

First shipment of biofuel at Sohar Port

In line with global trends aimed at promoting marine sustainability and reducing carbon emissions, the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, along with its strategic partners in Omani ports, is working on strategic plans to transition to green mobility and achieve carbon neutrality in the Sultanate by 2050. Sohar Port has announced the receipt of its first shipment of B20 fuel (a blend of 80% diesel and 20% biofuel) to begin the pilot phase of using biofuel in its marine tug operations. **SEE P13**

SUNRISE - 05:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:53 AM

DHUHR - 12:10 PM

ASR - 03:29 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:56 PM

ISHA - 08:17 PM



HM receives credentials of ambassadors



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik receives credentials from Showkutally Soodhun, Ambassador of Mauritius at Al Alam Palace on Monday

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received credentials of a number of ambassadors accredited to the Sultanate of Oman at Al Alam Palace on Monday.

During their meetings with His Majesty the Sultan, the ambassadors conveyed greetings of their countries' leaders and their best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty. They also wished the Omani people further development and growth

HIS MAJESTY RECEIVED CREDENTIALS OF THE FOLLOWING AMBASSADORS

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Showkutally Soodhun, Ambassador of Mauritius | 5. Duncan Mulima, Ambassador of Zambia | 9. Jacques Yacoub Nahayo, Ambassador of Burundi |
| 2. Christophe Farnaud, Ambassador of the European Union | 6. Razim Colic, Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina | 10. Uk Sarun, Ambassador of Cambodia |
| 3. Jean-Philippe Linteau, Ambassador of Canada | 7. Roberto Ebert Grob, Ambassador of Chile | 11. Miroslav Sestovic, Ambassador of Serbia |
| 4. U Tin Yu, Ambassador of Myanmar | 8. Dan Munyuza, Ambassador of Rwanda | 12. Nikoloz Revazishvili, Ambassador of Georgia |

under the wise leadership of His Majesty. They also expressed their great honour and delight at presenting their credentials to His Majesty.

They affirmed to exert all efforts to promote relations of their respective countries with Oman in various spheres in a manner that serves the joint interests of the Omani people and their countries' citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors, expressing his gratitude

for their leaders' greetings and best wishes. His Majesty affirmed that they would receive all support from him, the Government and the Omani people to facilitate carrying out their duties.

The credentials presentation ceremony was attended by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, the Foreign Minister, the Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman, the Head of the Royal Protocols and the Military Aides to His Majesty the Sultan. **SEE ALSO P2**

Oman jumps 99 places to 50 in Environmental Performance Index

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman was ranked second both in the Gulf region and the Middle East in the Environmental Performance Index, according to a report published on Monday by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy (YCELP) in the United States.

The Sultanate of Oman advanced 99 places and ranked 50th out of 100 countries compared to the 149th place it made in 2022 out of 180 countries around the world. This improvement in ranking will reflect positively especially in the economic sectors.

The index focuses mainly on the vitality of ecosystems and measures success in preserving, protecting and enhancing ecosystems. It includes 42 per cent of the total score of the index as a whole and comprises 6 categories namely: habitat and biodiversity, ecosystem services, fisheries, acid rain, agriculture, and water resources.

The index also measures a country's success in implementing environmental health policy objectives to protect the populations from environmental health risks. It

makes up 20 per cent of the total index score and consists of four categories namely: air quality, drinking water and sanitation, heavy metals as well as waste management. The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority alongside the other relevant authorities, strive to improve the quality of the ecosystem which represents about 42 per cent of the sub-indicators.

The issuance of a Royal decree establishing new nature reserves and bringing the total number of reserves in the Sultanate of Oman to 30, had a significant impact on improving the Sultanate of Oman's rating. The Environment Authority has also made significant efforts towards effective management of reserves by providing logistics, infrastructure and means of transportation. The Environment Authority's efforts have resulted in the elimination of more than 1 million invasive birds. Besides, the Environment Authority undertook initiatives to rehabilitate and protect threatened species, reclaim lands and combat desertification. – **ONA**

RO 20m pharma factory opens in Rusayl

MUSCAT: Menagen Pharmaceutical Industries opened its factory in the Rusayl Industrial Area on Monday.

The RO 20 million pharmaceutical plant is built on a 12,000 square metres land plot. It is constructed in accordance with the specifications stipulated by the Ministry of Health and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as well as the European Medicines Agency. It is the first pharmaceutical plant of its kind in the Middle East for manufacturing medicines for rare diseases.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Saif bin Khalfan al Hosni, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Menagen, said: "Menagen Pharmaceutical Industries has a significant contribution when it comes to localising pharmaceutical industries in the Middle East and North Africa region. The project which was once a mere idea has become a reality and we strive to realise more of our missions."

Hamad bin Saif al Hosni, Board Member,



It is the first pharmaceutical plant of its kind in the Middle East for manufacturing medicines for rare diseases.

said: "Menagen constitutes a significant addition to the healthcare landscape in the Sultanate of Oman. The first part of the name Mena refers to the Middle East and North Africa region (Mena region), a region that we are proud to be serving and contribute to its development in terms of health and economy. The second part Gene stands for genetics

reflecting our commitment to gene technology and innovation in the fields of biomedicine.

"This opening is the culmination of years of experience and of careful planning. Menagen is a strategic investment initiative worth over RO 30 million. The opening of our new pharmaceutical plant is in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040."



His Majesty welcomes new ambassadors



Christophe Farnaud, Ambassador of the European Union to Oman



Jean-Philippe Linteau, Ambassador of Canada to Oman



U Tin Yu, Ambassador of Myanmar to Oman



Duncan Mulima, Ambassador of Zambia to Oman



Razim Colic, Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Oman



Roberto Ebert Grob, Ambassador of Chile to Oman



Dan Munyuza, Ambassador of Rwanda to Oman



Jacques Yacoub Nahayo, Ambassador of Burundi to Oman



Uk Sarun, Ambassador of Cambodia to Oman



Miroslav Sestovic, Ambassador of Serbia to Oman



Nikoloz Revazishvili, Ambassador of Georgia to Oman



OMAN AIR TO BECOME ONEWORLD FULL MEMBER BY YEAR-END

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The national airline, Oman Air, is on track to join the One World Alliance as a full member by the end of the year.

Speaking to the Observer on

Monday, Nathaniel Pieper, CEO of One World Alliance, said, "The partnership with Oman Air is wonderful and it is appropriate to say that we are on track to meet the full integration by the end of the year."

Oman Air joined the One



World Alliance in 2022 as it will provide Oman Air passengers access to over 1200 destinations provided by the Alliance, including the lounge access.

Fiji Airways, the flag carrier of Fiji and the South Pacific, a OneWorld connect partner for

the past five years, became the 15th full member on Monday. The airline, with its hub at Nadi International Airport, serves 26 destinations in 15 countries and territories globally, including OneWorld hubs at Sydney, Hong Kong, Los Angeles and Tokyo.

OneWorld member airlines work together to deliver consistently a superior, seamless travel experience, with special privileges and rewards for frequent flyers, including earning and redeeming miles and points across the entire alliance network.

Salalah hotels gear up for Khareef

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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This is a busy time for hoteliers in Salalah when the whole of the GCC, including northern parts of Oman, reel under intense heat with temperatures ranging between 40-48 degrees Celsius.

The hotels in Salalah have already started preparations for the Dhofar Khareef season, which starts astronomically on June 21.

Keeping in mind the huge demand for Salalah and the rush during the season, the authorities have extended the season activities for three months. So this year the season will start on June 21 and continue till September 21.

This makes hoteliers a happy lot in terms of room occupation, revenue and many other activities like events and conferences.

Mehmet Tunc Mustecaplioglu, Area General Manager of Orascom Hotels Management of Oman, said, "On the books, it



The hotels in Salalah have already started preparations for the Dhofar Khareef season, which starts astronomically on June 21

looks 50 per cent better than the previous year. The season is rain-related and we are expecting a better season... a lot depends on last-minute bookings."

Mehmet is right in his observation, as the news of rain spreads all over very quickly and most of the hospitality properties get occupied soon after.

The Orascom GM welcomed the Dhofar Municipality's decision to extend the season almost by a month giving visitors more time to plan and enjoy the Dhofar Khareef.

"We are well prepared to receive guests in our 1,200 rooms

in Hawana Salalah and looking forward to entertaining them in the best possible way," he said.

Maheer Bahsoun, General Manager of Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah, said, "Our property is ready to welcome visitors from near and far for the much-anticipated Khareef season. Our dedicated team has been working tirelessly to ensure that every aspect of our resort is in prime condition, ensuring a memorable stay for all our guests." "From meticulously-groomed gardens, world-class amenities including our all-new The Villa Wellness & Spa, to personalised services,

we are committed to providing an unparalleled experience," he said.

Hotels in Salalah have already started bookings as smart visitors have started booking in advance to take advantage of pre-booking discounts and avoid the last-minute rush.

"We are already witnessing a significant surge in room bookings for the Khareef season, as travellers from across the Gulf region and beyond seek to escape the scorching summer heat and immerse themselves in the refreshing Salalah monsoon," said Maheer Bahsoun.

The same is the situation with other hotels. Since the destination is greatly in demand, all of the star hotels show 'fully booked' all through the season.

According to sources in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, there is a plan to add 1,000 hotel rooms to the existing 6000 by the end of this year. Thus hotel rooms by the end of this year will reach 7,000.

Oman participates in ESCWA meeting in Cairo



Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. — ONA

CAIRO: Represented by the Ministry of Social Development, the Sultanate of Oman took part in the 15th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), held in Cairo.

Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. The meeting discussed the

problem of escalating inequalities that emanate from a succession of crises in some countries, population segments in the Arab region, means to address common challenges, follow-up of achievements made in the field of social development and recommendations issued by the ESCWA committee during its 14th session. — ONA

Kuwaiti military delegation visits National Defence College, Command and Staff College

MUSCAT: A delegation from Mubarak Al Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College of the State of Kuwait on Monday visited the National Defence College.

Upon the arrival of the visitors at the academy, they were received by Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah

al Shidi, Commandant of the NDC.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest, especially in the academic and training spheres.

The visitors were also briefed about the college and its facilities.

They also toured its various departments.

Moreover, the Kuwaiti delegation visited the Joint Command and Staff College.

Upon their arrival at the college, they were received by Brigadier Saif bin Hamad al

Yousifi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College.

During this visit, the guests watched a presentation about the college and its training programmes. They also toured its various facilities and departments. — ONA



NRAA, CULTURE MINISTRY SIGN AGREEMENT TO IMPLEMENT 'WUSOOL' SYSTEM

MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) signed an agreement to implement the 'Wusool' system for electronic document and record management at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. This is part of the initial phase of the Wusool project, which is being executed by the Authority for 20 government agencies, in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology as a strategic partner. The project aims to establish a system for managing electronic documents and records, featuring all necessary functionalities to handle documents from creation to final disposition, in compliance with the national guidelines for electronic document management.

Over 1,000 commence training in vocational colleges

MUSCAT: This week, 1,066 trainees have commenced their training in vocational colleges as part of the local community development programme.

The trainees have been distributed among seven vocational colleges located in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the vocational colleges, aims to enhance the professional

and craft skills of community members in various fields such as engineering, information systems, architecture, construction, commerce, culture, society and plastic arts.

A total of 58 training courses will be conducted, with durations ranging from one to three weeks.

The Vocational College in Al Buraimi received the highest number of trainees (275), followed by Salalah (243), Saham (149), Sur (121), Ibbi (101) and Seeb (75).



A total of 58 training courses will be conducted, with durations ranging from one to three weeks



SMART SUMMER STRATEGIES TO SLASH ELECTRICITY BILL

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WITH the onset of summer, overall electricity consumption spikes, leading to higher bills that worry many people. Consuming electricity wisely is an easy and effective way to reduce your bill. For instance, avoid opening the refrigerator door too frequently, as every time you open it, cold air escapes, causing the refrigerator to consume more energy to cool the food inside again. Similarly, ensure that the door to your air-conditioned room is not left ajar, as unnecessary openings lead to increased electricity usage.

Leaving lights and other appliances on when they are not needed also wastes electricity and raises your bill. Be diligent about turning off lights and appliances when they are not in use.

Adopting some simple techniques and practices can help you save a significant amount of money. This includes using energy-efficient appliances and lighting, such as LED bulbs, and more energy-efficient devices. Utilise natural ventilation during cooler times of the day, using ceiling fans to circulate air, and incorporating more greenery and landscaping around the building to provide shade and a cooler microclimate.

Enhancing insulation in the building and sealing air leaks to minimise heat gain is another great step towards saving energy and reducing bills.

Dr Haitham al Rasbi, General Manager of Kafa'a Energy Services Company (a subsidiary of Aafaq Engineering Consultancy), warned that "uninsulated walls, single glazed windows, and high infiltration rates (high air leaks through doors and windows) can cause higher cooling demand, leading to higher energy consumption." It's never too late to add suitable energy-saving measures to your home.

If you are planning to build your house, integrating these measures will help reduce your electricity bill, preserve environmental resources, and reduce carbon emissions resulting from burning natural gas and oil to produce electricity.

This includes, as Dr Al Rasbi noted, "an insulated building envelope (lowest U-value possible with the least thermal bridging), double or triple glazed windows with the lower g-value (for lower solar transmittance) and lower U-value (for lower thermal transmittance), and high-efficiency lighting and HVAC systems."

Passive design strategies are also integral energy-saving measures. This involves designing the layout, orientation, and features of the house to maximise the use of space and maintain comfortable indoor air temperatures. Landscaping and planting can provide a cooler microclimate, and shading windows to limit heat gain based on their orientation is a good choice as well.



