Government Network (RO 38,558,520), nutrition services and accompanying tasks for students of Sultan Qaboos University (RO 10,385,104) and the replacement of old air-conditioners at schools of the Ministry of Education (RO 5,400,337).

— ONA

TAQAH CASTLE REOPENS

A historical gem reveals its splendour to the public

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Taqah Castle in the Dhofar Governorate has opened its doors to the public following an extensive restoration and maintenance project, coinciding within the Khareef Dhofar season.

Taqah Castle, considered as a revered historical landmark, was erected in the 19th century under the reign of Sultan Taimur bin Faisal al Said (1913-1932), and served as the administrative hub for the local region.

It located in the ancient neighbourhood of Taqah, and it stands as a testament to the harmonious coexistence of antiquity and modernity. Meticulous efforts have been made to preserve and enhance the castle's original charm, showcasing the remarkable craftsmanship and traditional practices that shaped the lives of Taqah's inhabitants in past eras and visitors will be transported back in time as they explore its exhibits, offering a fascinating glimpse into the rich cultural heritage and daily lives of the local community.

This remarkable restoration project,



undertaken by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism this year, in order ensures that Taqah Castle stands as a proud symbol of the region's history, spans two floors with unique features.

The ground floor includes a prison, a reception hall, a guard's room, and storage rooms which reflects the fort's multifunctional nature. Moreover, moving

to the upper floor, visitors will encounter watchtowers and the family quarters of the Wali (governor), offering a sight into the splendour and strategic significance of the castle.

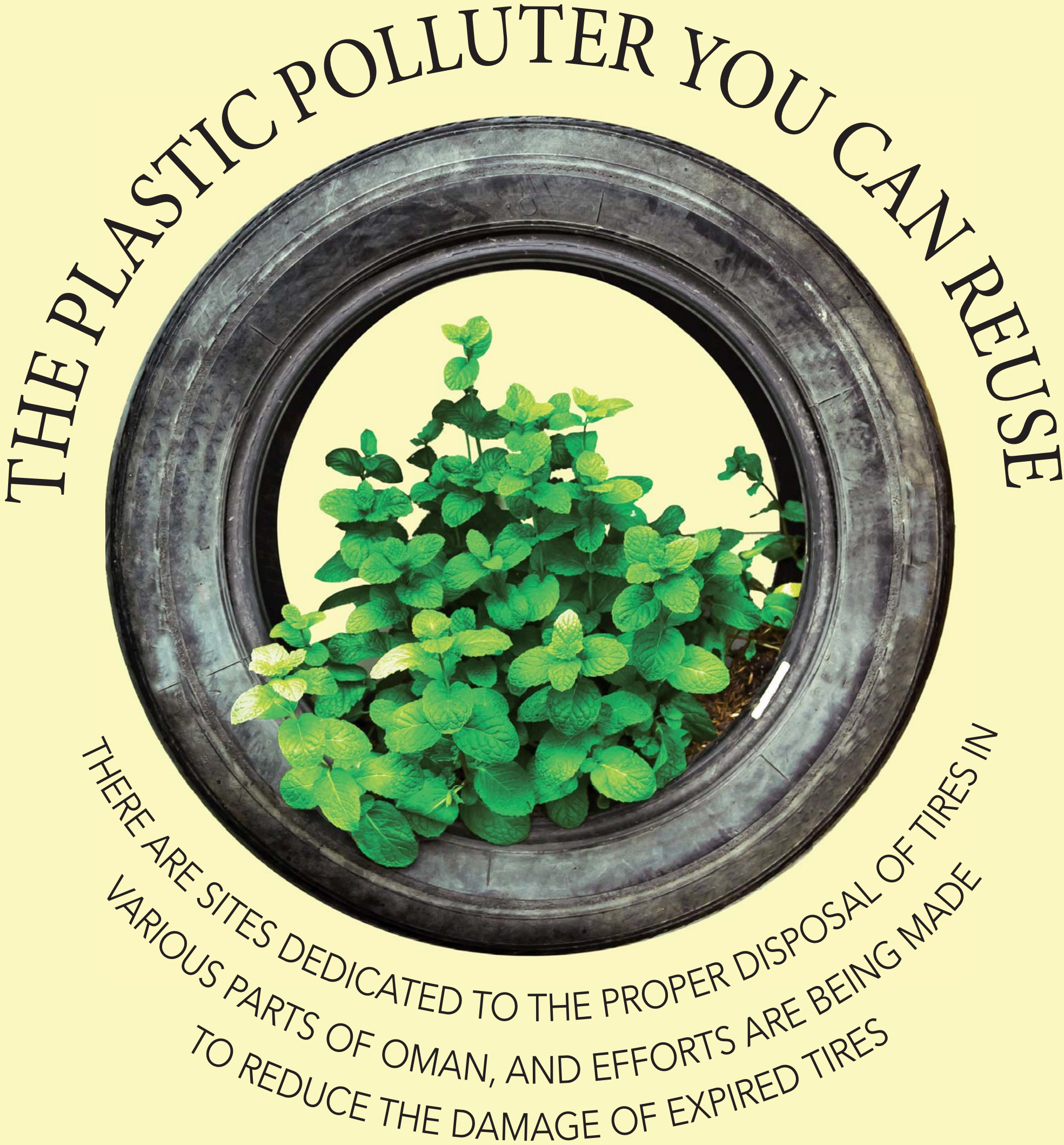
Ali al Maashani, Director, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar, told the Observer that he was delighted to witness

the grand reopening of Taqah Castle, which is a historical gem that holds immense significance in Dhofar's heritage.

"Taqah Castle's architectural splendour, adorned with ancient colours and intricate details, is a testament to the artistry of our ancestors. The recent restoration efforts have breathed new life into the castle, showcasing the remarkable craftsmanship and reflecting the noble traditions of the Omani people and our Arab and Islamic architectural civilisation," Al Maashani said.

Situated approximately 34 kilometres east of Salalah, Taqah Castle is easily accessible to visitors. Opening hours are from 9 am to 4 pm daily and on Friday from 8 am to 11.30 am. Entry to this historical castle is free, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Taqah's heritage without any financial barriers.

The commitment to its maintenance ensures the readiness of castle to welcome visitors while prioritising their safety. This reopening comes at a more opportune time, coinciding with the Khareef Dhofar season, when tourists from near and far flock to the beautiful region, eager to experience its rich history and cultural heritage.



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It is universally known that vehicles that work by internal combustion engines, gasoline, diesel and gas cause air pollution, but a new report revealed that tires and brakes cause more pollution than exhaust. Wear and tear on car tires and brakes releases fine particles into the air, linked to heart and lung disease, according to a report published by The Washington Post. According to the report, scientists have recently discovered that worn tires and brakes cause an alarming amount of particulate pollution, which could be a problem for the environment and human health. For decades, scientists and health officials have warned drivers about harmful pollutants coming from exhaust pipes. But as car exhaust systems become cleaner (they contain filters to filter out harmful emissions), pollution linked to heart and lung disease has

increased from a different source which are tires and brakes. Much of the pollution comes from road dust caused by driving. In recent years, particulate matter emissions from brakes and tires have also begun to grow, even surpassing those from tailpipes in some locations. The report indicated that the pollution caused by brakes and tires is also not benign. Tests conducted by Emissions Analytics, an engineering consultancy based in England, found that tires produce 2,000 times more particulate pollution than tailpipes by mass. In addition to not being regulated, these emissions exceed legal particulate matter limits for exhaust. The emissions also consist of more than 400 compounds of various sizes and toxicities. In contrast to the damage caused by tires, an environmental study in the past years between Oman Cement Company and the Omani Holding Company for Environmental Services (be'ah) revealed the importance of utilising expired tires as fuel that reduces the consumption of natural gas currently used in cement manufacturing furnaces at the Oman Cement Company. This is because tires are the most suitable for this purpose and are also the easiest in terms of handling. The study also concluded that the factory systems are ready to deal with the gas emissions resulting from the burning of tires in a safe and sound manner and without damage to the surrounding environment. Even several precautionary measures were proposed for safety and security measures. There are sites dedicated to the proper disposal of tires in various parts of the Sultanate of Oman, and there are efforts being made to reduce the damage of expired tires, indicating that tires are usually burned to extract the minerals contained within these tires, and that those people who are trying to extract these minerals need to understand that the damage to their health and the environment is much more than the value of the metal they extract. be'ah called on the public to learn and raise

awareness about the harms of burning tires to the environment and people. One of the most prominent solutions to avoid burning tires is to reuse the tire after it has been treated by specialists, and to recycle tires so that they can be used to make useful things from them. In addition to using tires as a source of energy in factories so that they are burned in ovens to generate energy for those factories, and the rehabilitation of tires is the process of building the outer layer of the tire, so that it is usable for a new period. There are many ways to recycle damaged tires, as it is one of the best solutions. These tires can be used in designing gardens, vertical farming, street paving, and use in sports surfaces and floors of children's play areas to protect them during falls. Also, they can be used in the manufacture of garbage bins and some pieces of home furniture such as chairs and tables. They are also used in port docks to prevent boats from colliding with the dock.



Number of displaced by Sudan war surpasses 3m

GENEVA: The number of people uprooted by a conflict between military factions in Sudan that erupted nearly three months ago has surpassed 3 million, according to estimates from the International Organization for Migration.

More than 2.4 million people have been displaced internally and more than 730,000 have crossed into neighbouring countries, data published late on Tuesday said.

Most have fled either from the capital Khartoum, the focus of the power struggle between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that broke out on April 15, or from Darfur, where ethnically-targeted violence has surged.

UN officials have said Sudan could slide into civil war, as regional and international mediation efforts have failed.

“This war won’t end shortly,” said United Nations special envoy Volker Perthes, speaking in Belgium. Several ceasefire agreements have been violated and “have basically been used by the parties to reposition themselves,” he said. On Wednesday, residents reported the sound of fighter jets and artillery shelling in Omdurman and Bahri, parts of the wider capital.

Fighting has also been reported in recent days between the army and powerful SPLM rebel factions in South Kordofan State, and in



An internally displaced child stands outside a tent pitched at the Hasahisa secondary school, in war-torn Sudan. – AFP

Blue Nile State near the border with Ethiopia, triggering displacement from those regions as well.

The fighting has laid waste to large parts of the capital and led to waves of attacks in Darfur. Civilians have faced widespread looting, power cuts, food and water shortages, a collapse in health services and a spike in physical violence.

The Sudanese government’s Combating Violence Against Women and Children unit said on Tuesday it had recorded nine new cases of physical assault in Khartoum, bringing the total since mid-April to 51, adding that the real number of cases was likely much higher.

Most victims blamed RSF forces for the assaults, the unit, which is seen as impartial, said in a statement. The RSF has called on civilians to report violations and said members found to be involved in abuses will be held to account.

Of those leaving Sudan, the majority have fled north to Egypt or west to Chad, with large numbers also crossing into South Sudan and Ethiopia.

International efforts to broker an end to the fighting have shown little sign of progress, including talks led by Saudi Arabia and the United States in Jeddah that were adjourned last month, and an African-led meeting in Addis Ababa this week. — Reuters

Death toll rises to 66 in India’s monsoon floods mayhem

NEW DELHI: Days of relentless monsoon rains have killed at least 66 people in India, government officials said on Wednesday, with dozens of foreign tourists stranded in the Himalayas after floods severed road connections.

Flooding and landslides are common and cause widespread devastation during India’s treacherous monsoon season, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

Torrential downpours have washed away vehicles, demolished buildings and torn down bridges in Himachal Pradesh, the worst-affected state.

At least 33 people have lost their lives in the state — popular for its picturesque Himalayan hill stations — since Saturday, said Onkar Sharma, head of the state disaster agency. Rescue teams were mobilised to assist 40 foreign travellers — including 14 Russians and 12 Malaysians — stranded at tourist destinations alongside several hundred Indian nationals, state police chief Satwant Atwal said.

“Due to heavy snowfall and bad weather it has become very difficult to evacuate them,” Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said on Wednesday.

“We are exploring all possible options.”

At least 12 people were killed in neighbouring Uttarakhand state, including nine on Tuesday when debris fell on their vehicles on a national highway, officials said.

A popular pilgrimage to the state’s



Residents use tree branches to climb on a flyover under construction, as others wait, after being displaced by the rising water level of river Yamuna after heavy monsoon rains in New Delhi. – Reuters

Kedarnath temple, home to a revered shrine of the Hindu deity Shiva, was suspended due to heavy rains.

“In view of continuous rains in all the areas of the state, I request the people and pilgrims to avoid making unnecessary journeys,” Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said.

Incessant rain had caused significant damage across Punjab state, with at least 10 killed in flash floods.

“There is a huge loss of life and property, the loss is being assessed,” state revenue minister Brahm Shankar Jimpa told reporters on Tuesday.

At least 11 people were killed in Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous state, according to state officials.

The capital New Delhi has also been put on high alert for flooding after the Yamuna river, which snakes past the megacity, recorded its highest levels since 1978.

The waterway has already inundated homes along its banks and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said it was expected to rise further later on Wednesday evening.

