

Tourist visa to be made easier

The Royal Oman Police is making significant efforts to support the tourism sector and boost the Omani economy. They are enhancing services by simplifying and expediting the electronic visa system, making it easier for travellers to obtain visas for tourism and work purposes in the Sultanate of Oman. There are various types of visas available to cater to different categories of travellers, including a tourist visa for employers, a tourist visa for residents of GCC countries and a tourist visa for non-employers. **SEE P3**

SUNRISE - 05:27 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:01 AM
DHUHR - 12:17 PM
ASR - 03:37 PM
MAGHRIB - 07:02 PM
ISHA - 08:24 PM



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DJOKOVIC CRUISES AT WIMBLEDON, ZVEREV CRASHES



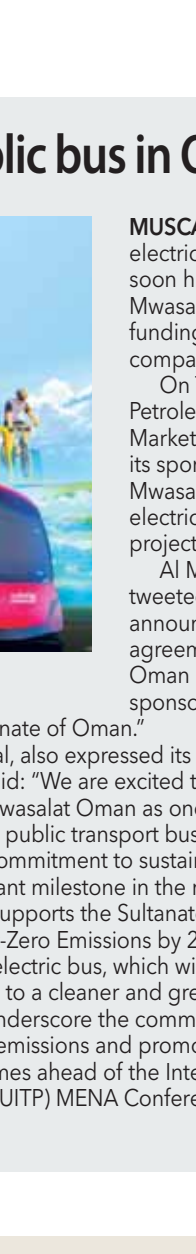
P13

PACT SIGNED TO ESTABLISH IBRI INNOVATION AND SCIENCE CENTRE



P19

RIVER SEINE TO HAVE FLYING TAXI LANDING PAD AT PARIS OLYMPICS



MUSCAT

EA TO HOST OMAN CLIMATE WEEK

The Environment Authority will host Oman Climate Week for the first time in Muscat from February 24 to 27, 2025. This landmark event aims to unite the world in support of climate action and highlight Oman's commitment to a Net-Zero future. Oman Climate Week arrives at a crucial time as the global focus intensifies on climate change mitigation and renewable energy to combat global warming. **SEE P2**

DON'T HIRE ILLEGAL MIGRANTS, WARNS ROP

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has urged companies and individuals to refrain from hiring anyone who is not sponsored by them. Employing illegal immigrants is considered an anti-national act and is punishable under Labour Law No 53/2023. The ROP mentioned that they are actively working to combat illegal immigration into the Sultanate of Oman. **SEE P2**

KYIV

UKRAINE RESCUERS SEARCH KIDS' HOSPITAL

Rescue workers were clearing debris and Ukraine was in mourning on Tuesday, the day after deadly Russian strikes tore open a children's hospital and sparked international condemnation. President Volodymyr Zelensky said 38 people across Ukraine were killed — including four children — and 190 wounded in the wave of nearly 40 missiles that targeted several towns and cities. Officials announced a day of mourning in the capital with flags to be hung at half mast and entertainment events postponed, as cranes and first responders were working at the scene of the Okhmatdyt paediatric hospital. **SEE P7**

SCALING MAJESTIC HEIGHTS



Oman's mountains offer unique opportunities to climbing enthusiasts looking to explore its diverse terrains. Areas such as Hadath, Sharaf, Qantab, Jabal Misht, Black Mountain, Bausher, Qurba Thani, to name a few, offer hundreds of routes to explore using different types of climbing techniques at different levels of skill. **REPORT ON P20**

SAI SUBMITS REPORT TO HIS MAJESTY

MUSCAT: Shaikh Ghusan bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), submitted the 2023 annual report to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

SAI also sent copies of the annual report to both the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman as per Article (66) of the Basic Law of the State, promulgated under Royal Decree No 6/2021, and Article (29) of State Audit Law, promulgated under Royal Decree No 111/2011.

The SAI report included several topics resulting from the enforcement and extension of the Institution's audit on some government units, authorities, investments and companies according to the 2023 annual audit plan.

SAI carried out 187 audit tasks that resulted in 185 audit reports, and their results were communicated to the entities concerned which demonstrated cooperation and response by taking corrective measures and remedies for the observations and implementing the Institution's recommendations. Some irregularities that constitute criminal suspicions were referred to the Public Prosecution Department for

SAI dealt with 951 complaints and reports related to financial and administrative irregularities, improper awarding of certain tenders, abuse of power and others

further action. The SAI annual report included an audit of several topics in the government units, such as the final account of the state, tax assessment and collection activities, financial and administrative activities and performance evaluation of some directorates in the government units, as well as an audit of some aspects related to the sectors of commerce, economy, tourism, housing, labour, health and education, besides some governors' offices.

As for topics related to activities of authorities, investments and companies, the report included an audit of aspects concerned with energy, minerals, aviation, environment, electricity, water, food security and other significant topics. The audited topics were reported to the entities concerned, including the SAI's observations and recommendations.

TURN TO P2

Mwasalat e-public bus in Oman soon



MUSCAT: Oman's first electric public bus could soon hit the roads as Mwasalat has secured funding from two major companies. On Tuesday, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company signed its sponsorship deal with Mwasalat Oman for the electric public transport bus project.

Al Maha Petroleum tweeted: "We are proud to announce the signing of an agreement with Mwasalat Oman as one of the main sponsors of the first electric

public transport bus in the Sultanate of Oman." Last week, Sohar International, also expressed its support for the initiative. In a LinkedIn post, it said: "We are excited to announce the signing of an agreement with Mwasalat Oman as one of the main sponsors of Oman's first electric public transport bus. "As part of our unwavering commitment to sustainable development, this partnership marks a significant milestone in the nation's pursuit of sustainable transportation and supports the Sultanate of Oman's ambitious goal of achieving Net-Zero Emissions by 2050." The statement added: "The electric bus, which will be inaugurated soon, showcases our dedication to a cleaner and greener future." The twin sponsorship agreements underscore the commitment of Omani companies to reducing carbon emissions and promoting green energy solutions. This development comes ahead of the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) MENA Conference, scheduled to be held in Salalah on July 16.

Famine has spread throughout Gaza

GENEVA: The recent deaths of several more children from malnutrition in the Gaza Strip indicate that famine has spread throughout the enclave, a group of independent human rights experts mandated by the United Nations said on Tuesday.

Gaza health authorities say at least 33 children have died of malnutrition, mostly in northern areas which had until recently faced the brunt of the Israeli military campaign launched after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel.

Since early May, the war has spread to southern Gaza, hitting aid flows into the enclave amid restrictions by Israel, which has accused UN agencies of failing to distribute supplies efficiently.

In Tuesday's statement, the group of 11 rights experts cited the deaths of three children aged 13, 9-years-old and six months from malnutrition in the southern area of Khan Younis and the

central area of Deir Al Balah since the end of May.

"With the death of these children from starvation despite medical treatment in central Gaza, there is no doubt that famine has spread from northern Gaza into central and southern Gaza," the experts said.

Their statement, signed by experts including the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, condemned "Israel's intentional and targeted starvation campaign against the Palestinian people".

Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva said the statement amounted to "misinformation".

"Israel has continuously scaled up its coordination and assistance in the delivery of humanitarian aid across the Gaza Strip, recently connecting its power line to the Gaza water desalination plant," it added. — **Reuters** **SEE ALSO P6**



A child sits amid the rubble as Palestinians inspect a house destroyed in an Israeli strike in Nusairat refugee camp on Tuesday. — **Reuters**



VOLUNTEERS REVIVE ANCIENT FRANKINCENSE ROUTE

MOHAMMED AL MASHAIKHI
SADAH, JULY 9

The Kharsh Afidhuq route in the Wilayat of Sadah was used by frankincense caravans in the Dhofar Governorate in a bygone era. It connects the ports of Sadah and Mirbat with the frankincense production sites in the Hawjar area and other production areas located behind the Samhan Mountain range in the north. Cutting through rugged terrain, the Kharsh Afidhuq



The route which was once a major artery for transporting frankincense is now used by trekkers



route provides evidence of the perils that surround frankincense transportation. Frankincense traders had to face all sorts of dangers travelling along this route to access the Frankincense production sites paths to collect frankincense, the unique aromatic substance that was in high demand in all markets of ancient civilisations. Jumaan bin Mohammed al Mashaikhi, a resident of Sadah said that the Kharsh Afidhuq route has recently experienced

rock falls caused by extreme weather hampering the passage of people, livestock and goods and prompting the residents to seek the assistance of the Sawaed Al Khair volunteering team to rehabilitate and restore this vital route. The route which was once a major artery for transporting frankincense is now used by mountain trekkers, military battalions during military training as well as some residents of the area who move the western side of Jabal Samhan during the fall season.

‘Refrain from hiring anyone who is not under your sponsorship’

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has urged companies and individuals to refrain from hiring anyone who is not sponsored by them. Employing illegal immigrants is considered an anti-national act and is punishable under Omani Labour Law No 53/2023. In a statement, the ROP mentioned that they are actively working to combat illegal immigration into the Sultanate of Oman by monitoring borders, tracking smugglers and conducting security campaigns in collaboration with other authorities. Ali bin Salem al Sawai, Director of the Office of the Joint Inspection Team at the Ministry of Labour, emphasised the negative impact of employing



Employing illegal workers disrupts social harmony, increases crime rates and hinders national development

non-Omani workers without proper licensing. Such actions can result in fines up to RO 2,000 and prison sentences ranging from 10 to 30 days. Dr Khalifa bin Saif al Hinai, a legal expert and judge, warned that individuals present in the country illegally may have

criminal backgrounds and could be fleeing justice in other countries. Supporting these individuals in finding work could lead to serious consequences, especially in cases involving arms, drug trafficking, and organised crime. Dr Al Hinai also highlighted

the potential risks associated with hackers who have criminal intentions and records. Enabling illegal workers poses significant economic harm as well, impacting the country's economic stability and security. The ROP stressed the importance of cooperation from society, citizens and expatriates in combating the employment of illegal immigrants. This collective effort is crucial in protecting everyone from the negative effects of this issue. Employing illegal workers disrupts social harmony, increases crime rates and hinders national development. Allowing different nationalities to infiltrate Omani society poses a threat to social activities and creates unfair competition in the labour market for legal economic activities.

DBBS appeals for urgent blood donation

MUSCAT: The Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) in Bausher has said there are low stock levels of blood units at the Central Blood Bank during this time, appealing to donors to donate blood urgently and join the life-saving journey. In a statement, the DBBS said, “Due to the low stock levels of blood units at the Central Blood Bank during this time, we urge everyone to donate blood today.” Individuals wishing to donate blood are requested to visit the blood bank from Saturday to Thursday (8 am to 6 pm) and Friday from 8 am to 2 pm.



NEW WALKING TRACK CONSTRUCTED AT WADI DARBAT

SALALAH: Dhofar Municipality has completed the implementation of a walking track with a length of 800 metres and a width of 7 metres at Wadi Darbat. The new walking track has 3 main entrances including one for people with special needs, seating areas, two platforms along the corridor for watching the view of Wadi Darbat in addition to 28 kiosks to provide various services needed by the visitors and tourists at Wadi Darbat.

EA TO HOST OMAN CLIMATE WEEK

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 9

The Environment Authority will host Oman Climate Week for the first time in Muscat from February 24 to 27, 2025. This landmark event aims to unite the world in support of climate action and highlight Oman's commitment to a net-zero future. Oman Climate Week arrives at a crucial time as the global focus intensifies on climate change mitigation and renewable energy to combat global warming. The event series will explore the cooperation required to deliver a 1.5°C aligned outcome in 2025 in line with commitments made at COP29 and will focus on the collaboration across governments and sectors to reduce climate impact. Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, emphasises the urgency of climate action, stating, “Scaling up investments in climate resilience is essential for survival. Urgent action is needed on financing, adapting to climate impacts, and cutting emissions. We must phase out coal, put a price on carbon, and ensure a just transition to renewables to safeguard our environment for future

generations.” Delegates will experience an immersive experience of insightful talks, hands-on workshops, and preview the latest technologies across various industries, highlighting the role of each sector and individual in achieving a sustainable future. The focus themes will include Climate Mitigation, Climate Adaptation, Climate Finance, Carbon Markets, Climate Technologies, Loss & Damage, and Social Inclusion. Climate Week will emphasise the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to an environmentally responsible future, involving all segments of society. Oman is dedicated to addressing climate change, with a strong emphasis on transitioning to renewable energy and an action plan to scale solutions for decarbonisation. Oman Vision 2040 and its National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change underscore the need for resilient infrastructure. It provides a platform for global industry leaders, policymakers, and innovators to showcase progress, collaborate, and share insights on mitigating while exploring opportunities in Oman and the wider MENA region.

SAI submits report to HM

FROM P1

During 2023, SAI dealt with 951 complaints and reports related to financial and administrative irregularities, improper awarding of certain tenders, abuse of power and others, which were received via available communication channels. The Institution has studied and examined 87 per cent of the received complaints and reports. The constructive cooperation between SAI and other State entities has contributed to the consolidation of the concept of responsibility to protect public funds and preserve the State's gains. — ONA

Omani businesses step in to fund community initiatives

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 9

Business leaders in Oman are taking proactive steps to support their communities through a series of impactful initiatives. These efforts aim to address both immediate needs and long-term development goals across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. One notable initiative is led by local Omani entrepreneur Said bin Ali al Hakmani, who has launched a programme to provide housing and financial aid to around 30 low-income families in the Wilayat

of Nakhal in Al Batinah South Governorate. This initiative complements existing social welfare efforts and underscores a commitment to ensuring housing security for vulnerable community members during the challenging summer months. Al Hakmani stressed, “My goal with this initiative is to motivate and encourage businessmen in all the governorates of Oman, hoping that they pay attention to financially disadvantaged groups, show them their concern, and take even small steps to help them.” He mentioned



The efforts aim to address both immediate needs and long-term development goals across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

that his next plan for this summer is to launch an initiative for people with special needs. Simultaneously, Shell Oman is offering summer internships designed to give young Omanis practical experience in real-world projects. These internships not only enhance participants' professional skills but also contribute to workforce development and economic growth, reinforcing the business sector's role in shaping the future of Oman's economy. Education remains a cornerstone of these community efforts, with businesses sponsoring

a variety of educational programs such as summer camps, workshops, scholarships, and Quran memorisation courses. These initiatives enrich the educational experiences of local youth, promote cultural and religious values, and strengthen community bonds across the nation. The collaborative approach involving businesses, government bodies, and residents working together underscores Oman's unity and resilience in the face of seasonal challenges.



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OMAN'S 1920
OMAN'S 1

Efforts on to make visa services for tourists easier

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

As the tourist season in Oman kicks off, the Royal Oman Police is making significant efforts to support the tourism sector and boost the Omani economy. They are enhancing services by simplifying and expediting the electronic visa system, making it easier for travellers to obtain visas for tourism and work purposes in the Sultanate of Oman.