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tenders for the following works:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
4/2024 (207/2024) at E-Tendering	Development and Implementation of the Electronic Portal and Mobile Application for the Government Communication Center	Excellent Frist	15/6/2024	30/7/2024	25/-
5/2024 (212/2024) at E-Tendering	Supply, Delivery and Commissioning of Two Identical Outside Broadcasting Vans each with Five 4K UHD IP Cameras and Accessories	International Excellent Frist	15/6/2024	30/7/2024	80/-

- All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
 - Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.
- (For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)
- Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am . Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically. You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.
- The Ministry has the right to:
 - 1) Add or Cancell some works in the tender if necessary.
 - 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



Crops are susceptible to various pests and diseases, and they are under stress due to fluctuating rising temperatures

‘High temperatures have impact on agriculture’

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

High temperatures in the Sultanate of Oman have their significant impact on agriculture. Crops are susceptible to various pests and diseases, and they are under stress due to fluctuating rising temperatures.

These conditions contribute to crop stress, reducing both their productivity and growth efficiency. To mitigate these negative effects, implementing effective agricultural practices and methods for plant protection is crucial.

Abdullah bin Juma bin Bakhit al Hajri, an agricultural engineer at the General Directorate of Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah South, advises farmers to adopt several measures to shield plants from heat. One such method is applying sawdust

or plant leaf remains around the soil near crops and trees, which helps maintain soil moisture and reduces direct sunlight exposure.

Selecting the appropriate tillage method according to the crop type and growth stage is also vital. For instance, traditional tillage involves mixing the soil with sawdust and leaf litter.

Alternatively, a method called “no-till tillage” is often preferred as it is effective in protecting plants from heat stress.

Reducing pruning or overcrowding of plants can also be beneficial. Higher branches can shield the tree from direct sunlight through their leaves and smaller branches.

The palm tree’s grapes, for example, enhance its ability to withstand heat stress. Consequently, agricultural experts recommend the optimal planting period to be between

December and January.

Al Hajri emphasises the importance of increasing irrigation, especially at dawn or early in the morning, and fertilising with nitrogen, potassium, and microelements. It is essential to consider the type of soil, crop variety, and growth stage to protect plants from heat stress effectively.

Other recommended practices include cultivating heat-and drought-tolerant species, using drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting, employing sensor technologies and geographical information systems to monitor soil and crops, planting genetically modified crops resistant to drought, and selecting appropriate planting times.

These methods and techniques are invaluable for farmers to reduce the adverse effects of high temperatures on their crops.

Researchers develop game to enhance problem solving skills in programming

MUSCAT: To enhance the education environment and to make teaching interesting, a research study titled “Teaching Problem Solving Skills using an Educational Game in a Computer Programming Course” by principal investigator Dr Roy Mathew, Assistant Professor and Software Engineering Programme Coordinator at Al Buraimi University College, utilises a game to improve problem-solving skills among students in a programming course.

According to Dr Roy Mathew, problem solving skills are considered an important component in learning to programme in an introductory programming (IP) course for novices. The research project therefore aimed to introduce a PROSOLVE game to enhance problem solving skills of novice programmers in the introductory programming course. Dr Roy elaborated that the game is based on pseudo-code technique. The game covers most of the teaching topics of the IP course. Consequently, students practice the problem-solving

skills throughout the course. A survey was employed to collect students’ feedback and semi-structured interviews were organised to collect instructors’ opinion about the game.

For the main findings, Dr Roy stated that the game helped most of the students in understanding the programming concepts, structures and problem-solving strategies. Moreover, the game supports students’ cognitive engagement, gains, and affective engagement in the IP course. Most of the students supported the idea that games should also be introduced in advanced courses of programming.

Dr Roy emphasised that instructors appreciated the game and considered it as an additional supporting teaching tool in the IP course. Students practice the problem-solving strategy for the whole semester because the game covers most of the teaching topics of the IP course. This process helps students to pay equal attention on the programming knowledge (syntax and semantics)

and the problem-solving strategies. The instructors also considered the game as good alternative of traditional pen and paper learning approach in attracting students’ interest in the programming domain.

The PROSOLVE game brings fun and competition elements which attract more attention of students in the learning process. The game is web-based which helps students with finishing exercises at their own convenience and time. Students can collect points and win medals and cups for their correct solutions against the given problem statements. This process also urges students to practice more questions and acquires deep learning of the programming domain.

This research project was published in the journal *Informatics in Education*.

The research team consisted of Dr Mathew, Dr Sohail Iqbal Malik, Assistant Professor and Head of IT Department at Al Buraimi University College, and Dr Ragad Moufaq Tawafak, Assistant Professor and Computer Science Program Coordinator at Al Buraimi University College.



The research team consisted of Dr Roy Mathew, Dr Sohail Iqbal Malik and Dr Ragad Moufaq Tawafak



The Ministry of Economy
Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/7	Request for Proposal (RFP) for Range of Fortinet Products Subscription-Renewal and Preventive Maintenance	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	23/6/ 2024

First • All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

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

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

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

✉ etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
☎ + 96824402200

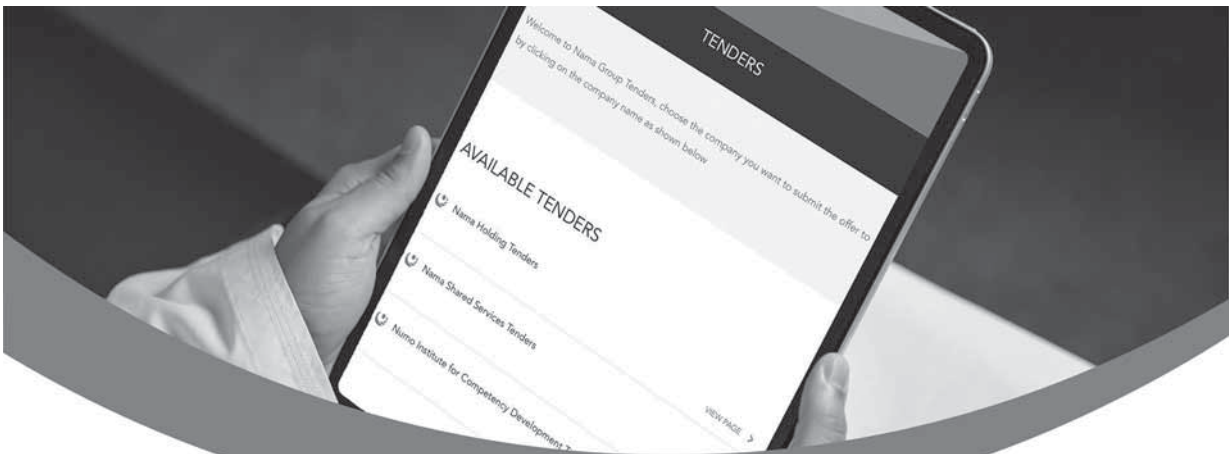
EA eliminates over 1 million invasive birds

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is ranked first in the world for eliminating invasive birds, making significant strides in promoting a well-rounded ecosystem.

According to the Environment Authority (EA), the campaign, initiated in December 2022, has successfully removed over one million invasive birds, with notable progress reported across some governorates.

Al Batinah North witnessed the largest impact, where approximately 621,592 invasive birds were controlled. In Al Batinah South, 203,077 birds have been eliminated so far, while in Dhofar and Muscat, 126,700 and 50,012 invasive birds were removed respectively.

The campaign's success underscores the need for continued efforts and sustainable strategies to manage and reduce the populations of invasive birds.



TENDER

Nama Shared Services invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2024/001	Disaster Recovery Colocation Services For Nama Group Datacentre	11-June 2024	24- June-2024	OMR 50/- (Plus VAT amount: 52.5 OMR)

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded at the same page.
- The tender fees should be paid online through the link provided on the website. The deposit must be made before 3:00 pm on the last day of purchase.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 3:00 pm Sultanate of Oman Standard Time on Monday, 24 June, 2024.
- Each bid should be accompanied by a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) OMR and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of submission offered. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception area.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event that you receive a tender document on behalf of another company, it is essential to accurately record and provide the details of the interested purchaser. This includes the person's name and the relevant company information.



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TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS



No aid with Israeli presence at Rafah crossing, warns Egypt



Palestinians react as they inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Khan Younis. — Reuters

DUBAI: Egypt is clear on rejecting an Israeli presence at the Rafah border crossing between Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on Monday.

"It is difficult for the Rafah crossing to continue operating without a Palestinian administration," he said in a press conference with his Spanish counterpart in Madrid.

The Rafah border crossing critical to aid deliveries into Gaza from Egypt cannot operate again unless Israel relinquishes control and hands it back to Palestinians on the Gaza side, Minister Shoukry added.

Last month, Israel seized Gaza's entire border with Egypt including the crossing during its offensive against Palestinians in the city of Rafah. The crossing also represents the only lifeline to the outside world for the 2.3 million population in the Israeli-besieged territory.



The Rafah border crossing critical to aid deliveries into Gaza from Egypt cannot operate again unless Israel relinquishes control and hands it back to Palestinians

SAMEH SHOUKRY
Egyptian Foreign Minister

Shoukry said the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty remained "a solid base for security and stability in the region and everyone must consider and take measures responsibly to preserve this important treaty".

His comments came amid rising tensions after the death of an Egyptian soldier last week in an exchange of fire with Israeli forces who Egyptian security sources said crossed a boundary line while pursuing and killing several Palestinians.

Two Egyptian security sources said a meeting on Sunday of US, Egyptian and Israeli officials were positive despite there being no agreement on reopening of the crossing. Egypt's delegation at the meeting said it would be open to European monitors at the border to oversee its operation by Palestinian authorities if Palestinian authorities agreed to resume work.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said on Sunday Israeli forces were seeking to destroy

tunnels between Gaza and Egypt used by Palestinian groups to smuggle in weapons, or possibly as a means to escape the war. Egypt has denied the existence of such tunnels.

Shoukry also called for Palestinian Hamas and Israel to accept the current proposal for a Gaza ceasefire presented by US President Joe Biden, saying that Hamas' initial comments were positive. "We are now waiting for the Israeli response," he said.

An aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday Israel had accepted the framework deal for winding down the Gaza war, but described it as flawed and in need of much more work. "The war will be stopped for the purpose of returning captives and then we will proceed with other discussions," spokesperson David Mencer quoted Netanyahu as saying, in what appeared a reiteration of Israel's refusal to call off the offensive entirely before the Palestinian groups are destroyed.

— Reuters

Palestinian mothers search for milk as malnutrition hits

GAZA: Amira Al-Taweel scoured pharmacies in northern Gaza for milk to feed her child, but could not find a single bottle to satisfy his hunger.

"Youssef needs treatment and milk, but there's none available in Gaza," the 33-year-old mother said at Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital in central Gaza where her son was admitted suffering from malnutrition.

"I feed him, but no milk as it's not available. I feed him wheat (flour) which makes him bloated," she said, as Youssef lay on a narrow bed, his frail body receiving desperately needed medication through intravenous tubes in his feet.

The government media office said that at least 32 people, many of them children, have died of malnutrition in Gaza since the war broke out on October 7.

Aid agencies warn that the situation is even worse when it comes to children. The World Health Organization said that more than four in five children had gone a whole day without eating at least once in 72 hours. "Children are starving," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said in a statement.

The rise in malnutrition among Gaza's children is largely a result of humanitarian aid that enters the Palestinian territory not reaching its intended destination, aid agencies said.

Since mid-January the UN humanitarian agency OCHA has screened more than 93,400 children under five in Gaza for malnutrition, including 7,280 who were found to be acutely malnourished.

Malnutrition is particularly prevalent in northern Gaza, which received little aid in the early months of the war.

Only in recent weeks has much of the food aid been diverted through new crossings after aid agencies warned of imminent famine.

Hazem Mostafa, a paediatrician at the hospital, blamed the closure of the Rafah crossing in the south for the worsening situation. — AFP



A displaced Palestinian boy weeps over the death of his father, killed by an Israeli airstrike, in Deir al-Balah. — AFP

More than half of Gaza structures destroyed, says UN

GENEVA: Some 55 per cent of all structures in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed, damaged or possibly damaged since war erupted in the Palestinian territory eight months ago, according to preliminary satellite analysis by the UN.

The analysis showed more than 137,000 buildings affected, UNOSAT, the United Nations satellite analysis agency, said on X, formerly Twitter.

The estimate is based on a satellite image taken on May 3, and compared with images taken in May a year earlier, last September, and on October 15 — just over a week after unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel that sparked the war.

The fresh satellite image was also compared to images taken during several dates in November, then again during the first months of this year, UNOSAT said.

"According to satellite imagery analysis, UNOSAT identified 36,591 destroyed structures," the agency said in a statement.



Palestinians inspect the damage to a house after it was hit in an Israeli strike in al-Bureij camp. — AFP

Satellite images correspond to around 55 per cent of the total structures in the Gaza Strip and a total of 135,142 estimated damaged housing units

In addition, it said it had seen "16,513 severely damaged structures, 47,368 moderately damaged structures, and 36,825 possibly damaged structures for a total of 137,297 structures".

"These correspond to around 55 per cent of the total structures in the Gaza Strip and a total of 135,142 estimated damaged housing units," it said.

UNOSAT said the image comparisons showed the governorates of Deir Al-Balah, in the centre, and Gaza, in the north, had suffered the worst damage between April 1 and May 3.

Comparing satellite images on those dates indicated that an

additional 2,613 structures had been damaged in Deir Al-Balah, while another 2,368 had been damaged in Gaza governorate in just over a month.

Within Deir Al-Balah, the Nuseirat municipality suffered the greatest number of newly damaged structures during that period, at 1,216, UNOSAT said.

The agency stressed that the findings were still part of a preliminary analysis, which had yet to be validated in the field.

The Gaza war was sparked by October 7 attack, which resulted in the deaths of 1,190 people, according to a tally based on Israeli official figures.

Palestinian groups also took about 250 hostages, 120 of whom remain in Gaza, including 37 the army says are dead.

Israel's retaliatory bombardments and ground offensive have killed at least 36,439 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the Palestinian territory's health ministry. — AFP



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In brief

■ TBILISI



GEORGIA SIGNS DISPUTED 'FOREIGN INFLUENCE' BILL INTO LAW

Georgia signed controversial "foreign influence" legislation into law on Monday, prompting its pro-European opposition.