The monsoon brings South Asia around 80 per cent of its annual rainfall and is vital both for agriculture and the livelihoods of millions of farmers. — AFP

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDERS NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
484/2023/MAFWR/HQ-43	Design and Build Services of Fish Landing Centre 'Marfa' at Hadbin in Sadah Wilayat	270/-	First	Thursday 27/7/2023	Sunday 20/8/2023
485/2023/MAFWR/HQ-44	Rehabilitation and Improvement of AL-Buraimi Falaj in AL-Buraimi Village in Wilayat of AL-Buraimi, AL-Buraimi Governorate	25/-	Fourth	Thursday 27/7/2023	Sunday 20/8/2023
486/2023/MAFWR/HQ-45	Consultancy Services for Construction Supervision of Buiding Works at the Hallaniyat Island, Dhofar Governorate, Sultanate of Oman	50/-	First	Thursday 27/7/2023	Sunday 20/8/2023

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders).
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
223/2023	Renting (7) four-wheel drive cars for the Ministry's General Office building	Companies specialized in the field of renting cars, equipment, and tools and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Tuesday 1-8-2023 02:00 PM	Monday 21-8-2023 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Thursday 13/7/2023**.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

Recall

Bridgestone Water Tank

13th of July 2023

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Glass Reinforced Plastic water tank, two compartments type, only two-meter height and with partition	1994 - 1998	5

Recall consequence

Unequal water levels in the compartments combined with a degradation of the materials due to extended life span product use have resulted in a risk of structural failure of the partition panel in the product when it is subject to water pressure.

Recall Action

Do not use the Tank if there are unequal water levels between the compartments. Completely empty all compartments when cleaning the Tanks.

If you have no choice but to leave water in one compartment when cleaning or for other temporary reasons, be sure to: (i) Lower the water level in the compartments as low as possible (preferably no higher than one half of the total volume or capacity of the compartment so as to minimize structural stress due to the water pressure; (ii) Inspect the Tanks prior to such temporary usage to ensure that there is no deformation or any cracks of the panels or other metal parts, water leakage, or any other identifiable defects; and (iii) Stop the cleaning process and vacate the Tanks immediately if there is any indication of observable defects including abnormal stresses being placed on the partition wall or any other indication that the partition may be failing.

BRIDGESTONE

Contact Albusaidy, Mansoor Jamal and Co. at 2482 9200 or at the following email: mj-co@omantel.net.om (acting on behalf of Bridgestone) to requests for recall of the product and issue a refund (upon examination of the product) within 1 year of the date of this advertisement, for the purchase price of the product at the time of purchase.

هئية حماية المستهلكات
Consumer Protection Authority
www.pccp.gov.om

دليل المستهلك
Consumer line
80079009
80077997

Thai election body recommends frontrunner’s suspension

BANGKOK: Thai election chiefs on Wednesday asked the country’s top court to suspend Pita Limjaroenrat, the frontrunner in the race to become prime minister, over allegations he broke campaign rules as an MP.

The recommendation is the latest hurdle thrown into the path of the progressive candidate, whose Move Forward Party (MFP) scored the most votes in May’s election by tapping into Thai’s appetite for change.

The Election Commission’s referral to the Constitutional Court was announced just a day before parliament was due to vote on a new premier.

While popular among voters, Pita’s bid for the premiership faces stiff opposition over his plans to amend Thailand’s royal defamation laws, which protect King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his family.

Following the commission’s announcement, MFP Secretary-General Chaithawat Tulathon said the party still wanted the vote to go ahead.

“Tomorrow is a day of crossroads to see if we will continue to disregard the people’s politics, or... return to normal democracy and move Thailand forward,” he said.

“I believe people will not accept it any more.”

Late on Wednesday afternoon, Pita was struck by a fresh hurdle when the Constitutional Court accepted a separate case centred on the promise of royal defamation law reform.

The court was asked to “consider whether the actions of (Pita and the MFP)... who have proposed the amendment of 112 in their political campaign are using their right and freedom to overthrow the constitutional monarchy”, referring to the number of the criminal code article that deals with lese majeste.

On Wednesday night, small groups of peaceful demonstrators gathered across Bangkok. — AFP



Rights council condemns the Holy Quran burnings

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council voted on Wednesday to condemn recent Holy Quran burning incidents, but many countries declined to back the resolution, fearing it encroached on free speech.

Despite overwhelming condemnation of the Muslim holy book being desecrated, the vote brought more division than unity, with countries from Europe and the Americas saying a bit more work could have resulted in a stronger, unanimous decision.

Pakistan and other Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries brought forward a debate and resolution after burning pages from the Holy Quran outside Stockholm's main mosque last month. The incident triggering a diplomatic backlash across the Muslim world.

The United Nations' top rights body backed the OIC resolution on countering religious hatred by 28 votes in favour, with 12 against and seven abstentions.

Despite the vote passing

to applause, there were some cheerful notes sounded in the chamber.

Britain, the United States, European Union countries including France and Germany, plus Costa Rica and Montenegro, voted against the resolution.

US ambassador Michele Taylor said that with more time and discussion, a consensus could have been reached.

"I'm truly heartbroken that this council was unable to speak with a unanimous voice today in condemning what we all agree are deplorable acts of anti-Muslim hatred, while also respecting freedom of expression."

And there was little sense of triumph from Pakistan's ambassador Khalil Hashmi, speaking for the OIC.

Hashmi insisted the resolution was not looking to curtail free speech, but had been aimed at striking a prudent balance.

"Regrettably, some states have chosen to abdicate their responsibility to prevent and

counter the scourge of religious hatred," he said.

"A message has been sent to billions of people of faith across the world that their commitment to prevent religious hatred is merely a lip service.

"The opposition of a few in the room has emanated from their unwillingness to condemn the public desecration of the Holy Quran.

The wording of the resolution condemns all manifestations of religious hatred, including "public and premeditated acts of desecration of the Holy Quran", and underscores the need to hold those responsible to account.

It urges states to adopt laws to "address, prevent and prosecute acts and advocacy of religious hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence".

It also wants the UN rights chief Volker Turk to identify gaps in countries' laws in light of the resolution.

— AFP



Abbas vows to rebuild Jenin camp after deadly Israeli raid

JENIN: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas vowed on Wednesday to rebuild the Jenin refugee camp during a rare visit that came a week after a deadly Israeli raid left much of it destroyed.

Abbas described the camp as an "icon of struggle" during his first visit in over a decade to the camp in the northern West Bank city.

Twelve Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were killed last week in the two-day raid on Jenin, the largest in years by Israeli forces.

The raid on the camp, which Israel views as a "terrorism hub", employed hundreds of troops as well as drone strikes and army bulldozers that tore up streets and damaged scores of houses.

Several top officials of Abbas's Fatah party, including deputy chairman Mahmoud Aloul, had

visited the camp soon after the raid, only to be heckled by crowds of angry residents.

On Wednesday, Abbas expressed determination to back Jenin's reconstruction and security.

He described the camp as an "icon of steadfastness and struggle", in a short address as crowds of supporters cheered.

"We have come to say that we are one authority, one state, one law," he said, warning against anyone who "tamper with the unity and security of our people".

He further vowed to oversee the reconstruction of the camp and the city to restore it "to what it was or even better".

As he concluded his visit, Abbas laid a wreath on the graves of Palestinians who lost their lives in recent Israeli raids.

A number of Arab countries

have announced aid for the camp after last week's offensive.

His visit "is a strong and important message... that he stands with the Palestinian people in their resistance to the occupation," Atta Abu Rumaila said, Fatah's secretary-general in the camp.

But Abdullah, a resident of the camp who gave only his first name, appeared to cast doubt over the purpose of the visit.

"What is more important is what happens after he leaves, and whether they (the Palestinian Authority) continue caring about the camp," he said.

The Jenin camp was established in 1953 to house some of those among the 760,000 Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes in 1948 when Israel was created, an event Palestinians call the "Nakba" or "catastrophe". — AFP

Iran's president in Kenya and Uganda to deepen ties

KAMPALA: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Kenya and Uganda on Wednesday on a mission to strengthen ties as he embarked on the first trip by an Iranian leader to Africa in 11 years.

The visit comes as the Islamic Republic tries to shore up diplomatic support to ease its international isolation, with Raisi due to travel to Zimbabwe on Thursday.

Raisi met Kenyan President William Ruto early on Wednesday, describing his visit to the East African powerhouse as "a turning point in the development of relations" between the two countries.

He then flew to the Ugandan city of Entebbe, where he was welcomed with a gun salute and military parade before heading into talks with President Yoweri Museveni, public broadcaster UBC showed.

He is due to meet with his Zimbabwean counterpart Emmerson Mnangagwa on Thursday.

Raisi said his talks with Ruto reflected "the determination and resolve of both countries for expansion of economic and trade cooperation, political cooperation, cultural cooperation."

Ruto described Iran as "a



critical strategic partner" and said the two sides had signed five memoranda of understanding covering information technology, investment, fisheries and other areas.

"These memoranda will enhance and further deepen our bilateral relations for sustainable growth and development," he said.

Ruto told reporters that Raisi had also shared plans for Iran to set up a plant in the port city of Mombasa "to manufacture an indigenous Iranian vehicle that has now been given the Kiswahili name, 'Kifaru', meaning rhino."

Iran's official IRNA news agency said Raisi's delegation includes the foreign minister as well as senior business people.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani earlier expressed optimism that the trip could help bolster

economic and trade ties with African nations.

He also said that Tehran and the African continent share "common political views."

On Saturday, Raisi welcomed Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf in a bid to boost ties with Algiers.

Iran became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which includes Russia, China and India.

In March, Tehran agreed to restore ties with regional rival Saudi Arabia. It has since been looking to re-establish relations with other countries in the region including Egypt and Morocco.

In June, Raisi undertook a Latin American tour that included Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba before a trip to Indonesia. — AFP

JOHANNESBURG

Truck arson attacks spark sabotage fears

South African police said on Wednesday 21 trucks have been torched in a series of mysterious attacks that President Cyril Ramaphosa has described as acts of "economic sabotage".

Unknown assailants set alight four lorries in the north-eastern province of Mpumalanga on Wednesday in the latest in a string of incidents.

"We know that these are not just random acts of criminality but organised," Police Minister Bheki Cele said.



"Intelligence suggests that the attacks on trucks may be business related," adding investigations were underway.

Police have identified 12 persons of interest. — AFP

RABAT

Morocco seeks new fisheries 'partnership'

Morocco wants a new fisheries "partnership" to allow EU vessels to operate in waters it controls, Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said on Wednesday.

A Moroccan-EU joint fisheries committee will meet this week in Brussels to assess the four-year deal, Bourita told reporters in Rabat.

Morocco "seeks a partnership of equals" that takes into consideration Morocco's own fisheries strategy as well as biological factors, he said.



Most of the 128 fishing vessels operating in Morocco-controlled waters under the deal are from Spain.

Morocco's fisheries exports rose 13 per cent. — Reuters

NAIROBI

Protesters clash with police over tax hikes

Stone-throwing demonstrators clashed with police in Kenyan cities on Wednesday and two were shot dead, officers on the scene said, in a second round of protests in less than a week against a raft of tax hikes.

Police fired tear gas to disperse protesters in the capital Nairobi according to reporters and footage aired on television stations.

Some of the most intense clashes took place on the expressway linking Nairobi to



its international airport, where protesters lit fires and pulled down the flower boxes that usually line the road to use as barricades.

— Reuters



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In brief

NEW YORK



EVACUATIONS IN VERMONT HIT BY CATASTROPHIC FLOODS

President Joe Biden declared a state of emergency in the northeastern US state of Vermont on Tuesday as heavy rains triggered flooding from which dozens of residents were rescued by boat.

“This has never happened since the dam was built so there is no precedent for potential damage,” Montpelier city manager William Fraser said in a statement late on Monday.

There were no immediate reports of any deaths or injuries in the state from the rains, which officials said had flooded downtown Montpelier.

The excessive rainfall came after flash floods in New York state killed a woman on Sunday.

— AFP

BELGRADE



PRESIDENT PLEDGES PROBE AGAINST SPY CHIEF

Serbia will investigate the accusations made by the United States against the head of its state security agency, President Aleksandar Vucic said on Wednesday, after the US Treasury imposed sanctions on the pro-Russian official.

The US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned Aleksandar Vulin, the director of the Serbian Security and Information Agency (BIA), implicating him in helping Moscow with “malign” activities in the Western Balkans region, and with having links to an arms dealer and a drug trafficking ring.

— Reuters

MADRID



SEARCH FOR BOATS TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED

Spain's coastguard temporarily suspended on Wednesday a search for three migrant boats reported lost off the Canary Islands after poor weather prevented a plane from being deployed to the area.

“Meteorological conditions are currently unfavourable to carry out a search with aircraft,” a coastguard spokeswoman said, without giving further details.

The situation will be reassessed later to see if an aeroplane can be deployed, she added. During their searches on Monday, rescuers found a boat carrying 78 sub-Saharan migrants who were taken to Gran Canaria island.

— AFP

G7 unveils long-term security pledge for Ukraine



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky attends with G7 members an event to announce a Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine during the Nato summit, in Vilnius. — AFP

VILNIUS: G7 countries on Wednesday unveiled an international framework for the long-term security of Ukraine to boost its defences against Russia and deter Moscow from future aggression, officials said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy was meeting leaders of Nato at a summit of the 31-member Western alliance, a day after they declared that Ukraine's future lay inside Nato but rebuffed his call for a timeline for membership.

Unable to join Nato while the war with Russia continues — given that Nato's Article 5, stipulating that an attack on one member is an attack on all, could push it into war with Russia — Ukraine nevertheless reaped rewards in the form of current and long-term security commitments it has lobbied for.

