

Oman takes active role in G20 meetings, fosters global solutions

Oman's Secretariat for the G20 meetings and a number of relevant government departments organised a media briefing at the Diplomatic Club in Muscat on Wednesday about Oman's participation in the 18th round of G20 meetings, held in India, to forge solutions to international issues. The G20 meetings bring together leaders and operators who seek ways of enhancing dialogue between the largest industrialised countries with economies that support global growth. **SEE ALSO P13**



P10

EARLY SEASON LEADERS AL ZUBAIR AND SCHILLER RETURN TO INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN ACTION IN HUNGARY



P15

PACT SIGNED TO MAXIMISE LOCAL CONTENT AND SUPPORT SMES



P18

UNVEILING THE TREASURES OF OMAN: AN ENRICHING 'ARABIAN ADVENTURE'



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY CONFERENCE'S PARTICIPANTS

The participants at the 6th Oman International Conference on Food Safety and Quality, held in Muscat on June 12-14, have sent a cable of thanks and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, on Wednesday. In their cable, the participants voiced their utmost thanks and gratitude to His Majesty for the warm welcome and hospitality which had a significant impact on the success of the conference. They praised the level of development witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman in various fields including food safety being one of the pillars of the country's future visions and its strategic goal for ensuring food safety and quality in accordance to the regulations and legislations. The participants prayed to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty and grant him good health and long life and wished the Omani people more progress and prosperity. — ONA

JEDDAH

OMANI HAJ MISSION ARRIVES IN SAUDI

The Omani Haj Mission, chaired by Sultan bin Said al Hinai, arrived in Jeddah, on Wednesday. During its stay in Mecca and Medina, the Omani Haj Mission will help Omani pilgrims to perform the Haj rituals and provide them with various services. The Omani Haj Mission was received upon arrival at King Abdulaziz International Airport by Mubarak bin Hamad al Hinai Consul-General of the Sultanate of Oman in Jeddah and Ibrahim bin Nasser al Kharousi, Haj and Awqaf Attaché. — ONA

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WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY CELEBRATED

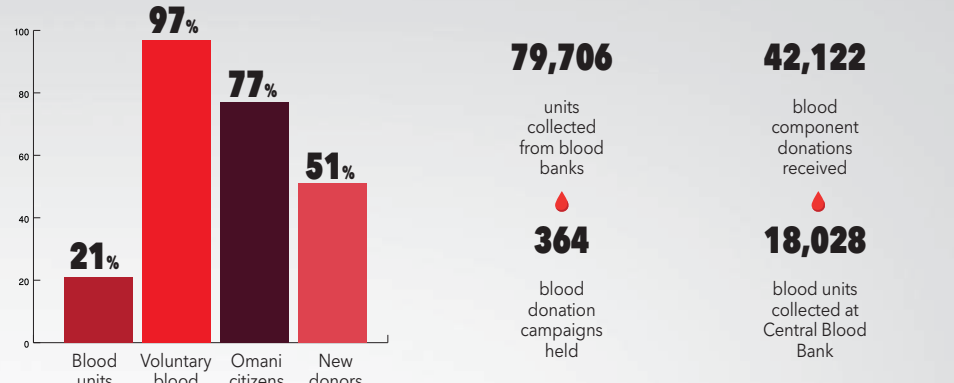
Over 80,000 donors respond to life-saving call in 2022

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

According to the Ministry of Health figures, in 2022 over 80,000 individuals responded to the call for life and humanity by donating blood in both government and private blood banks. These figures coincide with the Sultanate of Oman's commemoration of World Blood Donor Day which falls on June 14 every year and aims to raise awareness about the importance of blood donation in saving lives. Dr Zainab al Araimi, Director of the Blood Banks Services Department, Ministry of Health, highlighted the increase in the number of blood units by 21 per cent compared to the previous year, with a total of 79,706 units collected from blood banks and conducted 364 blood donation campaigns held.



of Health, highlighted the increase in the number of blood units by 21 per cent compared to the previous year, with a total of 79,706 units collected from the Ministry of Health's blood banks. The Blood Banks Services Department received 42,122 blood component donations and conducted 364 blood donation campaigns, with 43 per cent of donations occurring during campaign and 57 per cent at the Central Blood Bank building. **TURN TO P2**



Category	Percentage
Blood units	21%
Voluntary blood donation	97%
Omani citizens	77%
New donors	51%

79,706

units collected from blood banks

42,122

blood component donations received

364

blood donation campaigns held

18,028

blood units collected at Central Blood Bank

Floods warned as India, Pakistan brace for cyclone

AHMEDABAD/MUMBAI: Roads will be flooded along parts of India's western coast, crops could be damaged and some houses destroyed when a very severe cyclonic storm makes landfall late on Thursday, the country's weather department said. On Wednesday, the storm Biparjoy was situated in the Arabian Sea about 280 km from Jakhau Port in the Indian state of Gujarat and 340 km from Pakistan's largest city Karachi, the India Meteorological Department



(IMD) said. As heavy rain already began pounding coastal regions, authorities evacuated thousands of people. Pakistan's Climate Change Minister Sherry Rehman said Karachi, a city of 20 million

people, was not under immediate threat, but emergency measures were being taken to deal with accompanying winds and rain that are expected to batter Mumbai. The IMD criteria for cyclones classified Biparjoy as a category one storm, the least severe on its one-to-five scale. "It will touch Kutch-Saurashtra coast adjoining the Pakistan coast between Mandvi and Karachi and near Jakhau port on June 15 from 4 pm to 8 pm in India," Manorama Mohanty, the Gujarat director of the IMD, told reporters. — Reuters

Extreme heat grips Oman

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

Fahud sizzles at a scorching 49 degrees Celsius, Al Sinainah and Ibri not far behind at over 48, while Al Zamayim, Maqshan, Saham, and Haima experience temperatures hovering around 47 degrees Celsius. According to the Oman Met Office, desert, mountainous areas, and coastal regions along the Sea of Oman witnessed a significant surge in maximum temperatures, reaching the mid to late forties yesterday, with Fahud peaking at a scorching 49 degrees Celsius. Expect the majority of governorates to experience advection of medium and high clouds on Thursday, with isolated chances of light rain. Partly cloudy skies are predicted along the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate and adjacent mountains, with a possibility of sporadic showers. Moreover, desert and open areas may encounter gusts of wind carrying dust. There remains a concern about potential sea water inundation in low-lying governorates. **TURN TO P3**

Omani wins silver in Qatar's sports photography contest

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY @shadadm

Omani photographer Ahmed al Saeedi made the Sultanate of Oman proud by winning silver at Qatar's Sports Photography Competition for 2023. Organised by the Qatar Photography Centre, established by Qatar's Ministry of Culture, the photo competition has been developed as a focal point for the personal and professional creative growth of photographers in the region. Speaking to *Observer*, Al Saeedi said, "My winning photo is of a horse rider and I got the second place in Sports Photography Competition held in Qatar." Al Saeedi, who pocketed home a



Ahmed al Saeedi's prize winning click at the 2023 Qatar's Sports Photography Competition

prize of QR 6,000, says, "My winning photograph is about the expression of joy of a horse rider after he won the riding competition," he adds. The Doha-based Oman photographer is delighted to make his country proud. "I am so happy to win this prize and this is the little I can do to make my country proud," he says with glee. The idea of the Sports photography in Qatar is inspired by the fact that Qatar is famous for organising and hosting many local and international sporting events, and it has many distinguished sports talents. The competition aims to encourage professional and amateur photographers to express their talents in sports photography. The competition provides an opportunity to all photographers inside Qatar to participate, as the

competition aims to showcase the best sports photos and motivate photographers to develop their skills in photography. Participants can present various artworks on topics such as team and individual sports, water and air sports, the Special Olympics Games, in addition to the majestic sports facilities, celebrations, crowd emotions, and much more. "The competition includes all kinds of sports tournaments organised within Qatar, both local and international," Al Saeedi said. "This competition also aims to highlight Qatar's role in organising and hosting sporting events, and to raise the level of photographic awareness and an aesthetic sense among participants of all ages," he concluded.



Sayyid Badr receives credentials copy of Polish ambassador

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday a copy of credentials of Robert Rostek, appointed ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in carrying out his duties, and the bilateral relations between Oman and Poland further progress and growth. — ONA

Oman, India explore ties in space sector



MUSCAT: Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, received on Wednesday Somanath, Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of cooperation in the space sector, as well as the areas of the communications and information technology sector. They also touched on various matters of mutual interests that serve the joint interests. The meeting was attended by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, and a number of officials at the ministry. — ONA

Salalah travellers prefer road trips over air travel

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The number of visitors to Salalah during Khareef 2022 was 813,000 visitors, an increase of 6 per cent from 767,000 in 2021, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The exorbitant airfares on the Salalah-Muscat sector have been always a point of contention among passengers, especially those travelling with families during the peak Khareef months. These airfares force visitors to Salalah to take to the road and the long drive on the 1,000-km stretch which has turned out to be fatal for some motorists and their families. Overspeeding, fatigue, and low visibility during rains are often cited as the main reasons for these unfortunate incidents. Oman Airports recently said it will implement the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on providing direct subsidies on fuel prices at Salalah Airport, equivalent to the fuel prices at Muscat International Airport, with immediate effect. A travel company executive said, "Travelling to Salalah by air



is a costly affair for families during Khareef, and that forces passengers to travel by road. One of the main reasons for high fares seems to be the lack of competition and low capacity. With these new decisions, airlines will be encouraged to add more services to the sector while foreign airlines will be able to get more tourists from abroad." Directives from His Majesty the Sultan were aimed at facilitating tourism by increasing the number of flights to and from Dhofar Governorate by airlines as competition will lower ticket prices for citizens and residents and all categories of travellers to the governorate. The number of domestic flights to Dhofar Governorate was 16,114, while the number of international flights was 149,590. Oman Air will operate eight daily flights between Muscat and Salalah, starting from June 15 until September 15. The airline will further augment its services by increasing the daily flight count to 12 on selected days. Oman Air has announced a significant reduction in ticket prices for Economy Class travel between Muscat and Salalah for Omanis. The revised ticket prices will be set at an attractive rate of RO 54 return. Omanis constituted 69 per cent of the total number of visitors (562,995), while GCC countries constituted 161,260 in 2022. Money spent by visitors to Salalah during Khareef 2022 was RO 86 million, an increase of 32 per cent compared to 2019 when the total spending was RO 76 million, of which 32 per cent of the total expenditure was for housing.

Wheat harvesting season concludes in Al Najd

SALALAH: Wheat harvesting operation for the season 2022-2023 has come to an end in the Al Najd region in the Wilayat of Thamrait in Dhofar Governorate with a total of 5,940 tonnes of wheat produced. Eng Said bin Musallam al Khathiri, Director of Agriculture and Water Resources Department, stated that 5,112 acres were cultivated in this



season which lasted for 77 days. The official pointed to the efforts made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in cooperation with the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund and Dhofar branch of the Omani Agricultural Society to boost wheat acreage in the Najd farms. He stressed the economic and strategic importance of wheat for global food security. Al Najd is one of the promising regions for wheat cultivation due to the vast agricultural areas and availability of groundwater. The ministry offers many incentives to encourage farmers to expand wheat cultivation and improve its quality including providing farmers with bio-fortified seeds, the official said. — ONA

Omani diplomats around the world donate blood



MUSCAT: The Omani embassies in various countries all over the world and the headquarters of the Foreign Ministry in Muscat on Wednesday marked the World Blood Donors Day. This move comes as a humanitarian initiative which reflects a deep understanding that goes beyond the usual roles of diplomatic missions and embassies abroad. Omani diplomats, their families and employees at the Sultanate of Oman's embassies visited hospitals in the countries of accreditation to donate blood. Foreign Ministry staff have also donated blood through the medical visit of a specialised team from Sultan Qaboos University Hospital. This humanitarian initiative is part of the Foreign Ministry's strategy to support the health sector and raise awareness of the importance of blood donation as a humanitarian activity to help meet the increasing demand for blood in hospitals and medical centres around the world. The blood donation initiative also

encourages the ministry's employees to maximise the value of humanisation, selflessness, social responsibility, partnership and the expansion of humanitarian charitable work. The initiative received good response from the Foreign Ministry's employees and from the Omani diplomatic missions abroad, and reflected their awareness and the benevolent culture of the Omani society, and their sincere belief in the importance of this humanitarian work. — ONA

Over 80,000 donors respond to life-saving call in 2022

FROM PAGE 1
Dr Zainab emphasised that voluntary blood donation accounted for 97 per cent of the total donations, with 77 per cent of donors being Omani citizens. Additionally, 51 per cent of the new donors contributed to the overall number. As of now, the Central Blood Bank in Bausher has collected 18,028 blood units in the current year. The Ministry of Health's Directorate-General of Specialised Medical Care, represented by the Blood Banks Services Department, encourages individuals to donate blood to ensure a safe supply for healthcare institutions. The ministry also stressed the importance of plasma donation, which comprises approximately 55 per cent of blood and plays a crucial role in treating various diseases and medical conditions. Plasma-derived products, such as immunoglobulins, are utilised to enhance the immune system and prevent/treat infections. Clotting factors and albumin derived from plasma are

employed to promote blood clotting and restore blood volume, respectively, benefiting patients with conditions like haemophilia, burns, shock, or liver disease. Dr Zainab highlighted the conditions for blood donation, including age between 18 and 65 years, a minimum weight of 50 kg, normal blood pressure, normal haemoglobin levels, honest answers to the donation questionnaire, and no contraindications for donation. The World Health Organization acknowledges the challenges faced by blood services worldwide in providing sufficient quantities of safe blood. Particularly in low- and middle-income countries, the availability of safe blood and its derivatives affects all patients, especially those requiring regular blood transfusions. The organisation aims to assist these countries in improving the availability and quality of human plasma, optimising its use, and enhancing access to life-saving plasma protein therapies.



STATE COUNCIL DISCUSSES SERVICES PROVIDED TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



MUSCAT: The Office of the State Council on Wednesday held the 5th meeting of its 4th regular session for the 7th Term chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. The State Council's Office discussed fresh studies and proposals submitted by its committees. It looked into a study titled 'Services Provided to Persons with Disabilities in the Sultanate of Oman – the Reality and the Aspirations'. Then, it exchanged views about two topics presented by the Technology and Innovation Committee. The first topic dealt with scenarios of adapting to the use of electric vehicles (EVs). The second topic evolved around legislative and regulatory principles in e-commerce. The State Council's Office also discussed a study on distance learning (education) policies, legislation and ways to develop it in Oman. The study highlighted the importance of distance learning, its effects and the common challenges facing its implementation. – **ONA**

MoL signs pact for job-seekers training

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour signed an agreement with Horizon Integrated Business (Musalih) for training and qualification of job-seekers, on Wednesday. The agreement was signed by Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Labour Ministry's Under-Secretary for Human Resources Development, and Sultan bin Ameen al Zadjali, CEO, Musalih. As per the agreement, a total of 600 young Omanis will receive training in maintenance and repair work.



Extreme heat grips Oman

FROM PAGE 1

The Arabian Sea state is forecasted to be rough, with maximum wave heights ranging from 4.0 to 6.0 metres, while the Oman Sea state will be moderate to rough, with wave heights ranging from 2.0 to 4.0 metres.

Muttrah's seafront witnessed waves surging across roads on Wednesday, and high waves are expected to persist for the next three days.

In response to the situation, the National Multi Hazard Early

Warning Centre has urged the public to take precautionary measures to avoid the perils of the raging sea. They advise postponing tourism tours, marine activities, and trips until sea conditions improve, as the towering waves can pose a risk of capsizing small boats. Furthermore, they emphasise the importance of monitoring weather and sea conditions before embarking on any ventures.

Meanwhile, high-resolution satellite images captured the movement of Tropical Cyclone

Biparjoy, as it heads northwards towards the coasts of India and Pakistan. This has resulted in a continued influx of high and medium clouds across the Sultanate of Oman.

The Met Office has also raised an alert regarding high sea waves, categorised as rough, along the coasts of Oman. There are chances of sea water encroaching upon low-lying coastal areas in the Sea of Oman and parts of the Arabian Sea, with these hazardous conditions expected to persist for the next three days.

785 water licences issued



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources recently released statistics, shedding light on the water licensing landscape. According to the report, a substantial total of 785 water licences were issued in May 2023 across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

In regards to regional distribution, the Governorate of Al Dhahirah got the highest number of permits (248) while Al Dakhiliyah secured 199 permits.

