

‘Ready to help restore peace in Ukraine’

India stands ready to give all possible support to restoring peace to war-torn Ukraine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday in Vienna after a Kremlin visit criticised by Kyiv. Modi arrived in Vienna late on Tuesday after talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, where the Indian leader urged “peace through dialogue”, saying that “war cannot solve problems”. **SEE P7**

SUNRISE - 05:28 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:01 AM

DHUHR - 12:17 PM

ASR - 03:37 PM

MAGHRIB - 07:02 PM

ISHA - 08:23 PM



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P11

ALCARAZ FIGHTS BACK TO REACH WIMBLEDON SEMIS, SINNER TOPPLED BY MEDVEDEV



P13

OPEC STICKS TO 2024 OIL DEMAND VIEW, SEES STRONG TRAVEL SEASON



P19

LARGE PUMPKIN SCULPTURE BY JAPANESE ARTIST UNVEILED



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S MONGOLIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent greetings to President Ukhnaaгийн Khürelsükh of Mongolia on his country's National Day. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Khürelsükh and the people of his country.

STATE COUNCIL DISCUSSES DRAFT LAW

The State Council Office on Wednesday held a meeting during which it discussed its Legal Committee's proposal on the "Draft law on documentation" and a proposal on amending some provisions of the "Law on Arbitration in Civil and Commercial Disputes". The discussion took place as part of the 4th meeting of the State Council's first convening during the 8th Term. The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. The members of the State Council's Office discussed the Economic and Financial Committee's proposal. **SEE P2**

DATE HARVEST BEGINS



Al Tabseel or harvesting of dates began in Oman. The season spans from late June to the end of July as dates ripen early due to high heat.

REPORT ON P3

Al Ashkhara forum begins

AI ASHKHARA: The second edition of the Al Ashkhara forum kicked off at the Al Ashkhara Public Park on Wednesday under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ). The forum will continue until July 31 amidst various events and exhibitions.

Mohammed bin Humaid al Ghabshi, Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Forum, said: "This forum comes as a continuation of the successes of its first edition, which witnessed a large turnout from the community and visitors exceeding 220,000."

He pointed out that the organising committee in this edition was keen to diversify the events and activities to meet the desires of all age groups of the forum's visitors.

Massacres of Israel harden Gaza truce position, warns Hamas

GAZA: A top Hamas official said on Wednesday that "intensifying" Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip would harden the Palestinian group's negotiating position in mediation efforts towards a truce.

In recent days, Israeli forces have increased raids in northern Gaza as heavy fighting again raged in the far-southern city of Rafah.

And across the besieged territory, deadly strikes have hit four schools used as shelters, sparking rebuke from France and Germany which both labelled the attacks "unacceptable".

Hamas official Hossam Badran, asked about the increased military operations, said that Israel "is trying to pressure negotiations by intensifying bombing operations, displacement, and committing massacres".

As long-stalled diplomatic efforts have gathered pace, aiming for a hostage release deal and Gaza truce after more than nine months of devastating war, Badran said Israel was trying



Buildings lie in ruin, after Israeli forces withdrew from Shejaiya neighborhood, following a ground operation in Gaza on Wednesday. – Reuters

to force Hamas's hands. According to Badran, the Israeli government was "hoping that the resistance will relinquish its legitimate demands", which include a complete ceasefire and full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. But "the continuation of massacres compels us to adhere to our demands", he said. — **AFP**

Beware of unlicensed baby food

All formula products must get approval from MoH

AHMED AL KAABI

Muscat, July 10

Sale of baby milk powder and food by online stores without permission poses risk to infants, warned the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) after these products went viral in social media.

MoCIIP has issued a notice stating several online stores and promoters are selling baby milk formula and baby food under the age of 3 years, which is a violation of the Regulation for Organising Marketing and Promotion Activities on Social Media issued under Ministerial Resolution No. 2022/619.

The ministry said sale and marketing of infant food requires approval of the Ministry of Health (MoH).

MoCIIP stressed the need to adhere to the regulations on online marketing and promotion. The ministry added that it will take the necessary legal measures against anyone who violates these regulations.

Consumers should not rush to buy from unreliable sites, and make sure of the credibility of online stores before making any purchase. Consumers should read reviews and opinions of buyers. It is also advisable to make sure that the products circulating are compliant with the standards and specifications approved in Oman.



MoCIIP has issued a notice stating several online stores and promoters are selling baby food without adhering to digital marketing norms

The Ministry of Health has been extolling the virtues of breast milk and the nutrition it imparts to the infant for a while. In 2020 it released

Oman Specifications Standard (OSS) guidelines for regulating the marketing of formula products for infants and young children.

According to regulations, baby food should use raw materials

that conform to the OSS. The production, packing and trading of the products in this context must also be done according to the terms and requirements of OSS.

The sellers must not endorse any kind of medical, therapeutic or preventive aspect of the products before getting MoH approval.

No pictures of infants or mothers or any other pictures or phrases that praise the use of the classified product shall be used, nor are food flavourings allowed to be used in infant food up to the age of six months.

The use of sweeteners are also banned. Use of words or phrases about the product that imply similarity to breast milk is also prohibited.



COME HERE TO BEAT THE HEAT

Jabal Shams is the highest peak in Oman. It is characterised by its cold weather in winter and mild climate in summer. Visitors usually camp in Jabal Shams during summer to escape the heat. They camp by the edge of the canyon where the cool water and the captivating scenery.

REPORT ON P20

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 37°C Min 33°C

SALALAH: Max 29°C Min 27°C

NIZWA: Max 42°C Min 28°C



State Council discusses Draft Law on arbitration in disputes



The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. – ONA

MUSCAT: The State Council Office on Wednesday held a meeting during which it discussed its Legal Committee’s proposal on the “Draft law on documentation” and a proposal on amending some provisions of the “Law on Arbitration in Civil and Commercial Disputes”.

The discussion took place as

part of the 4th meeting of the State Council’s first convening during the 8th Term. The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The members of the State Council’s Office discussed the Economic and Financial Committee’s proposal on “the

framework for developing the government’s performance management system and criteria for placement in leadership positions”. The meeting also looked into a proposal on “the role of plant extracts in enhancing the local economy.” The meeting reviewed the Council of Ministers’ reply to observations and views made by

the State Council and the Majlis Ashshura about the “Draft of State Budget 2024”.

The members elaborated on two studies conducted by the State Council: One titled “Legislative and regulatory determinants for e-commerce” and the other titled “Arts and their role in supporting the national economy.” — ONA



The village boasts a distinguished location as well as biological and geological diversity that has made it a major tourist attraction for discovery and adventure enthusiasts. – ONA

Mountain adventures galore in Wajmah village

AL RUSTAQ: The village of Wajmah in Wadi Al Sahtan in the Wilayat of Rustaq in Al Batinah South Governorate is one of the most amazing and promising mountain villages. The village boasts a distinguished location as well as biological and geological diversity that has made it a major tourist attraction for discovery and adventure enthusiasts.

The village is well-known for its many water springs that flow from within the rocks. It has four falajs: Al Malj, Al Ghayl, Al Khatwa and Al Qabil which irrigate farms and are distributed over a large stretch of the mountain slope in the form of terraces.

Dr Al Mutasim bin Nasser al Hilali, Director of the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Batinah South Governorate, explained that the village of Wajmah is one of the most beautiful mountainous villages of Wadi Al Sahtan. The aflaj and farms are distributed on a steep mountainside while the houses are situated in the upper parts of the mountain. Remnants of old houses built of stone and mud can be seen alongside modern houses built of cement standing high as if they are suspended amidst the rocks.

The village’s most prominent landmarks are its small mosques, the general council of the villagers, the aflaj channels and the magnificently built agricultural terraces. Visitors can learn about ancient life in the village and how the ancestors

lived in a tough environment and how they handled transportation, tapped water sources and communicated with neighbouring villages, Al Hilali said.

Mountain hiking experts and adventurers can satisfy their passion for discovery in adventures that can take them as far as the villages of Jabal Shams and Misfat Al Abriyeen in the Wilayat of Al Hamra in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and many other villages such as Al Fara’a, Al Huwaib, Al Hob, Al Wada’im, Al Naid, Al Ghor and Limbu in Wadi Al Sahtan in Al Batinah South Governorate.

Al Hilali said that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has a strategy to diversify aspects of tourism investment. It allowed institutions and citizens to invest in small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism field. This includes investing in hospitality and heritage rest houses which are aplenty in the village of Wajmah.

He noted that investing in such beautiful villages located far from city centres contributes to the provision of tourists’ meets the requirements for services and accommodation which has been in high demand in recent years. In addition, investing in such buildings reflects positive aspects including preserving the existing buildings in the village by restoring and maintaining them to sustain the tourism movement and the movement of visitors to the village. — ONA



More than 5 tonnes of Sidr honey produced

MAHADHA: Sidr honey production in the Wilayat of Mahadha in Al Buraimi Governorate exceeded 5 tonnes this year. There are presently 45 beekeepers and 2,985 beehives according to the statistics of the Directorate-General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Buraimi Governorate.

Eng Mohammed bin Salem al Kaabi, Director of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Mahadha, said that the beekeeping is one of the oldest professions in the Sultanate of Oman and is a main source of income for many families in Al Buraimi Governorate. It contributes to supporting the national economy by meeting the local market’s need for local honey while the surplus is exported.

He added that Al Buraimi Governorate recently witnessed excessive rainfall which affected the vegetation cover and delayed the harvesting of honey this year.

Al Kaabi explained that there are two types of honey bees in the Wilayat of Mahadha. The first type is locally known as Abu Tuwaiq which lives in mountain caves. This type of bees produce



Beekeeping is a main source of income for many families in Al Buraimi Governorate. – ONA

high quality honey which is more expensive than other types due to the low production of the hive on the one hand and the small number of hives of this type on the other hand. The second type is known as the domesticated bees which are characterised by their small size and yellow colour. The bees are raised inside wooden hives using modern methods. These bees are peaceful



and they are known for their high production besides being resistant to most pests and diseases.

The Directorate of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Mahadha provides all needed support to beekeepers including technical support, tools and equipment needed to raise and multiply bees. Besides, it carries out awareness programmes, seminars and lectures for beekeepers on the correct methods of raising and multiplying Omani bees. — ONA

People’s satisfaction on quality of services high in Muscat

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A survey measuring the satisfaction levels of citizens and residents in the capital region showed amazing results, reflecting the local authorities’ commitment to ensuring quality services on a perpetual basis.

The survey, conducted by the Office of the Governor of Muscat, was based on the Muscat Governorate’s keenness to improve its services to achieve customer and beneficiary satisfaction. The results show that as many as 63 per cent of people living in the capital region are satisfied with the implementation of various development projects in the governorate.

Recently implemented, the survey aimed to measure the level of community members’ satisfaction with the services provided, evaluate the quality of various services, and assess the need for improvements to achieve the aspirations and ambitions of citizens and residents.

The survey also measured the satisfaction of beneficiaries of various essential services currently provided in the governorate. It was divided into five wide categories: removal of illegal possessions of state properties, implementation of various development projects, electronic services provided by the government as part of Oman Vision 2040, municipal permit services, and various afforestation



The survey, conducted by the Office of the Governor of Muscat, was based on the Muscat Governorate’s keenness to improve its services.

efforts in Muscat Governorate to tackle climate change and global warming.

According to the survey results, the satisfaction rate of

beneficiaries with the various services has reached encouraging percentages. The results showed a 74 per cent satisfaction level among beneficiaries of the

governorate’s efforts to remove illegal possessions, 63 per cent in development projects’ implementation, 72 per cent in the provision of electronic

services, and 63 per cent in municipal license services. The satisfaction rate of beneficiaries with afforestation efforts reached 83 per cent.

“These results reflect the commitment of Muscat Governorate and its official representatives in improving and developing both individual and societal services provided in the governorate. It also confirms the importance of continuing to implement periodic surveys to measure the opinions of citizens and residents, and to benefit from their opinions in guiding efforts to achieve the highest levels of quality and satisfaction in the governorate’s services,” a spokesperson from the Office of the Governor said.



■ SQU, MOSCOW STATE UNIVERSITY SIGN LETTER OF COOPERATION



MOSCOW: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and Moscow State University inked a letter of cooperation in the field of students exchange as well as research, education, scientific and cultural cooperation. The pact was signed by Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU, and Viktor Sadovnichiy, Rector of the Moscow State University. It is worth noting that Moscow State University was founded in 1755 as it is one of the oldest and largest universities in the Russian Federation. According to the “QS” global classification for 2024, Moscow State University obtained the 87th place. – **ONA**

Al Tabseel season begins in Oman

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 10

THE Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan recently hosted a harvesting and planting activity for Al Tabseel season. The event was organised under the auspices of Mohammed bin Ali Akaak, Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, and attended by several officials.

Al Tabseel season, observed in many governorates of Oman, spans from late June to the end of July. The ‘Busoor’ ripen early this time due to the high temperatures, marking the beginning of the ‘Jadaad’.

Salem bin Sultan al Araimi, Director of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, said that the number of palm trees in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South reached 115,367 palm trees, while the quantity of their production reached 7,798 tonnes in the year 2023, with an average production of 68 kilogrammes per palm tree.

He explained that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources plays an important role in developing the dates sector by adopting modern methods in agriculture and care of palm trees and care through prevention programmes for the most important palm pests, in addition to carrying out research, tissue propagation and agricultural extension work.

Al Tabseel includes several stages: Pruning the palm, separating the ‘Busoor’ from the ripe dates, boiling the ‘Busoor’ in water, drying it, and finally placing it under the sun to dry completely before bagging it in burlap sacks.

Residents begin their work right after the Fajr (morning) prayer, heading to the



Al Tabseel season, observed in many governorates of Oman, spans from late June to the end of July

‘Busoor’ cooking site where the heat intensifies throughout the week.

Said al Junaibi, a resident of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, said, “We eagerly await Al Tabseel season each year, witnessing the joy and cooperation among the people.” Mariam al Saadi added, “Women of all ages join men in this season, and even children enjoy participating.”

Encouraging participation from governmental and private institutions can boost the creation of companies focused on Al Tabseel products. This, in turn, will provide promotion and support for these companies in various fields, both locally and internationally. Young people practicing Al Tabseel are also encouraged to

turn their hobbies into small and medium enterprises, furthering public and private sector involvement through festivals and exhibitions.

Statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources indicate that there are over 374,800 Al Mabsley palm trees in Oman, with an average production of 85 kg per palm tree. Oman produces approximately 31,900 tonnes of Al Mabsley annually. Additionally, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion reports that there are 544 producers and marketers in Oman, with the annual crop value estimated at around RO 900,000.

Oman at WIPO: Israeli aggression under full sight of international community

GENEVA: Represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Sultanate of Oman participated in sessions of the 65th meeting of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), held in Geneva.

Oman’s delegation was headed by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

At the meeting, Masan read out the following statement: “The Sultanate of Oman would like to draw the attention of WIPO member states’ associations to the Palestinian people’s suffering caused by the devastating Israeli attacks on Palestinian tangible and intangible heritage. This devastation pervaded the existence of all objects and all human beings whose rights are blatantly violated on a daily basis. The Israeli aggression, which targeted all — men, children, women, health institutions and educational institutions — is unfortunately taking place under the full sight of the international community. No international organisation is taking legal action to hold the perpetrators culpable for these heinous crimes against humanity.”

In a speech during the meeting, Masan stressed that the Sultanate of Oman attaches great importance to cooperation with WIPO and has worked closely with WIPO on various projects aimed at consolidating the international organisation’s intellectual property system in the Sultanate of Oman.