"I signed today the law on transparency of foreign influence, whose main goal is to strengthen the sustainability of Georgia's political, economic, and social systems," the speaker of Georgia's parliament Shalva Papuashvili said in a statement.

The measures require NGOs and media outlets that receive at least a fifth of their funding from abroad to register within two months as "organisations pursuing the interests of a foreign power." The plans sparked nearly two months of daily mass protests. — AFP

■ ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN EX-PM KHAN ACQUITTED OF LEAKING STATE SECRETS

A Pakistan high court on Monday overturned a treason conviction against former prime minister Imran Khan, who remains in jail on other charges. The decision at Islamabad High Court was announced by Chief Justice Aamer Farooq.

"This is the first big case which was part of the political victimisation against Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi which has been dashed to the ground," Salman Safdar said, a lawyer for Khan's party.

Khan was convicted along with Qureshi, his former foreign secretary, of making public a classified cable sent to Islamabad by Pakistan's ambassador in Washington in 2022. — AFP

■ PARIS



FRENCH GOVT FACES CONFIDENCE MOTIONS AHEAD OF EU VOTE

France's government on Monday faced two confidence challenges in parliament as political temperatures rise ahead of European Parliament elections set to mark a major victory for the far right in the country.

The bids to unseat Prime Minister Gabriel Attal and his government come from opposite ends of the political spectrum.

An Ipsos poll released on Monday suggested 33 per cent of people could vote for the RN list in the June 9 polls, double the likely score for President Emmanuel Macron's governing Renaissance, whose 16 per cent placed them just ahead of the chasing Socialists. — AFP

Ukraine to ask for freedom to target Russia

KYIV: Ukraine said on Monday it would urge allies to give its troops more freedom to strike military targets inside Russia after the United States partially lifted restrictions on the use of some Western-supplied weapons.

Washington last week gave Ukraine limited permission to use Western-supplied weapons to strike some military targets on Russian territory as part of Kyiv's efforts to fend off attacks on its eastern Kharkiv region.

"It is not 100-per cent, you know, clearance. It comes with some rules that need to be followed," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said at a press conference with his Estonian counterpart. "We will continue to work with our allies on expanding the scope of its application," he added.

The issue has been deeply divisive among Ukraine's supporters, with some reluctant to permit Ukraine to strike over the border, fearing this could drag them closer to direct conflict with Moscow.

Kuleba also said Russia was using a three-pronged approach to dissuade countries from participating in a Ukraine peace summit to be held in Switzerland later this month.

He said Russia was aiming to discredit the summit publicly, convince countries not to participate and urge those intent on going to send low-level representatives.

"These attempts to disrupt the summit are systematic and are



Mourners attend the funeral ceremony of Iryna "Cheka" Tsybukh, who was killed in action in the Kharkiv region, in Kyiv. — AFP

unprecedentedly large in scale, which once again confirms that we are doing everything right," Kuleba said.

The Kremlin has repeatedly said any talks around securing peace in Ukraine should involve Russia, which has not been invited to the summit.

It has also issued veiled threats to countries that allow Ukrainian forces to strike Russia using weapons supplied by Kyiv's allies.

The issue has been deeply divisive among supporters to permit Ukraine to strike over the border, fearing this could drag them closer to direct conflict with Moscow

Meanwhile, Three people including a 12-year-old boy were killed in Russian attacks on eastern Ukraine, where Russian forces

have claimed steady advances in recent weeks, local authorities said on Monday.

The head of the Donetsk region, which the Kremlin claimed to have annexed in late 2022, said two people were killed and another wounded by Russian attacks on the village of Mykhaylivka.

"A 12-year-old boy is among the dead," the official, Vadim Filashkin, announced on social media, describing two aerial

attacks 30 minutes apart that left several homes damaged.

Separately, one person was killed and two wounded in a Russian rocket attack in the eastern Ukrainian region of Kharkiv, where Moscow's forces have recently captured several villages, the governor said.

Kharkiv borders Russia and has been under persistent shelling since the Kremlin ordered its attack of Ukraine in 2022. — AFP

Claudia Sheinbaum makes history as Mexico's first woman president

MEXICO CITY: Claudia Sheinbaum was elected Mexico's first woman president by a landslide on Sunday, making history in a country plagued by violence.

Flag-waving supporters sang and danced to mariachi music in celebration of the ruling party candidate's victory.

"I want to thank millions of Mexican women and men who decided to vote for us on this historic day," Sheinbaum told the cheering crowd.

The 61-year-old former Mexico City mayor thanked her main opposition rival Xochitl Galvez, who conceded defeat.

Sheinbaum, a scientist by training, won around 58-60 per cent of votes, according to preliminary official results from the

National Electoral Institute, which estimated turnout at 60 per cent.

That was more than 30 percentage points ahead of Galvez, and some 50 percentage points ahead of the only man running, centrist Jorge Alvarez Maynez.

Maria de los Angeles Gordillo, a 37-year-old member of the Tojolabal Indigenous community, said she was moved to tears as she listened to Sheinbaum speak.

"I'm here to celebrate this historic moment for our country and especially for women who carry these inequalities on their skin," she said.

Voters had flocked to polling stations across the Latin American nation, despite sporadic violence in areas terrorised by ultra-violent drug cartels.

Thousands of troops were deployed to protect voters, following a particularly bloody electoral season that saw more than two dozen aspiring local politicians murdered.

Women going to the polls had cheered the prospect of their favoured candidate breaking the highest political glass ceiling.

Nearly 100 million people were registered to vote in the world's most populous Spanish-speaking country, home to 129 million people.

Sheinbaum owes much of her popularity to outgoing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a fellow leftist and mentor who has an approval rating of more than 60 per cent but is only allowed to serve one term. — AFP



Mexico's presidential candidate for Morena party Claudia Sheinbaum talks to supporters following the results of the general election in Mexico City. — AFP



Chancellor Olaf Scholz gestures as he visits Reichertshofen, in the aftermath of severe flooding, Germany. — Reuters

Thousands evacuated from German flood zone

BERLIN: Rescuers battled on Monday to evacuate people from flood zones in southern Germany, as Chancellor Olaf Scholz said this was a "warning" that climate change was getting worse.

Thousands of people in the regions of Bavaria and Baden Wuerttemberg had to leave their homes since torrential rain on Friday sparked deadly flooding.

The floods have killed at least two — a volunteer rescuer and a woman who was found dead in the basement of a house.

More evacuations were called overnight into Monday as the huge volumes of water caused flood defences to fail.

In Bavaria, some 800 people were asked to leave their homes in the area of Ebenhausen-Werk after a dam burst early on Monday.

Residents around Manching-Pichl in the area worst affected by the floods were told to shelter in the upper floors of their homes.

Speaking on a visit to Reichertshofen, in a flood-hit area north of Munich, Scholz said that such floods were no longer a "one-off".

"This is an indication that something is up here. We must not neglect the task of stopping man-made climate change," Scholz said.

The Bavarian state premier Markus Soeder, who accompanied Scholz on his visit said there was no "full insurance" against climate change. "Events are happening here that have never happened before," Soeder said, after a state of emergency was declared by districts across his region of Bavaria. Some 20,000 people in Bavaria alone had been deployed to tackle the consequences of the flood, he said.

Rescuers on Monday found the body of a woman in the basement of her home in Schrobenhausen, Bavaria, according to local police. — AFP

Onus on us to rationalise power consumption



With the summer heat already hitting peak levels this year, the decision of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) to reduce rates on electricity bills for households will offer much-needed consolation. As air conditioners are forced to work overtime to keep homes, schools and workplaces cool and room temperatures at bearable levels, the decision made on Sunday indicates that the authorities are mindful of the people's concerns and sentiments, which is the need of the hour.

Rising temperatures are often attributed to global warming and climate changes that are direct consequences of rapid urbanisation considering carbon emissions and environmental pollution a necessary evil of any development journey. The ASPR decision to reduce rates of per unit electricity consumption bills during the summer months and stabilise unit rates for the year 2024 has been welcomed by many.

However, it is also the responsibility of all citizens

and residents in the Sultanate of Oman to contribute to the national cause of cutting zero-carbon emissions by rationalising consumption. It needs no special explanation on how any sort of energy consumption contributes to global warming via carbon emissions.

APSR has stabilised the rates for the year 2024 at the same rates as in 2023 with an assumption that power consumption will be higher this year as we are still in the early summer days and temperatures have started hitting the roof. It is clear that the smart electricity meter project, though resisted initially, allows households to keep a tab on their consumption patterns and take corrective measures. The reduction rates on the three consumption tiers during the previous May varied.

Consumers in the first tier of 0-4000 kilowatt-hours will receive a 15 per cent cut in their bill value. Consumers in the second tier of 4,001-6,000 kwh will receive a 10 per cent reduction in their bills, while consumers in the third tier of over 6,001 kwh, will receive a 5 per cent reduction.

ONE SOLUTION IS TO USE ENERGY EFFICIENT DEVICES WHICH MAY REDUCE THE EXTENT TO WHICH POWER DEMAND FOR AIR CONDITIONING INCREASES, BUT BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES MAY ALSO PLAY A PART

During June, July, and August, the reduction on the first tier will be 20 per cent of the bill value. Consumers in the second tier will receive a 15 per cent reduction in their bills, while the reduction on the third tier for consumption will be 10 per cent of the bill value.

As we enter the era of global boiling, power bills will continue to bulge thanks to continuous running of ACs. Globally, energy use for air conditioning has been forecast by the World Bank to triple by 2050. One solution is to use energy efficient devices which may reduce the extent to which power demand for air conditioning increases, but behavioural changes like switching off unnecessary devices and lights may also play a part. Energy consumption could be limited by setting the AC thermostat at 24°C, rather than a lower temperature.

The authorities in parts of the world including Japan, India and California have tried to encourage people to set AC units at between 24°C and 28°C, by making recommendations or by introducing regulations on default settings.

Huge challenges await Mexico's new president

ALEXANDER MARTINEZ AND LAURA BONILLA

Mexico's president-elect Claudia Sheinbaum faces a daunting array of challenges, including managing migration, delicate relations with the neighbouring United States and criminal violence that makes murder and kidnapping daily occurrences.

Other urgent tasks include reducing a poverty rate of more than 30 per cent and mitigating the growing impact of climate change in a country suffering drought and water shortages.

Despite outgoing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's "hugs not bullets" policy of tackling crime at its roots, roughly 80 people are murdered everyday in Mexico, including around 10 women and girls.

More than 100,000 people are missing and desperate relatives organise their own searches for remains.

"The ominous spread of organised crime and flourishing cartels is the most daunting problem Sheinbaum will need to confront," said Michael Shifter, an expert at the Inter-American Dialogue think tank in Washington.

"If she is not able to stem the dramatic deterioration of Mexico's security situation, it will be exceedingly difficult to pursue her economic and social policy agenda," he added.

Sheinbaum has promised to eradicate impunity and, like Lopez Obrador, focus on the causes of violence, for example by expanding youth programmes.

She has pledged to strengthen the National Guard as well as intelligence agencies, and to improve coordination with police and prosecutors.

Sheinbaum inherits a fiscal deficit of almost six per cent of gross domestic product, the largest in a quarter of a century, despite Lopez Obrador's austerity pledges.

The president-elect needs to boost the state coffers to finance the direct aid that 25 million young, elderly and disabled Mexicans receive, and to carry out reforms "There's a lot she needs to spend money on, and there's no money," said Pamela Starr, a professor at the University of Southern California.

Sheinbaum has touted the benefits of "nearshoring" — the trend of companies moving production from Asia to be closer to the US market. But Carlos Ramirez, an expert at the risk consultancy Integralia, warned that it would not be a "lifesaver" for Mexico, and that better security and infrastructure were needed.

Sheinbaum, who has a background in environmental science, has promised to increase investment in clean energy.

— AFP

Bridging the digital skills gap: Empowering Oman's workforce for Vision 2040



Dr Khalid Hussain

The author works at College of Economics and Political Science Sultan Qaboos University

Oman Vision 2040 charts a course towards a knowledge-based economy, driven by innovation, entrepreneurship, and a robust digital transformation. This strategic plan hinges on a critical element: a skilled workforce equipped to navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape.

However, a significant skill gap exists, posing a potential impediment to Oman's progress on this digital road map. Bridging this gap necessitates a multi-pronged approach that empowers individuals, leverages educational resources, and fosters a culture of digital fluency. The targets outlined in Vision 2040 paint a clear picture of Oman's digital aspirations. The aim is to propel the nation into the top 20 countries in terms of global innovation, skills, and competitiveness. To achieve these goals, Oman requires a digitally-adept workforce equipped with a diverse range of skill sets.

At the forefront of these crucial skills lies digital marketing and social media expertise. Understanding the complexities of online marketing strategies, social media engagement tactics, and content creation is paramount for businesses of all sizes. In today's digital retail environment, the ability to build and manage online stores, navigate the intricacies of e-commerce platforms, and leverage digital marketing channels is a cornerstone of success. The world of e-commerce presents a gateway to opportunity for fresh graduates and unemployed individuals alike. With minimal investment, individuals can leverage user-friendly platforms like Instagram, Shopify, Facebook Marketplace, and Amazon to build online stores. Products can be sourced from leading online marketplaces like Alibaba, AliExpress, Temu, or local wholesalers, catering to specific niche markets. This empowers individuals to take charge of their careers and tap into the vast potential of the digital economy.

While foundational skills like digital marketing and social media expertise are crucial, the digital landscape extends far beyond these. Delving deeper, individuals

can equip themselves with the knowledge of emerging technologies like cryptocurrencies and block chain, gaining a competitive edge in the ever-evolving financial sector. Understanding accounting and auditing principles in a digital context strengthens financial literacy and bolsters career prospects. Fintech, the merger of finance and technology, offers a burgeoning field for those adept at navigating its intricacies. Business analytics empowers individuals to translate data into actionable insights, a valuable skill in any organisation. Web development remains a cornerstone of the digital world, and proficiency in this area opens doors to building and maintaining the online infrastructure that drives modern businesses.