North Al Batinah obtained 77 licences, and North Al Sharqiyah was granted 92 licences while the Governorate of South Al Batinah got 86 permits.

Muscat Governorate lagged behind the others, with a modest issuance of merely 6 permits. South Al Sharqiyah garnered 32 licences, while Al Buraimi was granted 34 licences. Musandam, Al Wusta and Dhofar obtained 1, 4, and 6 licences respectively.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stated that water licences encompassed a diverse

range of activities including registration and licensing of wells, construction of dams and aflaj, well drilling contracts, and development projects.

It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources places paramount importance on issuing water licences as a means to effectively monitor and regulate the utilisation of water resources. The approach ensures a harmonious equilibrium between the available water quantities and the multifaceted requirements across different sectors.

Beware of snakes this summer: Municipality

ZAKIYA AL HUSSAINI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

In the scorching summer sun, it is common to encounter snakes at homes either crawling or hanging out somewhere to escape from hot places to wet ones.

For this, Muscat Municipality has set some precautionary measures to avoid their prevalence in residential neighbourhoods.

The municipality stated that it has intensified its efforts to combat venomous reptiles, specifically snakes by placing snake repellents or glue traps. It added that a special preventive drive covering parks is carried out to combat poisonous legless species.

The municipality confirmed that it deals with all snake spotting-related reports, noting that the adopted method by the municipality is to bring the snake back to its suitable natural environment.

According to the municipality, people should stay away if they spot a snake and make sure that children or pets are away, too. It is not recommended to kill snakes as much as possible as they play a vital role in maintaining the balance of ecosystems.



In the event of spotting a snake, a person is advised to call the municipality's call centre 1111.

The most common species in Oman include the Arabian cobra, saw-scaled viper, puff adder, wadi racer, tree snakes, sand viper, sand boa and the cat snake.

For snakebites, experts recommend going to a hospital immediately while victims must avoid putting pressure on the wound. If bitten by a snake, there is no need to be nervous but rather stay calm and move away from the site quietly.



ديوان البلاط السلطاني

DIWAN OF ROYAL COURT

Tender Notice (2)

Diwan of Royal Court sultanate of Oman, Muscat, announces the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name:	Tender Document Value	Last Date of Purchasing Tenders	Last Date of Submitting Tenders
15/2023	Annual requirements for Pharmaceutical items	150	2/8/2023	7/8/2023
16/2023	Annual requirements for Dental items	25	2/8/2023	7/8/2023
17/2023	Annual requirements for Surgical, Medical and X ray items	25	2/8/2023	7/8/2023
18/2023	Annual requirements for Laboratories items	25	2/8/2023	7/8/2023

- Qualified Companies with previous experience in similar works can obtain the Tender Documents from the Directorate General of Administrative, Financial Affairs and Human Resources (Treasury Department), Diwan of Royal Court, Al Khuwair, Ground Floor, from 7:30 am till 12:00 pm right from the date of post by paying the document value.
- Each company's tender should be accompanied by a Tender Bond in the form of bank guarantee or certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount of (1%) of the Tender Value valid for (90) days from the date of submission. Any Bid not accompanied with the full Tender Bond will be excluded.
- The Tender Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers.
- Bids must be submitted in an envelope sealed with red wax addressed to His Excellency, the Chairman of the Tender Committee. The Tender name and number should be written on the envelope. Nothing should be written on the envelope to display the identity of the bidder or what refers to him.
- The bids should be deposited in the Tender Box, Seventh floor, Diwan of Royal Court (Purchases Department), Ghala and no bids will be accepted after 12:00pm.
- No Bids will be accepted after the last date of submission shown in the above table.
- The Tender Committee will award the tender to the company that has the largest percentage of Omanisation and possible purchases of national products.

Diwan of Royal Court is not obliged to award the tender to the lowest or any other offer.

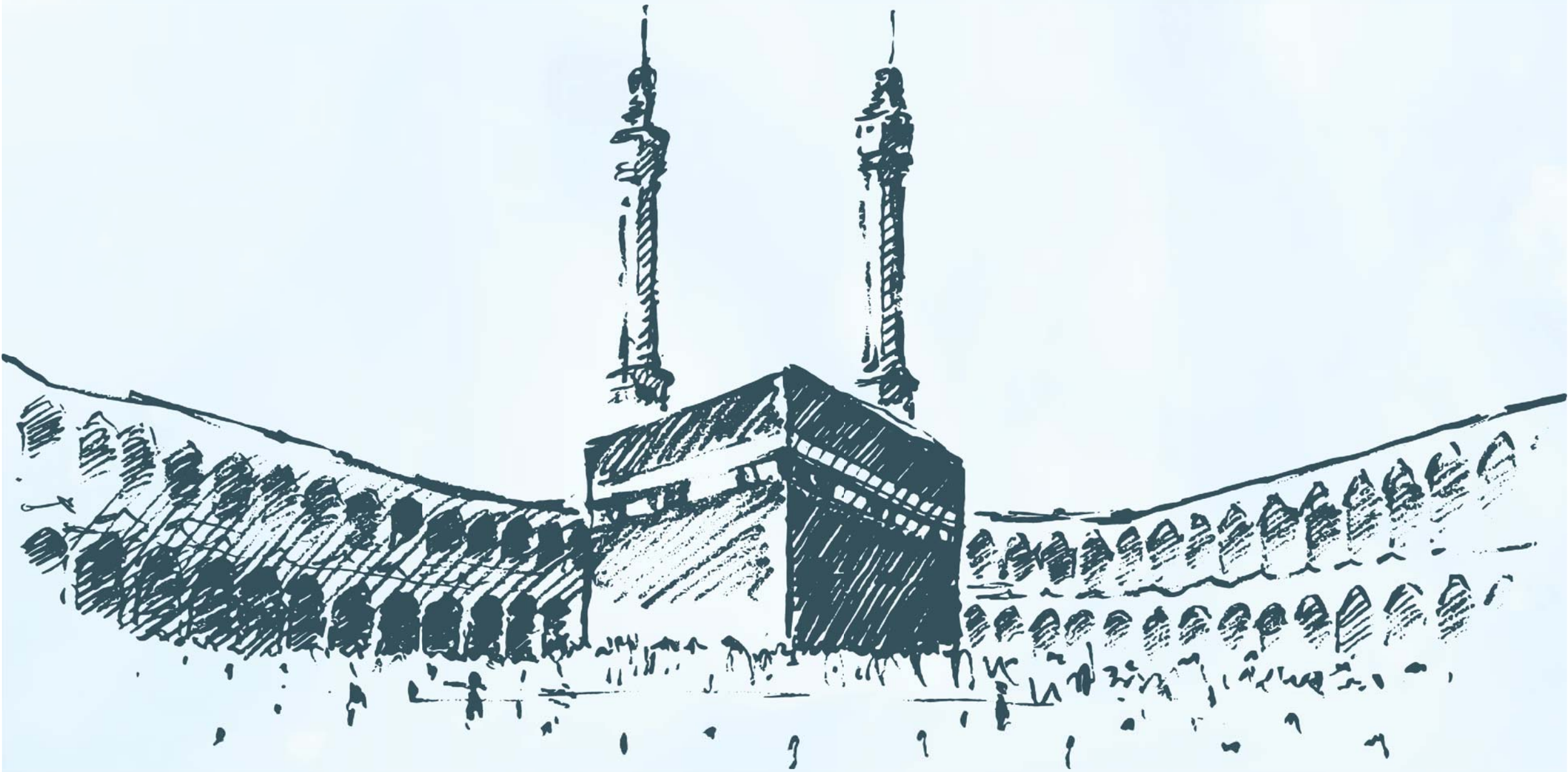
For any further clarification and assistance, you may contact the following numbers:

99616715 - 24213059 - 24026309 - 24026308 - 24026307



Going for Haj?

ESSENTIAL HEALTH TIPS TO CONSIDER



MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Undertaking the Haj pilgrimage requires careful attention to one's health and well-being due to its physically demanding nature.

While prioritising health preparations is essential to ensure a safe and fulfilling experience, it is crucial to consult with a healthcare professional before the journey to assess overall health, discuss any existing medical conditions, receive guidance on vaccinations, obtain prescribed medications for common ailments and receive tailored health advice.

Dr Saleh al Hinai highlighted the significance of certain medications and pharmaceutical products to address common illnesses during Haj, including Higeen, Travacort, Voltaren, Bonjela, Buscopan, Domp, Olfen, Duphalac, Luqman oil, Panadol, sunscreen cream, and tablets like Primolut N for delaying the menstrual cycle.

He explained that Primolut N is taken as one tablet (5mg) three times a day, starting three days before the expected date of the menstrual cycle, for a maximum duration of 14 days. Menstruation usually resumes 2-3 days after discontinuing the medication.

"It is crucial to ensure an adequate supply of medications for the pilgrimage, carrying them in the carry-on bag to prevent loss.

Keeping medications in their original packaging and having a prescription or doctor's note for controlled substances is essential," he indicated.

Dehydration is a significant risk during Haj due to physical exertion and hot weather. Staying hydrated by drinking ample water and electrolyte-rich fluids is crucial.

While carrying a refillable water bottle ensures access to clean drinking water at all times, protecting oneself from sunburn and heatstroke is vital.

Wearing a wide-brimmed hat, using an umbrella for shade, and applying high SPF sunscreen to exposed skin offer protection.

Haj involves long walks, physical exertion, and a busy schedule. It is important to listen to one's body, pace oneself, take breaks, rest when needed, and ensure sufficient sleep each night to recharge and maintain energy levels. Prioritising health during Haj allows for a focus on the spiritual aspects of the pilgrimage and ensures a safe and fulfilling journey.



KEEP MEDICATIONS



STAY HYDRATED



CARRY WATER BOTTLE



WEAR A HAT OR USE AN UMBRELLA



APPLY SUNSCREEN



TAKE BREAKS DURING LONG WALKS



SLEEP WELL TO MAINTAIN ENERGY LEVELS



HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY



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ONE KILLED IN WORKSITE MISHAP: CDA



MUSCAT: The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDA) said that one person died and another suffered a moderate injury following an incident involving heavy equipment in one of the worksites in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq.

ROBOTICS TRAINING WORKSHOPS Preparing children for future

SIHAM AL SAIDI
AL BATINAH, JUNE 14

As summer is here, parents and educators are recognising the importance of robotics training workshops for children. These workshops offer outstanding benefits, providing children with valuable advanced skills in an exciting and educational summer experience. STEM education, creativity and collaboration are the main parts in summer robotics programmes.

Children not only gain theoretical knowledge, but also have the opportunity to apply it practically by building and programming robots in a simplified way. By engaging children in these workshops, young participants develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills while deepening their understanding of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) concepts.

As technology rapidly loads, a strong foundation in STEM fields become increasingly crucial. Robotics workshops introduce children to engineering principles, programming basics and



mechanics from an early age. When children participate, they cultivate an interest in STEM subjects and provide them with a competitive edge in the future job market.

The Children's Museum which is located in Muscat launched its summer programme for the year 2023, including a number of activities aimed at developing children's skills and talents in various cultural, sports, scientific, technical and environmental fields.

A programme titled (Robotics Future) took place at Sohar Sports Complex in Al

Batinah North Governorate. The programme targeted 25 participants and aims to building up advanced technological skills to prepare them to interact and confront the rapid technological and scientific challenges.

Salwa al Rashidiyah, Acting Director of the Museum, said that the programme targets children around the country from the ages 4 to 16 to meet the needs and aspirations of children in this ages. "One of our goals during this year is to conduct a specified innovative programme starting from June until August 9. It aims to create

a modern, balanced generation with multiple skills and capabilities. The programme contributes to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and the cultural strategy," she said.

The summer programme will emphasise the sustainable development, environment, scientific creativity, Omani culture and arts, developing the skills of the buds, trade and economy, science and safety, hobbies and professions, and engineering.

Nowadays, robotics training workshops for children has become not just an enjoyable summer activity but a valuable investment in their future. Such efforts conducted by such institutions like Children Museum is unique and very popular among parents and children. These workshops offer hands-on learning experiences, promote STEM education, foster creativity and innovation, develop collaboration and teamwork skills, prepare them for the future workforce, boost confidence and self-esteem, and demonstrate real-world applications.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2023/084	REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING PORCELAIN INSULATOR WITH SILICONE RUBBER INSULATOR	29/06/2023	09/07/2023	RO. 105.000
DISC/ 2023/091	11 KV & LV NETWORK IMPROVEMENT WORKS- (LOT-2)	29/06/2023	09/07/2023	RO. 105.000
DISC/ 2023/109	UNE-LOT 05 I-2023	29/06/2023	09/07/2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/110	UNE-LOT 06 A-2023	29/06/2023	09/07/2023	RO. 52.500

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "isupplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232554
email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om

Dhofar Integrated Services Company S.A.O.C.
CR Number: 2185229; PO Box 2409
PC 211, Salalah - Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number 23232523, Fax 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om

شركة ضيافة الصحراء ش.م.ع.ع
Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.)
P.O. Box 311, Muscat, Postal Code 100, Sultanate of Oman.

DIRECTORS' REPORT THE SECOND QUARTER ENDED ON MAY 31, 2023

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to submit the unaudited Financial Statements of the company for the second quarter ended on May 31, 2023 along with related reports.

Revenue was RO 5,804,925 as against RO 6,237,085 in the corresponding period in the previous year whereas net Profit after taxes for the period was RO 1,171,067 as against RO 1,250,242 in the previous year.

The total shareholders fund increased from RO 25,837,258 at the end of May 2022 to RO 26,341,186 at the end of May 2023 and as a result of this growth, the net assets per share has recorded R.O.3.325.

On behalf of the Board of directors, I express our most sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour Al Said for his wise leadership and generous support to the private sector. Furthermore, I would extend our gratitude to his government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention of Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Muscat Security Market and Capital Market Authority.

I conclude this report by expressing our appreciation to our shareholders, Petroleum Development Oman, our bankers and customers for their valued support and cooperation.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors,

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Unaudited consolidated Statement of Financial Position as at 31 st May, 2023		
	2023 RO. '000	2022 RO. '000
Fixed Assets	14,327	15,221
Current Assets		
Inventories	26	28
Trade & Other Receivables	5,112	6,048
Receivable from related party	23	15
Bank and Cash	8,806	6,679
	13,967	12,770
Total Assets	28,294	27,991
Current liabilities		
Trade and other Payables	655	542
Payables to related parties	869	1,164
Lease liability	22	21
Tax liability	200	220
	1,746	1,947
Long-term liabilities		
Lease liability	34	56
Deferred Tax liability	155	136
Employees' end of service benefits	18	15
	207	207
Total Liabilities	1,953	2,154
Net Assets	26,341	25,837
Shareholder's Fund		
Share Capital	7,923	7,923
Legal Reserve	2,641	2,583
Retained Earnings	15,777	15,331
Total Shareholders' Equity	26,341	25,837

Unaudited consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income For 6 months ended 31 st May, 2023		
	2023 RO. '000	2022 RO. '000
Turnover/Revenue	5,805	6,237
Gross Profit	1,559	1,672
Other Income	106	108
Administration & General Expenses	(283)	(305)
Operating Profit	1,382	1,475
Finance Charges	(4)	(4)
Profit before taxation	1,378	1,471
Taxation	(207)	(221)
Net Profit attributable to ordinary shareholders	1,171	1,250
Net profit margin	20%	20%

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such request may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), P.O.Box: 311, Postal Code -100, Muscat.

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender Submission
2023/4	Design & Implementation Internal System for Managing & Follow-up for Ministry of Economy projects (Enjaz)	25 Omani Rials	24/7/2023

First

- All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board can participate and collect the specifications and conditions of the tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

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

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

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

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
+ 96824402200

Empowerment crucial for consumer rights

MUSCAT: Sulayem bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), held a meeting with Jassim bin Jaber bin Hassan al Thani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for Consumer Affairs in the sisterly State of Qatar. Several officials from both sides attended the video conference.

The aim of the meeting was to benefit from the CPA's experiences in supporting and enhancing consumer rights, especially the Consumer Empowerment Index initiative, promoting bilateral cooperation and sharing of experiences between the two countries.

During the meeting, several topics were discussed, the most important of which was how to benefit from the CPA's experiences regarding consumer rights, the efforts made, and the approach followed to empower the consumers. The participants discussed sharing experiences of consumers in both countries as this will help in enhancing awareness in various consumption areas.

The meeting reviewed the existing cooperation between the two countries under the Memorandum of Cooperation in the Field of Consumer Protection between the two governments whose aim was to activate initiatives that serve consumer protection and contribute to developing work and improving services.