“The projects included WIPO’s support for frankincense producers, a project aimed at preserving the quality and reputation of Omani frankincense and raising its marketing value locally and internationally through the application of the intellectual property system as a geographical indicator,” said Masan.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman is working on implementing the project of ‘National Intellectual Property Strategy’ in cooperation with WIPO. “The project seeks to establish a comprehensive framework to enhance innovation and ensure the protection of intellectual property rights in the Sultanate of Oman,” he explained. “WIPO’s Global Innovation Index (GII) serves as one of the main reference indicators of this strategy,” said Masan, noting that the Sultanate of Oman advanced 10 ranks in the GII in 2023, compared to its position in 2022.

Masan also laid emphasis on the significance the ‘Treaty on Genetic Resources and Related Traditional Knowledge’ in the protection of intellectual property rights for precious resources. He valued the support that the WIPO is lending to indigenous peoples and local communities by securing their fair access to benefits arising from the use of such resources. — **ONA**



Oman’s delegation was headed by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry. – **ONA**

Omani freediver inspires youths to take up challenges



ZUWAINA AL SULAIMANI
MUSCAT, JULY 10

Driven by a mission to support youth and provide them with ample opportunities, the Youth Centre sponsored its third freediving course, led by freediving world record holder Omar al Ghailani, for a group of 21 students aged 14 to 24 at Masirah Island last month.

The course, hosted at Masirah

Island Resort, was conducted by Omar al Ghailani, a world champion athlete and the first certified freediving instructor in Oman.

“We want to share these skills and make this sport more familiar in Oman to expand the students’ opportunities, whether they want to open a business or explore the sport further,” Al Ghailani explained.

“The course went well, with our maximum capacity registered and many more people looking to join, which shows a lot of interest in this sport — this is what we aimed for,” he added.

The course offered students a significant opportunity to explore the sport, divided into two parts: theoretical and practical. “The students did really well, showing impressive progress in holding their breath, which makes us



confident in the design of the programme and the information provided,” Al Ghailani noted.

The theory session covered the physics of freediving, essential do’s and don’ts, methodology, equipment and safety techniques, ensuring students felt confident before beginning the practical session, which also outlined rescue procedures. The practical session included breathing techniques, fin use, rescue drills and actual freediving.

Omar al Mahrooqi, a student who registered online through the Youth Centre’s website, shared his experience: “I wanted to try something new. I didn’t know what freediving was at first. It seemed much more difficult, but now I understand it and can do it. I have more confidence in the water and am excited to try more freediving courses in the future.”

The students came from various parts of Oman, including Muscat, Masirah, Al Mudhaibi, Samayil, and more.

Ahmed al Mahrooqi, another student from Muscat, remarked, “The course was very good. I used to freedive without professional training, which took me 3-4 months to do properly. This course sped up the process to two days. It’s amazing how the right coaching and small details can make a big difference. Now it feels like new levels unlocked, and I look forward to practicing more to become a pro athlete.” The same course is planned to take place next in Sur and will continue across Oman with the support of the Youth Centre, inspiring students’ goals and dreams and equipping them with the necessary skills for their future.



M O N S O O N B L U E S

A guide for a safe and joyful khareef season



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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Salalah, the jewel of Dhofar, is enveloped in the enchanting monsoon season, known locally as khareef. This unique period transforms the region into a lush green destination, attracting visitors from around the world, particularly from the GCC and Middle Eastern countries.

As the monsoon intensifies, it brings with it a delightful blend of merrymaking and natural beauty. However, to fully enjoy the khareef season, visitors must be mindful of certain hazards to ensure their visit is both happy and safe.

Khareef season in Salalah is a time for joy and exploration. The landscape is adorned with verdant hills, misty valleys, and refreshing waterfalls, making it an ideal time for road trips, picnics, and visits to various tourist spots. However, while the allure of khareef is undeniable, the monsoon also brings specific challenges that visitors need to navigate.

The khareef season in Salalah is a spectacular time filled with natural beauty and vibrant festivities. By following these safety tips, visitors can fully immerse themselves in the charm of Salalah while staying safe. Whether you are driving through the scenic landscapes, enjoying a picnic with loved ones, or exploring the rich cultural heritage of Dhofar, a cautious and well-prepared approach will ensure your khareef experience is both memorable and joyous.

Here are some key safety tips for a pleasant khareef experience

SLIPPERY ROADS: The monsoon rains make roads in Salalah slippery and treacherous. Advisable to exercise caution while driving, especially on curves and steep inclines.

Ensure your vehicle's tyres and brakes are in excellent condition to handle wet road conditions effectively.

AVOID SWIMMING IN SPRINGS: Although the springs look inviting, they can be dangerous due to strong currents, varying depths and hidden rocks. Swimming in these waters is not at all advisable.



MOSQUITO BITES: The monsoon season often brings an increase in mosquitoes. Protect yourself by using insect repellent and wearing long sleeves and pants while visiting tourist spots. Heed warnings from authorities: Always listen to and follow any warnings or advisories issued by local authorities. These alerts are meant to keep you safe from potential hazards such as accidents, waterlogging, landslides, or unsafe areas.

AVOID ROUGH SEA: The monsoon can make the sea rough and dangerous for swimming or boating. It is best to stay away from the water during this time to avoid accidents.

Eat from licensed shops only: To prevent foodborne illnesses, dine only at licensed eateries. This ensures the food you consume is prepared under safe and hygienic conditions.

DRIVE AT SAFE SPEEDS: Speeding on wet roads increases the risk of accidents. On some roads visibility becomes very low. It is advisable to maintain a safe speed and be extra vigilant of other drivers and pedestrians.

Constant fog significantly reduces visibility. Use headlights appropriately and drive slowly to ensure you can see and react to road conditions and other vehicles.

PLAN EARLY TOURS: Start your tours early in the day to avoid the rush and to cover more areas. Early planning also allows you to enjoy the serene beauty of Salalah without the crowd. Check car wipers and tyre conditions: Before heading out, ensure your car's wipers are functioning correctly and the tyres have adequate tread to handle the wet roads safely.



Raid targets UN agency’s building in the enclave

GAZA: Israeli forces launched more deadly strikes across Gaza on Wednesday, according to medical sources and the military, which said it targeted Palestinian groups operating from inside a UN agency building.

Early on Wednesday, four people were killed and one critically wounded in the bombing of a house in the central town of Nuseirat, a hospital source.

And two people were killed and six injured in another strike on a home in Bani Suhaila, near Khan Yunis, according to another hospital source.

Israel has stepped up air and ground attacks in Gaza City and southern Gaza since issuing evacuation orders for tens of thousands of people in the war-stricken Palestinian territory.

The heightened military strikes come as Israeli officials start talks in Qatar on Wednesday on reaching a truce in the war raging since the October 7 attacks.

The UN agency has not had control of the building since October. Israeli forces said in February they had found a tunnel underneath the headquarters.

The military said the Palestinians were “operating inside UNRWA’s headquarters in the area and using it as a base to conduct attacks on IDF (Israeli

Defense Forces) troops in the central Gaza Strip”. It said that groups had been “eliminated” and “large amounts of weapons” found.

UNRWA had no immediate comment on the attack, but has said it has “no way to verify” claims that its facilities are being used by groups and its allies.

Meanwhile on Tuesday’s deadly strike near the Al-Awda school in Abasan, near Khan Yunis, brought new condemnation from Palestinian groups over the Israeli military tactics.

The Gaza government said a “majority” of the dead were women and children.

The Israeli military said the air force had “struck gunmen from Hamas’ military wing who took part, among other terrorist activities, in the October 7 attacks” in southern Israel.

It was the fourth time in four days that Gaza school buildings sheltering the displaced had been hit.

The military said it was “looking into the reports that civilians were harmed, adjacent to the Al Awda school”, which it acknowledged was “near the location of the strike.

The incident is under review.” Israel’s military offensive has killed over 38,000 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the territory’s health ministry.

— AFP



People sit behind a fence as they watch the arrival of victims wounded or killed in Israeli bombardment near Khan Yunis. — AFP



Palestinians walk past the rubble of houses destroyed during the Israeli military offensive, in Khan Yunis.

— Reuters

Israeli missile strike kills 29

GAZA: An Israeli missile slammed into a tent encampment in southern Gaza just as displaced people had gathered there to watch a football match at a school, eyewitnesses said on Wednesday.

At least 29 people, mostly women and children, were killed in the strike, according to Palestinian officials, which took place as spectators crowded the school grounds in Abassan east of Khan Yunis and hawkers sold smoothies and biscuits.

“They were watching a football match. There were injuries and martyrs. I witnessed this... people thrown around and body parts scattered, blood,” a young woman, Ghazzal Nasser said in Abassan. “Everything was normal. People were playing, others were buying and selling food and drinks.

Hamas said the renewed Israeli campaign threatened to derail efforts to secure a ceasefire in the nine-month-old war

There was no sound of planes or anything,” she said.

The Israeli military said it was reviewing reports that civilians were harmed.

It said the incident occurred when it struck with a “precise munition” a Palestinian fighter who took part in the October 7 raid on Israel.

The military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether it knew that a football match was going on when the strike was ordered.

At the nearby Nasser Hospital, dozens of Palestinians bid farewell to loved ones before funerals and burials.

“The schools were overcrowded with people and the street was full too, suddenly a missile hit and destroyed the whole place,” said Asmaa Qudeih, who lost some relatives in the attack.

“Bodies flew in the wind, body parts flew, I don’t know how to describe it,” she said.

Israeli forces continued to press their offensive in north and central Gaza on Wednesday, and deepened their incursion into two Gaza City districts, carrying out house-to-house searches.

The Palestinian group Hamas said the renewed Israeli campaign threatened to derail efforts to secure a ceasefire in the nine-month-old war, with talks to

resume in Doha on Wednesday.

In Tel Aviv, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US Middle East envoy Brett McGurk he was committed to securing a Gaza ceasefire deal provided Israel’s red lines were respected, his office said.

Hamas has accepted a key part of a US plan aimed at ending the nine-month-old war, dropping a demand that Israel first commit to a permanent ceasefire before signing the agreement.

In the central Gaza camp of Al-Nuseirat, medics said six Palestinians, including children, were killed in an air strike on a house, while another air strike killed two people and wounded several others in Khan Yunis.

More than 38,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since the start of the war, health officials in the territory said. — Reuters

Occupation forces urge all Gaza City residents to leave

GAZA: The Israeli army dropped thousands of leaflets over Gaza City on Wednesday urging all residents to flee a heavy offensive that has rocked the main city of the besieged Palestinian territory.

The leaflets, addressed to “everyone in Gaza City”, set out designated escape routes to the south and warned that the urban area, previously home to more than half a million people, would “remain a dangerous combat zone”.

The warning follows three partial evacuation orders and came as Israeli troops, backed by tanks and aircraft, have fought the Palestinian groups in the heaviest combat operations the city has seen in months.

In one operation, the army said it had killed militants and found weapons inside the long-vacated Gaza City headquarters of the UN Agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.



A Palestinian woman holds her daughter as she walks past the rubble, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

Elsewhere across Gaza, deadly strikes have hit four schools used as shelters in four days, sparking international outrage.

The upsurge in fighting and displacement came as mediator Qatar was due to resume talks on Wednesday toward a truce and captives release deal to end the war, now grinding on into its 10th month.

An Israeli delegation led by Mossad chief David Barnea arrived in Doha for the talks, a source with knowledge of the negotiations said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of their sensitivity.

CIA director William Burns was also expected in the Qatari capital, after holding talks in Cairo on Tuesday.

The latest fighting in Gaza has newly displaced 350,000 civilians, said UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini, who spoke before the latest leaflet drop and said “There is absolutely no safe space in Gaza”. — AFP

■ SHARED GRIEF IN WAR



Palestinians mourn over the bodies of loved ones following Israeli bombardment in Deir El Balah in the central Gaza Strip amid the ongoing Israeli strikes. — AFP



Ready to help restore peace in Ukraine: PM Modi

VIENNA: India stands ready to give all possible support to restoring peace to war-torn Ukraine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday in Vienna after a Kremlin visit criticised by Kyiv.

Modi arrived in Vienna late on Tuesday after talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, where the Indian leader urged “peace through dialogue”, saying that “war cannot solve problems”.

“This is not an age of war. Problems cannot be solved on the battlefield,” Modi told reporters in Vienna alongside Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer.

Modi said India and Austria stand “ready to provide all possible support” to “rapidly restore peace and stability”.

On Ukraine, Nehammer said both countries shared the “common goal” to achieve a “comprehensive, just and lasting peace, in accordance with the UN Charter”, underlining India’s crucial role as the world’s largest democracy.



Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer (L) takes a selfie with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Heldenplatz (Heroes' Square) on Wednesday. – AFP

Problems cannot be solved on the battlefield. We stand ready to provide all possible support to rapidly restore peace and stability

NARENDRA MODI
Indian Prime Minister

According to Nehammer, neutral Austria was ready to serve as a “venue for dialogue” for “future peace summits”, adding that his cabinet was “in constant contact with the EU”.

The two leaders did not take any questions. During his visit, Modi also recalled that the Congress of Vienna in the 19th century had laid the foundations for peace and stability in this part of the world. The state visit to Austria coincides with the 75th anniversary of the establishment

of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and is the first by an Indian head of government since Indira Gandhi in 1983.

Meanwhile, Russia has promised to allow dozens of Indians fighting in Ukraine after being recruited into Moscow’s army on misleading terms to return home, India’s foreign minister said on Tuesday.

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi had “strongly raised the issue of early discharge of Indian nationals who have been misled into the service of the Russian army” with President Vladimir Putin at a summit in Moscow, Vinay Kwatra told reporters on the meeting’s sidelines.

“This was taken up strongly by the prime minister and the Russian side promised early discharge” the Asian nation’s top diplomat said.

While Kwatra said he did not know exactly how many Indian nationals had been recruited to fight in Moscow’s offensive, India “anticipates it to be roughly 35-50”. Of those, 10 have already been brought back to India. — AFP

South Sudan ‘on brink of famine’: Charity

NAIROBI: Parts of South Sudan are on the “brink of famine” as the nation braces for a “horror scenario” ahead of the worst floods in decades, a British charity warned on Wednesday.

Almost 13 years after its independence in 2011, the world’s newest nation remains plagued by instability and violence, despite rich oil reserves.

South Sudan is expected to “suffer its worst floods in 60 years that will drive parts of the country to the brink of famine,” Save the Children said, citing data from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, established by USAID.

“A horror scenario is unfolding in South Sudan,” Save the Children country director Pornpun Jib Rabilossaporn said.

“In all likelihood we will see children start to die from hunger-related illnesses as the flooding takes hold,” she said, warning of “imminent disaster”.

Many of those impacted have already faced years of conflict, hunger, rising food prices, and previous floods, the statement said.

The 15-month conflict in Sudan has also seen an influx of refugees and returnees, placing even greater strain on the country’s meagre resources and weak infrastructure.

Famine was declared in South



Women waded through flood waters after the River Nile broke the dykes in Pibor, Greater Pibor Administrative Area, South Sudan. – Reuters file photo

Sudan in 2017, affecting some 100,000 people in Unity state — an area that has often been a flashpoint for violence.

Plagued by feuding leaders and chronic instability, the country has spent almost half of its life as a nation at war.

Some 400,000 people died and millions were displaced in the 2013-2018 civil war before President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar signed a peace deal and formed a unity government.

Since then, the country has battled flooding, hunger, violence

and political bickering as the promises of the peace agreement have failed to materialise.

