

Major infra projects to enrich Al Batinah North Governorate

In a significant development for the Al Batinah North Governorate, a series of road and lighting projects have been approved this year, with a total investment exceeding RO 38 million. These projects have been carefully selected based on their developmental, service, and social dimensions to meet the needs of the citizens.

SEE P2



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LAFAY GIVES COFIDIS FIRST TOUR WIN IN 15 YEARS, POGACAR PICKS UP BONUSES



P13

VALUE OF REAL ESTATE DEALS IN OMAN REACHES RO 1.220 BILLION



P19

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S JOURNEY TO SHOWCASE OMAN'S CULTURAL HERITAGE



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF BELARUS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Lukashenko. His Majesty also wished the people of Belarus further prosperity and growth.

OMAN BETTERS RANK IN PEACE INDEX

The Sultanate of Oman has emerged as one of the most improved countries, with 16 places up to secure the 48th spot worldwide, according to Global Peace Index 2023 recently released by the Institute for Economics and Peace. This year, Oman received 1.794 score with 18 points improvement according to the index. Last year, the country was ranked 64th globally. This remarkable achievement reflects Oman's efforts in promoting peace, stability and harmony within its borders.

SEE P3

PARIS

AT LEAST 719 ARRESTED FOR RIOTS IN FRANCE

French police arrested at least 719 people on Saturday night during further rioting about police brutality, according to an initial Interior Ministry assessment on Sunday morning. The ministry tweeted that 45 police officers were injured in the riots that began after a teenage driver was shot dead at close range by a policeman in a traffic check. Thanks to the deployment of 45,000 police officers and thousands of firefighters, it was a "calmer night" than the previous day.

SEE P7

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95210257

COASTAL ROAD, TAKE ME TO KHAREEF DHOFAR

If you are planning to see khareef, travel to Dhofar via Hasik - Al Shuwaimiyah road coming from Al Wusta. The trip reveals the treasures of Oman's diverse geography. The road itself is very scenic, impressively cut through the mountains and at times running parallel to the shore. This coastal router is longer but worth the effort for its stunning views of the silvery shoreline and limestone cliffs. Photo courtesy: @experienceoman



HAJ PILGRIMS COME HOME TO TRADITIONAL WELCOME

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 2

As Omani Hajis return home from a gruelling but soul fulfilling pilgrimage, families in some wilayats are decorating homes and offering them coffee and dates to welcome them. This practice is a testament to the deep-rooted values of solidarity, love, respect, brotherhood within the Omani community.

One of the most prominent customs in the Wilayat of Shinas is festooning houses with palm fronds. Families raise green flags, signifying the arrival of pilgrims in their homes.

The celebrations also include the 'Nathira' gathering, where families, relatives, and friends



come together to celebrate the pilgrims' homecoming. Traditional delicacies, nuts, sweets, and coins are mixed in a bowl and showered scattered on the pilgrims upon their arrival, accompanied by lavish feasts and chants.

Aisha al Raisi, a resident of Shinas, said that the custom

of receiving pilgrims not only makes the pilgrims feel the weight of their sacred duty but also brings joy and pleasure. Furthermore, it serves as an encouragement for youths to embark on Haj.

Al Raisi said some homes put up ornamental lights with words like 'An accepted pilgrimage, a grateful endeavour, and a forgiven sin.'

Families also present traditional gifts brought by the pilgrims from the Holy Land such as prayer rugs, rosary beads and incense. It is customary for at least one family member to greet the pilgrims at their final stop on the journey and accompany them home, completing the joyous reunion.

4 including a baby lose lives in road accidents

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

Despite repeated warnings of Royal Oman Police for caution and safety, road accidents continue to claim lives.

A Bangladeshi family of three died on the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar mountains when they were driving down the mountain road. The deceased were identified as Mohammed Shabeer, a businessman in Muttrah Souq, his wife and 6-month-old baby. Three others who were injured were admitted to the hospital.

In another incident, an expat from Qatar died and his co-passenger injured when his car hit a camel, in Qatbeet, 80 kilometres away from Thamrait. The deceased has been identified as Mohammed Aflah, aged 39, who was working for a private firm in Doha and the injured is Misbah, who is in the ICU of Sultan Qaboos Hospital, Salalah.

In another incident, a youngster was drowned in Wadi Darbat on Saturday.

Najeeb Kanthapuram, a lawmaker from India's Kerala state who is in town for Eid, said that other two passengers, Mohammed Aftah and eight-year-old Mohammed Asil are safe. "I laud the efforts of the Royal Oman Police, the medical fraternity in Oman and social activists in the country," he said.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) have urged all to be careful while driving especially in the Haima-Thamrait road due to sandstorms and piling up on sand on both sides of the road.

In AI tussle, Twitter restricts number of posts users can read

NEW YORK: Elon Musk announced on Saturday that Twitter would temporarily restrict how many tweets users could read per day, in a move meant to tamp down on the use of the site's data by artificial intelligence companies.

The platform is limiting verified accounts to reading 10,000 tweets a day. Non-verified users — the free accounts that make up the majority of users — are limited to reading 1,000 tweets per day.

New unverified accounts would be limited to 500 tweets.

The decision was made "to address extreme levels of data scraping" and "system manipulation" by third-party platforms, Musk said in a tweet on Saturday afternoon, as some users quickly hit their limits.

"Goodbye Twitter" was a trending topic in the United States following Musk's announcement.

Twitter's billionaire owner did not give a timeline for how long the measures would be in place.

The day before, Musk had announced that it would no longer be possible to read tweets on the



site without an account.

Much of the data scraping was coming from firms using it to build their AI models, Musk said, to the point that it was causing

The platform is limiting verified accounts to reading 10,000 tweets a day. Non-verified users — the free accounts that make up the majority of users — are limited to reading 1,000 tweets per day

traffic issues with the site.

To create AI that can respond in a human-like capacity, many companies feed the programmes examples of real-life conversations

from social media sites.

"Several hundred organisations (maybe more) were scraping Twitter data extremely aggressively, to the point where it was affecting the real user experience," Musk said.

"Almost every company doing AI, from startups to some of the biggest corporations on Earth, was scraping vast amounts of data," he said. "It is rather galling to have to bring large numbers of servers online on an emergency basis just to facilitate some AI start-up's outrageous valuation."

Twitter is not the only social media giant to have to wrangle with the rapid acceleration of the AI sector. In mid-June, Reddit raised prices on third-party developers that were using its data and sweeping up conversations posted on its forums.

It proved a controversial move, as many regular users also accessed the site via third-party platforms, and marked a shift from previous arrangements where social media data had generally been provided for free or a small charge. — AFP



Major infrastructure projects to enrich Batinah North

SIHAM AL SAIDI
MUSCAT, JULY 2

In a significant development for the Al Batinah North Governorate, a series of road and lighting projects have been approved this year, with a total investment exceeding RO 38 million. These projects have been carefully selected based on their developmental, service, and social dimensions to meet the needs of the citizens.

Several roads have already been completed, while others are currently under construction or in the bidding phase for implementation in the six wilayats of: Suhar, Shinas, Liwa, Saham, Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq.

With the launch of the vision for the Al Batinah North Governorate, specialised and high-quality projects will be implemented in each province, considering the economic, commercial, tourism, recreational, and social aspects. Close partnerships with the private sector will also be fostered to execute various projects that directly benefit the local population.

Projects in Suhar include the continuation of Jabal Sham road project, which spans 7 kilometres in its second phase. The project involves the construction of protective structures for existing box culverts, the creation of side drainage channels for rainwater, concrete and steel barriers, necessary protections for vertical and horizontal sections, and the establishment of a rockfall



protection system along the road's 7-kilometre route, with heights reaching 50 metres.

Additionally, lighting works will be completed, protections for Falaj Al Shum in the road's vicinity will be installed, and the remnants of the previous project will be cleared. This project aims to reduce the road's previous steep slopes in accordance with the latest safety standards and technical specifications, mitigating accidents resulting from severe gradients.

It will also improve accessibility to villages and areas along its path, serving as a vital route for the stability and convenience of the wilayat's residents in their

localities and facilitating access to the city centre.

Another project in Suhar is the second phase of the Yanba Al Arad road pavement, spanning two kilometres after the completion of the first phase, which covered 24 kilometres.

The second phase will include protections for valleys and road sections at excavation sites, the construction of box culverts over the valleys, and the installation of concrete and steel traffic safety barriers.

In terms of vital projects in Saham, the rehabilitation of Al Bat'ha street in the Al Tareef area will involve the addition of a 3-kilometre asphalt layer,

sidewalks, a sports walkway along the road, and the paving of parking areas for commercial buildings along the commercial strip. The design and construction of internal roads spanning 10 kilometres will also be implemented to keep pace with the significant urban development witnessed by the city.

Furthermore, a project to develop 32.6 kilometres of roads in industrial areas across the north, central, and south wilayats of the governorate has been assigned to 21 sites. The University Street in the Khawr Al Siyabi area, located in front of Sohar University and the University of Applied Sciences, will contribute to alleviating traffic congestion as it experiences significant traffic density.

Moreover, several other projects in different provinces, including lighting replacements with LED technology, road pavement, and the expansion of parking areas, are set to enhance transportation infrastructure and improve safety and convenience for the residents.

The approved projects reflect a strong commitment to advancing the Al Batinah North Governorate's growth and meeting the diverse needs of its communities. These developments are poised to have a positive impact on the economy, commerce, tourism, and overall quality of life in the governorate, while promoting sustainable practices and partnerships with the private sector.

■ FOUR HELD IN DRUG CASE IN SOUTH AL BATINAH



MUSCAT: The police command of South Al Batinah Governorate arrested four Asian people in connection with possessing drugs and entering the country illegally. The police seized amounts of morphine, heroin and crystal meth from the defendants and legal action against them is under way.

Vehicle catches fire in Dhofar



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 2

A trailer truck loaded with grass caught fire in Al Fazazih area in Dhofar Governorate.

Teams for the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) responded to the incident and put out the fire. No casualties were reported.

Vehicle fire incidents usually increase in the summer causing human and material losses, CDAA said, underscoring the importance of regular maintenance of vehicles and replacing faulty parts

with new ones. The CDAA explained that vehicle fires result from leakage of fuel or oils from the tank or pipes, maintenance of the vehicle by unqualified persons, an increase in pressure on tires due to overloading, improperly inflated tires and high engine temperature due to lack of water level in the coolant.

The CDAA warned against the installation of electrical appliances and connections by the unspecialised and the installation of counterfeit spare parts.

■ HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS PROGRAMMES BEGIN



MUSCAT: The National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking (NCCHT) began its awareness programmes for this year which target 4-star hotels. The first workshop was conducted at Avani Muscat Hotel and dealt with several topics that included the methods and indicators of the human trafficking crime.

Eid al Adha activities end with pomp in Al Dakhiliyah

AMAL AL RIYAMI
TANUF, JULY 2

Eid al Adha activities concluded on a high note in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with the end of the second Tanuf Forum (Child's Joy), which was held in the Tanuf team of Nizwa Club yard, and lasted for 3 days.

The forum celebrated Eid al Adha and brought joy and happiness to the community in general and the people of Tanuf in particular.

The forum, organised by the Tanuf team of Nizwa Club in cooperation with the Nizwa Municipality, saw a large audience of all ages.

The Folklore Band performed throughout the forum while a horse show was held, during which the audience interacted greatly. The activities also included a paragliding show and motorcycle games, horseback riding, and children's activities.

The theater hosted many talented performers such as poets, singers, storytellers, and people with

extraordinary individual talents, competitions, and gifts for the audience.

It also held various laser shows and contained a special corner for sellers.

Tanuf team founder Ahmed bin Mohammed al Farqani said: "The town needs such activities that people turn to so that they make their children happy and feel the joy of Eid days.

Khalfan al Busaidy, Director of the Nizwa Municipality, said: "We are impressed with the activities and organisation. The distinguished attendance indicates the forum's success. The municipality contributed with all its available capabilities to the forum's success."

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Muslehi, head of the Tanuf team, said, "We always strive to provide everything beneficial to society, and praise is to Allah, the forum fulfilled all promises, and the large attendance indicates success, and we will continue the path and the next is better and more beautiful."





Oman betters ranking in Global Peace Index

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 2

The Sultanate of Oman has emerged as one of the most improved countries, with 16 places up to secure the 48th spot worldwide, according to Global Peace Index 2023 recently released by the Institute for Economics and Peace. This year, Oman received 1.794 score with 18 points improvement according to the index. Last year, the country was ranked 64th globally. This remarkable achievement reflects Oman's efforts in promoting peace, stability and harmony within its borders.

With the new rankings, the Sultanate of Oman is ranked third in MENA region, which is led by Qatar at 21st place, followed by Kuwait at 35th. Completing the top five in the region include Jordan at 62nd place and the UAE at 75th.

The Global Peace Index, published annually by the IEP, provides a comprehensive analysis of the state of peace in countries around the world. It evaluates various factors, including levels of violence, crime rates, political instability, militarisation, and societal safety to determine a

nation's peacefulness.

The index ranks 163 independent states and territories according to their level of peacefulness. Iceland remains the most peaceful country globally, a position it has held since 2008, while Denmark replaced Ireland to the number two spot.

The index said the average level of country peacefulness deteriorated by 0.42 per cent in the 2023 Global Peace Index. This is the ninth consecutive year that global peacefulness has deteriorated. The average level of peacefulness has only improved twice year-on-year since 2008.

In the past year, 84 countries recorded an improvement, while 79 countries recorded a deterioration in peacefulness. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its consequences were the main drivers of the deterioration in peacefulness globally. Both Russia and Ukraine are now ranked amongst the ten least peaceful countries, and Ukraine had the largest deterioration of any country in the 2023 GPI.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region recorded the second largest improvement in peacefulness after North America, however it remained



the world's least peaceful region. Europe remains the most peaceful region in the world and

is home to seven of the ten most peaceful countries. However, it deteriorated on all three GPI

domains over the past year, as tensions between European countries and Russia continued

to grow. Europe is less peaceful now than it was 15 years ago, the index added.

Omani pilgrim aged 79 dies in Mecca

MECCA: The Omani Haj mission on Sunday announced the death of Said bin Abdullah al Rahbi, a 79-year-old Omani pilgrim who passed away in the Holy Lands after performing the farewell circumambulation of Haj rituals (Tawaf Al Wadaa).

Sultan bin Said al Hinai, Head of the Omani Haj mission, said the mission's team is taking necessary measures to finalise related procedures in cooperation with authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in the presence of relatives of the deceased.

He prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the deceased's soul in the abodes of Heaven and grant his relatives patience and solace.

Meanwhile, convoys of Omani pilgrims began the trip back home from the Holy Lands after performing the farewell ritual circumambulation 'Tawaf Al Wadaa'.

Al Hinai said that the Haj mission is scheduled to leave Mecca on July 4 and that it would continue offering its services to the pilgrims until the time it leaves the holy places.

As many as 14,000 pilgrims performed Haj from Oman this year, while the number of Haj companies stood at 93.

— ONA

Annual strategic exercise 'Decision Making-10' begins



MUSCAT: Activities of the annual strategic exercise 'Decision Making-10' began at the National Defence College (NDC) on Sunday.

The exercise is carried out by the NDC tenth batch from various military, security and

civil units.

The exercise aims to enhance the participants' decision making on the strategic level, analysing the main strategic topics within simulated national, regional and international events.

'Decision Making-10' also targets striking a balance in utilising the country's resources to achieve the national interests, establishing harmony in utilising tools of global powers and developing strategic thinking. — ONA

SalamAir launches direct flights to Almaty in Kazakhstan

MUSCAT: Oman's first economic air carrier, SalamAir, inaugurated its first direct flights to the city of Almaty in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The twice weekly flights will be operated on Saturdays and Wednesdays, using its latest Airbus aircraft.

Mohammed Ali Najmuddin, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Sultanate of Oman, said that the new destination will enhance bilateral relations between the two countries, especially economic and tourism relations. "We are counting on this historic step, since it introduced the first scheduled flight between the two countries," the ambassador added.

On his turn, Dr Anwar bin



Mohammed al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of SalamAir Company, said that choosing Almaty in the Republic of Kazakhstan was based on studies about the business market and tourism data. The city, he explained, boasts large scale tourism potentials that made it an attractive destination for many visitors from around the world. — ONA

Oman a safe haven for Bridled Tern

TEXT & PHOTOS BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The Bridled Tern (Onychoprion Anaethetus) is always seeking for tranquil places far from the noise. It is very common to see this bird on the edges of mountain beaches and islands far from the crowd of people.

This bird is characterised by its agility. Its upper parts are coloured grey and dark brown. As for its wings and beak, they tend to be black. The underparts are grey and white.

In Oman, the bird can be frequently watched in the rocky beaches along the Oman coastline.

This bird is known for its speed in flight, and it can catch its food very skillfully from the surface of the water. The bird eats small squid, crustaceans, and insects.

The period from May to September is considered the



breeding season for this bird, as it begins to mate and then takes care of the eggs of its young.

Young may leave nest after a few days and hide in nearby cover. Both parents feed young, regurgitating small fish. Age at first flight about 55-63 days; may become independent about a month later.

Environmental resources said that Bridled Tern is a widespread seabird of the tropics and subtropics. Sometimes common

over the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, but seldom seen from land in North America except after hurricanes.

A handful of pairs have nested in southern Florida since 1987. Very light and buoyant in its flight. Almost never seen resting on ocean; birds at sea may perch on driftwood or floating debris.

This bird lives in a groups and can be seen in many parts of the world such as, North and South America, Asia and Africa.



DRIVING PHOBIA

ROAD ACCIDENTS
MOST COMMON
CAUSES OF
'FEAR OF DRIVING'



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
[@shadadm](#)

The fear of driving (driving phobia) is a significant problem that can affect everyday life. In addition, in Oman, there are various fears related to driving that may cause panic and possibly leading to suffer an anxiety attack. In most cases, people cannot leave negative past experiences of accidents behind, which become part of their unconscious thought

processes and eventually getting driving phobia, which becomes an automatic reaction hence hard to beat. Road safety experts say the imagination of past driving calamities can result in gruesome bad experience. They say that past car accidents are the most common causes of driving phobia. It can be horrific especially among women. When some drivers had met or seen an accident, they tend to develop driving phobia and some never drive again. In addition,

driving in different conditions put minds at fear. The repetitive thoughts and fears of many scenarios may then cause the person to avoid driving. The fear of losing control and lack of confidence may also lead to driving phobia. If drivers imagine the worst and expecting what should not be expected, it makes the mind active in imagining the worst, which is not healthy for driving. Experts also say being nervous can make life harder for drivers. Nervousness include fear of

inexperienced drivers who might make a mistake while driving, fear of driving on highways or narrow roads or in bad weather conditions like rains and hot sun. A good number of people in Oman may be having driver's licenses but they are never comfortable driving. "I got my driver's licence 19 years ago but I am never comfortable driving. When I drive, I am always in fear of someone crashing into me. In addition, most of the times, I think of accidents that occur on daily basis in Oman and then I begin

to panic. However much I have tried to drive, I just can't drive long distances," Fathia Khalaf, a mother of three, said. Conquering the fear of driving is possible but it usually requires help. "Lack of confidence, new roads, stress while driving, near-accidents scenarios and past accidents lead to driving phobia. When driver's fear pattern is triggered, this pattern causes panic and anxiety. Drivers can only deal with this problem by gathering their mind in a positive way," said a psychiatrist based in Muscat.



EU ambassador regrets lack of progress with China on trade

BEIJING: The European Union's ambassador to China expressed regret on Sunday over the lack of "substantial progress" with Beijing on trade talks, as EU countries seek to reduce their economic dependence on the Asian giant.

The European Commission has suspended its efforts to get member states and parliament to ratify an investment agreement reached with China at the end of 2020, after seven years of talks.

With relations cooling, the EU also decided in May to "readjust" its position towards China to reduce its economic dependence at a time when Beijing is suspected of giving Moscow tacit support for its war in Ukraine.

"I'm sorry to say that we have a dialogue on economic issues and trade which has not made any progress, or at least substantial progress, in the last four years," EU Ambassador Jorge Toledo said at a forum in Beijing.

"We want to engage with China, but we need progress, and we need it this year," Toledo said, adding that a high-level economic dialogue between the two sides would be held in September.

For the EU, China is



An attendant walks past EU and China flags ahead of the EU-China High-level Economic Dialogue at Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. – Reuters file photo

"simultaneously a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival", he said.

The European Commission unveiled a strategy last month to respond more decisively to economic security risks, with China in particular in its sights.

The Commission put forward proposals in March to secure supplies of materials, such as lithium or nickel, needed for the production of key technologies such as batteries and solar

panels.

Germany, France and Italy said last week they would cooperate more closely on the procurement of raw materials as Europe aims to reduce its reliance on imports from countries such as China.

One of the most contentious issues between the EU and China relates to Beijing's ambiguous position on Moscow's war of Ukraine.

While China does not

recognise the territories annexed by Russia in Ukraine, it also has not condemned Moscow's attacks.

"Ukraine, for instance, is the issue which can make or break relations between the European Union and China," Spain's ambassador to China, Rafael Dezcallar Mazarredo, said at the same forum. "It can improve them substantially, or it can send them down a very negative path." — AFP

South Africa nearing end of daily power cuts

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's electricity minister said on Sunday the country was closer to ending daily power cuts as warmer weather returns towards the end of the year.

South Africa is on course to see its most blackout days in history this year with daily power cuts extending to almost 10 hours a day, affecting businesses and households in an economy already hobbled by high interest rates and inflation.

The power cuts, called loadshedding locally, is expected to shave off 2 percentage points from GDP this year, the central bank said last month.

Blackouts have eased in the past few weeks but there is a fear that as the southern hemisphere winter takes deeper hold in July and August, higher heating



Kgosientsho Ramokgopa

demand could trip many power plants. By September, the temperature starts to climb once more. "I know when we get into summer conditions, then at the current rate, generation will far exceed demand," Electricity Minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa said in a news conference.

— Reuters

Thousands rally across Australia in support of Indigenous reform

SYDNEY: Thousands rallied in Australia on Sunday to back a campaign to recognise the country's Indigenous people in the constitution ahead of a referendum later this year, after a recent dip in support for

the change. The referendum, likely to be held between October and December, seeks to amend the constitution and establish an advisory body, called the Indigenous Voice to Parliament, to give Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander people a direct say in policies that impact them.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's centre-left Labour government backs the change, while the opposition Liberal-National conservatives urge a "No" vote.

On Sunday, an Australian Council of Social Service tweet showed Sydney rally attendees in T-shirts with the words "Vote Yes" and caps with the words

"The Uluru Statement", referring to a key document that calls for an Indigenous Voice.

One rallygoer, Jason Howard, said the event was "a great opportunity for all Australians to get behind something that's going to make this country better".

Another attendee, Isabelle Smith, said in her opinion the referendum was the most important issue in Australia.

"It'll bring Australians together and I think voting 'Yes' is the most important thing that people can do," she said.

Yes23, the group behind more than 25 rallies nationwide, said the crowd in Sydney was around 3,000 and that it expected up to 25,000 people to participate in total.

The day of action comes after support for the referendum appeared to be ebbing,

according to a poll last month, which showed "No" ahead for the first time, 51 per cent to 49 per cent. Opponents, including some Indigenous people, have said the proposal lacks detail and will divide Australians.

"We do not really focus on the polls. What we focus on is the work that is involved in getting out and talking to people, Yes23 director Rachel Perkins said on Sunday. Indigenous Australians, who account for 3.8 per cent of the population, face disadvantages including discrimination, poor health and education outcomes and high incarceration rates.

— Reuters

LANDS FOR SALE

- ◆ Residential commercial land in Wilayat Bausher/ Al Gubrah Al Janubiyah adjacent to Oman Mall and overlooking Muscat Expressway and has an area of 5000 sqm.
 - ◆ Residential commercial land in Wilayat Bausher/ Ghala has an area of 2934 sqm.
 - ◆ 5 Industrial lands in Wilayat Duqum/ Duqum Al Hadithah and each has 7500 sqm.
- Contact us by email info@alsakhaya.com or by call through 97365922 / 92822040



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT



The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/ DGKH-24/ 2431/2023	Replacement of Water Heaters in PHASE 1,2,3, 6,7,8 & 9 at Khoula Hospital	12/July/2023	09/August/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25.000

Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان

وزارة التراث والسياحة

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL TENDERS

Tender No.	81/2023/MHT/HQ-15	Tender Name	Appointing Company for Production of The Opening Ceremony Show of Oman as An Official Host Country of ITB 2024.
	83/2023/MHT/HQ-17		Appointing Tourism Company to represent Oman in the People's Republic of China.
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)		81/2023/MHT/HQ-15	25 O.R
		83/2023/MHT/HQ-17	25 O.R
Tender Document Sales End Date		09/07/2023	
Last Date for Bid Submission		01/08/2023	
Grade	81/2023/MHT/HQ-15	International	
	83/2023/MHT/HQ-17	International	
E-Tendering Portal		https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om	

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.

Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by electronic tender bond from a local or International bank registered in Oman not less than (1%) of the bid value, valid for (90) days from the date of its submission.

- The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids.

The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries

For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200

For further information

Email : sotic@mht.gov.om
Phones : 22088348 - 22088085



Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDERS NOTICE

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

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
431/2023/ MAFWR/ HQ-33	Supplying Materials, Equipment for Rehabilitation of Rainfall Enhancement System	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 9/7/2023	Thursday 27/7/2023
439/2023/ MAFWR/ HQ-34	Rental of Helicopter for the Maintenance of Rainfall Enhancement Stations	25/-	Specialized	Thursday 29/6/2023	Monday 10/7/2023
440/2023/ MAFWR/ HQ-35	Rehabilitation and Maintenance at Kumzar Fishery Harbour in Musandam Governorate	50/-	Excellent	Monday 10/7/2023	Sunday 30/7/2023

Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders).

All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



Fighting shakes Khartoum as displaced battle disease

KHARTOUM: Fierce fighting between the forces of rival generals shook the Sudanese capital Khartoum on Sunday as disease and malnutrition threatened the rising number of displaced.

Khartoum residents said they were shaken awake by warplanes and “violent fighting” between forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Witnesses said that a police base and the state television building in the capital's northwest were under attack by the RSF, who said they had shot down an army MiG fighter.

In central Khartoum, others saw “scores of RSF vehicles” driving towards the vicinity of “the Armoured Corps”.

Since April 15, the war between Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohammed Hamdan Daglo, has killed nearly 3,000 people and displaced 2.2 million within the country, with another 645,000 fleeing across borders, according to the International Organization for Migration.

“The situation is grave,” the medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said in a statement detailing the hardships of displaced Sudanese stuck in nine camps in



People flee as smoke billows in Wad Hamid, about 100 kilometres north of Sudan's capital. — AFP

White Nile State which borders South Sudan.

In addition to Khartoum, the

worst fighting has been in the western region of Darfur where residents, as well as the United

Nations, United States and others, say civilians have been targeted and killed for their ethnicity by the

RSF and allied groups.

The death toll is believed to be much higher than recorded, as the

World Health Organization says about two-thirds of health facilities are “out of service” in combat-affected areas.

Many injured people are unable to reach hospitals, and bodies lie rotting in the streets of Khartoum and Darfur.

A record 25 million people in Sudan need humanitarian aid and protection, the UN says.

“Hundreds of thousands of people, most of them women and children”, pack camps that stretch out from the south of Khartoum all the way to the border with South Sudan, MSF said.

“There are suspected cases of measles, and malnutrition among children has become a vital health emergency. “From June 6 to 7 we treated 223 children with suspected measles, 72 were hospitalised and 13 have died,” MSF said.

The war has smashed the country's already fragile infrastructure, leaving residents short of water and electricity in the oppressive summer heat.

Numerous ceasefires, including some negotiated by the United States and Saudi Arabia, have failed to hold.

Fighting continued during the just ended Eid al Adha holiday for which the warring sides announced separate unilateral truces. — AFP

Israeli air strikes hit targets in Syria

DAMASCUS: Israel carried out air strikes in Syria near the government-held city of Homs, Syrian state media reported on Sunday, and the Israeli army later said it struck an anti-aircraft battery after rocket fire.

During more than a decade of war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air raids on Syrian territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hizbullah fighters as well as Syrian army positions.

“The Israeli enemy carried out air strikes coming from the northeast of Beirut, targeting some points in the vicinity of the city of Homs,” which is about 20 kilometres from Lebanon, Syrian state-run news agency SANA said, quoting a military source.

Syrian air defences intercepted some missiles, and that there had been some “material” losses.

In a brief statement early on Sunday that did not mention the air strikes, Israel's army said a Syrian anti-aircraft rocket “appears to have exploded in the air over Israeli territory”.