This is because CPA has a pioneering experience in protecting consumers at the regional and international levels.

The meeting included a presentation on CPA's experience in supporting and enhancing consumer rights through the Consumer Empowerment Index initiative, its most important steps and stages, and the measures implemented to achieve it. The meeting discussed the most significant difficulties, challenges and the success made in achieving CPA's objectives; thanks to an integrated work plan and having a clear vision that is in line with the priorities and pillars of Oman Vision 2040.

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- ◆ Residential commercial land in Wilayat Bausher/ Ghala has an area of 2934 sqm.
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Xi calls for a Palestinian state to become ‘full member’ of UN

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated to Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas on Wednesday his call for a state of Palestine to become a “full member” of the United Nations, state media reported.

Xi expressed Beijing’s position during a summit with Arab countries in Saudi Arabia in December, although the latest call comes as the Asian powerhouse works to strengthen its role as mediator in the Middle East.

Xi met Abbas during the December trip and pledged to “work for an early, just and durable solution to the Palestinian issue”.

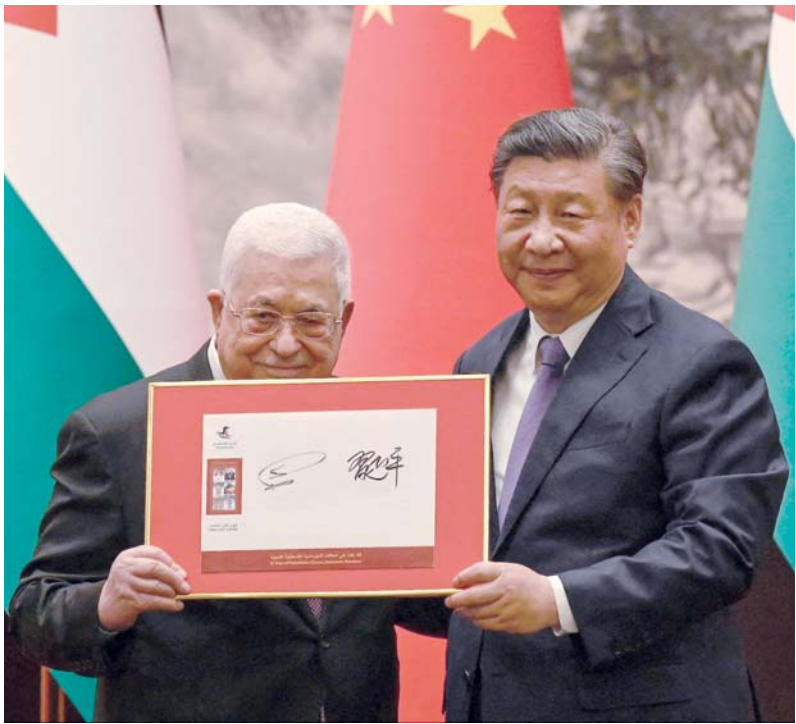
Beijing has since positioned itself as a mediator in the Middle East, brokering the restoration in March of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

“China supports Palestine in becoming a full member State of the United Nations,” Xi said during a meeting with Abbas in Beijing, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

“The fundamental way out of the Palestinian issue lies in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State,” he said.

Abbas will be in the Chinese capital until Friday, his fifth official visit to the world’s second-largest economy.

Xi told Abbas at a welcome



China’s President Xi Jinping and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas attend a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. – Reuters

ceremony at the Great Hall of the People that China was “ready to strengthen coordination and cooperation with the Palestinian side”.

“Today, we will jointly announce the establishment of a China-Palestine strategic partnership, which will be an important milestone in the history of bilateral relations,” Xi said.

Abbas arrived in Beijing on Monday to hold talks with top Chinese leaders including Xi and Premier Li Qiang.

The two sides are using the opportunity to discuss ways to advance relations and resolve longstanding challenges to the Palestinian-Israel relationship.

Beijing has sought to boost its ties in the Middle East.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin called long-time Palestinian leader Abbas an “old and good friend of the Chinese people” during a regular media briefing last week.

Finding a lasting solution

“we will jointly announce the establishment of a China-Palestine strategic partnership, which will be an important milestone in the history of bilateral relations

XI JINPING
Chinese President

to Israeli-Palestinian tensions may prove elusive, as peace negotiations between the two sides have been stalled since 2014.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang told his Israeli and Palestinian counterparts in April that his country was willing to aid peace negotiations, Xinhua reported.

And Qin told Palestinian foreign minister Riyad Al-Maliki that Beijing supports the resumption of talks as soon as possible, according to the state news agency.

In both calls Qin emphasised China’s push for peace talks on the basis of implementing a “two-state solution”. — AFP

Erdogan dampens hopes of Sweden joining Nato in July

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday rebuffed growing international pressure on Ankara to ratify Sweden’s Nato membership bid before the Western defence alliance meets in July.

Western officials had hoped Erdogan would soften his position on the diplomatically charged issue after he secured a hard-fought re-election last month.

But Erdogan signalled no major shift in comments that were released by his office while Turkish and Swedish officials were locked in last-minute negotiations in Ankara.

“Sweden has expectations. It doesn’t mean that we will comply with them,” Erdogan was quoted as saying.

Sweden and its Nordic neighbour Finland ended decades of military non-alignment and applied to join the US-led defence bloc in response to Russia’s attack of Ukraine. Türkiye and fellow Nato member Hungary ratified Finland’s membership this year.



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan is pictured during a press conference in Ankara. — Reuters file photo

Unanimous backing is needed for new countries to secure the guarantees afforded by the world’s most powerful defence alliance.

Ankara hopes to win US congressional approval of a major defence package that could substantially modernise Türkiye’s ageing fleet of fighter jets.

Biden directly linked the F-16 fighters’ sale with the Swedish bid for the first time.

Erdogan “still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted a deal with Sweden, so let’s get that done”, Biden told reporters after a call with Erdogan. — AFP

Lebanon’s crisis deepens as presidential vote collapses

BEIRUT: The parliament members thwarted a bid to elect a top IMF official as Lebanon’s president on Wednesday, sharpening sectarian tensions and further dimming prospects for preventing a collapse of the state.

Four years since Lebanon went into a financial meltdown that marks its worst crisis since the 1975-90 civil war, parliament failed for a 12th time to elect someone to fill the post reserved for a Maronite Christian under the country’s sectarian system.

Neither Azour nor Suleiman Frangieh came close to winning the 86 votes needed to win in a first round vote. Azour, the IMF’s Middle East Director and an ex-finance minister, won the support of 59 of 128 lawmakers. Frangieh secured 51.

Hezbollah and its allies then withdrew from the session, denying the two-thirds quorum

required for a second vote in which 65 votes are enough for victory.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri did not schedule a new session. It leaves Lebanon with no immediate way of filling a post vacant since the term of President Michel Aoun ended in October.

Azour thanked lawmakers who backed him, saying he hoped the will expressed by “the majority of deputies” would be respected.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hussein al-Haj Hassan said the group was ready for dialogue but sticking by Frangieh. Lawmaker George Adwan said the vote was “a major victory” because it showed Azour close to 65 votes.

But with parliament fractured, analysts say the logjam may now require the type of foreign intervention that has resolved past crises in Lebanon, including the 1989 deal mediated in Saudi Arabia that ended the civil war.



Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri heads a parliament session in the presidency election in downtown Beirut. – Reuters

Lebanese political sources have anticipated that a new detente between Saudi Arabia and Iran could play out in Lebanon, but say they have not yet sensed pressure as other issues.

“You can’t stay in this situation,” said Mohanad Hage Ali of the Carnegie Middle East Center, noting forthcoming state decisions included agreeing a replacement for central bank governor Riad Salameh.

Lebanon has been without a fully empowered cabinet since parliamentary elections last year.

Azour, 57, has said he wants national unity and reforms.

He was finance minister from 2005 to 2008, a period of political conflict pitting a government backed by the West and Saudi Arabia against Hezbollah-led opponents aligned with Damascus. That crisis culminated in conflict in 2008. — Reuters

DAMASCUS

Israel strikes hit wounding a soldier

Israel carried out air strikes near Damascus early on Wednesday, wounding a Syrian soldier, state news agency SANA said.

During more than a decade of war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes on its territory.

Explosions were heard in the Syrian capital early on Wednesday.

“At around 01:05 am, the Israeli army carried out an aerial aggression from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights tar-



geting several positions southwest of Damascus,” SANA cited a military source as saying.

The source said the strikes “severely wounded” a soldier and caused material damage.

SEOUL

South Korea sues North over office demolition

South Korea said on Wednesday it has filed a lawsuit seeking damages from North Korea for the 2020 demolition of a liaison office. The office was established in 2018 with funding from Seoul at an industrial zone near the border in North Korean territory.

But after that process collapsed and relations deteriorated, North Korea demolished the building in June 2020.

South Korea’s unification ministry said “We will firmly deal with North Korea’s infringement



of the property rights of our government and our people.”

It said the suit was filed because the statute of limitations for property damage in the case expired on Friday.

KANO

Death toll rises to 106 after boat disaster

The death toll from a Nigeria river boat disaster rose to 106 people on Wednesday as rescue teams searched for more survivors after one of the country’s deadliest waterway accidents in years.

The boat, carrying around 250 passengers travelling from a wedding ceremony, capsized in the early hours of Monday in north-central Kwara state, police and officials said.

The river capsizes are common due to overloading, poor



safety and heavy flooding in the rainy season.

More than half the victims came from one village, Ebu, and another 38 were from nearby Dzakan village.



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In brief

■ LONDON



POLICE SEARCH FOR NOTTINGHAM MURDERS' MOTIVE

British police were questioning a man on suspicion of murder on Wednesday as they sought the motive for a stabbing and van attack in the central English city of Nottingham which left three people dead.

Two 19-year-olds university students were found dead on a city centre street with stab wounds after police were alerted at about 4 a.m. on Tuesday.

Another man was then also found dead with knife wounds on a road about two miles away.

Police said investigations had revealed that a man who matched the suspect's description had also attempted to break into a residential care home after attacking the students.

■ ATHENS



DOZENS DEAD, 100 RESCUED AS BOAT SINKS

At least 78 migrants died after their fishing boat sank off the Peloponnese, Greece's coastguard said on Wednesday, as fears mounted that the death toll could rise to hundreds.

Some 100 people were rescued after the boat capsized in international waters in the Ionian Sea in an operation complicated by strong winds, the coastguard said.

A migration ministry source said that according to the coastguard there could have been "hundreds" of people on the fishing boat.

"We fear there will be a very large number of missing persons," the official said.

■ BELGRADE



SERBIA ARRESTS KOSOVO BORDER POLICE

Serbia said it arrested three Kosovo police on its territory on Wednesday but Pristina countered that the group had been kidnapped within its borders.

Serbia said the officers were armed with automatic weapons and in full military gear with GPS devices, maps and other equipment.

"This terrorist gang was arrested today at 12:38 pm deep in the territory of central Serbia in the area of the village of Gnjilica in the municipality of Raska," Petar Petkovic, the head of the Serbian government's office for Kosovo, told reporters.

Deadly Russian missile strikes hit Ukraine

KYIV: Deadly Russian missile strikes hit southern and eastern Ukraine on Wednesday, as Kyiv claimed fresh advances in its long-awaited counter-offensive.

After Russia fired four Kalibr missiles on the southern port city of Odesa from a warship in the Black Sea, Ukraine's air force said. The country's western-backed air defences shot down three of them.

But one missile hit a food warehouse, killing three employees and wounding seven, said Oleg Kiper, the head of the region's military administration.

"There may be people under the rubble," he added.

Another six people were wounded after a business centre, shops and a residential complex in central Odesa were damaged "as a result of air combat and the blast wave", he said.

Overnight, in the eastern cities of Kramatorsk and Kostiantynivka, Russian missile strikes killed three people and destroyed dozens of private houses, regional authorities said.

A blast in Kramatorsk left a huge crater in a street of one- and two-storey family houses.

The blast completely demolished some houses, and several more around lost their windows and roofs.

The attack killed at least two men, while several other people were wounded and evacuated for treatment.

Police officer Anastasiya Korzun, 33, said that she and



Ukrainian service members ride a BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicle, near the front line in village Neskuchne in Donetsk region. — Reuters

her husband had escaped their damaged house and then others trying to dig neighbours out of the rubble.

"My colleagues from the police were on the scene in 20 minutes to help," Korzun said, showing cuts on her arm from flying glass.

Russia said it had launched multiple strikes overnight, targeting Ukraine's troops and

"foreign mercenaries" as well as warehouses containing foreign-made weapons.

"All the assigned targets have been hit," the defence ministry said. Kyiv also reported that Russians had a day earlier shelled a van in northeastern Ukraine, close to the border with Russia, killing six people.

Ukrainian prosecutors said

the Soviet-era van was hit near the village of Seredyna-Buda, on the border with Russia in the northeastern region of Sumy.

Moscow has intensified its nightly attacks on major Ukrainian cities in recent weeks while Kyiv has launched a long-awaited counter-offensive to reclaim Russian-occupied territory.

Ukraine said on Wednesday

that its forces had retaken around three square kilometres of territory and advanced in some areas as far as 1.4 kilometres, in the last three days. Fighting was continuing near recaptured villages.

The latest strikes came as the death toll from Tuesday's missile strikes on Kryvyi Rig rose to 12.

— AFP

Blinken to seek to 'responsibly manage' tense ties on rare China trip

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Antony Blinken will seek to reduce the chances of miscalculation on a rare visit to Beijing, officials said.

The State Department confirmed that Blinken will travel this weekend to Beijing on the first trip by a top US diplomat in nearly five years, rescheduling a visit that was scrapped in February.

Ahead of the trip, Blinken spoke by telephone to Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang and stressed "the importance of maintaining open lines of communication to responsibly manage" the relationship, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.

Relations between the world's two largest economies have tanked in recent years in different issues.

Daniel Kritenbrink, the top State Department official for East Asia, said that the United States was "realistic" about what Blinken could achieve.

"We're not going to Beijing with the intent of having some sort of breakthrough or transformation," Kritenbrink told reporters.

Instead, Blinken is coming with a "sincere desire to manage our competition in the most responsible way possible."

The United States hopes the trip "will, at a minimum, reduce the risk of miscalculation so that we do not veer into potential



This combination shows (L)US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and (R) China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang. — AFP

conflict."

US policymakers across party lines have spoken of China as the foremost US competitor, even as President Joe Biden also focuses on countering Russia over its attack of Ukraine.

"We know efforts to shape or reform China over several decades have failed," said Kurt Campbell, who leads Asia policy at the White House.

"We expect China to be around on the world stage for the rest of our lifetimes," he told reporters.

China struck a confrontational tone in a readout of the call with Blinken, saying that Qin had warned that relations between the two countries had faced "new

difficulties and challenges" since the beginning of the year.

"It's clear who is responsible," Qin said, according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

"China has always viewed and managed China-US relations in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation put forward by President Xi Jinping," he added.

Blinken will be the first secretary of state to visit Beijing since a brief 2018 stop by Mike Pompeo.

Biden and Xi met in Bali in November and agreed to try to prevent tensions from soaring out of control, including by sending Blinken to Beijing. — AFP



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz along with German officials attend a press conference on the day they present the national security strategy, in Berlin. — Reuters

Scholz: More world instability prompted new German security strategy

BERLIN: The challenges of facing a more unstable world order, as seen by Russia's war against Ukraine, means Germany's security environment has changed and the country needs to respond, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in presenting a new security plan on Wednesday.

Scholz presented the National Security Strategy, which had previously been adopted by the cabinet after months of deliberations, together with his foreign, interior, finance and defence ministers.

It is Berlin's first ever national security strategy, launched at a moment when the security environment is tense, with Russia's war on Ukraine launched last year plus heightened geopolitical rivalry between China and the US.

"Despite all the changes, it remains the central task of the state to ensure the security of its citizens, without compromise," the chancellor said.

This is no longer confined to defence and the armed forces, or Bundeswehr, "but about the full range of our security," Scholz

stressed.

"Today's Russia is the greatest threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area for the foreseeable future," the more than 70-page paper states.

While the paper acknowledged that "China is a partner, competitor and systemic rival," it also noted that "China is trying in various ways to reshape the existing rules-based international order, is increasingly aggressively claiming regional supremacy, and is repeatedly acting in contradiction to our interests and values."