Meanwhile, South Sudan’s leader Salva Kiir urged unity on the anniversary of the independence of the conflict riven young nation, saying there had been progress on a long-delayed peace agreement.

A peace agreement six years ago ended a 2013-2018 civil war between Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, but key provisions are still unfulfilled and transition timelines repeatedly delayed.

Kiir said the country must

honour those who had lost their lives for independence by coming together, to “learn from our mistakes and join hands to rebuild South Sudan.”

He described the implementation of the 2018 peace agreement as a “difficult journey”, but said “most of the critical outstanding issues have been implemented,” in a statement issued late on Tuesday.

His government would work with regional bloc IGAD and partners to “fully implement the remaining provisions”, he said.

— AFP

Samsung main S Korea union goes on indefinite strike

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics’ biggest workers’ union in South Korea said on Wednesday it will continue a strike indefinitely, stepping up its campaign against the tech giant for better pay and benefits.

The National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), whose roughly 30,000 members make up almost a quarter of the company’s South Korean workforce, said it has decided to indefinitely extend the strike that started on Monday because management had shown no indication of holding talks.

The strike was initially planned to last three days through Wednesday.

It adds to challenges for the world’s biggest memory chipmaker which is struggling to navigate competition in semiconductors used for artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

Union officials said 6,500

workers had participated in the strike, and they urged more members to join.

“It is time that we need power and help from our fellow members,” Lee Hyun-kuk, the union’s vice president, said in a YouTube live broadcast.

“Really our objective is to stop (chip production) lines,” he said.

Lee said that the strike had disrupted production on certain chip lines, with equipment running more slowly. Samsung said the strike had caused no disruption during the first three days.

“Samsung Electronics will ensure no disruptions occur in the production lines. The company remains committed to engaging in good faith negotiations with the union,” it said in a statement.

Samsung’s share price closed up 0.1% on Wednesday, while the benchmark KOSPI index was little changed. — Reuters



The National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU) workers hold placards during a general strike, in Hwaseong, South Korea. – Reuters

SHORT TAKES

JOHANNESBURG

12 children killed in S Africa school minibus blaze

Twelve children were killed in South Africa when a minibus taking them to school near Johannesburg overturned and burst into flames after being hit by another vehicle. The driver of the minibus was also killed and seven other children were rushed to hospital.

Images showed that the minibus was totally destroyed by the fire in the early morning crash in Merafong, more than 70 kilometres west of the city.

“A private scholar transport



minibus was involved in a tragic accident in the Kokosi-Wedela area in Merafong, claiming the lives of the 12 learners and their driver,” the Gauteng government said. — AFP

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan extends Afghan refugee registration cards

Pakistan will extend expired registration cards given to almost 1.5 million Afghans for a year, the prime minister said on Wednesday, after the UN refugee commissioner asked for a pause in the country’s plan.

It was not immediately clear whether the extension of the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards that expired in June would exempt holders from any future deportations, and the Pakistani foreign office said the repatriation plan would continue. “The



cabinet accepted the proposal of a one-year extension of the PoR cards of 1.45 million Afghan legal residents that expired on June 30, 2024,” PM Shehbaz Sharif’s office said. — Reuters

BENGHAZI

Libya’s parliament approves \$18.3 bn to budget

Libya’s parliament approved what it called an additional budget of \$18.3 billion on Wednesday to its appointed government for the rest of the current year. The approval was unanimous in a closed session, the parliament spokesman Abdullah Belhaiq said.

The HoR member Saltana al Mosmari said that there was a deficit in the first approved budget. Some HoR members had contacted sectors and municipalities and found out that old



budget “was not enough”. “It will be spent on all Libyan territories and will be allocated to the Libyan government,” Mosmari said. It would be implemented by the Central Bank. — Reuters



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THURSDAY | JULY 11 | 2024

7

In brief

■ BRUSSELS



5 BELGIAN PARTIES BEGIN TALKS ON COALITION GOVT

A month after legislative elections in Belgium that boosted right-leaning parties, five groups have agreed to open formal talks on forming a coalition government around Flemish conservative leader Bart de Wever.

De Wever, head of the N-VA party that for a decade has held sway over the Dutch-speaking Flanders region, met King Philippe and was asked to assemble a coalition. The five hold an 81-seat majority in Belgium's 150-seat parliament.

Belgium's elections — conducted the same day as a European Parliament vote across the EU — saw the right and centre-right triumphant. — **AFP**

■ WARSAW



POLAND TO RAMP UP MILITARY PRESENCE AT RUSSIAN BORDER

Poland said on Wednesday it would boost its military presence and defence fortifications along its borders with Russia and Belarus.

"Everyone is aware of how dangerous the situation is, I'm thinking of what the Russian Federation is doing", Poland's Deputy Minister of Defence Cezary Tomczyk said. He also evoked "constant provocations" along the border with Belarus.

Nearly 6,000 Polish troops guard the borders with Belarus and Russia, but the government plans to increase that number "up to 17,000 — 8,000 on site and 9,000 in the reserve," said General Wiesław Kukula, military chief. — **AFP**

■ ROME



MORE THAN 40 HELD IN ITALY FOR MIGRANT VISA FRAUD

More than 40 people have been held in Italy over migrant visa fraud, police and prosecutors said on Wednesday, weeks after Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni complained that mafia groups were exploiting the system for profit.

Forty-four people were apprehended, including 13 put in jail, 24 under house arrest and seven in custody.

They were charged with various crimes, such as criminal association aimed at abetting illegal immigration, money laundering and false invoicing. A further 10 suspects were banned from business activities for 12 months. — **Reuters**

Blinken says F-16 jets being sent to Ukraine

WASHINGTON: The first batch of US-built F-16 fighter jets are already being transferred to Ukraine from Denmark and the Netherlands and will be flying over Ukrainian skies this summer, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

Blinken, speaking at an event on the sidelines of the Nato summit in Washington, said a robust package for Ukraine will be unveiled over the next couple of days that will build a clear and strong bridge for Ukraine's Nato membership.

"I'm also pleased to announce that as we speak, the transfer of F-16 jets is underway, coming from Denmark, coming from the Netherlands," Blinken said.

"And those jets...will be flying in the skies of Ukraine this summer to make sure that Ukraine can continue to effectively defend itself against the Russian aggression."

Reinforcing air defences has been crucial for Ukraine as it fights a Russian attack. Moscow renewed its aerial assaults on Ukraine's national power grid in the spring, causing sweeping blackouts.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last week that he wanted to double Ukraine's air defence capacity over the summer and that his country needed at least seven additional Patriot systems to protect itself.

Nato members have announced the delivery of five additional Patriot and other strategic air defence systems to help Ukraine. Still more aid announcements were expected at this week's summit in



Volunteers clear broken windows from a room of a kindergarten destroyed by a missile strike, in Kyiv on Wednesday. — **AFP**

Washington, which marks the alliance's 75th anniversary.

A joint statement from the leaders of the United States, Denmark and the Netherlands said the Danish and Dutch governments were in the process

of donating American-made F-16s to Ukraine, with the support of the United States.

"We are grateful to Belgium and Norway for committing to provide further aircraft, and to the other members of the Air

Force Capability Coalition for their support," the statement said.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters on Wednesday morning that Nato allies were expected to agree a "substantial" package for



And those jets...will be flying in the skies of Ukraine this summer to make sure that Ukraine can continue to effectively defend itself against the Russian aggression

ANTONY BLINKEN

US Secretary of State

Ukraine and would expand other partnerships particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Stoltenberg said the package would involve a new Nato command for Ukraine to provide security assistance and training, and a long-term pledge to continue and sustain support for Kyiv.

He said there would be new announcements of immediate military support, including air defense and moves to ensure full interoperability between Ukrainian forces and Nato forces.

He also said he expected allies to reiterate a commitment that Ukraine will become a member of Nato.

In a forceful speech on Tuesday, Biden said the 32-member collective security alliance was "stronger than it's ever been". — **Reuters**

Le Pen accuses left of inciting protest in France

PARIS: French far-right party leader Marine Le Pen on Wednesday drew parallels between a hard-left politician's call for a march towards the prime minister's office and the assault on Capitol Hill by supporters of former US President Donald Trump.

The comments marked a hardening of language by Le Pen, who has framed tactical voting in Sunday's inconclusive parliamentary ballot as an establishment plot to keep her party out of power.

The left-wing New Popular Front (NFP) unexpectedly won most seats but with no group having gained an absolute majority, France has been plunged into uncertainty, with no obvious path to a stable government.

Le Pen said the NFP has almost "subversive attitudes since they are calling for the Matignon to be taken by force, from what we could understand," referring to the prime minister's office.

"It's their assault on the Capitol," Le Pen added, in a reference to when Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, in a bid to overturn his election defeat.

The hard-left France Unbowed, which is part of the NFP, immediately rejected her accusation.

After President Emmanuel



Marine Le Pen, French far-right leader and member of Parliament, poses for a family photo with newly-elected lawmakers, in Paris. — **Reuters**

Le Pen said the NFP has almost subversive attitudes since they are calling for the Matignon to be taken by force, from what we could understand

Macron asked centrist Prime Minister Gabriel Attal to stay on for now to run current affairs, former France Unbowed lawmaker Adrien Quatennens had accused Macron of wanting to "steal" the left's victory and suggested a "big popular march" to the prime minister's office.

Quatennens said Le Pen was "nuts" to see his post for a march as a call for insurrection.

Le Pen has spent the last few years cleaning up the image of a party once known for its xenophobic and antisemitic attitudes and she now has to decide which direction to take if it is to break through and win power in the 2027 presidential election.

The leftist NFP, which combines France Unbowed, the Communists, Greens and Socialists, continued talks to try and agree on a cabinet and policy plans. Amid warnings from rating agencies, financial markets, the European Commission and France's eurozone partners are all watching closely to see whether the impasse can be broken.

— **Reuters**

Armenia, Azerbaijan to hold US-mediated talks

YEREVAN: Foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan will meet on Wednesday in Washington for a fresh round of US-mediated talks, Yerevan and Washington announced, as the arch-foe neighbours negotiate a peace agreement.

The Caucasus rivals fought two wars — in the 1990s and in 2020 — over control of Azerbaijan's breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, which had been predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians.

Last autumn, Baku recaptured the mountainous enclave in a one-day offensive that led to the exodus of its entire Armenian population — more than 100,000 people.

Years of internationally mediated peace talks between Baku and Yerevan have failed to produce a breakthrough, but the two countries' leaders said recently that a comprehensive peace deal is within reach.

"A trilateral meeting between Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will be held on July 10," Armenian foreign ministry spokeswoman Ani Badalyan said. The meeting will take place on the sidelines of the Nato summit in Washington, she added.

The meeting was listed on Blinken's official schedule for Wednesday, according to the US Department of State's website.

State Department spokesman, Matthew Miller, told reporters on Tuesday that the US continues "to work for a diplomatic resolution" of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, but refused to provide further details about the planned talks.

Blinken has led repeated talks between the countries in hopes of averting further conflict. — **AFP**



Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan are welcomed by European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels. — **Reuters file photo**

The most incredible poll in French history



Zaki Laïdi

The author is a professor at Sciences Po

By calling a snap parliamentary election in the wake of his party’s defeat in the June European Parliament election, French President Emmanuel Macron hoped to “clarify” the political situation for his own benefit. Clearly, he failed. The election produced no parliamentary majority, only a great deal more confusion. With many losers and very few winners, it is the most astonishing election in the country’s modern history.

Among the many losers is National Rally (RN), the far-right party that clinched a decisive and shocking victory in the European elections just weeks earlier. Though RN has increased its seat count and emerged as the largest party in the National Assembly, it fell far short of expectations. The second round featured a powerful anti-RN mobilisation, as voters shifted tactically from the centre to the left, and from the right to the centre. Many French apparently concluded during the campaign that RN’s candidates were ill-prepared to hold power.

Most pundits had come to believe that the French electoral system’s natural immunity against the far

right no longer worked. But this election disproved that. Though the far right is now the country’s leading political force, it cannot do anything without allies, and it has none.

The second loser is Macron, whose party lost around 100 seats. Before the election, his Ensemble grouping could anchor a relative majority. Now, it is dwarfed by the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP), which won the most seats overall.

But while Macron probably will be forced to appoint a new prime minister from the left, the NFP remains around 100 seats short of an absolute majority. Moreover, it is a loose coalition whose members disagree on much and whose leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of France Unbowed, has only one objective: to radicalise public debate and create the conditions for a face-off between him and RN’s Marine Le Pen in the 2027 presidential election. Thus, it is not necessarily in Mélenchon’s interest for a left-wing government (under a different figurehead) to succeed. To benefit Mélenchon personally, the NFP would need to be able to execute on its entire electoral programme; but that will never happen without an absolute majority. Moreover, the next

MOST PUNDITS HAD COME TO BELIEVE THAT THE FRENCH ELECTORAL SYSTEM’S NATURAL IMMUNITY AGAINST THE FAR RIGHT NO LONGER WORKED. BUT THIS ELECTION DISPROVED THAT.

government — whatever shape it takes — will soon have to answer to the European Commission, which recently launched an “excessive deficit procedure” against France.

Looking ahead, the most likely scenario is that a moderate minority government will be formed to serve as a caretaker for the next year (the president cannot dissolve the National Assembly again until June 2025). But with Macron on the defensive and lacking a parliamentary majority, France will be in uncharted waters. As in every political system, some French politicians want to pursue stability and compromise, while others are bent on crushing perceived enemies. France’s fragmented politics are not so different from those of other European countries. But its political culture and institutions are unique in the degree to which they favour confrontation over coalition-building.

Will this election outcome spur French politicians to see things differently, or will everyone just keep behaving as they always have? In the latter scenario, RN need only bide its time, capitalise on the government’s ineffectiveness, and sooner or later win everything.

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Aviation strike call threatens Paris Olympics preps

TANGI QUEMENER

A dispute between aviation workers and management at the French capital’s airports threatens to overshadow years of preparations and a 50-million-euro investment for visitors and athletes arriving for the Paris Olympics this month.

Unions at state-controlled ADP group, which runs the main Charles de Gaulle airport and its cross-town rival Orly, announced a one-day stoppage on July 17 to press for bigger Olympics bonuses and staff recruitment.

If it continues, the stand-off with management could impact the Games, with athletes set to start arriving en masse from July 18 and hundreds of thousands of ticket holders flying in ahead of the July 26 opening ceremony.

“The fact that we are forced to call for a strike is because of the obstinate refusal of management and in particular the CEO of the company,” unions said in a joint statement on Monday. Along with train stations, Charles de Gaulle and Orly are set to be the main gateways into France for foreign Olympics fans, as well as athletes and equipment.

The ability of ADP’s unions to mobilise workers next week is uncertain, however, with a previous stoppage called on May 19 having little effect on operations.

The country’s air traffic controllers, despite winning large pay increases last year, went on strike again on April 25, causing thousands of flight cancellations.

Charles de Gaulle and Orly will be the first glimpse many foreign visitors and athletes have of the French capital when they arrive for the Games.

As a result, ADP has spent 50 million euros (\$54 million) upgrading its infrastructure and French authorities are deploying extra resources to make the experience as smooth and safe as possible. “We know that there are some days that will be really intense and we will maybe have 300,000 travellers in the same day at Charles de Gaulle,” Julien Gentile, director of border security forces at Paris’s airports, told reporters last week.

That number is well above the daily summer average of 200,000 at the airport and is far beyond the record 250,000 daily fliers reached in the summer of 2019.