Beyond these specialised skills, young people can future-proof their careers by mastering essential tools. Spreadsheets like Excel and data visualisation platforms like Power BI and Tableau allow for data analysis and interpretation, a sought-after skill in today's data-driven world. Generative AI applications promise to revolutionise content creation, and understanding their potential is a valuable asset. Tools like Semrush and Canva empower individuals to optimise online presence and create stunning visuals, respectively.

Finally, learning traditional design software like Photoshop with the power of AI-powered content marketing equips individuals to create impactful marketing campaigns. By mastering this diverse range of skills and tools, young Omanis position themselves as invaluable assets in the digital economy. Furthermore, businesses require experts skilled in developing and managing digital strategies, overseeing online operations, and analysing digital data to optimise their presence in the digital marketplace. This expertise falls under the umbrella of digital business development and management, a field experiencing significant demand.

Vision 2040 not only envisions a robust digital economy but also seeks to cultivate a vibrant culture of digital entrepreneurship. This necessitates fostering skills in

identifying viable digital business opportunities, building and scaling digital ventures, and securing funding to bring these ventures to fruition. The tourism sector, a top priority under Vision 2040, thrives on the power of compelling social media content. Creating engaging content specifically tailored for social media platforms is crucial for attracting tourists and showcasing the captivating cultural tapestry and breathtaking landscapes that Oman has to offer.

Equipping oneself with these essential skills is more accessible than ever before. A plethora of online platforms offer a wealth of free courses and certifications from tech giants like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft. Platforms like SEMrush, HubSpot, Coursera, and Binance provide valuable resources and structured learning opportunities. Additionally, YouTube and Meta (Facebook) function as treasure troves of tutorials and learning materials. These resources empower individuals to significantly enhance their career prospects, open doors to exciting job opportunities in the digital sphere, and equip them with the necessary tools to launch their own entrepreneurial ventures.

The digital age has ushered in the era of the freelance economy. Platforms like Upwork and Fiverr empower individuals to leverage their newly acquired skills and provide services to a global clientele. This not only fosters financial independence but also allows individuals to gain valuable real-world experience and build a strong portfolio that showcases their expertise. Fresh graduates often face a gap between their academic knowledge and the practical realities of the professional world. Internships bridge this gap by providing invaluable real-world experience. By actively seeking internship opportunities, graduates gain the chance to apply their knowledge in a practical setting, network with industry professionals, and enhance their resumes, making them more competitive in the job market. The digital destiny of Oman lies in the hands of its people, and by equipping themselves with the tools for success, they can collectively shape a prosperous digital future for the nation.

Strive for clarity of thought

Change is constant. Now the question is whether it for better or worse? Some changes we just have to accept. Even when we try to defy age and go through procedures, people still look different. And nothing can bring back the glow and youthfulness of teen years.

On the other hand, each decade makes us evolve and we should value our experiences and be proud of everything we have gone through because that is what makes us who we are.

When we are young, our parents and family members are proud of any trace of talent in us. Years pass by, and most of the talents are overlooked because they may not make much economic sense. So talent remains a spark not a light.

Instead, if we had taken up a bit of training and a little more, we would have become skilful and no matter what profession you take up you would be that person with extra skills. People who have skills tend to become problem solvers, we all have noticed that. These are the same people who have a way of looking at life from different perspectives. There is no room for boredom. In other words, people with extra skills are happier people.

It could be linguistic skills, ability to recycle, flair for training, life coach or artists. While they are good people to be inspired by. In today's world there are opportunities to monetise the talent. But for this we need to learn the skills to become a professional. The person who taught me this concept was the late Shaikh Khalfan al Esry, Islamic Scholar and life coach.

So what is the most important skill in life? According to most experts, it would have to be decision making, and other skills such as creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self awareness building skills, empathy and the ability to handle stress and emotions. If you notice it is obvious that most of these skills can be taught and developed from



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WHEN WE ARE BEGINNING OUR CAREER WE OFTEN DO NOT UNDERSTAND THESE REQUIREMENTS, BUT ALL ONE HAS TO DO IS PUT ONESELF IN THE SHOES OF THE EMPLOYER. THIS IS WHEN WE UNDERSTAND WHY WE NEED AN UNDERSTANDING TEAM PLAYER.

home. However, it is not that easy as well and that is because each person is born with their own personality, as any mother would vouch. Even the newborns show a clear pattern of personality.

So while we can blame the environment and the surroundings for having an influence on the child's personality. There is no denying the gene pool of the person too. Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence are built every day to every month. Then there is a very thin line between confidence and overconfidence. Another wonderful skill is to know your weaknesses and strengths.

When these skills are needed the most when one seeks a job. What employers are looking for is critical thinking and problem solving. So can you imagine when we become a problem by being demanding and being finicky. The prerequisites of a workplace are the skills to be a team player and are able to collaborate with others. Then comes the oral and written communication skills. When we are beginning our career we often do not understand these requirements, but all one has to do is put oneself in the shoes of the employer. This is when we understand why we need an understanding team player.

Today, life has evolved in many ways and if there is any area you are confused about one can always learn online most of the time free of cost.

In the initial days it was about getting the news online, but now it is about attending classes and meetings online and Google anything to have a quick update.

But it is the attitude that really makes a person different from others. That attitude has to come from within and this is where the state of the mind is important more than anything else. The set of qualifications may not hold if one is not able to communicate and present oneself.

A clear mind with clarity of thought is what we should strive for. And that requires a whole different set of skills from breathing to control of thoughts.

EYE ON BALLOT



British Prime Minister kicks a ball at Alfredian Park, home of Wantage Town Football Club, in Wantage, Britain, on Monday. – Reuters

Should Hamas have rejected Iranian support?

The significant participation of Ismail Haniyeh, head of the Hamas political bureau, in the funeral of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi conveyed a clear message to the world and Israel: Iran remains unwavering in its support for Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements. The Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, assured Haniyeh that the interim Iranian President, Mohammad Mokhber, would continue the policies of the late president towards Palestine, affirming that “the divine promise regarding the demise of the Zionist entity will be fulfilled, and the State of Palestine will emerge from the sea to the river, God willing.”

He added that the “first divine promise” had been fulfilled through the victory of Gaza’s people against powerful adversaries like the US, Nato, and Britain.

Haniyeh’s presence and his memorial speech at Tehran University underscored the deep ties between Iran and the Palestinian resistance. These relations have sparked significant debate, leading some to side with Israel against the Palestinian resistance due to Iran’s support and Hamas’s Islamic Brotherhood roots. Critics argue against Hamas accepting Iranian support, especially as Arab support has waned. Their sentiment can be summarised as: “We do not help



Zahir al Mahrooqi

THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE HAS THE RIGHT TO SEEK SUPPORT FROM ANY QUARTER, AND IT IS UNREASONABLE TO CRITICISE IT FOR DOING SO IN THE ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE ARAB BACKING

you, but we will not accept you receiving help from God either.”

Khaled Meshaal, former head of Hamas political bureau abroad, echoed Haniyeh’s sentiments in his speech at Raisi’s funeral at the Iranian embassy in Doha. He lauded Raisi and Abdullahian’s roles in supporting Palestine, particularly in the “Al-Aqsa Flood” battle, emphasising Iran’s unwavering support since the Iranian Revolution. Meshaal’s remarks were not mere eulogies but reflected genuine gratitude for Iran’s long-standing support.

Critics argue that Iran has its own regional agendas. This might be true, but where is the counter-agenda? If Iran’s goal is to besiege Israel in Lebanon, Gaza, and the Red Sea, shouldn’t that align with Arab interests? Some claim that Palestinian resistance is now beholden to Iran due to this support, to which one might respond: did the Arabs offer support that Hamas rejected? When Haniyeh and Meshaal thank Iran, it is because Iran provided what no Arab nation did.

A 2020 US State Department report confirmed Iran’s annual contribution of \$100 million to the Palestinian resistance, including Hamas, increased to

\$350 million annually by 2023.

Moreover, Iran has provided training and military support to thousands of Hamas members.

The relationship between Hamas and Iran has seen its strains, notably after Hamas moved its headquarters from Damascus to Doha in 2011, leading to reduced Iranian

support. Despite these tensions, the relationship normalised, with Iran resuming its status as a major supporter of Hamas’s military wing. This support is seen as essential for the resistance’s effectiveness.

But what does Iran gain from supporting the Palestinian resistance?

Researcher Muhammad Hussein Abu Hadid suggests that backing Hamas grants Iran soft power, attracting supporters of Hamas and the Palestinian cause.

Iran’s support presents it as a champion for the broader Islamic nation, not just the Shia sect, demonstrating its appeal to Sunni resistance groups like Hamas.

Without Iran, Hamas would not have been able to execute the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, as highlighted by Matthew Levitt of the Washington Institute, who noted the crucial role of Iranian training, weapons, and financing.

Given the Arab world’s growing ties with Israel, Hamas’s turn to Iranian support is understandable and logical.

Rejecting such support, especially when it changes the military dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict, would have been impractical.

The Palestinian resistance has the right to seek support from any quarter, and it is unreasonable to criticise it for doing so in the absence of adequate Arab backing.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari. The original version of the article was published in Arabic in Oman newspaper on June 3, 2024.



A demonstrator takes part in a pro-Palestinian demonstration under the slogan ‘All Eyes on Rafah’ in front of the US embassy in Jakarta on Sunday. – AFP

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OMAN LOSE FRIENDLY MATCH AGAINST IRAQ

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Oman under-19 football team suffered a 3-1 loss against the hosts Iraq at a friendly match at Al Shaab International Stadium in Baghdad city on Sunday as part of the ongoing camp in Iraq. Both teams will repeat the preparatory match again on Wednesday.

Under the guidance of national coach Ahmed al Alawi, the junior Red Warriors aimed to acclimatise to international match conditions in preparation for upcoming events. The national team entered the match with less focus during the opening half, allowing Iraq to dominate and create numerous opportunities. Qais Halkord opened the scoring for Iraq with a powerful strike from outside the box, setting the tone for the first half. Oman's defence struggled, and a mistake by Fahad al Mukhaini allowed Laith Mahmood to capitalise and score Iraq's second goal, ending the first half at 2-0.

Oman's performance improved in the second half. Ghassan al Masrouri scored seven minutes into the second half, reducing the deficit to 2-1. However, Iraq responded swiftly, with Mohammed Waheed hitting the bar. Despite several attempts, including a near-equaliser by Ghassan al Masrouri saved by Wassam Ali, Oman could not move the nets again. Mohammed Baqir al Shabani sealed Iraq's victory with a third goal in the dying minutes, concluding the match at 3-1.

The junior national team will have a busy schedule ahead, including participation in the West Asian Championship in Saudi Arabia in August. The team will also compete in the AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers in September, with the finals slated for February 2025.



Real Madrid sign Mbappe on free transfer



France's forward Kylian Mbappe (L) leaves the pitch next to France's head coach Didier Deschamps without taking part in the training session as part of the team's preparation for the UEFA Euro 2024 European football championships in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines. — AFP

GDANSK: France forward Kylian Mbappe has joined Real Madrid as a free agent on a five-year contract, the LaLiga club said on Monday, ending a transfer saga that rumbled on for years before the European champions captured their newest "Galactico".

"Real Madrid C. F. and Kylian Mbappe have reached an agreement whereby he will be a Real Madrid player for the next five seasons," the Spanish champions said in a statement, fresh off their 15th European Cup triumph.

The 25-year-old captain of the French national team had announced he was leaving Paris St Germain in a video posted on social media platform X on May 10. Mbappe will move to Real Madrid in July when his PSG contract expires on June 30 but the forward will be unveiled before joining up with the France squad for the European Championship in Germany.

Mbappe joins a star-studded side in Madrid with the likes of Ballon d'Or favourites Vinicius Jr. and Jude Bellingham, led by Italian Carlo Ancelotti —

the most successful coach in Champions League history with five titles.

Although Mbappe won several trophies at PSG, often completing domestic doubles and trebles, the Champions League has eluded him and remains the only major honour left to complete his sparkling resume.

Mbappe leaves PSG after seven years at the club where he won six Ligue 1 titles and four French Cups, finishing his career in the capital city as the club's all-time top scorer with 256 goals.

The 2018 World Cup winner surprised PSG last year when he sent a letter stating he would not take up the option of a one-year contract extension when it expires in June.

The letter led to a standoff with the club and Mbappe was omitted from the first-team squad before being reinstated.

Allowing Mbappe to run down the final year of his contract meant PSG were unable to recoup any of the 180 million euro (\$195.95 million) transfer fee they paid in 2017 to sign him from AS Monaco. — Reuters



Esteban Ocon to leave Alpine at end of 2024 Formula One season

PARIS: Formula One driver Esteban Ocon and constructor Alpine have agreed to part ways at the end of the 2024 season, the French constructor announced on Monday in a statement.

"We would like to firstly thank Esteban for his commitment to the team for the past five years. During his time, we have celebrated some fantastic moments together, the best of which coming at the 2021 Hungarian Grand Prix with a memorable race win," said Alpine team principal Bruno Famin.

Frenchman Ocon won his first, and the constructor's first, Grand Prix in Budapest in 2021.

"We wish Esteban the very best for the next chapter of his driving career when that moment comes," added Famin.

"I've crossed paths with so many inspiring individuals in my time here and there are too many people to thank for their hard work, passion, and dedication to the cause," said the 27-year-old driver.

"We had many ups and certainly some downs, but all I can say is that it was an honour racing alongside you, whether you were at the factories or trackside.

"Still, there is a long way to go this season and my focus and energy is 100 per cent dedicated to this team."