There are various types of visas available to cater to different categories of travellers, including a tourist visa for employers, a tourist visa for residents of GCC

countries, and a tourist visa for non-employers.

Visa applications are processed promptly as long as they are complete and accurate. It is advisable to submit your application at least four days before your intended arrival in Oman. Processing times may vary depending on the specifics of each application. The system also specifies usage periods for visas post-issuance, such as one month for express visas, three months for visas with a local employer, and one month for visas without an employer.

The Royal Oman Police website notes that after submitting the



application, paying the fees and verifying the data's accuracy, a copy of the visa will be sent electronically to the registered e-mail. It's important to note that payment does not guarantee automatic visa

PROCEDURES

Ensure you have a personal account on the website by filling out your personal data

Access your activated personal account

Find the visa application you need, enter the travel document number or any required personal information, and click the Inquiry button

Print the visa in PDF format

issuance.

An officer from the Royal Oman Police informed the Observer

that the electronic visa system has been expanded to include sponsored tourist visas and express visas, facilitating immediate visa completion through the Royal Oman Police website. This electronicsystem marks a significant shift in service provision, aligning with the strategic objectives of the Royal Oman Police to enhance and streamline services.

For any inquiries, travellers can contact the call and assistance centre. The centre has been activated to provide support and answer questions via the phone numbers listed on the website and through e-mail, ensuring prompt responses to all queries.

OCCI discusses challenges facing businesses

SUHAR: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Al Batinah North Governorate discussed the plans of sectoral committees and their role in addressing the challenges posed to commercial sectors, as well as means to meet the aspirations of the business community in the governorate.

A meeting to this effect was held in Suhar under the auspices of Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the OCCI's branch in Al Batinah North Governorate.

The meeting looked into preparations for the events to be implemented during the last quarter of this year (2024), including two business-related forums. The first, titled



The meeting looked into preparations for the events to be implemented during the last quarter of this year 2024. — ONA

'Reconstruction Horizons Forum', will focus on mining industries. The second will be the 6th GCC Businesswomen's

(with the aim of increasing the volume of trade exchange and investments), studying other countries' experiences (in the sectors of food security, industry, real estate development and mining), organising internal visits to OCCI branches (with the aim of enhancing cooperation and communication, exchanging experiences and successful practices) and discussing common challenges facing the commercial sector.

The meeting approved requests for partnerships with a number of government establishments and private enterprises, with the common objective of better serving members of the public.

— ONA



The Letter of Cooperation includes organising joint exhibitions, conferences and events, as well as activities to raise awareness about reading

Children's libraries sign Letter of Cooperation

MUSCAT: As part of the collaboration between the Children's Public Library and the Russian State Children's Library, the two libraries signed a Letter of Cooperation in the field of organising joint exhibitions, conferences and events, as well as exchanging expertise among staff and collaborating on children's research. This is the first international cooperation agreement for the Children's Public Library.

The Letter of Cooperation was signed on behalf of the Sultanate of Oman by Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at Sultan Qaboos University and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Children's Public Library.

The signing was attended by Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, Hamood bin Salim al Towaiya, the Accredited Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation, and Abdullah bin Hamad al Riyami, Head of the Cultural Cooperation Department at the Foreign Ministry. From the Russian side, the Letter of Cooperation was signed by Maria Vedenyapina, Director of the Russian State

Children's Library. The Letter of Cooperation includes organising joint exhibitions, conferences and events, as well as activities to raise awareness about the importance of reading for children. It also involves exchanging expertise among staff, collaborating on children's research and training library employees on the latest technologies used in libraries. This initiative is part of the library's plans to enhance international cooperation and explore ways of collaboration in areas of mutual interest.

The Russian State Children's Library was established in 1969 in Moscow and is one of the largest children's libraries in the Russian Federation.

The library houses approximately 560,000 books and organises events and workshops to foster a love of reading and learning. It also supports teachers and parents with educational resources and curricula, and includes an information and research centre specialising in children's literature and development. The library receives around 45,000 visitors annually and aims to promote culture and education among the younger generations in the Russian Federation.

Silal Market to boost food security

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

In the trial operation phase of the Silal Central Market for fruits and vegetables located in Khazaen Economic City in the Wilayat of Barka, the Consumer Protection Authority convened a crucial meeting with relevant stakeholders. The meeting aimed to foster collaboration among various institutions and advance sustainable development goals.

The session brought together the Consumer Protection Authority, suppliers and wholesale dealers of fruits and vegetables in the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting was led by Walid bin Ali al Rawahi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Consumer Services and Market Surveillance. The focus was on strengthening existing cooperation, addressing challenges and proposing solutions to benefit the public. The Authority emphasised its commitment to support both suppliers and consumers at the



Silal Central Market.

The Silal Central Market stands as a major national project, highlighting Khazaen Economic City's role in the food security sector. The market serves as a key platform for marketing, exporting, importing and re-exporting of fruits and vegetables. It also acts as a vital marketing outlet for local agricultural products from producing companies and farmers.

Remarkably, within a day of its opening, the market received

600 trucks from various parts of Oman and 68 trucks from international origins via a single inspection platform.

Al Rawahi underscored the Authority's ongoing support across sectors, aiming to achieve significant returns for both providers and consumers. He noted that the cooperation at the Silal Central Market is expected to boost economic recovery, diversification and trade activity. Continuous efforts are being made to ensure the availability

and stable pricing of fruits and vegetables, safeguarding consumer interests and market stability.

Furthermore, the Authority reiterated its commitment to regulating the market and warned against any unauthorised price hikes. The presence of the Authority's office in the Silal Central Market is intended to support suppliers and monitor market dynamics.

Salem bin Sulaiman al Dhahli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, said that the Silal Central Market is a national initiative that strengthens Oman's position in the fruits and vegetables marketing sector and creates investment opportunities with local added value.

During the meeting, stakeholders discussed ensuring consistent product availability and preventing exploitation of market variables. They agreed on mechanisms to maintain product supply and price stability across Oman's markets.



FIGHT PLASTIC POLLUTION, SAVE ENVIRONMENT

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

Plastic bags are convenient and widely used in our daily lives, but they significantly contribute to environmental pollution, the death of wildlife, and pose serious health risks to humans.

When we shop, it's typical for sellers to provide plastic bags for our purchases. Often, these bags end up in the trash, leading to environmental harm.

Plastic bags are notorious for their longevity in the environment, taking up to 2,000 years to decompose. The manufacturing process of plastic releases toxic chemicals that can damage the nervous system, disrupt hormone production and cause cancer. These chemicals also pollute our land, water and air.

The World Health Organisation warns that high exposure to BPA and phthalates, common in beauty products, can cause lung problems and increase the risk of asthma in children.

Additionally, exposure to these compounds can lead to insulin resistance, high blood pressure,

obesity, diabetes and increased risks of kidney and heart disease.

The production of plastic consumes 60–100 million barrels of oil annually, depleting valuable resources and raising oil prices. When plastic bags accumulate in garbage sites, they release chemicals into the ground, contaminating groundwater, which can then affect the plants we eat and the water we drink. This pollution disrupts the natural food chain, impacting animals and plants, from large mammals to microscopic plankton.

SIGNIFICANT STEPS

Recognising these dangers, Oman has taken significant steps to reduce the use of plastic materials. In 2022, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion issued a decision banning the import of plastic bags. This move aims to encourage environmentally friendly manufacturing, support local industries, boost exports and establish a sustainable plastics manufacturing sector.

Ahmed bin Zahir al Hinai, Director General

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of Environmental Affairs, stated that the ban on single-use plastic shopping bags is part of a broader plan to protect Oman's environment and wildlife. This decision aligns with the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law No. 114/2001 and integrates sustainable development goals into national action plans.

Al Hinai explained that the decision followed extensive studies and workshops involving governmental and private entities. An adequate transition period was provided to ensure manufacturers and consumers could adapt without significant disruption. The Authority has reviewed the experiences of other countries with similar bans, noting significant reductions in pollution and environmental preservation. The decision is being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, ensuring compliance by companies and commercial institutions. By taking these measures, Oman is making a substantial effort to reduce plastic pollution and protect both its terrestrial and marine environments.



Sri Lankan Roadshow promotes culture and tourism in Oman



1,000 attendees, including Sri Lankans residing in Oman and local nationals participated in the event.

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 9

The Embassy of Sri Lanka, together with the Sri Lanka Business Council Initiative (SLBCI) in Oman, hosted the inaugural Sri Lankan Roadshow – 2024 themed ‘Serendib the Golden Island’ on recently.

Held at Oasis Mall in Al Khuwair, the event aimed to showcase Sri Lanka as a premier travel destination and highlight its vibrant culture and trade opportunities to over 1,000 attendees, including Sri Lankans residing in Oman and local nationals.

Sabarullah Khan, Sri Lankan Ambassador to Oman, underscored the event’s role in enhancing bilateral economic ties and promoting Sri Lankan trade and tourism post-pandemic.

An introductory video was played showcasing Sri Lankan culture, trade and tourism followed by opening remarks from Anodya Chirasrie, Counsellor and Head of Chancery.



The roadshow featured traditional Sri Lankan dances such as the ‘Mangalam’ dance by students of Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM), followed by the Kohomba Hela and Ravana dances.

A video message from Chalaka Gajabahu, Chairman of Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, emphasised Sri Lanka’s attractions and tourism potential.

Sri Lankan traditional Puja dance, called ‘Mangalam’ dance was performed by the Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM) students to packed audience.

This was followed by traditional dances Kohomba Hella and Ravana representing significant aspect of Sri Lankan dances. There was a video message by Chalaka Gajabahu, Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, followed by special guests visiting the promotional stands at the venue.

Cultural performances also included the

sophisticated Kandyan dance choreographed by Visharad Sasikala Abeysuriya, showcasing Sri Lankan traditions.

Yasas Abeysuriya’s solo songs and a rendition of the popular ‘Manike Mage Hithe’ in Arabic attire added to the cultural diversity.

Highlighting fashion as a universal language, a stunning fashion show by Roshani Rajapakse captured Sri Lankan designs and traditions.

The event concluded with the mesmerising ‘Hela Thala Rata’ dance, showcasing Sri Lanka’s rich history through displays of Angampora martial arts and traditional Kandyan dance.

The grand prize raffle draw, won by Omani national Yousef al Busaidy, offered an all-inclusive vacation to Sri Lanka for two, courtesy of Green Holiday.

The roadshow left a lasting impression, fostering cultural exchange and strengthening economic relations between Oman and Sri Lanka.

Oman dentist awarded best student

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 9

Dr Lakshmi Harish, a former student of Oman Dental College (ODC) and currently practicing at Duroob Al Shifa Dental Clinic in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, has been awarded the prestigious title of ‘Best Postgraduate Student of 2023’ by the International Medical College, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany.

Professor Susanne Bierbaum, who mentored Dr Lakshmi in research methodology, praised her outstanding work and expressed joy in their collaboration. “It was very much fun working with her,” said Prof Bierbaum. “She was full of energy and displayed exceptional initiative in setting up data, qualities not often seen.” Dr Iris Frasheri, clinical supervisor at Ludwig Medical University Munich, Germany, also praised clinical skills Dr Lakshmi for her excellent work.

Dr Lakshmi extends her heartfelt gratitude to her teachers in Oman, acknowledging that the real-life situation-based education provided in Oman helped her meet the high standards of education and examination in Ireland and Germany.

Reflecting on her achievement, Dr Lakshmi commented, “Receiving the title of ‘Best Postgraduate Student of the Year 2023’ is a tremendous honour and a testament to



Dr Lakshmi Harish was awarded best postgraduate student.

the hard-work and support I have received throughout my academic journey.” Dr Harish, completed her MSc in Restorative and Aesthetic Dentistry with honours, earning recognition for her exemplary academic excellence and research. Her certificate states, “Dr Harish’s specialist knowledge and work in her master thesis towards the successful completion of MSc in restorative and aesthetic dentistry has been declared exemplary in terms of highest academic excellence and research leading to honours.” Her thesis examiner also praised her research in a recommendation letter for her PhD application, noting that her work exceeded the university’s expectations.

Reflecting on her journey, Dr

Lakshmi credits her education in Oman for preparing her to face the highest academic challenges. She is an alumni of Indian School Muladha, Indian School Al Ghubrah, and Indian School Sohar, where she gained proficiency in English and competence in various subjects. Her undergraduate programme not only honed her skills as a dentist but also introduced her to medical research and presentation skills.

While at ODC, she served as the ‘Ambassador of Oman’ in the Gulf Dental Students’ Association (GDSA) for two years, organising oral health awareness campaigns with her team. She also presented at multiple conferences in Oman, UAE, and Germany during her undergraduate studies.

EA LAUNCHES TREE PLANTING CAMPAIGN

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 9

The Environment Authority (EA) in Dhofar Governorate is initiating a week-long tree planting campaign as part of a major environmental conservation drive from today. The initiative, which aims to increase green cover and promote environmental responsibility, will involve the planting of 10,000 local trees around the governorate.

The Environment Authority is leading the campaign in partnership with Dhofar Municipality, the Directorate General of Culture and Youth, and Omantel. This collaborative endeavour emphasises the value of a coordinated approach to environmental sustainability.

“The Environment Authority’s steadfast dedication to improving Dhofar’s natural environment is demonstrated by this extensive tree planting campaign,” an Environment Authority spokesperson said. “We encourage all residents and visitors to participate in this initiative and contribute to a greener future for our beloved governorate.”



Around 10,000 tree saplings will be distributed as part of the week-long drive

The week-long programme provides an excellent opportunity for the Dhofar people to engage in environmental stewardship. Residents are encouraged to take part in the planting activities and learn more about the need of protecting the governorate’s unique environment. Following the Environment Authority’s major campaign, which culminated last week and saw a significant 4 million seeds distributed throughout Dhofar, comes this tree planting initiative. These continuous initiatives show how committed the authorities is to halting desertification and advancing biodiversity in the governorate.