Automated passport control machines, which can be used by EU travellers, as well as crowd-monitoring technology that alerts managers to the arrival of passengers, are also part of the efforts to avoid bottlenecks. One of the key challenges for ADP over the Olympic period is managing irregular and sharp spikes in demand. — AFP



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Progress is measured by our capacity for compassion and ethical leadership

Every year, July 4 is rightfully held in high regard by hundreds of millions from various faiths across the world. On July 4th, 1187 CE, Saladin (1137-1193) the first Sultan of Egypt, the Levantine & Yemen and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty not only led a campaign that liberated Palestine, including the holy city of Jerusalem, but he also became a role model in mercy, chivalry and interfaith understanding for almost a millennium.

Our world also owes him firmly diminishing the reign of terror of our world’s most infamous Assassins cult, and ending the unjust rule of Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt.

In contrast, as the US celebrated its 248th Independence Day, while hundreds of millions around the world who believe in the right to live with dignity are holding the US responsible for the continuous suffering of tens of thousands of people. This suffering is not only in Palestine but also in Sudan, Congo, Yemen and Syria. United Nations organizations, including the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) among others, have attested to this through witness testimonies, live broadcasts of massacres, and documented evidence of the Israeli occupation’s murders, rape and torture. The optimal way for humanity to make serious socio-economic progress is to celebrate the values learned from Saladin and hold those responsible for genocide accountable.

As we reflected on the significance of July 4, it is essential to recognise the stark contrast between the legacy of Saladin and the current state of global affairs under a unipolar world order. Saladin, is often remembered not only for his strategic acumen but also for his chivalrous conduct during the Crusades. His actions, particularly during the conquest of Jerusalem in 1187, were marked by an extraordinary level of mercy and respect for the defeated. Unlike the mass slaughter that followed the Christian capture of Jerusalem in 1099, Saladin ensured safe



A woman and children on a donkey-drawn cart return to their home in the Tuffah district east of Gaza City. – AFP

SALADIN TEACHES US THAT EFFECTIVE AND JUST LEADERSHIP MUST BALANCE POWER WITH ETHICS, STRENGTH WITH COMPASSION, AND VICTORY WITH MERCY

passage for Christian inhabitants and safeguarded holy sites. His approach to leadership, grounded in principles of fairness and respect, starkly contrasts with the modern unipolar methods that often prioritise power over principle.

The US backed genocide against Palestinians committed by the Israeli Occupation Forces serves as a poignant example of the failures of a unipolar approach devoid of moral consideration.

The decision, driven by geopolitical interests rather than ethical considerations, resulted in a protracted conflict that has cost countless lives and exacerbated global divides. This starkly contrasts with Saladin’s ethos, where even in victory, the well-being of civilians and respect for different cultures and religions were paramount.

Similarly, the protracted conflict in Syria reflects the unipolar system’s inability to foster peace and stability. Multiple interventions by the US and its allies, often driven by strategic

interests rather than humanitarian concerns, have prolonged the suffering of the Syrian people. The lack of “redlines”, and a coherent and morally grounded approach has led to a complex and devastating civil war, with millions displaced and untold numbers killed. Saladin’s model of leadership, where diplomacy and ethical conduct were as crucial as military might, offers a stark lesson on the importance of moral integrity in conflict resolution.

The ongoing tension in Eastern Europe, particularly the conflict in Ukraine, further exemplifies the deficiencies of a unipolar world order. The initial response from the West, characterised by sanctions and military aid, has not led to a resolution but has instead entrenched the conflict. This approach, driven more by power dynamics than by a genuine commitment to peace and justice, highlights the moral void at the heart of the unipolar paradigm. Saladin’s legacy reminds us that true leadership involves not just strength but also the wisdom to pursue peace and the empathy to consider the well-being of all affected parties.

In conclusion, the current global conflicts reveal the inherent flaws of a unipolar world order that operates without the guiding principles of morality exemplified by leaders like Saladin. His legacy teaches us that effective and just leadership must balance power with ethics, strength with compassion and victory with mercy.

As the world grapples with ongoing and emerging conflicts, there is an urgent need to revisit these timeless principles and recognise that the path to lasting peace and stability lies not in unipolar dominance but in a morally guided and multipolar world order.

Let us not only celebrate the independence and values of the US but also reflect on the broader implications of our actions on the global stage.

Let us honour the legacy of Saladin by striving for a world where power is tempered with justice, and where true progress is measured by our capacity for compassion and ethical leadership.

We are all out of date

One may argue that journalism is losing its luster in this murky world of events. We have propaganda, advertising, but no journalism. We live in naive realism, where we believe we know the truth. Politicians and media influencers flood the public sphere with narratives of enemies and tailored interests. Events are receiving a weaponised storytelling approach. By the time we start making sense of what is happening around the world, new developments have us swaying into space. There is hardly time to reflect on the immediate social, economic and political changes.

We live in a vulnerable and easily manipulated time in a world gripped by absurdity. Journalism has become one of the victims of such craziness.

Communicators can be trained to create psychological products for a target audience, modeled on advertising campaigns that stir up emotions. At the same time, journalists are expected to achieve objectivity and accuracy while occasionally balancing between objectivity and advocacy, or sensitivity and objectivity.

A communicator is tasked with serving the interests of organisations or individuals they represent, emphasising specific messages whereas a journalist (ideally) writes accurately a good and factual story. From my perspective as a journalist and academic, teaching journalism is far different than working in a newsroom. Theorists bring to the classroom a selection of scholarly information and insights from practitioners. Professional journalists bring to the classroom their skills developed in the newsroom. Different universities place different priorities on practice and theory. However, unlike academics, journalists don't often have time to reflect on their work.

Current shifts in journalism run deeper than merely technological transformations. With adaptations and evolution happening, and the increased use of psychological tactics in communication, the question is what journalism and media students should be learning. How are media



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RADICAL CHANGE
REQUIRES RADICAL
REFORM. AS
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educators adapting their courses and programmes to meet shifting media environments and new demands?

For example, an evolutionary psychology and biology paradigm is producing fresh approaches to the processes and impacts of strategic communication — how individuals engage with and are influenced by media content and technology. Heart rate measurement and facial muscle activation are part of psychophysiology for understanding and better evaluating narrative engagement.

Journalism and technology are in a gradual process of transformation, so can academia lead to a change in practice? Are students gaining exposure to cutting-edge technologies while at the same time developing critical thinking, and an inquisitive mind? How tangible is the preparation of future journalists' abilities to add value while working alongside machines? It's been a long time since students would transcribe lectures rather than internalise what was being said. Future journalists face many challenges, and a serious one is the politicisation of news. Cubs, the newcomer to the field, will lack the 'nose' to detect the weaponisation of a narrative, and much less the ability to comprehend subtle psycho strategies.

A novice reporter will try to apply whatever he has learned at school. Most likely, the cub will use open sources to craft a gentle, amusing story or delegate the effort to artificial intelligence techniques. As in many dynamic fields, journalists need constant learning and adaptation due to industry trends, audience preferences and evolving technology. However, perhaps there are more hurdles in journalism and media education than in the practice of reporting. Radical change requires radical reform. As journalism and communication have turned upside down, education programmes need to stay current. In education, institutions need long-term investment plans, the ability to foresee future change and demand, and be prepared for the challenge of hiring faculty expertise.

In such a progressive context, I wonder where we can build a bridge.

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE



A woman buys a bottled water from the Seine River ironically described as "finely polluted" in Paris, on Wednesday. James Colomina's installation is to draw attention on the investment by Paris City Council to clean up the Seine for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The aim of this symbolic action is to denounce the exorbitant expenditure and to question the sustainability of this initiative. — AFP

The Starmer model



Daron Acemoglu

The writer is Institute Professor of Economics at MIT

FINDING
THE RIGHT
COMMUNICATION
STRATEGY AND
THE RIGHT
PRINCIPLES
TO GUIDE ITS
IMMIGRATION
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The Labour Party's sweeping victory in the United Kingdom's general election already holds lessons for centre and centre-left parties elsewhere. But whether it will matter in the long run depends on Prime Minister Keir Starmer's ability to address his country's economic woes — a very tall order.

To their credit, the Tories showed respect for democracy by accepting defeat, with Conservative Party leader Rishi Sunak graciously congratulating Starmer even before the vote count was final.

Starmer's rapid rehabilitation of the Labour Party also holds valuable lessons. Upon taking the reins from Jeremy Corbyn in 2020, just after the party's worst defeat since 1935, Starmer emphasised moderation and policies to improve the economy and public services. His victory shows that it is possible to win elections without extremism. He promised to make democracy work better for everyone.

This is a powerful message. My own recent research shows that people become much more pro-democratic when they see democracy functioning properly and delivering in terms of economic growth, stability, public services, and low levels of inequality and corruption. The same basic formula has worked well for workers' parties and social democrats elsewhere. The birth of the storied Nordic model can be

traced to election victories by workers' parties in Denmark, Sweden and Norway almost a century ago. These parties first moved away from hard left ideas and rhetoric. Then, once in power, they delivered on the concrete improvements they had promised. Transforming a party is difficult. For Starmer, it involved sidelining Corbyn and making clear that his brand of far-left extremism would no longer be on the agenda. Starmer endured many months of widespread criticism from the left, but he held firm. Now comes an even bigger test. The import of Labour's victory ultimately will depend on whether the party delivers, especially when it comes to reviving economic growth. Britain's economic performance during the past 14 years of Tory rule has been rather disappointing. Per capita income growth has been slow, and the country's leaders have failed to address an obvious productivity problem: growth in output per hour worked compares poorly to that of the US, France and Germany.

Recognising that a lack of public and private investment underlies the UK's anemic productivity and employment performance, Labour has sound ideas for kickstarting a robust

economic recovery. But to finance the public investments in healthcare, education, infrastructure and technology that Starmer has promised, the government will need to increase its tax revenues.

Starmer therefore may need to walk back a separate promise not to increase taxes for working people. If so, he should point out that no advanced economy can achieve sustained, dynamic growth without innovating. While countries such as Vietnam and China have been able to leverage mature technologies and low-cost labour, high-income economies lack this option. They must either innovate or fall behind the global technological frontier. Although specialising in financial services can provide a

boost, the benefits are temporary.

And as the British example shows, becoming a financial hub for money from Russian oligarchs, petrostates and tax evaders brings a range of societal ills. But innovation is easier said than done. Despite the previous government's emphasis on artificial intelligence, Britain is lagging behind in the technology race, and no amount of government emphasis will miraculously turn things around. Instead, the UK needs a coherent long-term strategy geared towards finding a niche in the broader innovation economy. Success will require more than just an old-style industrial policy of supporting specific companies or sectors. There are also potential fault

lines within Labour's plans for making democracy work better. Responsive democratic governance means that no major public concern is ignored, and the electorate has again signalled that it is very concerned about immigration. One reason why the Conservatives fared so poorly is that Nigel Farage's populist, anti-immigration Reform UK party performed so well. In fact, if the Tories had captured most of Reform UK's vote, they would have won the election.

As in the rest of Europe, the British right will face growing pressure to tilt further rightward, and Labour and other centrist politicians will need to prepare for this shift. Election after election has shown that ignoring the population's views on immigration is not a viable strategy. Labour must make the humanitarian case for allowing in refugees, while also promising greater transparency and control on immigration overall. Finding the right communication strategy and the right principles to guide its policy will be one of the new government's biggest challenges. As someone who worked both as a human-rights lawyer and as a chief prosecutor dealing with public-order issues, Starmer may be uniquely qualified to succeed where others have failed.

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Prime Minister Keir Starmer talks to journalists as he travels on board a plane to Washington DC on his way to attend the Nato Summit. — AFP

sport

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Handball team conclude Cairo camp ahead of Asian Tourney

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 10

The Oman national youth handball team will conclude its external training camp in Cairo on Friday, after three friendly matches against Egyptian teams. The team then will head to Jordan to participate in the 18th Asian Youth Handball Championship, which will be held from July 14 to 25. Four teams from the Asian championship will qualify for the World Cup, which will be hosted by Poland in 2025.

The team gained many benefits from its experiences in Egypt, where the technical staff, led by national coach Yahya al Mashari and his assistant Hassan al Mamaari, aimed to give all team members experience and helped them to play in high-profile friendly matches to gain more exposure and improve performance by addressing



mistakes. The gains included improving understanding between the players and developing offensive and defensive plans, in addition to strengthening physical fitness and endurance. The friendly matches were an opportunity to assess the players' performance under pressure conditions and work on improving aspects of team and individual play.

The team aspires to achieve outstanding results and reach



advanced positions in the championship. The team will begin its journey in the championship by facing India on July 14, and then will face the host Jordan on July 15. Top two teams from each group will qualify for the main round of the championship. Thirteen teams are participating in the Asian Championship, distributed into 4 groups. The championship will in a single round-robin system in the first stage, after which

two teams from each group will qualify for the second stage.

Mohammed al Alawi, a member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Handball Association, and head of the mission of the national youth indoor handball team participating in the Asian Championship in Jordan, said the team is fully prepared to participate in the championship after the friendly matches in Egypt. Al Alawi added, "The goal of the

camp was for the team to gain more experience and exposure to other teams, to get used to the atmosphere of the matches, and to improve the technical and physical levels of the players. He explained that the aspirations in the championship are to achieve good results, especially since the team includes good elements that are the infrastructure of the national teams and are capable of achieving outstanding results in the future."

Al Alawi added that the

technical staff worked to correct the mistakes that appeared during the friendly matches, and focused on strengthening the players' strengths, stressing that the team enters the championship with high confidence and high morale. He explained that the friendly matches in Egypt were an opportunity to analyse the players' performance under pressure and provide individual advice to improve performance.

Oman athletes impress at Arabian championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 10

Oman athletes won four medals, including three gold and one bronze, at the the U-23 Arabian Athletics Championship which was held in Egypt from July 6 to 9. The national team came fourth in the overall tally topped by Morocco with 11 medals including six gold. Hosts Egypt came second with 15 medals including five gold while Algeria came third with seven medals including four gold.

Sprinter Ali al Balushi continued his top show with his second successive gold medal. He finished first in the 200 meter event with an Arab record timing of 20.68 seconds. Tamer Saleh from Lebanon finished second after he clocked 21.01 seconds while Yaqub Alaazme bagged bronze in 21.26 seconds. Al Balushi claimed the gold medal earlier in the 100m event and registered a new personal record in 10.00 seconds.

Ali has now set his sights for making an impressive debut at the 2024 Paris summer Olympic Games with an impressive 49th global rank in 100 m event.

The national youth record-holder, Mubeen bin Rashid al Kindi, bagged a gold medal in hammer throw after clearing a distance of 67.46 metre with a new national record.

Asian Games bronze medalist Hussain al Farsi delivered a bronze medal to Oman after he came third place in the 800m event in 1:51:34 minutes while Hiethm Shnetf from Algeria bagged the gold medal in 1:51:61 minutes. El Assal Abderrahman from Morocco claimed silver in 1:51:98 minutes.



Alcaraz fights back to reach Wimbledon semis

SINNER TOPPLED BY MEDVEDEV



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts during quarter-final. – Reuters

LONDON: Defending Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz returned to the semi-finals with an enthralling comeback on Tuesday but there will be no blockbuster showdown with Jannik Sinner after the world number one was dragged the distance and dumped out.

Having taken his Grand Slam tally to three at the French Open last month, Alcaraz pushed on in his quest to retain a major trophy for the first time and cement his big-league status by rallying past American Tommy Paul 5-7 6-4 6-2 6-2.

“When I’m not playing my best tennis, I’m going to try to find solutions just to be a bit better and beat the opponent,” said Spaniard Alcaraz.