Nato has pointedly refrained from giving military assistance to Ukraine as an organisation, to avoid entering a direct conflict with Russia, and is keen to

continue leaving that to member states and others.

Britain, France, Germany and the United States have been negotiating with Kyiv for weeks over a multilateral text to create a broad international framework, encompassing elements including advanced military equipment.

The Group of Seven major industrialised countries said in a statement: “Today we are launching negotiations with Ukraine to formalise — through bilateral security commitments and arrangements aligned with this multilateral framework, in accordance with our respective legal and constitutional requirements — our enduring support to Ukraine as it defends its sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

US President Joe Biden said at the signing ceremony for the plan that it was “a powerful statement of our commitment to Ukraine.”

Zelenskiy said: “Today there are security guarantees for Ukraine on the way to Nato...that shall be further

extended through arrangements with our key partners.

“(Our) delegation is bringing home significant a security victory for Ukraine,” he added.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the G7 move misguided and “potentially very dangerous” for the West to give Ukraine security guarantees, which it said would infringe on Russia's own security.

Moscow has cited Nato's eastern enlargement towards its borders as a factor in its decision last year to attack Western-leaning Ukraine, which was once part of the old Russian-dominated Soviet Union.

The G7, which comprises the United States, Germany, Japan, France, Canada, Italy and Britain, as well as the European Union, said other countries could also sign on to make their own commitments.

The declaration said the G7 nations would begin bilateral talks with Ukraine immediately. — Reuters

Greece, Türkiye seeking to build ‘positive momentum’

VILNIUS: The leaders of Greece and Türkiye on Wednesday pledge to build on a “positive momentum” in a restart of strained relations prompted by cooperation following this year's deadly earthquake.

It marks a turn for the two uneasy Nato neighbours that have long feuded over maritime borders and energy exploration rights in disputed parts of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan “agreed that it is to the benefit of both countries that the positive climate formed in bilateral relations over recent months has continuity and consistency,” a statement issued by both their offices said.

“To this end, the two sides agreed to build on the positive momentum and activate multiple channels of communication between the two countries in the coming period,” the statement said.

The next round of talks between officials will be held in Thessaloniki in the fall, it said.

Erdogan and Mitsotakis had a one-hour meeting on the sidelines of a Nato summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

“We are cautiously optimistic that we can start on a new page,” Mitsotakis told reporters after the meeting.

“With mutual gestures of goodwill, we can defuse possible sources of future tension,” he said.

Mitsotakis added that he had “no reason to doubt the sincerity” of Erdogan, albeit noting that the “turn” in the Turkish leader's formerly aggressive tone could be interpreted as “possibly adapting to reality”.

At their last encounter in Prague in October, the pair had a verbal spat when Erdogan reportedly said Athens was raising tension in the region with provocative actions. — AFP



Greece's PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis meets with Türkiye's President Tayyip Erdogan during a Nato leaders summit in Vilnius. — Reuters

North Korea fires long-range ballistic missile

SEOUL: North Korea has fired a long-range ballistic missile, the South Korean military said on Wednesday, days after Pyongyang threatened to down US spy planes that violated its airspace.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points ever, with diplomacy stalled and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un calling for increased weapons development, including tactical nukes.

In response, Seoul and Washington have ramped up security cooperation, vowing that Pyongyang would face a nuclear response and the “end” of its current government were it to ever use its nuclear weapons against the allies.

South Korea's military said it had detected the launch of a long-range ballistic missile from the Pyongyang area around 10:00 am.

“The ballistic missile was fired on a lofted trajectory and flew 1,000 km before splashing down in the East Sea,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

A lofted trajectory involves



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul. — AFP

firing a missile up and not out, a method Pyongyang has previously said it employs in some weapons tests to avoid flying over

neighbouring countries.

The launch “is a grave provocation that damages the peace and security of the Korean

peninsula” and violates United Nations sanctions on Pyongyang, the JCS said, calling on North Korea to stop such actions.

The United States and its allies, including France, also strongly condemned the launch.

“This launch is a brazen violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions and needlessly raises tensions and risks destabilising the security situation in the region,” National Security Council spokesperson Adam Hodge said in a statement.

The flight time of around 70 minutes is also similar to some of North Korea's previous ICBM launches, experts said.

“Given what we have at this point, it's about 90 per cent certain that it was an ICBM launch,” Choi Gi-il said, a professor of military studies at Sangji University.

He added that it could also have been North Korea trying to re-test its satellite launch technology to prepare for another attempt to put a spy satellite into orbit, after a May launch failed.

Wednesday's launch came after North Korea on Monday accused a US spy plane of violating its airspace and condemned Washington's plans to deploy a nuclear missile submarine near the Korean peninsula. — AFP

Empowering Omani entrepreneurs

In order to foster foreign investment and the unlimited facilities provided to foreign investors, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has not ignored the issue of legalising value-added economic activities wherein foreigners can invest in old and new domains as well as activities in which entrepreneurs could be engaged.

The ministry has thus revised the list of activities prohibited for foreigners on a regular basis and incorporated new activities favouring entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the ministry issued an additional list of economic activities prohibited for foreigners, bringing the total to 96 activities, demonstrating the ministry’s concern for providing new opportunities to Omani residents.

Such activities do not require foreign funding and provide a profitable return for Omani entrepreneurs.

Due to its potential to lessen uneven competition, this surely improves the practice of entrepreneurship and adds to creating bigger vistas for small and medium enterprises to achieve development. The ministry created this list of new activities after consulting with a variety of stakeholders, including governors and councils of municipalities in the governorates, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The MoCIIP is particularly interested in small and medium-sized firms, which account for more than 90 per cent of all businesses in Oman and other economies, including industrialised nations. It is a tendency that makes Oman more committed to bolstering and qualifying the national workforce and empowering them through all possible and accessible means, including banning foreign investments in certain activities that can be carried out by Omani youth who have the necessary abilities and capabilities that would assist in achieving high added value.

The decision adds 27 new activities to the list prohibited for Omani investors only. Furthermore, the foreign investor



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THE MINISTRY’S EFFORTS TO HELP FOREIGN INVESTORS WILL SURELY IMPROVE THE PRACTICE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ADD CREATE BIGGER VISTAS FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES TO ACHIEVE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

is prohibited from engaging in the aforementioned activities, increasing the total number of activities designated for Omanis to 95, while the previously prohibited activities for foreigners remain unchanged.

The ministry is also offering incentives to foreign investors, including 100 per cent ownership of projects, as part of its pursuit and role in collaboration with other stakeholders in attracting qualitative investments to Oman, particularly those that require larger capital or have added value or advantages in terms of expertise and technology transfer.

Foreign investors are permitted to engage in over 1,700 commercial or industrial operations. Also, the country has allocated lands and real estate required for the project through long-term lease arrangements for up to 30 years, renewable for an equivalent period, in addition to exempting manufacturing supplies from customs duties and tax in certain industries for a period of up to 30 years.

The law also provides the foreign investor the right to carry out all project-related transfers to and from outside the Sultanate, as well as the rights to existing investment projects.

The enterprises exposed to foreign capital investment, on the other hand, have been compelled to hire at least one Omani in order for competition to be equitable and in order to attract quality investments that fulfil national goals.

After a year following the company’s inception, an Omani citizen must be registered with Social Security. Following that, foreign enterprises must adhere to the nationalisation rates established for each industry.

Once favourable circumstances for foreign investors are provided, these significant initiatives and decisions, of which we have only covered a tiny portion, will herald a new era in the economic sector. The government has also provided more opportunities for firms to thrive. This balance was created based on a thorough investigation, and these results came together to promote and reinforce Oman’s Vision 2040.

ENORMOUS TITAN BLOOMING



Visitors look at the Arum Titan ‘Amorphophallus titanum’, the largest flower in the world, as it blossoms for the first time on July 11, at the Botanical Garden in Villers-les-Nancy. The flower has a 1,95-metre high yellow pistil and a red-brown petal-shaped funnel. Many curious are awaited to observe the short-term phenomenon despite the smell of rotting meat generated by the plant. – AFP

Winning the fight for women’s land rights

Women have cultivated and nurtured life on our planet for centuries. Yet while the world enjoys the fruits of their labour, they often have no say or control over the land they work.

To add insult to injury, the twin threats of drought and desertification — intensified by climate change — have reduced the amount of usable land, jeopardising livelihoods as well as food production. Moreover, unsustainable farming is eroding soil 100 times faster than natural processes can restore it. The United Nations has classified up to 40 per cent of the world’s land as degraded.

Land degradation is a huge challenge, but the solution lies in the people most concerned about protecting this valuable resource: women. When given the chance, women are responsible stewards who use their extensive knowledge and skills to protect and restore the land in their possession. They have also proven capable of building resilience to droughts, which are becoming more severe and more common as temperatures rise.

As matters stand, women are rarely offered such opportunities.

Discriminatory practices such as inadequate land-tenure systems, limited access to credit, unequal pay, low levels of decision-making autonomy, and sexual- and gender-based violence prevent their active participation in land management.



Tarja Halonen

The writer is the first female president of Finland, is United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Land Ambassador



Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim

The writer is President of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad

In Chad, the government excludes many women and girls from land allocations, leaving them with insecure tenure.

Gender norms that devalue the contributions of women further reinforce their precarious position. The common expression “Mara sakit,” meaning “She’s just a woman,” exemplifies this sexist dynamic.

The problem extends far beyond one country. Despite comprising nearly half of the world’s agricultural workforce and producing up to 80 per cent of food in developing economies, women own less than one-fifth of land worldwide. More than 100 governments continue to deny women the right to inherit their husband’s property.

This imbalance, coupled with the worsening climate crisis, leads to female agricultural workers bearing the brunt of land degradation.

They suffer from food and water scarcity and are often forced to migrate, which is a contributing factor to gender inequality and its expression through violence and discrimination against women and girls. Indigenous women and girls, people with disabilities, and women human-rights defenders are particularly vulnerable in such conditions.

Frustrated by their lack of agency in decision-making,

women in some countries have started to fight for their land rights. Sierra Leone, for example, recently passed a new law that grants women the right to own, lease, or buy land in the country.

In Tanzania, women who have been given stronger land rights are earning up to 3.8 times more income and are also more likely to have individual savings. This highlights an important byproduct of equal land rights: economic security for women and girls. Giving women a greater say in land management can have cascading knock-on effects on household income, food security, and investment in children’s education and health.

Equal land rights could also boost food security,

as women invest more in agricultural technology, and use their indigenous traditional knowledge, that results in higher yields. In fact, if women farmers had access to the same level of resources as men, the number of undernourished people in the world could be reduced by as much as 100-150 million people.

To make this a reality, governments must remove the barriers that prevent women and girls from owning and inheriting land. More broadly, policymakers should involve women in decisions about land management, conservation and restoration.

The private sector also has a critical role to play.

By expanding access to

credit, for example, financial institutions can make it easier for female agricultural workers to purchase the technology and inputs required to improve yields, protect soils and guard against land degradation.

Yet the most important work, including raising awareness and campaigning for change, falls to local communities.

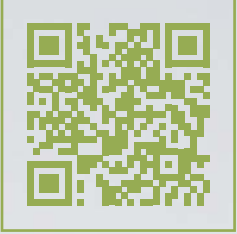
Campaigns like With Rural Women for a Chad Without Hunger have pushed for land reforms and encouraged dialogue with authorities, putting affected women front and centre. The outcome in Chad is promising: after mobilising more than 25,000 women in seven provinces between 2017 and 2019, 300 hectares of land were allocated to 18 women’s groups.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification has placed gender equality at the core of its mandate — and for good reason. As the convention acknowledges in its Gender Action Plan, women play a crucial role in sustainable land management. Consequently, securing women’s land rights is not only the right thing to do; it will boost land-restoration efforts, develop long-term resilience to droughts and create more equitable economies. Our planet, and the health of our societies, depends on it.