Several hours later the military said it had targeted “an anti-aircraft battery in Syria, as a



An Israeli military vehicle patrols along the border with Syria near Kibbutz Haspin in the Israel-annexed Golan Heights. — AFP

response to the launch of an anti-aircraft rocket from Syria into Israeli territory”.

It added that Israeli jets had also “struck additional targets in

the area”, and that no injuries were reported from the Syrian missile.

Israeli media showed pictures purportedly from a piece of the missile about 1.5 metres in length

which landed in Rahat, southern Israel.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said the strikes targeted “Hizbullah sites and ammunition depots” on the northeastern outskirts of Homs, killing one member.

Israeli strikes in Syria killed two Revolutionary Guards in late March.

Along with Hizbullah, Assad is backed by Russian forces and has clawed back much of the ground lost early in Syria's conflict.

Israel's latest strikes also targeted an air defence base in Qadmus, in Tartus province northwest of Homs, said the Observatory, which has a wide network of sources inside Syria.

Israel rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria, but it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch foe Iran to expand its footprint there.

On June 14, Israel carried out air strikes near Damascus wounding a soldier, according to SANA.

The Observatory, based in Britain, said at the time that the strikes had targeted arms depots belonging to pro-Iran fighters.

— AFP

UN chief calls on world to make troubled Haiti ‘top priority’



Jean Victor Geneus, Haiti's Minister of Foreign Affairs, looks on as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during a press conference in Port-au-Prince. — AFP

PORT-AU-PRINCE: On a visit to spotlight violence and chaos in Haiti, the UN secretary-general on Saturday called for a robust international effort to help the beleaguered national police in fighting rampant criminal gangs.

“We must put Haiti on the international political map, and make the tragedy of the Haitian people the international community's top priority,” Antonio Guterres said during the visit, his first to the impoverished Caribbean country as head of the UN. “I met Haitians, and I felt the exhaustion of a population that has been facing a cascade of crises

and unbearable living conditions for too long,” he said.

“This is not the time to forget about Haiti,” Guterres said after meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Henry, and other political and civil society leaders.

Guterres urged the UN Security Council, which is due to discuss the Haiti situation later this month, “to authorise the immediate deployment of a robust international security force.” In October, he relayed Henry's request for a non-UN force to support police overwhelmed by ever-increasing gang violence. — AFP

KANO

5 killed in a deadly rocket attack

Five people have been killed and 11 others injured after suspected group fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a town in northeast Nigeria's Borno state.

Scores of fighters attempted to invade the town of Damboa, but met stiff resistance. The attack is the latest in Nigeria's 14-year conflict in the northeast, where 40,000 have died and more than two million have been displaced.

“Out of desperation, the insurgents fired an RPG on the town from a distance, which



killed five people and injured 11 others,” said Babakura Kolo, a militia leader in the region. The five dead victims were buried while the injured were flown to the regional capital Maiduguri for medical attention. — AFP

MUMBAI

Monsoon rains cover entire country

India's annual monsoon covered the entire country on Sunday, six days earlier than usual, the state-run weather office said, but rain totals are 10% below average so far this season.

The monsoon delivers much needed water to farms and restocks reservoirs and aquifers. It also brings relief from the worst of the summer heat.

In a typical year, rains usually lash Kerala state, on India's southwest coast, from around June 1 and move northwards to



cover the entire country by July 8. This year, the monsoon arrived on the coast of southern Kerala state on June 8, more than a week later than normal, and its progress was later stalled by severe cyclone Biparjoy. — Reuters

BANGKOK

Elephant touches homeland after flight

A Thai elephant gifted to Sri Lanka two decades ago arrived back in its birth country on Sunday. Thai authorities had gifted the 29-year-old Muthu Raja — also known back in its birthplace as Sak Surin — to Sri Lanka in 2001. But they demanded the elephant back last year after allegations that it was tortured and neglected while kept at a Buddhist temple.

The 4,000-kilogram mammal arrived in Thailand just after 2 pm, having been transported



inside a specially constructed giant steel crate onboard an Ilyushin Il-76 cargo plane.

“He arrived in Chiang Mai perfectly,” Thai Environment Minister Varawut Silpa-archa said at the airport. — AFP



In brief

■ WARSAW



POLAND UPS SECURITY ON BELARUS BORDER

Poland is to deploy additional police officers to its border with Belarus to boost security in response to plans by the Wagner group of Russian mercenaries to set up base there, Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski said on Sunday.

The 500 extra police, including members of the anti-terrorism unit, will support 5,000 border guards and 2,000 soldiers already stationed along the border with the country's eastern neighbour.

Deputy Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who is responsible for security issues, recently announced that uniformed personnel would be increased and border fortifications strengthened.

— dpa

■ HAMBURG



RESIDENTS EVACUATED AS WWII BOMB DEFUSED

Around 8,200 people living in the northern German city of Kiel were temporarily evacuated from their homes on Sunday as a bomb disposal team defused a 250-kilogramme device dating back to World War II.

Police in the port city, which was a major naval base during the war, tweeted that the operation had been completed in the Neumühlen-Dietrichsdorf district without incident.

The bomb was uncovered during construction work. On Tuesday, another British bomb was defused in the Schreventeich district in the city. Some 3,000 residents had to be temporarily evacuated. — dpa

■ ROME



QU DONGYU RE-ELECTED AS HEAD OF UN FOOD AGENCY

The head of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, Qu Dongyu, was re-elected on Sunday for a second term as head of the UN agency.

He was the only candidate standing for the role of FAO Director-General, and received 168 out of 182 votes in a ballot in Rome on Sunday.

Qu, a former Chinese minister who was nominated for the post by Beijing, will serve a new four-year term from August 1.

His appointment is seen as a part of a drive by Beijing to get more figures into senior jobs at international bodies. — AFP

At least 719 arrested in France after rioting; mayor's house attacked

PARIS: French police arrested at least 719 people on Saturday night during further rioting about police brutality, according to an initial Interior Ministry assessment on Sunday morning.

The ministry tweeted that 45 police officers were injured in the riots that began after a teenage driver was shot dead at close range by a policeman in a traffic check.

Thanks to the deployment of 45,000 police officers and thousands of firefighters, it was a "calmer night" than the previous day, the tweet said.

Paris, Marseille and Lyon were among the cities most affected, with riots, looting and damage to property.

Police in Paris cleared the city's famous Champs Élysées boulevard using tear gas, Le Figaro newspaper reported.

There was also renewed looting in Lyon and Nice.

In Marseille, the situation was tense but under control, the city administration said in the evening. Groups formed throughout the evening to cause damage, the prefecture of Bouches-du-Rhône said.

The police tried to disperse



French police officers patrol in front of the Arc de Triomphe in the Champs Élysées area of Paris. — AFP

people with tear gas.

There was a major increase in the police presence in cities nationwide, particularly in Marseille, Lyon and Grenoble.

In Marseille, police deployed

armoured vehicles, helicopters and special troops.

Rioters also rammed a mayor's house with a car and set it alight while his family were sleeping, according to Vincent Jeanbrun,

mayor of L'Haÿ-les-Roses, outside Paris.

He said the rioters rammed the house with a car and set fire to it, injuring his wife and one of his children.

The public prosecutor's office opened an investigation for attempted murder, according to the television station BFMTV.

The mayor was still at the town hall during the night, which was barricaded with barbed wire and guarded by police officers due to attempted attacks after days of riots.

However, the building where the mayor's wife was sleeping with their two small children was not secured and the rioters rammed the gate to his house with a car and then set fire.

Earlier, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin said that Saturday night was quieter due to the "determined action" of law enforcement officers.

Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne thanked the police, gendarmes and firefighters deployed nationwide. "In the face of violence, they show exemplary courage," she tweeted.

Riots have also been reported in French overseas territories, including French Guiana in South America and the Caribbean island of Martinique.

French President Emmanuel Macron cancelled his state visit to Germany planned for next week given the political unrest. — dpa

Labour dispute shuts down Canada's west coast ports



Longshoremen with the ILWU on strike at Canada's busiest port in Vancouver, Canada. — Reuters

MONTREAL: Workers at Canada's busiest port in Vancouver and at harbours up and down the nation's west coast stopped work in a labour dispute that is likely to disrupt global freight transport.

After months of failed talks, more than 7,000 terminal cargo loaders and 49 waterfront employers in 30 ports went on strike.

Port automation, the rising cost of living and outsourcing are key issues behind the collective action led by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

Union leadership "has not taken this decision lightly, but for the future of our workforce we had to take this step," Rob Ashton, president of the union's Canadian branch, said in a statement.

He remained positive, however, about reaching a "collective agreement for the rights of (the) Working Class!"

The union's last contract expired on March 31.

For its part, the BC Maritime Employers Association said it has "made repeated efforts to be flexible and find compromise on

key priorities" without success.

"We appreciate the assistance of federal mediators in supporting the parties and we remain open to any solutions that bring about a balanced agreement," said the trade group, which represents ship and port owners and terminal operators.

On Friday, the association had indicated that a possible strike would not affect cruise ships docking in Vancouver, Prince Rupert and on Vancouver Island.

Members of the BC Maritime Employers Association transport goods across Canada and to the United States, including automobiles, coal, grain and containers.

A strike would have repercussions in US and other markets that receive goods through Canada.

The Port of Vancouver alone handles some CAN\$305 billion worth of goods annually, and contributes CAN\$11.9 billion to the nation's annual output.

All the west coast ports combined handled 16 per cent of Canada's total traded goods in the year 2020, the port companies said. — AFP

Two killed, dozens wounded in Baltimore mass shooting

WASHINGTON: At least two people were killed and 28 wounded in a mass shooting at a street party early on Sunday in the US city of Baltimore, police said.

Police received multiple calls about a shooting in the city's Brooklyn neighbourhood just after 12:30 am on Sunday, Acting Police Commissioner Rich Worley told a press conference.

"Upon officers' arrival we located multiple victims suffering from gunshot wounds," Worley said.

One 18-year-old woman was found dead at the scene in the East Coast port city, and a 20-year-old man died after being taken to hospital, a police statement said.

The wounded were being treated at area hospitals, he added, with three of them in critical condition.

Worley said authorities were

working to identify a suspect and determine a motive for the shooting.

"This is an extensive crime scene, our detectives are going to be here quite a while," he said.

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, speaking to reporters at the crime scene, condemned the shooting.

"This is an absolute tragedy that did not have to happen," he said.

"It again highlights the impacts and the need to deal with the over-proliferation of illegal guns on our streets and the ability for those who should not have them to get their hands on them," Scott said.

"We will not stop until we find those cowards who decided to just shoot dozens of people, causing two people to lose their lives," he said.

With more firearms than inhabitants, the United States has

the highest rate of gun deaths of any developed country — at least 44,357 in 2022, including 24,090 suicides, according to the Gun Violence Archive (GVA).

Sunday's incident was at least the 338th mass shooting to occur so far this year, according to the GVA, which defines the term as a gun-related incident in which four or more people are wounded or killed.

Earlier this year, Scott penned an editorial in The Washington Post in which he said his city "has over-relied on the three Ps — policing, prosecution and prisons — to reduce violence."

"An act of violence doesn't start or end when someone pulls a trigger. There are countless points along the way where we can intervene," wrote the mayor, who was elected in 2020 on a pledge to reduce gun violence. — AFP



A view of the scene where a shooting took place, in Baltimore. — Reuters

The writer is Assoc
Prof, Dept of English
Language and
Literature, SQU

It is only in the 21st century that boredom has begun to be seen as restorative, calming, even necessary for human wellbeing. This is mainly because the pace of life has become so fast and changes so unpredictable that the yearning for a moment of peace is welcome.

Because boredom occurs when the mind is looking for stimulus, good, if not great ideas can come during such downtime. So can stepping away from the endless hysterical noises on social media. We can't think through all that din, so consciously staying away can provide a chance to just daydream and spend time with ourselves. All this then can also give us an honest perspective on life – where we are

IF YOU FEEL
BORED
APPRECIATE IT
AS A FULFILLING
MOMENT,
KNOWING
THAT IT IS
JUST ANOTHER
IMPORTANT
PHASE OF LIFE

So, next time children or adults repeat the refrain of how bored they are, appreciate it as a fulfilling moment, knowing that it is just another important phase of life.



On a sacred rewarding mission

Just a few days back, Muslims all over the world have celebrated Eid Al Adha with family and friends. Millions of pilgrims celebrated this Eid differently with Haj's various rituals.

The purpose of Haj is to commemorate the name of Allah. As the Holy Quran states, "You shall commemorate God for a number of days". Haj represents an appeal from pilgrims to the Almighty Allah; seeking forgiveness, mercy and acceptance as obedient worshipers.

Pilgrims of different backgrounds, nationalities and languages converge for the same religious cause. All men wear white and all women black. With no exception, all of them came to Mecca for the same reason and mission as that of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and other pilgrims thousands of years back. Similar tasks, which have been performed in the past centuries are being performed today in the same locations.

Although Haj is a religious mission, it mirrors a social and spiritual unity for Muslims where all individual differences are set aside. It brings harmony and compassion among pilgrims despite the huge crowd. The feeling of being a pilgrim is unbelievably heartening. Pilgrims are sharing respect, empathy and support to each and everyone as if they are one family; brothers and sisters. It is very touching indeed. The way the pilgrims are united and coming together is undoubtedly magnificent.

They are sincerely worshipping the Almighty Allah in a different way unlike the



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

ALTHOUGH HAJ IS A RELIGIOUS MISSION, IT MIRRORS A SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL UNITY FOR MUSLIMS WHERE ALL INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ARE SET ASIDE. IT BRINGS HARMONY AND COMPASSION AMONG PILGRIMS DESPITE THE HUGE CROWD

usual prayers that are performed in masjids five times a day. Each day there, they are performing different tasks in which they become very serious in what they do and truthful with the prayers they say. Although the reason behind performing some tasks the way it is done is hidden, pilgrims are obliged to follow what the Prophets Muhammad and Ibrahim (PBUT) have performed ages ago.

Haj is the fifth essential pillar of Islam and only capable Muslims are requested to perform it. Those who are physically or financially unable to go for Haj can do it when they are ready or else assign someone but with certain serious conditions. Otherwise, many people might get an excuse, but they get deprived from the honour and big reward of going for Haj. All Muslims intending to go for Haj must be healthy and strong enough to sufficiently perform all the tasks required.

The reward granted by Allah to all pilgrims is that all their sins, faults and wrongdoings will be forgiven and rubbed out once they come back home from Haj. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Whoever performs Haj and does not commit any obscenity or transgression shall return free from sins as he was on the day his mother gave birth to him". He also said, "The reward of a Haj mabroor is nothing but paradise".