“Sometimes it’s going to be difficult to do it but sometimes, like in these matches, I didn’t play brilliant but I played enough just to (win) the match.”

The clash between the two most recent Queen’s Club champions still produced some breathtaking shot-making on Court One before Paul’s bid to end a 21-year US wait for a men’s Grand Slam champion faded.

“I’m really happy to be back in the semi-finals here. Really happy about the level that I’m playing,” added Alcaraz, who was still in a crib when American Andy Roddick won the US Open title in 2003.

Sinner is another of the men’s tour’s young guns who was heavily backed to succeed at the grasscourt Grand Slam after his breakthrough Australian Open triumph and a potential encounter with Alcaraz had left fans excited following the draw.

The ailing 22-year-old came crashing down to earth against fifth seed Daniil Medvedev in a rematch of their Melbourne Park title clash, however, a sobering result that snapped a run of five straight wins over the Russian.

BRAVE FIGHT

Sinner put up a brave fight under the Centre Court roof after a timeout due to illness but the Italian was unable to prevent a 6-7(7) 6-4 7-6(4) 2-6 6-3 defeat.

“This morning I didn’t feel great. I had some problems. Then with the fatigue, it was tough,” said Sinner.

“But take nothing away from Daniil. He played



Russia's Daniil Medvedev celebrates after the winning.

smart. Played good tennis. That’s it... It wasn’t an easy moment.

“I tried to fight with that what I had today.”

Sinner’s compatriot Jasmine Paolini was grinning from ear to ear on the main showcourt after her utterly dominant performance against American 19th seed Emma Navarro later on Tuesday.

The seventh seed cruised to a 6-2 6-1 victory in 58 minutes on another damp day at Wimbledon to set up a meeting with Croatian Donna Vekic, who ended the extraordinary run of 123rd ranked qualifier Lulu Sun.

Vekic had serious doubts about the durability of her knee after surgery in 2021 and considered quitting, but she now finds herself in a maiden semi-final on the grandest stage. “Those couple of years were tough,” said Vekic, reflecting on the period after her surgery. “Now, reaching my best result ever at a Grand Slam, I’m really proud of myself, of the work that I’ve done, of the work that my team has done.” — Reuters

Oman ready for ICC World Cup League 2 in Scotland

MUSCAT: A new venue and a changed format (50-over-a-side) welcomed Oman national cricket team in Scotland as they arrived earlier this week to take part in the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 (CWCL2), which will be held from July 16-24.

Following the disappointment of the ICC T20 World Cup in West Indies, where Duleep Mendis’ men lost all their four games in the group stage, the team regrouped at home and had a brief camp before departing for Scotland. Aaqib Ilyas, who led Oman at the T20 World Cup, has been retained as skipper.

Three changes have been made to the squad that took part in the T20 World Cup with Jay Odedra, Samay Shrivastava and Karan Sonawale drafted into the team. The players who have been dropped are Naseem Khushi, Mohammad Nadeem and Shakeel Ahmed.

The Men in Red are scheduled to play a 50-over tri-nation tournament as part of the CWCL2 and will face hosts Scotland and Namibia in the series. Both Scotland and Namibia were coincidentally part of the same group at the T20 World Cup. Oman lost to Namibia in a Super Over in Barbados and then were outplayed by Scotland in Antigua.

Coach Mendis was confident that the team, which has few changes from the T20 squad, will put up a strong performance in the CWCL2, where Oman had finished behind Scotland in the previous cycle to qualify for the ICC ODI World Cup qualifier in Zimbabwe.

The ICC has tweaked the format and in the current cycle, has included eight teams in the CWCL2. Oman meet Scotland on 16 July and then meet Namibia on 18 July. They play again with Oman taking on the hosts on 22 July and Namibia on 24 July.



Oman National Cricket Team at the Muscat Airport tour to Scotland

Messi on target as Argentina beat Canada to reach Copa America final

EAST RUTHERFORD, NEW JERSEY:

Defending champions Argentina booked their place in the Copa America final after goals from Julian Alvarez and Lionel Messi gave them a 2-0 win over Canada in Tuesday’s semi-final in New Jersey. Argentina will face either Uruguay or Colombia in Sunday’s final in Florida, a match that could represent the last shot at silverware for several senior squad members including Messi, Angel Di Maria and Nicolas Otamendi.

“Let’s enjoy what we are experiencing as a national team, as a group. It is not easy to be in a final again, to compete again to be champions,” Messi told TyC Sports.

“I’m living it as I have been living everything lately: enjoying it very much and being aware, as it happens to Fideo (Di Maria) and Ota (Otamendi), that these are the last battles.”

Argentina have won a joint-record 15 Copa titles and reached the final six times in the past eight editions but Canada caused them real problems in the opening 20 minutes, Jacob Shaffelburg twice shooting wide from promising positions. After soaking up the early pressure, though, Argentina went ahead when Rodrigo De Paul played through Alvarez, who ghosted in between two defenders to score with a tidy finish in the 22nd minute.

Argentina, 2022 World Cup winners and number one in Fifa’s rankings, gradually took control and Messi had a chance to double their lead in the 44th minute when he created space in the box with some silky footwork before lashing his effort wide.

Canada nearly snatched an equaliser against the run of play in first-half stoppage time as Jonathan David sneaked in ahead of his marker to get on the end of a long throw, but his



Lionel Messi celebrates scoring second goal. – AFP

close-range shot was hit straight at goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez. Messi had struggled with a muscle injury earlier in the tournament but appeared revitalised on a hot and humid evening at the MetLife Stadium.

He scored Argentina’s second in the 51st minute, sticking out a boot to divert Enzo Fernandez’s shot from the edge of the area past Canada goalkeeper Maxime Crepeau.

The goal moved Messi to joint fifth in the all-time Copa America scoring charts, level with Peru’s Paolo Guerrero and Chile’s Eduardo Vargas, on 14.

His 109th goal for Argentina also saw him surpass Iran’s Ali Daei to take sole possession of second place on the all-time international scoring charts. Messi trails only Cristiano Ronaldo, who has scored 130 goals for Portugal.

Despite their two-goal cushion, Argentina had a nervy finish to the match as Canada substitute Tani Oluwaseyi tested Martinez with a crisp shot in the 89th minute before directing a glancing header wide a minute later.

For Canada, the defeat ends a remarkable run in which they defied expectations and performed better than their higher-ranked CONCACAF rivals Mexico and the United States, their fellow co-hosts of the 2026 World Cup.

“They’re the best team in the world, but at the same time we had our chances in the beginning of the game,” midfielder Stephen Eustaquio told Canadian broadcaster TSN.

“If we scored one of our chances, the story of the game would probably have been different. To get here, the last four of the Copa America, it’s a big achievement.” — Reuters



UEFA
EURO2024
GERMANY



Yamal on target as Spain edge France 2-1 to reach final

MUNICH, GERMANY: Spain struck twice in five minutes in a pulsating first half to secure a 2-1 comeback win over France on Tuesday as a record-breaking goal from teenager Lamine Yamal and a Dani Olmo effort propelled them into the Euro 2024 final.

The 16-year-old Yamal cancelled out Randal Kolo Muani's opener with a sublime shot in the 21st minute to become the youngest scorer in a Euro or World Cup before Olmo added another in the 25th for his third goal in the knockout stage.

The Spaniards, who have won every game of the tournament so far, confirmed their favourites tag with another display of attacking football, especially in the first half, that is a far cry from the tiki-taka passing game that earned them world and European titles more than a decade ago.

"I'm very happy to have made it to the final," said man-of-the-match Yamal. "Now the most important thing is to win it. We were in a difficult moment, you wouldn't expect a goal so soon." "I wanted to put it in where it went in, and I'm very happy. I'm happy and content with the victory. I want to win, win and win," added the teenager.

They will now face the winners of Wednesday's match between England and Netherlands in the final in Berlin on Sunday as they hunt a record-breaking fourth European crown.

It was an anti-climactic end to France's tournament, although the 2022 World Cup finalists never lived up to expectations in Germany with a very low conversion rate that carried into the semi-final.

"Spain proved tonight that they are a very good team. We were fortunate to open the scoring, but they caused us problems because they were superior in terms of control," said France coach Didier Deschamps.

"Tonight they showed all their qualities. We were... perhaps a little less fresh, which led to some technical waste, particularly in the build-up of the game. We didn't push forward often enough."

Spain had an early chance when Yamal, the youngest player to feature in a World Cup or Euro semi-final, floated a cross to the far post but Fabian Ruiz headed over the bar.

FRANCE GOAL

France did better from an almost identical move in the ninth minute with Kylian Mbappe, playing without a mask after breaking his nose earlier in the tournament, crossing for Kolo Muani to head in their first goal from open play at Euro 2024.

But the Spaniards, who were missing suspended Dani Carvajal and Robin Le Normand as well as injured Pedri, quickly turned the game around.

Yamal curled a stunning left-footed effort from 25 metres in off the post to break another record held by Brazil great Pele, as the youngest scorer in a Euro or World Cup.

Before France had any time to recover, Olmo completed their lightning-quick comeback in the 25th with a shot that was deflected in by France's Jules Kounde.

France, who had only conceded one goal in their previous five games in the tournament, upped the tempo after the break and had chances through Mbappe and Theo Hernandez. But they could not carve out an equaliser with Spain, pulling back and successfully soaking up the pressure. — Reuters

Spain's Lamine Yamal celebrates after the match. — Reuters



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Move to spur growth of digital FDI in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 10

An initiative targeting the growth of Digital Foreign Direct Investment in the Sultanate of Oman is expected to be launched soon, according to the Chief of Global Cooperation and Partnerships of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO), Michael Grant.

Speaking during a key e-commerce forum held in Muscat recently, Grant unveiled that the Riyadh-based intergovernmental organisation, which aims to foster collaboration within the field of digital economy, is piloting the initiative in cooperation with the World Economic Forum in Oman.

“We are particularly excited about piloting DCO’s Digital Foreign Direct Investment Initiative with the World Economic Forum here in Oman.

“This two-year project aims to create a community of purpose to grow digital FDI in Oman, by first surveying the digital landscape,



Michael Grant, Chief of Global Cooperation and Partnerships of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO), speaking at the e-commerce Forum held in Muscat.

then by providing advice on what steps to take, and finally, by supporting the implementation of these priority actions by helping to attract the needed investment.

This initiative will showcase and celebrate Oman’s digital friendly investment climate. Further positioning Oman as a regional e-commerce hub.”

Grant further added: “Oman’s digital vision has been made clear with such initiatives as the national plan for e-commerce, a bold undertaking to diversify its

economy and stimulate growth, focusing on the important role of SMEs.

“According to the World Economic Forum, 70 per cent of the world’s economic growth will be driven by the digital economy over the next decade. If it isn’t clear yet, it should be growth equals digital.”

Founded in 2020 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Digital Cooperation Organization currently groups 16 member states representing a population of 800 million and a combined GDP of \$3.5 trillion.

“Our mission is clear to foster collaboration among all stakeholders in DCO’s digital ecosystem to ensure that everyone, our member states and their citizens, can fully participate in and reap the benefits from the digital economy,” shared Grant.

Additionally, the Chief of Global Cooperation and Partnerships highlighted the significance of tech diplomacy. “In this endeavour, tech

diplomacy enables new modes of cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders, from governments, private entities, civil society and academia, to leverage digital innovation for inclusive prosperity.”

He added: “This is very much at the heart of DCO’s mandate — collaboration between the public and private sectors is not just beneficial, it’s essential for navigating the complexities of our interconnected world.”

According to Dr Ali bin Amer bin Ali al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, the value of digital investments in Oman amounted to \$2.5 billion in 2023 since the launch of the National Programme of Digital Economy — a programme aimed at increasing the digital economy’s contribution to the local GDP from 2 per cent to 5 per cent in 2030 and 10 per cent in 2040.

Opec sticks to 2024 oil demand view, sees strong travel season



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed stock graph and Opec logo in this illustration picture. – Reuters

MOSCOW/LONDON: The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) stuck to its forecast for relatively strong growth in global oil demand in 2024 and next year, saying on Wednesday that resilient economic growth and strong air travel would support fuel use in the summer months.

Opec, in a monthly report, said world oil demand would rise by 2.25 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2024 and by 1.85 million bpd in 2025. Both forecasts were unchanged from last month.

“Expected strong mobility and air travel in the Northern Hemisphere during the summer driving/holiday season is anticipated to bolster demand for transportation fuels and drive growth in the United States,” Opec said in the report.

Forecasters have been split more widely than usual on the strength of oil demand growth, partly due to differences over

the pace of the world’s transition to cleaner fuels. Earlier on Wednesday, BP said oil demand would peak next year.

Opec+, which groups Opec and allies such as Russia, has implemented a series of output cuts since late 2022 to support the market. The group agreed on June 2 to extend the latest cut of 2.2 million bpd until the end of September and gradually phase it out from October.

Opec also raised its forecast for world economic growth this year to 2.9 per cent from 2.8 per cent, and said there was potential upside to that number, citing momentum seen this year outside developed countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Oil prices edged lower on Monday, reversing course after four weeks of gains, as hopes of a ceasefire deal in Gaza eased worries of tightening supply.

— Reuters

New real estate investment fund gets listed on Muscat Stock Exchange

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 10

Jabal Asset Management, a Muscat-based investment fund, has announced the listing of its Jabal Real Estate Investment Fund (Jabal REIF) on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) following a successful Initial Public Offering (IPO) last month. The official listing took place at the MSX Hall on July 10, 2024, in the presence of representatives from the Financial Services Authority (FSA), MSX and the REIF.

The Jabal Real Estate Investment Fund boasts a capital of RO 17,400,000, divided into 174,000,000 units priced at 100 baisas each. The subscription period for the Fund ran from June 13 to June 27, 2024, and saw overwhelming interest from investors, exceeding the minimum target capital on the very first day.

Designed to meet the diverse needs of investors, the Fund is established as a closed-ended fund under REIF regulations and is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange. It aims to invest in a variety of high-quality, income-generating commercial properties with resilient tenant profiles.

Initially, the Fund will include two anchor assets: an office building and a warehousing complex in Oman, both boasting over 90 per cent occupancy rates and leased to a diverse tenant pool.



Abdulaziz bin Ali al Muqbali (2nd, right), board member of Jabal Asset Management, rings the bell to celebrate the listing of Jabal Real Estate Investment Fund at the Muscat Stock Exchange.

While Jabal Asset Management serves as the investment manager, Sohar International Bank is the custodian and administrator of the Fund.

Additionally, a professional property manager will be appointed to ensure effective management and monitoring of the properties. The Fund’s management team will actively seek new opportunities to maximise financial results.

Importantly, the Fund will not initially use borrowings for acquiring the portfolio, offering potential to increase returns by attracting leverage later, up to 60 per cent as per REIF regulations.

The Fund targets a long-term total return for investors that exceeds both inflation and deposit rates, with quarterly dividend distributions providing regular cash income.

Investors will benefit not only from professional management focused on generating strong and sustainable returns, but also from increased accountability, with the Fund providing regular reports and public communication.

Majid al Lawati, a member of the Fund Management Body, commented, “We are pleased with the successful IPO of Jabal REIF. The Fund garnered substantial interest and was oversubscribed

shortly after the subscription commenced. It offers investors an attractive long-term return and potential asset appreciation.”

He added, “The Fund provides a unique opportunity for investors to participate in a professionally managed, diversified income-generating real estate portfolio in Oman, with the potential for future growth.