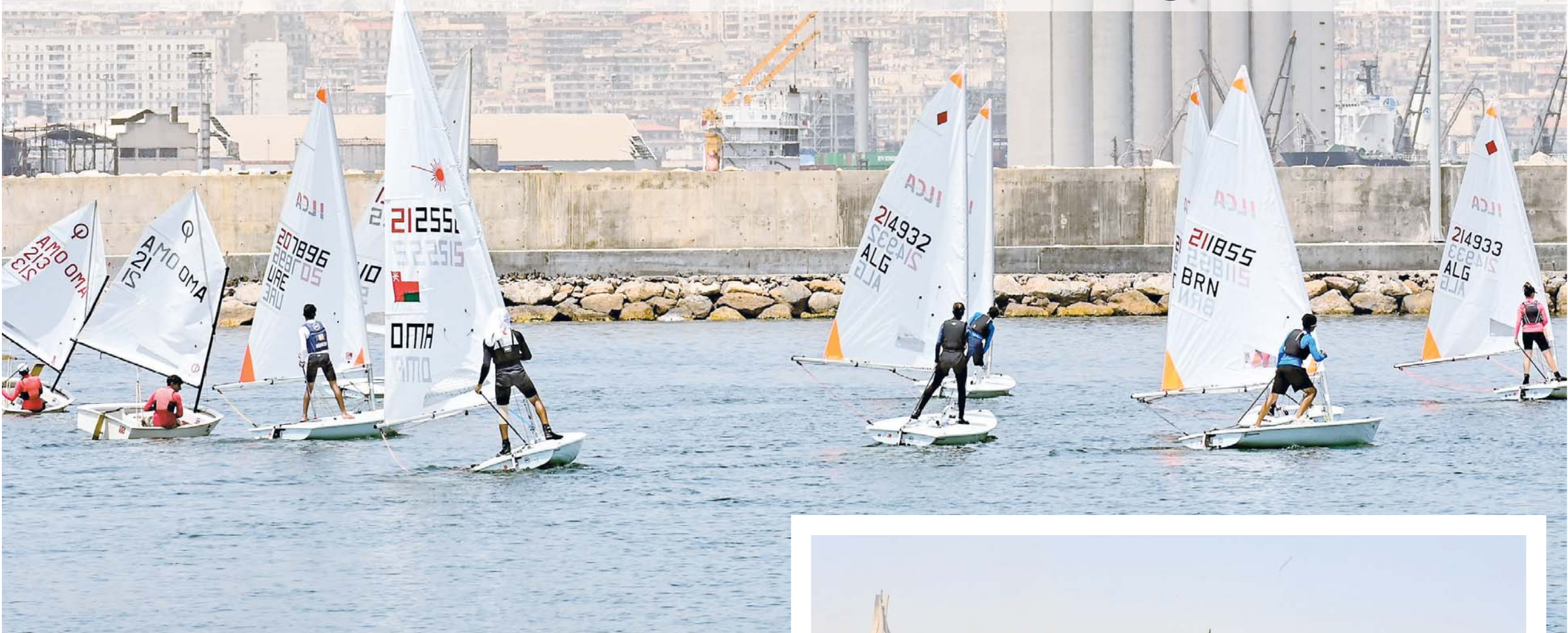


sport

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Oman Sail maintains excellent form at Arab Games in Algeria



MUSCAT: After four days of racing, Oman's sailing squad continues to excel at the 2023 Pan Arab Games in Algeria. At the halfway point in the competition, all seven sailors remain in contention for medals across all three classes with Omani sailors occupying first, second and third in the Optimist event.

Tuesday's racing was halted by a lack of wind, so Tamim Suleiman al Balushi retained his place atop of the leaderboard after a series of strong performances. He extended his lead over Feras bin Haitham al Nabhani in second to eight points, while Hassan bin Nasser al Wahaibi rebounded well today after a setback on Monday to finish just one point behind in third.

Soud bin Talib al Shaqsi is currently in sixth place, level

on points with Mallim Zakaria of Algeria in fourth after a competition best performance in race six, and just five points behind Idriss Dardaoui of Tunisia fourth.

Hatim bin Mohsin al Araithi moved to second in the ILCA 4, six points behind leader Waleed Daraan of Bahrain who posted two perfect runs in races six and seven. Teammate Abdullatif bin Zaid al Qasbi stays in fifth, seven points from the podium positions.

Abdulla Janahi of Bahrain continues to be unbeatable in the ILCA 7, notching seven straight wins to take command of the competition. Oman's Ahmed bin Hassan al Balushi remains in third place with Adil Khaled of the United Arab Emirates in second.

National Team Manager, Ahmed al Qasbi, said, "The Pan



Tamim Al Balushi

Arab Games, so far, has been a very valuable experience for our sailors. We have worked on the technical and mental aspects of racing and prepared for a variety of scenarios. It is good to see these lessons in action and show that our methods are working. All of the sailors are performing very well, and we are optimistic or the



remainder of the competition."

Speaking about his performance so far, Tamim al Balushi, leader in the Optimist event, added, "I am very happy with my performances over the first four days, and the performances of my teammates. We are helping each other as a team and supporting each other. There is a lot of racing still to

come but we are calm and sailing well together, and we hope to win medals for Oman at the end of the competition."

The Omani team joins nearly 4,000 athletes from 18 countries from across the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa at the 15th edition of the Pan Arab Games, being held in Algeria for the first

time since 2004.

After wrapping up competition in Algeria, the team will then return home for the Oman Sailing Championship in Ras Al Hadd from 24-28 August 2023, and then begin to prepare for this year's Al Musannah Race Week, from 18-24 October 2023, at Barcelo Mussanah Resort.

Al Musannah Club withdraws from OFA competitions

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 12

Al Musannah Club, a prominent football club in Oman, announced on Tuesday its decision to withdraw from all first football competitions that organise by the Oman Football Association (OFA) for the season 2023-24. The club cited ongoing financial difficulties as the primary reason for this difficult step.

In an official statement released by Al Musannah Club, it was revealed that the decision was made during the fifth meeting of the Board of Directors. The club acknowledged that financial challenges had plagued their football activities for more than one season. However, through prudent spending and careful financial management, they were able to navigate those obstacles without incurring debt or financial obligations.

Unfortunately, the current period has presented increasingly dire circumstances for Al Musannah Club. The financial burdens associated with the extended duration of the Omantel League, which exceeds 11 months, along with



exaggerated player contracts and salaries, have intensified the strain on the club's resources.

In the Club statement "We deeply regret having to make this arduous decision, which marks a significant milestone in the club's history. We apologise for our inability to participate in the Oman Football Association competitions, limiting our involvement solely to the first

football team for this season 2023-24"

The club's management extended their sincere apologies to the loyal supporters and fans of Al Musannah, emphasising that this decision was made in the best interest of the club as they seek to restructure their operations and establish a sustainable income stream for future seasons.

During the previous season, Al

Musannah Club finished in the ninth position in the Omantel League, earning a total of 33 points from 26 rounds. They achieved seven victories, drew in 12 matches, and suffered seven defeats.

Al Musannah Club's first team withdrawal from the Oman Football Association competitions comes shortly after Al Suwaiq Club, the league's runner-

up, announced their departure from all competitions on June 24. Al Suwaiq's decision was motivated by a decline in the technical team's performance and the challenging financial conditions they faced. The absence of financial support from marketing and advertising associated with football participation has significantly impeded their ability to sustain the club.

On the other side the Oman Football Association postponed the issuance of the football competition schedules, which are scheduled to start in August due the apologies of some clubs.

The Football Association did not reveal the details of these apologies in its statement on Wednesday, "Based on the federation's keenness to organise local competitions with quality standards to represent national teams in upcoming entitlements to ensure the achievement of the desired goals. The committees decided to delay issuing the details, conditions and rules schedules of the local competitions, and they temporarily contented themselves with issuing the competition calendar".

Barcelona sign Brazilian forward Roque on seven-year deal from 2024

BARCELONA: Barcelona have reached an agreement to sign Vitor Roque from Club Athletico Paranaense with the Brazilian forward set to join the Spanish champions from the 2024-25 season on a contract until 2031, the LaLiga club said on Wednesday.

Financial details were not disclosed but media reports said Barca agreed a 40 million euros (\$44.07 million) fee with 21 million in add-ons for the player seen as the successor to Robert Lewandowski who turns 35 next month.

The 18-year-old has scored 22 goals for Paranaense in 66 appearances, helping them reach the Copa Libertadores final last season.

He earned his first cap for Brazil in March, becoming the youngest ever debutant for the five-times world champions.

"In footballing terms, a centre forward still in development but his adaptability means he can also play on the wing should the situation require," Barcelona said in a statement.

"An excellent reader of the game he also stands out for his pace and his finishing skills in front of goal."

Barcelona said they have inserted a buyout clause of 500 million euros into his contract. — Reuters



Messi lands in Florida ahead of Inter Miami move

FORT LAUDERDALE, United States: Argentine star Lionel Messi landed in Florida on Tuesday ahead of putting the final touches on his move to US Major League Soccer club Inter Miami.

Argentine television footage showed Messi, with members of his family, walking off a private jet at a small, executive airport adjacent to Inter Miami's stadium in Fort Lauderdale.

The World Cup winner is expected to put pen to paper on a two and a half year deal, reported to be worth \$60 million a year, before being presented to fans at a stadium event on Sunday.

"We are happy with the decision we made. Prepared and eager to face the new challenge, the new change," Messi said in an interview with Argentine TV show, Llave a la eternidad, released on Tuesday.

"My mentality and my head are not going to change and I am going to try, wherever I have to be, to give my best for myself and my new club and continue to perform at the highest level," he added.

Messi is the biggest name to ever move to MLS and the greatest player to head to the United States since Brazilian great Pele signed for the New York Cosmos in 1975.

MLS hope that Messi will massively increase the profile of the league and boost subscriptions to their streaming broadcast deal with Apple TV. Ticket prices for games likely to involve Messi have already sky-rocketed.

Fans had begun to gather at the club's DRV PNK stadium early in the morning ahead of his expected arrival.

One of the supporters, Julio Iglesias, 42 said he founded the 'Messias 305' fan group when he learned the Argentine star



Fans of Argentina's Lionel Messi wait for his arrival at the DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida on July 11, 2023, ahead of his debut in the Major League Soccer (MLS) with Inter Miami. Inter Miami, announced July 7, 2023, it will hold a presentation event, called 'The Unveil', on July 16 at its home stadium. Messi said last month that he was moving to the MLS club after allowing his contract at Paris Saint-Germain to run out. — AFP

was coming to Miami. He didn't previously watch MLS games but said he now won't miss any Miami matches.

"For us, Messi coming means everything, wherever he goes there is always incredible happiness," he said, while standing by a banner declaring 'We are waiting for you Messias'.

World Cup fever
Messi's arrival will also add to the momentum around the sport ahead of the 2026 World Cup, which will be hosted by the United States along with Canada and Mexico.

He is expected to be joined at the club by former Barcelona team-mate Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets, while ex-Argentina and Barcelona coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino recently

took over as coach.

Miami owner Jorge Mas has suggested Messi and Busquets could be part of "three to five" new signings for the South Florida club in the current transfer window.

Another former Barca player, Spanish full-back Jordi Alba, has also been strongly linked with a move to the team, which is co-owned by former England and Manchester United star David Beckham.

Messi is expected to make his debut for his new club in the July 21 Leagues Cup match against Mexican club Cruz Azul.

Miami are currently bottom of MLS's Eastern Conference with just five wins from 21 games and are ranked 28th out of the 29 teams in the league.

But the club are in the semi-

finals of the US Open Cup, where they have been drawn against league-leaders FC Cincinnati.

The seven-times Ballon d'Or winner has spent the last two seasons at Paris Saint-Germain, after moving from Barcelona in 2021, where he spent the majority of his career.

During his time with Barca, Messi won ten Spanish league titles, seven Copa del Rey (Spanish Cup) titles and four Champions League winners medals.

He scored twice for Argentina in the World Cup final which they won on penalties in Doha in December, after the game ended 3-3 after extra-time and raised the trophy as captain. Messi also won an Olympic gold medal with Argentina in 2008 and the Copa America in 2001. — AFP

Sabalenka into second Wimbledon semi-final

LONDON: Aryna Sabalenka powered into a second Wimbledon semi-final on Wednesday with a straight-sets win over Madison Keys of the United States.

World number two Sabalenka from Belarus, a semi-finalist in 2021, came through 6-2, 6-4 and will face either defending champion Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan or Tunisia's Ons Jabeur for a place in Saturday's final.

Along with all Russian and Belarusian players, Sabalenka was banned from the 2022 tournament following the attack of Ukraine.

Belarus is a key ally of Moscow.

"It was an amazing battle and I'm so happy to be back in the semi-final. I just hope to do better than last time," said Sabalenka.

She was defeated in three sets by Karolina Pliskova in the last four in 2021.

"Madison is a great player. I'm super happy that I came back when I was 2-4 down, 0-40 in the second set," she said.

"When I was a little girl I dreamed of winning Wimbledon. It's something special here."

Sabalenka clinched a double break in the opening set, in the first and fifth games, with her American opponent not helped by 10 unforced errors, twice as many as the more accurate Belarusian.

Keys, playing her second quarter-final at Wimbledon, also needed a quick court-side visit from the tournament doctor at 1-4 down in the opener.

The world number 18 broke for a 4-2 lead in the second set and was 40-0 in the next game but immediately undid all her hard work.

Sabalenka, 25, made the American pay by holding and breaking again for a 5-4 lead, which was converted into victory off a second match point after 87 minutes of action on Court One. — AFP



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in action during her quarter final match against Madison Keys of the US. — Reuters



PHILIPSEN

bags fourth stage win of Tour de France

MOULINS, France: Belgian Jasper Philipsen sprinted to his fourth stage win on this year’s Tour de France with a powerful last burst on stage 11 from Clermont-Ferrand to Moulins.

The Alpecin sprinter edged Dutch rider Dylan Groenewegen to the line on Wednesday with Phil Bauhaus in third. There was no change in the overall standings between race favourites Jonas Vingegaard and Tadej Pogacar.

Philipsen has dominated the bunch sprints on the 2023 Tour although two of his three previous triumphs were garnered with some wobbly manoeuvres that had to be validated by the race commissaire.

In the final sprint during his first win at Bayonne he appeared to swerve in front of Wout Van Aert.

He then won out after a series of falls at the Nogaro motorbike circuit.

On the banks of the Garonne at Bordeaux for his third stage win he also appeared to cut off the path for Biniam Girmay, who waved his arms in anger before Philipsen was again cleared.

“It looks like there might be



Alpecin-Deceuninck’s Belgian rider Jasper Philipsen celebrates his victory on the podium after winning the 11th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 180 km between Clermont-Ferrand and Moulins, in central France, on July 12, 2023. – AFP

three more stages that are possible to win,” said Philipsen.