TENDER NOTICE

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

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

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are eligible to participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
141/2024/MAFWR/HQ-13 Recall	Drilling and Aquifer Testing of (10) Exploration wells on the Agricultural Investment Land in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah	Wednesday 3/7/2024	Sunday 14/7/2024	Tuesday 23/7/2024	Specialized companies registered with excellent and first grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
596/2023/MAFWR/HQ-72 Recall	Design, Supply, Installation, Operation and Maintenance of Hvac Systems for the Administration Building and Fish Market in Barka Marina	Monday 8/7/2024	Thursday 18/7/2024	Sunday 28/7/2024	Specialized companies registered with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
446/2024/MAFWR/HQ-30	Consultancy Services for Design Review and Construction Supervision of “Manage / Alleviate Sedimentation Problem at Al-Ashkarah Fishery Harbour in Sharqiyah South Governorate”	Thursday 4/7/2024	Tuesday 23/7/2024	Monday 12/8/2024	Specialized companies registered with first and Second grades	(50/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
447/2024/MAFWR/HQ-31	Implementation of Aerial Spraying Operation to Control Dubas bug Insect on Date Palm	Wednesday 3/7/2024	Tuesday 23/7/2024	Tuesday 13/8/2024	Specialized companies registered with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(125/-) Omani riyals for local companies (25/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
449/2024/MAFWR/HQ-32	Routine Maintenance of CCTV for Fishery Harbours	Wednesday 3/7/2024	Tuesday 23/7/2024	Tuesday 13/8/2024	Specialized companies registered with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
450/2024/MAFWR/HQ-33	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Voice Gateways in Branches	Wednesday 3/7/2024	Tuesday 23/7/2024	Tuesday 13/8/2024	Specialized companies registered with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
451/2024/MAFWR/HQ-34	Purchasing hydrometric Monitoring Instruments for updating of Flood Maps Projects	Thursday 4/7/2024	Wednesday 24/7/2024	Tuesday 13/8/2024	Specialized companies registered with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
454/2024/MAFWR/HQ-35	Supply of Pesticides for Dubas bug Control in Date Palm Trees/ Spring Generation 2025	Monday 8/7/2024	Sunday 28/7/2024	Sunday 18/8/2024	Specialized companies registered with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
459/2024/MAFWR/HQ-36	Maintenance of Fishery Harbours in Liwa, Sohar and Al Suwaiq	Monday 8/7/2024	Sunday 28/7/2024	Sunday 18/8/2024	Specialized companies registered with fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for International company that not have head quarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender) and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



Smoke rises in Gaza amid ongoing Israeli strikes. — Reuters



Gazans flee assault that could threaten ceasefire

CAIRO: Gaza City residents fled under Israeli fire as tanks thrust deeper into the heart of the city on Tuesday, the second day of a stepped-up military offensive that Palestinian group Hamas said could jeopardise ceasefire talks.

Qatari and Egyptian mediators, backed by the United States, have accelerated their efforts this week to seal a ceasefire deal aimed at ending the Gaza war and releasing Israeli captives in the enclave in return for Palestinian prisoners jailed in Israel.

On Tuesday, Israeli tanks deepened their incursion into some Gaza City districts including Shujaia, Sabra and Tel Al Hawa, where residents reported the previous day some of the most fierce fighting since the start of the war between Israel and the Palestinians.

Footage circulated on social media on Tuesday showed families packed onto donkey carts and in the backs of trucks piled with mattresses and other belongings racing through the city's streets to

Israeli tanks deepened their incursion into some Gaza City districts where residents reported the previous day some of the most fierce fighting since the start of the war

flee areas under Israeli evacuation orders.

"Gaza City is being wiped out, this is what is happening. Israel is forcing us to leave homes under fire," Um Tamer said, a mother of seven. She said it was the seventh time her family had fled their house in Gaza City, in the north of the enclave and one of Israel's first targets at the start of the war in October.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said all of its medical clinics were out of service in Gaza City due to the evacuation orders.

The assault has unfolded as senior US officials were in the region pushing for a ceasefire after Palestinian Hamas made

concessions last week.

The armed wings of Palestinian groups said they fought against Israeli forces in Tel Al Hawa with anti-tank rockets and mortar fire, and inflicted casualties. There was no immediate response from the Israeli military on those claims.

Palestinian health officials said Israeli air strikes on Tuesday killed six people in a house in Gaza City, nine in two houses in Al Nuseirat and Deir Al Balah in central Gaza and three people in Rafah on the Gaza Strip's southern edge.

An Israeli strike against a group of Palestinians in Al Bureij camp in central Gaza Strip killed at least seven people, most of them children, medics said.

More than 38,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli military offensive since then, according to Gaza health officials.

Hopes among Gazans of a pause in the fighting had revived after Hamas last week accepted a key part of a US ceasefire proposal. But gaps still remain between the two sides. — Reuters

UN experts say children dying in Israel's starvation campaign

GENEVA: UN rights experts on Tuesday accused Israel of carrying out a "targeted starvation campaign" that has resulted in the deaths of children in Gaza.

"We declare that Israel's intentional and targeted starvation campaign against the Palestinian people is a form of genocidal violence and has resulted in famine across all of Gaza," 10 independent United Nations experts said in a statement.

The experts, including the UN special rapporteur on the right to food Michael Fakhri, insisted there was no denying famine was under way.

"Thirty-four Palestinians have died from malnutrition since 7 October, the majority being children," said the experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, but who do not speak on behalf of the United Nations.

Their statement was immediately slammed by Israel's mission to the UN in Geneva, which charged that "Fakhri, and many so-called 'experts' who joined his statement, are as much accustomed to spreading misinformation, as they are to supporting Hamas propaganda



Palestinians collect water from a UNICEF tanker in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

and shielding the terrorist organisation from scrutiny".

The UN experts meanwhile listed three children who had recently died "from malnutrition", after a number of others were said to have starved to death in northern Gaza earlier this year.

"Fayez Ataya, who was barely six months old, died on May 30, 2024, and 13-year-old Abdulqader Al Serhi died on June 1, 2024 at Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al Balah," they said.

Nine-year-old Ahmad Abu Reida died just two days later "in

the tent sheltering his displaced family in Al Mawasi, Khan Yunis", they said.

"With the death of these children from starvation despite medical treatment in central Gaza, there is no doubt that famine has spread from northern Gaza into central and southern Gaza," they said.

The experts decried that the world had not done more to avert this disaster. "When a two-month-old baby and 10-year-old Yazan Al Kafarneh died of hunger on February 24 and March 4 respectively, this confirmed that famine had struck northern Gaza," they said.

"The whole world should have intervened earlier to stop Israel's genocidal starvation campaign and prevented these deaths." "Inaction is complicity."

The UN has been warning for months of a looming famine in Gaza, especially in the north, but one has not been officially declared. "Israel has continuously scaled up its coordination and assistance in the delivery of humanitarian aid across the Gaza Strip," it said, claiming Hamas "intentionally steal and hide aid from civilians". — AFP

EGYPT'S SISI AND CIA'S BURNS DISCUSS TRUCE EFFORTS

CAIRO: Gaza ceasefire negotiations will resume in Doha on Wednesday then return to Cairo on Thursday after talks on Tuesday between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi and US Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns, Egypt's state-affiliated Al Qahera News TV said.

An Egyptian security delegation will head to Qatar's capital on Wednesday "on a mission to bring viewpoints closer between Palestinian Hamas and Israel in order to reach a truce agreement as soon as possible", Al Qahera News quoted a senior source as saying.

"There is an agreement over many points," the senior source

said, adding the negotiations will be back in Cairo on Thursday.

Egypt and Qatar have been spearheading mediation in the nine-month-old war between Israel and Hamas in hopes of ending the fighting and securing the release of Israeli captives in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Israel.

Senior US officials were in the region to push for a ceasefire after Hamas made concessions last week, but the Palestinian group said a new Israeli assault on Gaza on Monday threatened truce talks at a crucial moment, and it urged mediators to rein in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. — Reuters



A man stands in a destroyed building in Khan Yunis. — AFP



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In brief

■ ANKARA



TÜRKIYE LAUNCHES FIRST SATELLITE FOR COMMUNICATION

Türkiye launched its first domestically-produced communications satellite, Turksat 6A, in a move Ankara said would widen the country's satellite coverage and meet its television broadcasting needs. A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket carried the satellite into space from Space Launch Complex 40 (SLC-40) at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said the launch marked the opening of a "new phase" for Türkiye in satellite production. "We produced 81 per cent of the subsystems, satellite ground stations, which is of great importance for our country's future," he said. — **Reuters**

■ BRATISLAVA



SLOVAK PM BACK AT WORK TWO MONTHS AFTER SHOOTING

Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico said he had returned to work on Tuesday, after a lone gunman had shot him four times on May 15. The 59-year-old Fico was shot from close range after a government meeting in central Slovakia and underwent two lengthy surgeries in a nearby hospital. The gunman, identified as 71-year-old Juraj Cintula and prosecuted on terrorism charges, is in custody awaiting trial. "Dear progressive liberal media and opposition, I apologise for having survived but I'm back," Fico said. He was released from hospital on May 31 and made his first public appearance last Friday. — **AFP**

■ ATHENS



GREECE RECORDS HOTTEST JUNE IN OVER SIX DECADES

Greece recorded in 2024 its hottest June since 1960 as the Mediterranean nation braces for heatwaves and wildfires. The average temperature in Greece has increased by 2.5 degrees Celsius during the decades from 1960 to 2024, said Kostas Lagouvardos, research director at the National Observatory of Athens. "The month of June 2024 was characterised by long periods of elevated temperatures over several days, largely surpassing normal seasonal temperatures throughout the country," he added. The nation had a heatwave with temperatures of over 40C. — **AFP**

Modi meets Putin at Kremlin on peace trip



Russia's President Vladimir Putin meets with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Kremlin in Moscow. — **AFP**

MOSCOW: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday told President Vladimir Putin that "war cannot solve problems" and urged peace on a trip to Moscow over two years into the Ukraine offensive.

On his first visit since Russia launched its campaign in Ukraine in February 2022, Modi said he and Putin had chatted on a range of issues, adding: "I was happy that in Ukraine, we could both express our views openly and in detail."

"When innocent children are murdered, one sees them die, the heart pains and that pain is unbearable," Modi told Putin. "I know that war cannot solve problems, solutions and peace talks can't succeed among bombs, guns and bullets," the Indian leader added. "And we need to find a way to peace through dialogue."

Putin thanked Modi for "the attention you pay to the most urgent problems" and said "You are trying to find some ways to solve the Ukrainian crisis, too, of course primarily by peaceful means".

Modi landed in Moscow on Monday hours after Russia launched a massive barrage across Ukraine that killed at least 38 people and heavily damaged a children's hospital in Kyiv, sparking condemnation from governments in Europe and North America.

On Monday evening Modi

was pictured with Putin at the Russian president's country residence, where the leaders spent several hours together, according to the Kremlin.

At the Kremlin, Putin hailed India and Russia's "very long-

standing friendship" and said they now enjoy a "specially privileged, strategic partnership".

Russia is a vital supplier of cut-price oil and weapons to India, but Moscow's isolation from the West and growing ties

with Beijing have impacted its partnership with New Delhi.

Modi is courting closer Western security ties after being returned to power last month as leader of the world's most populous country.

I know that war cannot solve problems, solutions and peace talks can't succeed among bombs, guns and bullets. And we need to find a way to peace through dialogue

NARENDRA MODI

Indian Prime Minister

The United States on Monday urged Modi to make clear in his talks with Putin that "any resolution to the conflict in Ukraine must... be one that respects the UN Charter with respect to Ukraine's territorial integrity".

Modi last visited Russia in 2019 and hosted Putin in the Indian capital two years later.

New Delhi said in February it was pushing Moscow to return several of its citizens who had signed up for "support jobs" with the Russian military, following reports some had been killed after being forced to fight in Ukraine.

New Delhi and Russia have maintained close links since the Cold War, which saw the Kremlin become a key arms provider to the country. — **AFP**

Kyiv rescuers clear rubble from children's hospital



Rescue personnel clear the rubble of the destroyed building of Ohmatdyt Children's Hospital, in Kyiv. — **AFP**

KYIV: Rescue workers were clearing debris and Ukraine was in mourning on Tuesday, the day after deadly Russian strikes tore open a children's hospital and sparked international condemnation.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said 38 people across Ukraine were killed — including four children — and 190 wounded in the wave of nearly 40 missiles that targeted several towns and cities.

Officials announced a day of mourning in the capital with flags to be hung at half mast and entertainment events postponed, as cranes and first responders were working at the scene of the Ohkmatdyt paediatric hospital.

Zelensky said rescue work was ongoing at several of the attack sites and that patients from Ohkmatdyt had been transferred to other facilities.

The interior ministry said

it had completed its search for survivors at the hospital and that two people were killed there and 32 wounded. Eight children had been hospitalised, it said.

"We are continuing our work to increase the protection of our cities and communities from Russian terror. There will be decisions. The world has the necessary strength for this," Zelensky added.

He has been urging allies to bolster Ukrainian air defence systems and was expected to renew those calls as a Nato summit kicked off later Tuesday in Washington.

The Ukrainian president also called for a United Nations Security Council meeting on the strikes that claimed some 10 lives in his hometown of Kryvyi Rig.

Zelensky said some 400 rescuers had responded to the strikes but hundreds of volunteers

gathered at the Ohkmatdyt complex on Monday to help clear rubble and search for survivors.

City officials said that the two people killed at the hospital were both adults, a doctor and a visitor.

Kyiv's mayor said three more people had been pulled dead from the rubble of a housing bloc in a central district that was also struck in the attack.

The total killed in the capital was 31 with 117 wounded, the city's military administration said.

Ukraine said a Russian Kh-101 cruise missile had smashed into the renowned children's hospital but Moscow blamed Ukrainian air defence systems.

The United Nations however said there was a "high likelihood" that the children's hospital in Kyiv suffered "a direct hit" from a missile "launched by the Russian Federation". — **AFP**

French parties scramble for influence after inconclusive vote

PARIS: French parties sought to project strength and gather allies on Tuesday, with the government adrift following an election in which no one political force claimed a clear majority.

Having defied expectations to top the polls, new MPs from the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP) alliance began showing up to visit their new workplaces in parliament ahead of a first session on July 18.

But the coalition of Greens, Socialists, Communists and the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) is still debating over who to put forward as a potential prime minister and whether it could be open to working in a broader coalition.

Combined, the left-leaning parties' hold 193 of 577 seats in the National Assembly and are well short of the 289-seat threshold for a majority.

In the French system, the president nominates the prime minister, who must be able to survive a confidence vote in parliament — a tricky proposition with three closely-

balanced political forces in play.

Any left-leaning government would need "broader support in the National Assembly," influential Socialist MP Boris Vallaud acknowledged in an interview with broadcaster France Inter.

Macron's camp came second in Sunday's vote, taking 164 seats after voters came together to block the far-right National Rally (RN) from power. This left the anti-immigration, anti-Brussels outfit in third place with 143 MPs.

The president has kept Prime Minister Gabriel Attal's government in place for now, hoping horse-trading in the coming days and weeks could leave an opening for him to reclaim the initiative.

However, "there has been an institutional shift. Everyone thinks it's up to the newly-elected National Assembly to bring forth a solution, which (Macron) would simply have to accept," wrote commentator Guillaume Tabard in conservative daily Le Figaro. — **AFP**



French socialist newly-elected Members of Parliament pose at the National Assembly in Paris. — **AFP**

How do we interpret the reality of societies?