Germany's National Security Strategy includes diplomacy as well as policing, fire fighting, technical aid organisations, development cooperation, cyber security and the resilience of supply chains. "All these means and instruments must interlock and work together to strengthen our country's security," the chancellor said.

The plan includes national and alliance defence, protection of technical infrastructure, cyber and space security, raw material, energy and food security. — dpa

Change your thinking patterns



Dr Anchan C K

The writer is an international advisor

Everybody’s view of the world is different and it all comes down to the thinking patterns you use in your daily life. If you think life is wonderful you will notice the wonderful things in your life and if you think life is not worth you will find things not good about life. Change your thoughts and you literally change the world you are living in. First, you have to recognise your destructive thinking pattern. Recognising and changing your way of thinking can be a long process depending on what patterns of thinking you employ and how badly you want to change. People can change, do change, and change for the rest of their lives. It can be extremely difficult to focus on the good when, seemingly, bad things are happening in your life. However, you can train your

mind to focus on the good things in your life rather than dwelling on the bad. You see everyone as incapable of doing anything right and your way is the best way to do it For example, “He can’t do it right; you will find a lot of people in life who just don’t think there is a problem so there is no need to change. If this is you then do nothing. If you want to change you must think there is a need and you will start to recognise what things need to change and it usually starts with your perception of life. You tend to make a lot of conclusions without any evidence to back up your conclusions. This can be a really destructive pattern as it can limit you from seeing reality for what it is. This is when you think nothing good will ever happen to you. This can be a deep-seated way of thinking and it is a deep-down inability to believe you are worthy of anything good happening to you e.g. “I’ll never have

TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT YOUR GOALS AND TAKE THE TIME OFTEN TO DO THIS. TAKE TIME EVERY DAY TO THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU WANT TO BE IN LIFE AND SLOWLY BUT SURELY IT HAPPENS

money; I’ve never had it before so I’ll never have it in the future. Everybody’s perception of life is different; therefore, everyone’s reality is different. I don’t live in the same world as you and you don’t live in the same world as me. That might sound like a strange concept to some people, but think about it for a few minutes, it could change the way you see the world. Your new way of thinking to good effect, you will start to notice new types of people enter into your life who can help you reach the goals you have in life, and in turn, you will help them reach their goals, don’t worry about how just now. Take time to think about your goals and take the time often to do this. Take time every day to think about where you want to be in life and slowly but surely it happens. Wishing you all the best

Fake Twitter ‘blondes’ promote UAE climate summit

ROLAND LLOYD PARRY WITH ANUJ CHOPRA

Researchers call them the “American blondes” -- bright-eyed environmentalists tweeting passionately in support of the UAE and its handling of the forthcoming COP28 climate summit. The only problem? They are not real. Ben, Brianna, Emma, Caitlin and Chloe exude a refreshing optimism about the role of the Gulf state and its COP28 chief, oil executive Sultan Al Jaber, in promoting climate action. Their sultry profile shots look like drawings from a fantasy novel -- apparently concocted using an AI-powered picture generator. Their names, locations and environmental credentials do not appear together elsewhere online. Analysts identified these and dozens of other Twitter accounts as being involved in coordinated activity, labelling the tactic as a form of “astroturfing” -- a false grassroots campaign to influence public opinion. The “blonde” accounts, for example, were created within hours of each other in August 2022, according to a digital analysis by Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), a coalition of non-government groups. It said the accounts posted clusters of similar messages nearly simultaneously, including retweets of posts from the UAE Embassy in Washington. A COP28 spokesperson said in an e-mail that the accounts were “generated by outside actors unknown and unconnected to COP28 and are clearly designed to discredit COP28 and the climate process.” They said COP28 had reported activity by the suspect accounts to Twitter and had asked the platform to take “immediate action to stop these activities”. Many of the accounts appeared to have been suspended on Twitter after being flagged by researchers. In May, US and EU lawmakers called for Jaber to step down, saying his position as head of the state-owned oil company ADNOC means a conflict of interest for someone chairing discussions about ending planet-warming carbon emissions. Jaber has the support of COP parties including US climate envoy John Kerry. He has called for rapid development of renewable energy and acknowledged last week that “the phase-down of fossil fuels is inevitable.” The Twitter campaign sought to portray Jaber as committed and capable of fixing the climate crisis. When Romain Ioualalen, a campaigner from Oil Change International, tweeted about the risk that COP28 hosted by the Emirates “slows down the transition away from fossil fuels”, he received several responses from some of the accounts identified as fakes by researchers. — AFP



THOMAS FIREDMAN

The writer is an opinion columnist for NYT

TRUMP HAS CONSISTENTLY TRIED TO DENIGRATE PEOPLE WHO HAVE DEMONSTRATED CHARACTER AND COURAGE, BY LABELING THEM LOSERS AND WEAKLINGS. THIS COMES EASY TO TRUMP BECAUSE HE IS A MAN UTTERLY WITHOUT CHARACTER

Trump thrives in a broken system. He’ll get us there soon

What if Mitch McConnell, at the close of his scalding speech on the Senate floor blaming Donald Trump for the riot that occurred at the Capitol on January 6, had promised to use his every last breath to ensure that Trump was convicted on impeachment charges and could never, ever become president again? What if the influential evangelical leader Robert Jeffress, after Trump was caught on tape explaining that as a TV star he felt entitled to “grab” women in the most intimate places — or after Trump was found liable by a Manhattan jury of having done pretty much just that to E. Jean Carroll — declared that he would lead a campaign to ensure that anyone but Trump was elected in 2024 because Trump was a moral deviant whom Jeffress would not let babysit his two daughters, let alone the country? Where would statements and actions like those have left Kevin McCarthy, his knuckleheads in the House GOP caucus, and other Republicans who now are defending Trump against the Justice Department indictment? Would they be so eager to proclaim Trump’s innocence? Would they be raging against Tuesday’s hearing in Miami? Would they be claiming, falsely, that President Biden was indicting Trump, when they know full well that the president doesn’t have the power to indict anyone? I doubt it. But I know that all of these questions are rhetorical. None of those people have the character to rise to these ethical challenges and take on Trump and what he has done to break our political system. Trump is like a drug dealer who thrives in a broken neighbourhood, getting everyone hooked on his warped values. That is why he is doing everything he can to break our national neighbourhood in two fundamental ways. For starters, Trump has consistently tried to denigrate people who have demonstrated character and courage, by labeling them losers and weaklings. This comes easy to Trump because he is a man utterly without character — devoid of any sense of ethics or loyalty to any value system or person other than himself. And for him, politics is a blood sport in which you bludgeon the other guys and gals — whether they are in your party or not — with smears and nicknames and lies until they get out of your way. Trump debuted this strategy early on with John McCain — a veteran,



Former president Donald Trump greets people during a stop at the Versailles restaurant in the Little Havana neighbourhood in Miami.

a man who never broke in five-plus years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, a man of real character. Do you remember what Trump said about McCain at a family leadership summit in Ames, Iowa, on July 18, 2015? When McCain ran for president, “I supported him,” Trump told the audience. “He lost. He let us down. But he lost. So I never liked him much after that, because I don’t like losers.” When the audience laughed, the moderator, the pollster Frank Luntz, interjected, “But he’s a war hero!” Trump — who wangled a dubious medical deferment to avoid the Vietnam War draft — then responded: “He’s not a war hero. He’s a war hero because he was captured. I like people that weren’t captured.” Later that day, Trump retweeted a web post headlined, “Donald Trump: John McCain Is ‘A Loser.’” So part of the way Trump tries to break our system is to redefine the qualities of a leader — at least in the GOP. A leader is not someone like Liz Cheney or Mitt Romney, people prepared to risk their careers to defend the truth, serve the country and uphold the Constitution. No, a leader is someone like him, someone who is ready to win at any cost — to the country, to the Constitution and to the example we set for our children and our allies. And when that is your definition of leadership, of winning, people of character like McCain, Cheney and Romney are in your way. You need to strip everyone around you of character, and make everything about securing power and money. That is why so many

people who entered Trump’s orbit since 2015 have walked away muddled. And that’s why I knew that all the questions I asked earlier were rhetorical. The second way that Trump is trying to break our system was on display on Tuesday in Miami, where he followed his appearance as a federal criminal defendant with a political meet-and-greet at a Cuban restaurant. There, once again, Trump tried to discredit the rules of the game that would restrain him and his limitless appetite for power for power’s sake. How does he do that? First, he gets everyone around him — and, eventually, the vast majority of those in his party — to stop insisting that Trump abide by ethical norms. His family members and party colleagues have grown adept at running away from reporters’ microphones after every Trump outrage. But precisely because key political allies, church leaders and close family members will not call out Trump for his moral and legal transgressions — which would make his 2024 re-election bid unthinkable and hasten his departure from the political scene — we have to rely solely on the courts to defend the rules of the game. And when that happens, it puts tremendous stress on our judicial system and our democracy itself, because the decision to prosecute or not is always a judgment call. And when those judgment calls have to be rendered at times by judges or prosecutors appointed by Democrats — which is how our system works — it gives Trump and his flock the perfect opening to denounce the whole process as a “witch hunt” — New York Times

Driving deeper into disaster

AIDAN LEWIS AND
KHALID ABDELAZIZ

Shooting their way through truces, Sudan's warring factions have shown the limited leverage the United States, Saudi Arabia and other foreign powers have in ending a two-month conflict that is driving the nation deeper into disaster.

Neither the army nor the paramilitary Rapid Response Forces (RSF) seem far enough backed into a corner to take ceasefire talks in Jeddah seriously, which diplomats partly blame on rival regional powers aligning with different sides.

Bringing more regional players to support talks, such as Egypt, which sees the army as the best bet for a stable neighbour, and the UAE, which has backed the RSF leader in the past, may be key to progress, one US official said.

For now, after almost two months of war, Africa's third biggest nation and its 49 million people — close to 2 million of whom have already fled their homes — is hurtling towards a deeper humanitarian crisis with its own farms at risk of failing and aid unable to reach all those in need after swathes of the capital and the west of Sudan became a war zone.

“Nobody will negotiate in earnest until they feel that the military balance is not moveable any more,” said Rift Valley Institute analyst Magdi El Gizouli. “The internal dynamic of this war is a bit beyond what an external actor can really influence”.

After the latest 24-hour truce expired on Sunday, residents in Khartoum and capital area reported fresh artillery fire and clashes. They said fighting had intensified since early June.

The United States and Saudi Arabia, which lies across the Red Sea from Sudan, have sponsored talks in the Saudi port city of Jeddah. But every temporary truce has been violated so far, even though both sides say they are committed to negotiations and despite US sanctions.

Diplomats with knowledge of the talks say the Jeddah process was faltering partly because key players were absent, including Egypt, which also

AFTER ALMOST TWO MONTHS OF THE WAR, SUDAN IS HURTLING TOWARDS A DEEPER HUMANITARIAN CRISIS WITH ITS OWN FARMS AT RISK OF FAILING AND AID UNABLE TO REACH ALL THOSE IN NEED AFTER SWATHES OF THE CAPITAL AND THE WEST OF SUDAN BECAME A WAR ZONE

has a general-turned-politician at its helm, and the UAE, which has ties to RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti.

A senior US State Department official told reporters existing parties to the talks had considered broader participation, adding that Cairo and Abu Dhabi “do have specific leverage that could be helpful”.

A Cairo-based diplomat said a new African Union-led forum aimed to bind Arab and African states into the process, including Egypt and the UAE, though it was unclear that either country was ready to exert real pressure.

Adding to the overlapping peace initiatives, Kenya's president said on Tuesday that another African grouping within the forum, IGAD, intended to meet Hemedti and army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan in the next 10 days in a bid to stop the war.

Mohamed Mokhtar, a senior adviser to Hemedti, said the RSF supported the Jeddah and AU processes, and that these should be expanded to civilian parties in order to reach a “comprehensive solution”.

Burhan could not be part of any future authority in Sudan, Mokhtar said, and Hemedti, who he said was with his forces on the battlefield, would not have a political role but would continue to lead the RSF.

The army did not immediately respond to questions.

The war threatens to tear the Sudanese state apart and convulse the region four years after the popular uprising that toppled Omar al Bashir brought hopes of democratic change following decades of autocracy, sanctions and civil conflict.

Fighting that erupted from tensions over a plan for a transition to civilian rule has ripped through Khartoum and its adjoining cities of Omdurman and Bahri, as well as hitting the conflict-scarred western region of Darfur, North Kordofan state and other areas.

On the ground in the capital, the absence of authorities is galling, residents said, adding to a sense that those who remain have been abandoned.

— Reuters

PELICAN BRAVES BIPARJOY



A pelican stands at a deserted coastal area in Badin district of Pakistan's Sind province. The weather office has warned of floods as India, Pakistan brace for cyclone. — AFP

Will democracies stand up to Big Brother?

SIMON JOHNSON, DARON
ACEMOGLU, AND SYLVIA
BARMACK

Fiction writers have long imagined scenarios in which every human action is monitored by some malign centralised authority. But now, despite their warnings, we find ourselves careening towards a dystopian future worthy of George Orwell's 1984. The task of assessing how to protect our rights — as consumers, workers, and citizens — has never been more urgent.

One sensible proposal is to limit patents on surveillance technologies to discourage their development and overuse.

All else being equal, this could tilt the development of AI-related technologies away from surveillance applications — at least in the United States and other advanced economies, where patent protections matter, and where venture capitalists will be reluctant to back companies lacking strong intellectual-property rights. But even if such sensible measures are adopted, the world will remain divided between countries with effective safeguards on surveillance and those without them. We therefore also need to consider the legitimate basis for trade between these emergent blocs.

AI capabilities have leapt forward over the past 18 months, and the

RAPID ADVANCES IN AI AND AI-ENHANCED SURVEILLANCE TOOLS HAVE CREATED AN URGENT NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND COORDINATION TO SET SENSIBLE STANDARDS. BUT WITH OPPRESSIVE AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES UNLIKELY TO COOPERATE, THE WORLD'S DEMOCRACIES SHOULD START PREPARING TO PLAY ECONOMIC HARDBALL

pace of further development is unlikely to slow. The public release of ChatGPT in November 2022 was the generative-AI shot heard round the world. But just as important has been the equally rapid increase in governments and corporations' surveillance capabilities.

Since generative AI excels at pattern matching, it has made facial recognition remarkably accurate (though not without some major flaws). And the same general approach can be used to distinguish between “good” and problematic behaviour, based simply on how people move or comport themselves.

Such surveillance technically leads to “higher productivity,” in the sense that it augments an authority's ability to compel people to do what they are supposed to be doing. For a company, this means performing jobs at what management considers to be the highest productivity level.

For a government, it means enforcing the law or otherwise ensuring compliance with those in power.

Unfortunately, a millennium of experience has established that

increased productivity does not necessarily lead to improvements in shared prosperity. Today's AI-powered surveillance allows overbearing managers and authoritarian political leaders to enforce their rules more effectively. But while productivity may increase, most people will not benefit.

This is not just speculation. Corporations are already using AI-enhanced surveillance methods to monitor their employees' every move. Amazon, for example, requires delivery workers to download an app (Mentor) that scores their driving

— supposedly in the name of safety. Some drivers report being tracked even when they are not working.

More broadly, the consultancy Gartner estimates that the share of large employers using digital tools to track their workers has doubled since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, to 60 per cent, and it is expected to reach 70 per cent within the next three years. Although the available evidence suggests that more surveillance is correlated with lower job satisfaction, even many employers who agree that monitoring their employees raises

“ethical concerns” still do it.

True, surveillance technology is not inherently anti-human. On the contrary, it could improve safety (such as by monitoring for active shooters) or convenience. But we must find the right balance between these benefits and privacy, and we must do everything we can to ensure that AI technologies are not biased.

Tackling these issues will require new international norms and cooperation.

Any AI used to track or punish workers should be disclosed, with full transparency about how it makes recommendations. If you are fired because an AI deemed your behaviour problematic, you should be able to contest that decision. Yet, because many of the new AIs are “black boxes” that even their developers do not understand, they automatically limit the scope of due process.

Even in a country as polarised as the US, people are likely to unite in favour of restrictions on surveillance. Everyone from left to right shares a basic concern about being constantly watched, even if their specific fears differ.