Ocon added that "news would be announced in due course" regarding his future going into the next F1 season. At last month's Monaco Grand Prix, Ocon drew the ire of Alpine management when his attempt to overtake team-mate Pierre Gasly resulted in a racing-ending collision. — AFP

Namibia defeat Oman in T20 World Cup after super over thriller



Namibia's David Wiese (R) takes the catch to dismiss Oman's Khalid Kail (L) during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 group B cricket match between Namibia and Oman at Kensington Oval, in Bridgetown, Barbados on June 2, 2024. — AFP

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS: Namibia scored a nerve-shredding victory over Oman in their T20 World Cup Group B clash in Barbados on Sunday after a low-scoring thriller was decided by a super over.

David Wiese was the hero for Namibia, contributing 13 runs in the Africans' super over total of 21 before then restricting Oman to 10 runs with the ball in hand to seal a crucial win at Kensington Oval.

The match had gone to a decisive extra over after a tense duel saw both teams finish with 109 runs from their allotted 20 overs.

Oman had looked to be heading for defeat after a superb four-wicket bowling display from Ruben Trumpelmann saw them all out for 109 off 19.4 overs.

But Oman's bowlers responded with a disciplined performance to contain Namibia's bats, with Mehran Khan conjuring a superb spell to leave the match on a knife edge.

Khan finished with figures of three wickets for seven runs off three overs.

The veteran Oman bowler took two wickets in the final over to frustrate Namibia, who had



Oman's Ayaan Khan (2R) and Oman's Kashyap Prajapati (3R) celebrate the dismissal of Namibia's captain Gerhard Erasmus (L) during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 group B cricket match between Namibia and Oman at Kensington Oval. — AFP

needed just five runs from the over to clinch victory.

But Khan was bizarrely overlooked for the super over bowling duties by Oman, with Bilal Khan handed the ball instead.

That move backfired spectacularly, though, with Wiese blasting a four off the first ball and then crushing a full toss for six off Khan's second delivery.

Wiese took three more runs off the next two balls before Namibia skipper Gerhard Erasmus hit

back-to-back fours to set Oman a daunting victory target of 22 off their super over.

Wiese took over the bowling duties for Namibia and after conceding just two runs from his first two deliveries, took the wicket of Naseem Khushi.

Two more singles left Oman needing 18 from the last delivery to win, meaning Wiese could allow Zeeshan Maqsood to blast a six knowing victory was assured.

"I definitely aged a couple of years tonight," the 39-year-old Wiese said. "And I don't have a lot of years left in me. It was an emotionally draining evening."

Wiese said he had been confident of steering Namibia to victory with bat and ball in the super over.

"It helped that I had a feel of the game and knew if I get a few hits out in the Super Over then with the ball, felt like taking the ball and executing.

"The pitch was difficult and didn't play the way we thought. But we adapted well."

Oman captain Aqib Ilyas was left lamenting an agonising near-miss — but defended the decision to opt for Bilal as the super over bowler over the in-form Khan.

— AFP

OOA HOLDS DESIGNING TRAINING COURSE



MUSCAT: The specialised symposium "Designing Training Plans" will conclude on Tuesday, organized by Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by Oman Olympic Academy (OOA), as part of the National Coach Certification Programme to develop and enhance the capabilities of sports coaches in the Sultanate of Oman.

The symposium was held at Sultan Qaboos University and the headquarters of OOA during the period from June 2 to 4 of this year, and was presented by Dr Shihabuddin bin Ahmed al Riyami, director of the national coach certification programme and a certified international lecturer for sports training, with the participation of 26 coaches from federations, committees, sports clubs, and the military sports sector.

The symposium topics varied between the theoretical and practical aspects, with the aim of providing participants with various sciences and studies as an essential part of the programme's strategy to ensure the provision of high-quality training. Including the goals, importance and design of sports training plans, time planning for training and its types, the main elements of its preparation, and annual plans and their sections. In addition to the temporal planning of motor abilities and anatomical adaptations to physical abilities. The symposium also included training on using the NCCP programme to design seasonal training plans.

The participants will present visual presentations to evaluate them and measure the extent of their understanding and knowledge during the days of the symposium, and a work and evaluation mechanism will be implemented for the symposium according to international standards and programmes.

The programme aims to build a base of qualified trainers in the field of sports training, and gives the opportunity for coaches to participate in an educational programme that gives them a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge and experience, develop their skills and will have a positive impact in enhancing the performance of athletes in the Sultanate of Oman and raising their technical levels.

It is worth mentioning that the National Coach Certification Programme is one of the important national projects and a summary of the sports sciences that keep pace with the Omani society and the national training cadre. It is considered the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman and the second in the Arabian Gulf region. It is based on a balance between theoretical and scientific aspects in accordance with what is followed in the most recent successful international experiences, and is divided into two levels, the first level and the second level, in addition to specialised seminars.



Mads Pedersen (C) celebrates as he crosses the finish line. — AFP

Pedersen wins Dauphine sprint

FRANCE: Denmark's Mads Pedersen won the opening stage of the Tour de France warm up race the Criterium du Dauphine on a foggy 172 km run on Sunday.

The 2019 world champion also takes the yellow jersey after his ninth win so far this season in a week he was named in Denmark's Olympic Games team.

The Lidl Trek rider edged Sam Bennett and Hugo Page in a mass sprint, one of two flat stages on the eight-day race seen as a fine tuning opportunity ahead of the Tour de France later this month.

"I love racing in France, it's all so well organised," said Pedersen.

"It'll be a challenge defending the yellow jersey," said the 28-year-old rider, looking ahead to the hilltop finish at Col de Loge on Monday.

Pedersen explained his main task was to protect team leader Tao Geoghegan Hart, a climb specialist and dark horse for a podium spot or at least some mountain stage wins at the Tour de France.

Primoz Roglic, Remco Evenepoel or Juan Ayuso are more likely to win this Criterium which ends with three blockbuster mountain stages in the Alps next weekend. — AFP



Danish rider Mads Pedersen, Team Intermark's French rider Hugo Page and Team AG2R's Irish rider Sam Bennett compete to cross the finish line at the end of the first stage of the 76th edition of the Criterium du Dauphine cycling race, 172,5km between in Saint-Pourcain-sur-Sioule, central France. — AFP

D J O K O V I C E Y E S

th

NOVAK DJOKOVIC will aim to reach his 15th successive French Open quarter-final on Monday after setting an unwanted Roland Garros record, while Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina eased through in the women's draw.

Defending champion and 24-time Grand Slam title winner Djokovic made the last 16 by defeating Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in a bruising five-set epic which concluded at 3:07 am on Sunday.

It was the latest ever finish at Roland Garros.

"I think certain things could have been handled differently," said the 37-year-old Djokovic.

"There is a certain beauty in winning the match at three in the morning if it is the last of the tournament, but this wasn't the case."

On Monday, three-time French Open champion Djokovic faces Argentine 23rd seed Francisco Cerundolo for a place in the last eight.

Victory would give him a record 370th Grand Slam match win.

Cerundolo and Djokovic have never met before but the Argentine stunned world number four Alexander Zverev on clay in Madrid earlier this season on his way to the quarter-finals.

The 25-year-old also made the last 16 in Paris in 2023 where he lost in five sets to Denmark's Holger Rune.

In the women's tournament, world number two Sabalenka, who was a semi-finalist in 2023 and has made at least the last four at her past six Grand Slams, proved far too strong for American 22nd seed Emma Navarro.

The Belarusian raced into the quarters, hammering 36 winners during a 6-2, 6-3 success in only 69 minutes.

The 23-year-old Navarro was playing in the last 16 of a Grand Slam for the first time and could not deal with Sabalenka's power.

Sabalenka, who lost to Iga Swiatek in the Madrid and Rome Open finals this clay-court season, will play either Moscow-born French player Varvara Gracheva or 17-year-old Russian Mirra Andreeva in the last eight.

Former Wimbledon champion Rybakina,

the fourth seed and the only woman to defeat world number one Swiatek on clay this year, saw off experienced Ukrainian 15th seed Elina Svitolina 6-4, 6-3, also in just 69 minutes.

The Kazakh fourth seed is into the last eight for only the second time and first since 2021, after withdrawing following the second round last year through illness.

She will next face Italian Jasmine Paolini after the 12th seed fought back to defeat Russian Elina Avanesyan 4-6, 6-0, 6-1.

"On clay, it's a bit more complicated with the movements but overall we are doing a good job and I'm proud with how I improved in the last few years," said Rybakina. Gracheva later plays Andreeva, who is the youngest woman to reach the last 16 on all three Slam surfaces since Anna Kournikova in 1998.

"I know Varvara pretty well. We've been practising together for almost two years, so I know what to expect. She's at a great level right now," said Andreeva of her 88th-ranked opponent.

ZVEREV FACING RUNE TEST

In Monday's other men's ties, Zverev continues his bid for a first Grand Slam title against Rune in the night-session match.

Zverev, who knocked out 14-time champion Rafael Nadal in the first round, was pushed to the brink by Tallon Griekspoor in the third round where he battled back from 4-1 down in the final set.

The 27-year-old German is playing under the shadow of an ongoing trial in Berlin over allegations of assaulting an ex-girlfriend.

Zverev is in the fourth round at Roland Garros for the seventh consecutive year and is the only player to reach the semi-finals at the last three French Opens.

Rune, a two-time quarter-finalist in Paris, defeated Zverev in straight sets in their only previous meeting on clay in Munich in 2022.

Fifth-seeded Russian Daniil Medvedev takes on Australian 11th seed Alex de Minaur.

Former US Open champion Medvedev reached the quarter-finals in 2021, ending a run of four successive first round losses. Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Nadal and then Djokovic in the last two years, tackles Taylor Fritz for a quarter-final spot. — AFP



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Sohar Port welcomes first shipment of biofuel

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

In line with global trends aimed at promoting marine sustainability and reducing carbon emissions, the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, along with its strategic partners in Omani ports, is working on strategic plans to transition to green mobility and achieve carbon neutrality in the Sultanate of Oman by 2050.

Sohar Port has announced the receipt of its first shipment of B20 fuel (a blend of 80% diesel and 20% biofuel) to begin the pilot phase of using biofuel in its marine tug operations, starting with the tugboat “Sohar,” and then expanding the project to include all tugs by next month in collaboration with Svitzer, Waqud, and Hormuz Marine.

On this occasion, Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of Sohar Port, stated: “Marine operations are the main contributor to greenhouse gas emissions at Sohar Port, which have increased with our growth



The project embodies the strategy of Sohar Port and Freezone to enhance the circular economy and support economic development in the Sultanate of Oman.

due to fuel consumption for our tugboat operations.

The use of biofuel will significantly reduce emission levels, supporting the country’s efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. By intensifying our efforts with partners who share our vision and approach, this

project has become an exemplary model in the region and beyond.”

Engineer Abdullah bin Ali al Busaidy, an expert on the carbon neutrality team at the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, confirmed that the ministry is currently collaborating with

various government entities on the 18 carbon lab initiatives.

In the area of green ports, the ministry has laid out a clear roadmap that includes several projects to reduce emissions, convert equipment to operate on electric power and smart systems, connect ships to electrical power,

and decarbonise the port sector.

The ministry is also working on establishing a regional centre for supplying ships with clean fuel.

He emphasised that the ministry, in collaboration with entities involved in the biofuel initiative such as the Environment Authority, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Ministry of Economy, has reached some important outcomes.

Additionally, the private sector has contributed to resolving some project challenges, the most significant being the price difference between biofuel and regular fuel.

Al Busaidy added that the private sector has identified primary materials for biofuel production, focusing on used cooking oils from restaurants and commercial outlets.

Sultan Qaboos University, in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman, has made significant efforts to innovate a method using date pits as a primary material in biofuel, which has already been used in

one of Mwasalat’s buses. Deniz Kirdar True, General Manager of Svitzer in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, commented: “We are proud to collaborate with Sohar Port on this important initiative.”

She added, “Svitzer has been providing safe and reliable marine services to customers at Sohar Port for years, and in this partnership, we found an ally who shares our ambitious goals for decarbonisation and is ready to do things differently and innovatively. This pioneering project is a unique example of leveraging our global expertise to share with our partners in Oman on their journey towards reducing environmental impacts.”

Suleiman al Hadhrami, CEO of Hormuz Marine, stated: “Working with Sohar Port to supply the first biofuel for ships in Oman is a pivotal step towards emissions reduction and sustainability in the maritime industry.

While marine fuel remains necessary in the short term, the gradual increase in biofuel use will result in a significant reduction in harmful emissions.”

Power and fuel subsidies soar to RO 870m in 2023

MUSCAT: Subsidies on electricity supply and fuel products surged to a total of RO 870 million in 2023, up from a budgeted sum of RO 524 million for the year — a steep 66% increase that underscored the Omani government’s efforts to mitigate the impacts of elevated international oil prices — a key contributory factor — on consumers in the Sultanate of Oman.

According to the final

accounts of the State General Budget for Fiscal 2023, the subsidy allocation towards fuel products jumped nearly 10-fold to RO 370 million at the end of the year, up from a budgeted sum of RO 39 million at the start of the year.

The Ministry of Finance said the increase was made possible by Royal Directives from His Majesty the Sultan mandating a cap on fuel prices rising beyond a certain threshold.

DETAILS ON PAGE 15

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN OPEC MEETING ON OIL PRODUCTION CUTS



RIYADH: Mohsen bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, participated in the joint consultative ministerial meeting held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This meeting took place on the sidelines of the 37th ministerial meeting of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee between the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and non-Opec member states, as part of the joint cooperation charter to reduce crude oil production, via video conference. The participating countries agreed to extend the voluntary crude oil production cuts agreed upon in April 2023 until the end of December 2025. Additionally, the voluntary additional crude oil production cuts agreed upon in November 2023 were extended until the end of September 2024, with a gradual return to monthly production increases until the end of September 2025, aiming to support the stability of oil markets.

Oman launches investment opportunity for tech zones

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

The Internal Investment Committee of the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, in collaboration with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), in a move to bolster the country’s digital economy, has announced an exciting investment opportunity for both local and international companies and investors.