Dr Muamar bin Ali Al Tobi

The author is an academic and researcher

It is essential to acknowledge that delving into the depths of human existence, where the mind forms its core and serves as the main artery of thoughts and emotions. We must strive to balance the importance of technical knowledge, extensively covered in previous articles, with the humanities. These disciplines, encompassing psychology, anthropology, and biology, explore human societies and unravel the mysteries of civilisations built on rational foundations. The Palestinian plight, enduring prolonged oppression by Zionism and its allies, exemplifies the complexity of such issues. Discussions and proposed solutions often focus on historical, political, and religious angles, neglecting psychological and philosophical perspectives that could provide deeper insights into the roots of societal dilemmas. Integrating these perspectives with history, politics, and religion can enhance awareness and liberate societies from the constraints of collective mentality that stifles creativity and ethical behaviour. Observing human societies, I see conflicts driven by competition, often disregarding the moral

foundations we consider crucial. This is evident in some Western societies, particularly among politicians, where a disconnect between theory and practice is prevalent. These leaders endorse theories advocating justice, equality, and freedom of expression, deceiving the uninformed with an appearance of morality, yet in practice, there is a glaring contradiction. The support some Western politicians offer to the Zionist entity, aiding its genocidal acts in Gaza and suppressing freedom of expression, underscores the ethical void obstructing justice and human rights. Amidst the conflicts within human societies, where moral instincts clash with survival instincts through conflict-driven means, some perceive an existential chaos, mistakenly believing in the absence of a creator and viewing life as random and chaotic, stripping away the will of existence. This chaos is prevalent, incompatible with ethical principles, due to the dominance of groups oppressing others, often exploiting humanity in the absence of awareness and ethical elevation. A segment of humanity falls victim to collective mentality and the will of powerful individuals, utilising methods that evolve

THE AWAKENING OF HUMAN CONSCIENCE BRIDGED THE MORAL GAP, ADDRESSING THE CHRONIC ETHICAL DILEMMAS THREATENING HUMAN SOCIETIES

with time. In our era, media steer the collective mindset, frequently undermining ethical values and breeding criminals. In a contrasting scene, efforts to restore humanity and its ethical foundations to their existential essence, rooted in human awareness, emerge. This represents a resistance against the chaos and conflicts within human societies. This scene manifests in the global rise of human consciousness, transcending religion, race, or ethnicity, expanding the moral awareness of individuals within societies. This counters Colin Wilson’s concept of the Outsider describing individuals in societies driven by conflicts and trivialities, feeling disconnected from a society lacking ethical foundations, and overshadowed by injustice and oppression. Wilson’s writings in 1956 reflect the harsh experiences of Western societies during the World Wars, fostering a sense of despair in the ‘Outsider.’ Yet, the awakening of conscience bridged the moral gap, addressing the ethical dilemmas threatening societies, nearly extinguishing life’s ethical aspects. The global liberation of the mind from constraints blocking ethical impulses signifies a rejection of the disconnect between these impulses and the desired reality.

Meals dry up as Zimbabwe’s drought bites

FANUEL JONGWE

A bed of sand and a patch of mud is all that remains of Kapotesa dam, which once provided the water vital for crops and livestock in this remote part of Zimbabwe. Nearby, farmer Georgina Kwengwere walks among corn stalks desiccated by the drought that is ravaging her country and leaving millions of people in need of food aid. “I did not harvest anything after all my effort and using all our savings to buy seeds,” the 54-year-old said, shaking her head despondently. “Not even a single cob.” The Kapotesa dam dried up in May, Kwengwere said. “Only God knows how we are going to survive until the next harvest next year,” she said. When the rains are good, water from the dam in the northeastern Mudzi district allows Kwengwere and her husband to grow vegetables to feed themselves and their six children. There is even a surplus to sell for cash to buy livestock and pay school fees. Now Kwengwere has to join other villagers on a five-kilometre daily walk to a business centre in the small town of Kotwa to look for odd jobs to be able to buy food. On a good day she will make about \$3; on a bad day, she makes the long-walk back home to her village of Mafuta empty-handed. Like most villagers in the district of around 164,000 people, her family has cut back meals to just two a day. “Most of us have no food in our homes,” said Takesure Chimbu, 58, also from Mafuta. “Without water, everything is down,” he said. Cases of malnutrition have jumped by around 20 per cent in Mudzi in the past three months, district medical officer Kudzai Madamombe said. “Food is quite expensive in the district especially due to the fact that we are drought-prone,” he said, calling for government assistance. Faced with this spike in malnutrition, health experts in Mudzi have come up with a nutritional porridge called maworesa, which means “the very best” in the local Shona language. It is made from cheap, locally sourced ingredients such as eggs, sugar beans and baobab fruit that are contributed by the villagers. The porridge was concocted to cover basic nutritional needs by including carbohydrates, protein, and fruits and vegetables, Madamombe said. “This has greatly helped in curbing malnutrition using as little money as possible while making sure that every child in every family gets at least four basic food groups at least once a week,” he said. — AFP

Democracy: A complex, multifaceted concept



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The word democracy is one of those words or phrases like ‘freedom’ or ‘the public good’ which Western and East European politicians in particular are often fond of using to gain support from their people. Indeed western politicians often make statements that are quite meaningless without giving their subjective definition of what these words or phrases mean. How often have we heard Western leaders say, “We need to make our country great again.” Few question what they mean by ‘great’ and more worrying still is that the voters who applaud such statements often have no idea what their country being ‘great again’ means. For English does it mean returning to the 19th Century when Britain had an Empire or does it mean when Britain was the greatest industrial power or perhaps during WW2 when Britain was victorious against the Nazis or when in 1966 England won the football World Cup? For many Germans, neither WW2 nor losing to England in the finals of the World Cup would be regarded as great. However, such words and expressions are spoken by politicians and accepted by Western voters as being universally true. If you were to put ten Western voters in a room and ask each of them, what the word democracy means you might find that you get ten different answers. In the UK, we are told we have ‘representative democracy.’ This form of democracy is a political system whereby voters as in England and most Western countries vote for a Political Party which is allowed to pass laws and rule on their behalf. It is not a ‘direct democracy’ whereby the citizens of a country have a right to vote for legislation before it is passed into law. An example of direct democracy in Britain was when its citizens were given a referendum to decide whether or not we should exit or remain in the European Union. Such an act of direct democracy is rare and many UK politicians will be wary of allowing this again. Within reason under representative democracy ruling politicians can decide to do what they want to do for a period of five years, rebutting any criticism of their actions by saying that they were elected



A person runs past a polling station shortly before the polls open and voting begins in the UK general election in London. – Reuters file photo

by the people to do things on their behalf even if the people don’t like it. No better example of this is when Tony Blair took Britain to war against Iraq in 2003. It seemed likely that had the British been allowed to vote on such an important decision they would have voted against a war that most now realise was entered into based on POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE RARELY LIVED UP TO THEIR PROMISES AND AS A RESULT, THE BRITISH VOTING PUBLIC HAS BECOME CYNICAL

inaccurate information produced by Blair and his political allies. Blair when going to war had stated that “I have made the right decision” on behalf of the British people. Blair’s decision to go to war was made in the face of widespread criticism and ignoring the hundreds of thousands of anti-war demonstrators in London. The word “I” is relevant. He didn’t use the word “we.” Of course, legally under representative democracy Blair and his Members of Parliament were within their rights to take us into a war we disagreed with and weren’t in favour of. Blair realised that under the UK’s political system of representative democracy, he had virtually been given a blank cheque to do as he wished. He wasn’t loathe to cash it in when it suited him using his Party’s large majority in

the House of Commons. There are many different types of democracy including Direct democracy, Representative democracy, Parliamentary democracy, Authoritarian democracy, Participator democracy, Islamic democracy, and Social democracy. And, probably quite a few more. Winston Churchill reportedly said, possibly often mentioned out of context, “that democracy is the worst form of government except for all others.” Since I began spending much of the year in my beloved Oman, a country that is stable and peaceful and where all are given equal rights under Omani law, I have begun to question Churchill’s famous statement. However having been brought up in England and having gotten used to its way of how we are governed, I remain hopeful that we may one day have a UK government that truly represents its people’s best interests. We have just elected a new Labour Party government which says it will do all those things for its citizens which the outgoing Party failed to do. The trouble is that we long-suffering voters have heard such statements from countless past political parties when they were first elected. These parties have rarely lived up to their promises and as a result, the British voting public has become cynical. The turn-out of voters for our latest General Election was one of the lowest in history. 40 per cent of those who were eligible to vote did not. I was therefore in good company being one of those who stayed at home watching the football on TV.

It's not the end of the world

Climate change has become the biggest crisis of our era, and global warming is dangerously close to spiralling out of control. It is causing suffering and death, and we're all obsessed with the talk of changing environmental metrics!

Look at the year 2023 alone, when heatwaves claimed hundreds of lives in Mexico and the US and wrecked widespread devastation in Europe, China, Laos, and many other parts of the world.

Tornadoes and wildfires displaced thousands of people in China, Japan, Pakistan, Chile, Brazil and Haiti, to name a few countries.

Beyond predictions, the weather has been crazy, and it is forecast worsen in the years ahead. A few months ago, the World Meteorological Organization issued a "red alert" about global warming due to the huge rise in greenhouse gases and land and water temperatures.

The agency's secretary-general, Celeste Saulo, was quoted by news agencies as saying, "Never have we been so close — albeit on a temporary basis at the moment — to the 1.5°C lower limit of the Paris agreement on climate change."

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the planet has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius since the preindustrial era began 250 years ago.

The warning is that it could reach a worst-case scenario of 4 degrees Celsius by 2100 if we fail to tackle the causes of climate change.

But can the Earth handle this change and save us from the doomsday warnings? As experts point out though we cannot stop it, we can slow the rate.

If we examine the weather history, we will find that current events are nothing unusual.

In this context is the book *Not the End of the World* by data scientist Hanna Ritchie, in which she argues, "If we take several steps back, we can see something truly radical, game-changing and



Samuel Kutty @samkuttyyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

life-giving happening."

The book, packed with the latest research, practical guidance and enlightening graphics, makes us rethink almost everything we've been told about the environment.

Look at all those geologic timelines, including changing atmospheric gases, ice ages, earth quakes, floods and other extinction events — all these have happened over and over in the past, and the Earth has handled all of them!

"All these problems are big. But they are solvable. We are not doomed. We can build a better future for everyone.

Let's turn that opportunity into reality," Hanna suggests, adding, "The time for debating is over. We need to move past it to the question of what we're going to do about it."

In the past, it was common for disasters to claim millions of lives a year. Similarly, air pollution kills millions of people every year, but it doesn't have to be this way.

We know how to keep levels of air pollution very low, she points out in the book.

Despite being heavily criticised, the book presents what the data and facts are.

The author suggests realistic ways to adapt in energy, transport, food and construction to rein in climate change while improving human well-being at the same time.

Although I personally don't agree with every point in this book, there are many things that make me think, and I hope they will also make other readers think.

The book offers us all hope, especially those who are bombarded with negative messages about their future.

But one thing is true: the world has woken up to the reality of climate change. People are now taking action.

If we want a sustainable future, we need to create it. The time for debating whether climate change is happening or not is over.

We should accelerate our actions and focus our efforts, although solutions to the crisis turn out to be political in nature.

THE WORLD HAS WOKEN UP TO THE REALITY OF CLIMATE CHANGE. PEOPLE, IF NOT ALL, ARE NOW TAKING ACTION. IF WE WANT A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE, WE NEED TO CREATE IT

MAIDEN FLIGHT



The European Space Agency (ESA) satellite launcher Ariane 6 rocket moves to the launch pad prior its lift off at the Guiana Space Centre in Kourou, French Guiana, on Tuesday. Ariane 6's maiden flight will also carry 17 different "passengers", including 11 university micro-satellites, as well as re-entry capsules and small scientific experiments. — AFP

The role of the Arab world in Sudan's future

As the world watches with averted eyes, the people of Sudan endure an unfolding nightmare. The civil wars and conflicts that ravage this vast and storied land are not mere footnotes in the annals of geopolitical strife; they are a humanitarian catastrophe of monumental proportions.

Sudan is not simply a country with people who represent diversity, resilience, and a rich history and culture. This country is blessed with highly educated human resources, vast and fertile lands, enormous animal wealth and rich natural resources. It offers promises of growth and development for the Arab world and Africa.

The Sudanese crisis, if left unchecked, harbours the potential to unleash ideological and security perils that will reverberate throughout the Arab world for generations.

The collapse of governance, the scarcity of resources and the proliferation of armed groups have created a fertile ground for extremism and radical ideologies, most notably among children and youth. The suffering of the Sudanese people is not confined to physical deprivation; it extends to the erosion of their cultural and social fabric, threatening the very identity of this ancient land.



Ahmed Al Mukhaini

The writer is a Muscat-based policy analyst and international interlocutor

THE SITUATION IN SUDAN DEMANDS A MULTIFACETED APPROACH THAT ADDRESSES BOTH THE IMMEDIATE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND THE UNDERLYING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

It is imperative that the international community, and particularly the conscientious leaders and policymakers of Oman, the GCC and Arab world act decisively to prevent Sudan from descending further into chaos and oblivion.

The international community's apathy towards Sudan's plight is not merely a moral failing; it is a strategic blunder. The vacuum of power and governance in Sudan provides a breeding ground for extremist ideologies and transnational threats.

The fractures within Sudanese society can easily spill over into neighbouring countries, destabilising the region and fostering a climate of perpetual conflict.

Unfortunately, foreign interventions in Sudan have often been marked by competing interests and a lack of coordination, leading to exacerbated conflicts and further destabilisation.

The Arab world, already grappling with its own array of challenges, cannot afford to ignore the simmering cauldron that Sudan represents. The ideological undercurrents that flow from Sudan's chaos could seep into the

broader Arab world, stoking fires of extremism and unrest.

The suffering of the Sudanese people, if left unaddressed, will echo far beyond Sudan's borders, haunting the Arab world for years to come.

The situation in Sudan demands a multifaceted approach that addresses both the immediate humanitarian needs and the underlying political and social issues. Hence, a four-track path is proposed as follows:

International humanitarian intervention: The immediate priority must be to alleviate the suffering of the Sudanese people. This requires a coordinated international effort to provide humanitarian aid, ensure safe corridors for displaced persons, and support local and international NGOs working on the ground. The international community must commit substantial resources to address the urgent needs for food, shelter, medical care, and education.

Diplomatic engagement and mediation: The Arab League, the African Union and the United Nations must take a proactive role in mediating peace talks between the warring factions. These efforts

should be supported by key international players, including Oman, whose diplomatic acumen can help bridge divides and foster dialogue.

A comprehensive peace agreement that addresses the root causes of conflict, including ethnic tensions, political representation and resource distribution, is essential.

Strengthening governance and institutions: Long-term stability in Sudan depends on the establishment of robust and inclusive governance structures.

The international community must support efforts to build democratic institutions, promote the rule of law, and ensure accountability for war crimes and human rights abuses.

This includes providing technical assistance, financial support and capacity-building programmes to strengthen Sudan's civil society and governmental institutions.

Regional cooperation and development: The Arab world must recognise that Sudan's stability is integral to regional security and prosperity. Regional cooperation initiatives, focusing on economic development, infrastructure

projects and cultural exchanges, can help integrate Sudan into the broader Arab and African economies. This will not only provide economic opportunities for the Sudanese people, but also foster a sense of shared destiny and mutual support.