“It’s been an incredible Tour so far.

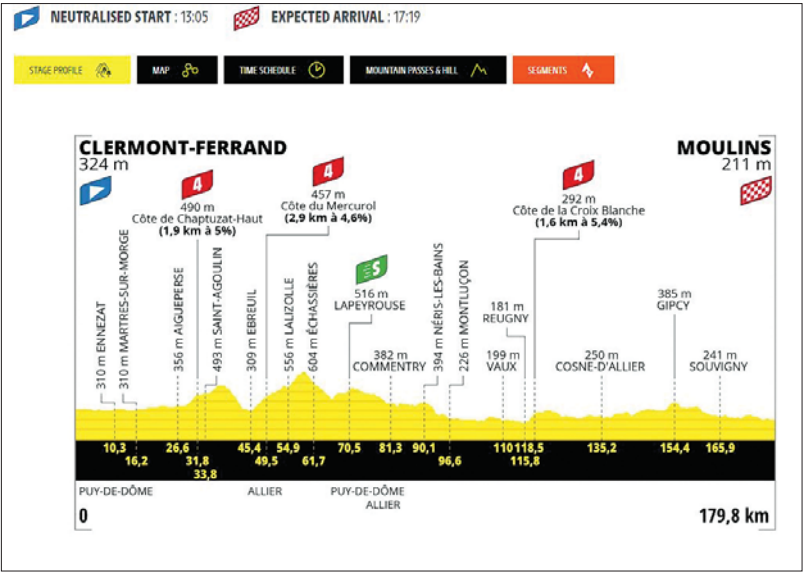
“I think I’ve made a good gap in the standings and that gives me a bit of comfort going into the Alps.”

“I’m super proud, I’m also really happy with my shape,” he added.

Philipsen leads the sprint

points race by 145 points, with Frenchman Bryan Coquard second on 178.

Race leader Vingegaard and second-placed Pogacar remain separated by just 17 seconds, with



Australian rider Jai Hindley in third at 2min 40sec.

Pogacar clawed back a few seconds for a second time on stage nine after the Dane dropped his rival to gain 53 seconds on him in Laruns on stage five.

Stage 11 left the industrial city of Clermont-Ferrand, where the tyre company Michelin has its base, and headed north-east to Moulins as the action closes in on the Alps.

It was a largely flat stage raced under overcast skies with the temperatures down considerably from Tuesday’s testing 38C peak.

Neilson Powless of Education First took the polka dot climbing jersey after stage one and has stubbornly clung on to it.

The American team also lost their leader on stage one when Richard Carapaz fell, so the jersey has been a fun form of consolation, albeit likely a temporary diversion.

The American rider should hold on Thursday for the hilly run through the Beaujolais region before three straight mountain stages round out the week. — AFP



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Omani industries can
apply for customs
exemptions from July 15

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 12

Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced that industrial establishments can apply for customs exemptions starting from July 15, 2023.

According to the Directorate General of Customs, establishments must first obtain an industrial licence before applying for exemptions in accordance with the unified industrial regulation system law of the Gulf Cooperation Council states issued by Royal Decree No. (61/2008) and its executive regulations and the two ministerial decrees (56 and 66 / 2009) issued by the Finance Ministry.

Establishments must then apply for customs exemptions before importing materials through the "Bayan" platform on the Royal Oman Police website. The requests are then reviewed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and forwarded to the Tax Authority.



According to data from the Ministry, 1,643 permits to import raw materials and advanced machinery were granted to industrial establishments in the first quarter of 2023, followed by 181 approved applications for customs exemptions, while four establishments were granted tax exemptions.

The Bayan system, according to Eng Mohammed bin Said al Mahrouqi, Head of the Exemptions Department at the Ministry, allows establishments to submit and follow applications without the need to visit the Ministry.

The platform also allows companies to track and monitor their requests and receive feedback, in addition to utilising a Harmonised Code system to identify materials and equipment.

Foundation stone laid for Oman's
first biological drugs, vaccines

MUSCAT: Opal Bio Pharma Company held a ceremony on Wednesday, July 12, to celebrate laying the foundation stone for the second phase of the first Omani factory for biological medicines and vaccines in the Sultanate of Oman.

To be establishment with an investment RO 60 million, the plant will come up on a 37,000 sqm site at Khazaen Economic City. Its construction will be completed in two years.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. Sa'ad bin Moosa al Junaibi, Chairman of Opal Bio Pharma Company, said the factory will place Oman on the global vaccines production map and offers the country an opportunity to export medical drugs to other countries of the world.

He added that the project will provide many employment opportunities for Omanis who are holders of different academic qualifications. The unit will also cut down dependence on the imports of medical drugs, notably during health crises and disasters, he explained.

For his part, Eng Salim bin



Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the factory is the first of its kind in the Pharmaceutical City at Khazaen and that the unit targets local and foreign markets.

Al Thuhli added that Khazaen

Economic City, which constitutes one of the pillars of Oman Vision 2040, was embarked on attracting pharmaceutical industries as part of their strategic importance in medical drugs' security.

The Ministry of Health affirmed that investment in this project

responds to the requirements of the current stage aimed at placing Oman on the global map of advanced countries.

The objectives include the establishment of a diversified economy based on integration among all sectors, as well as the realisation of national aspirations to reach drug security, the ministry added.

Major industries localised in the medical drugs city include insulin production, human biological vaccines, veterinary medicines and vaccines, medical supplies and dental implant industries. — ONA

Dualisation of key Salalah road to
support tourism, economic growth

Strategic carriageway: 27 km
Raysut - Mughsayl dualisation
to include three interchanges
and two roundabouts.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 12

The Raysut-Mughsayl carriageway, a vital roadway providing access to some of Dhofar's biggest tourist attractions as well as Oman's southwestern-most wilayats bordering Yemen, has been tendered out for dualisation.

Suitably qualified local and international contractors have been invited by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to submit their offers for the multimillion dollar project.

Targeted for dualisation is a 27 km stretch that begins at Raysut Roundabout at the entrance to the Port of Salalah and extends all the way to the social housing complex at Mughsayl. But in addition to a new track on the either side of the



carriageway, the dualised road will also include three interchanges, two roundabouts and five animal crossings — all designed to ensure the delivery of a streamlined, all-weather and climate-resilient blacktop that serves the growing needs of western Dhofar Governorate.

Additionally, a new 5 km bypass to Salalah will be created to ensure the dualised carriageway is well integrated into the local road network. Significantly, the project

is part of a portfolio of strategic road ventures identified by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for early implementation.

At a media briefing held earlier this year, Ministry officials pledged to complete the delivery of pending and new road projects of an aggregate length of over 1,300 kilometres during 2023.

Listed for implementation are: Dibba-Lima-Khasab road, completion of the Batinah

coastal road (Barka- Suwaiq), the Harweeb-Al Mazyouna-Metin road, completion of the Sharqiyah Expressway project, dualisation of the Haima-Thamrait highway and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali-Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan road, in addition to the Raysut - Mughsayl project.

The latter project will enable speedy and convenient access for tourists to the famous blowholes at Mughsayl, one of the most visited attractions, during the khareef season.

The coastline in these parts, punctuated by white-sand beaches, is also a significant draw for beach-based leisure activities.

Beyond Mughsayl, the road leads to the wilayats of Dhalkout and Rakhyou, which are home to varied natural and historical attractions. Damaged in parts by back-to-back cyclones in 2020, the Raysut - Mughsayl stretch will be built to international standards to ensure its roadworthiness even in severe weather events.

The tender for submission of commercial and technical bids for the contract is August 21, 2023.

Campaign launched for
competition protection,
monopoly prevention



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 12

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Dhofar Governorate, organised a workshop titled "Together to Ensure Freedom of Competition" yesterday. The event aimed to raise awareness and promote economic competitiveness by focusing on the importance of competition protection,

monopoly prevention, and fair trade practices.

The workshop featured various informative sessions presented through working papers. These sessions covered essential topics such as the roles and responsibilities of the Centre for Competition Protection, Monopoly Prevention, and Prohibited Practices. Additionally, the concept of economic focus, anti-dumping measures, and harmful practices in international trade were discussed. **TURN TO P14**

Oman Cement posts impressive first half of 2023 profit growth



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 11

Oman Cement Company (OCO), which is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, has achieved a 32.02 per cent increase in net profit for the first half of 2023.

According to the recently released financial statements, Oman Cement reported semi-annual profits of RO 4.19 million for the first half of this year, surpassing earnings of RO 3.17 million for the same period in 2022.

The financial statements further reveal that Oman Cement experienced a 5.13 per

cent revenue growth during the first half of 2023.

Revenue totalled RO 36.76 million, up from RO 34.96 million for the corresponding period of 2022. Annual profit in 2022 climbed 22.65 per cent to RO 5.45 million, up from RO 4.45 million in 2021.

Hong Kong based Huaxin International Holdings Limited has a controlling interest in Oman Cement through its wholly-owned subsidiary Abra Holdings Limited incorporated in the Republic of Mauritius. Abra currently holds a 64.65 per cent stake in the Omani cement manufacturer.

OAB launches ‘Bring Your Kids to Work’ initiative



MUSCAT: Over 200 children of Oman Arab Bank (OAB) staff from across the Sultanate of Oman enjoyed a unique opportunity to join their parents at work during their summer break.

Giving them a glimpse into the world of banking and beyond, the Bring Your Kids to Work initiative is a diverse programme of workshops and experiences tailored to different age groups and interests, such as arts, photography, technology and banking. Leen al Atassi, Head of Corporate Communications at Oman Arab Bank, said: “At OAB, we are dedicated to nurturing a supportive and engaging work environment. This extends to the personal growth and development of our employees’ children.

With Bring Your Kids to

Work, we wanted to give the participating children enriching opportunities for skill-building and exposure to new experiences, as well as helping to foster a sense of community throughout the bank.”

She added, “The thoughtfully designed programme captivated children and helped them gain a better understanding of banking and their parent’s workplace, enabling them to connect what they are learning in school to the work environment.”

For an entire week, OAB hosted a series of workshops packed with interactive sessions, hands-on activities and engaging discussions plus challenges and competitions. The activities aimed at enhancing skills such as creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and financial literacy.

OPAZ delegation engages with leading Irish industrial bodies

DUBLIN: Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic and Free Zones (OPAZ), met in Ireland with Dara Calleary, Minister of State for Trade Promotion Digital and Company Regulation, responsible for regulating economic zones, issuing laws and regulations related to investment, and developing supportive electronic systems.

Dr Al Sunaidy is currently leading a delegation comprising officials from the Authority, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

The visit comes within the framework of OPAZ’s institutional transformation plan. Since the beginning of the year, OPAZ has started a transformation programme in association with International Development Ireland, benefiting from the Irish expertise in managing and developing economic zones.

The cooperation aims to enhance the Authority’s ability



to attract strategic industrial projects and to link supply chains between local and international manufacturers and to empower small and medium size enterprises, and to promote the use of digital platforms and applications.

During the visit, the delegation also met with the CEO of the Irish Investment Promotion agency “IDA Ireland”, the CEO of

Enterprise Ireland and the Chair of the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council in Ireland.

The delegation also visited several economic zones, manufacturers and the Centre for Bioprocessing and Training, and discussed the methods of harmonisation between different industrial zones, enhancing

productivity, and increasing integration between them.

The delegation also explored existing programmes to enhance job opportunities and raise worker efficiency, skills development, and professional competence and discussed possibilities of collaboration in developing industrial clusters in the various zones in the Sultanate of Oman.

Campaign launched for competition protection, monopoly prevention

FROM PAGE 13

Zaher bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Director General of the Centre for Competition Protection and Anti-Monopoly Prevention at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, delivered a speech emphasising the vital role of competition in driving economic and social development.

He highlighted its impact on stimulating innovation, improving product quality and services, creating employment opportunities, and benefiting consumers through competitive pricing.

Al Mahrouqi emphasised that protecting competition and preventing monopolies are at the core of the ministry’s economic and commercial agenda. These initiatives align with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises competitiveness as a key driver of sustainable growth and economic prosperity.

The workshop was held under the auspices of Shaikh Tariq bin Khalid al Hinai, Wali of Taqah, with the participation of government officials, business

leaders, and owners of small and medium enterprises in the governorate.

In conjunction with the workshop, the Ministry launched the ‘Together to Ensure Freedom of Competition’ campaign.

Scheduled until September 18, the campaign aims to raise awareness about the Centre for Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention, disseminate information about the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law and its executive regulations, contribute to economic growth, enhance economic competitiveness, cultivate a culture that protects competition and prevents monopolies, promote the principles of a free market, and highlight the significance of anti-dumping laws in safeguarding the national industry.

By organising this workshop and launching the campaign, the Ministry seeks to empower businesses, encourage fair competition, and create a level playing field that drives economic progress in the Sultanate of Oman.



Bank Muscat opens new Asalah Centre in Izki branch

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to provide financial facilities and services to enhance its customers’ experience, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrated the opening of its latest new Asalah Centre in its branch in the Wilayat of Izki, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate under the auspices of Shaikh Younis bin Ali al Mantheri, Majlis Ashshura member, and in presence of members of the bank’s executive management and customers.

The new Centre will be a special addition to the existing 41 Asalah Centres across Oman.