“We extend our gratitude to the FSA and MSX for facilitating the successful launch of the Fund. We believe that Jabal REIF will positively impact the overall Oman real estate market by enhancing market transparency and liquidity.”

Win big with Ford’s exciting Fabulous 4 offer



MUSCAT: Unlock this season’s hottest promotions as Ford Oman presents an exclusive limited-time offer to own the Ford of your dreams. Experience the Ford line up at your nearest showroom to participate in the Walk-in and Win Raffle Contest and secure a chance to win the Apple Watch 9 series! Ford’s Fabulous 4 offer is up for grabs for customers to reap huge benefits.

Receive a company-enabled service of 3 years/60,000kms (whichever is earlier) with the added advantage of a 5-year manufacturer’s warranty, 5-year roadside assistance and complimentary 1-year registration.

Also win iPhone 15s and apple watches 9 series through Buy and Win Raffle draw. Enjoy the incredible perks and bag the

coolest tech products in town while the campaign lasts until August 1, 2024.

Relish the summer fun in a brand-new Ford Territory, Taurus or Everest which are now available as part of Ford’s summer offerings.

Ford extends its Buy and Win raffle draw to new owners to win iPhones 15s and Apple watches 9 series. Stay within budget and experience huge savings with an attractive EMI plan starting at RO 209 along with free 1-year vehicle registration. Achieve peace of mind with high-quality car maintenance at Ford’s service facilities by professional staff.

Ford is proud to offer convenience and quick response security in cases of mechanical failure through Ford’s 5-year roadside assistance plan and an

additional 5-year manufacturer’s warranty for the safety of its customers.

“Ford provides premium automobile products that radiate luxury and style. We want to deepen our relationship with our customers and these offers exemplify our commitment to providing the best-in-class services.” Shared a representative from Ford Oman.

“Ford’s 24/7 roadside assistance service is designed to assist Ford drivers during road emergencies in case of breakdowns.”

He further shared. Create joyful memories in Ford Territory, a mid-size crossover SUV that boasts a dynamic design and is powered by a 1.8L EcoBoost I-4 engine paired with a 7-speed automatic transmission.

Bank Muscat relaunches Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched its highly popular Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme for the year 2024 after the great success of last year’s campaign.

The current referral scheme, which will run till the end of December 2024, offers cash rewards when referring new customers to the Bank to enjoy an extraordinary banking experience. It is worth noting that the current scheme is cross-referral between the two segments, “Asalah” Priority Banking and “Al Jawhar” Privilege Banking.

Asalah customers may refer Al Jawhar customers to the Bank, while Al Jawhar customers may also refer customers to open a new Asalah salary account and avail the advantages of this year’s campaign. The Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme sees positive feedback from customers every year.

The scheme offers Asalah customers and new customers a chance to win up to RO 100 for every successful referral after the referees meet the eligibility criteria.

The referees should have a monthly salary of RO 3,500 or transfer and maintain a deposit



of RO 30,000 or more in their savings accounts within a maximum period of 30 days from the date of referral.

Both the referrer and referee get a sum of RO 100 if the referee successfully meets all eligibility criteria after opening the new Asalah account.

For Al Jawhar customers, the referrer and the referee will win RO 50 per successful referral once the referees successfully meet all eligibility criteria, including maintaining a depositing RO 10,000 - 29,999 in their Bank Muscat Al Jawhar savings accounts within a month from the date of successful referrals or have a monthly salary of RO 1,000 – 3,499. Both the referrer and

referee win a sum of RO 50 per successful referral, if the referee successfully meets all eligibility criteria after opening the new Al Jawhar account.

On this occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager – Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “We are pleased about the relaunch of the referral scheme campaign this year for Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking from Bank Muscat, after the great success of the scheme last year.

In line with its vision “To serve you better, every day,” Bank Muscat continues to focus on fostering customer experience and enhancing its customer base in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dhofar Islamic launches Al Rifaa privilege banking

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic Banking Window of BankDhofar, announced the launch of its new suite of Islamic banking services, Al Rifaa Account. Al Rifaa offers a comprehensive range of Sharia-compliant products and services designed to meet the financial needs of affluent customers.

The innovative account is designed to cater to the distinct needs of Dhofar Islamic’s valued customers, providing an elevated banking experience that combines exclusive benefits, personalised services, and gratifying rewards.

Al Rifaa Privilege Account is tailored for individuals who demand exceptional financial solutions, opening the door to a world of advantages, while setting a new standard in the banking industry.

Customers will earn preferential financing rates and avail branded Platinum Debit Card and Titanium Credit Card facilities with convenient banking solutions, including mobile and internet banking.

The credit card is embedded with a host of benefits, ranging from special offers to airport lounge access, in addition to reward points on local and international purchases.

“Dhofar Islamic is committed to delivering excellence and innovation to our customers. Al Rifaa Privilege account exemplifies our dedication to providing a superior banking experience, with a combination of financial expertise with exclusive privileges.

We believe that banking is not restricted to transactions; it’s about enabling dreams and enhancing lifestyles. With Al Rifaa, we are raising the bar for personalised banking services in the Sultanate of Oman,” said Amor bin Said al Amri- DGM Dhofar Islamic Retail Banking.

Dhofar Islamic is committed to providing its customers with innovative Sharia-compliant financial solutions.

With the launch of Al Rifaa account, Dhofar Islamic is confident that it can further serve the growing demand for Islamic banking in the Sultanate of Oman.

During the past period, it has doubled its network of branches and ATMs/CDMs enhancing its product and service offerings to customers as well as enriching customers’ digital experience.

Dhofar Islamic continues to be committed towards building a strong foundation for valuable offers.



National Finance, Mohamed & Ahmed Al Khonji Group sign pact to offer boat engine financing



MUSCAT: Solidifying its standing as a trusted partner for growth, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, has partnered with distinguished business conglomerate Mohamed & Ahmed Al Khonji Group, the exclusive distributor of Suzuki Marine engines in the Sultanate of Oman.

This strategic alliance aims to extend boat engine finance solutions to fishermen and boat owners, positioning National Finance as the first in the country to offer financing to those seeking to invest in boat engines.

This marks a significant step in the company’s dedicated efforts to broaden its portfolio and address the specific requirements of the marine and fisheries sector.

Designed to significantly fuel business growth within the fisheries industry, the Boat Engine Finance solution offers customers the opportunity to secure financing ranging from RO 1,000 to RO 10,000, with a minimal down payment requirement of only 20 per cent.

Furthermore, customers can benefit from flexible financing tenure options spanning from

12 to 60 months, enhancing accessibility and convenience.

This strategic partnership enables National Finance to broaden its market presence and offer its unparalleled services to customers seeking the latest Suzuki Marine Engines from Mohamed & Ahmed Al Khonji outlets nationwide.

Concurrently, Mohamed & Ahmed Al Khonji Group augments its product offerings by providing customers with enhanced financing options, thereby enriching the overall consumer journey.

OUIC inks strategic Bancassurance pact with Muscat Finance

MUSCAT: Oman United Insurance Company SAOG (OUIC) and Muscat Finance SAOG yesterday announced the signing of a strategic Bancassurance agreement.

The agreement was signed by Sayyid Nasser bin Salim al Busaidy, Chief Management Executive of OUIC, and Rashad al Shaikh, CEO of Muscat Finance, at Muscat Finance’s Head Office in Azaiba, Muscat.

OUIC, a leading Omani insurance company with a 39-year history, offers a comprehensive range of insurance products to both individuals and corporates. Muscat Finance SAOG, established in July 1987, is a pioneer in the non-banking financial sector in Oman,

providing innovative financial services to individuals, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and Corporates across the Sultanate of Oman.

The partnership between these two financial institutions is designed to leverage each other’s strengths, aiming to enhance customer experience through integrated financial and insurance solutions. This collaboration underscores OUIC’s commitment to innovation, operational excellence, and business diversification. Additionally, and in line with Muscat Finance diversification strategy, this partnership aims to provide the best-in-class insurance products along with financing to its customers.



The signing ceremony was attended by senior officials from both companies. Representing Muscat Finance were Kumail al Musawi, Chief People Officer, and Rajesh Bansal, CFO.

From OUIC, present were Sivakumar, Deputy CEO, Sanjay Jha, Medical & Life General Manager, and Moosa bin Yahya al Amri, Company Secretary and Investors Relations Officer.



Oman: An ideal hub for semiconductor industry

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, JULY 10

In a remarkable leap for Oman's semiconductor industry, GS Micro Electronics (GSME) is leading the charge with cutting-edge manufacturing services and innovative products.

Originally established in Silicon Valley, California, GSME has now expanded its operations to Oman, focusing on the production of power management integrated circuits (ICs) to meet the growing need for efficient battery-powered devices in consumer electronics.

During a recent interview with Oman FM, Farhat Jahangir, GSME Founder, President and CEO shared insights into the company's mission.

"At GSME, our priority has always been to develop products that validate our company's value and drive growth. We are deeply committed to innovation, particularly in power management ICs, to tackle the critical challenge of extending



Oman offers a unique combination of untapped potential, cost-effectiveness, and a skilled local workforce with a strong work ethic

FARHAT JAHANGIR*Founder, President and CEO
GSME*

battery life in various electronic gadgets and wearables."

Explaining why Oman was chosen as a key operational hub,



GSME has already achieved significant milestones in Oman, including the successful design and manufacturing of two pioneering semiconductor chips, Oman 1 and Oman 2.

Jahangir elaborated, "Oman offers a unique combination of untapped potential, cost-effectiveness, and a skilled local workforce with a strong work

ethic. These attributes make Oman an ideal location for nurturing the growth of the semiconductor industry, setting it apart from other countries in the

GCC region."

GSME has already achieved significant milestones in Oman, including the successful design and manufacturing of two pioneering semiconductor chips, Oman 1 and Oman 2. These chips are the first of their kind to be designed locally in Oman and the entire GCC region, showcasing the capabilities and innovation potential of the Omani workforce trained by GSME.

Expressing his pride in this achievement, Jahangir said, "The development of the Oman 1 and Oman 2 chips marks a major breakthrough in Oman's semiconductor landscape.

These chips not only reflect our commitment to nurturing local talent but also pave the way for future innovations and the introduction of commercial products using advanced semiconductor technologies."

Looking ahead, GSME plans to further revolutionise semiconductor technology in Oman by expanding its focus to include board design, assembly,

and testing capabilities. Jahangir emphasised, "Our goal is to transfer technological expertise to the local workforce, empowering them to innovate and excel in semiconductor manufacturing.

We are actively working towards establishing manufacturing facilities in Oman to strengthen the semiconductor ecosystem and position the country as a key player in the industry."

As GSME continues to drive technological advancements and innovation in Oman's semiconductor sector, Jahangir calls for ongoing support for the local semiconductor ecosystem. He highlights the crucial role of local talent in fostering growth and innovation.

"Together, we have the potential to put Oman on the global semiconductor map and make lasting contributions to the industry. Let's embrace innovation and propel Oman's semiconductor industry towards unprecedented achievements," he concluded.

Government budgeting guide highlights strategic financial management in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 10

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) has recently unveiled its Programme and Performance Budgeting Guide, emphasising a strategic approach to financial management. This budgeting method serves as a vital tool for organising budgetary information and aiding decision-makers in selecting the best service delivery options.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, stated, "Programme and Performance Budgeting represents a new foundation in public financial administration, aimed at enhancing the efficiency of public spending and achieving desired outcomes through the allocation of budgets to government units."

This guide aims to align governmental expenditures with strategic priorities, ensuring optimal resource allocation and fostering sustainable development. It details various methodologies for preparing detailed justifications within programme and



performance budgets.

Most budget models require descriptions of services, long-term programme objectives, and short-term goal specifications (typically expected achievements in the next year). Some guidelines also necessitate referencing government mandates or laws upon which the programmes are based, describing significant concerns and issues, and providing concise descriptions of implementation plans.

The integration of economic classifications in Programme and Performance Budgeting is crucial.

This classification, based on economic categories and expenditure items, forms the basis for budget segmentation after allocation, focusing on government units designated in the expenditure budget. This structural foundation of programmes and activities guides allocation in Programme and Performance Budgeting.

Furthermore, Programme and Performance Budgeting embodies an integrated budgeting framework, combining both development and current budget structures within a unified approach.

This integration ensures that both types of expenditures (current and developmental) are planned based on programmatic activities, rather than separately. Thus, the budget aligns expenditures with the specific goals of each programme, prioritising their achievement.

In subsequent sections, the guide elaborates on methodologies for implementing programme and performance budgeting, highlighting its potential impact on both governmental and private educational institutions in Oman.

Oman oil price reaches \$84.53 per barrel

MUSCAT: The official price of Omani oil on Wednesday, for next September delivery reached \$84.53 per barrel. The price of Oman oil witnessed a decrease of \$1.01 per barrel compared to the price on Tuesday, which amounted to \$85.54.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery this July amounted to \$83.89 per barrel, down \$5.41 compared to the price for delivery last June.

Meanwhile, international oil prices steadied on Wednesday as the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) kept its growth forecast for oil demand unchanged for this year and next, while US crude and gasoline inventories likely fell last week.

Brent futures were up by 1 cent, or 0.01%, at \$84.51 a barrel at 13:12 GMT, after falling 1.3% in the previous session. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up 11 cents, or 0.11%, to \$81.29 a barrel, after falling 1.1% in the previous session.

Opec maintained its 2024 and



2025 global oil demand growth forecasts at 2.25 million barrels per day (bpd) and 1.85 million bpd, respectively, it said in a monthly report on Wednesday.

"Expected strong mobility and air travel in the Northern Hemisphere during the summer driving holiday season is anticipated to bolster demand for transportation fuels and drive growth in the United States," Opec said in the report.

US crude oil fell by 1.923 million barrels and gasoline inventories by 2.954 million barrels, according to market sources, who cited American Petroleum Institute figures on Tuesday. — **Agencies**

New SME development programme launched in Oman

MUSCAT: To continue its innovative initiatives in supporting entrepreneurs and their projects to achieve broad growth, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced the launch of two new initiatives: a training programme for developing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and a specialised electronic banking platform to simplify financial services for entrepreneurs, under the auspices of Halima bint Rashid bin al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority.

The two initiatives come as a commitment from OAB to support SMEs, which are an essential pillar for economic growth and ambitious diversification trends in the Sultanate of Oman.

In his speech during the inauguration ceremony, Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said: "Assisting business performance, unleashing the growth potential of the local business community, and

creating a thriving ecosystem for entrepreneurship and emerging companies are pivotal factors for raising the competitiveness of the national economy, improving its growth on a sustainable and diversified basis, and enabling young people to participate in achieving the ambitious goals of Oman's future vision.

As part of its national responsibility to contribute to implementing these ambitions, OAB has made a huge effort through its initiatives to build national capabilities and qualify human resources as part of its long-term sustainable growth strategies. These initiatives have achieved tangible success in supporting efforts to empower youth, hone national talent, and prepare future leaders.

It includes unique programmes, including the "Ruwad Al Arabi for Leadership Development", the "Ruwad Al Arabi Programme for Empowering and Training Youth," and the "Tumouhi"



The two initiatives come as a commitment from OAB to support SMEs, which are an essential pillar for economic growth and ambitious diversification trends in the Sultanate of Oman.

programme, which provides a seamless experience for small and medium enterprises, by providing an integrated ecosystem.

He added: "To continue the initiatives of OAB, we are pleased to announce the launch of the SME development workshops

programme, and the electronic platform designed specifically for financial services for entrepreneurs.

The two initiatives fall within the integrated activities of the "Tumouhi" programme, which aims to develop young people to

lead their businesses."