This initiative invites specialised firms to submit investment proposals for the creation and management of specialised tech zones.

The submissions can be made through the “Tatwir” platform (www.tatwir.om), managed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

This effort aligns with the goals of the National Digital Economy Programme and Oman Vision 2040, aiming to prioritise and support the digital economy as a crucial contributor to the national economy.

The project is designed to attract tech startups from across the region, fostering their growth and facilitating their global expansion through a range of incentives and benefits offered within the tech startup zone.

Before participating in the



The project is designed to attract tech startups from across the region, fostering their growth and facilitating their global expansion.

investment opportunities, investors must register as a commercial entity and subscribe to an annual membership costing RO 100, plus a 5% banking tax (RO 5).

The investment opportunities are structured into four distinct phases:

1. Purchase phase: This initial phase involves purchasing the investment opportunity booklet,

which typically lasts 30 days. The booklet contains all the terms and requirements for the opportunity.

Participants can also download and review other relevant documents, such as financial solvency forms, initial concept models, and land plot maps.

During this period, participants are encouraged to note down any questions or inquiries they may have in preparation for the subsequent phase.

2. Inquiry phase: Participants can raise their questions and seek clarifications about the investment opportunity.

3. Bidding and proposal submission phase: During this phase, participants will submit

their bids and proposals for the investment opportunity.

4. Grant phase: The final phase involves the evaluation and awarding of the investment opportunity to the successful bidders.

This strategic initiative is expected to attract a wide range of tech startups from the region, providing them with various incentives and advantages within the tech startup zone.

By fostering an environment conducive to growth and innovation, Oman aims to position itself as a regional hub for technology and digital economy, thereby contributing significantly to the national economy.

BMW Group Middle East head visits BMW Oman

MUSCAT: AlJenaibi International Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, welcomed the new Managing Director of BMW Group Middle East, Karim-Christian Haririan, on his first official visit to Oman since assuming his role.

The tour provided an opportunity for Haririan to witness firsthand the robust operations and customer-centric services that have been the cornerstone of the premium automotive brand's success in Oman.

During his visit, Haririan conducted an extensive walk-around of the showroom and facilities. Rachid Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, and Dennis Obermeier, Regional Sales



Manager for BMW Group Middle East. Zamani commented: "We are thrilled to welcome Karim-Christian Haririan to Oman for a visit to the heart of our retail and service operations, in Muscat. With his vast experience and proven track record within the

BMW Group, we look forward to working closely with Karim-Christian to continue delivering exceptional experiences to our customers and push for market growth.

This visit aligns perfectly with our long-term vision for BMW Oman". Reflecting on his visit, Haririan stated: "I was delighted to visit BMW Oman and witness the dedication and enthusiasm of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles.

This much-anticipated first visit has given me an exciting glimpse into Oman's dynamic automobile scene and market requirements.

I am excited about the opportunities ahead and confident that, together, we will achieve new successes for BMW in Oman.

Additionally, I am proud to announce that BMW Oman was awarded Balance Scorecard Champion for 2023 at the BMW Group Middle East Importer Awards this year.

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles looks on track to repeat this milestone in the future, ensuring continued excellence and innovation in their operations and service.

I look forward to seeing the ongoing growth and innovation in this vibrant market."

This visit marks a promising milestone for the BMW brand in Oman, alongside the wider region, with Haririan's leadership anticipated to drive the brand to new heights, building on its legacy of excellence and innovation.

Taageer Finance wins best non-banking financial institution award



MUSCAT: Taageer Finance, a leading financial and leasing company (FLC) committed to delivering exceptional value to its stakeholders, proudly announces its recognition as the Best Non-Banking Finance Company for the year 2024 by the Oman Economic Review (OER).

The Award was conferred to the company as per a survey conducted by Abu Timam Grand Thornton that was based on 13 key industry excellence parameters.

The prestigious award was presented at the OER's New Age Banking Summit (NABS), held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

The award was received by Fahad bin Khamis bin Abdullah al Balushi, COO of Taageer Finance, from Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, who was the Chief Guest at the event. The ceremony was attended top business leaders, CEOs, and senior government officials.

This prestigious accolade reinforces Taageer Finance's status as a frontrunner in the

financial sector, highlighting its remarkable performance, innovation, and dedication to delivering superior financial solutions to its esteemed customers.

The victory underscores the company's significant accomplishments and steadfast commitment to excellence in every aspect of its operations. Expressing his gratitude, Shahin bin Mohammed al Balushi, CEO stated, "Receiving this distinguished award at the New Age Banking Summit 2024 is a tremendous honour for us.

It highlights the relentless effort and commitment to excellence exhibited by our remarkable team across every facet of our business. This accolade also validates our strategic direction, emphasising our adaptability and growth in the evolving financial sector.

We are dedicated to continually improving the value we offer our customers, setting new standards and pushing the boundaries of excellence in the industry."

Ominvest hosts Annual Internal Audit Forum 2024

MUSCAT: The Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) hosted the Annual Internal Audit Forum 2024, providing a unique platform to emphasise the significance of internal auditing and contemporary practices in the sector.

The Forum saw participation from CEOs, board members, and internal auditors from Ominvest group companies.

The event coincided with the global celebration of Internal Audit Awareness Month, observed every May.

The one-day Forum focused

on enhancing the internal audit function, the strategic role of internal audit in business development, and positioning internal audit as a strategic partner for senior management and the board of directors.

Jan Bladen, an international speaker from the GCC Board Directors' Institute, highlighted the critical role of internal audit in business development and enabling companies to compete locally and globally from governance regulations.

He emphasised the importance of alignment between internal audit, the board of directors,



and senior management to foster business growth. Bladen, with his extensive experience in international companies, has discussed essential skills required within the Internal Audit team, and its role in strengthening the company's operations.

UNLOCK EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS WITH MOPAR'S SPECIAL OFFER CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles, the official distributors of the iconic Stellantis brands — Jeep, Dodge, Ram, and Alfa Romeo — and the after-sales brand Mopar, are excited to announce a special offer for Jeep, Dodge, and Ram vehicle owners. During this offer period, customers can enjoy discounts ranging from 25% to 50% on their 10,000-kilometre service, excluding VAT.

This offer is applicable to Jeep, Dodge, and Ram vehicles from the 2019 model year or older, with open recalls, and is limited to the first 500 unique VINs. Please note that this offer is not applicable to Diesel, 1.3 Turbo, SRT, Hellcat, and 392 engines. Eligible



customers can avail themselves of the 10,000-kilometre service at the special rate of OMR 35 (excluding VAT).

To check if their vehicles have an open recall, customers can

call the CRM at 80022008. If eligible, they can then make an appointment for the service. This special campaign underscores Mopar's commitment to customer satisfaction and vehicle maintenance, encouraging customers to check for open recalls and schedule their appointments promptly to take advantage of these significant savings.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles, expressed his enthusiasm for the campaign, stating, "At MHD Automobiles, we are dedicated to providing our customers with the best service possible. This campaign is an excellent opportunity for our valued customers to benefit from substantial discounts while ensuring their vehicles are serviced and maintained to the highest standards."

FDO showcases range of seafood products at HORECA Oman

MUSCAT: Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) is thrilled to announce its participation in HORECA Oman 2024, one of the Middle East's premier hospitality and food service exhibitions.

Set to take place from June 4-6, 2024, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, the event will bring together large crowd of attendees, visitors and exhibitors, offering a vibrant platform for networking, innovation, and showcasing the finest products and services in the industry.

FDO, a proud sponsor of the Culinary Competition, will spotlight its subsidiaries and their contributions to Oman's burgeoning food service and



hospitality sectors.

This year, SIMAK, a flagship subsidiary, will introduce its range of premium canned seafood products in the Omani market, including tuna, sardines, and mackerel, all processed at its state-of-the-art factory in Duqm.

With an impressive processing inflow of 30,000 tonnes per year, SIMAK boasts a staggering estimated output of over 100 million cans annually, translating to more than 16,000 tonnes of premium-grade seafood products.

This state-of-the-art facility will focus on processing tuna, sardine, and mackerel, offering a compelling value proposition to stakeholders across the supply chain.

SIMAK's presence at HORECA underscores its commitment to transforming the seafood industry.

The cannery's advanced technology and strategic location in the Duqm Free Zone, a hub with major ports and specialised fisheries infrastructure, enable it to deliver over 100 million cans annually, of premium-grade seafood. This output not only meets local demand but also positions Oman as a significant player in the global seafood

market.

SIMAK integrates the latest technological advancements to promote efficiency and reduce waste.

Its eco-friendly practices, such as water conservation and solar energy utilisation, are central to its operations. SIMAK is not just about business growth; it's about contributing to a sustainable future.

OSARA, another FDO product, focuses on shrimp aquaculture projects across Oman. OSARA is set to boost Oman's aquaculture industry significantly as it has developed farms in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali with a capacity of up to 10,000 tonnes

per year.

The new shrimp production farm in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate will enhance local production, supporting Oman's Vision 2040 economic plan by promoting food security and generating employment.

FDO's Blue Waters subsidiary is dedicated to leading the development of sustainable aquaculture in Oman.

With marine finfish (seabream), cage farms capacity of 5000 tonnes annually, modern processing facilities, and a hatchery producing 21 million juveniles annually, Blue Waters ensures a consistent supply of high-quality, nutrient-rich seafood.



Power and fuel subsidies soar to RO 870m in 2023

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Subsidies on electricity supply and fuel products surged to a total of RO 870 million in 2023, up from a budgeted sum of RO 524 million for the year – a steep 66 per cent increase that underscored the Omani government's efforts to mitigate the impacts of elevated international oil prices – a key contributory factor – on consumers in the Sultanate of Oman.

According to the final accounts of the State General Budget for Fiscal 2023, the subsidy allocation towards fuel products jumped nearly 10-fold to RO 370 million at the end of the year, up from a budgeted sum of RO 39 million at the start of the year.

The Ministry of Finance said the increase was made possible by Royal Directives from His Majesty the Sultan mandating a cap on fuel prices rising beyond a certain threshold.

Accordingly, the retail prices of petrol and diesel continue to be capped at the average rates that prevailed in October 2021, when international oil prices scaled new peaks at the time.

Concerned about the knock-on impacts of these price trends on the general population in Oman, authorities have continued to keep the caps in place.

Consequently, M91 petrol remains capped at 229 baizas/litre, M95 at 239 bz and diesel at 258 bz.

In addition, thousands of limited-income earners among the national population benefit



Petroleum products were subsidised to the tune of RO 370 million in 2023, according to the Ministry of Finance.

from a further discounted rate on M91 under the National Subsidy System, first launched in 2020.

Suitably qualified Omanis,

including fishermen, registered under this scheme are eligible to receive up to 400 litres of M91 fuel per month at a subsidised rate of

180 bz/litre.

Electricity subsidy, on the other hand, climbed marginally to RO 500 million in 2023, up from a budgeted allocation of RO 485 million, the Ministry of Finance stated.

The electricity sector is targeted for price reform, with a goal to roll back all subsidies (save for a targeted, low-income segment) over an extended timeframe.

Nevertheless, with international energy prices remaining buoyant, the Omani government has intervened from time to time to keep electricity prices in check, particularly for residential segments.

Earlier this week, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) announced further cuts in residential tariffs for the

summer period spanning May to September 2024.

Significantly, a number of other utilities and services reported higher subsidy allocations during 2023.

Notable are the Transport sector, which received RO 100 million in subsidies (up from a budgeted sum of RO 84 million), Solid Waste – RO 66 million (up from RO 66 million), Water – RO 91 million (up from RO 75 million).

Wastewater – RO 67 million (up from RO 60 million), and Housing Loan interest subsidies – RO 42 million (up from 23 million).

Subsidy on basic food commodities, however, declined to RO 12 million (down from RO 25 million allotted for the year).

Madayn, Sadad Gateway sign pact to provide electronic payment services

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has signed an agreement with Sadad Electronic Payment Gateway on the sidelines of Comex Global Technology Show 2024, aimed at introducing electronic payment services for investors and business owners.

Through this partnership, investors and business owners will gain seamless access to Sadad Gateway's comprehensive payment platform, ensuring secure and efficient transactions within the Sultanate of Oman.

As per the agreement, self-service payment machines will be located at Masar Service Centres across various industrial cities under Madayn's purview.

The provided services,



Khalid al Salehi and Eng Ibrahim al Hosni sign the agreement.

including payment kiosks and mobile applications, will empower users with convenient and secure payment options, enhancing their overall experience with Madayn's

services.

The agreement was signed by Khalid bin Sulaiman al Salehi, Director of Industrial Incubations and Innovation at the Industrial

Innovation Academy from Madayn's part, and Eng Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Hosni, CEO of Sadad Gateway.

Madayn aims to boost efficiency and productivity through this agreement by introducing self-service payment machines, streamlining payment processes and reducing the need for investors and employees to leave their premises for transactions.

The agreement also supports digital transformation by promoting advanced technologies and electronic payment systems, aligning with global trends, and elevating user experience with smooth payment methods, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction.

Report: Oman's digital transformation accelerates under National Programme

**BUSINESS REPORTER**

MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Oman's journey towards a digital future under its National Programme for Digital Economy is explored in a new advisory report produced by Oxford Business Group (OBG) in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

Titled "Oman's Digital Future," the report provides an in-depth analysis of the country's efforts to enhance its digital infrastructure, advance e-government services, adopt artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies, and foster growth in the space, e-commerce and fintech sectors.

Guided by the National Programme for Digital Economy, Oman's digital transformation process is revolutionising its economy and society by enhancing productivity and fostering new growth engines.

The report highlights significant advancements in connectivity, AI innovation, cybersecurity, and the burgeoning e-commerce and fintech sectors.

It delves into the eight executive programmes guiding Oman's progress towards achieving its digital economy goals and enhancing its global competitiveness in next-generation technologies and future-oriented industries.