It is featured with new design and modern technology to provide better services to customers with the help of experienced Omani cadres, who are ready to enhance their banking experience. Bank Muscat avails of its deep understanding of customer needs in its strategy of constant innovation for the best customer experience. On this occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager — Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “We are keen in the bank to prioritise the needs of our customers and offer them the best services which they can access easily.”

Toyota’s Festival of Joy campaign with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Owning a Toyota is now even more attractive with exclusive benefits. The benefits include service from 2 years/20,000 kms up to 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year, scratch and win fuel card raffle with prize up to 100 litres of fuel and attractive instalments.

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.

Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

In Oman, Toyota range includes the Corolla, Hilux, Land Cruiser, all-new Urban Cruiser and Camry.

The Toyota Corolla is available with monthly instalments from RO 108. The Corolla is equipped with a 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m



of torque.

The Toyota Hilux is available with monthly instalments from RO 127. In Oman, customers have a choice of two versions of

the Hilux. The rugged Hilux with J-Deck and the sporty 4.0 Litre V6 Hilux Adventure with the A Deck.

The Toyota Land Cruiser

is available with monthly instalments from RO 239. Powering the Land Cruiser is a choice of two powertrain options. The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses that of a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 650 nm.

The all-new Toyota Urban Cruiser is available with monthly instalments from RO 116. The 2023 Toyota Urban Cruiser is a five-seater vehicle which features

a 1.5-litre gasoline engine and Integrated Starter Generator (ISG) that functions as both an electrified generator and motor.

The Toyota Camry is available with monthly instalments from RO 145.

The Toyota Camry takes style and performance to high levels with stylish exterior, advanced range of features and technology. The Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options.



Workers tend to an unfinished electric pick-up truck on the assembly line at Foxconn's electric vehicle production facility in Lordstown, Ohio. — Reuters

US EV market struggles with price cuts and rising inventories

DETROIT: The US electric vehicle market is growing, but not fast enough during the latest quarter to prevent unsold EVs from stacking up at some automakers' dealerships or to allow Tesla to avoid new price cuts, according to analysts and industry data.

Rising inventories and price-cutting could represent only a short-term pause in EV market growth. But they could be signals that boosting US EV sales above the current 7% market share level will be more costly and difficult than expected, even with federal and state subsidies.

Automakers North America have billions of dollars in EV-related investments riding on how the next several quarters play out. If production of EVs continues to outpace demand, automakers will have to choose between slashing prices and profit margins, or slowing assembly lines.

More than 90 new EV models are expected to hit the US market through 2026, according to AutoForecast Solutions. Many will struggle to reach profitable sales volumes, analysts said.

Dealers for established automakers such as General Motors, Ford, Hyundai and Toyota have more than 90 days' worth of unsold EVs at their stores at current sales rates,

according to a report from Cox Automotive.

US dealers have more than 92,000 EVs in stock, more than three times the number on their lots a year ago, according to Cox data. Overall, new vehicle inventories are up 74% from a year ago, Cox said.

There is a wide range in the availability of EV models. GM had 50 days' worth of Cadillac Lyriqs available as of June 30, below the industry average of 52 days' supply at current sales rates, Cox said.

GM said in a statement that it has "very low inventory - and high demand" for its EVs. More than 80% of Lyriqs and GMC Hummer EVs built are still in transit to dealers, the automaker said.

GM's bigger challenge has been accelerating production and delivery of its next-generation EVs built on GM's Ultium architecture. Of 36,024 EVs GM delivered in the United States during the first half of this year, only 2,365 were Ultium EVs. GM has a goal of building a total of 100,000 electric vehicles in North America during the second half of this year.

Ford had 86 days worth of F-150 Lightnings and 113 days' worth of Mustang Mach-E electric SUVs on hand, Cox said. — Reuters

Saudi output cuts help drive up one corner of global oil market

HOUSTON: Prices for sour crude oil have climbed globally this month after top exporter Saudi Arabia hiked prices and expanded production cuts of higher-sulphur oil in the first sign its efforts to prop up global prices is having an impact.

The de facto leader of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) this month deepened its production cuts to 1 million barrels per day in response to benchmark prices that fell to below \$72 a barrel this summer.

"The kingdom's curbs have had an outsized impact on the supply of medium-and heavy-sour barrels," Mark Rossano, a partner at energy data provider Primary Vision Network, said.

The increases — seen among North Sea, US and Canadian sour crude grades — have jumped as oil refiners in China, Europe and the US bid up dwindling supplies from sanctions on Russia and Saudi Arabia's cutbacks, according to traders and brokers.

Also pushing up sour crudes are US government purchases to restock its emergency reserves, production outages from Canadian wildfires, and worries about potential for Atlantic hurricane season to cut production of US sour crude.

Most of Saudi Arabia's crude oils, such as Arab Light, Medium and Heavy, are sour grades, a type that requires more complex refining and typically trades at a discount to sweet crude, which has lower sulphur content.

But sour prices are no longer cheap. Norway's medium sour Johan Sverdrup crude climbed on Friday to a record \$3.50 per barrel premium to dated Brent, according to traders, compared with a more than \$6 discount in December.

US Mars sour crude prices on Thursday of last week also traded at a \$2 per barrel premium to US crude futures at Cushing hub, its highest in three years. It traded at a premium to light, sweet



General view of Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura oil refinery and oil terminal in Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

Oil stuck between supply strains and economic doubt

LONDON: Oil prices were little changed on Wednesday in a market caught between expectations supply cuts by the world's biggest fuel exporters will drive prices higher and concerns global economic weakness will sap demand.

Brent futures had edged up 20 cents to \$79.44 a barrel by 11:45 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 30 cents to \$74.86 a barrel.

"Fundamentally, we should reach a supply deficit situation in the third quarter, but whether that is trumped by recession concerns and cautious sentiment around rate hikes remains to be seen," DBS Bank's lead energy analyst Suvro Sarkar said.

US inflation data later on Wednesday will provide clues



on the interest rate outlook in the world's biggest economy.

Markets expect one more rise, but that the US rate-hiking cycle is peaking. Higher rates can slow economic growth and reduce oil demand. US crude inventories rose about 3 million barrels in the week to July 7, market sources said, citing American Petroleum Institute industry figures.

Analysts polled expected a 500,000-barrel rise in crude stocks. — Reuters

WTI Midland at East Houston terminal, something rarely seen before. Mars also traded at a \$3.70 premium to Middle East crude benchmark Dubai, significantly higher than spot Middle Eastern crude.

Western Canadian Select heavy crude, another widely discounted sour grade, traded at the US Gulf Coast on Monday at a \$2.30 per barrel discount, compared with a more than \$8 per barrel discount as recently as March, according to brokerage CalRock.

Saudi Arabia's price hike to Asia, the second month in a row, has pushed some Chinese refiners to seek cheaper sour crude alternatives from the spot market, traders and brokers said. This has lifted prices for other sour crudes.

US Gulf Coast refiners, which are mostly configured to run sour crude, likely will purchase more Latin American barrels, said Rohit Rathod, an analyst at energy data provider Vortexa.

"Opec+ players are pulling back supplies and we are already in a tight market at least for sour crudes." — Reuters

UK is coping with higher interest rates: BoE

LONDON: Britain's economy is so far proving resilient to a surge in interest rates over the past year and a half, but it will take time for the full impact to feed through, the Bank of England said on Wednesday.

The Bank last month raised rates to 5%, up from 0.1% at the end of 2021, raising concerns about a hit to households, businesses and the broader financial sector that could push the economy into a recession.

But in a half-yearly assessment of the health of the financial system, the BoE said there was no reason for alarm. "The UK economy and financial system has so far been resilient to interest rate risk," BoE Governor Andrew Bailey told a press conference.

"We will continue to monitor credit conditions for any signs of tightening which are not explained satisfactorily by changes in the macroeconomic outlook."

The proportion of households



Mounted police officers sit in outside the Royal Exchange and the Bank of England in London. — Reuters

with heavy mortgage burdens was rising. But even considering the higher cost of living — with inflation at 8.7% in May — it was likely to remain below the peak seen in 2007.

On Tuesday, average interest rates for new two-year fixed-rate mortgages - the most common form of housing finance - rose above their peak following last

September's mini-budget to a 15-year high, according to data provider Moneyfacts.

Britain's finance industry estimates 800,000 households will need to refinance onto more expensive mortgages in the second half of 2023, and a further 1.6 million in 2024.

The Bank said the typical mortgage holder refinancing

BRITAIN'S FINANCE INDUSTRY ESTIMATES 800,000 HOUSEHOLDS WILL NEED TO REFINANCE ONTO MORE EXPENSIVE MORTGAGES IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2023, AND A FURTHER 1.6 MILLION IN 2024.

later this year would pay an extra 220 pounds (\$285) a month, and that, by the end of 2026, nearly 1 million households would be paying at least 500 pounds a month more.

The number of households spending more than 70% of their income on mortgage payments, after tax and other essential spending, is on course to rise to 650,000 by the end of the year, 2.3% of the total and lower than the 3.4% peak in 2007.

Consumer credit is a bigger source of trouble, with around 10% of households spending more than 80% of income after taxes, essentials and housing costs on servicing debt, up from 9% a year ago.

The BoE said British

banks were less exposed than households to the adverse effects of higher interest rates, especially compared with financial institutions in other countries, while the corporate sector remained "broadly resilient".

"Nevertheless, higher financing costs are likely to put pressure on some smaller or highly leveraged firms," it added.

The BoE saw particular risks in global commercial real estate and from corporate borrowing in the private credit and leveraged lending markets.

Britain's eight largest lenders all have enough capital to cope with higher interest rates, and no financial need to keep down rates for savers or treat borrowers harshly, the BoE said following its annual 'stress test' of the sector.

"Major UK banks' capital and liquidity positions remain robust and profitability has increased, which enables them both to improve their capital positions and to support their customers."

— Reuters

Pakistan optimistic of securing IMF approval for \$3 bn bailout

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was optimistic that the International Monetary Fund will approve a \$3 billion bailout at its board meeting on Wednesday.

Pakistan and the Fund reached a staff level agreement last month, securing much-needed funding for the cash-starved country.

The agreement needs the board's approval before disbursing \$1.1 billion upfront and the rest of the money in instalments.

"The meeting is happening today," Sharif said at an event in Islamabad. "I hope the board will approve the programme. This programme will help Pakistan's economy to stabilise." — Reuters

Buying Russian oil with Chinese currency



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

Despite US and Western sanctions imposed on the Russian government because of the war with Ukraine, some countries especially in the Asian continent have begun to buy Russian oil with the Chinese currency “yuan”.

The step confirms that the world is moving towards finding alternatives to mitigate the effects of sanctions that are harmful to many economies in the world.

In particular, India - one of the founding countries of BRICS, has begun to pay for Russian oil imports in the Chinese currency.

Russia, India and China, along with Brazil and South Africa, are founding members

of the “BRICS” group, all of which are working to issue their own currency during its next conference in South Africa in August.

This step aims to reduce dependence on the US currency in its international commercial transactions gradually.

Western sanctions against Moscow are currently pushing countries to find alternatives to the US dollar to settle payments. Sanctions create new shifts in trade transactions, especially for countries that depend on oil to operate their various industries and services

India is considered one of Russia’s main partners in the oil trade, and it is not in its interest to delay the value of the oil deals

that is conducting with Russia.

At the same time the Chinese currency is playing an increasing role in the Russian financial system as a result of the international sanctions.

India began to emulate China in this direction, so that the two countries are working to buy Russian oil using the yuan for these transactions.

As a result, oil refiners importing Russian oil are increasingly spurred to deal with currencies other than the dollar for their transactions. This happens at a time when the volume of foreign imports of Russian oil to those countries is increasing.

It is well known that Russia has been excluded from dealing

with the global financial system “SWIFT” operated by the Association of Global Financial Communications between global banks to obtain rapid payments to finance global trade.

Therefore, the alternative is to pay in currencies other than the dollar even as the value of the Chinese currency is rising particularly in oil-related deals.

This trend may help Saudi Arabia to implement its decision to use the “yuan” when selling oil during the coming period.

The Chinese government succeeded in 2015 in persuading the International Monetary Fund to include the “yuan” in the basket of currencies of Special Drawing Rights (SDR), lifting the “yuan” to third place after the

dollar and the euro in the weight of the five currencies that make up the SDR basket, along with the British pound and Japanese yen.

It is expected that China will succeed in including its currency to price oil deals for countries in Asia and the Gulf region in the coming years.

Saudi Arabia has previously held active talks with Beijing to price some of its oil sales to China in “yuan”, which confirms that this step would reduce the dominance of the dollar in global oil markets in the future.

All these steps are taking place within the framework of the geopolitical transformations taking place in the Middle East and the wider world.

Andrew Bailey’s silence is hurting UK homeowners

FRANCESCO GUERERA

The Bank of England’s silence has left traders in a tizzy. Market interest rates have spiked due to soaring inflation expectations, pushing up mortgage costs. That looks like an over-reaction but unless Governor Andrew Bailey says so, homeowners will pay the price.

Something is off in the overnight index swaps market – a type of derivative used by traders to bet on future interest rates movements and by banks to price mortgages.

On May 12, the day after the BoE provided its latest economic predictions, OIS swaps showed that markets expected rates to peak around the current level of 5% by August.

Now, traders believe rates will be at around 6.2% in a year’s time and stay above 5.8% for a further two years.

That spike sent the average two-year fixed mortgage rate to 6.66% on Tuesday, the highest level since August 2008, according to Moneyfacts.