We must rise above geopolitical calculations and respond with the urgency and compassion that the situation demands. The suffering of the Sudanese people is a stain on the conscience of the world, and it is within our power to help them find peace and dignity.

As far as the leaders and policymakers of Oman are concerned, Oman's special relationship with Sudan and Africa makes it imperative for us to carve our own role in this endeavour. Our legacy of diplomacy, peace-building and humanitarianism positions Oman uniquely to lead efforts in galvanising regional and international support for Sudan.

In this hour of darkness, let us be the light that shatters the darkness of apathy and oblivion, and guides Sudan towards a future of hope and renewal. Let us not turn a blind eye to their suffering, but instead, extend our hands in solidarity and action.



Training of football team in full throttle in Spain

MOHSIN JOINS BANGKOK UNITED FC CLUB

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

The Oman national football team have completed over six training sessions since their camp in Spain began last week. Head coach Jaroslav Silhavy and his staff have shifted focus to the technical and tactical development of the players after an initial emphasis on fitness. The coaching staff gave one day rest to the team on Monday and resumed training on Tuesday. Oman's striker Mohsin al Ghassani left the external camp and travelled to Thailand as he joined the training of his new team at True Bangkok United FC. The Seeb former player had signed a contract with the Thai club for the s43 next season after successful seasons with Seeb club. Training takes place daily in the Asturias region, where favourable temperatures and occasional rain provide an optimal environment. This 20-day camp is crucial for Oman as they prepare for the third round of the AFC Asian Qualifiers Road to 26, starting in September. Oman will face Iraq in Basra on September 5 and then take on South



Korea in Muscat on September 10. Additionally, the camp serves as a key preparation phase for the Gulf Cup in December in Kuwait,

where Oman hopes to improve on their runner-up finish in January 2023 in 25th edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra.

The selected players are diligently working to meet all the camp's objectives. The coaching staff will address weaknesses from the last round of qualifiers and aim to enhance team harmony, especially among newcomers including Al Wahda's goalie Ibrahim al Rajhi, Sultan al Marzooq (Dhofar), Khalid al Ghatreefi (Ibri) and Jawad al Azi (Al Seeb). Mohammed al Ghafri (Al Rustaq) and Nasser al Rawahi (Oman club) came back to the team. OMAN SQUAD: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayeze al Rushedi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Mohammed al Musallami, Khalid al Buraiki, Ghanim al Habshi, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmed al Kaabi, Amjad al Harthy, Abdulaziz al Shmoosi, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaei, Omar al Malki, Zaher al Aghbari, Arshad al Alawi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Abdulrahman al Mushefrie, Musaab al Maamari, Mohsin al Ghassani, Essam al Subhi, Nasser al Rawahi, Mohammed al Ghafri, Sultan al Marzooq, Khalid al Ghatreefi, Jawad al Azi and Mohammed al Ghafri.



Mohsin al Ghassani

Al Harthy all set for Rolex 6hrs of Sao Paulo

Brazil: FIA World Endurance Championship racer Ahmad Al Harthy will imminently arrive in South America for the first time in his motor racing career, as the Omani prepares to resume his 2024 campaign at the famous Interlagos circuit in Brazil – the Rolex 6 Hours of Sao Paulo. Round five of the FIA WEC season this weekend, 13th/14th July, brings an entirely new challenge for the Omani who is determined to get his championship back on track with Team WRT team-mates Maxime Martin and Valentino Rossi. While there has been disappointment over the past couple of FIA WEC events, retirements at both Spa-Francorchamps and in the 24 hours of Le Mans, Al Harthy's positivity and focus is perhaps greater than ever as he strives to mount a major challenge in the No.46 BMW M4 LMGT3.

Prior to the aforementioned frustrations in rounds three and four, Al Harthy, Martin and Rossi had celebrated their maiden LMGT3 podium finish at the 6 Hours of Imola in late April with a fantastic run to second position. In the season curtain-raiser in Qatar, the squad raced to the fourth position. Following the Imola event, the trio held fourth in the LMGT3 standings, underlining the strong start to the 2024 campaign which had been made. Indeed, this showed the true level of performance and competitiveness of the squad and the chief aim is to return to that and deliver the same over the remaining four race meetings of the season – beginning this weekend in Brazil. Practice at Intergalos gets underway on Friday, 12th July, and so there will be plenty to learn for the second-year FIA

WEC racer as he tackles the 4.3-kilometre track – home, of course, to the Brazilian Grand Prix since the 1970s – for the first time. AHMAD AL HARTHY “It's a very exciting prospect to be visiting and racing in Brazil for the first time. Interlagos is a fantastic track with a lot of history, and it's going to be amazing to drive there for the first time. We're all determined to be back challenging for the podium, we've had two unfortunate weekends in FIA WEC over the last couple of events so we're all focused on turning that around. “There's a lot to learn being a new track for me, but I'm confident we can hit the ground running and the important thing is to ensure we have the best car we can for the race. Qualifying is always very important, and we've done a good job there so far, but we

need to have the speed and consistency to compete in, what will be, a very challenging race. I'm looking forward to getting started.” Opening practice in Sao Paolo will get underway at 10.45 local time on Friday, 12th July, with the second session following at 15.15. On Saturday, 13th July, session three will begin at 10.30 local time ahead of qualifying at 14.30. The Rolex 6 Hours of Sao Paolo is scheduled to take place on Sunday, 14th July, with the big race starting at 11.30 local time. FIA World Endurance Championship LMGT3 Driver Standings 1st Yasser Shahin / Morris Schuring / Richard Lietz, 75pts 2nd Klaus Bachler / Alex Malykhin / Joel Sturm, 75pts 3rd Darren Leung / Sean Gelael / Augusto Farfus, 73pts 4th Marco Sorensen / Erwan Bastard, 42pts 5th Francois Heriau / Simon Mann / Alessio Rovera, 41pts 9th Ahmad Al Harthy / Maxime



FIA World Endurance Championship Round 4 Le Mans, France. – AFP

Djokovic cruises at Wimbledon, Zverev crashes

LONDON: Novak Djokovic demolished Holger Rune on Monday to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals, staying on track for a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam as Taylor Fritz stunned fourth seed Alexander Zverev.

Ukraine's Elina Svitolina wore a black ribbon and broke down in tears as she progressed hours after a Russian missile barrage killed dozens and ripped open a children's hospital in Kyiv.

Seven-time champion Djokovic, who dropped sets in the second and third rounds, was expected to be tested by Rune, but instead gave the young Dane a harsh lesson, winning 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in a shade over two hours.

The Serb, 37, still wearing a knee support on his right knee after surgery last month, did not drop a single point in the opening three games against his bewildered opponent.

He engineered a single break in the second set before two more breaks in the third set sealed a quarter-final against Australian ninth seed Alex de Minaur.

But despite his easy win, the Serbian launched an angry tirade against some sections of the Centre Court crowd, whom he accused of showing him disrespect.

"To all the fans that have had respect and stayed here tonight, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and I appreciate it," said a frustrated Djokovic after reaching a 60th Grand Slam quarter-final.

"And to all those people that have chosen to disrespect the player — in this case me — have a good night," he added, mocking his tormentors.

Djokovic seeking to equal Roger Federer's record of eight Wimbledon men's titles, is also aiming to pull clear of Margaret Court's mark of 24 majors.

- Fritz comeback -

Earlier, 13th seed Fritz mounted a stirring comeback from two sets down to dump big-serving Zverev out of the tournament, winning 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 6-3.

Confronted with Zverev's relentless serve, the American looked to be heading home but engineered a crucial break in the third set — the first time the German had been broken in the entire tournament — changing the momentum of the match.

"It was amazing to do that on Centre Court, two sets down in front of this crowd. It's a dream,"

said the American, who will face Italian 25th seed Lorenzo Musetti in the last eight.

"The thing was I still felt I was playing really well for being down two sets. I was just thinking it sucked to be playing this well and to lose in straights."

Zverev, wearing a support on his left knee, said he was "on one leg today" as a result of an injury he picked up in his third-round win against Cameron Norrie. "It is nothing that I need surgery on," he added. "It is nothing that doesn't heal by itself. It just needs time."

The 27-year-old, who was runner-up at the French Open last month, played down fears he would not be able to defend his Olympic title at the upcoming Paris Games.

TEARFUL SVITOLINA

Svitolina wept on court after reaching the last eight for a third time with a 6-2, 6-1 win against China's Wang Xinyu in just 55 minutes.

The 21st seed, wearing a black ribbon on her white shirt, was in action after Russia struck cities across Ukraine in missile attacks, killing 36 people and heavily damaging a Kyiv children's hospital, according to Ukrainian officials.

"It's a very difficult day today for all Ukraine people," said the 29-year-old Svitolina.

As she attempted to compose herself, she received a lengthy round of applause from spectators on Court Two.

"It was not easy to focus on the match. Since this morning it has been very difficult to read the news and go on court."

Svitolina will next play Russian-born Kazakh Elena Rybakina, who progressed when Anna Kalinskaya retired with the score at 6-3, 3-0.

Australian ninth seed De Minaur, who won the 's-Hertogenbosch grass-court tournament last month, prevailed in four sets against France's Arthur Fils.

Musetti ruined big-serving Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard's 21st birthday by coming from a set down to win 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-2.

Former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko beat Iga Swiatek's conqueror Yulia Putintseva 6-2, 6-3 and will next play the Czech Republic's Barbora Krejckikova, who beat 11th-seeded Danielle Collins in straight sets. — AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning. — REUTERS



Zverev walks off the court after losing. — REUTERS

OOC's Executive Office holds third meeting



Khalid al Zubair head the meeting

MUSCAT: Oman Olympic Committee's Executive Office held its third meeting for this year on Tuesday, the meeting was headed by Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of the Oman Olympic Committee(OOC).

The office reviewed several topics and approved the Oman mission that will take part in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games which will be held between July 26 and August 11. The attendees reviewed the list of teams that expressed their desire to participate in the 6th Asian Indoor Games slated to be held in Thailand during November 21-30.

The meeting reviewed a statement of the allocations and financial and logistical requirements for the external

participations that fall under the umbrella of Oman Olympic Committee this year. This included the first Gulf Youth Games which was held in the United Arab Emirates in April, the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, and the Asian Indoor Games in Thailand.

Also discussed at the meeting was the latest developments regarding the Sultanate of Oman's hosting of the third Gulf Beach Games which will be held next year with the participation of all Olympic committees in the GCC countries.

The meeting also discussed the preparations for holding the Oman Olympic Committee's general-assembly and the elections for the 2025-2028 term and reviewed the procedures required in this regard. It was

agreed to refer the matter to the next Board of Directors meeting for approval. The meeting discussed activating the Olympic Museum of the Oman Olympic Committee and the most important steps that should be taken to implement it in line with the vision and objectives of the committee.

In addition, the members reviewed the invitations received by the Oman Olympic Committee including an invitation to attend the 44th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia which will be held in Delhi, India on September 8, and the regular meeting of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) which will be held in Portugal from October 29 to November 1.

Philipsen finally bags stage win as Pogacar stays in control

SAINT-AMAND-MONTROND, FRANCE:

Belgian Jasper Philipsen finally claimed victory in this year's Tour de France when he won the 10th stage with a textbook sprint on Tuesday.

Philipsen, who won four stages on the world's biggest race last year, benefited from a perfect lead-out by Alpecin-Deceuninck teammate and world champion Mathieu van der Poel to prevail after 187.3-km (116 miles) from Orleans.

Eritrean Biniam Girmay, who has already won two stages in this edition, took second place with German Pascal Ackermann coming home third.

Slovenian Tadej Pogacar retained the overall leader's yellow jersey after an uneventful day as the peloton gears up for a tricky mountain stage in the Massif Central on Wednesday.

The peloton stayed compact throughout the day through a few rain showers but everyone stayed quiet after Monday's rest day.

Agitation came in the final five kilometres with the sprinters' teams looking to get the best position and Alpecin-Deceuninck did the best job.

Van der Poel crushed the pedals with 300 metres to go, leaving Philipsen to finish it off comfortably for his seventh career win on the Tour. It was a big relief for the 26 year-old, whose best result was a second place since the start in Florence.

"We came on the Tour de France with a strong lead out train and it paid off today. The mark is checked now we can continue the Tour with more confidence," Philipsen said.

"We just had to keep believing, but every time you waste an opportunity, it's gone, and chances are limited, sometimes the break way goes all the way.



Belgian rider Jasper Philipsen (C) cycles past the finish line.— AFP

"Last week was not our week and we intended on starting this week with a win," added Philipsen, who praised Van der Poel for his hard work in the finale.

"Mathieu is a really strong guy. When he can show his power and play his part there aren't many riders who can emulate him. Having the world champion as your lead-out guy is fantastic."

The only bad news for Philipsen is that he did not regain much ground on Girmay as his rival stayed firmly in control of the points classification. Girmay has 267 points to Philipsen's 195. — Reuters

Semi-final is just another game for England’s Rice

BLANKENHAIN, GERMANY: Declan Rice is taking England’s Euro 2024 semi-final against the Netherlands in his stride and believes they have the momentum to beat the Dutch and win their first-ever European Championship.

The Arsenal midfielder, the bedrock for England during what has been a lacklustre run to the last four, said he was in relaxed mood ahead of Wednesday’s clash in Dortmund, while expecting a tough game.

“It’s business as usual... I don’t put too much pressure on myself, I don’t think about it too much,” Rice told England’s Lions’ Den programme.

“It’s another game of football, it’s a semi-final and that’s the only way I think about it.”

“We’re here for a reason, Holland are here for a reason and may the best team win. It’s a game of football, we feel like we’ve got a really good bit of momentum on our side,” he added.

The statistics underline Rice’s contribution for England, covering more distance in the tournament than any other player at 63.9 km (39.7 miles) over five matches, with the fourth most tackles and balls recovered.

Rice said it was all in a day’s work.

“This is our job, this is what we’re conditioned for, 90-minute football matches,” he said.

“The bigger the games, the more driven I get and I just get extra spurts of energy... they say I run too much but it’s just a part of me, I love trying to help my team-mates and I love winning the ball back.”

Victory in Dortmund would send England into their second successive Euros final and their third major final overall.

Rice believes England can go all the way and urged fans to keep backing the team ahead of what he called a massive game against the Netherlands, for a chance to meet Spain or France.

“We’ve got a lot of respect for them. If you look at the history of the Dutch, the players they’ve produced, the managers... they’ve always been the top nation. I’m never going to sit here and talk them down,” Rice said.

“We’re really confident. Keep backing us, keep supporting us because we’re feeling that love, that energy. Hopefully, we can create history again by going back-to-back finals.”

— Reuters



Spain fans outside the stadium. – REUTERS



France fans gather at Marienplatz. – REUTERS



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Oman’s public revenue reaches RO 5.075 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 9

The state’s public revenues by the end of May 2024 amounted to approximately RO 5.075 billion, marking a decline of seven per cent compared to the same period in 2023, which recorded RO 5.463 billion.