As Haj pilgrims return from Mecca and Madina, they get Allah's reward to start a new clean chapter in life. Dear pilgrims, congratulations all on completing your hard mission and wish you a safe return home. May Allah bless all pilgrims, accept their Haj and reward them paradise.

CLOSE TO THE WHITE BALLOON



A passenger plane of Kazakhstan's SCAT Airlines is seen flying in front of the moon in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on Saturday. – Reuters

Truth, democracy depend on each other

It has become something of a cliché in recent years to say that we live in a post-truth, post-fact age. In the United Kingdom, the Brexit referendum and the spectacular rise and fall of former Prime Minister Boris Johnson catapulted the crisis of truth to the forefront of political debate. In the United States, former President Donald Trump's incessant falsehoods during his tumultuous term in office and his equally turbulent post-presidency continue to pose an unprecedented threat to the fabric of American democracy.

During his four years in the White House, the *Washington Post* estimated that Trump told 30,573 untruths — an average of 21 false claims a day. Of course, Trump capped his term with the most egregious lie of all: that he won the 2020 election. In reality, it wasn't even close. President Joe Biden secured 306 Electoral College votes and won the popular vote by more than seven million.

In Trump's telling, millions of Biden votes were fabricated, and the presidential election was "rigged" by a grand conspiracy of the "deep state" and the Democratic Party. Although this conspiracy theory has been thoroughly debunked over the past two and a half years, the "stolen election" narrative remains immensely popular among Republican voters and will likely help propel Trump to the 2024 GOP nomination.

Johnson's lies were far less grandiose



Chris Patten

The author is Chancellor of the University of Oxford

OPEN SOCIETIES THRIVE ON PRESS FREEDOM, VIGOROUS DEBATE, AND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

than Trump's. But his arms-length relationship with the truth ultimately caught up with him: his blatant misrepresentations to Parliament about breaking Covid-19 lockdown rules led to his downfall.

But does honesty — or at least a genuine effort to be honest — still matter? Johnson, after all, is hardly the first British politician to lie. Certainly, the self-styled "big beasts" of UK politics have dabbled in deceit. But while some falsehoods are undoubtedly self-serving, some could be in the service of maintaining social harmony, a concept Plato and Socrates called the "noble lie." For example, policymakers contemplating a currency devaluation will likely deny it to prevent speculative attacks.

To be sure, there are flaws to this reasoning. In 1956, for example, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden unequivocally lied to Parliament when he repeatedly insisted that the UK intervened militarily in the Suez Crisis solely to stop the fighting. In fact, the UK orchestrated the failed invasion of Egypt with France and Israel. Eden probably also lied to Queen Elizabeth II about this humiliating debacle. It is doubtful that these falsehoods genuinely served the public interest.

Nearly a half-century later, then-Prime Minister Tony Blair



During his four years in the White House, the *Washington Post* estimated that Trump told 30,573 untruths — an average of 21 false claims a day.

was, at the very least, economical with the truth about the reasons Britain entered the disastrous Iraq War. Blair, generally known for his integrity, would likely have justified this by arguing that it was important for the UK to support its American allies, even when intelligence appeared to have been manipulated to accommodate a pre-existing plan. While there may be some truth to this, the arguments for the invasion appear threadbare in retrospect.

Yet, as Immanuel Kant observed, truth and freedom are inextricably linked. This connection becomes especially

apparent when comparing the conduct of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes to that of open democratic societies. In dictatorships, the leader propagates whatever narrative appears to support their actions. Dissent, of course, is not tolerated. That is how Joseph Stalin could rationalise the Holodomor, the "terror famine" that killed millions of Ukrainians in 1932-33, and Adolf Hitler was able to make a horrifying case for the murder of millions of Jews. In the absence of free speech, transparency, and political opposition, telling the truth was simply not part of these tyrants'

agendas. This is also part of the reason why Russian President Vladimir Putin has managed to evade accountability for his "special military operation" in Ukraine, at least for the time being. Similarly, Chinese President Xi Jinping claims that the Uyghurs who are incarcerated in camps in Xinjiang are simply undergoing "re-education" to prevent them from becoming terrorists.

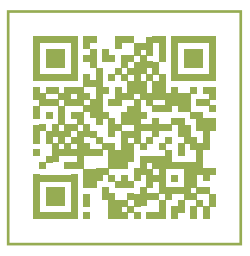
Open societies, on the other hand, thrive on press freedom, vigorous debate, and evidence-based policymaking. While liberal democracies do not always live up to this ideal, the understanding that this is how things should work, and that voters can remove leaders who transgress this expectation, is the source of their strength.

When liberal democracies lose sight of their core values, however, checks and balances that underpin their existence inevitably deteriorate. Once lies become accepted as a normal part of political discourse, it is only a matter of time before demagogues exploit tolerance of falsehood. Sooner or later, courts are overruled, opposition parties are marginalised, and corruption becomes increasingly prevalent. Eventually, trust collapses, and the fabric of democracy unravels.

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sport

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Cofidis' French rider Victor Lafay celebrates as he cycles to the finish line to win the 2nd stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race 208,9 km between Vitoria-Gasteiz and San Sebastian, in northern Spain, on Sunday. – AFP

Lafay gives Cofidis first Tour win in 15 years, Pogacar picks up bonuses

SAN SEBASTIAN: Victor Lafay gave his Cofidis team their first Tour de France victory in 15 years when he claimed the second stage, a 209-km hilly ride from Vitoria Gasteiz on Sunday.

The Frenchman, who had showed great form in Saturday's opening stage, powered away with one kilometre to go and did not look back with a reduced bunch breathing down his neck.

Cofidis had not won a stage on the Tour since Sylvain Chavanel in Montlucon in 2008.

Belgian Wout van Aert (Jumbo Visma) took second place and Slovenian Tadej Pogacar finished third while his UAE Emirates team mate Adam Yates retained the overall leader's yellow jersey.

Two-time Tour winner Pogacar gained a two-second bonus, added to the eight seconds he earned for being first to the top of the Jaizkibel climb, just ahead of defending champion Jonas Vingegaard.

The Danish rider picked up five seconds there but now trails his big rival by 11 seconds in the overall standings.

Yates leads Pogacar by six seconds, with Vingegaard in sixth place.

Monday's third stage is a 193.5-km ride from Amorebieta Etxano to Bayonne as the race enters France. — Reuters



Cofidis' Victor Lafay celebrates on the podium wearing the green jersey after winning stage 2. – Reuters



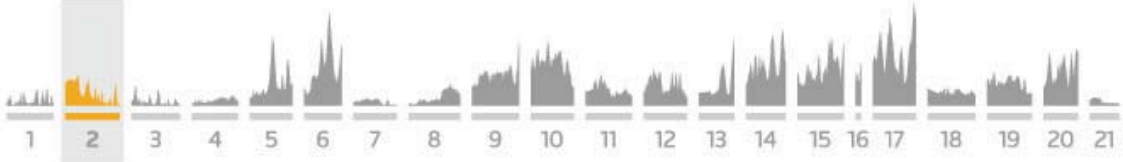
UAE Team Emirates' Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium wearing the white jersey after stage 2. – Reuters

Stage 2



VITORIA-GASTEIZ – SAINT-SEBASTIEN

JULY 2



ROUTE



Length
208.9 km

B
Bonus

S
Sprint

1 2 3 4 ← Easy
Climb categories

ELEVATION



Note: Maps and elevation profiles are based on existing roads. Some discrepancies may occur.
Sources: Maps4News; GPS Visualizer; Amaury Sport Organisation.
Aditi Bhandari, Prasanta Kumar Dutta, Sudev Kiyada and Jitesh Chowdhury | Reuters, June 30, 2023

Australia in control to go two-up in Test series

ANDY JALIL
LORDS, JULY 2

Australia are poised to wrap up the second Test on the fifth day and take a two-nil lead in the five-Test series. England have a mammoth task of scoring a further 257 on a last day's wearing pitch with just six wickets remaining.

England were soon in trouble as they began the run chase of 371. With the exception of Ben Duckett, the top order fell apart rapidly with Zak Crawley caught behind in the third over and in the next over Ollie Pope's middle stump was uprooted by a beautiful ball that came in sharply. Both batsmen had fallen to Mitchell Starc and England were 13 for two.

The thirteenth over bowled by Pat Cummins brought further disaster to the England innings as Joe Root, unable to keep the ball down which rose sharply, edged to first slip on 18 and three balls later Harry Brooks, on 4, playing from the crease was bowled by a ball that was angled into him. That was four down for 45 and still 326 required.

Then came the resistance in the fifth wicket stand between Duckett and Ben Stokes whose unbroken partnership lasted over an hour-and-a-quarter during which they faced 18 overs, adding 69. They remained not out with Duckett on his second half century of the match and Stokes on 29. Duckett was fortunate that Starc having caught him on 50, grounded the ball as he fell and on review he was given not out.

Earlier, England required early wickets with the tourists on 130 for two overnight and in an overall lead of 221. But with Usman Khawaja on 58 and in ominous form and Steve Smith with him at the crease the breakthrough took 23 overs to come.

Khawaja had taken his score to 77 and their partnership for the third wicket was 64 when Stuart Broad was brought on and he struck in his first over as Khawaja hooked into the hands of fine leg.

Smith, meanwhile, had moved on to 33 and had struck 4 fours taking three of them in an over from James Anderson. All three



England's Ben Stokes in action. – Reuters

were beautifully struck, a lovely cover drive, an off drive from a half-volley and then a delicate late cut.

But in the following over after Khawaja's dismissal, Smith fell in

similar fashion being held from a hook at deep backward square leg for 34 off Josh Tongue who had seen Travis Head dropped off his bowling on the previous ball. Australia were 190 for four.

Head wasn't to last long following his fine 77 in the first innings. On 7, he edged a rising ball from Broad and Joe Root at short square leg snapped up a left-handed low catch.

By lunch Australia had slowly progressed to 225 for five. With good controlled bowling England were keeping a check on the runs and Australia kept losing wickets. After the break, Cameron Green who managed just 18 in nearly two hours, hit a chest-high ball from Ollie Robinson to be caught at deep square leg.

Robinson struck again in his next over with a ball that rose on Alex Carey and he gloved it to short leg for a simple catch. That was the seventh wicket to fall on 242 with Australia still finding it difficult to score freely.

Broad, who eventually finished with four for 65 accounted for Cummins for 11 and Ben Stokes dismissed Josh Hazlewood with the ball going off the edge of the bat on to his thigh pad before Root took the catch.

Nathan Lyon hobbled out to bat despite his calf injury and defiantly lasted 25 minutes during which he helped Starc to add 15 to take the innings total to 279 before he plodded a rising ball for a catch at short mid-wicket.

AUSTRALIA TAKE CONTROL OF WOMEN'S ASHES THANKS TO T20 WIN

LONDON: Australia took a dominant grip of the multi-format women's Ashes with a four-wicket victory in the first T20 of the series on Saturday.

Beth Mooney's 61 not out steered the world T20 champions home with one ball to spare at Edgbaston chasing 154 to win.

After winning the sole Test match of the series, the visitors now lead 6-0 on points with just 10 left to play for, courtesy of two points for a win in the two remaining T20 clashes and three one day internationals.

Australia captain Alyssa Healy, who played despite managing two fractured fingers, won the toss and elected to field first.

Sophia Dunkley anchored the England innings as she hit 56 off 49 balls but wickets fell regularly at the other end. Danni Wyatt, Alice Capsey and Nat Sciver-Brunt all departed for single figures.

But a middle order rally from captain Heather Knight (29) and Amy Jones, who was 40 not out,



Australia's Darcie Brown celebrates with teammates after taking a catch to dismiss England's Sophia Dunkley off the bowling of Megan Schutt. – Reuters

allowed England to post 153.

Healy fell early to the bowling of Lauren Bell, but a rapid 40 from Tahlia McGrath took the game away from England.

Ashleigh Gardner won the tourists the Test with the ball and took Australia close to the finishing line with 31 off 23 balls.

Two wickets in two balls from

Sarah Glenn got rid of Gardner and Grace Harris.

But Mooney remained at the crease and hit nine fours in her 47-ball innings to make sure of victory.

England now likely need to win all five remaining matches in the series to reclaim the Ashes for the first time since 2014. — AFP

Austria's Formula One deal extended to 2030

SPIELBERG: Austria's Red Bull Ring will remain on the Formula One calendar until at least 2030 after the sport announced a contract extension on Sunday.

The race in Spielberg is a home one for the energy drinks company that owns two of Formula One's 10 teams in champions Red Bull Racing and Italy-based AlphaTauri.

Both sides agreed a four-year extension to 2027 only last March.

Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali said the latest extension was a tribute to the "vision and passion" of Red Bull's late co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz, who died last October.

"The race in Austria is a big favourite for the drivers and all our



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen competes ahead of Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr and Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc during the Formula One Austrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull race track in Spielberg, Austria. — AFP

fans and we are looking forward to many years of excitement and action that are ahead of us," he added in a statement.

Sunday's announcement puts Austria ahead of other European circuits in terms of contract longevity. — Reuters

Kyrgios says absence 'brutal' but didn't 'miss tennis'

LONDON: Australian whirlwind Nick Kyrgios will blow back into Wimbledon where he made a storming run to the final in 2022, admitting his injury-enforced absence from tennis has been "brutal".

The 28-year-old firebrand has only played one match in 2023 — in Stuttgart last month — after undergoing knee surgery.

It was the worst possible preparation for a return to the All England Club 12 months after losing the final to Novak Djokovic.

"It's been brutal, it's been hard," Kyrgios said Sunday.

However, he added: "I didn't miss the sport. I was almost dreading coming back a little bit, but it's my job."

At Wimbledon in 2022, the Australian dominated most of the headlines.

His high-octane, flamboyant shot-making was accompanied by signature clashes with rivals and officialdom.

He was fined \$10,000 for spitting and \$4,000 for shouting obscenities — one of which sent

the British tabloids into meltdown as it was within earshot of eight-year-old Prince George.

Kyrgios also fought out an explosive third round clash with Stefanos Tsitsipas with the Greek even describing him as "evil" and a "bully".

In the final against Djokovic, he demanded a woman be ejected from the crowd for consuming "700 drinks, bro".

"In a way it was good to be home. Obviously heartbreaking as well," said Kyrgios as he reflected on his time out of the sport.

"Last year I felt like everything kind of came together for me. Finals of Wimbledon. Barely lost a match. Had the third best season on tour.

"Obviously my body was just crying out for some sort of rest."

For Kyrgios, being away from the tennis courts didn't mean an absence from the public view.