That’s bad news for would-be homebuyers, the 800,000 households who have to refinance their home loans in the second half of this year and a further 1.6 million people whose mortgage deals expire in 2024, according to figures from trade body UK Finance.

To be fair, consumer prices for May, released on June 21, saw core inflation, which excludes energy, food and tobacco, rise at an annualised 7.1% - a 31-year high. A day later, the BoE surprised investors by increasing rates by 50 basis points to 5%.

But it’s hard to see why traders expect rates to go so much higher and stay elevated.

For a start, the full impact of the BoE’s 13 consecutive rate rises will only be felt in the next six months or so.

The Bank predicts that inflation will fall towards its 2% target by the end of 2024. And unemployment ticked up to 4% in the three months to May – a sign that wage growth should abate soon.

The BoE’s muddled communications and wayward forecasts may be adding to the market’s anxiety. The Bank’s projections missed actual inflation numbers by an average of 6 percentage points between December 2021 and March this year, according to calculations of data collected by Berenberg analysts.

But Bailey still needs to tell markets that their predictions are wrong. Central bankers are reluctant to guide traders too explicitly – and Bailey recently refused to do so.

But in November 2022, after the turmoil caused by then Prime Minister Liz Truss’ “mini-budget”, the governor said he didn’t believe rates would reach the level markets expected.

A repeat performance would be applauded by millions of households. — **Reuters**

Dude, where’s my recession?



PAUL KRUGMAN

The author is an American economist who is the Distinguished Professor of Economics at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and a columnist for *The New York Times*.

Almost a year has passed since the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which estimates gross domestic product, announced that real GDP had declined over the previous two quarters — a phenomenon that is widely, although incorrectly, described as the official definition of a recession.

Right-wingers had a field day, crowing about the “Biden recession.” But it wasn’t just a partisan thing.

Even forecasters who knew that recessions are defined by multiple indicators, and that America wasn’t in a recession yet, began predicting one in the near future. As Mark Zandi of Moody’s Analytics, one of the few prominent recession skeptics, put it: “Every person on TV says recession.”

Every economist says recession. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

By late 2022, members of the Federal Reserve committee that sets monetary policy were predicting an unemployment rate of 4.6% by late 2023; private forecasters were predicting 4.4%. Either of these forecasts would have implied at least a mild recession.

To be fair, we don’t know for sure that these predictions will be falsified. But with unemployment in June just 3.6%, the same as it was a year ago, and job growth still chugging away, the economy would have to fall off a steep cliff very soon to make them right, and there’s little hint in the data of that happening.

So it sure looks as if economists made a bad recession call. Why were they wrong? One answer might be to ask why anyone would expect them to get it right.

A few years ago, the International Monetary Fund did a systematic study of the ability of economists to call recessions in advance, and basically found that they never succeed.

As the authors noted wryly, there



was little to choose between private and official forecasts: “Both are equally good at missing recessions.”

In a way, however, the IMF study isn’t that relevant to what we’ve just seen. The authors found many examples of recessions that happened but that forecasters failed to predict; what we’re seeing now is a recession that forecasters predicted but failed to happen.

So where did this almost unanimous but, as it turns out, unwarranted pessimism come from?

I know that at least some forecasters were looking at a certain financial indicator: the spread between short-term and long-term bonds. An inverted yield curve, in which long-term bonds pay lower interest than short-term, has historically predicted recessions.

But the meaning of an inverted yield curve is widely misunderstood. It doesn’t cause a recession. It is instead an implicit prediction about future Fed policy — namely, that the Fed will cut rates sharply in the future, presumably to fight a deepening recession.

So the inverted yield curve wasn’t really independent evidence, just a market reflection of the same “recession is coming” consensus you were hearing on cable TV.

So where did that consensus come from? Leaving aside all the “Biden’s socialism will tank the economy” takes, I think it’s fair to say that most economists bought into the view that we were seeing a replay of the early

1980s.

What happened then was that, faced with high inflation, the Fed sharply hiked interest rates, causing a recession; this recession brought inflation down, and the Fed then reversed course, cutting rates again.

Indeed, the Fed has, once again, raised rates sharply to fight inflation. But events since then have failed to follow the script in two distinct ways.

First, those rate hikes have so far failed to produce a recession. Instead, the economy has been remarkably resilient. Mortgage interest rates — arguably the most important place where the rubber of monetary policy meets the road — have soared over the past year and a half.

Yet unemployment hasn’t meaningfully gone up at all, which isn’t what most economists, myself included, would have predicted.

Why not? Part of the answer may be that housing demand surged in 2021-22, largely as a result of the rise in remote work, and that this increase in demand has muted the usual negative impact of higher rates.

This is especially true for multifamily housing, where high rents have given developers an incentive to keep building despite higher borrowing costs.

Another part of the answer may be that the Biden administration’s industrial policies — in effect, subsidies for semiconductors and green energy — have led to a boom in nonresidential investment, especially manufacturing.

There may be other factors as well, like all the “revenge travel” Americans have been doing as fear of Covid-19 fades. Whatever the reasons, the economy has shrugged off higher interest rates to an extent few expected.

Now, you might think that this means that the Fed will have to push interest rates even higher. After all, don’t we need a recession to curb inflation?

But here’s the other place where things have gone off script: Despite steady job growth and continuing low unemployment, inflation has in fact subsided. This is true even if you look at measures that try to exclude transitory factors.

My preferred measure these days is “supercore,” which excludes food, energy, used cars and shelter (because official measures of housing costs still reflect a rent surge that ended a year ago.)

This is the measure I’ll be looking at when new inflation numbers come in Wednesday. (P.S.: The Fed has a different measure of supercore — non-housing services — but when you look at the details of that indicator, it’s a dog’s breakfast of poorly measured components that I find hard to take seriously.)

In any case, something really strange has happened. I can’t think of another example in which there was such a universal consensus that recession was imminent, yet the predicted recession failed to arrive.

— **The New York Times**

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Living with COVID

ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUELI VOL. 39 NO. 239 | PAGES 16

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Hadi took the oath of office at Al Rashid Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al-Hadi (pictured), Chairman of the Supreme Court and Saad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Hadi, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries took the oath of office at Al Rashid Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

bin Abdullah bin Saad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Hadi, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries took the oath of office at Al Rashid Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and to commemorate the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

are not "in these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves."

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamed al-Wahabi, who accepted his car to

scare away a group of people at a highway in Muscat. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his view, Hamed said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4



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LIFESTYLE

A child cools off with water fountains in Strasbourg, eastern France, as a heat wave hits France. For the third month running, around two-thirds of France's water tables remain below seasonal normals, fuelling drought and threatening water supplies. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Spanish bullfighter Morante de la Puebla walks after performing a pass to a bull with a muleta during a bullfight of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain.—AFP

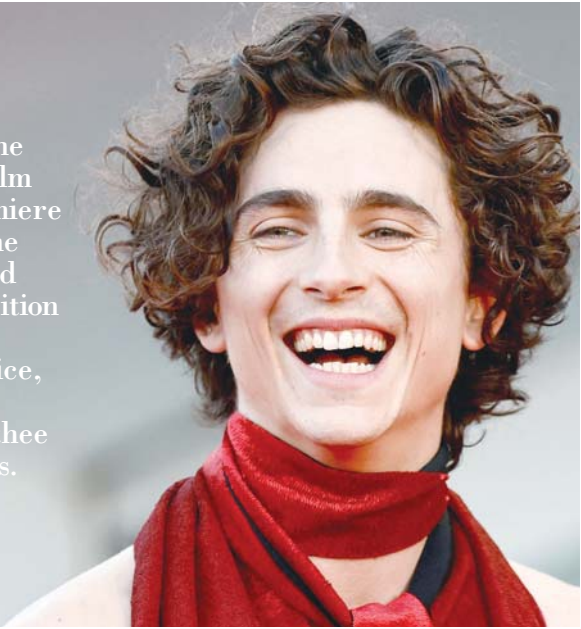


ENVIRONMENT

The “garrano”, a lively and stocky horse, the size of a pony, is today a breed threatened with extinction.—AFP

FILM

ARCHIVE: The 79th Venice Film Festival - Premiere screening of the film “Bones and All” in competition - Red Carpet Arrivals - Venice, Italy, Cast member Timothee Chalamet poses. —Reuters



TRAVEL

A beachgoer carries buoys on a beach in Argel-sur-Mer, southern France —AFP



art & life

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Health enthusiasts head to malls for walks

Across the world, shopping malls are the second most popular venue for walking in many countries and it is a common practice so prevalent everywhere.

LIFESTYLE

Why do mosquitoes like me so much?

Q: I GET BITTEN BY MOSQUITOES WAY MORE OFTEN THAN MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY. WHY IS THAT? AND IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO MAKE IT STOP?

Mosquitoes are drawn to all people, said Christopher Potter, an associate professor of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. But if you find yourself flitting them away more frequently than those around you, it's possible you're one of the unlucky ones who is inherently more tempting to mosquitoes.

There is not a single, definitive reason some people get bitten more than others, Potter said, in part because it's a challenging problem for scientists to study.

But experts have identified two main categories that make us more attractive to mosquitoes: biological

aspects we can't change and behaviours we can.

Chief among the first group is how you smell. Dozens of diverse molecules distributed throughout your body come together to create your unique odour.

"It's like strawberries – there's no one odour in a strawberry that gives it that smell," Potter said. "It's a combination of a dozen odours that all come together."

And it's likely this distinctive mix of chemical compounds that draws mosquitoes in, he said.

It's also possible that some people emit more of the odour that mosquitoes like, said Lindy McBride, an associate professor of ecology, evolutionary biology and neuroscience at Princeton University.

That doesn't mean someone who's particularly fragrant to humans will always be a mosquito



target – mosquitoes are sensitive to different smells, even ones humans can't detect, McBride said. For instance, "mosquitoes love forearm odour," she said. "No one ever thinks of their arms as being smelly."

Mosquitoes are attracted to

sebum, a waxy, oily substance on the skin that protects it from drying out and contains molecules that contribute to your odour.

Blood type may also matter, said Dr. Christopher Bazzoli, an emergency medicine physician at the

Cleveland Clinic who specialises in wilderness medicine. Mosquitoes seem to gravitate toward people with Type O blood, he said, for reasons researchers haven't confirmed.

The individual pattern of how you breathe – what Bazzoli called the "breathing signature" – also plays a role. Mosquitoes seek out carbon dioxide, and the more we exhale, the more carbon dioxide we send into the air, inviting bugs our way.

Then there are the factors that are more dependent on how you act throughout the day.

If you were to do a vigorous workout outside, you might breathe more heavily and exhale more carbon dioxide, which might usher in mosquitoes, Potter said.

Sweat sends a powerful signal to mosquitoes too, McBride added – particularly sweat that's lingered for a few hours, mixing with bacteria on our skin.

And if you've had a few beach-side beers or happy hour margaritas, you might also emit some alcohol in your sweat, Bazzoli said, which can lure mosquitoes in. Additionally, alcohol might change the chemical makeup of your body odour, he said, which could entice mosquitoes.

There are a few evidence-based strategies for warding them off.

Some fragrant personal care

products such as certain perfumes and scented soaps and lotions can attract mosquitoes, Bazzoli said, so if you'll be spending time outdoors when mosquitoes are around, try to use products that are fragrance free.

Certain clothing colours like black and dark blue can act like a mosquito magnet, he added. Research also suggests that mosquitoes are drawn to bright oranges and reds. Stick to lighter colours, Bazzoli said; and if you want to be extra careful, wear long sleeves and pants.

A number of insect repellents can help keep mosquitoes at bay, in part by effectively masking the smell of your skin, Potter said. Wirecutter, the product recommendation service from The New York Times, recommends those that contain instead of DEET.

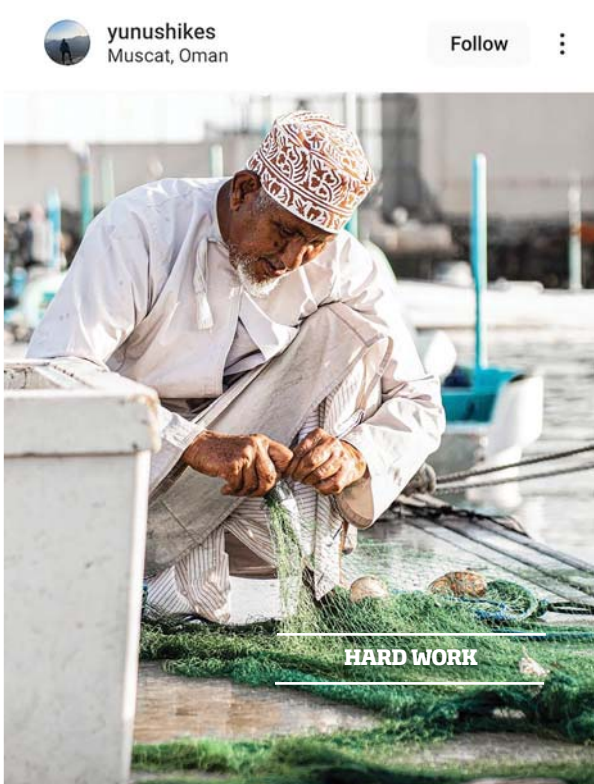
There are also electronics and gadgets like specialised string lights or gear made by the company Thermacell that may help clear mosquitoes from the outdoor space around you.