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sport



Oman draws with Tajikistan at Cafa Nations Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Oman national football team ended their second match at the Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 with a 1-1 draw against Tajikistan on Wednesday. The match took place at Pakhat Akor Stadium in Tashkent. In a late match in same group, Uzbekistan played against Turkmenistan. The draw gave Oman their first point in group A while Tajikistan raised their tally to two points as they played out a 1-1 against Turkmenistan in

the opener. Although the Red Warriors could not register their first triumph in the event after they finished their opening match with a 3-0 loss against the hosts Uzbekistan on Sunday. In a late match, Uzbekistan played against Turkmenistan. Oman's head coach, Branko Ivankovic began the match with a starting line-up featured from Ibrahim al Mukhaini as a goalie. The defending line comprised from Ahmed al Kaabi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Khalid al Buraiki and Jameel al Yahmadi. The experienced Harib al Saadi monitored the centre alongside Abdullah Fawaz, Zaher al Aghbair



and Salah al Yahyaei. Both strikers Essam al Subhi and Mohsin al Ghassani were in the forward line. Oman team were looking to register their first win and revive their chances to move into the

next level. Oman took the lead in the 14th minute with Salah al Yahyaei converting a penalty into a goal. The opponent Tajikistan found the net in the 44th minute through B V Hanonov to end the first half at 1-1. In the beginning of second half, the referee showed red card for Tajikistan's Tabree Islomov and decided a penalty for Oman. The penalty was saved by the goalie of Tajikistan Yatimov as Mohsin al Ghassani did not convert the ball into a goal. Later, Oman players pressed hard towards scoring the second goal. However, all the attempts could not find the goal as the match finished at 1-1 draw.

Oman will conclude their group match against Turkmenistan on Saturday while the hosts Uzbekistan will face Tajikistan. In the other group, Iran thrashed Afghanistan 6-1 in the opening match on Tuesday while Kyrgyzstan defeated Afghanistan 1-0 in the opener. The Central Asian Football Association (Cafa) Nations Cup 2023 acts as a golden opportunity for Red Warriors to shape their readiness for the forthcoming crucial assignments in AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals and the qualifiers for Asian teams on road to the Fifa World Cup 2026 as well as the AFC Asian Cup 2027.

Faisal, Schiller return to international GT Open

HUNGARY: After missing the second round of the series in Spa, Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and German team-mate Fabian Schiller return to 2023 International GT Open action at the Hungaroring in Hungary this weekend. The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes AMG GT3 duo led the prestigious endurance championship by two points after claiming a race win and a second place at round one in Portugal. With the Belgian event not part of their diverse 2023 racing programme, the duo arrive in Hungary holding fourth place in the championship behind the British duo of Charlie Fagg and Samuel de Haan, Argentina's Marcos Siebert and Mexican team-mate Diego Manchaca and Eastalent Racing's Simon Reicher and Christopher Haase. Al Zubair said: "I am really looking forward to this weekend's round of the International GT Open near Budapest. I believe that Fabian and I, along with the Getspeed car, have a great package and will be fighting for the win in both races, hopefully. "The first round of GT Open was great for us. We did miss the second round, as we are not doing



the full championship. Budapest is a track I have been on before and so has Fabi and we feel quite confident on that track with the Mercedes. Hopefully, it will be a good round." International GT Open drivers will take to the famous circuit in Mogyoród for a pair of one-hour

free practice sessions on Friday from 10.04hrs and 15.02hrs, respectively. The first 30-minute qualifying session takes centre stage at 09.45hrs on Saturday morning and precedes the opening 70-minute race that gets underway with a rolling start from 14.25hrs.

Q2 takes place at a similar time on Sunday morning and is followed by a shorter second one-hour race, starting at 14.00hrs. **2023 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN - POSITIONS AFTER ROUND TWO:** 1. Charlie Fagg/Samuel de Haan 50pts 2. Marcos Siebert/Diego Manchaca 45pts 3. Christopher Haase/Simon Reicher 42pts 4. Al-Faisal Al Zubair/Fabian Schiller 27pts, etc



Oman Paralympic Sailing team all set for Berlin 2023

Muscat: The Oman Paralympic Sailing team will join more than 7,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from 190 countries in Berlin, Germany, for the 16th Special Olympics World Games, being held from 17-25 June. Mohammed al Wahaibi and Saleh al Raisi will represent Oman in the RS Toura dinghy as part of a 32-strong fleet. The team will be coaching by Ali al Shuhaimi, Al Mouj Sailing Manager.

Speaking ahead of the team's departure for Germany, Ali al Shuhaimi said, "We are very proud to continue supporting the Special Olympics World Games and participate for the first time under the SailFree banner. Oman Sail has made sailing accessible for everyone in communities across Oman and this is a chance to join sailors from around the world in celebrating our joy for a life on the water while representing Oman at the world's largest sports movement for people with intellectual disabilities."

Sailing joins 25 other disciplines for nine days of inspiring



competition which proves sport is accessible for all and is capable of achieving greater recognition and social participation of people with intellectual disabilities in society.

Racing will be held at the Seglerhaus am Wannsee club, the second oldest sailing club in Germany. The competition will see sailors with the same abilities compete in the Divisioning stage, scheduled for the first two days. The leading sailors will

then advance to the Preliminary Competition where the winners over those two days will qualify for the final medal races on Saturday 24 June.

The Special Olympics is the world's largest sports movement for people with intellectual disabilities, with more than 5 million athletes in 174 countries, and is officially recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Held every

two years, the Special Olympics World Games has been changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities since being first held in Chicago, USA, in 1968. As well as sport, the Special Olympics World Games also supports people with intellectual disabilities through health, education, and skills development programmes.

Established in 2008, Oman Sail is an equal opportunity sailing programme that uses the power of sport to contribute to the long-term social and economic development of Oman. Inspiring a new generation to discover sailing, Oman Sail has introduced thousands of young Omani men and women to sailing, competed in national, regional, and international championships, and launched the region's first Para Sailing programme, SailFree, in 2019. Oman Sail's coaches have also adopted the training methods used in sailing to teach valuable life skills, create career opportunities, and give back to communities across the nation.



Oman Beach Handball team gearing up for Bali World Beach Games

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Oman Beach Handball team players will report back to their training sessions again as they will have an internal preparatory camp in Sur during June 17 to 22. The team players were busy for many days in their intensive domestic preparatory camp which started on June 3 in Muscat under supervision of the long serving head coach Hamoud al Hasani. The training sessions took place in the sand courts at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex during evening session.

The ongoing training sessions are part of preparation for crucial events including: World Beach Games, Bali 2023 during August 5 to 12, under Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC), Men's Beach Handball World Championships in June 2024 in Spain under the International Handball Federation (IHF).

As per the approved preparatory programme by Oman Handball Association (OHA), the handball beach team players will have a short camp on June 25 and 26 in Muscat. Then, the players will have a break for Eid holidays. Later, the squad will report back to the training sessions in beginning of July at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher before moving to Al Musannah for another comprehensive camp during July 15 to 21.

The last domestic camp will be in Bausher from July 23 until 27, ahead of travelling for abroad camp in Thailand or Vietnam, to be confirmed soon, then the team will head off to Bali city for a short camp ahead of the ANOC Games start.

During the underway local training camps, the coaching staff



led by coach Hamoud al Hasani and assisted by the former player Jaber al Balushi worked hard to shape the players readiness for the closest event represented by ANOC Games. The daily technical practices focused in different technical and tactical areas.

As many as 16 top players were opted by the head coach. The selected squad comprised many top experienced players who are ready and confident in playing at the world class events. The squad: Nasr al Tamtami, Asad al Hasani, Abdulhakeem al Siyabi, Muhanad al Zarafi, Mahdi al Sulaimani, Said al Hasani, Nawaf al Hasani, Bashar al Hina, Yasser al Harthi, Mohammed al Balushi, Hudhifa al Siyabi, Osama al Kasbi, Ahmed al Hina, Azzan al Maashari, Hani al Dughaishi and Ahmed al Ghailani.

Oman beach handball team last presence was in the Asian Men's and Women's Beach Handball Championship, which concluded on March in Bali city, Indonesia. Coach Hamoud al Hasani's men had delivered an impressive show and Oman had finished their campaign in the Asian event as runners-up. In the final clash, Oman lost the game 2-0 against Qatar while Iran team claimed the bronze medals and Vietnam finished in fourth place.

MoCIIP snatch Fellowship Fund League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) achieved successful conclusion at the seventh football championship of the Fellowship Fund League for the ministry's employees. The thrilling tournament concluded on Tuesday, witnessed the industry team's remarkable victory, earning the coveted championship title.

Under the esteemed auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef, the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in presence of Dr Saleh bin Said bin Salim Masan, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

, as well as presence of Pankaj Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion , alongside supporting companies.

The Fellowship Fund League



witnessed participation from a total of eight teams, divided into two groups. The first group comprised the Minister's Office, Trade, Investment Services Center, and the General Directorate of Standards and Metrology. The second group included the Industry, Administrative, and

Financial Affairs, Al Rustaq and Nizwa management teams, and the planning team. The tournament kicked off in mid-May and all matches were held at the sub-stadium of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The pinnacle of the tournament saw the industry team claim

the championship title after a nail-biting encounter with the Administrative and Financial Affairs team. Following an intense match that ended in a goalless draw, the industry team triumphed over their opponents through a series of penalty kicks. The Administrative and Financial Affairs team demonstrated exceptional skill and determination throughout the competition, securing the runner-up position.

In an equally fierce battle for third place, the Minister's Office team secured victory by defeating the Investment Services Center team by a thrilling penalty shootout.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion commends all the teams for their exceptional sportsmanship and unwavering commitment throughout the Fellowship Fund League. This tournament not only fosters camaraderie and teamwork among the ministry's employees but also promotes a healthy and active lifestyle.

Oman Cricket to vie for two ICC Qualifier in Zimbabwe

MUSCAT:As the national team prepares for their biggest test ever, Khimji is filled with pride as he speaks about the team's journey to the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier, which will be played in Zimbabwe from June 18-July 9.

Omani team face a challenging hurdle in their quest to make it to their first ICC Cricket World Cup later this year in India.

They along with nine other nations vie for the two available slots in Zimbabwe. Besides Oman, the other teams in Group B are World Cup winners Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and the UAE. Group A comprises Zimbabwe, Netherlands, two-time winners West Indies, United States and Nepal.

He has seen the highs and lows of Oman Cricket over the past many decades. Taking over a legacy left by Late Kanak Khimji, first president of Oman Cricket, he has been the fulcrum around which the sport has grown in the Sultanate of Oman. Today, Pankaj Khimji, the president of Oman Cricket (OC), is one of the most respected administrators in world cricket.

Khimji said: "Today, it is a new Oman. It is no longer the squad of 2005 and 2009 (the previous occasions when Oman competed in the World Cup Qualifier) when the players faced totally a new ball game while playing abroad as we did not even have a turf pitch then.



"We are now a seasoned team and one of the most respected teams among the Associate nations. Since our maiden qualification for the 2016 T20

World Cup in 2015, our boys haven't looked back. Today, there isn't any team we haven't defeated in the Associate world."

Khimji, who is also the Asian

Cricket Council (ACC) vice-president, said: "Our team is in good hands under Duleep Mendis.

The coaching staff of Avishkar

Salvi [bowling coach] and Evert Laubscher [assistant coach] have worked hard with Duleep to get our boys ready for this important mission.

"We have got the blessings of our patron-in-chief, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said, and the constant support of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. We successfully hosted the ICC T20 World Cup in 2021 and then the Legends Super League. We have some of the best facilities and turf ground among Associate nations and all these developments have kept cricket in focus. We now hope the boys will deliver at the big stage and complete a successful mission."

Australia coach wants ‘great performance’ to stop Messi



Argentina's Lionel Messi with teammates during training. – Reuters



Australia coach Graham Arnold during a press conference in Beijing. – Reuters

BEIJING: Australia said on Wednesday they have maximum respect for Lionel Messi but will do everything they can to stop him when they meet Argentina in a Beijing friendly.

The two sides clash in the Chinese capital on Thursday in a re-run of their last-16 clash at the World Cup, where skipper Messi scored and terrorised the Socceroos in a 2-1 win.

Messi and Argentina went on to win the World Cup. “Regarding Lionel Messi, how could you not respect someone who’s done what he’s done in football?” Australia coach Graham Arnold told reporters at the 68,000-capacity Workers’ Stadium.

“Of course we respect him, but at the same time we’re looking to stop him and make sure our focus is on our performance, make

sure that we get out there and play right, and put in a great performance against the world champions.”

The 35-year-old Messi said last week that he will join MLS side Inter Miami following the end of his two-year deal with Paris Saint-Germain.

Tickets for Thursday’s game have sold out rapidly despite soaring prices, with Chinese fans desperate to see Messi in the flesh.

Arnold, who said Australia had “learned lessons” from their loss to Argentina in Qatar last winter, has taken a young squad to China after numerous players were ruled out with injury.

“We have a younger squad of players here, up-and-coming players who we’re looking at over the next four years to (see if we) can qualify for the next World Cup,” he said. — AFP



Milner signs for Brighton after leaving Liverpool

BRIGHTON: Experienced midfielder James Milner will join Brighton & Hove Albion as a free agent next month following his successful eight-year spell at Liverpool, the two Premier League clubs announced on Wednesday.

Brighton said the 37-year-old has signed a one-year deal with the south-coast club after a trophy-laden spell with Liverpool where he won the Champions League, the Premier League, the FA Cup and League Cup in 332 appearances for the club.

Brighton will be playing in Europe for the first time after they finished sixth to qualify for the Europa League

and the club’s technical director David Weir said the Milner’s big stage knowledge would come in handy.

“We are delighted that James has agreed to join us after a hugely successful period at Liverpool. His experience speaks for itself with the amount of games he has played and the trophies

he has won throughout a decorated career,” Weir said.

“These games include European competition, which will be of huge value to us as we embark on our first season in Europe.”

Milner is one of the ever-present players in England’s top flight having made his debut with Leeds United in 2002 as a 16-year-old.

With 619 Premier League appearances, he is third on the all-time appearances list behind Gareth Barry (652) and Ryan Giggs (632). — Reuters

Alba relishing surprise return to Spain squad

ENSCHDEDE, Netherlands: Jordi Alba’s career might be at a crossroads after being released by Barcelona but he is relishing his surprise return to the Spain squad for this week’s Nations League finals.

The 34-year-old full back, who has 91 caps, last played for Spain at the World Cup in Qatar and his international career looked at an end after he was left out for new coach Luis de la Fuente’s first two games in charge in March.

“The decision I make about my future will not depend on whether or not I can come to the Spanish team. The coach has seen what I can do and picked me and I see myself capable of continuing for more years. It

is always a delight to be here with the national side,” Alba told a press conference on Wednesday.

“I value this call-up. I’ve come to help and I’m convinced that things will go well.”

Spain play Italy in Enschede on Thursday in the second semi-final, preceded by Wednesday’s clash between the Netherlands, who are hosting the four-team tournament, and Croatia in Rotterdam.

“What I see is very positive. From within we are very united. It is a very nice tournament to play and hopefully we can win it,” Alba added.

Alba skirted questions about his next club



destination.

“As you know I don’t have a team and I’m not worried about being here without a team. It is a decision that I have to make with my family,” he added.

Alba played less than half Barcelona’s league games this season, leading to the suggestion he was nudged out at the financially-troubled club despite 11 successful seasons that which included six La Liga titles and a Champions League victory in 2015.

Spanish media reported he had been approached about a potential move to Major League Soccer to join Lionel Messi at Inter Miami. Alba also been linked with Atletico Madrid, Inter Milan and clubs in Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

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Oman forges valuable alliances with diverse economies during G20 Summit

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Sultanate of Oman's participation in the G20 Summit will reflect positively on the country's economy, according to Pankaj Khimji, leader of the Secretariat of the Sultanate of Oman for the meetings of the Group of Twenty and Advisor to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

During a press conference to announce the updates of Oman's role in the G20 summit, Khimji shared that Oman's participation in the conference has allowed for unprecedented networking opportunities with diverse economies that will result in forging valuable alliances aligning with the country's sustainable goals.

The Sultanate of Oman, in addition to nine other countries,



were invited to participate in the 2023 summit hosted by India for the first time.

The forum, known as the Group of Twenty, aims to address global economic issues, and comprises 19 member states and the European Union.

G20 members account for more than 80 per cent of global GDP, 75 per cent of international trade, and 60 per cent of global population.

The theme of this year's forum is 'One Earth One Family One Future', and aims to promote inclusivity through the summit's two tracks: the Sherpa track, which addresses a diverse range of topics, and the financial track which targets global macroeconomic concerns.

Leader of the financial track and Director General of the Macro Fiscal Unit at the Finance Ministry,

Dr Salim al Jahwari, shared how the theme of inclusivity emerged during work group discussions.