- Social media 'rabbit hole' — In May, his car was stolen from his mother at gunpoint from outside the family home in Canberra.

Before that incident, Kyrgios



Nick Taylor reacts after sinking a birdie putt on the 17th hole during the final round of the RBC Canadian Open golf tournament. — USA Today Sports

pleaded guilty in February to assaulting a former girlfriend.

He avoided a conviction for what the magistrate called a "single

act of stupidity".

Kyrgios has also been the headliner in the Netflix series "Break Point" where he spoke

candidly about his mental health.

He admitted he had considered suicide and ended up in a psychiatric ward in 2019.

"It took me seven, eight years to be able to just open up about that," he explained on Sunday.

"I feel great now. It's hard because I'm putting so much expectation on myself. Compared to that time, I'm feeling a lot better."

Kyrgios says his mental well-being has been aided by reducing the time he spends on social media, describing it as a "rabbit hole".

"It's horrible what athletes have to deal with. I don't think it's normal at all, how much criticism, how much negativity, how much sniping that people have to deal with now. It's out of control."

Despite claiming not to have missed tennis, Kyrgios has been enchanted by the impact made by world number one Carlos Alcaraz.

"What Alcaraz has been able to put together in such a short period of time is nuts. He's got such discipline and he just loves the sport.

"He's fun to watch. He's got so much discipline but he's got that showman about him, as well, which I like.

— AFP

Saudi Arabia’s Al Hilal reappoint Jorge Jesus as coach



RIYADH: Saudi Arabian side Al Hilal have reappointed Portuguese Jorge Jesus as their coach on a one-year deal, the Saudi Pro League club said on Saturday.

Former Benfica manager Jesus, who arrived in Riyadh from Türkiye’s Fenerbahce, previously managed Al Hilal in 2018-19 when he led them to a Saudi Super Cup win over rivals Al Ittihad in his first game in charge.

In the 2022-23 season he won the Turkish Cup, leading Fenerbahce to their first trophy in nine years. They finished second in the Turkish Super League.

The 68-year-old has replaced

Ramon Diaz who said goodbye to the Al Hilal players in mid-May before travelling to Argentina for personal reasons. His contract was set to expire at the end of the season.

Al Hilal finished third in the 2022-23 league standings behind champions Al Ittihad and runners-up Al Nassr.

They signed Senegal defender Kalidou Koulibaly from Chelsea on Sunday until 2026 after Portugal midfielder Ruben Neves joined the club from Wolverhampton Wanderers on a three-year deal for a reported 55 million euros (\$60.01 million).

(\$1 = 0.9166 euros) — Reuters



Former ManUnited midfielder Cleverley retires

“Today, I am announcing my retirement from football as a player. The last year has been immensely difficult trying to overcome the obstacles of injury

TOM CLEVERLEY

games for Watford, who finished 11th in the Championship standings.

Cleverley underwent surgery on an Achilles injury that had kept him out for an extended period at the beginning of last season before sustaining a thigh injury in February.

“Today, I am announcing my retirement from football as a player. The last year has been immensely difficult trying to overcome the obstacles of injury,” the former Premier League winner said in a statement on Saturday.

“Unfortunately, my body has failed me and just hasn’t got the capacity to perform anymore.”

Cleverley, an academy graduate of United, played 79 games for the Old Trafford outfit

before joining Leicester City, Watford, Wigan Athletic, Aston Villa and Everton on loan.

“Special mentions must go to Manchester United... The people and the club that gave me the foundations as a player and person and also the club that made my dreams come true...”

“To all those involved with Watford Football Club. I have the privilege of calling this club home... The love you have shown me as a young loanee up to the moment I retire as a grown man I can never repay.”

Watford said, “Some exciting news will soon be announced jointly by the club and Tom.” — Reuters

Dominant England held at home by Portugal

MILTON KEYNES: England were held to a frustrating 0-0 home draw by Portugal after the Lionesses dominated Saturday’s World Cup warm-up.

The European champions, who have lost one of their last 32 games, had 22 shots to Portugal’s two at Stadium MK, including a terrific chance for Georgia Stanway - earning her 50th cap - that she banged off the crossbar seconds before halftime.

Alessia Russo managed to beat Portugal goalkeeper Ines Pereira but defender Ana Borges stretched to make a spectacular clearance off the line during a flurry of second-half chances for England.

Lionesses captain Leah Williamson and Euro 2022 Golden Boot winner Beth Mead, who will both miss the World Cup with serious knee injuries, watched on from the stands.

“Of course we are disappointed that we didn’t score a goal,” manager Sarina Wiegman told ITV Sport after fourth-ranked England’s final match on home soil before flying to Australia.



England’s midfielder Laura Coombs (2R) vies with Portugal’s defender Diana Gomes (2L) during the International football friendly match between England and Portugal at the Stadium MK, in Milton Keynes, north of London on Saturday. — AFP

“It was a little different between the first and second half. I think we were too slow in our possession game in the

first half and we had too many players behind the ball. “Although we did have lots of chances ... (but) shots don’t

say everything.” Wiegman will have one more friendly to firm up her World Cup starting team with

England playing Olympic champions Canada behind closed doors on July 14 in Australia.

Portugal, who were late additions to last year’s Euros as a replacement for banned Russia, take on the Netherlands on July 23

“Yeah of course,” Wiegman said of tinkering with her squad. “This was the first game after we’ve not seen each other for a long time. So last time was April (a 2-0 loss to Australia that ended England’s 30-game unbeaten run).

“So I think this is good. Then we travel on Wednesday, that will take a little time to get adjusted in Australia, then we have one more moment to play and then we should be ready.”

England kick off their sixth World Cup campaign on July 22 against Haiti.

Portugal, who were late additions to last year’s Euros as a replacement for banned Russia, take on the Netherlands on July 23 in their World Cup debut. — Reuters





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Value of real estate deals in Oman reaches RO 1.22bn

MUSCAT: The total value of real estate deals in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of May 2023 reached RO 1.220 billion compared to RO 885.6 million during the same period in 2022, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The figures revealed that the total fees collected for all transactions amounted to RO 28.9 million, comprising an increase of 17.5% compared to the same period in 2022.

The traded value of sales contracts increased by 6.4%, to



stand at RO 468 million. The number of sales contracts declined by 4.1%.

The statistics indicated a rise in the traded value of mortgage contracts by 70.3%, to reach RO 748.4 million (10,110 contracts). Meanwhile, the number of swap contracts reached 620 at value of RO 4.2 million.

The number of title deeds issued by the end of May 2023 stood at 99,893, comprising a rise of 7.6%.

The number of issued title deeds for GCC citizens surged by 68.1% to reach 516. — ONA

Mobile internet subscriptions in Oman surge by 9 per cent

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 2



The number of active mobile broadband Internet subscriptions increased by 9 per cent until the end of May 2023 compared to the same period of the previous year, to reach 5,851,173 subscriptions, and the total fixed telephone subscriptions connected to the Internet Protocol (IP) increased by 6.1 per cent, registering 275,607 subscriptions, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The statistics showed that the number of mobile phone subscriptions increased by 12.4 per cent until the end of May 2023, compared to the same period last year, recording 6,953,100 subscriptions.

The largest number of mobile phone subscriptions was in prepaid mobile phone subscriptions, reaching 5,229,350, with an increase of 9.5 per cent until the end of May 2023, compared

to the same period last year.

The total number of analogue fixed line subscriptions, which include prepaid and postpaid, decreased by 13.1 per cent, while the total number of fixed Internet service subscriptions reached 541,870, up by 3.2 per cent until the end of May 2023, compared to the same period last year.

MB LLC completes sukuk of RO 30m

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 2

Mohammed Al Barwani LLC, a Muscat-based multinational group of companies, has issued local sukuk of RO 25,000,000 which was offered with a green-shoe option due for maturity in 2028 at a coupon rate of 8.5% per year, distributed semi-annually.

The issue was oversubscribed and the company decided to exercise the green-shoe option to retain the additional RO 5,000,000.

Said al Jabri, Chief Operations Officer of MB LLC, said: “The success of this sukuk represents the confidence the market has placed in the MB Group.

This reflects the long-standing success and exceptional performance of the Group in maintaining a high standard and



محمد البرواني ش.م.م
MOHAMMED AL BARWANI LLC

Operational Excellence over 42 years of existence.”

The Omani Rial denominated issuance was subscribed by banks, insurance companies, GREs, pension funds, Institutions, and HNIs. The sukuk was rated omBBB by Capital Intelligence and carries an amortising structure with a final maturity date set as June 2028.

MB Group is predominantly Oil and Gas Exploration and Services entity, besides having business interests in Mining and

Engineering Services among other sectors.

MB Sukuk was open for subscription on a private placement basis, which opened on June 6 and closed on June 15, 2023.

Ammar al Ali, Chief Commercial Officer of MB LLC, said: “Robust financial performance, strong business fundamentals, and consistent track record, and experienced management team, were some of the key reasons for strong investors’ participation and I would like to thank all the investors who decided to be a part of this journey of Value creation.”

Ahli Bank SAOG and Maisarah Islamic Banking Services acted as Joint Issue Managers, collecting banks and Advisors on the transaction, while Trowers were the legal advisors.

Oman launches comprehensive review of flood hazards

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 2

Seeking to bolster the country’s preparedness against flash floods – an increasingly worrying trend attributable to climate change – the Omani government is preparing to undertake a comprehensive review of flooding threats aimed at developing risk management and emergency response plans covering vast swathes of the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources whose broad remit also includes the construction of flood protection dams, recharge dams and reservoirs.

In a series of tenders floated in recent weeks, the Ministry has invited qualified consultants to bid for contracts seeking advisory services encompassing an array of objectives, including the updating

BESIDES HELPING STRENGTHEN OMAN’S DEFENCES AGAINST FLOOD-RELATED THREATS, THE UPDATED FLOOD RISK MAPS WILL ALSO HELP IDENTIFY AREAS THAT ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO FLOODING AND THUS SUBJECT TO MORE STRINGENT DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION SAFEGUARDS.

and development of Flood Hazard Maps, as well as the preparation of Flood Risk Management and Emergency Response Plans.

These studies cover all areas of Oman prone to flash flooding, notably Muscat, Dhofar, and Al Sharqiyah North and South, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North and South, Al Dhahirah, Al Wusta, Musandam and Al Buraimi governorates. Besides helping strengthen Oman’s defences against flood-related threats, the updated flood risk maps will also help identify areas that are



susceptible to flooding and thus subject to more stringent design and construction safeguards.

“The purpose of flood plain, flood hazard and flood risk mapping is the geographical identification and illustration of areas at different levels of risk from flood hazard,” the Ministry noted in a brief overview.

“In this respect, flood maps need

relevant water flow direction.”

Selected consultants, according to the Ministry, will conduct their studies in three distinct phases:

(i) Phase A will focus on rainfall and flow data analysis, (ii) Flood Mapping activities (covering the flood plain and preparation of flood hazard maps), and (iii) Formulation of Flood Risk Management and Emergency Plans.

Also as part of their remit, the consultants will be required to prepare rainfall intensity, duration and frequency tables for each governorate, alongside a Flood Design Manual.

The goal is to improve the understanding of all stakeholders with regard to the rainfall-runoff co-relation in each major catchment area. Furthermore, using hydrological data, the consultants will have to identify risks associated with the main channels of wadis.

Following a succession of

devastating flood events witnessed in recent years, Omani authorities have ramped up investment in flood control and mitigation infrastructure targeting areas predisposed to severe flooding.

Flood protection schemes are currently under various stages of development and construction in, among other governorates, Muscat, Al Sharqiyah South and Dhofar. In April, flood protection projects planned across Wadi Al Ansab (Muscat Governorate), Wadi Tahwa (Al Sharqiyah South Governorate) and Wadi Al Zuhaimi (Al Batinah North Governorate) were accorded the status of public utility projects, effectively prepping them for implementation.

Besides claiming human lives, recent flood events in Oman have been responsible for severe damage to public infrastructure, private businesses and homes, farmland, and other economic assets.

Al Mouj Muscat launches new urban farm

MUSCAT: An urban farm at Al Mouj Muscat is a first for Oman and the latest initiative from the premier lifestyle destination to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability, whilst encouraging a strong sense of community among its 8,000 residents.

Located at Linear Park within the oceanfront integrated tourism complex, the urban farm provides a richly fertile space where residents can come together to grow their own produce and learn about sustainable agriculture.

The 250 square metre farm is proving extremely popular with people of all ages and so far, more than thirty (30) volunteers have embraced the opportunity to garden outdoors and collectively plant, grow and harvest a variety of vegetables, fruit and herbs.

The hands-on, eco-friendly concept is both sociable and educational as it provides an environment where people can connect over a mutual appreciation and love of nature whilst sharing their skills and knowledge.



The produce is enjoyed by the volunteers who have the pleasure of taking home nutritious produce, promoting good health and well-being.

Nasser bin Masoud al Shaibani, Chief Executive Officer of Al

Mouj Muscat, commented: “The addition of the urban farm is a wholesome addition to our community, and we are grateful for the tremendous support we have received from all of our volunteers.

“By engaging our residents and fostering a sense of ownership and pride, it helps to create a stronger, healthier, and more connected community, values which sit at the core of Al Mouj.

“What is also central to

our guiding principles and philosophy is the importance of environmental stewardship. By providing opportunities to incorporate nature into daily life, we are supporting our aims of pioneering sustainability.

Currently the urban farm is growing a variety of produce including tomatoes, potatoes, spinach, eggplants, sweet potatoes, aubergines and herbs and over the winter months when stronger harvests are likely, any surplus will be given away freely to the wider Al Mouj community.

Al Mouj Muscat was the Sultanate of Oman’s first Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), a joint venture between Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Omran and Tanmia that today people from 85 nationalities call home.

In addition to its world-class oceanfront retail and dining experiences, visitors are attracted to a 400-berth marina from which sea tour operators run leisure trips off the coast of Oman, an award-winning World 100 championship golf course and luxury hotels.

Win up to RO 4,000 with BankDhofar Al Riadah referral scheme



MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to providing the best banking experience to its customers, BankDhofar announced the launch of Al Riadah Referral Scheme. The new scheme offers customers attractive incentives giving them chances to win up to RO 4,000 by referring their friends and family members to join Al Riadah Priority Banking Services.

Elaborating on that, Hind bint Abdulmalik al Sabbaghiyah, AGM & Head of Priority Banking at BankDhofar, said: “At BankDhofar, we continue our commitment to provide exceptional banking experience to our customers. With the launch of the referral scheme, we aim to reward our existing customers who share their experience with their family and friends, and refer them to BankDhofar Priority Banking Services. We look forward to welcoming new customers who will enjoy unparalleled banking experience.”