Al Harthy stressed OAB's commitment to the continuous development of its banking services and initiatives that work to create a positive and sustainable impact on society and the business environment, which supports

the progress achieved by the government's efforts in supporting entrepreneurship and what Oman achieved in its ranking in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report.

Sulaiman al Hinai, Chief wholesale banking officer at OAB, said: "The advanced banking services provided by OAB contribute significantly to managing the financial affairs of SMEs, allowing them to focus on growth.

Assupporting entrepreneurship activities and empowering youth are a priority, thus comes the launch of the training programme for developing SMEs, which includes a series of workshops designed to enable entrepreneurs to succeed and expand by providing them with knowledge, principles, and foundations of financial management, the best practices and tools that SMEs need to improve their performance, support decision-making and achieve sustainable growth."

Empowering women to work in the private sector

Modern history is replete with examples regarding the empowerment of women in the field of entrepreneurship, but in many developing societies, challenges abound. This represents a major impediment to delivering economic policies aimed at advancing women in the fields of business and entrepreneurship. Many agencies believe that it is difficult to achieve a more sustainable future in societies, except when both genders, women and men, enjoy equal rights and opportunities, especially in the work that women can do in societies. This is what prompts governments and civil society to take measures aimed at enhancing women's



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THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERING WOMEN MEANS PROVIDING THEM WITH THE ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THEIR FUTURE

empowerment through organising various programmes and creating the necessary training. In this regard, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry works to empower women and create job opportunities for them in cooperation with the rest of the institutions that work in the field of women's employment and the protection of their rights. The process of empowering women means providing them with the ability to make decisions that are important to their future work in order to sustain them, as well as giving them the strength to organise the affairs of their professional lives and making them aware of achieving greater success in their work. From this standpoint, the OCCI represented by the Women Business Committee, recently organised

a dialogue session entitled "Inspiring Experiences in Entrepreneurship," which aimed to inspire Omani women entrepreneurs to present themselves in the fields of business and share with those present their success stories in business. The aim of the event was to motivate participants to achieve more efforts to reach the goals they seek in private work with quality and mastery, while identifying the challenges facing women's work in managing their institutions concerned to sustain them in these works and to benefit from the experiences and lessons to move forward in these responsibilities. This event witnessed the presence of many Omani women interested in establishing small and medium enterprises in the country, which helps women

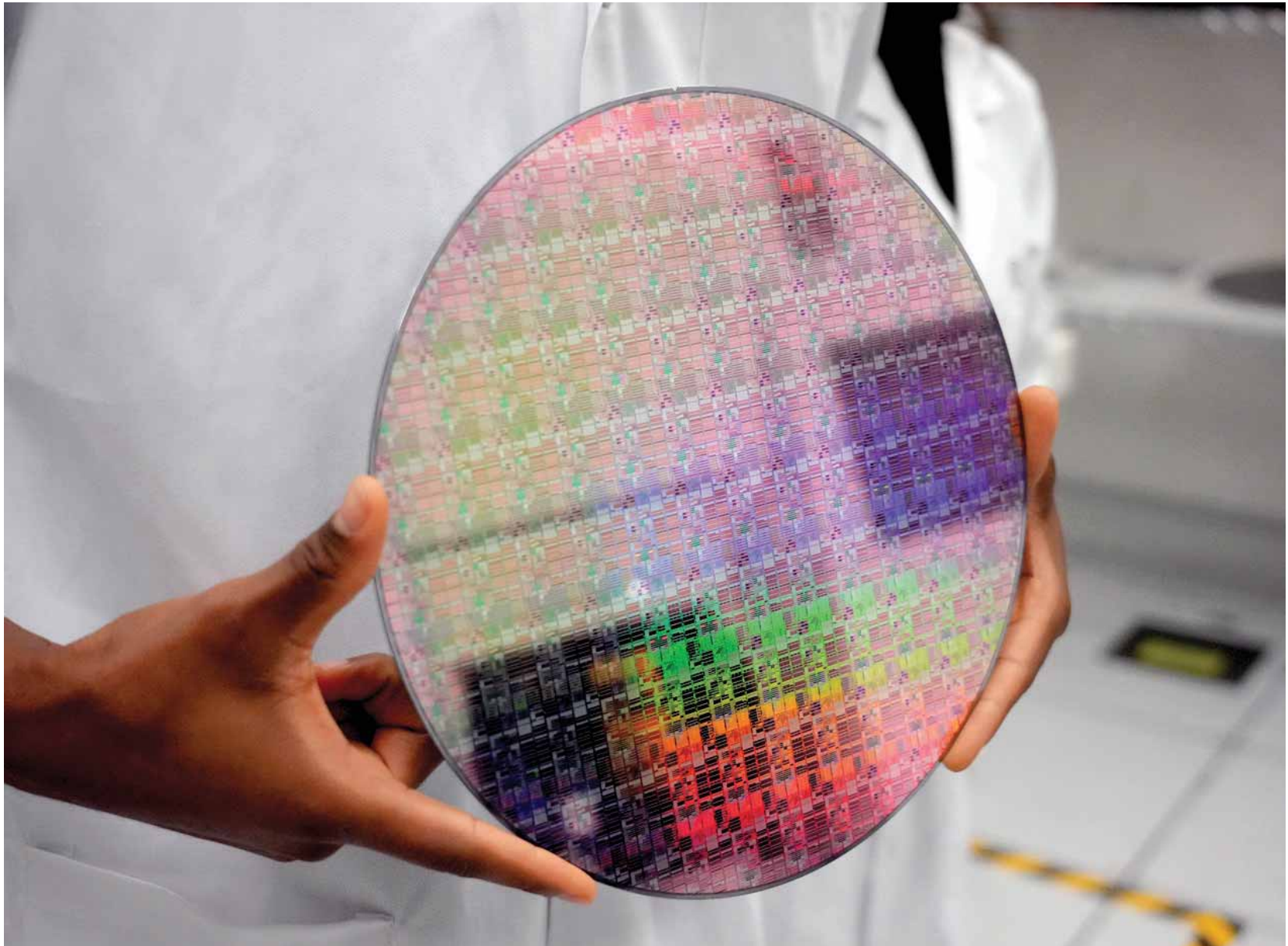
and enables them to market their products. The OCCI has enabled some female entrepreneurs to participate in trade delegations heading to countries around the world to learn more about the products that can be manufactured locally, in addition to opening areas of the trade with foreign institutions, which helps in enhancing the process of direct import and export of products and expanding business in foreign markets. The Chairwoman of the Women Business Owners Committee and member of the Board of Directors of the OCCI, Areej bint Mohsen al Zaabiyah, confirmed that the dialogue session for this activity is important and essential in promoting the culture of entrepreneurship, especially for Omani women who have

entered businesses recently, as these sessions provide a broader horizon for learning about entrepreneurship opportunities. Omani women entrepreneurs can also develop their businesses by having others shed light on their inspiring experiences, which helps them benefit from their success stories in those businesses and identify the challenges facing their modern businesses. The activities carried out by the OCCI aim to achieve the strategy consistent with the Oman Vision 2040, which works to improve the business environment, empower women in the entrepreneurship sector, and transform their innovative ideas into projects that enhance productivity and quality in the work they do, which enhances economic diversification trends in the country.

US plans up to \$1.6 billion in funding for packaging computer chips

DON CLARK

The Biden administration said on Tuesday that it would direct up to \$1.6 billion in funding toward developing new technology for packaging computer chips, a major thrust in US efforts to stay ahead of China in creating components needed for applications like artificial intelligence. The proposed funding, part of the money authorised under 2022 legislation called the CHIPS Act, will help companies innovate in areas such as creating faster ways to transfer data between chips in a package and managing the heat they generate, said Laurie Locascio, an undersecretary in the Commerce Department who is also the director of its National Institute of Standards and Technology. Her announcement, at an annual industry conference in San Francisco, serves as a starting gun for companies to start applying for grants to fund research and development projects, with awards expected to total up to \$150 million each. "Our research and development efforts in advanced packaging will heavily focus on high-demand applications like high-performance computing and low-power electronics, both needed to enable leadership in AI," Locascio said. The CHIPS Act received bipartisan approval to invest \$52 billion to stoke domestic chip production, with most of the money directed toward the factories that turn silicon wafers into chips. The US share of that activity has dwindled to around 10 per cent, much of it lost to companies in Asia. US reliance on factories run by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., or TSMC, in particular, has worried policymakers because of China's territorial claims on Taiwan. The dependence on foreign companies is even more stark in chip packaging. That process attaches finished chips — useless without ways to communicate



A silicon wafer at Applied Materials in Sunnyvale, California. — The New York Times

with other pieces of hardware — onto a flat component called a substrate, which has electrical connectors. The combination is typically wrapped in plastic. Packaging mainly takes place in Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, the Philippines Vietnam and China. A global industry group called IPC, citing Defence Department data, has estimated that the US only accounts for about 3 per cent of advanced chip packaging. With most federal funding so far directed toward the early stage of manufacturing, chips produced in new US factories might then be flown to Asia for packaging, which would do little to reduce dependence on foreign companies. "You can make all the silicon you want here, but if you don't take it to the next step, it doesn't

do any good," said Jan Vardaman, president of TechSearch International, a consultancy focusing on chip packaging. The situation is being compounded by companies increasingly striving for greater computing performance by packaging multiple chips side by side or on top of each other. Nvidia, which dominates sales of chips for AI, recently announced a product called Blackwell that has two big processor chips surrounded by stacks of memory chips. TSMC, which fabricates the latest chips for Nvidia, also packages them with advanced technology. TSMC is slated to receive federal grants for chip production in Arizona, but it hasn't said it will shift any packaging services from Taiwan. Intel, a Silicon Valley

chipmaker, is considered a leader in packaging research and has invested heavily to upgrade factories in New Mexico and Arizona as part of broader efforts to compete with TSMC in manufacturing services. But US companies could use federal money to help stay on the cutting edge, Vardaman said. The new grants are part of a plan called the National Advanced Packaging Manufacturing Program, which Commerce Department officials said would receive about \$3 billion in total funding. "Today's announcement is another important step in the right direction," said Chris Mitchell, IPC vice president of global government relations. Some industry players aren't waiting for government help. Resonac, a company based in

Tokyo, announced on Monday a new consortium with nine other Japanese and US companies to focus on packaging research and development in a new facility that will be built in Union City, California. In an interview, Locascio said the administration would also announce this week its conceptual model for the National Semiconductor Technology Center, a proposed public-private partnership for chip research and development that is expected to include new facilities, which officials in multiple states hope to attract. "We get a lot of calls daily about that," Locascio said, adding that the announcement should clarify what kinds of facilities are envisioned and "the process by which people can compete for those." — The New York Times.

THE NEW GRANTS ARE PART OF A PLAN CALLED THE NATIONAL ADVANCED PACKAGING MANUFACTURING PROGRAM, WHICH COMMERCE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAID WOULD RECEIVE ABOUT \$3 BILLION IN TOTAL FUNDING.



BABY SUPER STAR
A baby Pangolin sits on a scale to be weighed at the Prague Zoo. It is the second Pangolin that was born in a zoo in Europe. — AFP



FIREWORKS
Lightning strikes over the countryside during a thunderstorm following high temperatures near Potsdam, eastern Germany. — AFP

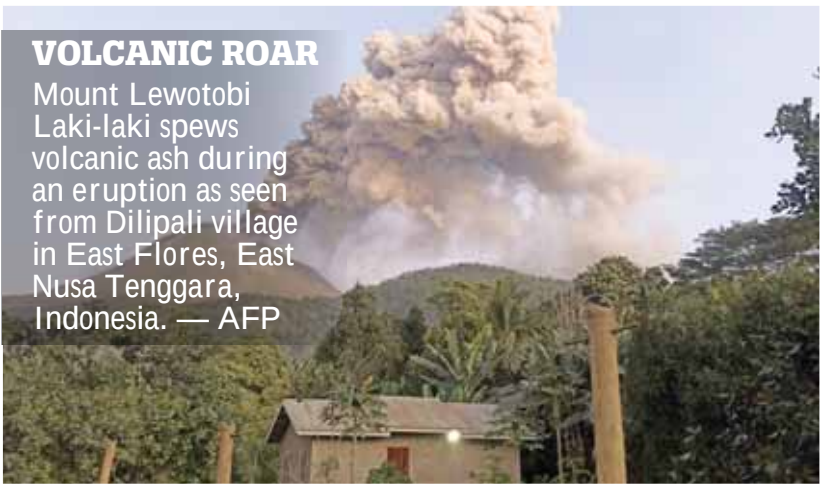


COUP
A bull overthrows a Picador's horse during a bullfight of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain.



SIGN OF SPORTS

Olympic rings are being installed in front of the Nantes train station in Nantes ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games as the city will host part of the Olympic football matches. — AFP



VOLCANIC ROAR

Mount Lewotobi Laki-laki spews volcanic ash during an eruption as seen from Dilipali village in East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. — AFP

art & life

THURSDAY | JULY 11, 2024 | MUHARRAM 5, 1446 AH

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Jabal Shams is perfect destination to beat the heat

Al Hamra will never stop surprising, every time you visit it, as it is unlike any other wilayat in Oman. It welcomes you with an enchanting stretch of green farms and splendid falajes... P20

Colours of pain and oppression

Lakshmi Kothaneth

A PROGRAMME DEDICATED to the Palestinian cause was held at the National Museum in the presence of the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the Sultanate of Oman, Tayseer Farhat, and the Secretary-General of the National Museum, Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi.

"The objective of the event was to show the support for our brothers and sisters in Palestine. Its core focus was to bring together a group of esteemed poets, artists, and leading public figures to send a strong message to the people of Gaza to convey that we have not forgotten," said the event organiser, Al Sayyida Wafa al Busaidy, who led a team that produced the various parts of the event that was held at the National

Museum.

In reality, this event is not a single event but rather a series of touch points to connect the local audience with core Palestinian values that define the defiance of the Gazan population against the aggression on them.

Wafa, who is a clinical psychologist and a writer, said she had the idea months ago.

"We just gathered all the creative people who came together for Palestine and did everything for free."

The sentiments were expressed through various traditional Palestinian songs, beautifully sung by Omani schoolgirls. The poetry recitations, captured the deep emotions of the Omanis for the Palestinian cause as Gaza continues to go through the turmoil. A video inspired by Wafa al Busaidy's message to

the people of Palestine, written by the esteemed poet Aisha al Saifi, winner of the title the Poet of Millions, was named, "Palestine Concerns Us". Within minutes of launching it, the video went viral.

"In the video, each personality received a line indicating support for the people of Gaza and Palestine in their plight. It began by stating that Palestine is our concern (our cause), and the different participating personalities focused on a different aspect of the Palestinian plight and icons," explained Wafa.

From the Al Aqsa mosque to the seven decades of struggle to the olive tree to Koufeih (the resistance icon), the words brought together the severity of the Palestinian struggle and the support of the Omani people for the cause.



There are more features yet to come and one of them is the auction of artwork by leading Omani artists created to support the Palestinian cause. These paintings were on display at the launch and in the forthcoming days it will be available on auction.

"It provides an opportunity for everyone to contribute to this important cause, with the returns from the auction being donated to Palestine through the Oman Charitable Organisation," noted Wafa.

Artists of Oman drew about Palestine through their own



interpretations.

"These paintings are breathtaking with amazing details. In total we have 22 paintings from 16 popular Omani artists including Yousuf al Nahwi, Hassan Meer, Enaam Ahmed and A Majeed Karooh.