Or, you can try a simple trick recommended by McBride: Grab a fan and point it under a table. As indestructible – and endlessly annoying – as mosquitoes may seem, they struggle in a breeze, she said. "They're not good flyers." — NYT



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Thirst for fitness occupying space in the mall

BY KABEER YOUSUF

Shopping malls leave no stone unturned in wooing customers to their outlets while trying their level best to retain the existing ones. These attempts range from killer prices to shopping offers, special discounts and play centres, and activity corners for the kids but everybody would agree that never a gym or a jogging track for the adults who would do shopping side by side has been offered at least in this region.

But it seems that the health-conscious lot has identified the various uses of a shopping mall and are making the best use of the malls in the mornings and evenings to fulfil their need to sweat those extra calories or to stay fit.

Abdulrahman al Balushi, a public sector employee in his early 50s, visits the nearby shopping mall every evening without fail but with a difference. That father of four makes it a point to be dressed in his sport gear and sets his smartwatch's jogging time to zero only to feel the accomplishment after an hour's walk in the comfort of the mall.

His wife, Arwa al Balushi, a teacher by profession, keeps tab on her husband's visit and tags along so that she could run some errands for the home when he is busy walking round and round the walkways inside the mall, if not everyday, on every alternate day.

Al Balushi is not an odd one out but with the summer getting severe by the day, a beeline of health-savvy people is seen at Oman's various shopping malls mostly in the evenings making the most of their 'walking time', thanks to the sweltering heat outside.

"I come here at the Mall of Oman every day to walk for an hour or 10,000 steps, whichever is earlier as a means to stay fit," says Abdulrahman. "The good part is that my wife keeps company with me but after a couple of rounds, she heads to the hyper-



market to purchase some provisions almost every day," laughs Al Balushi.

People who used to walk on the beaches and pavements on the roadsides do disappear from their favourite jogging tracks in and around the parking areas when the temperature rises high and drives them away to the shopping malls.

"My uncle who is a high diabetic and aunt who has some ailments visit Avenues Mall on a daily basis to carry out his jogging everyday as the mall is very close to their house," said Maleeha, an expatriate working for a leading brand in Muscat.

Again, what makes the daily walk more

interesting is that first, the activity is carried out in the comfort of air-conditioned surroundings which still allows one to sweat out, free, relatively accessible, and pedestrian-friendly environments for many mall walkers. Secondly, it is the opportunity to meet different people, accessibility to drinking water, and last but not the least, one can take rest at the food court munching on some light foods, confessed many.

From the mall management side, they often don't take notice nor do they oppose their customers' thirst for fitness occupying space in the mall.



"We have noticed some people come here just for jogging most of the days but we don't oppose their activity because the next day they are seen at the check-out queue hence, neither do we promote nor do we discourage," a senior manager of a shopping mall chain said.

GLOBAL SCENARIO:

Conversely, mall walkers are not a new concept in the world nor a thing to shy away from. Across the world, shopping malls are the second most popular venue for walking in many countries and it is a common practice so prevalent everywhere.

In some countries, shopping malls address mall walkers as 'Mall Stars' for the respect and promote and encourage them considering they are very special to them. Some shopping malls open early for them and keep a nominal number of their staff members to take care of them. Some malls give its walkers swipe-cards that let them track their time spent walking and provide them with periodic reports on their walking time and calories burned, as well as hosting monthly breakfast meetings featuring talks by wellness experts for a very nominal fee. Also, they offer some incentives and discount programmes for these 'mall stars'.

TRAVEL

Greece to cool tourists in season's first heatwave warning

GREECE'S CULTURE MINISTRY on Monday said it would boost shade and hand out free water at the Acropolis as the country's weather service issued the year's first heatwave warning.

The national weather service EMY on Monday said a six-day heatwave would grip Greece from Wednesday, with temperatures hitting highs of 43 degrees Celsius (109.4 Fahrenheit) towards the end of the week.

The culture ministry in a statement said some outdoor archaeological sites may close during the warmest hours, depending on local conditions.

At the Acropolis, Greece's most-visited site, the ministry said shading canopies would be set up to shield the monument's thousands of visi-



tors, while Red Cross staff will hand out free water at peak temperature hours. Culture Minister Lina Mendoni last week said the ministry was seeking ways to address massive queues at the 2,500-year-old monument, noting that visitor numbers have jumped by 80 per cent compared to 2019.

Much of the problem is caused by cruise ships disembarking hundreds of passengers simultaneously early in the morning, operators say. She told Skai radio that a time slot system to reduce bottlenecks by spreading out visits throughout the day is ready to be implemented.

"The project is ready... it could be implemented in July," she said. According to the Greek state statistics agency Elstat, over three million people visited the Acropolis last year, up from 1.2 million in 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Greece is counting on tourism to boost its economy after its near-decade debt crisis. Officials hope to exceed the 31.3 million arrivals recorded in 2019, a record year for the country. Tourist numbers visiting Greece are ticking up to levels rivaling pre-pandemic times as the world witnesses a resurgence in demand for leisure travel. — AFP

MUSIC

Philippine 'Swifties' flock to Taylor Sheesh show

THOUSANDS OF DIEHARD TAYLOR Swift fans erupted in screams on Friday as a Philippine drag queen impersonating the American music megastar strutted on stage in a Manila shopping centre.

For many Filipino "Swifties", as Taylor Swift's fans are called, this is the closest they will get to the singer's "The Eras Tour" after the Philippines was left off the Asian leg next year.

As fans across the region scrambled on Friday to get their hands on tickets for her six shows in Singapore, one of only two stops in Asia, Filipino Swifties flocked to a mall to see the next best thing: Taylor Sheesh.

Wearing a long blonde wig and gold sequined and tasselled dress, Sheesh shimmered across the floor as she imitated Swift's dance moves and lip-synced songs from her 2010 "Speak Now" album.

Mostly young fans sang along to



the lyrics they first heard as children, bouncing up and down while filming with their smartphones.

"I love her writing and her songs," gushed Daphne Ayuste, 21, after posing with her boyfriend in front of a cardboard cut-out of Swift.

Fans began lining up in the tropical heat more than four hours before Friday's concert celebrating the release of Swift's re-recorded "Speak Now" album.

Many wore cat-ear headbands featuring Swift's face and the colour purple to match her dress on the album cover.

One fan carried a framed picture depicting Swift as the Virgin Mary.

Sheesh, whose real name is Mac Coronel, began impersonating Swift in 2017.

The 28-year-old has seen her popularity explode in the Philippines after footage of her performing her own version of The Eras Tour in May went viral.

"She's very popular here," Coronel said, describing the Philippines as "Taylor nation".

"We all know that (for) every situation... there's always a Taylor Swift song," she said. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

What men should know before colouring their hair!

A CHANGE IN HAIR COLOUR can be emblematic of a shift in someone's personal life, a fresh start or an attempt to hit pause on the aging process. Depending on the person, it may be a significant change that lasts for a while — or just till the next haircut.

For many men, it can feel like a chance to strut out a new look, or to signify that they are back on the market. That may have been a consideration for Bill de Blasio, the former New York City mayor: After 30 years of marriage, he and his wife, Chirlane McCray, revealed this week that they were separating. (The couple said they did not intend to divorce and would continue to live together for the time being.)

One of the major takeaways for readers who remembered his grayer days in Gracie Mansion, however, was de Blasio's considerably darker hair. "I never anticipated ever doing anything with hair colour," he said in the interview. "But I like feeling what I feel."

We spoke with hairstylists and colourists about what men should know before going under the dye bottle.

FIRST, BE SURE YOU WANT TO DITCH THE GRAY.

Garrett Bryant, founder of the Hawthorne hair salon in Manhattan, said he typically tried to talk his clients out of colouring their gray hair.

"I will admit that I am a big opponent of gray coverage," he said. "It's not that I have a daddy complex or anything, I just think that gray hair can be beautiful."

Hair colour for men can be tricky because their hair is often shorter than women's, meaning less length in which a colourist can blend colours for a more natural look. You want to avoid any abrupt shifts in colour.

"If you go too dark to try to completely cover the gray, you're going to get very flat results; it's going look all completely one colour," Bryant said. "That's when it's going to not look natural on you."

ADD A LITTLE PEPPER TO YOUR SALT.

For first timers, it's best to start small by camouflaging gray hair, rather than completely covering it. Blending allows for a more subtle and natural look.

Hannah Parsley, a men's cut and colour specialist at Takamichi Hair in lower Manhattan, said she preferred to start off as minimal as possible when colouring her clients' hair to avoid that "line of demarcation when their hair grows out."

"You won't get 100 per cent coverage with blending," she added, "but it's a great way to kind of baby step into starting to colour your hair and having it naturally get a little darker every time."

DON'T JUST GOOGLE, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL.

In the age of DIY, it may seem



simple to do a quick Google search or open up TikTok for references. Resist the temptation: It's usually worthwhile to seek out a professional.

Garren, a hairstylist and co-founder of the hair-product line R+Co., recommends getting into specifics with your hair colourist before a single drop of dye is applied.

"It's about figuring out the hair-style you're going to wear with it," he said. "Like, if you're going to colour your hair, what's your haircut going to look like? What's your style? You have to have a conversation with your hair cutter, your colourist, and come to some agreement on what you're going to feel comfortable with in your own skin."

Bryant estimated the cost of professional men's hair colouring in Manhattan to be \$50 to \$100. For de Blasio, it was almost certainly a good deal less.

Alberto Amore of Astor Place Hairstylists has been the former mayor's barber since de Blasio was a freshman at NYU, according to his bio. Although he declined to speak specifically about de Blasio as a customer, Amore said on Thursday that he typically charged \$20 for a dye job.

BE CAREFUL NOT TO GO TOO DARK WITH BOX DYE.

Neutral and ash colours tend to be the best route when colouring your own hair. You should also not go strictly based on the shades advertised on the box.

"The rule of thumb is that those colours tend to be one to two shades darker," said Rita Hazan, the owner of a namesake salon on the Upper East Side. "So if you think your hair is dark brown, I would go with, like, medium brown. If you think your hair is medium brown, go to light brown."

GOING TOO DARK CAN GIVE YOU A REGRETTABLE SHOE-POLISH LOOK.



"I find that a lot of guys start doing it over the counter, and all of a sudden, they get themselves where it starts looking inky or too brassy," Hazan said. "It overlays and absorbs and then it overlays and overlays to where it gets way too dark, and all of a sudden you see the roots growing out really quickly."



KEEP UP THE UPKEEP.

Maintenance is what will ultimately determine how long your hair colour lasts. Bryant advises going to the salon every four to six weeks, but colouring can have a longer life if it's well taken care of. Several hairstylists recommended Redken and Paul Mitchell products, adding that sulfate-free products could help avoid damaging hair colour. —NYT

THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



Shaddad al Musalmy

'I told you so!'

There is that part of life when you acknowledge that you are grateful for that one person you were chosen to unite and entangle together. We hear of phrases 'two in one' or 'three in one' but this time it is 'many in one.'

How possible is it that when my car changes the slightest sound or any technical issues, my wife is the first one to detect it? It is amazing but it is true.

As we were approaching our long Eid holidays, she needed to get some groceries and so we drove together to the supermarket, shopped a fully heaped trolley, and were ready to go back home.

As I started the car, she told me that there was a different sound and hesitation as my car was starting. She insisted that we pass by and check on the battery since it was what she "thought" was the problem. She always pretends to know more about cars.

You see sometimes as men we go through rough times, especially during the holiday seasons. We always need to provide our families with outfits, groceries, and outings to mention but a few. Therefore, when another problem arises, we rather try to push it further yet we know it's "unavoidable."

Back to my narration, I told her that we would tackle the problem the following day. However, she still insisted and reminded me that public holidays were beginning the following day and probably shops would be closed.

With all the explanations, I still did not pass by the car electrician to check on the car and I motivated myself saying it would not be a battery problem because I had just replaced it nine months back. I took a chance and I said to myself "What may come, I am not going to push myself to do so."

She was dead silent. I know that reaction

HOW POSSIBLE IS IT THAT WHEN MY CAR CHANGES THE SLIGHTEST SOUND OR ANY TECHNICAL ISSUES, MY WIFE IS THE FIRST ONE TO DETECT IT? IT IS AMAZING BUT IT IS TRUE.

from her. Whenever she insists on something and I do the opposite, she lets me be but she prepares herself to tell me, "I told you so!" This is of course in a negative and mockery way.

That day we reached home safely, I parked my car, and I was so happy that it did not cause me any problems.

The following morning, on the actual Eid day, my car was not starting. The battery was dead. I could not use it for the first three days of Eid because shops were closed.

I, unfortunately, had to rent a car, which cost me more than the price of a battery plus fuel expense.

The look in her eyes was a bit strange. Sometimes I felt she was pitying me but on the other hand, it's like she was having the deepest laughter from within and even though she did not say it verbally, I could still hear the words: "I told you so."

Just to make this case pass peacefully, I reminded her of a few words from the song 'I told You So' by Randy Travis.

Here are the words.
*I told you so, oh, I told you so
I told you someday you'd come crawling back
and asking me to take you in
I told you so, but you had to go
But now I've found somebody new and you
will never break my heart in two again*

Anyways, from now on, I have totally surrendered. The next time she warns me of technical issues or any other kind of problem, I will obey with gratitude because a stitch 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'

Shaddad al Musalmy is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

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