According to Al Jahwari, working groups such as the financial and economic group framework emphasised the topic of security, in terms of food and shelter.

Discussing how climate change affects food security and what can be done about it, and shelter security and creating inclusive sustainable cities.

Additionally, Al Jahwari delved into the topic of financial inclusivity and how multilateral institutions can enhance their performance. According to the press conference, the Sultanate of Oman represented by over nine government entities, has participated in over 80 meetings thus far. Ministerial-level meetings are expected to take place this August, leading up to the final summit in September.

CMA:Virtual assets service providers required to register first



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued Decision 35/2023 setting out guidelines for the 'Registration of Virtual Assets Services Providers (VASPs) and Implementation of Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Financing Terrorism'.

According to the decision, registration is a prerequisite for issuance of the regulatory framework for licensing, supervision and regulation of virtual assets services providers in the Sultanate of Oman, which is currently under preparation in collaboration with a consultant.

The instructions were issued to register VASPs to obligate them to comply with AML/CFT requirements. Virtual assets refer to any digital representation of value that can be digitally traded, transferred or used for payment and investment.

The decision emphasised that VASPs must adjust their situation within three months from the date of effect of the decision. The instructions stipulate that any person can only carry out the virtual assets activity in Oman after registration with the CMA.

The instructions comprise the activities of virtual assets services providers, registration requirements and processes, customer risk assessment procedures, products and services etc.

They emphasised on putting in place internal procedures and policies, suspicious transaction reporting, providing information for the National Centre for Financial Information as well as provisions for transfer of virtual assets and precautionary measures prior to transferring.

The decision obliged the VASPs who are legal persons incorporated in the Sultanate of Oman and the natural persons who have place of business in Oman and VASPs who are legal or natural persons who offer or render virtual assets service in the Sultanate of Oman to register with the CMA and explained the method of application for registration and the required documents and statements.

Oman to supply up to 1.5 mtpa of LNG to Bangladesh from 2026



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Sultanate of Oman will supply liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Bangladesh starting from 2026 under a new Sale and Purchase Agreement (SPA) to be signed on June 19, according to a report.

Under the new agreement, Oman will supply an additional 0.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) to 1.5 mtpa of LNG to Bangladesh's state-owned PetroBangla per year from 2026 for the next 15 years, the Business Standard reports.

The LNG will be sourced from Oman's natural gas fields and exported to Bangladesh via LNG carriers. The deal is expected to help meet Bangladesh's growing demand for energy and support its economic growth.

Currently around 20 per cent of gas demand in Bangladesh is met by LNG, which is purchased on international spot markets.

OMAN HAS BEEN SEEKING TO INCREASE ITS LNG EXPORTS, AND THIS AGREEMENT WITH BANGLADESH IS A SIGNIFICANT STEP TOWARDS ACHIEVING THIS GOAL.

The agreement comes after PetroBangla recently signed a 15-year supply deal for LNG with QatarEnergy for 1.8 mtpa starting also in 2026.

At present, Bangladesh has a 15-year import deal with Qatar for 2.5 mtpa of LNG and a ten-year import deal with Oman's OQ Trading for 1.5 mtpa.

This new deal is part of Oman's efforts to diversify its economy and expand its international trade. Oman has been seeking to increase its LNG exports, and this agreement with Bangladesh is a significant step towards achieving this goal.

The country has already signed similar agreements with other countries.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Oman's first chip testing lab is now fully operational

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

In a further boost for Oman's nascent semiconductor sector, an international firm behind the recent unveiling of the first indigenously designed integrated chips (IC), says it now brought into operation the country's first full-equipped IC testing lab.

GS Micro Electronics (GSME), a global leader in semiconductor and microelectronics innovation, has announced that its local affiliate GSME Oman has now put in place a modern lab facility to help drive the growth of Omani talent in this lucrative global industry.

"GSME's state-of-the-art 2200 sq. ft lab in Muscat Oman's office is now fully operational," GSME Oman said in a post. "The lab is nicely equipped with the most advanced equipment needed to test and verify Integrated Circuits designed by the company. GSME is ensuring to train, empower and facilitate its Omani design team to be fully independent," it further added.

Earlier this month, Oman took the wraps off a pair of integrated chips wholly designed by all-Omani team – a ground-breaking first for the country.

Dubbed 'Oman-1' and 'Oman-2', the chips were unveiled at a grand event attended by



top officials of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology as well as Ministry of Labour.

The pair of chips were despatched to labs of the Taiwan Semiconductor Industry Company in Taiwan, a global semiconductor manufacturing powerhouse, for testing and validation in preparation for their potential commercialisation.

Their development in Oman represents one of the early successes of the National Programme for the Digital Economy – an initiative spearheaded by the Finance Ministry in collaboration with stakeholder ministries and government bodies.

California-based GSME is a global provider of customisable silicon design, complete

manufacturing operations, and comprehensive quality services for IC design companies.

A year ago, the company's local affiliate, the Semiconductor Development and Investment Company (SDIC), signed an agreement with the Ministry of Labour, as well as the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, to support the establishment of Oman's first project centring on the design and manufacture of semiconductors. T

hat yearlong effort, while paying off with the launch of Oman's first locally designed chips, is also paving the ground for the country's eventual break into the global semiconductor manufacturing industry, currently worth an estimated \$600 billion.

Heritage luxury brand Shama Perfumes opens first GCC flagship store in Muscat

MUSCAT: Shama Perfumes, a heritage fragrance brand from India with over 5 decades of experience, is proud to announce the launch of its first-ever GCC region boutique store in the vibrant city of Muscat, Oman. The new boutique will serve as a sanctuary where the art of perfumery pays homage to the nation's heritage.

With an unwavering commitment to crafting extraordinary fragrances that captivate the senses and transcend boundaries, Shama Perfumes extends a warm invitation to discerning connoisseurs, inviting them on an extraordinary journey of olfactory excellence that surpasses all others.

Nestled in Galleria Mall Opera, Royal Opera House, Muscat, Shama Perfume's exquisite store stands as a testament to the brand's profound connection to Oman's majestic traditions, rich cultural heritage, and loyal clientele.

The launch of Shama Perfumes' flagship store in Muscat marks a significant milestone for the brand as they continue to expand their presence across the GCC and



share their passion for oud and perfumes with a wider audience. Shama is also proud to house its accessible mainline collection,

inviting all to become fragrance connoisseurs.

Upon stepping into the store, guests are encapsulated

in a symphony of captivating fragrances emanating from Shama Perfumery's exquisite offerings.

From alluring agarwood sticks to potent oud concoctions, the Muscat boutique immerses all in a refined and sensorial experience. The boutique seamlessly blends Omani and Indian design influences resulting in a harmonious blend of Rajasthani arches, rich textures, and intricate architectural details that echo Muscat's captivating landscape.

At the heart of the store lies a mesmerising 20-ft scent library, with customized displays of an exquisite collection with an apothecary-like experience and an opulent VIP room.

Every detail, from fabrics and decorative lights to repurposed antique decanters, elevates the rich craftsmanship, creating a story-filled space at Shama Perfumes where guests are invited to discover the heritage of the brand as described by Principal Designer- Saniya Kantawala from SKD Studio.

"Shama Perfumes is dedicated to making extraordinary fragrances that are captivating

and unique. We believe that scents have the power to make you feel things and bring back memories.

We care-fully select the best ingredients from all over the world and blend them in a special way to create unique fragrances. Our goal is to make scents that stay with you and make you feel special.

"Our flagship store in Muscat is designed to transport visitors to a world of luxury and refinement, and yet the stunning interiors are sure to make you feel at home, where we hope to welcome all our guests like family with the utmost hospitality.

We invite our esteemed patrons and fragrance enthusiasts to embark on a sublime sensory experience," Salman Shama, Managing Director of Shama Perfumes, said. Visit the Shama Perfumes boutique in Muscat and be captivated by the allure of all their oud, fragrances and bespoke service guided by experts.

Immerse yourself in a world of scented wonders and discover the true artistry behind the creation of unforgettable perfumes.

Actility announces ModSoft as premium network partner in Oman

MUSCAT: Actility, a global leader in IoT connectivity solutions, has announced that Modern Software (ModSoft), an end-to-end IT and telecom solutions provider, has become its Premium Network Partner in Oman.

Actility and ModSoft are jointly propelling the digital transformation journey of their clients to forge a unique innovation ecosystem in Oman.

Actility selected ModSoft based on its demonstrated expertise in collaborating with major service providers to nurture the Internet of Things (IoT) ecosystem, which is centred on a value chain of connections of things, data, processes, and people.

Actility's Premium Network Partners stand out as value-added resellers, excelling in consultancy, system integration, network, and support. ModSoft, already a partner of Actility, has been instrumental in providing advice and technology, thereby facilitating IoT business models.

The company has made a name for itself as an IT & Telecom solutions provider, offering its customers a wealth of expertise and further strengthening its authority in the Oman market for Low Power Wide Area Networks (LPWAN).

As a Premium Network Partner, ModSoft has knowledge about ThingPark Wireless, a modular, multi-technology (LTE-M, NB-IoT, and LoRaWAN), secure and scalable IoT Platform, and ThingPark X IoT Flow.

Mohammed Habeebuddin, Managing Director of ModSoft, says "This partnership with Actility reaffirms our commitment to digital innovation and underscores our determination to bring world-class IoT network solutions to our customers in Oman" "We are excited to embark on this journey with ModSoft, aiming for a mutually beneficial and enduring partnership," says Olivier Hersent, Actility's CEO.

Ahlibank receives Bank Dhofar's confirmation of acquisition offer

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Ahlibank SAOG says it has received a written note from Bank Dhofar confirming that its Board of Directors has offered to acquire the entire issued share capital of the former, pursuant to Takeover and Acquisitions regulations.

The publicly traded lender said in a filing that its Board of Directors is currently waiting to receive the official Offer Document from Bank Dhofar, which must first be approved by the regulatory authorities.

"The Board of Directors is carefully reviewing the terms of the offer and considering whether they should invite other potential buyers to make



a competing offer," ahlibank said in its filing.

It also noted that consortium led by Oman International Development & Investment SAOG (Ominvest) had previously expressed its intention to acquire up to 75 per cent of Ahlibank's shares in a letter received on May 25, 2023.

"Ahlibank is working closely with the regulatory authorities to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations for takeovers and acquisitions," it further stated.

MoSD recognises Oman Arab Bank for its inclusive and diverse policies

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) recognises Oman Arab Bank (OAB) for fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace environment, particularly in integrating staff members with disabilities.

This achievement reflects OAB's human resources policies, which prioritise inclusivity and forward-thinking practices. The bank was commended at 'Be with Us for Them' event, which aligns with the Ministry's efforts to do more for people with disabilities.

Esam al Busaidy, Head of HR at Oman Arab Bank, said: "We harmonise our human resources policies by seamlessly integrating employees with disabilities at our workplace. This weaves a thread of inclusivity and diversity, ultimately creating a vibrant workplace where barriers crumble and extraordinary talents flourish."



The efforts of the bank go hand in hand with a wider vision for the country to guarantee the rights of people with disabilities.

Oman is a signatory member of the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD), an international human

rights treaty adopted in 2006 ensuring people with all types of disabilities enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as actively supporting the Sustainable Development Goals – both of which are reflected in the aims of Oman Vision 2040.

Bank Nizwa leverages digital transformation to empower staff

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading Islamic bank, has demonstrated its commitment to the development of its talented staff by introducing a new Learning Management System (LMS) powered by Disprz.

This state-of-the-art platform, with over 100,000 courses, is the latest initiative in the bank's ongoing efforts to provide its employees with comprehensive learning opportunities.

By investing in the growth and enhancement of its workforce, Bank Nizwa aims to nurture a culture of continuous learning and professional development, ensuring that its staff remains at the forefront of the ever-evolving banking industry.

The introduction of the LMS is an important milestone in the bank's journey towards empowering its employees with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in their roles.

Equipped with advanced digital tools, LMS offers a seamless and convenient way for Bank Nizwa's staff to upgrade their capabilities and stay ahead in their careers.

"We are thrilled to introduce our new Learning Management System. This platform represents a significant investment in our employees' professional growth, aligning with Bank Nizwa's culture of continuous learning and excellence. By leveraging state-of-the-art digital tools and



partnering with Disprz, we are equipping our talented staff with the resources they need to excel in their roles and deliver exceptional services to our customers," said Haifa al Lawati, Assistant General

Manager of Human Resources at Bank Nizwa.

"We believe that investing in employees' skills and knowledge is a key driver of success and we are confident that the new LMS

will empower our workforce to reach new heights.

Bank Nizwa remains dedicated to maintain its position as a leader in the industry and this advanced learning platform is another step forward in our digital transformation journey. We are excited about the possibilities it holds and the positive impact it will have on our employees' careers and our overall organisational growth," she added.

The platform features a vast library of self-paced as well as instructor-led courses, videos and interactive content, enabling Bank Nizwa employees to develop new skills and expand their knowledge in various fields.

The LMS, equipped with advanced digital tools, and designed to provide a comprehensive range of learning opportunities. Its modern and intuitive user interface, combined with an advanced tracking and reporting mechanism, allows employees to track their progress and assess their performance effectively.

The system will be accessible to all Bank Nizwa employees, empowering them to access training programmes from anywhere and at any time. This flexibility allows employees to balance their work and learning commitments effectively, ensuring continuous improvement.



Pact signed to maximise local content and support SMEs

MUSCAT: The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) signed yesterday a cooperation agreement with the aim of supporting the entrepreneurship sector, and providing facilities and incentives through ICV programmes in the Authority and its subsidiaries.

The cooperation agreement includes launching a financing product managed by the Authority, benefiting small and medium enterprises that have contracts (tenders, purchases or business opportunities) by the agency's subsidiaries, as they are financed by 80 per cent of the contract value and a maximum of RO 250,000.

In order to achieve the objectives of the financing product, the Authority has set a set of conditions for submitting a financing application, including passing the Entrepreneur Readiness Programme, which is an intensive training programme that aims to develop knowledge and entrepreneurial skills to match the rapid changes in the field of entrepreneurship.

This is also to enhance technical and technical



practices that contribute to the sustainability of projects, whether in the stage of incorporation, project development, or crisis management that may have a direct or indirect impact on the continuity of project efficiency.

Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of SMEDA, said the programme is an opportunity to strengthen the Authority's strategic partnership with the Oman Investment Authority and to continue providing incentives and facilities to owners of small and medium enterprises through

local value programmes through contracts, tenders and business opportunities for companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority.

This reflects the agency's commitment to its active role in sustaining the activity of small and medium enterprises, and enhancing their sustainability and contributions to the national economy.

For his part, Shaikh Nasser bin Sulaiman al Harthy, Vice-President of the Oman Investment Authority for

Operations, said: "The programme comes in line with the royal directives maximising local commerce, contributing to efforts to localise local industries, and strengthening the role of small and medium enterprises in developing the national economy, as well as encouraging services."

This is also for the benefits of national products by enhancing its presence in the markets instead of importing from abroad, and this in turn will contribute to the efforts of the agency and its companies in empowering the private sector and supporting the national economy."

The cooperation agreement also included the allocation of business opportunities for SMEs through the In-Country Value programmes for its subsidiaries, and the provision of information and data in the field of the future needs of industries, supplies and related services that can be localised or developed locally.

This will provide greater opportunities for SMEs to compete and obtain wide business opportunities, and create direct and indirect job opportunities for the national workforce. — ONA

MSX attends key London forum on GCC financial markets

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) is actively participating in the second edition of a leading annual conference focusing on financial markets in the Gulf.

The five-day long forum, which concludes in London tomorrow, has brought together key players from the Gulf financial markets, including senior officials and representatives from stock exchanges across the GCC states.

The event has also attracted international investors, policymakers, and stakeholders from the Middle East, representing both public and private sectors.

The primary objective of the conference is to foster collaboration and partnerships between Gulf stock exchanges and global investors while facilitating access to investment opportunities in the region.

It will also delve into crucial developments, challenges, and regulatory advancements shaping the future of financial markets.

The agenda covers a wide range of topics, including the growth of financial markets, reforms, strategies for economic diversification, and sustainable investments that support the transition to a more sustainable economy.



Haitham bin Salem al Salmi (pictured), CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, emphasised the continuous commitment of the MSX to attract foreign investments and strengthen global partnerships.

He described the conference as an opportunity to address the most critical challenges and opportunities faced by Gulf stock markets, exchange valuable experiences and information, engage with multinational investors, institutions, and companies, understand their needs and requirements, and showcase tailored offers and services to meet those needs.