With the aim of increasing the digital economy's contribution to GDP by 10% by 2040, the National Programme for Digital Economy is driving several key initiatives.

These include the expansion of 5G networks,

the development of satellite communications capabilities, and the establishment of comprehensive cloud systems. Investment in AI and cybersecurity is also being prioritised to ensure Oman remains at the cutting edge of technological innovation.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and IT, emphasised the importance of the digital economy in meeting the long-term objectives of Oman Vision 2040, the country's long-term blueprint for socio-economic development.

"Government entities in Oman understand the importance of the digital economy in spurring innovation and growth.

Top priorities include the expansion and enhancement of digital infrastructure, in addition to stimulating growth in the digital content industry and capitalising on Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies in order to enable the digital transformation of various economic sectors, data centres, cloud services and government," he said.

Commenting on the report, Dana Carmen Agarbicean, OBG's Country Director for Oman, said that the findings underscore Oman's commitment to becoming a leader in the digital economy. "Our report explores the strategic initiatives driving Oman's significant progress in developing a robust digital economy.

These efforts are positioning Oman as a competitive player in the global technology landscape and boosting productivity in government and the corporate sector," she said.

MSX, Muscat University sign MoU to share knowledge and boost research

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, JUNE 3

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and Muscat University have taken a significant step toward enhancing cooperation and fostering development by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU).

This partnership aims to boost research, share knowledge and experiences and develop both academic and training programmes. Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, CEO of MSX and Dr Khamis bin Hamad al Yahyai, President of Muscat University, formalised the agreement in the presence of numerous officials and academics from both institutions.

The MoU outlines various collaborative activities, such as organising workshops and seminars, facilitating exchange visits, and creating specialised training programmes for employees and students. Haitham bin Salim al Salmi said, "We are proud to sign this MoU with Muscat University.

It represents an important step towards strengthening cooperation between the academic sector and the financial sector. We believe that this partnership will contribute to building qualified national cadres who will contribute to achieving Oman Vision 2040."

He elaborated further, "This agreement aligns with the Muscat



Dr Khamis bin Hamad al Yahyai, President of Muscat University, and Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, CEO of MSX, sign the MoU.

Stock Exchange's policy, social responsibility and commitment to deepening relationships with universities in the Sultanate of Oman.

We see this partnership as an opportunity to enhance knowledge and culture related to the capital market and investment in securities among various societal segments, especially students. We look forward to fruitful cooperation that will allow students to actively participate in the development of the national economy and ensure their readiness for the labour market."

The importance of the agreement is underscored by Muscat University's focus on practical studies that meet labour market needs through vocational training and expanding academic

specialisations.

This ensures the provision of high-quality education that aligns with market requirements and national projects. Muscat University is recognised as one of the leading institutions associated with the trade and industry sector in Oman.

Professor Dr Khamis al Yahyai emphasised the significance of this collaboration, stating, "The Muscat Stock Exchange is a leading institution in developing the financial market and attracting investments.

This agreement enhances Muscat University's presence as an academic institution that keeps pace with international developments and best practices in economics and financial analysis."

Will Google soon be replaced by Gen AI?



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is founder of Knowledge Oman knowledgeoman.com

Still remember vividly the day when touchscreen mobile phones were introduced over 20 years ago, specifically in 2007 when the late Apple founder and CEO, Steve Jobs, went on stage and introduced the touch screen with the first iPhone. Many found it strange at that time; some of the tech business leaders (including Microsoft’s then CEO Steve Ballmer)

laughing out loud and stating that the phone was expensive so as useless for the business community, let aside personal use (for consumers); nevertheless, the reality is, it was a moment that redefined the tech industry and our interaction with devices. Fast forward today, almost every mobile phone, let aside tablets and other user-interactive gadgets, have touch screen embedded as the main user interface. That innovation has not only set a new standard for smartphones (and handheld gadgets as a whole) but has also paved the way for a wide range of touch-enabled devices too. Look at the mobile phone you (and smart wearables) that you are using today. Yes, proof is in the pudding. I see generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), for example the ChatGPT, replicating the same effect with the traditional search engines of the

likes of Google. Deja vu it is! OpenAI’s ChatGPT introduction is indeed a groundbreaking moment in the field of artificial intelligence, because it showcases an unprecedented leap in conversational capabilities. A new level of sophistication to human-machine interactions, enabling more natural, coherent, and context-aware dialogues too. This is the outcome of this new innovative AI solution. ChatGPT (unlike a traditional chatbot) has the ability to understand and generate human-like text across a wide array of topics. Try it yourself and see the magic before your own eyes. Sooner or later and at an impressive speed, many functions and industries will integrate AI into their fabric. One cannot deny that ChatGPT’s remarkable advancements in AI technology will surely sparkle excitements

about the future possibilities of human-AI collaboration. Yes, smart robots too will be living in our homes and probably be part of the families as well. So how will a generative AI (such as ChatGPT) replace a traditional search engine like Google? I will tell you. Open a browser, and head to google.com website, and type a search in the textbox. Do the same with ChatGPT. Do you see the difference in terms of the output of the result and the level of interaction it has with you? Google will produce flat results of links to sites (stored from the massive database of records it has), while ChatGPT will be more like a human sharing the results to you (yes, some may not be totally accurate for now). Nevertheless, the style, the approach, the user-interface and the comfort is definitely better. What does this say? Future is brighter for the

Gen AI (Generative AI) but riskier for the traditional search engines (unless they pull their socks and fasten their seatbelt with the innovations in place), that includes the possibility of integrating AI into their technology fabric as well. The retrieval of data (digital information) is evolving rapidly – thanks to AI’s massive revolution. The way we search and interact online is no longer the same, and this will continue to ultimately evolve. Artificial intelligence, particularly machine learning and natural language processing (NLP), has significantly enhanced search engines ability to understand and process queries. What traditional search engines do is basically provide results based on indexing and retrieval capabilities of data stored on their massive database systems across data centre around the world. Microsoft has integrated AI

into their search engine (BING) and Google too have followed suit with its BERT; nevertheless, the majority of people do not seem to be using them as opposed to Open AI’s ChatGPT, simply because that’s how they have been used to be doing with traditional search engines, needless to mention the quality output that ChatGPT has in store (in comparison). While it may be a bit early to see Google disappear like how Blackberry, Nokia and the infamous Windows Phones did with Apple and Android, but the pattern and picture is clear. The race of one approach or technology to win the other is on, and unless there is some kind of synergy between the two, I see Gen AI taking over traditional search engines sooner or later. Time will tell if my anticipation based on historical feat is noteworthy. Until then, stay positive and continue winning.

The role of administrative corruption in shrinking the economy



ATIF BIN MOHAMMAD AL ZADJALI

The author is a PhD Researcher in Economic Sciences

Administrative corruption is a phenomenon that is widespread in various societies and sectors. It involves the improper use of public or private positions to achieve personal or collective interests through illegal and unethical means. Administrative corruption can be defined as the behaviour exhibited by individuals who hold responsibilities in the government, companies, or any other institution. They aim to achieve personal gains for themselves or their close associates by exploiting the authority granted to them. The various definitions of corruption indicate that it can take on multiple and diverse forms, but the common and most widespread notion describes corruption as the unlawful exploitation of power by an individual in a public position, with the aim of achieving personal or collective interests and obtaining illegitimate gains. This individual could be a politician or a government official, and corruption may involve receiving bribes, violating laws, manipulating financial operations, or abusing public resources. The aim of the United Nations Convention against Corruption is to enhance international efforts in combating administrative corruption. Administrative corruption is

defined as engaging in activities that constitute improper performance of duties or the exploitation of position or authority. This includes actions that manipulate signatures to gain personal advantage or expose oneself to obtaining unlawful gains. This can be done through the receipt or pursuit of illegitimate benefits, either directly or indirectly, or by accepting benefits that are granted to either the individual or another person. Administrative corruption causes a range of negative effects that spread throughout society, negatively impacting development and economic growth. One of these effects is the damage to the credibility of the state and its various institutions. When administrative and financial corruption spreads, the official system of operation is harmed, and the rules and regulations aimed at achieving the state’s objectives fade away. This leads to a loss of trust in administrative agencies, diminishing reliance on them by citizens and those who interact with them. Additionally, the widening scope of corruption weakens administrative structures and the state’s administrative system, ultimately resulting in the failure of the entire administrative system. Another negative impact of administrative corruption is hindering the development process and weakening economic growth. The spread of corruption leads to the obstruction of development efforts and impedes progress in society. In the 1997 World Bank Development Report, it was emphasised that administrative and financial corruption is the biggest obstacle to development. Corruption is a behaviour that harms stability and disrupts balance. Numerous studies indicate



A gavel and a block is pictured at the George Glazer Gallery antique store in this illustration picture.

that administrative corruption has a negative effect on economic growth. For example, corruption results in reducing investment rates, consequently decreasing overall demand, leading to a decline in economic growth. Moreover, the bribery associated with administrative corruption is considered a form of taxation on businessmen, prompting them to reduce their investments in countries where corruption is prevalent. Administrative corruption has always had a significant impact on political stability in society. When corruption spreads, political stability is jeopardised, income levels decrease, and conflicts escalate within the ruling elite. Corruption also leads to the deterioration of the situation on all fronts, including the corruption of administration, its expansion, and its influence. In this context, a class emerges that seeks to spread corruption to achieve its personal interests, causing the identity of the administrative apparatus to fade away, and corrupt systems

dominate within it. Those benefiting from corruption work to spread it across as many government agencies and institutions as possible, supported by the lack of accountability and legal consequences. Finally, administrative corruption negatively impacts the distribution of resources and social justice in society. When corruption undermines the economy, the disparity in the distribution of wealth and opportunities among individuals and communities increases. Resources and opportunities are redirected in favour of those with less capability and those involved in corruption, leading to an exacerbation of poverty and social inequality. In this way, administrative corruption causes a weakening of political stability, a deterioration of public services, and an unfair distribution of resources in society. Therefore, corruption is considered a significant obstacle that hinders progress and negatively impacts all aspects of

economic and social life. There are concerted efforts, both locally and internationally, to combat the phenomenon of administrative and financial corruption. In the 1989 Paris Summit, industrialised countries decided to form a working group to take financial measures to combat and eliminate corruption. The group identified 40 measures to fight and eliminate corruption. By early 1996, international agreements related to anti-corruption efforts worked to strengthen political commitments against corruption. These agreements expanded the basic international standards and practices for addressing corruption, reducing its prevalence by enhancing the necessary transparency to combat it. It is well-known that administrative corruption thrives in an environment lacking transparency. Corruption benefits from ambiguity and lack of clarity, especially in the absence of accountability and effective

oversight supported by systems and powers aimed at protecting public funds and holding those responsible for corruption accountable. As countries and organisations are actively working on implementing robust legislation aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and combating corruption in various sectors, whether governmental or private. These laws include stringent measures to combat bribery and avoid conflicts of interest, as well as the promotion of effective mechanisms to uncover and punish those responsible for corruption. In addition to legislation, several initiatives are implemented to enhance integrity and transparency in various sectors. These initiatives include the development of effective management systems, strengthening monitoring and oversight, and promoting the role of civil society and media in monitoring and documenting cases of corruption. Educational and media efforts are intensifying to raise public awareness about the harms of corruption and its negative consequences on societies. Awareness campaigns are being implemented to promote values of honesty and ethics, and to enhance awareness of the importance of transparency and accountability in institutions and communities. Citizens are also encouraged to report cases of corruption and provide necessary support to witnesses and whistleblowers. Combating corruption requires continuous and multi-dimensional efforts, including strong legislation, comprehensive awareness, effective oversight, and the collaboration of countries and international organisations. Through these collective efforts, it is possible to reduce the phenomenon of corruption and promote integrity and accountability in our societies.

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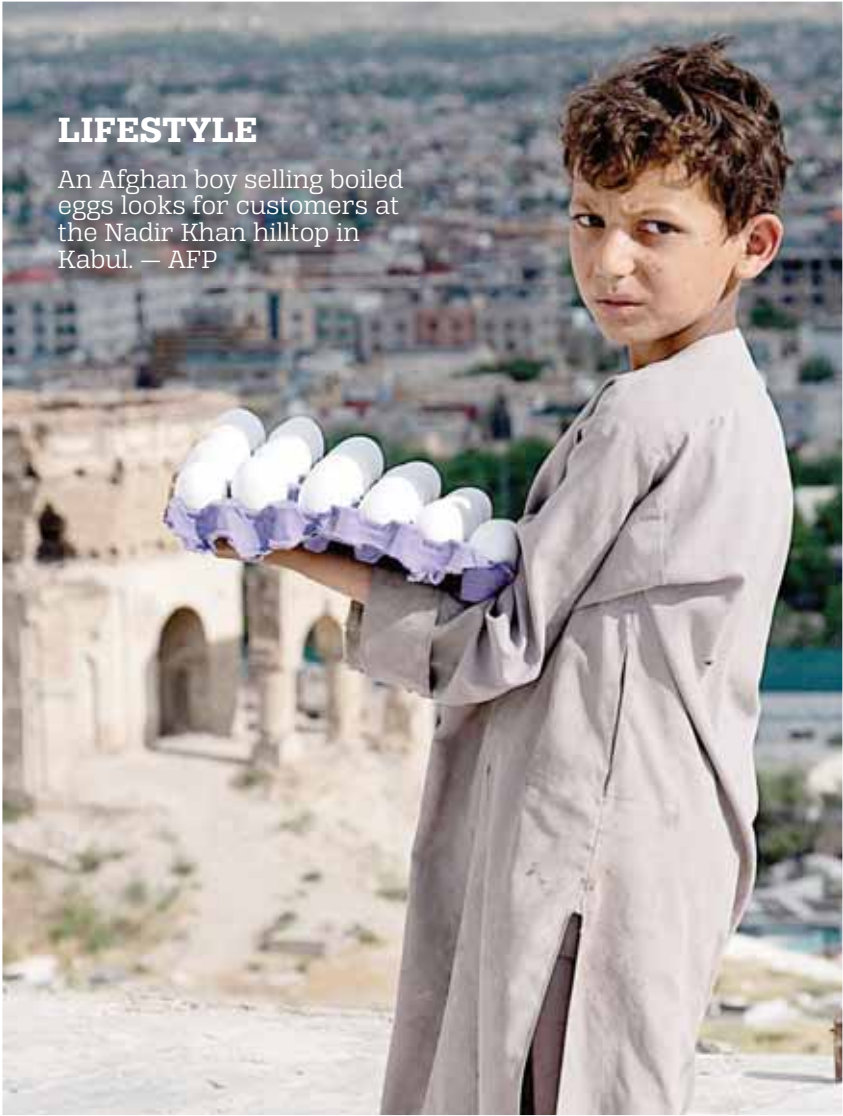
CHOCOLATE

An employee submerges sweets in milk chocolate with traditional Sudanese taste at a restaurant, Cairo. — AFP



MUSIC

Brazilian musician Marcelo Mariano performs at the Blues & Jazz Festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

An Afghan boy selling boiled eggs looks for customers at the Nadir Khan hilltop in Kabul. — AFP



FILM

French-American filmmakers Jules-Clement Naudet (L) and his brother Thomas Gedeon Naudet pose during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



ANIMAL

Bishop stands under his owner, Rosa Clark, as she and her sister Erica McCauly take part in a reunion of beagles from Envigo, at the Charlottesville, Virginia, US. — AFP

art & life

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HERITAGE CASTLE MUSEUM UNVEILS RICH PAST

The museum's assortment of artefacts is impressive, spanning centuries and including ancient metal objects and items from various countries, acquired during Abdullateef's travels... P20

A LOOK AT THE ACADEME



DR. ZAINAB AL-AJMI

Why do Students Lack Interest in studying?