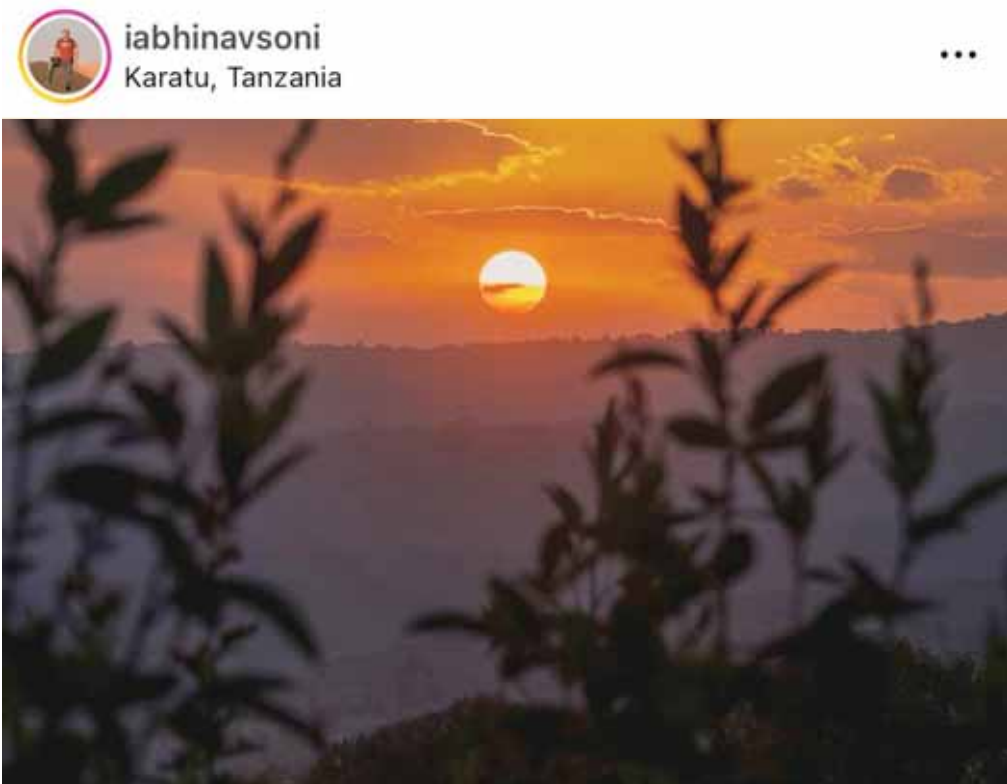


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Sticky future: Climate change hits Nepal's honey hunters

Hanging from a rope-and-bamboo ladder off a Himalayan mountain cliff, skilled Nepali climbers gather highly prized hallucinogenic honey – an ancient tradition stung by environmental degradation and rapid climate change. Wreathed in smoke to drive away defensive clouds of giant bees, 26-year-old Som Ram Gurung dangles dangerously 100 metres (325 feet) off the ground, slicing off dark and dripping hunks of delicious honeycomb.

For as long as anyone can remember in villages of Lamjung district, collecting the honey was worth the risk.

The combs are valued as “mad honey”, sweetness with a sting in its tail that collectors say provides an intoxicating buzz with mild psychoactive properties derived from rhododendron nectar that the bees love.

It was never easy to harvest. The high-altitude honey comes from the world's largest honey bee species, Apis laboriosa, which favours inaccessible cliffs. But the skilled craft is now beset



with extra challenges, many driven by the increasing effects of a heating planet. Honey hunters say shifting weather patterns and environmental threats are impacting their remote forested valleys, 100 kilometres (60 miles) northwest of Kathmandu.

Doodh Bahadur Gurung, 65, who taught his son Som Ram his skills, said hunters had seen a rapid slump in the number of hives and amounts of honey harvested.

“When we were young, there used to be beehives on almost all cliffs because of the abundance of wild-flowers and water sources,” said Doodh Bahadur.

“But with each passing year, it's becoming harder to find hives.”

DAMS, PESTICIDES, WILDFIRE

He blamed the decline in bees on increasingly irregular rainfall, wildfires, agricultural pesticides and the diversion of rivers due to a surge of hydropower dams and accompanying construction of roads.

“Streams are drying up due to hydro-projects and irregular rainfall,” he said, noting wild bees prefer to nest near water.

“Bees that fly to farms also face the problem of pesticides, which kill them.”

With erratic rain, drier winters and baking heat, bushfires have become more common.

Government data shows Nepal tackled over 4,500 wildfires this year, nearly double the year before.



“Wildfires are more common now,” Doodh Bahadur said. “There aren't enough young people to douse them in time”.

A decade ago, his village of Taap could harvest 1,000 litres a season.

Today, Doodh Bahadur said they count themselves lucky to get 250 litres. The hunters' observations are confirmed by scientists.

They say rising temperatures due to fossil-fuel-driven climate change is a key factor.

“Bees... are highly susceptible to changing temperatures,” said bee specialist Susma Giri, from the Kathmandu Institute of Applied Sciences.

“They are wild creatures and can't adjust to human movements or noise, which directly affects wild bees.”

ALARMING ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES'

ICIMOD rang the alarm in May, noting at least 75 per cent of Nepal's



crops depend on pollinators such as bees.

“Among the key factors for their decline... are climate change and loss in habitats,” ICIMOD said. “The reduced pollination that ensues has already had alarming economic consequences.”

A 2022 study, in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives, calculated annual losses from reduced pollination in Nepal amounted to as much as \$250 per capita – a massive sum in a country where annual average income is \$1,400.

Shrinking supplies means the rare honey commands high prices.

A litre that sold for \$3.5 per litre two decades ago now sells for \$15.

Traders say there is increasing demand from the United States, Europe and Japan, fuelled by its reported health benefits on social media.

Honey traders in Kathmandu estimate annual exports to be



around 10,000 litres, and internationally, a 250-gramme pot of “mad honey” can command prices of \$70 online.

“The demand for ‘mad honey’ increases yearly, but quality production has decreased,” said Kathmandu-based honey exporter Rashmi Kandel.

LOSING EVERYTHING

With honey drying up, fewer young people want to join the traditional month-long mountain hunt.

Across Nepal, young people are leaving rural life, seeking better-paid jobs abroad.

Suk Bahadur Gurung, 56, a local politician and part of the honey hunting team, is gloomy the next generation will follow the trade.

“You need skills and strength,” Suk Bahadur said. “There aren't many youths who want to do it.”

Som Ram Gurung held out his swollen arms and legs after descending from the cliff. — AFP

POLKA DOT ART

Large pumpkin sculpture by Japanese artist unveiled in Kensington Gardens

A GIANT POLKA DOT patterned pumpkin has been unveiled in Kensington Gardens after it was sent “to London with love” by its Japanese artist creator.

The six-metre-high bronze sculpture by Yayoi Kusama is located by the round pond in the park and goes on show 24 years after the Serpentine Gallery gave Kusama her first British retrospective show.

The 95-year-old, known for her trademark polka dots, regularly uses images of pumpkins in her work. “Since my childhood pump-



kins have been a great comfort to me, they are such tender things to touch, so appealing in colour and form. They are humble and amusing at the same time and speak to me of the joy of living.” Yayoi Kusama is one of the world's best-selling living female artists and her mirror room show at Tate Modern ran for three years due to public demand

only closing this April. Serpentine CEO Bettina Korek and artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist said it was “an honour” for the gallery to show her work.

In a statement, they said: “Her signature pumpkins have become a landmark motif for the artist and this project is a reunion for Kusama and Serpentine.” — ONA

VANDALISM

German climate activists smear iconic statue in Bremen with paint

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS HAVE covered the statue of the Town Musicians of Bremen with black paint.

The sculpture depicts the four animals that feature in the fairy tale of the same name by the Brothers Grimm, and is a well-known landmark in the northern German city.

Police were alerted by witnesses on Friday afternoon, and found three activists holding up posters from the Last Generation protest group in front of the bronze statue



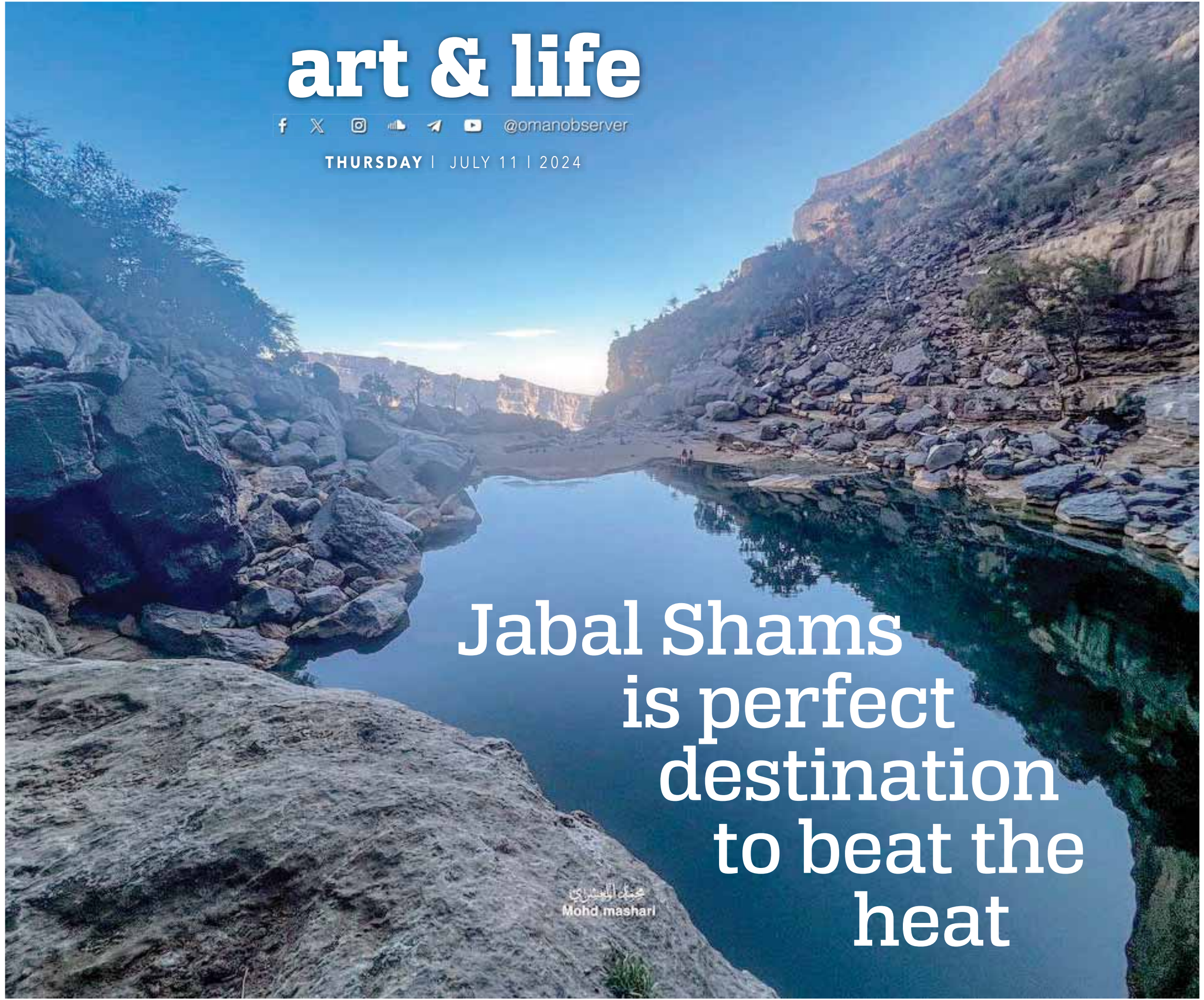
of a donkey, a dog, a cat and a rooster.

The police said the fire brigade was able to remove most of the paint. Criminal charges were brought against the three activists for damage to property. The police have launched an investigation.

Radio Bremen reported that the environmental activists are demanding that Bremen's centre-

left mayor Andreas Bovenschulte read out a statement from the group, which was handed over to his office on June 27, at a public press conference.

The conservative CDU in Bremen described the action as senseless vandalism. Damaging cultural monuments was detrimental to any goal, no matter how well-intentioned, the party said. — dpa



Jabal Shams is perfect destination to beat the heat

محمد الماشري
Mohd mashari

By Arwa al Hashimi
Photos by Mohammed al Mashari

Al Hamra will never stop surprising, every time you visit it, as it is unlike any other wilayat in Oman. It welcomes you with an enchanting stretch of green farms and splendid falajes. As you ascend slightly, you can see how Omanis have adapted nature to their advantage in a view that seems like a fantasy in Misfat Al Abriyeen.

Climbing even higher, you find Jabal Shams, the highest peak in the Sultanate of Oman. The name means mountain of the sun which comes from it being the first place to greet sunlight and the last to bid it farewell at sunset.

The mountain stands at 3,009 metres above sea level and consists of rare canyons and rock formations, including the significant Great Rift Fault, which ranks as the world's second largest in size, with a depth exceeding one kilometre. It is characterised by its cold weather in winter and mild climate in summer. It is rich in the cultivation of seasonal crops on agricultural terraces, including apricots, peaches, pomegranates, and grapes. Its residents are known for herding and wool weaving to make carpets and some other handicrafts.

Many exciting activities can be enjoyed while visiting Jabal Shams most favoured of which is camping. Visitors usually camp in Jabal Shams during summer to escape the heat. They camp by the edge of the canyon where the cool water and the captivating scenery.

Stargazing, with the stars glowing intensely on the dark mountain nights, is an essential part of the camping experience. And for a perfect stargazing experience, the peak would be a great spot as its far away from light pollution.

Hiking is also a wonderful activity to do at Jabal Shams especially for adventure lovers who love exploring the beauty of mountains.

According to Said al Khatri, a tour guide, 'Jabal Shams Balcony Walk is the most popular and



محمد الماشري
Mohd mashari



highly recommended route for casual hikes. It's an easy path along the rim of the 'Grand Canyon.' The hike begins in Al Khitam village, located at the end of the road at Jabal Shams. Upon entering the village and passing the stalls set up by the locals, you will notice the white, red, and yellow flags indicating the start of the route. The hike level is suitable for hikers with moderate fitness levels. It takes about 3-4 hours and the trail passes through traditional villages and offers stunning views of the surrounding valleys and mountains.

There is also Sab Bani Khamis balcony walk. This trail is considered one of the most famous and easiest routes in Jabal Shams, taking visitors along the mountain's edge with magnificent views of Wadi Nakhr. It is suitable for beginners and families and it takes about 2-3 hours to complete. It features stunning natural scenery, allowing hikers to see deep valleys and towering cliffs, passing through the village of Sab Bani Khamis nestled under a rocky overhang that protects it from rain, waterfall runoff, and cold winds.

Most amazingly, Jabal shams is the best spot for mountain climbing enthusiasts and climbing it during summer is the perfect time as it is snowy during winter. Jaba Shams Summit Trail takes hikers to the summit of Jabal Shams, the highest point in Oman, standing at over 3,009 meters. It is difficult and requires a high level of fitness and climbing experience. It takes about 8-10 hours round trip and shows a breathtaking views of rugged mountains and deep valleys, presenting a wonderful challenge for adventure enthusiasts.

Hikers should be well prepared for such experience by ensuring to wear appropriate clothing and sturdy, comfortable footwear. They should carry water and food as there may be limited water sources along some sections of the trail. Maps or guidebooks should be included and ensure familiarity with the trail before setting out. Most of all, hiking should be totally avoided in bad weather or during midday when temperatures are high.