This drop is primarily attributed to a reduction in both oil and non-oil revenues. The financial performance bulletin from the Ministry of Finance revealed a two per cent decline in net oil revenues, which stood at RO 2.740 billion by the end of May 2024, down from RO 2.810 billion in the same period of 2023.

The average oil price achieved was \$82 per barrel, with an average production rate of 1,006,000 barrels per day.



A two per cent decline in net oil revenues is recorded which stood at RO 2.740 billion by the end of May 2024.

Net gas revenues saw a more significant decrease of twenty-four per cent, reaching RO 763 million by the end of May 2024, compared to RO 1.300 billion in the same period in 2023. This reduction is due to a change in the gas revenue collection methodology.

Current revenues also decreased, collecting RO 1.562 billion by the end of May 2024, down by RO 82 million from the RO 1.644 billion recorded in the same period of 2023.

Public spending by the end of May 2024 was RO 4.724 billion, a reduction of RO 158 million or three per cent compared to the RO 4.882 billion spent in the same period in 2023.

Civil ministries’ current expenditures amounted to RO 3.340 billion, a decrease of RO 25 million from the RO 3.365 billion

recorded as of May 2023.

Development expenditures for ministries and civil units were RO 430 million by the end of May 2024, with a disbursement rate of forty-eight per cent of the total development liquidity allocated for 2024, amounting to RO 900 million.

Total contributions and other expenditures increased by eleven per cent, totalling RO 754 million compared to RO 678 million in the same period in 2023.

Support for the social protection system, petroleum products and the transportation sector up to the end of May 2024 amounted to approximately RO 233 million, RO 137 million and RO 30 million, respectively.

Additionally, RO 166 million was transferred to a designated debt repayment item. — ONA

Pact signed to establish Ibri Innovation and Science Centre



MUSCAT: OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries — an OQ Group Company — and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), signed yesterday an agreement with the Office of the Governor of Al Dhahirah to design, establish and manage the Ibri Innovation and Science Centre.

With an investment of RO 1.5 million, the project aims to promote sustainable development in line with Oman Vision 2040 and encourage innovation among the youth of Oman.

This strategic partnership aims to contribute to the development of Al Dhahirah Governorate through sustainable projects.

The establishment of this centre demonstrates the commitment of the two companies to social responsibility, community service and supporting local collaboration. It aims to create new growth opportunities and partnerships through the planning and execution of social projects, supporting the social and economic development goals of Oman.

Signing the agreement

were Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah Governorate; Kamil al Shanfari, Chief Executive OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries; and Engineer Mohammed bin Ahmed al Ghareebi, External Affairs, Communication and Social Investment Manager at PDO.

The centre will offer a variety of facilities to benefit the local community, including an innovation hub, a youth and culture centre, a museum, a public library, an open-air theatre and retail shops among other facilities.

This centre will become a hub for innovation and culture in Al Dhahirah Governorate, offering Omani youth broader opportunities to develop their creativity and skills in scientific and cultural fields.

PDO will oversee the Ibri Innovation and Science Centre’s construction and management until completion. Once operational, the centre will seamlessly transition to the Office of the Governor of Al Dhahirah for day-to-day management.

Oman advances CO₂ pipeline for CCUS and blue hydrogen

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 9

In an ambitious move to meet the requirements of early adopters in carbon capture and storage (CCUS) and blue hydrogen (Blue H₂) sectors, OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) — Oman’s sole gas transmission operator and owner — is spearheading the conceptualisation of a comprehensive CO₂ (carbon dioxide) pipeline network in Oman.

This initiative is a critical component of Oman’s larger strategy to align with the Oman Vision 2040 and the nation’s Net-Zero Emissions (NZE) target by 2050.

During the inaugural launch of “Talks with CEOs @ U Capital”, Eng Mansoor al Abdali, Chief Executive Officer of OQGN reiterated that Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) is at the helm of this extensive project, meticulously developing CCUS and Blue H₂ regulations and policies in collaboration with key stakeholders.

A Steering Committee led by MEM has been established to streamline efforts across various workstreams.

These include CO₂ capture led by Oxy, CO₂ transport managed by OQGN, CO₂ oil and gas utilisation overseen by MEM, CO₂ storage directed by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), blue products and synthetic fuels handled by Shell,



OQGN is spearheading the conceptualisation of a comprehensive CO₂ (carbon dioxide) pipeline network in Oman.

and international opportunities in CCUS coordinated by MEM.

Al Abdali added that to accelerate investment in CCUS and Blue H₂, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals initiated the CCUS Core Team structure in late 2023. This team is pivotal in driving forward the nation’s environmental and economic objectives.

“OQGN plays a crucial advisory role, providing MEM with insights on the regulatory and techno-commercial aspects of CO₂ transport.

This collaboration is essential to enable first movers in the industry, with MEM designating Trailblazer Project status to three commercial-scale CCUS projects,” he said.

OQGN is also collaborating under a Joint Steering Agreement with Shell, OQ, and PDO on the Blue Horizons project, currently in its pre-Front End Engineering Design (pre-FEED) phase. This project is essential in developing a viable CCUS value chain.

OQGN is exploring attractive commercial models with Blue

Horizons Inc. to ensure the project’s financial viability.

Additionally, OQGN is actively collaborating with Oxy to develop a competitive CCUS value chain that meets Oxy’s requirements for CO₂ Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR).

This partnership, built on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2023, involves an ongoing feasibility study for the CO₂ pipeline. This study aims to assess the technical and commercial feasibility of the pipeline, which is a critical infrastructure component for the success of CCUS projects.

As Oman pushes forward with Oman Vision 2040 and NZE by 2050 targets, the collaborative efforts led by OQGN and supported by MEM and other key stakeholders are crucial.

These initiatives not only aim to reduce carbon emissions and develop sustainable energy solutions but also position Oman as a leader in the global energy transition.

“Talks with CEOs at U Capital” is an initiative by Ubhar Capital SAOC (U Capital), a leading financial services firm. In this series, CEOs and CFOs from top companies in Oman interact with the investor community. In this inaugural event, U Capital hosted Mansoor al Abdali, CEO of OQGN, and Khalid al Qassabi, CFO of OQGN, who showcased their investment case enhanced by green hydrogen technologies in Oman.

MG MOTOR OMAN REDEFINES LUXURY AND PERFORMANCE WITH MG ONE AND MG WHALE

MUSCAT: MG Motor, a distinguished name in the automotive industry, proudly presents its premium models, the MG ONE and MG Whale, designed to revolutionise the driving experience with a blend of cutting-edge technology, performance, and luxury.

MG One: Activate Your Adventure

The MG One is crafted for the modern urban adventurer, combining a striking exterior with a spacious, tech-savvy interior and robust performance. Built on the SAIC Motor Intelligent Global Architecture (SIGMA) platform, it offers a dynamic and refined driving experience.

Key features of the MG One:
Turbocharged 1.5-Litre Engine: 181 horsepower, 285 Nm of torque, 0-100 km/h in 8.8 seconds.
High-Tech Interior: Features include cruise control, push-button ignition, keyless entry, and a rear-view camera. Full-option



models offer a 360-degree parking view camera.

Advanced Safety: Over 65% high-strength steel body structure, Electronic Stability Programme with eight safety functions including ABS, EBD, CBC, TCS, VDC, HAZ, HHC, BDW.
Designed with the urban driver in mind, the MG One combines sporty aesthetics with advanced

technology to provide a smooth and enjoyable driving experience. Whether navigating city streets or cruising on the highway, the MG One ensures safety and comfort for all occupants.

MG Whale: A Splash of Elegance

The MG Whale blends futuristic design with a daring coupe-like



silhouette, reflecting the vibrant and progressive spirit of urban life.

Inspired by the majestic blue whale, this SUV Coupe features distinctive elements such as a signature front grille, Baleen daytime running lamps, and whale-fin door mirrors, exuding playfulness, intelligence, and grace.

Key features of the MG Whale include:

Powerful 2.0L Turbocharged Engine: Delivers 231 horsepower and 370 Nm of torque, paired with an 8-speed automatic gearbox for smooth and efficient performance.
Striking Exterior: Two-tone glossy black roof, matte gold bumper accents, chrome dual

exhaust pipes, silver decoration, and 19-inch alloy wheels enhance its visual appeal.

Luxurious Interior: Electric seat adjustments with memory seats, dual-zone air conditioning, and a power-operated panoramic sunroof ensure a comfortable and hassle-free journey.

The MG Whale is designed to offer a premium driving experience, combining elegance with powerful performance.

Its advanced features and luxurious touches make it an ideal choice for those seeking both style and substance in their vehicle.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, MHD ACERE remarked that “At MG Oman, our goal is to surpass the ordinary by offering unparalleled driving experiences.

The MG One and MG Whale exemplify this commitment with their blend of cutting-edge technology, comfort, and style. We invite you to discover the future of driving with MG Motor Oman.”

NBO Muzn Islamic Banking guarantees financial security

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to deliver customer-centric solutions, NBO Muzn Islamic Banking ensures financial protection for both customers and their loved ones through the Bancatakaful products and plans offered in collaboration with Takaful Oman Insurance.

These Sharia-compliant insurance offerings, including My Health Plus, Takaful Elite Life, and Takaful Motor, not only provide financial security but also offer additional peace of mind. The continuous efforts of NBO Muzn Islamic Banking underscore its dedication to delivering products and services that genuinely benefit customers.

Salima al Marzooqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Muzn, said: “We are committed to delivering financial solutions that cater to the diverse needs of our community. National Bank of Oman’s Muzn Islamic Banking believes in empowering individuals and prioritises the overall well-being of our valued customers.

Our Bancatakaful products offered in collaboration with Takaful Oman Insurance are



purposefully crafted to provide a secure financial solution for the future. They provide assistance in times of necessity, alleviating stress and uncertainty. We encourage both our current and new-to-bank retail customers to seize this opportunity and gain financial safety for their dear ones.”

NBO Muzn Islamic Banking’s Bancatakaful products encompass plans such as Takaful Elite Life, My Health Plus, and Takaful Motor. Takaful Elite Life, a comprehensive family takaful plan crafted to secure the financial future of families, also offers complimentary travel coverage, ensuring complete protection for international journeys.

Ooredoo ties with Al Dakhiliyah Governor office to support Riyada award

MUSCAT: Ooredoo recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Al Dakhiliyah Governor office to sponsor the Riyada (Entrepreneurship) award and provide training opportunities for SMEs and Government officials in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

This will benefit Ooredoo’s B2B customer base and boost digital transformation. It will be the first and premier Riyada award organised by the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate office.

The agreement includes delivering the ‘SpringForward’ training programme to a number of participants. The programme focuses on enhancing personal and professional skills, through a series of training workshops.

Its primary goal is to provide young Omanis with entrepreneurship skills, thereby empowering them to become business owners who can contribute to the national economy and create a positive



and sustainable impact on future generations.

Bassam bin Yousuf al Ibrahim, Chief Executive Officer of Ooredoo, said, “We are delighted to be partnering with the Governor Office for these awards. Entrepreneurs are key to the diversification of Oman’s economy, and we want to recognise their outstanding achievements through our support of the programme.

As we continue to develop into a smart telco that goes beyond connectivity, we will also

continue driving innovation, contributing to the nation’s digital transformation and celebrating achievements towards these goals.”

Telecoms is the backbone of any digitally advanced society. By meeting the requirements of rapidly changing digital world, the company is positioning itself as the leading digital infrastructure provider in the region by transforming into a telecom and infrastructure holding company with a delayed multi-business structure.

Bank Muscat inaugurates new branch in Sahalnoot in Wilayat of Salalah

MUSCAT: In line with its strategy to enhance its branch network across the country, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrated recently the inauguration of a new branch in Sahalnoot in the Wilayat of Salalah in the presence of Mohammed bin Hassan al Ansi, Member of the Majlis Ash’shura, Representative of the Wilayat of Salalah, senior officials from the Bank and a number of invitees.

The new branch is located in Sahalnoot, which witnesses a significant urban growth and is characterised by a variety of commercial activities.



The Sahalnoot branch has a modern design and distinctive space that provides customers

comfort while completing their banking transactions. It provides a wide range of financial services

including personal, Sayyarati and Baituna financing, numerous types of cards, and a dedicated centre for Asalah customers.

Also, as part of the bank’s focus on improving access to persons with disabilities, the branch has installed access ramps, teller counters and ATMs, which are disabled-friendly.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir N al Raisi, General Manager – Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “We are pleased to see the ongoing expansion of the Bank’s branch network across the Sultanate and the implementation of cutting-edge technologies to meet global standards. We believe

that by enhancing accessibility, we will be able to provide a seamless banking experience while also meeting customers’ expectations.

The inauguration of Sahalnoot branch is a significant addition to our commitment to provide the best banking services possible, as well as an extension of our current branches in the Wilayat of Salalah and Dhofar Governorate in general. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the Bank’s keenness to enhance its branch network in accordance with the continuous developments in the sector in order to better serve its ever-growing customer base.”



BankDhofar credit card enhances summer travel experience

MUSCAT: BankDhofar is pleased to share the credit cards rewards programme that enhances the customers’ travel experience. The Bank’s credit cards are crafted to meet diverse customer needs, providing a seamless blend of convenience, security, and exclusive perks.

Whatever the need, you will find a BankDhofar Credit Card that perfectly fits the lifestyle — and even earn you rewards post each purchase. Customers can choose the ultra-premium Visa Infinite and World MasterCard; the exclusivity of Platinum MasterCard; the special benefits of Visa Gold and Gold MasterCard; the utility of Visa Classic and Standard MasterCard – or simply opt for the functionality of the E-Com MasterCard credit card for online shopping.

BankDhofar credit cards offers tiered benefits based on the card type such as; travel rewards, where customers can earn points for every purchase and redeem for travel, hotel stays or exclusive experiences.

Lounge access, with complimentary access to airport lounges worldwide. Global acceptance, as the cards are recognised and accepted worldwide and up to 47 days interest-free credit period. Cash advance facility at millions of ATMs worldwide. Seamless and secure Internet shopping via secure OTP authentication.

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Pact signed to promote Islamic finance in Oman



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 9

In a strategic move to bolster Islamic financial investments and foster stronger ties between the financial and advisory sectors, the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has signed a memorandum of cooperation with Eltizam Sharia Financial Consulting Company, a leading provider of Sharia-compliant investment advice and solutions.

This partnership underscores MSX's dedication to creating a sustainable investment environment and promoting Islamic financial culture in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement aims to facilitate collaboration between the two entities and strengthen their relationship in the realms of Islamic finance and governance.

It aligns with MSX's ongoing efforts to develop an investment sector that adheres to Islamic values, thereby fostering an

investment climate that mirrors the principles of Islamic Sharia and supports sustainable economic growth in Oman.