Al Salmi highlighted the significant transformations and advancements witnessed by Gulf stock exchanges in recent years. He emphasised their ongoing efforts to enhance their global standing and implement new policies and procedures aimed at bolstering confidence in financial markets and attracting increased investments.

Oman Cement appoints United Securities to advise on stake acquisition

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Oman Cement Company SAOG (OCC) says it has appointed well-known Omani investment management firm United Securities LLC to provide advisory services on the proposal by Abra Holdings Limited to acquire a biggest stake in the Omani cement manufacturer.

Oman Cement said in a regulatory filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that it had received an offer to acquire an additional stake of up to 15.52 per cent in the company.

"Following a thorough evaluation of the Offer Document, the Board of Directors of OCC has taken significant steps to ensure transparency and provide valuable information to shareholders," Oman Cement said.

"As part of this process, the board has appointed United Securities LLC as an independent advisor to prepare a comprehensive report on the financial



fairness of Abra Holdings Limited's offer, in accordance with Article 32 of the Takeover Regulations.

A publicly traded company, Oman Cement also shared documents that, it said, "are vital for shareholders to assess the offer from Abra Holdings Limited".

It included the Offer Document, outlining the terms and conditions of the proposed acquisition by Abra Holdings Limited. Also included in the annexes was a report by Oman Cement's board, providing insights

into the offer and its potential impact on the company.

Additionally, Oman Cement attached the expert opinion of independent advisor United Securities, which had conducted an "impartial assessment of the financial fairness of Abra Holdings Limited's offer.

Finally, an Offer Acceptance Form was enclosed for shareholders to either accept or reject the offer. "OCC encourages all shareholders to carefully review these materials, which are attached to this press release. The provided information will enable shareholders to make informed decisions regarding the offer from Abra Holdings Limited," Oman Cement in conclusion.

Earlier this month, Abra Holdings Ltd (Abra), which owns the stake of Huaxin Cement in Oman Cement Company, had announced a public offer to acquire an additional 15.42 per cent of the issued share capital of the latter, a move that would increase the former's stake in OCC to 75.0 per cent.

Oman to supply up to 1.5 mtpa of LNG to Bangladesh from 2026

FROM PAGE 13

This include India, South Korea and Japan.

For Bangladesh, the deal is expected to help reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels and promote the use of cleaner energy sources.

For Bangladesh, the deal is expected to help reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels and promote the use of

cleaner energy sources.

Bangladesh has been experiencing rapid economic growth in recent years, and its energy demand is expected to continue to grow in the coming years. The country has been investing in renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, but these sources currently make up a small fraction of its energy mix.

Moody's upgrades OETC outlook to Ba2/positive

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

Moody's Ratings has recently published a new statement on its website to reflect on the upgrade of the Oman Electricity Transmission Company's (OETC) rating from (Ba3) to (Ba2) with a positive outlook, which reflects the positive financial performance and position of the company in the market.

Moody's view OETC as a government-related issuer (GRI) whose Ba2 corporate family rating (CFR) reflects the high level of dependence and high level

of support from the government of Oman.

Their view is supported and influenced by OETC's strong business profile, which will remain commensurate with the rating under Price Control 6.

It also sheds light on OETC's dominant market position as the natural monopoly national transmission system operator within a supportive regulatory framework with a low business risk profile of its electricity transmission activities. Credit ratings are an important indicator of the company's financial health and stability.



This rating upgrade reflects Moody's view of OETC's consistent track record of prudent financial management.

The OETC's new rating increases the confidence of different stakeholders including investors and financial institutions

and improves the company's reputation at the global and regional levels, leading to secured funding plans and higher profitability.

Furthermore, Fitch Ratings has upgraded OETC's rating from (BB) to (BB+) with a stable outlook based on the enhancement of the company's financial performance and position in the market.

The company reaffirms its commitment to enhancing its performance and attaining further achievement to contribute to the development of different sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

OETC, member of Nama

Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity in the Sultanate of Oman's network, where electricity is transferred from production stations to distributed load centres in all governorates of Oman, and the transmission network operates at a voltage of 132 kV and above, to cover most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or in the south.

In addition, OETC manages the interconnection lines between the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf interconnection network with a voltage of 220 kV.

Iran enjoys a boom in tourism



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

The Iranian government is working to enhance its tourism programmes to support a rebound of visitor inflows to levels prevailing in 2019, before the pandemic. These efforts are also targeted at citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

We have seen many Omanis heading to Iran in recent years for various purposes, including medical treatment, trade, and pilgrimages.

There is no entry visa for Omani citizens with Oman Air, SalamAir and some Iranian airlines promoting direct travel

between the two countries. This is what I witnessed during my last trip to Iran via SalamAir.

The International World Tourism Organization indicates that Iran received over 4.1 million foreign tourists in 2022, which was 55 per cent lower than the 2019 peak of 9.1 million tourists just before the outbreak of the pandemic. Local tourists are not accounted for in this tally, but are an important component of tourist movement inside the country. Foreign tourists are also impacted by an economic boycott waged by the US and a number of Western countries, but foreigners from the West typically use other airlines to travel to Iran.

Everyone knows that Iran is one of the active countries in the tourism sector as a result of its cultural, historical, archaeological heritage, natural geographical diversity and stunning scenery.

The presence of health institutions and hospitals has led to an increase in arrivals into Iran.

Thanks to high-level health services, more than 1.2 million people travelled to Iran last year, according to Iranian officials.

Today, this country has become a pioneer among Islamic countries in the field of medical tourism as a result of the rapid growth of its healthcare system, along with developments in the field of medical research and technology.

The depreciation of its national currency has also made healthcare cheaper for foreign patients.

For its part, Iran is making concerted efforts to attract tourists to various destinations, whether from among its citizens or from abroad. Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the majority of foreign visitors to Iran have been to the well-known shrines of the city of Mashhad or Qom and other parts, but there are large groups that began to come for tourism, entertainment, recreation and economic activities.

Tourism in Iran has mobilised a lot of internal and external investments in building huge five-star hotels and below, and

has provided millions of job opportunities for its people. Around 2 million new jobs are expected to be created by 2025, up from 1.3 million a year ago.

The Iranian government issues one-week visas for citizens of 68 countries at airports, in addition to electronic visas and through Iranian embassies and consulates in a number of countries around the world.

After the Covid-19 pandemic, Iran decided to boost the tourism sector by allowing more tourists to visit Iran, and there is a vision developed for the tourism sector to invest \$32 billion in this vital sector with a goal to target 20 million tourists by 2025.

Japan’s economic scars might blind it to inflation

PETE SWEENEY

Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda knows well the risk of tightening policy prematurely. Attempts to slow stimulus and raise borrowing costs by his predecessors have backfired repeatedly since 1997. Investors worry about market ructions if Ueda hikes rates now but there is another risk: that he waits too long.

Since taking the helm from Haruhiko Kuroda in April, Ueda has enjoyed a quiet market honeymoon. The yield on the benchmark 10-year bond has stopped testing 0.5 per cent, the high end of its trading band set by the BOJ, and the Nikkei 225 large-cap equity index, up 20 per cent in the last three months per Refinitiv data, is the world’s best performing major benchmark, slightly ahead of the Nasdaq Composite.

That is because Ueda’s decision to keep ultra-low interest rates in place for now has eased investors’ worries that rising inflation and a collapsing yen would force him to start tightening monetary policy right out of the gate.

That could have prompted an accelerated repatriation of funds Japanese investors have parked abroad in search of better returns – a process that is already getting underway as currency hedging costs rise. Bank for International Settlements data shows Japanese entities held over \$5 trillion in overseas assets at the end of 2022, higher than any other country.

Ueda’s inaction – and the domestic markets’ positive response – have bought him time to focus on evaluating macroeconomic fundamentals, particularly inflation. Here is where his job gets complicated.

The country only emerged from a decades-long deflationary rut relatively recently, so local economists, executives and consumers are unused to worrying about consumer prices rising too fast. That might help explain why many policymakers and economists dismiss the recent spike as temporary, driven by imported factors.

Yet that may be changing. The economy has exited recession, and the “core-core” Consumer Price Index, which excludes volatile food and energy items, rose at an annualised rate of 4.1 per cent in April, well above the BOJ’s 2 per cent target.

In addition, the general services component, which excludes government services and is largely insulated from external factors, is now growing at an annual rate of 2 per cent a year, a 28-year high. The unemployment rate is falling and private consumption is rising, as is demand for credit.

If workers demand and get higher wages to compensate for the jump in their living costs, Japan could face a long-term rise in inflation that would need a gradual monetary tightening.

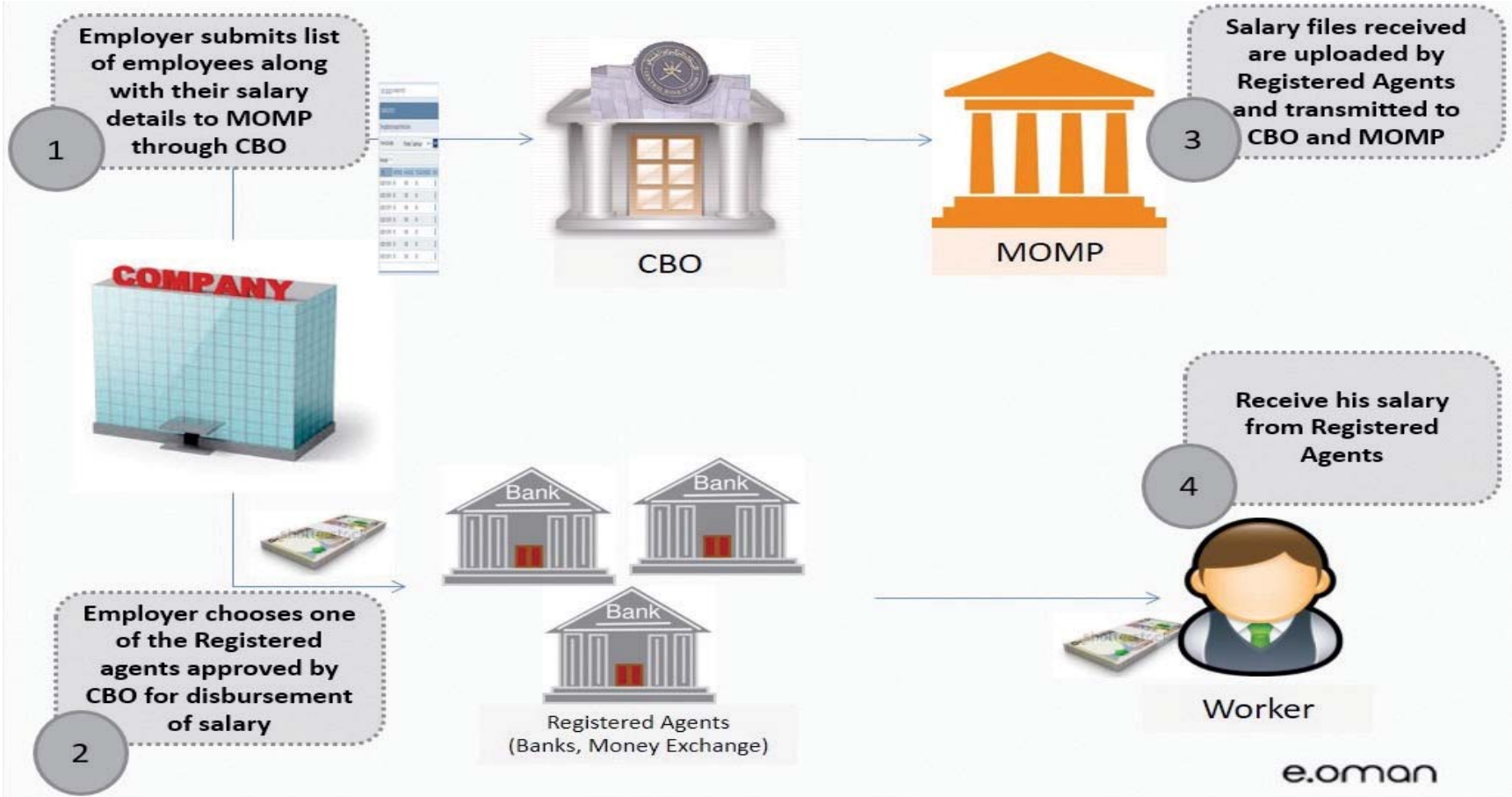
Unfortunately for Ueda, the picture is muddy. Annual wage hikes negotiated by the country’s largest unions in April averaged around 3 per cent: high by historical standards but below CPI — albeit with some dramatic exceptions like Fast Retailing, owner of the Uniqlo clothing chain. And an intense worker shortage in some sectors is pushing up non-union and informal pay.

It is worth remembering that Japan was once one of the world’s frothiest economies. Ripping export-driven growth led by manufacturing champions like Toyota Motor and Toshiba helped fuel exuberant speculation in domestic real estate and shares between 1986 and 1991.

The BOJ recognised the problem as early as 1987 but officials were rattled by the Black Monday stock market crash in the United States. They waited two years to act.

— Reuters

Guaranteeing timely salary transfers through wages protection system



THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR HAS IMPLEMENTED VARIOUS INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS CURRENT CHALLENGES AND IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LABOUR MARKET. THESE INCLUDE TACKLING WAGES ISSUES, COMBATING GHOST EMPLOYMENT, AND ADDRESSING HIDDEN TRADE PRACTICES.



NAWAL AL ARAIMI

The term ‘labour market’ is widely discussed, and to gain a precise understanding of it, we must delve into its intricacies, including its location, timeframe, determinants, factors of influence, and the products traded within. Furthermore, it is crucial to explore its impact on national economies.

The labour market can be described as virtual marketplace where employers and jobseekers converge, engaging in agreements and negotiations regarding wages, employment terms, and the costs associated with production output. Its economic influence is reflected in the levels of wages and productivity.

Based on this, there are several distinctive features that differentiate the labour market from other markets. The produced commodity in this market is the combination of effort and time, which cannot be stored or traded.

Moreover, it is closely intertwined with the worker or employee, whose overall contribution is influenced by behavioural, personal

social, and upbringing factors, among others. Furthermore, there is a variety and divergence in the causes of negotiations that arise between the parties involved in the employment relationship, necessitating different approaches to intervention, monitoring and impact management.

The labour market information provides a reliable and comprehensive overview of key events that shape decision-making and policies. It includes details on the workforce, wages, and their distributions, as well as the selection process of qualified individuals by employers.

These insights improve interactions between supply and demand across different geographic and demographic dimensions.

The labour market is vast and complex requiring consideration from multiple perspectives.

As a virtual marketplace, its organisation is challenging due to diverse stakeholders such as employers, workers policymakers, educational institutions, and technology’s impact.

Moreover, the rapid pace of technological advancements and the utilisation of innovative technologies have reshaped relationships, making it more challenging to determine wage

levels, productivity, and facilitate effective re-employment.

In light of these circumstances, the Ministry of Labour has implemented various initiatives to address current challenges and improve relationships in the labour market. These include tackling wages issues, combating ghost employment, and addressing hidden trade practices.

The Wages Protections System serves as a comprehensive and collaborative framework between the Ministry of Labour and the Central Bank of Oman. Its objectives is to offer joint solutions to various stockholders in the labour market, while supporting the judiciary in issuing judgments and resolving disputes concerning workers’ entitlements.

Aligned with international organisational requirements and human rights standards, the system aims to safeguard the rights of both national and expatriate workforce.

This is achieved by ensuring timely payment of wages in accordance with legal agreements between employers and employees, as well as maintaining a reliable database of wage transfer within the private

sector. This data facilitates the identification of payment delays and enables the implementation

of legal remedies when necessary. By upholding workers’ rights and expediting dispute resolutions, the system contributes to a more stable and productive labour market.

The use of secure technology and protected databases for transferring wages between banks offers multiple benefits. It ensures accurate assessment of wage levels in the private sector, facilitates comprehensive studies on various workforce characteristics, and supports electronic transformation for government institutions requiring salary verification.

One of the crucial elements that employers can utilise to maximise the benefits of this initiative is to ensure its thoroughness and inclusivity. This can be achieved by ensuring that the institution is registered in the system and consistently updating wage data for both Omani and non-Omani employers, specifically regarding salaries, professions, and contact details.

Additionally, it is important to guarantee timely salary transfers in accordance with the specified periods outlined in the employment contracts. Efforts are underway to provide accessible statistical data and future wage forecasts for decision-makers, private sector institutions, and citizens.