Al Riadah referral Scheme, which is valid until the end of March 2024, is open for existing customers of Al Riadah Priority Banking. Customers will get the chance to win RO 50 per successful referral, and up to RO 1,000 for 20 valid referrals per quarter. Eligibility criteria for referrals include a salary credit of RO 3,000, a savings deposit of RO 30,000, or a fixed deposit of RO 250,000. The reward amount will be credited quarterly.

Al Riadah Priority Banking provides a unique range of banking products and services that are tailored to suit the unique lifestyle of priority customers, ranging from personalised cheque book, exclusive Al Riadah card, including; Visa Infinite Debit Card, Visa Signature Debit Card, Visa Infinite Credit Card, Visa Signature Credit Cards and MasterCard Platinum Credit Card.

Customers can enjoy exceptional times at restaurants, shops, procurement protection, extended warranty, access to airport lounges around the world, travel insurance for cardholders and their families, and other exclusive services. BankDhofar also has tailor-made financing solutions to meet the needs of its priority banking customers with low insurance fees and simple and fast procedures.

The bank also provides deposit accounts at competitive interest rates and low insurance fees.

OAB welcomes Eid with Al Rahma Association



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) helped to lift the spirits of more than 400 children thanks to its participation in Eid celebrations organised by Al Rahma Association for Motherhood & Child Welfare.

As part of its unwavering commitment to making a positive difference across the Sultanate of Oman, the bank organised a heartwarming event that created a memorable experience for the children.

The event was part of OAB’s ongoing year-long programme

of community-based events to foster a sense of togetherness, exemplifying the bank’s core values of responsibility and social impact.

Earlier this month, OAB collaborated with the Ministry of Health to promote awareness of the early detection and prevention of breast cancer, following on from a month of Ramadhan events across the Sultanate of Oman that benefitted the elderly, children, cancer patients and several non-profit organisations.

Bank Nizwa joins MoSD’s initiative ‘Be with us for them’

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, was honoured at a prestigious ceremony commending participants of the “Be with us for them” initiative, organised by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), as part of its commitment to social responsibilities.

The initiative, with a primary focus on training and employing those who possess mental, visual and mild to moderate hearing disabilities offers diverse job opportunities tailored to their unique capabilities.

By contributing to this initiative, Bank Nizwa exemplifies its dedication to aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and empowering individuals from all walks of life.

Haifa al Lawati, Assistant



General Manager of Human Resources at Bank Nizwa said, “Bank Nizwa stands as a firm believer in the power of inclusivity. With a strong commitment to embracing diversity, the bank strives to create an environment where everyone feels valued and included.

Bank Nizwa actively promotes equal opportunities

for individuals, including those with special needs. The bank focuses on investing in skilled individuals to showcase their unique capabilities and contribute meaningfully to the workforce. Through its dedication to inclusivity, Bank Nizwa paves the way for a more equitable society, where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.”

Citibank honours Bank Muscat for excellence in US Dollar transfers

MUSCAT: In continuation of its excellence in banking services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, won recently the Straight-through-processing (STP) award from the New York headquartered multinational banking giant, Citibank, for its outstanding performance in US dollar-denominated fund transfers in both Commercial payments and Treasury payments.

The award was based on evaluation of the quality and accuracy of SWIFT payment messages routed through Citibank, which was above 97 per cent.

This prestigious award is given to leading financial institutions around the world that apply



the highest levels of efficiency in executing money transfers and financial transactions with minimal manual intervention, which reflects on enhancing efficiency and avoiding any delay

in executing payments.

Bank Muscat has been continuously winning this kind of accolades from various global financial institutions.

Speaking on the occasion,

Zuwaina bint Abdullah al Sharjiyah, Assistant General Manager — Central Operations & Change Management, Bank Muscat, said: “It is a matter of pride to win this award once again. The award highlights the bank’s commitment to the highest standards of quality in meeting the stringent criteria for fund transfer.

The bank’s exceptional quality in the delivery of commercial payments and transfers, facilitated by a state-of-the-art in-house payment architecture, which helps to consistently maintain high SWIFT standards for automated processing throughout the payment chain, was also acknowledged.”

Citibank representatives

commended the operational teams involved in processing dollar payments at Bank Muscat for the error-free rate, which was maintained consistently throughout the year.

The bank is focused on maintaining its leadership in offering cutting-edge products and services, including electronic payment and online services with emphasis on introducing multiple channels and new products that cater to different sectors.

Bank Muscat’s performance has been consistently lauded by the financial and banking community for decades, with the bank winning similar awards from Wells Fargo, Standard Chartered and JP Morgan in the past.



Elon Musk's photo is seen through a Twitter logo in this illustration. – Reuters

Musk says Twitter will limit how many tweets users can read

WASHINGTON: Twitter is limiting how many tweets per day various accounts can read, to discourage “extreme levels” of data scraping and system manipulation, Executive Chair Elon Musk said in a post on the social media platform.

Verified accounts were initially limited to reading 6,000 posts a day, Musk said, adding that unverified accounts will be limited to 600 posts a day with new unverified accounts limited to 300.

The temporary reading limitation was later increased to 10,000 posts per day for verified users, 1,000 posts per day for unverified and 500 posts per day for new unverified users, Musk said in a separate post without providing further details.

Previously, Twitter had announced it will require users

to have an account on the social media platform to view tweets, a move that Musk on Friday called a “temporary emergency measure.”

Musk had said that hundreds of organisations or more were scraping Twitter data “extremely aggressively”, impacting user experience.

Musk had earlier expressed displeasure with artificial intelligence firms like OpenAI, the owner of ChatGPT, for using Twitter's data to train their large language models. Twitter was down for thousands of users on Saturday morning, according to outage tracking website Downdetector.com.

Nearly 7,500 users across the social media platform reported issues with accessing the app during the peak of the outage at around 11:17 AM ET.

German firms, economy are struggling, says commerce chief



Employees of German car manufacturer Porsche work on a Porsche 911 at the Porsche factory in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Germany. – Reuters

BERLIN: The German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) sees great uncertainty in the German economy and no signs of abroad-based upswing for the time being.

“Germany is in a recession. We are one of the few countries in Europe that are back below pre-coronavirus levels in economic performance.

This is an alarm signal,” DIHK chief Peter Adrian said. Business associations such as the DIHK have long been calling for more help from the government to stimulate growth, a reduction in bureaucracy and faster planning and approval procedures.

The situation of the German economy is difficult overall, Adrian said, pointing to struggles particularly among medium-sized companies.

“There is a great reluctance to invest,” he added. — dpa

Top US banks raise dividends after sailing through Fed stress tests

NEW YORK: US banks including JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley hiked their third-quarter dividends after sailing through the Federal Reserve's annual health check, which showed they have enough capital to weather a severe economic downturn.

JPMorgan, the biggest US lender, plans to increase its quarterly stock dividend to \$1.05 per share from a current \$1.00. Wells Fargo will boost its dividend to 35 cents a share from 30 cents, the companies said.

Goldman Sachs' dividend will rise to \$2.75 a share from \$2.50, while Morgan Stanley's will increase to 85 cents a share from the current 77.5 cents. Citigroup's dividend will rise to 53 cents a share from 51 cents. The banks announced the dividend hikes after passing the Fed's stress test, which determines how much capital they need to set aside before they can return money to shareholders.

Under the Fed's scenario of a major economic slump, the 23 banks tested — including JPMorgan, Bank of America and Goldman Sachs — would suffer a combined \$541 billion in losses, while still holding more than twice the amount of capital required.

The largest US lenders stayed resilient despite the failures of three large regional banks that

Opec oil output posts small drop in June ahead of Saudi cut

LONDON: Opec oil output has fallen only slightly in June as increases in Iraq and Nigeria limited the impact of cutbacks by others, despite a wider Opec+ deal and voluntary cuts by several members to support the market, a survey found.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries has pumped 28.18 million barrels per day (bpd) this month, the survey found, down 50,000 bpd from May's revised figure. In May, output dropped by 240,000 bpd as the latest cut took effect.

The survey suggests little further progress by Opec in limiting supply ahead of a further voluntary reduction by Saudi Arabia which takes effect in July, as part of the producers' latest agreement made in June to support the market. Several members of Opec+, which includes Opec and allies such as Russia, had in April pledged voluntary cuts on top of those made in late 2022 as the economic outlook worsened.

For May, six Opec members agreed to cut output by a further 1.04 million bpd, adding to about 1.27 million bpd of reductions already in place. These curbs remain in place for June.

Month on month, production in June among the Opec nations that are required to limit output fell by 10,000 bpd, the survey found, as the increases in Iraq and Nigeria limited the impact of cuts by other members.

Opec's output is still undershooting the targeted



A 3D-printed oil pump jack in front of the OPEC logo in this illustration picture. – Reuters

amount by almost 1 million bpd partly because Nigeria and Angola lack the capacity to pump as much as their agreed level. Opec is hosting a conference this week in Vienna expected to be attended by prominent oil ministers and CEOs.

Opec Gulf producers Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have largely implemented their voluntary cuts and continued to show high compliance in June, the survey found.

Saudi Arabia lowered its output by 40,000 bpd, according to the

survey, the biggest decline among the nations required to limit output. Opec's biggest decline, of 50,000 bpd, was seen in Iran, where exports fell back from an usually strong level in May, the survey found. Iran, along with Libya and Venezuela, is exempt from Opec cuts.

Iranian supply was revised up by 300,000 bpd in May as its exports were far higher than earlier thought. Iraqi output edged up because of higher exports from the south of the country. But with exports from the north still shut down, Iraqi production remained well below

its allowed level.

Nigeria also posted a further small gain with exports holding strong from key streams, the survey found, although it is pumping much less than allowed under the Opec+ deal.

The survey aims to track supply to the market. It is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data, information from companies that track flows such as Petro-Logistics and Kpler, and information provided by sources at oil companies, Opec and consultants. — Reuters

Italy aims to turn up renewable power to two thirds of total by 2030

MILAN: Italy aims to generate nearly two thirds of its electricity from renewable energy sources by the end of the decade, the energy ministry said, slightly improving targets made public three years ago.

In a revision of the country's energy and climate plan, the ministry said Italy aimed to get 65% of its electricity from renewables by 2030, up from a previous target of 55%.

Renewables are expected to cover 40% of gross energy consumption in all the sectors by the end of the decade versus 30% in the old plan.

For heating and air conditioning, renewable sources should provide 37% of consumption and 31% in the transport sector, the ministry said.

Its ambition is that hydrogen produced without carbon emissions will cover 42% of industrial needs by 2030.

The European Commission asked each member state to submit a revised strategy for 2030 to align with the Fit-for-55 and REPowerEU energy packages, announced in the last two years, which include binding goals on the energy transition to tackle climate change. — Reuters



Man walks past JP Morgan Chase's international headquarters on Park Avenue in New York. – Reuters

roiled the industry earlier this year. Big banks stayed on a firm footing even as the Fed raised interest rates to tame inflation, which could tip the economy into recession.

“The results show that these banks are able to withstand a severe stress and maintain a capital buffer above regulatory minima, a credit positive,” rating agency Moody's Investors Service in a note.

Citigroup repurchased \$1 billion of common stock during the

second quarter and will continue to evaluate its capital actions every quarter, CEO Jane Fraser said in a statement.

Citigroup's stress capital buffer (SCB) requirement rose to 4.3%, from a current 4.0%, contrasting with large peers whose SCB dropped. The size of the SCB, an additional layer of capital introduced in 2020 that sits on top of banks' minimum capital requirements, reflects how well a bank performs on the test.

“While we would have clearly preferred not to see an increase in our stress capital buffer, these results still demonstrate Citi's financial resilience through all economic environments,” Fraser said.

Analysts had expected banks to stay conservative given the uncertain economic environment while they prepare for international capital rules that could be announced as early as this summer. — Reuters

Building a strong brand: A guide to brand management for entrepreneurs and startups



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

Hello, esteemed readers. Let's embark on a journey into a vital aspect of successful entrepreneurship – the realm of brand management. Can you remember a time when you chose a product over its competitors, not because of superior functionality or price, but because of a certain bond you felt with the brand?

That, dear reader, is the magic of a strong brand. For entrepreneurs and startups, understanding and practicing effective brand management is an imperative for carving a unique space in the market.

The power of a strong brand

A strong brand is more than a logo or a catchy slogan; it's a potent business asset. It engenders recognition, instils trust, engenders customer loyalty, and can even demand a higher price.

More than just tangible attributes, a strong brand makes a promise of consistent value, credibility, and quality to its audience. It becomes a vital differentiator, a beacon that stands out in a crowded marketplace, and a pillar for startups seeking long-term success.

Decoding brand management

But what exactly does brand management entail? Here are its critical components:

- Brand positioning: This involves creating a unique spot in the consumer's mind for your brand. It defines how you want your brand to be perceived vis-à-vis your competitors.
- Brand personality: Brands, like people, possess a personality. These are the human traits associated with your brand, such as being innovative, reliable, or entertaining.
- Brand equity: This refers

to the added value that your brand brings to your products or services. High brand equity suggests that customers are willing to pay more for your brand than for a generic equivalent.

The art of building a strong brand

Creating a strong brand isn't an overnight phenomenon. It demands a clear vision, consistency, and an intimate understanding of your target audience. Here are some fundamental strategies:

- Define your brand: It starts with a clear understanding of your brand. What does your brand stand for? What unique value proposition do you offer?
- Know your target audience: Your brand should resonate with your target audience. Comprehending their needs, preferences, and challenges can shape your brand narrative.
- Be consistent: Consistency

in all brand-related activities strengthens brand identity. This applies to everything from your logo and website design to your customer service and social media engagement.

Case Study: Airbnb

Consider the case of Airbnb, a platform that connects homeowners offering short-term rentals with travellers seeking unique accommodations. Despite entering a crowded hospitality industry, Airbnb etched a unique brand identity around the concept of 'Belong Anywhere'.

With a brand personality that exudes adventure, community, and authenticity, Airbnb has cultivated significant brand equity and loyalty. It stands as a testament to the power of strong, consistent brand management.

Conclusion

In conclusion, effective brand management is not an optional

luxury for startups; it's an absolute necessity. A strong brand serves as a trusted guide for customers in a sea of choices. It amplifies your voice, reinforces your market position, and drives growth.

As an entrepreneur, investing time and resources in nurturing your brand can be the game-changer that propels you from being another startup to becoming a beloved brand.

The journey to successful entrepreneurship doesn't end here.