By promoting Islamic financial culture and offering Sharia-compliant investment solutions, the collaboration responds to the growing demand for financial products and services that align with Islamic principles.

This partnership also reflects MSX's commitment to sustainable economic development and to providing an encouraging investment environment.

This significant step enhances the capabilities of both MSX and Eltizam to deliver innovative and effective solutions in the field of Islamic investments.

It further aims to achieve shared goals in building a sustainable investment environment within the capital market, thereby promoting investments that are consistent with Islamic values.

Project management efficiency key to controlling government spending

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 9

Enhancing the efficiency of project management cadres is key to reining in government expenditure, according to Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Speaking to the *Observer* during a ceremony marking the graduation of a cohort of engineers under 'Imkan', a programme designed to hone the skills of engineers in the field of contracting and project management, the minister shared the following: "Project management is a broad field with a significant impact on the efficiency of government spending.

"The more skilled individuals we have in the system, the more it improves government spending efficiency."

"The ministry, on average, accounts for approximately half of the government's spending on civil development projects. Therefore, it is crucial to be more efficient and careful in spending by effectively managing these projects," he stated.

Yesterday's "Imkan" project, launched by the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, celebrated the graduation of 50 engineers from eight different government entities.

Speaking at the ceremony,



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Eng Badr bin Salem al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, during the "Imkan" graduation ceremony.

Eng Badr bin Salem al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, shared that in addition to achieving its intended goals of enabling engineers to manage government projects and contracts, the programme also resulted in the creation of an integrated human resources platform for workers in the field of project and contract management using.

"Imkan" is a national programme based on education and training, not just a standard programme. It runs for about six months, with most of this time dedicated to on-the-job training.

"This batch includes approximately 50 graduates from various entities, and we place great hope in them, or improving the implementation of government projects. This batch has gone through all stages of project implementation, from start to finish," he said.

The Secretary-General also announced the launch of the second phase of the programme. "On a related note, today we are launching the second phase of the "Imkan" programme, which will include around 120 project managers from more than eight entities.

"Similarly, this initiative is aimed at small and medium enterprises to ensure that the entire chain of project implementers is complete from all sides."

Among the participating government entities in the first phase of the programme were the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Muscat Municipality, and Dhofar Municipality.

Trading platform for recyclable wastes under development

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 9

A digital platform envisaged as an online portal for enabling commercial transactions around recyclable waste commodities is currently in the early stages of development, according to the Oman Environmental Holding Services Co (be'ah), the state-owned entity overseeing the management of municipal and solid wastes in the country.

Dubbed the 'Trading Platform and Collection System', it seeks to unlock the significant economic potential of Oman's recyclable waste sector across all key waste streams, aimed at attracting investment inflows into this emerging circular economy, as well as spawning the growth of SMEs and jobs across this promising industry.

At the same time, the proposed trading platform will strengthen regulation of the recycling industry, primarily with the goal of promoting the onshoring of recycling and reuse activities, thereby curbing the outflow of recyclable commodities to overseas markets.

According to be'ah, development of the platform was kicked off with a "thorough initial market screening to evaluate the diverse range of available solutions for the trading platform and collection system".



Oman is laying the groundwork for the growth of a domestic circular economy.

"This comprehensive assessment involved scrutinising various systems and vendors to identify the most suitable options that align with the project's objectives and requirements," be'ah, part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), stated in its recently published 2023 Sustainability Report.

Following the completion of the market screening exercise, be'ah floated a tender inviting proposals from interested vendors. "These proposals were rigorously evaluated based on both technical and financial criteria to ensure the selection of

the best possible solution for the project's needs," it added.

be'ah officials have previously said that the platform will have an important regulatory function as well.

Once operational, it will mandate all generators, collectors, transporters and recyclers of all types of recyclable wastes to transact their business via this portal.

Consequently, all of the respective participants in the supply chain, starting from the generators all the way to the recyclers, will be required to register on the platform — a

measure designed to shut out of shadowy operators blamed for siphoning commercially valuable recyclable wastes to overseas markets to the detriment of Oman's fledgling recycling industry.

The overarching objective is to maximise value creation through the development of a circular economy around wastes, encompassing used cooking oil, metal scrap, aluminium cans, used tyres, electronic and electrical waste, paper and card, glass bottles and plastic, among other waste streams.

US economy no longer overheated, Fed's Powell tells Congress

WASHINGTON: The US is "no longer an overheated economy" with a job market that has "cooled considerably" from its pandemic-era extremes and in many ways is back where it was before the health crisis, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said in remarks to Congress that suggested the case for interest rate cuts is becoming stronger.

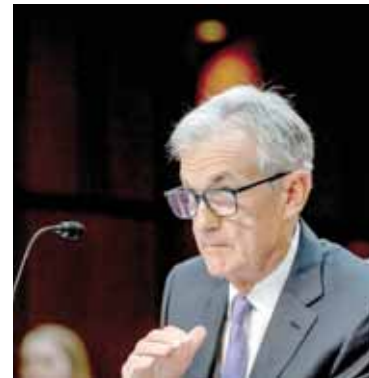
"We are well aware that we now face two-sided risks," and can no longer focus solely on inflation that nevertheless still "remains above" the central bank's 2 per cent target, Powell told the Senate Banking committee on Tuesday. "The labour market appears to be fully back in balance."

Powell in his prepared remarks told Senators that inflation had been improving in recent months and that "more good data would strengthen" the case for looser monetary policy.

The Fed has kept its policy rate in the 5.25 per cent to 5.5 per cent range since July 2023.

Powell's comments appeared to show increasing faith that inflation will return to the Fed's target, and contrasted the lack of progress on inflation in the first months of the year to recent improvement that has helped build the Fed's confidence that price pressures will continue to diminish.

"After a lack of progress towards our 2 per cent inflation objective in the early part of this



US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell testifies before a Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington on Tuesday. — Reuters

year, the most recent monthly readings have shown modest further progress," Powell said in remarks to the Senate Banking Committee. "More good data would strengthen our confidence that inflation is moving sustainably towards 2 per cent."

The Fed receives consumer price information for the month of June on Thursday.

A jobs report on Friday showed a still-solid 206,000 jobs added in June, but with a slowing monthly trend and a rising unemployment rate now at 4.1 per cent.

Powell called that a "still low level," but also noted that "in light of the progress made both in lowering inflation and in cooling the labour market over the past two years, elevated inflation is not the only risk we face."

— Reuters

Data showing positive signs of economic growth



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

The Labour Party's landslide election victory has somewhat coincided with the UK economy showing signs of progressing in the right direction. The inflation figures for May released just over a fortnight ago

gave experts pause for thought as they considered the UK's growth prospects for the year to follow. The earlier figures showed surprisingly strong growth in the first quarter of this year beating every other G7 economy. However, recent figures have been a little less positive. For example, April's GDP figures, showed that the economy was stagnant-raising questions about the strength of the UK's economic recovery. June's data, however, provided some clues as to what is really happening. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) released its retail sales figures for May, which were very encouraging. The data showed that sales volumes jumped 2.9 per cent in May, well ahead of expectations and more than offsetting the

surprisingly large fall in April. This big fall was largely driven by the wet weather, according to the ONS, and so May's better weather was given some credit. But analysts were quick to point to improving consumer sentiment as households continue to recover from the cost-of-living crisis. Senior UK economist at Capital Economics, Andrew Wishart, noted: "The strength was broad-based across the retail sector including online suggesting an underlying strengthening in sales beyond weather effects." Reinforcing the retail strength, GfK's (Growth from Knowledge) consumer confidence figures showed that consumer confidence rose to its highest level since November 2021 in May, albeit still strongly in negative territory.

Coming just a few days after inflation touched two per cent and the Bank of England suggested that an August rate cut was looking likely, many economists found a good case for optimism. Just then there was S&P's latest purchasing manager's index (PMI) conducted in June which measures activity in the private sector and is generally seen as a good indicator of growth. The PMI showed that output had dropped to the lowest level since November. It fell to 51.7 in June, down from 53.0 in May and well below expectations. The slowdown was driven by slower performance in the UK's all-important service sectors, which include the retail sector. On one level there's a question of timing. June's PMI comes, of

course, later than May's retail sales, so probably both could be true. But it would seem odd for one measure to point to a strong recovery which is then almost entirely wiped out the very next month. Chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomists, Rob Wood, said the strength in retail sales made him "sceptical" that growth had "suddenly slowed". More likely is that June's PMI was impacted by the election. Indeed, the survey showed that political uncertainty was contributing to the slowdown. Chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, Chris Williamson, said many firms were seeing a "hiatus" in decision-making as they await clarity on various aspects of economic policy. The survey

suggested that new business orders remained fairly consistent in June, suggesting that growth could return in the months ahead. "The PMI fall is an election-related blip," Pantheon's Wood said. "The UK is growing fine". If you take the average of the last three PMI's, then the UK is on track to grow about 0.2 per cent in the second quarter, which is not particularly impressive. The retail sales figures have also been extremely volatile in recent months, with a large fall in sales volumes swiftly followed by a slightly larger recovery. The underlying trend is positive but it is slow progress. Looking through the volatility of monthly figures shows an economy that needs reform to get it to storm ahead.

Innovate or perish: Lessons from history



MUBEEN KHAN

The author is a Muscat-based Chartered Accountant and researcher

A Finnish cellphone giant dominated mobile telecoms with the advent of cellphone technology, but later failed to innovate. Then, a startup from innovative America, focused on transforming the cellphone into a smartphone, quickly overtook the Finnish giant. Its critical mistake was failing to continue innovating. The recent news of the little-known chip maker Nvidia reaching a \$3.3 trillion market cap, surpassing Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon, caught my attention. What I found astonished me. An American chip giant, whose chips powered almost all digital devices and computers since their inception, failed to learn from the Finnish cellphone giant's downfall. Although they were aware of the need for innovation, they chose to outsource it to a Dutch chip manufacturing equipment maker. The Dutch company was ready to deliver a revolutionary EUV technology-based machine that could have helped them lead in producing next-generation nanochips. However, the American chip giant refused to embrace this innovation, unlike other sponsors of the same research project. Now, the innovation train has left the station, and this once-dominant chipmaker is scrambling to catch up. Lessons from history inspired by Marco Polo's journals describing the riches of Asia, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus sought a sea route to Asia but instead discovered a Caribbean island in the Americas in 1493, sponsored by

the King and Queen of Spain. Following Columbus, Hernan Cortes landed on the shores of present-day Mexico in 1519 with approximately 600 conquistadors to defeat the Aztec Empire. The Aztecs, with their 200,000 warriors armed with stone-edged spears, arrows, and wooden armour, fought Cortes and his men, who were equipped with steel swords, armour, muskets, cannons, and horses. The Aztecs stood no chance, and their historic capital, Tenochtitlan, was set on fire on April 22, 1522. Their pride, land, identity, language, culture, and future were crushed under Spanish steel and buried in history. This massive Aztec empire made the same fatal mistake that caused other ancient empires to be wiped from history. They failed to innovate and embrace new methods and technologies with changing times.

Management lessons

Communities, societies, countries, continents, and businesses must understand that history can cruelly repeat itself if we do not learn from it. Innovation or the lack thereof has its own wonders and catastrophes. Christopher Columbus would have loved to conduct his expedition for the Venetians, any other Italian city-state, Portugal, where he lived for a long time, or the English King, to whom he petitioned for funding. However, his talent was recognised by the Spanish. Had it not been, the Venetians might have forged an empire in the New World much bigger than the collapsed Western Roman Empire. Businesses can derive crucial management lessons from world history. There must be talent-based elevation of people rather than promotions based on flattery, loyalties, appeasement, and politics, which often lead to inefficiency. People who dare to challenge traditional ways of doing things, far beyond the organisation's psychological boundaries, must be respected and encouraged. Innovation can prevent your organisation from becoming a relic in the history museum of your industry.

Are Americans ready for the US-China trade war?



KENNETH ROGOFF

The writer is a former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, is Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University

It is hard to think of an issue that brings together the United States' deeply divided political class more than the need to contain China's growing influence, whether through trade restrictions, tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs), or banning TikTok. But while the national-security argument for such protectionist measures is undeniably compelling, it is unclear whether US political leaders and the American public are prepared for the potential economic fallout. The prevailing belief among policymakers is that the surge of Chinese imports into the US market during the 2000s hollowed out America's manufacturing base, making the kind of rapid military build-up that enabled the Allies to win World War II all but impossible. In US policy circles, the "China Shock" is often portrayed as a massive error that devastated towns across the Rust Belt and led to a sharp increase in inequality. Consequently, there is widespread agreement among policymakers and commentators that the US must prevent a "China Shock 2.0" by imposing massive tariffs and trade restrictions on Chinese technologies such as cell phones, drones, and, crucially, EVs, solar panels, and green-energy equipment. President Joe Biden and his predecessor, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee in November's presidential election, disagree



An aerial view shows containers and cargo vessels at the Qingdao port in Shandong province, China. – Reuters

THE CHINA TRADE SHOCK OF THE 1990S AND 2000S IS WIDELY BLAMED FOR HOLLOWING OUT THE US MANUFACTURING SECTOR. BUT ANYONE WHO THINKS THAT UNWINDING TRADE WITH CHINA WILL NOT RESULT IN PRICE INCREASES AND SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL BACKLASH IS IN FOR A RUDE AWAKENING.

on most issues. When it comes to dealing with China, however, both appear to be competing for the title of America's most protectionist president. But the China Shock narrative that underpins current US trade policy is deeply flawed. While competition with Chinese producers has adversely affected some manufacturing jobs, free trade has undoubtedly created more winners than losers. Moreover, low-income US consumers have been among the biggest beneficiaries of low-cost Chinese imports. Policymakers who believe that unwinding trade with China will not result in price increases and significant political backlash are in for a rude awakening. To be sure, the economic impact of US trade restrictions could be minimised by rerouting Chinese imports through third-country suppliers, enabling Americans to buy Chinese-made solar panels as though they were produced in India, albeit at a higher price. But while this tariff theatre may be popular with voters, it is hard to see how this would

improve national security any more than rerouting Chinese fentanyl into the US through Mexico helped solve the opioid crisis. Moreover, it would take years for "friendlier" countries to develop their own manufacturing bases that can compete with China's, especially at the low prices offered by Chinese producers. In some sectors like EVs, China's production capacity has given it an almost insurmountable lead over Western countries. Given this reality, the United Auto Workers' goal of having Americans buy electric cars produced in high-wage, unionised US facilities will be extremely difficult to achieve, no matter how much Biden or Trump may support it. A more targeted approach would ideally distinguish between trade involving sensitive military technologies and other goods, but doing so is more complicated than many seem to realise. The convergence of military and civilian technologies has become painfully apparent

during the Russia-Ukraine war, with low-cost drones originally designed for carrying packages being repurposed as bombers and private mobile networks playing a pivotal role in major battles. Additionally, as the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, the US and its allies depend on Chinese medical supplies. For those of us who believe that multilateral cooperation is necessary to address the world's most pressing problems, from climate change to regulating artificial intelligence, the escalating rivalry between the world's two major powers is deeply troubling. From the US perspective, China's authoritarian government undermines the foundational liberal values that underpin the global economic and political order. China's relentless cyberattacks continue to pose an immediate threat to the US economy and American companies, and a potential Chinese blockade or invasion of Taiwan would have far-reaching global consequences. From China's perspective, the US and its allies are cynically trying to maintain a world order established through centuries of European and American imperialism. © Project Syndicate, 2024