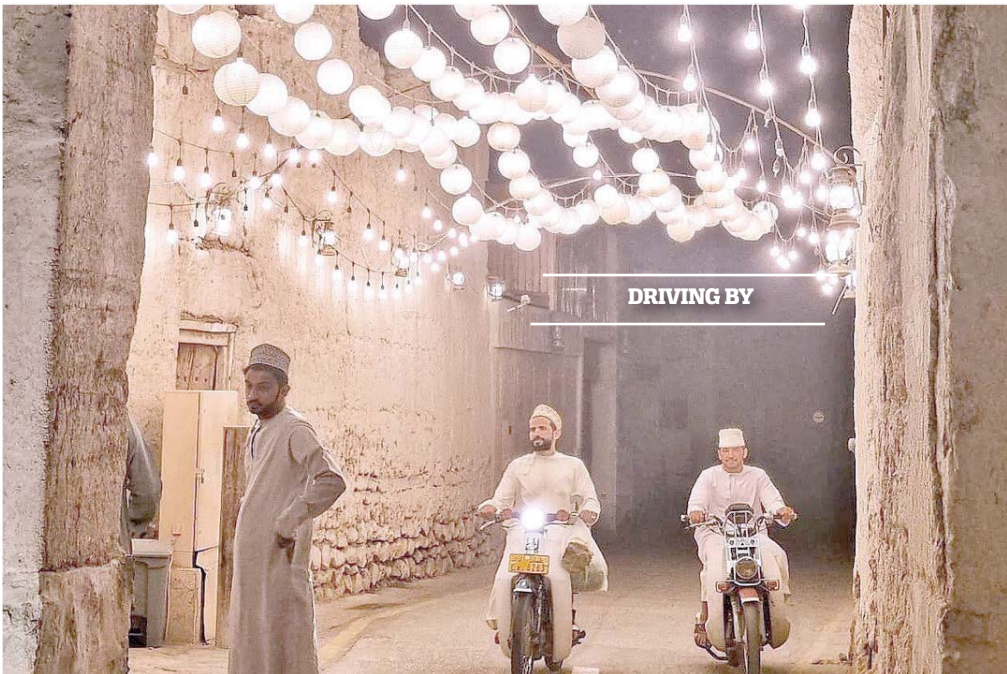
This aims to empower individuals to assess wage levels, make informed choices, and promote transparency and stability in the labour market.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Oman

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Venezuela's
'daily bread,'
humble arepa
conquers the
world

FROM THE STREETS of Caracas to trendy eateries in New York, Paris and Tokyo, the arepa, a humble cornmeal flatbread, is riding a wave of Venezuelan emigration and feeding a craving for exotic and gluten-free food.

Prepared in just minutes by forming a ball from pre-cooked cornflour and water, it's flattened and then grilled. The arepa can be whatever you want: filled with anything from cheese and meat to beans or seafood, even

greens.
A favourite in Venezuela is the "reina pepiada" — a mix of chicken, mayonnaise and avocado.
The 'viuda' or widow, comes without a filling — the ideal accompaniment for a soup but also the only option for many among Venezuelans' poor.
The arepa "is the daily bread of the Venezuelan. He eats it every day, every night," said Patrick Ribas, who translated into French the book "Arepologo" dedicated to the maize delicacy.
"You can put anything you want in it. It's a dish. You can also eat it on its own when you don't have much money. This is unfortunately the case for many Venezuelans," he said.
According to "Arepologo" author Ricardo Estrada Cuevas, the arepa "is a food that has no social class."
"It is eaten by everyone, from the simplest and most humble people to (someone who is) a manager," he said.
"It is a food that everyone eats, in the same way, with the same

fillings, with the same characteristics. Where there is a Venezuelan, there are arepas."
'EXOTIC' AND GLUTEN-FREE
Amid a political and economic crisis that has seen their country's GDP shrink by 80 per cent between 2013 and 2022, more than seven million Venezuelans — almost a quarter of the population — have emigrated in recent years.
And they've taken their cuisine with them.
Marlyn Quiroga, 47, was a lawyer in Venezuela but left five years ago for New York.
She did odd jobs until 2021, when she started an arepa catering business. This despite saying she "did not know how to cook an egg" before then.
"I went door-to-door in Queens: to beauty salons, offices, clinics. I gave away free samples" to promote the business, Quiroga said.
Success came quickly, said the boss of "Arepas LaNewYorkquina," explaining

that more and more people in the City That Never Sleeps now prefer gluten-free arepas to bread.
And on the other side of the Atlantic, "It's a change from the ubiquitous hamburger," said Jean-Francois Lamaison, a 63-year-old digital designer and diner at the Venezuelan restaurant "Ajidulce" in Paris.
Ajidulce boss Luis Fernando Machado, a former petroleum engineer who moved to the French capital in 2011, said he started with a food truck but now employs 10 people.
His restaurant has an open kitchen so customers can see their meals being prepared.
"Parisians love to discover exotic food," he said. "It is a bit like taking a trip to the Caribbean."
It also helps to be listed on a register of gluten-free restaurants in the City of Light. "There are a lot of tourists who come" for that reason, said Machado.
- 'SPREAD OUR CULTURE' -
In Tokyo, Venezuelan expat

Raul Marquez, 42, and his Japanese wife Miho advertise "gluten-free, healthy street food" at their food truck selling arepas.
"Venezuela has been through a difficult time, you know, for the last few years... that leads people to emigrate, and you know, to spread our culture in all ways, and food is part of it," Marquez, who himself left about a decade ago, said.
After all these years, for Marquez, an arepa still represents "my mom... eating in the morning before going to school."
"That's what I bring when I'm selling arepas — that passion, that love that comes from home."
Back in Caracas, Lisbeth Marquez has been selling arepas on the street for 15 years, from 4 pm to 2 am every day.
Her personal favourite? The "pabellon," which comes with melted butter, black beans, an egg and grated cheese.
She sells about 1,200 arepas a day, but "I never tire of eating them. The best arepa is the one made at home." — AFP

ART

Banksy mural aims to 'open up conversations on domestic abuse'

ARTWORK BY mysterious British graffiti artist Banksy set to go on public display in the seaside town of Margate in south-eastern England will hopefully spark conversations among thousands of people on domestic abuse, organisers said.
The street mural titled "Valentine's Day Mascara" was first discovered on the side of a house in the seaside town, 200 metres down the road from its new home at Dreamland amusement park. The piece was unveiled on Friday ahead of its public opening in the theme park's Roller Room from June 11. Dreamland boss Eddie Kemsley said: "Dreamland is about fun, entertainment and escapism and having a great time, I don't think peo-



ple will talk about that (the theme of the artwork) whilst they are here, but it will give them something to take away with and open up conversations at home."
The piece that appeared on Valentine's Day depicts a 1950s housewife with a swollen eye and missing tooth, wearing an apron and yellow washing up gloves, and throwing a man into a freezer.
The real-life freezer used to complement the street mural had been removed twice in the days following the discovery of the artwork in February, leading to the decision to move the piece to an accessible environment.
It was the wish of the homeowner, however, for the artwork to stay local,

to shine light on domestic abuse and wants to use this unique opportunity to tackle stigma.
"I think it will have a huge impact. It is a difficult subject to talk about and it doesn't naturally come up," she said.
"When you are coming in here as a group of young people, or as a family, or individual, and you are looking at it, it does raise the question," she added. "It truly will spark and create conversations and this is only a positive thing." Work to move Banksy's pop-up was collaborated between Dreamland, Red Eight Gallery and Turner Contemporary with a team of engineers and an art conservator.
— PA Media/dpa

DISCOVERY

Newly discovered dinosaur may have been a last gasp for its species

A newly discovered dinosaur may have been a last gasp for the species during a period when Earth's warming climate forced big changes to global dinosaur populations, a study suggests. The plant-eating animal, named Iani smithi after Janus, the two-faced Roman god of change, was an early ornithomimid.
This group of dinosaurs ultimately gave rise to the more commonly known duckbill dinosaurs such as Parasaurolophus and Edmontosaurus.
Most of the young dinosaur's skeleton — including skull, vertebrae and limbs — was recovered from Utah's Cedar Mountain Formation in



America.
Corresponding author Lindsay Zanno, associate research professor at North Carolina State University and head of palaeontology at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, said: "Finding Iani was a stroke of luck."
"We knew something like it lived in this ecosystem because isolated teeth had been collected here and there, but we weren't expecting to stumble upon such a beautiful skeleton, espe-

cially from this time in Earth's history. Having a nearly complete skull was invaluable for piecing the story together."
She added: "Iani may be the last surviving member of a lineage of dinosaurs that once thrived here in North America but were eventually supplanted by duckbill dinosaurs."
"Iani was alive during this transition — so this dinosaur really does symbolise a changing planet."
"This dinosaur stood on the precipice able to look back at the way North American ecosystems were in the past, but close enough to see the future coming like a bullet train. I think we can all relate to that."
Iani smithi lived some 99 million years ago (the mid-Cretaceous), and researchers say its most striking feature is its powerful jaw, with teeth designed for chewing through tough plant material.
According to the study published in Plos One, Iani smithi is unique not just because it is newly discovered, but also because of its rarity in the North American fossil record and its position in dinosaur history.
Dr Zanno thinks that studying this fossil in the context of environmental and biodiversity changes during the mid-Cretaceous will shed more light on the history of Earth. — PA Media/dpa



Unveiling the Treasures of Oman: An Enriching 'Arabian Adventure'

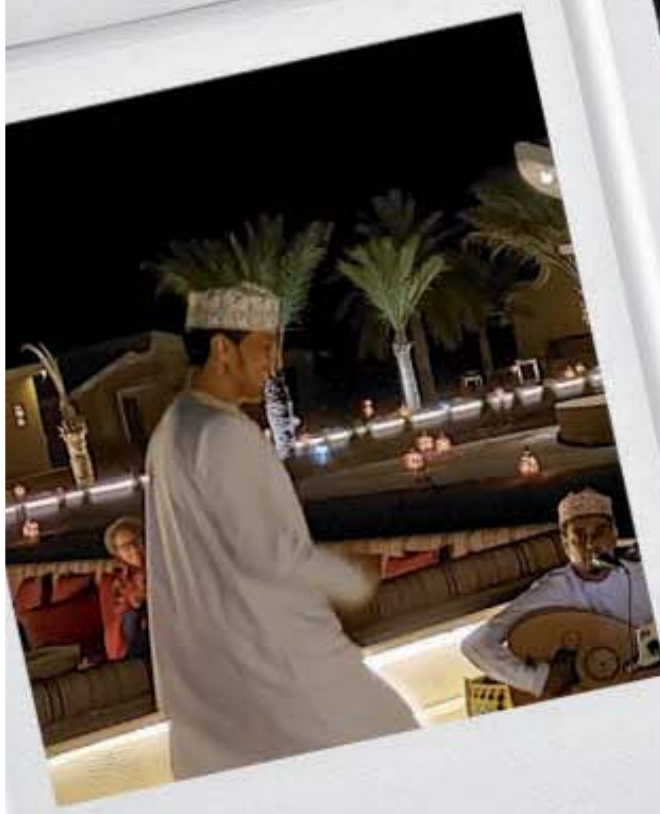
By Linda Pappas Funsch
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Following a hiatus occasioned by the Covid pandemic, I had the pleasure of resuming my annual 'learning on location' study visits to the Sultanate of Oman in January 2023. As a scholar-escort for the 'Arabian Adventure' accompanying guests on this unique cultural immersion journey to one of the most fascinating countries in the world, I have frequently enjoyed accompanying our group of thirteen consisted primarily of adult students from the Institute for Learning in Retirement at Frederick Community College in Maryland. The institute has sponsored a comprehensive program of courses in Middle East and Islamic Studies for more than two decades.

In advance of this unique adventure, we met several times to review books and articles, study the itinerary, and discuss cultural nuances and appropriate etiquette. We attended a pre-departure orientation briefing in Washington, DC, hosted by the Embassy of Oman at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center.

Our journey was made even more special by the warm and welcoming people of the Sultanate of Oman. From exploring Muscat's iconic landmarks to venturing into the mountains and deserts, every moment was filled with awe and wonder for that captivating country.

Our journey was made even more special by the friendships formed and knowledge shared. Each member of our group brought a unique perspective and expertise, contributing to a rich spirit of adventure. Together, we embraced the spirit of Oman, discovering the hidden treasures of Oman. As we bid farewell to that extraordinary land, we left with a deeper understanding of Oman's rich heritage and a profound appreciation for its vibrant culture. The 'Arabian Adventure' Oman study trip will forever remain a cherished memory, reminding us of the power of travel to broaden our horizons and connect us to the world.



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Upon arrival in Muscat, we met our learned and amiable guide, Qais, of Zahara Tours. On Day 1, we embarked on a sunset cruise aboard a traditional dhow from Marina Bandar. During a sumptuous dinner in Muttrah we were introduced to frankincense water and other Omani culinary specialties, including traditional shuwa.

In the days that followed, we sampled intoxicating scents at the Amouage perfume factory, wandered through art galleries featuring the work of renowned Omani artists, and were welcomed by the proprietor of a private museum dedicated to the preservation of Oman's history. The scale and beauty of the Royal Opera House Muscat, a world-class venue for the performing arts, reminded our guests of the importance of Oman's cosmopolitanism and outreach to world cultures.

Flying to Musandam, we were welcomed by a local guide and, also, by Iman, a dear friend whom I had not seen since my previous journey to Oman in 2020. Accompanied by Iman, we explored the restored Khasab Fort and the ancient petroglyphs of Wadi Tawi. During our stay in Khasab, we had the additional pleasure of reconnecting over lunch with 'Eida, a local activist and champion of women's health, education, and social welfare whom I had met previously during a research trip.

Linda Pappas Funsch is planning the next 'Arabian Adventure' in Oman study visit for early 2024. Among other destinations, it will include the Governorate of Dhofar. She can be reached at lindafunsch@gmail.com



En route to a mountain safari to Jabal Harim, the highest mountain in Musandam, we stopped at Khor Najd to admire the breathtaking view of the lagoon. On the next day, we set sail aboard a dhow for a full-day cruise to Kumzar, a remote village with a rich history spanning hundreds of years, located at the furthest tip of the Musandam Peninsula. Before leaving Khasab, the women in our group were invited to Zaree Khasab, a local tradition where Omani hostesses dress guests in traditional clothing, apply henna to their hands, and serve local delicacies.

From the port we boarded a ferry to traverse the Strait of Hormuz, observing the flow of sea traffic through this critical chokepoint. Disembarking at the port of Shinas, we travelled to Suhar where its distinctive square-towered fort has been meticulously restored. Inspired by the colours and architecture of Persia and Central Asia, with elements of Omani design, the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Suhar is distinctive from many others in the country.

Proceeding into the interior of Oman, we stopped for lunch at the blue sulphur springs of Ain Sahban, followed by a visit to Al Hazm castle, a masterpiece of Islamic architecture. In the plains of Al Dakhiliyah, we explored the mysterious beehive tombs Bat, Al Khutm, and Al Ayn, a trilogy of ancient burial sites steeped in mystery.

Nizwa, the cultural capital of Oman, enchanted us with its lively Friday market and vibrant souq. We admired the imposing fort and climbed its towers, enjoying a panoramic view of the city and surrounding palm oasis. After visiting the fort of Bahla, a UNESCO World Heritage site, we drove to the old town to observe the remarkable craftsmanship of Omani potters. In Jabreen, we explored its 17th century castle, renowned for its painted ceilings and intricate woodwork.

Venturing into the desert from Bidiya, we were enthralled by the magic of Rimal Al Sharqiya, riding atop dunes in 4x4 vehicles, witnessing the shifting sands, and marvelling at the glorious sunset. We were warmly welcomed by the Bedouin community, and spent an unforgettable night under the stars at a desert camp. Sitting around a campfire, we listened to stories and traditional music, immersing ourselves in the rich Bedouin culture.

The final leg of our journey took us to Sur, where we learned about the traditional craft of dhow building. We visited the picturesque coastal town of Ras al Jinz, renowned for its turtle nesting sites. Here, we witnessed the incredible sight of baby turtles making their way to the sea, an awe-inspiring symbol of nature's resilience and the importance of conservation.

Our last stop before returning to Muscat was Wadi Beni Khalid, a hidden oasis nestled amidst rocky cliffs. We hiked through canyons, swam in crystal-clear pools, and marvelled at the lush vegetation that thrives in this desert paradise.

As our study visit to Oman ended, we were filled with indelible memories of its culture, history, and natural beauty. The trip was an enriching and immersive adventure that provided an opportunity