Stay tuned for the next insightful article, "Accelerating growth: A guide to growth hacking for entrepreneurs and startups," where we explore dynamic strategies to drive exponential growth for your startup.

Thank you for your time. Remember, a strong brand is the heart of a successful startup. Keep learning, keep innovating, and keep growing!

Nurturing innovation beyond tech hubs



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

Setting up a tech startup can be challenging, especially when you are not based in a traditional tech hub.

However, with the right strategies and a global mindset, Omani entrepreneurs can compete on a global scale and establish successful tech startups.

This article explores key approaches and opportunities for Omani tech entrepreneurs to navigate the global landscape, including working remotely, expanding beyond the domestic market, participating in international events and pitch competitions, and building global communities for product development.

In the digital age, physical location is becoming less of a barrier for tech startups. Embracing remote work allows Omani entrepreneurs to tap into talent worldwide and build diverse teams.

The globe is the playground for innovation, and wherever there is a thriving ecosystem, players tend to gather.

Currently, I am spending some time in Bangkok Thailand, and I found many foreigners who decided to be based here to work on their global projects. Oman could be a catalyst for this type of profiles.

Remote hiring platforms and freelancing networks provide access to a global talent pool, enabling startups to recruit specialised skills and expertise needed for their success.

By leveraging remote work opportunities, Omani tech

startups can build agile and cost-effective teams.

When it comes to the market size, while the domestic market is essential, Omani entrepreneurs should identify global problems and solutions that resonate beyond borders. Conducting market research and understanding global trends can help identify niche markets or underserved sectors where innovative solutions can thrive.

By developing products or services with international scalability in mind, Omani tech startups can attract strategic investors and customers from around the world. One observable trend is the continuous proliferation of tech events around the world. From a handful of noteworthy conferences a few years ago, there is now a plethora of tech conferences that have emerged worldwide.

International events and pitch competitions offer valuable platforms for Omani entrepreneurs to showcase their ideas, gain exposure, and connect with potential investors and partners.

By actively participating in these events, startups can gain valuable feedback, refine their business models, and build crucial relationships with industry experts and mentors. Such interactions can pave the way for strategic investments and global expansion opportunities.

Engaging global communities interested in the product's development can provide valuable insights and foster a sense of ownership and loyalty among users.

Omani entrepreneurs can leverage social media platforms, online forums, and targeted outreach to build communities of early adopters, enthusiasts, and potential customers worldwide.

Engaging these communities as part of the development process can help refine products, validate market fit, and create a strong foundation for global success.



ANDREW SHENG

The writer is a distinguished fellow at the Asia Global Institute at the University of Hong Kong.

China's growth model is undergoing fundamental change. After decades of relying primarily on external demand to drive growth, the government has embraced a "dual circulation" model, driven by both internal and external demand.

The goal is to make China's economy more resilient and less vulnerable to external shocks, but the structural transformation has run up against major roadblocks.

When Deng Xiaoping launched his "reform and opening up" in 1978, China pursued a development strategy modelled after successful East Asian economies like Japan and South Korea: welcome foreign direct investment, expand cross-border trade linkages, leverage low labour costs to bolster the manufacturing sector, and take advantage of external demand to drive growth.

Over the last four decades, FDI flows – about two-thirds of which came through Hong Kong – enabled China to transform Guangdong and other coastal provinces into global supply-chain hubs.

As industrialisation progressed, incomes and wealth increased, and Chinese workers became consumers of both goods and services. As a result, the foreign-trade-to-GDP ratio declined, from a peak of 67% in 2006 to around 35% today, though China still relies on the jobs provided by its export industries.

As China built up its



A man walks on an overpass near a construction site of a subway station in Beijing, China. – Reuters

manufacturing sector, it also invested heavily in expanding its construction and financial industries, thereby laying the foundations for a dynamic real-estate market.

Over the last decade, the nominal average annual growth rate of the construction sector and the financial and real-estate industries reached 13%, 14.8%, and 10.5%, respectively.

In 2021, China's construction sector contributed 13.8% to China's GDP, with the real-estate industry's value-added reaching 6.8% of GDP, though it fell to 6.1% in 2022.

Today, real-estate assets account for about 70% of household wealth, with important implications for consumption.

Moreover, real-estate loans account for 27% of total bank credit, meaning a thriving real-estate market is also critical to financial stability.

The real-estate market's rapid growth was driven partly by a financing innovation that originated in Hong Kong.

Rather than completing projects, and then recouping their investment, residential housing developers began selling units before completion. This enabled

them to use down-payments from home-buyers – in addition to the funds released by lending institutions as construction progressed (construction drawdowns) – to finance projects.

From 2015 to 2022, the share of down payments and mortgages in total developer funding increased from 62.4% to 80.4%.

But this approach carried risks. By striking deals before construction was completed, developers and home-buyers left themselves exposed to interest-rate increases and slowdowns in price growth.

Developers who had borrowed heavily using US dollar bonds were particularly vulnerable – a reality that became painfully clear when surging inflation in the United States compelled the Federal Reserve to begin aggressively raising interest rates.

Last year brought a series of defaults by major real-estate developers, which forced local governments to intervene to protect the rights of the affected home-buyers.

The real-estate sector's travails have generated considerable fiscal challenges. In 2021, direct real-estate taxes accounted for 16.9% of national tax revenue,

and 24% of local-government tax revenue.

But falling real-estate prices have squeezed those revenues. In 2022, income from state-owned land sales decreased by 23.2%, causing China's national budget revenue to fall by 20.6%.

Declining revenue is also undermining local governments' ability to support growth, such as by financing urban investment platforms.

The deterioration of US-China relations, and the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, have further impeded China's structural transformation.

In fact, the economy's internal and external circulation have both slowed significantly, damaging the balance sheets of households, enterprises, and all levels of government. Both imports and exports fell last month, by 4.5% and 7.5%, respectively.

Within China, jobs are not being created fast enough to absorb the supply of new graduates: as of last month, some six million young people (aged 16-24) – 20.8% – were unemployed.

Housing and stock prices remain under pressure.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haithan bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalfah al Butaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Sheikh Al Mubtar bin Ahmad bin Al-Hadi took the oath of office at Al Rashid Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world. "He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability." — ONA

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

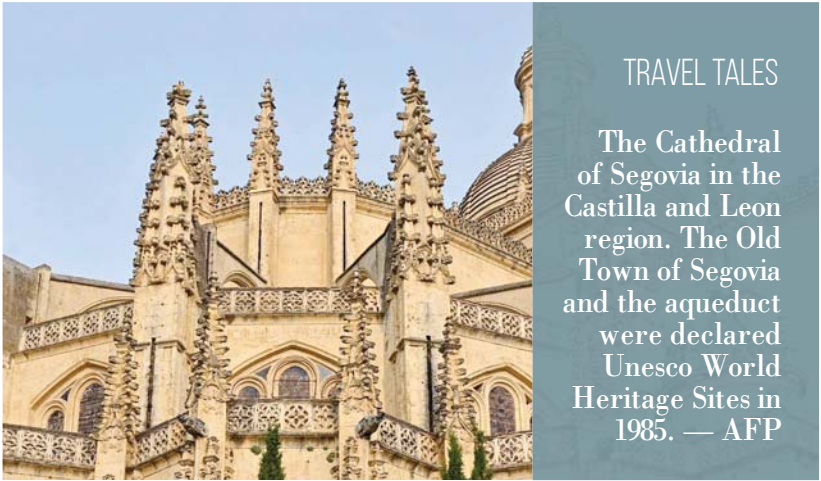
MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and to commemorate the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other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

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL MUTTA
MUSCAT: The frequent orders and frequent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are falling on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Muscat and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, secure away a group of people at a midway in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his awe, Hamed said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

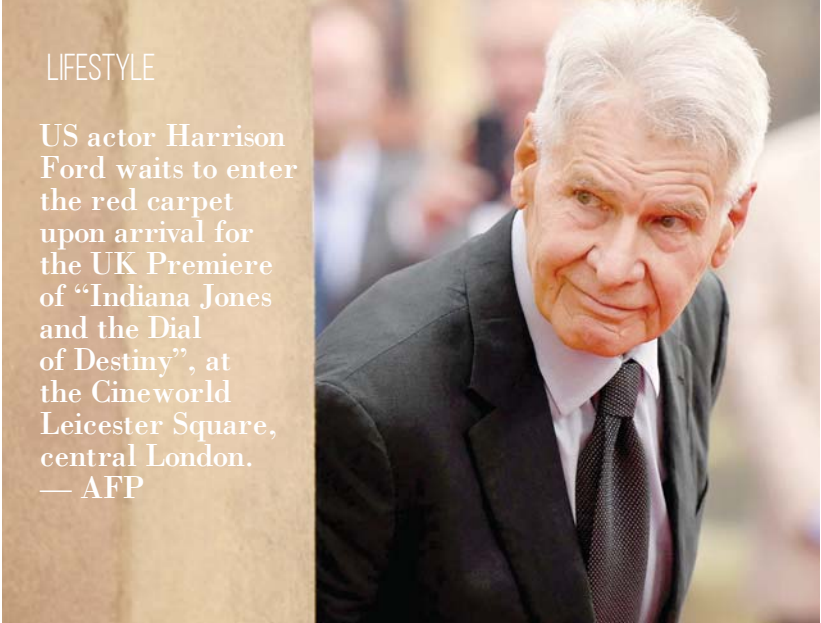
SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

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



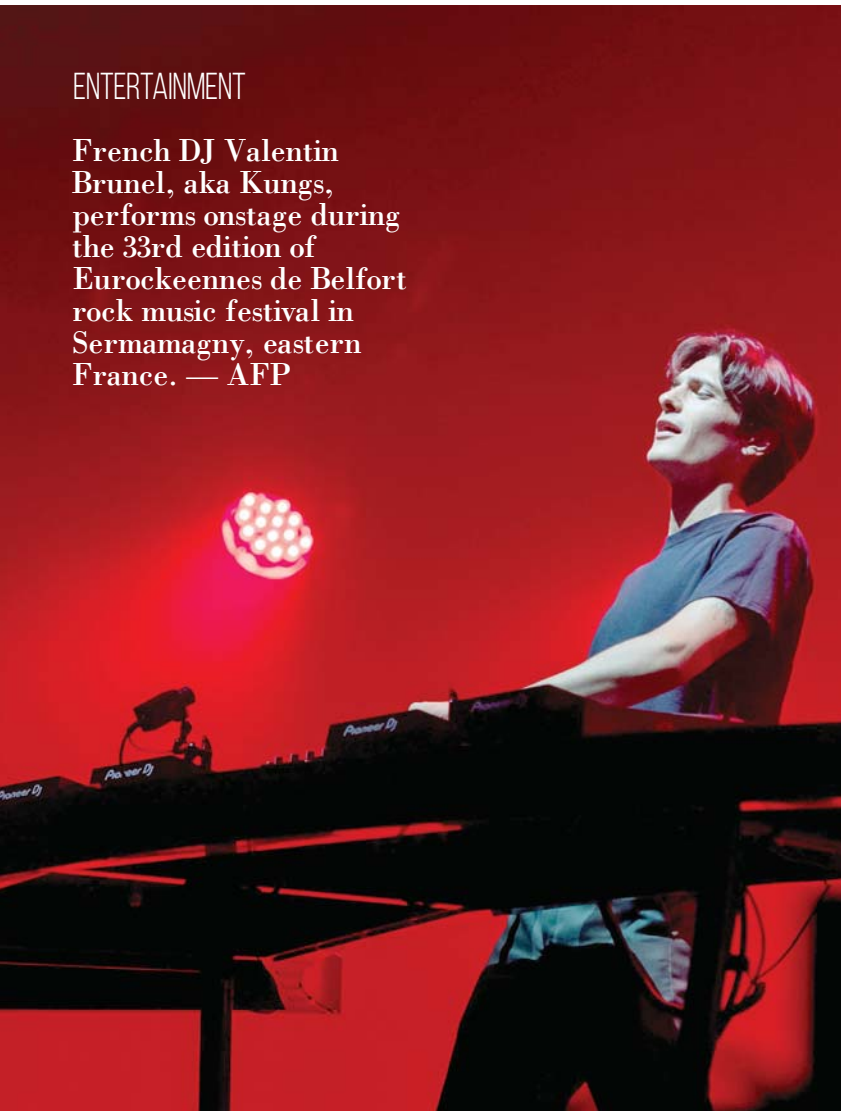
TRAVEL TALES

The Cathedral of Segovia in the Castilla and Leon region. The Old Town of Segovia and the aqueduct were declared Unesco World Heritage Sites in 1985. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

US actor Harrison Ford waits to enter the red carpet upon arrival for the UK Premiere of “Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny”, at the Cineworld Leicester Square, central London. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

French DJ Valentin Brunel, aka Kungs, performs onstage during the 33rd edition of Eurockees de Belfort rock music festival in Sermamagny, eastern France. — AFP



FOOD SCENE

Nicolaus from “New Meat Truck” serves a vegan curry sausage from his food trailer during the Vegan Summer Festival at Alexanderplatz square in Berlin. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents creations by local designers during a fashion show at the 2023 edition of the Hollywoodbets Durban July horse race in Durban. — AFP



art & life

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A photographer's journey to showcase Oman's cultural heritage

Iman bint Khalfan al Buraikiyah is a visionary artist who has dedicated herself to showcasing the rich cultural heritage and moments of Oman through her lens

ENTERTAINMENT

Taiwan celebrates linguistic diversity at annual music awards

TAIWAN CELEBRATED linguistic diversity at the Golden Melody Awards late on Saturday with big wins for singers who primarily sing in Mandarin, at one of the most prestigious entertainment events in the Chinese-speaking world. The awards celebrate not only Mandopop but also artists singing in Taiwanese - also known as Hokkien - Hakka and indigenous languages, a visible sign of the government's efforts to promote tongues other than Mandarin. While Mandarin remains