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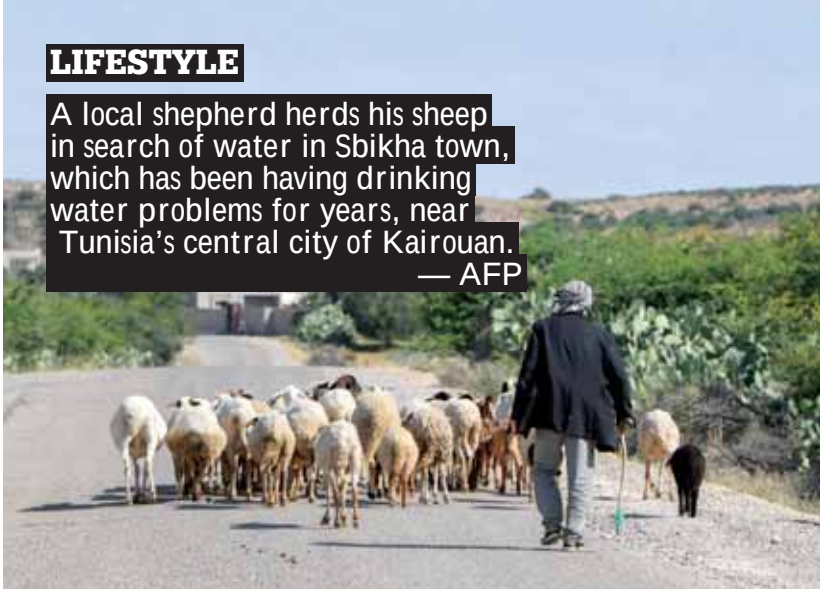
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FILM
US actress Jaimie Alexander attends the world premiere of Apple Original Films' "Fly Me to the Moon" at AMC Lincoln Square in New York. — AFP



LIFESTYLE
A local shepherd herds his sheep in search of water in Sbikha town, which has been having drinking water problems for years, near Tunisia's central city of Kairouan. — AFP



FASHION
Women wearing traditional costumes pose at the Forbidden City in Beijing. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Afghan boys ride a donkey along a street in Khash district of Badakhshan Province. — AFP



MUSIC
Brazilian singer Maria Rita performs during the music Winter Festival at Marina da Gloria, Brazil. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | JULY 10, 2024 | MUHARRAM 4, 1446 AH

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Scaling new heights of Oman's majestic mountains

Oman's mountains offer unique opportunities to climbing enthusiasts looking to explore its diverse terrains... **P20**

Political films dominate at Munich Film Festival

A multinational production detailing the journey of two Palestinian cousins fleeing their homeland for Germany received the coproduction award at the Munich Film Festival on Saturday. Danish-Palestinian director Mahi Fleifel's "To a Land Unknown" takes his audience into a world in which the protagonists cannot avoid doing the wrong thing, the jury said.

The story tells of two stranded young men forced to cross every border in order to achieve their dream of a secure life in Europe — without papers and with no money.

France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom were all involved in the production. A number of other prizes were awarded on Saturday, the festival's penultimate day, with Best International Film going to a Slovakian-Hungarian production "An Explanation for Everything" in

which a young man fails his finals after falling in love, possibly on account of his politics.

Among the German contributions, the German-Slovakian production "Führer und Verführer" by Joachim A Lang with Robert Stadlober, FritzKarl and Franziska Weisz won the audience prize. It centres on Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, who committed suicide in 1945.

"Samia" by German director Yasemin Samdereli, which tells of a female Somali sprinter dreaming of participating in the Olympic Games, was a winner in the international section. Other winners included "Simón de la Montaña" by Argentinian director Federico Luis; "Lars er LOL" by Eirik Sæter Stordahl from Norway; "Viet and Nam," by Vietnamese director Minh Quy Truong; "Sad Jokes" by Fabian Stumm of Germany and "Petra Kelly - Act now!" by German director Doris Metz. — **DPA**





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River Seine to get flying taxi landing pad

A Volocopter air taxi 'Volocity' stands on display during the International Paris Air Show. — AFP file picture



Paris: France's government on Tuesday gave the go-ahead for construction of a floating landing pad on the River Seine for flying taxis set to be shown off during the Paris Olympics. An official decree said that the pad "can be used until December 31, 2024" after months of suspense over whether the taxis would take to the air during the

July 26 - August 11 Games. The landing site will float on the Seine near the Austerlitz railway station in southeastern Paris. Flights will be limited to two per hour, between 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, and no more than 900 over the whole trial period "given the experimental nature" of the vehicles, the decree read. Private firms involved in the fly-

ing taxi project include Paris airport operator ADP and Germany-based Volocopter. Its "Volocity" two-seaters are fitted with 18 electric-powered rotors on a circular frame above the fuselage. They hope to use the global draw of the Olympics to show that the technology can efficiently link "vertiport" take-off and landing

sites. While four vertiports — airports for vertical take-off and landing vehicles — have already been set up in the Paris suburbs, including one at Charles de Gaulle airport, the Austerlitz site will be the first within the city proper. Backers tout flying taxis as a low-carbon form of aviation and hope future larger versions could be

used as ambulances or in other roles. But many city officials in Paris have derided the plans as harmful to the environment. People close to mayor Anne Hidalgo said on Tuesday that city hall would challenge the landing pad permit in court. France's national environment authority found that an impact

assessment for the landing pad was "incomplete" on issues including noise pollution, energy consumption and greenhouse emissions. Neither have the taxis been certified by the European Union's Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) — meaning operators can only offer free demonstration flights during the Games. — AFP

MUSIC

THREE PLANES, 270 tonnes of equipment, 800 square metres of stage: the figures from Madonna's massive free concert in Rio in May sounded like they came from another age. These days, megastars are usually keener to claim a smaller footprint. Coldplay, who just headlined Glastonbury Festival in Britain, recently announced they had cut carbon emissions on their world tour by 59 per cent compared with their last tour in 2016-17.

They have taken innovative steps including solar panels and even a special dance floor that generates electricity from the movement of the audience.

Critics point out they are still flying around on planes, and there was particularly opprobrium in 2022 when they announced a partnership with Finnish oil giant Neste. Though Neste promised to help them use sustainable biofuels, the Transport and Environment campaign group said Coldplay were being used by the oil firm as "useful idiots for greenwashing".

Though the overall impact is hard to measure, one study by University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute in 2010 estimated that Britain's industry alone generated 540,000 tonnes of carbon emissions annually. Climate group Clean Scene found that the top 1,000 DJs took 51,000 flights in 2019, equivalent to 35,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions.

CLIMATE COMMITMENTS

As a result, all the big festivals now have climate

Music festivals seek greener footprint



pledges and initiatives, from composting and car-pooling schemes at Coachella in California to renewable energy usage at Glastonbury.

One festival that has taken a lead is We Love Green in Paris, as the name suggests.

Some 110,000 festival-goers attended last month's

event to see artists including Sza, who travelled with "almost no equipment" according to Marianne Hocquard, the festival's head of sustainable development.

She said that was down to the festival ensuring they have much of the equipment needed by its artists, and setting energy caps for performances.

Others have taken radical steps: the Bon Air festival in Marseille cancelled DJ I Hate Models this year after learning that he was coming by private jet.

Many events now encourage their attendees to take greener modes of transport.

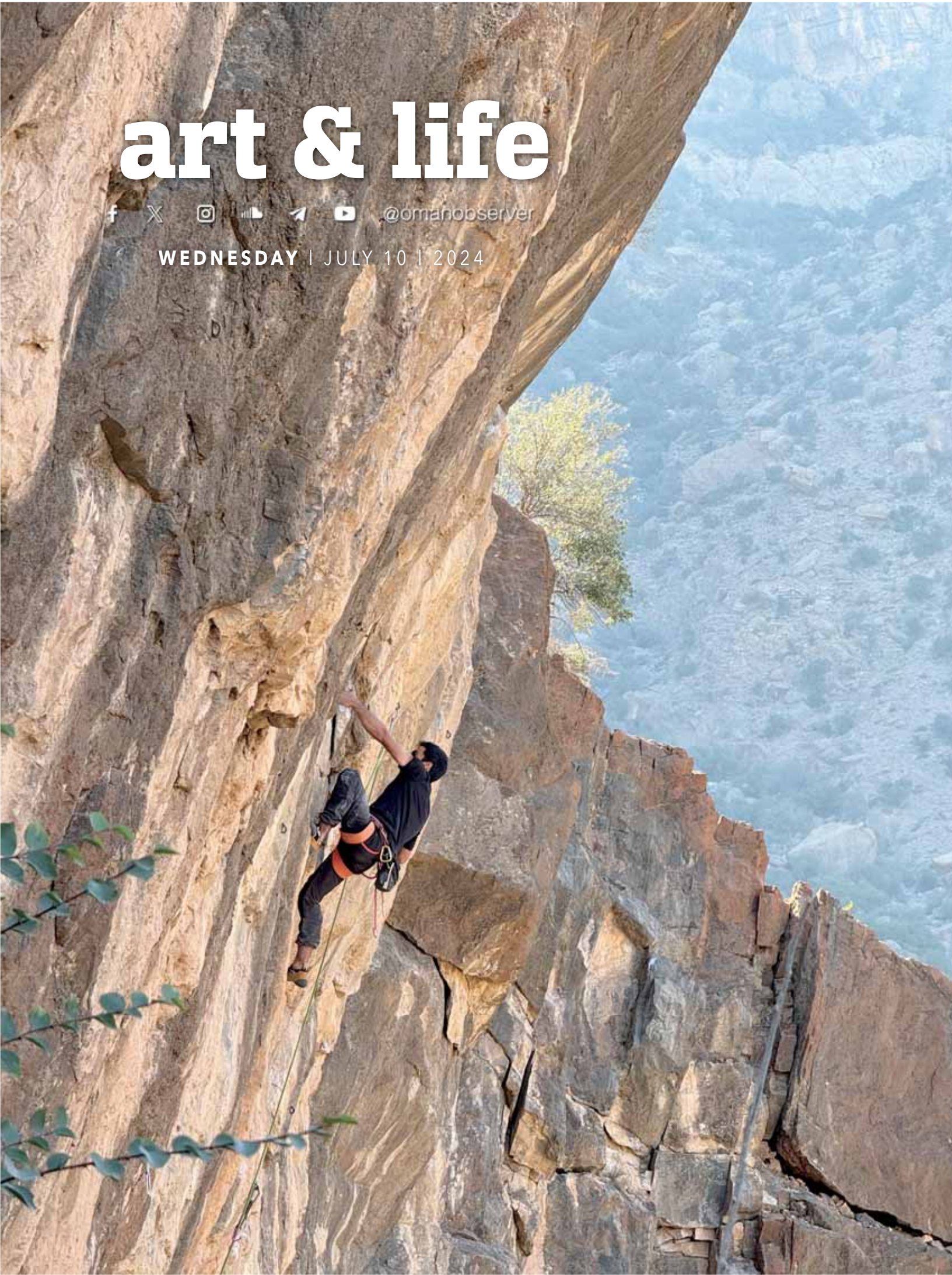
We Love Green launched a partnership with the French Cycling Federation to organise convoys of bikes for this year's edition, and said 14 per cent of ticket-holders came on two wheels despite the dodgy weather, up from eight per cent last year.

But there is a limit to how much can be done.

When Taylor Swift played Paris in May, the city mayor's office said there was a surge in arrivals of private jets at local airports.

Private jet operators have been jumping on entertainment events such as festivals or the Euro 2024 football tournament to boost their business.

There was little about the climate in a recent press release by private jet operator KLASJet, which said: "When you're travelling to an amazing event like Euro 2024, the last thing you want is for your experience to be ruined by a delayed flight". — AFP



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SCALING NEW HEIGHTS OF OMAN'S MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

Oman's mountains offer unique opportunities to climbing enthusiasts looking to explore its diverse terrains.

Areas such as Hadath, Sharaf, Qantab, Jabal Misht, Black Mountain, Bausher, Qurba Thani, to name a few, offer hundreds of routes to explore using different types of climbing techniques at different levels of skill. Fahmi Ali, avid mountain climber and instructor, has helped introduce this sport to over hundreds students of all ages. "This is a sport that is accessible to everyone. It is a great way to make the most of Oman's diverse mountainous climate," he says.

The sport of climbing requires 50 per cent leg strength, and 50 per cent upper body strength including forearms, biceps, triceps alongside finger strength and balance. "You need to hug the mountain," Fahmi explains. The reward is the thrill and adrenaline of the climb alongside the breathtaking views to follow.

Fahmi started the sport when he saw his brother climbing 10 years ago, when he was 19 years old. "My first climb was at in Nakhal. It was an incredible experience. We had the right gear so I always felt safe," he explains. In Oman, the sport of climbing is split into 4 categories, sport climbing, deep water solo, trad climbing, and bouldering. Outside of Oman, these categories also expand to include ice climbing.

Sport climbing involves climbing routes with pre-placed anchors and bolts; focusing on the physical challenge rather than the technical difficulty of the route. Deep water solo climbing is practiced on sea cliffs and without ropes and harnesses; making use of the safety of falling into the water below. Trad climbing (traditional climbing) involves placing their own protection (cams, nuts and hexes) as they climb. Bouldering involves climbing on small ropes and without the use of ropes and harnesses.

Fahmi explains how Oman's unique landscape is best suited for all these types of climbing. "We have really good spots for all of these climbing types, including multi-pitch areas, like Jabal Misht, where you can climb more than one route and experience different levels of climbing."

The infamous Jabal Misht has 25 pitches, the highest of which peaks at a thousand metres. This is the biggest climbing wall in all the Middle East. Climbing up Jabal Misht specifically uses trad climbing, and needs two people, the belay and the climber, each one putting the nuts and cams to secure their next step up. Trust, attention to detail and focus alongside stamina and teamspirit are required for this adventure.

"You cannot practice in Jabal Misht, you go there prepared. Your skillset and body needs to be already confident, there is no room for error," he says.

Jabal Misht was first climbed in 1982 by a french group. It has since become more popular, continuing to draw in hundreds of climbers looking to experience its unique terrain. Oman offers a paradise for climbing enthusiasts with diverse terrains to explore. With passionate climbers like

Fahmi Ali sharing their expertise and promoting this thrilling sport, climbing communities continue to expand with more routes explored, supporting Oman's tourism goals in solidifying its reputation as a premier destination for climbing, and introducing the natural beauty of its landscape and the thrill of the sport to create unforgettable experiences.