Dr Zainab al Ajmi, an erudite academic and dedicated educator, brings insightful perspectives to her columns. With a wealth of experience in teaching and research, her writings delve into the intersection of academia and societal issues, fostering intellectual discourse with clarity and depth. For feedback, you can email her at zeinbf@moe.om

LACK OF INTEREST in school can become common for kids at various stages of their educational journey. Additionally, the increasing academic demands and complexities of schoolwork can sometimes overwhelm students, leading to disengagement and apathy toward learning. Social factors, such as peer influence and pressure to fit in, can also contribute to a decline in interest in school during this time. Educators need to recognise the signs of disengagement early on and provide support for students' interest and motivation in learning (Icard, M, (2023, August 2). What to Do When Your Child is

Struggling Academically | Our Children (ptaourchildren.org. Access on: 1/3/2024). According to Sasson (2019), a lack of motivation is defined as having insufficient levels of desire and excitement for carrying out a task. Additionally, Shore (2017) points out that a lack of drive can be mistaken for a disregard for one's responsibilities. Low confidence levels, unmet expectations in the classroom, feeling unloved or unsupported by the family, and strong pressure lead to pupils having low motivation for studying, which has a negative impact on their academic achievement. Students lose motivation for a variety of reasons, including the teacher's imprecise delivery of the lesson, his or her lack of confidence, their discontent with the lessons, and their own personal issues, and poor academic performance (Rone et al, 2023). As a means of involving students in their education, classroom involvement has gained importance, considering that millennial students are always looking for interaction. Studies on student academic motivation and goal orientation have been carried out by numerous researchers. Particularly, researchers

who focus on the dynamics of motivation in learning environments have begun to highlight the possible contributions of relationship variables and teacher behaviours to student academic engagement. The development of competencies during the transition to middle school and in the early school years is heavily influenced by teacher-student relationships. By creating a classroom environment that encourages both student motivation and learning, teachers can influence students' intellectual and socioemotional experiences. Additionally, interactions between teachers and students regulate the growth of social, emotional, and academic skills. Self-determination theorists contend that children start to value activities that are rewarded, including both their own and those of important people in their social settings (for example, teachers and families). Students start to choose activities that are compatible with their own feelings once they internalise these values as being their own. Previous studies suggested that a student's motivation had the biggest influence on whether they learned. As has

already been established, one of the most crucial factors affecting student learning is motivation (Rone et al, 2023, p. 638). Moreover, during the preschool and early school years, the interactions between teachers and students are fundamental in nurturing the development of motivation. These formative years mark a critical period where children begin to form their attitudes towards learning and discover their intrinsic drives. To sum up, positive interactions with teachers can inspire curiosity, enthusiasm, and a passion for learning in young minds. Teachers who provide encouragement, support, and constructive feedback help cultivate a growth mindset and resilience in students, empowering them to tackle challenges with confidence. Conversely, negative interactions or lack of engagement from teachers may hinder motivation and potentially discourage students from actively participating in their educational journey. Therefore, fostering meaningful and supportive relationships between teachers and students is essential for building a strong foundation for lifelong learning and motivation.



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Delays and Alilegations
Cool Off Africa's
Hottest Art Event

ARTISTS WERE putting the final touches to their works. Visitors had bought tickets long in advance. Everyone was counting on a big splash for the 15th edition of the event rapidly becoming Africa's most prominent cultural gathering — the biennale in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, which had been set to start May 16.

So when the West African country's new government postponed Dak'Art at the last minute, saying it wanted to wait to hold it in optimum conditions, the African art world initially responded with dismay. The delay until November would mean less traffic through exhibitions and fewer sales, hurting a crop of up-and-coming African artists, many observers felt. The artists had regrouped, vowing to plow ahead in May with the smorgasbord of side events and exhibitions known as OFF despite the absence of the official biennale.

THE FAITHFUL STILL CAME. Artists hung paintings from trees, converted the walls of stores and restaurants into galleries, and filled some of Dakar's run-down architectural gems with installations — piles of rubble, pieces of pirogue boats, a tennis court. Visitors zoomed around town in yolk-yellow ramshackle taxis, each one a work of art in itself, and dressed up in their best bazin and pagne tissé — colourful African fabrics — to attend a full programme of exhibition launch parties. It helped that the Partours, a collection of artistic events in galleries around town, kept its pro-

gramming for mid-May to mid-June, as planned.

On a recent afternoon at Selebe Yoon, an airy gallery space in a quiet street of Dakar's downtown, Tam Sir, a young man in a tank top that read "Installing Muscles. Please Wait," was showing a slow stream of visitors around a series of installations by Senegalese-Mauritanian film director and artist Hamedine Kane.

A video loop of a desolate shore was projected through glistening water-filled beads scattered on a well-worn floor; balanced on the painted boards of a deconstructed wooden boat were dozens of the jerrycans used to carry gas for ocean journeys.

Kane's theme was the effects of industrial international fishing on local fishing communities, where many risk their lives on rickety boats to Europe as a result in their search for new jobs. Living a few minutes from Dakar's busiest fishing beach, Sir knew firsthand the devastation and the hard choices his generation had to make, and tried to convey it to viewers, including a party of teens from a local school.

"Here, when you're young, you carry the hopes of a family," he said, explaining why, when thousands of Senegalese die at sea each year trying to migrate, his contemporaries still tried to make it. "They're often pushed to go by considerations of honour."

Nearby at OH Gallery, another installation — this one by French artist Emmanuel Tussore — evoked more despair, using ubiquitous Senegalese materials to



create a war zone reminiscent of scenes from Gaza, in Dakar's first "modern" building, a colonial-era bank. Visitors picked their way around body bags fashioned out of cement sacks and rubble; a piano looked as if a bomb had hit it; a round fountain had broken glass for water and bore the circular inscription "foundations are ruins are foundations are ruins."

A short walk away, at Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, sickly-sweet pink walls clashed intentionally with high-saturation paintings by Na Chainkua Reindorf, dominated by the escapades of a woman's serpentine braids. In one triptych, figures hid behind two dense curtains of hair, only their bright pink arms and feet showing.

As always with OFF, the offerings were eclectic, and Dakar's



stylish, beachy backdrop was as much an attraction as the works on show. With a new, youthful president, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, 44, at the country's helm, the shows added to the optimism in the Senegalese air. The absence of the headline exhibitions at the former Palace of Justice was felt, though. The crowds have been thinner, and the whole affair less the non-stop party conjured in

previous years, when many combined the biennale with a weekend at the annual jazz festival in the biggest city in Senegal's north, Saint Louis, known as Ndar in the dominant Wolof language.

But with the official biennale still to come, this month's shows are, perhaps, a warm-up for the delayed main event in November — when Dakar can do it all again. — **NYT**

FASHION

JLo cancels summer tour as Affleck split rumours swirl

JENNIFER LOPEZ said on Friday she was cancelling her summer tour to spend more time with her family as rumours circulate over a split with actor-husband Ben Affleck.

The announcement from the singer and her promoter also comes after reports that sales for the multi-date event were flagging.

In her newsletter "On the JLo" which she sent to fans on Friday she revealed the tour was off.

"I am completely heartsick and devastated about letting you down. Please know that I wouldn't do this if I didn't feel that it was absolutely necessary," Lopez



wrote.

"I promise I will make it up to you and we will all be together again. I love you all so much. Until next time..."

The e-mail also included a message from tour promoter Live Nation noting that "Jennifer is taking time off to be with her children, family and close friends."

The cancellation comes after a number of adjustments and cur-

tailments were made to the tour, including slicing dates off and rebranding it as a greatest hits tour, rather than one focused on her latest album.

But it also comes with Lopez and Affleck's apparent troubles dominat-



ing the tabloid and entertainment press.

Reports suggest the pair — who married in 2022, almost two decades after their first relationship fell apart — have been living separately in Los Angeles.

People Magazine said relations between the "Good Will Hunting" star, 51, and the "On the Floor" singer, 54, were strained because of their different approaches to celebrity.

"She likes to open her heart to her fans and to the world," the magazine quoted an unnamed source saying.

"He is more introspective and private. This has been difficult day-to-day."

The pair first met on the set of the widely panned movie "Gigli," released 2003.

They became a media sensation as they dated but postponed their planned 2003 nuptials, then announced their relationship was over in early 2004.

"Bennifer" — the couple's public nickname from their first highly publicised relationship — set the internet alight in 2021 when photos of them together again began circulating.

They wed in a small ceremony in Nevada in July the following year, and then had a star-studded ceremony at Affleck's lavish 87-acre (35-hectare) waterfront compound in the southeastern US state of Georgia in August.

The couple reportedly bought a \$60 million home together in Los Angeles last year. — **AFP**



Siham al Saidi

On THE COAST near the sea, there is a historic castle in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah, Al Batinah North Governorate. It has a captivating museum. This hidden treasure houses a remarkable collection of artefacts from the Abbasid and Ottoman periods, meticulously gathered by Abdullateef Alansari, a passionate collector.

His dedication to preserving history was realised with the support of businessman Juma al Shehi, who helped present these treasures in a creatively pleasing manner for public viewing.

Adjacent to this ancient archaeological museum, within the historic castle, lies a café, which provides visitors with a peaceful spot to enjoy cold beverages while immersing themselves in the rich history on display.

The museum's collection is a testament to the creativity and daily life of ancient Omani households. Among the exhibited items are traditional tools and household objects used by Omanis for thousands of years. One fascinating piece is the old coffee grinders, historically used by Omani women to prepare Arabic coffee, a staple of Omani culture.

The collection also includes pieces of the Kaaba's cover from Saudi Arabia, which traders once replaced and sold.

Abdullateef shared, "I was keen on collecting these pieces and ancient coins, ensuring to gather them from various places and individuals who had collected them. It was not an easy task, but it was worth the effort, especially seeing the great interest in this national heritage."

The museum's assortment of artefacts is impressive, spanning centuries and including ancient metal objects and items from various countries, acquired during Abdullateef's travels. His journeys allowed him to buy numerous unique pieces, adding to the museum's diverse inventory.

"There are pieces I travelled long distances to acquire, spending significant amounts of money and engaging in long negotiations. It wasn't easy, but I found huge joy in collecting them. I know these historical artefacts will be worth millions in the future, but I have no intention of selling them. Instead, I want to share them with people and thoroughly enjoy talking about them," Abdullateef explained.

Abdullateef's commitment to gathering these historical artefacts has turned the museum into a treasure trove of Arab and Omani heritage. His efforts have not gone unnoticed, as the museum has garnered wide attention from tourists, leading to a surge in visits to the old castle. This historic site beautifully reflects the essence of the Sultanate of Oman from ancient times, offering a wonderful blend of historical education and visual appeal.

Polina from Russia, one of the museum's visitors, said, "I am pleased to visit this museum and very impressed with the information I received from the castle's owner. I admired the presence of such artefacts in a beautiful place like this near the sea." Juma added, "The museum has witnessed visits from several tourist groups from various countries. It serves as a bridge between the past and the present, allowing visitors to travel through time."

The appeal of this castle extends beyond entertainment. Visitors find the experience deeply educational, exploring Omani heritage and treasures. Each visit offers a mysterious and astonishing journey through various historical eras.

The detailed artefacts, coupled with the historical narratives they represent and Abdullateef's explanations, provide a profound understanding of the region's cultural evolution. A collection of pottery, copper, and silver artefacts in Abdullateef's personal museum, now public, has attracted the attention of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as the curiosity of every visitor.

The castle has become a focal point for cultural exchange and learning. Tourists are not only entertained but also gain valuable insights into the historical and cultural fabric of Oman. The castle's atmosphere, enriched by the surrounding picturesque beauty and the café's welcoming ambiance, enhances the overall experience, making it a memorable destination.

The heritage castle in Al Khabourah, with its powerful museum showcases and inviting café, stands as a symbol of Omani history and culture. It invites visitors to step back in time, offering a unique blend of historical richness and modern hospitality. Abdullateef's vision and dedication have created a space where the past is preserved and celebrated, ensuring that the legacy of ancient Oman continues to inspire future generations.

Al Khabourah's heritage castle museum unveils Oman's rich past