Taiwan's main language of education and government, other languages are strongly encouraged and supported. In China, despite constitutional protections for minority tongues, in practice only Mandarin is promoted. Veteran star Julia Peng was named best singer in Hakka, despite never recording an album in the language before, while Enno Cheng won for best female singer in Taiwanese and best Taiwanese album, a language she does not speak. "My friend asked me, why



don't you sing good songs in Chinese?", Peng said upon receiving the prize in Taipei. "I don't think there should be lan-

guage restrictions on singing." Cheng, speaking in Mandarin, thanked the Taiwanese language for "teaching me how to

bow my head and slow down". In the indigenous language category, the Paiwan singers Kasiwa and Matzka rapped and

sang in their native tongue, with Kasiwa getting the prestigious jury award. While Taiwan has only 23 million people, its music scene has an outsized influence in the Chinese-speaking world, in part due to creativity unhindered by censorship. Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen wrote on her Facebook and Instagram pages that at the show the love of music had "eliminated language boundaries between different ethnic groups." "Here, no matter what language everyone uses - Taiwanese, Hakka, indigenous languages, Mandarin, English and Japanese, - they can all sing freely, which also brings us together." Disco queen Ouyang Fei Fei, one of two special contribution award winners and as famous for her big hair as her big voice, broke through in Japan in the 1970s singing in Japanese. "Singing and performing have always been my dream. If I can, I will continue to sing and never give up," Ouyang, now 73, told the audience. — Reuters



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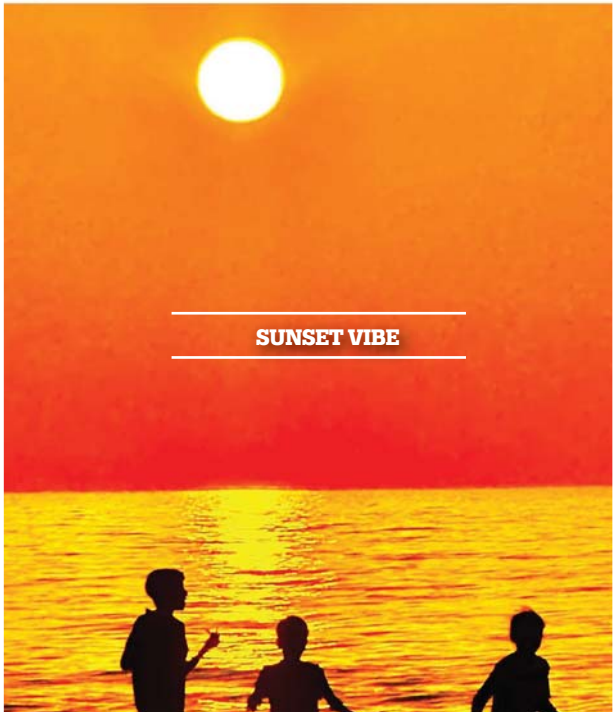
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By Siham Al Saidi

In the mesmerising land of Oman, a talented and passionate female photographer has been making waves with her extraordinary work. With her keen eye for detail and a deep appreciation for tradition, she has become a leading force in capturing the essence of Omani culture, particularly the vibrant lives of women who proudly exhibit their strong personalities through traditional customs. Through her lens, this remarkable photographer unveils a world where strength and beauty converge, shedding light on the unique stories and empowering expressions of the Omani people.

Iman bint Khalfan al Buraikiyah is a visionary artist who has dedicated herself to showcasing the rich cultural heritage and moments of Oman through her lens, especially by targeting women's lifestyles and giving the audience a chance to see such traditional moments in modern life. In a rapidly changing world where modernity often overshadows tradition, she has chosen to focus on preserving the customs, habits, and values that make Omani society and women so unique. With a deep sense of admiration for the strength of Omani women, she works hard to showcase their extraordinary stories in each photograph she captures.

At the core of this talented photographer's work lies her desire to showcase the strong personalities and practises of Omani women in a very classic and harmonious way. Through their attire, gestures, and expressions, she captures the essence of their vibrant spirits. By emphasising traditional customs, such as the face burqa, old-fashioned abaya, fantastic designs of traditional customs, and beautifully embroidered garments, she provides a platform for Omani women to proudly display their cultural heritage and individuality.

Iman chose the art of portraiture, which is a powerful medium for storytelling, and this gifted photographer harnesses that power to shed light on the deep-rooted traditions of Oman. Each photograph becomes a window into the lives of Omani women, revealing their strength, loyalty, wisdom, and grace. The subtle play of light and shadow, the intricate details of their traditional clothing, and the candid moments of joy come together to paint a vivid picture of a culture that is as resilient as it is beautiful.

Iman has secured many prizes in photography, both locally and internationally. She got "Bronze FIAP Medal in Montenegro International Competition". Iman also got the third prize in portrait photography in the Youth Creativity Competition at the Oman Club. Iman has gained fame through her participation in Macedonia, UAE, and China.



Through her work, Iman helps breathe new life into the traditional customs of Oman, either through customs, some traditional tools, the places chosen for photography sessions, or the lightening or darkness of the photo set. By capturing the unique expressions and personalities of her subjects, she encourages a renewed appreciation for the cultural practices that have shaped generations of Omani women. Her photographs serve as a reminder that tradition can coexist with modernity and that it is through the preservation of customs that the true spirit of a nation remains alive.

What makes Iman's photography special is not that she shares a new story



with each new scene; more than that, a supportive family is behind her success. What attracts us to her work is sharing the support of her family — her mom, sisters, and her talented brother, the photographer Yahya al Buraiki. The support of parents didn't stop at finishing school; rather, it continues to show in their future! Iman commented: "Mom sometimes likes to join us in the photography sessions, her humble spirit motivates me, and her pieces of advice drive and direct me to get the best scenes that carry stories!"

Al Buraikiyah is not merely a photographer but also a storyteller, capturing the essence of Omani tradition and empowering women through her art. Through her



remarkable photographs, she has succeeded in immortalising the strong personalities of Omani women, who proudly display their traditional customs. As we gaze at her evocative portraits, we are reminded of the enduring strength and beauty of Omani culture and the indomitable spirit of the women who breathe life into it. Her portraits serve as a bridge between different cultures, fostering



understanding, and promoting a global appreciation for the beauty and diversity of Omani humanity.

Iman's passion for photography has enabled her to beautifully capture the traditional lifestyle of Omani people, with a particular focus on the strong personalities of Omani women. Through her art, Al Buraikiyah not only preserves and celebrates Omani traditions but also empowers women and spreads awareness of their strength, originality, and resilience. With her unique vision and messages through her scenes, she continues to inspire others to appreciate and value the beauty of cultural diversity and fascinatingly keep such memories.

DISCOVERY

Spanish archaeologists plan rescue of 2,500-year-old Phoenician shipwreck

A GROUP OF SPANISH archaeologists have made detailed diagrams of a 2,500-year-old Phoenician shipwreck to help work out how best to recover it from the sea before a storm destroys it forever.

The eight-metre-long Mazarron II, named after the municipality in the southeastern Spanish region of Murcia where it was found off the coast, is a unique piece of ancient maritime engineering.

Nine technicians from the University of Valencia underwent 560 hours of scuba diving over more than two weeks in June to record all the cracks and fissures in the ship, which lies 60 metres (66 yards) from the Mazarron's Playa de la Isla.



Later this year, the experts will recommend how to protect and retrieve the wreck, possibly as early as next summer.

It could be extracted piece by piece using the existing cracks and reassembled out of the water like a puzzle, said archaeologist Carlos de Juan from the University of Valencia-Institute of Nautical Archaeology, who coordinated the project.

"It is more reasonable to rescue the ship, treat it and exhibit it in a museum for people to enjoy it, rather than worrying every time a big storm arrives," he told Reuters.

The Phoenicians, from coastal areas of present-day Lebanon and Syria, established colonies and trading posts throughout the Mediterranean from 1,500 BC to 300 BC.

Historians have used the Mazarron II, probably made around 580 BC, to document how they shipped metals such as lead from the Iberian Peninsula.

After it sank, it remained buried in sediment for more than two millennia until changes in sea currents due to construction on the shore unearthed it almost 30 years ago.

It now lies under about 1.7 metres (5.6 ft) of crystal-clear Mediterranean water, surrounded by sandbags and a metal structure built for protection. The structure is sinking into the sand at a faster pace than the wreck and threatened to crush it, so has had to be partially removed. — Reuters

FASHION

Celine cancels fashion show over French riots

FRENCH FASHION HOUSE Celine has cancelled its menswear show in Paris this weekend due to ongoing riots sparked by the police killing of a teenager, designer Hedi Slimane said on Saturday.

"A fashion show in Paris, while France and its capital are bereaved and bruised, seems... inconsiderate and totally misplaced," Slimane wrote in French on Instagram.

He said it was "a great disappointment" to cancel the show, due to take place in the French capital on Sunday, but that the "uncertain evolution of the very serious troubles" meant it was necessary for the security of his team and guests.

France has been hit by four nights of protests over the death of teenager Nahel M., shot dead by a policeman after refusing to stop



his car.

Menswear week finished in Paris on June 25 but Slimane, one of the most influential designers in men's fashion, has lately chosen to present outside the official schedule.

The cancellation will raise questions for other fashion houses, since Paris is set to host the haute couture week starting from Monday.

Several cultural events have been cancelled due to the riots,

including two concerts at the Stade de France by one of the country's most popular singers, Mylene Farmer, and the last night of the Fnac Live festival in the capital.

President Emmanuel Macron also had to postpone a state visit to Germany. With the haute couture week due to start on Monday, there will be tense discussions among fashion labels in the coming hours. — AFP



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CULTURE

Moroccan women shake up world of Gnaoua music

YOUNG MOROCCAN WOMEN are bringing new and inclusive energy to the centuries-old art of Gnaoua, a spiritual musical repertoire traditionally reserved for men.

Also known as “tagnaouite”, it gained worldwide recognition after it was listed by Unesco as intangible cultural heritage in 2019.

“Why shouldn’t women be part of this dynamic?” asked Asma Hamzaoui at the Gnaoua World

as possible before I flew solo.”

The all-female ensemble wowed the festival-goers — with Hamzaoui on vocals and the guembri, and four musicians on qraqeb steel castanets.

They played alongside the Amazonas d’Afrique, another all-female group, from Mali.

FEEDS THE SPIRIT

“It’s exceptional to have women playing Gnaoua music, which shouldn’t be reserved for men,”

concerts and festivals.

“The city of Essaouira is the cradle of tagnaouite,” said Ennaira, who was taught to play the guembri by friends. “It is beautiful heritage that feeds the spirit. It is important for young people to value it.”

Ennaira put her own touch on the tradition by bringing in a guitarist and drummer to accompa-

also how we interpret traditional music,” the musician said.

“It is not very accepted or even tolerated by some of the stricter individuals.

“We replaced the bass with the guembri and the guitar with the awisha (a small guembri) and cre-



Music Festival in Essaouira, a southern coastal city steeped in the musical tradition.

The 26-year-old Casablanca native is one of the first women to perform Gnaoua, which blends African rhythms with spiritual chants and poetry.

Her father, a Gnaoua master, initiated her into the artform at a young age.

“I’ve accompanied him to his evening gatherings since I was seven years old,” recounted the young woman, who in 2012 formed the group “Bnat Timbouktou”, or The Girls of Timbuktu.

“I gradually learned to play the guembri, a three-stringed lute made of camel skin. My father made sure that I learned as much

said Hamza Tahir, a member of the audience. “They bring fresh air into this music.”

Inspired by Bnat Timbouktou’s success, rising star Hind Ennaira developed her passion for tagnaouite in her hometown of Essaouira.

Its fortified citadel on the Atlantic coast is a breeding ground for the mystical musical tradition, in which religious hymns invoke ancestors and spirits.

Originally practised by enslaved people and dating back at least to the 16th century, Gnaoua has gone from being practised largely in private gatherings, where therapeutic rituals accompanied the music, to public events such as

ny the traditional ensemble.

“At first, there were some differences because they were not used to working with a woman,” she said. “But after some challenging exercises, they adapted to me and we became complementary.”

JIMI HENDRIX’ STYLE

Yousra Mansour — the front woman of the band Bab L’bluz (“The Blues Gate”), which fuses Gnaoua, rock and blues — also encountered challenges entering the music scene.

“There were two constraints for me: first, the fact that this field is usually reserved for men, but

ated a kind of ‘power trio’ in the style of Jimi Hendrix with reimagined traditional instruments,” explained Mansour.

The 32-year-old vocalist passionately defends women’s freedoms, saying that “as a woman, I have not had an easy life.”

“There was a lack of women in this field. When I see Asma Hamzaoui or Hind Ennaira, they are magnificent,” she said.

“It is not easy to evolve in a predominantly male universe, but we see changes emerging.” — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT



Hollywood actors extend contract talks, temporarily averting strike

HOLLYWOOD’S ACTORS union and major Hollywood studios agreed on Friday to keep negotiating through mid-July, staving off the immediate threat of a second labour strike in the entertainment business this summer.

The SAG-AFTRA union and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) said they would extend their current contract, which had been set to expire at midnight, through July 12.

The agreement gives the two sides more time to work out a deal and prevent a work stoppage that would have added to ongoing labour strife in Hollywood. Members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) walked off the job on May 2, forcing many film and TV productions to shut down.

A-list stars including Jennifer Lawrence and Meryl Streep, in a letter to union leadership this week, said they were ready to walk off the job if negotiators failed to reach a “transformative deal” on higher base pay and safeguards around use of artificial intelligence (AI).



The letter came days after union negotiators issued a video saying their talks had been “extremely productive,” a possible sign that a deal was within reach.

In a message to members on Friday, SAG-AFTRA’s negotiators they had unanimously agreed to the contract extension “in order to exhaust every opportunity to achieve the righteous contract we all demand and deserve.”

“No one should mistake this extension for weakness,” they said.

SAG-AFTRA voted in early June to give its leaders the authority to call a work stoppage if talks were to break down.

Negotiations were taking place during a difficult time for Hollywood studios. Conglomerates are under pressure from Wall Street to make their streaming services profitable after pumping billions of dollars into programming to attract subscribers.

The rise of streaming has eroded television ad



revenue as traditional TV audiences shrink.

The walkout by 11,500 writers has shut down a wide swath of TV production and delayed the filming of movies including Marvel’s “Thunderbolts” and “Blade.” Any ongoing filming would have to halt if actors also strike.

Leaders of SAG-AFTRA, which represents 160,000 actors, and the WGA say the entertainment industry has changed dramatically with the rise of streaming television and the emergence of technology such as generative AI, which they fear could be used to write scripts or create digital actors.

The AMPTP, which negotiates on behalf of the studios, has declined to comment about its talks with SAG-AFTRA. The two sides have agreed to keep negotiating without discussing the talks with the media, according to a joint statement on Friday.

With the writers, the AMPTP said it had offered “generous” pay increases but could not agree to all of the writers’ demands. The studios and the WGA have not held talks since the writers’ strike began on May 2.

The WGA walkout is hitting caterers, prop suppliers and other small businesses that generate a large portion of their income from Hollywood productions. The last writers’ strike in 2007 and 2008 cost the California economy an estimated \$21 billion. — **Reuters**