LET'S TALK
Times OF OMAN

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CERTIFICATE

HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN GREETS PRESIDENT OF MADAGASCAR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Andry Rajoelina of the Republic of Madagascar on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Andry Rajoelina and the people of his country. — ONA

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SAYYID FAHD LAUDS SHURA'S ROLE IN UPHOLDING INTEREST OF OMAN

The Council of Ministers and Shura Council's Office held joint meeting on Tuesday

MUSCAT: In the presence of members of the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Khalid bin Hilal Al Ma'awali, Chairman of the Shura Council, and members of the Shura Council's Office.

The meeting took place within the context of coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman.

The two sides held a meeting within the framework of the Basic Law of the State and the Law of the Council of Oman. The meeting constituted strong support for integration among all institutions of the state.

It also underscored the importance of reaching common visions that lead to promoting economic and social aspects.

Sayyid Fahd commended the role undertaken by the Shura Council and its cooperation with the government for sustaining efforts to implement the general policies of the state and upholding the country's supreme interest.

HH Sayyid Fahd spoke about various matters of relevance to consolidating cooperation between the two councils.

He affirmed that the Council of Ministers accords full attention to the views of the Council of Oman that target support for efforts undertaken by government units in realising all that serves the nation and the citizens.

Emphasis

The meeting also laid emphasis on the role of the Shura Council in accomplishing the missions entrusted to it.

Pursuant to this approach, service ministers respond to the Shura Council's requests to present ministerial statements and visual presentations that explain the government's efforts to provide the highest rates of performance in all sectors.

The meeting also touched on the significance of the Shura Council's hosting government officials to discuss topics being considered by its committees. It elaborated on the extent to which the two sides deal positively with those proposals and integrate their outcome in development plans and programmes.

The meeting reviewed other topics, including support for cooperation with the government, as well as means to enhance awareness in a manner that reflects the true image of joint national action.

The meeting also underlined the role of the joint ministerial coordination committee (between the Council of Ministers and the Shura Council) in achieving the desired goals.

For their part, the Chairman of the Shura Council and members of the Council's Office commended the importance of the meeting with the Council of Ministers. >A2

RELEASE OF CITIZENS

HM receives phone call from King of Sweden

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday received a phone call from King Carl XVI Gustav of Sweden.

During the phone call, King Carl XVI Gustav expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to reach an understanding between Sweden and the Islamic Republic of Iran to release two Swedish citizens and repatriate them to their country.

The Swedish King valued Oman's positive role through which it contributes to resolving many international issues.

The telephonic conversation touched on the advanced relations between Oman and Sweden. His Majesty the Sultan and King Carl XVI Gustav also exchanged views about the latest developments in regional events of common concern. -ONA

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN
Oman, Russia hold bilateral talks

1 The Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation yesterday held a session of political talks in Moscow. The session highlighted bilateral relations and mutual visits. >A2

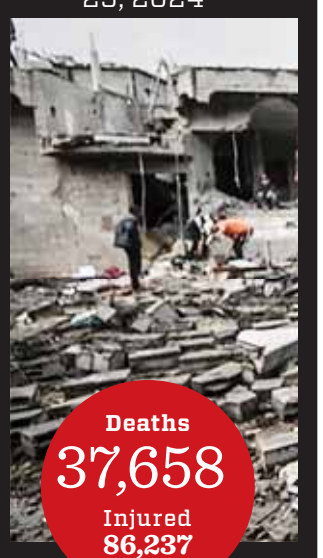
WORLD
China's lunar probe returns with samples

2 China's lunar probe landed safely in the northern China's border region with Mongolia on Tuesday. It returned rock and soil samples from the moon. >A6

SPORTS
Afghanistan qualify for semi-finals

3 Afghanistan qualified for the semi-finals of the ongoing T20 World Cup 2024 after beating Bangladesh by eight runs in the Super Eights match on Tuesday. >A8

GAZA DEATH TOLL
as of June 25, 2024



Deaths 37,658
Injured 86,237

'AIDA' PROJECT

Sayyid Theyazin presides over the launch of Trump International Resort

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, presided over the launch of Trump International Resort being set up within 'Aida' project in Yiti on Tuesday.

It comprises more than 140 hotel units, suites, villas, residential apartments and a golf course.

Aida will be developed with the support of Oman Tourism Development Company, the executive arm of the Sultanate of Oman for tourism development. The value of the project is $4 billion, and it will be developed over 10 years. See also >A4

ABL SPACE SYSTEMS, ETLAQ SPACEPORT

MoU signed to strengthen Oman's space industry

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority hosted the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the U.S. based satellite launch company ABL Space Systems, and Etlaq spaceport. The ceremony was attended by CAA President Naif Al Abri along with Ana Escrogima, the US envoy to Oman.

Under the MoU, ABL and Etlaq will explore launching ABL's RS1 launch vehicle from the Etlaq Spaceport, bringing orbital satellite launch capability to the Gulf region. The initial project focus is on evaluating local logistics and site construction, as well as developing regulatory and export control frameworks with both the U.S. and Oman governments.

The Etlaq Spaceport located at 18-degree latitude, is expected to be operational in 2027 and will provide wide orbital access from sun synchronous to low inclination orbits.

The nearby commercial airport and deepwater port in Duqm provide critical logistical capabilities to serve these satellite missions. The spaceport will strengthen the Sultanate's space sector and position Oman as a regional and global leader in the space industry. >A5

'FUTURE LEADERS' PROGRAMME

RAM to nurture young Omanis

MUSCAT: In alignment with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's vision to cultivate national leaders equipped with future leadership capabilities and skills, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040, the Royal Academy of Management has launched 'Future Leaders' programme.

This initiative underscores the Academy's dedication to empower leaders across diverse levels by equipping them with innovative solutions and foster positive change, consequently enhancing sustainable development within public and private sector institutions.

The programme targets 50 participants who have at least 3 years of practical experience and are not over 34 years old, including employees of small and medium-sized enterprises, startups, and freelancers.

The programme will take them on a knowledge journey consisting of three in-person modules and three talent labs over the course of 6 months, starting from this June until next December.

The 'Future Leaders' programme is among the Academy's strategic plan for 2024.

The programme aims to empower leaders in both public and private sectors by creating a learning environment that enhances their talents and leadership skills. The programme seeks to prepare second-tier leaders for higher levels of leadership in the future. >A4

OMAN

PRAYER TIMINGS

Dhuhr....12:15pm
Asr....3:33pm
Maghrib....7:02pm
Isha....8:25pm
Fajr (Tomorrow)....3:55am

JOINT MEETING

< FROM A1

Discussions to help achieve more progress, prosperity

They spoke about a number of aspects that realise more cooperation between the two sides. They also expressed thanks to Oman's government and leadership for their valuable support towards constructive cooperation between the two councils.

The Chairman of the Shura Council and members of the Shura Council's Office stressed that discussions that took place during the meeting would consolidate efforts to preserve the gains of Oman in its quest to achieve further progress and prosperity. -ONA

MET OFFICE

Hamra Ad Duru records highest temperature

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Hamra Ad Duru station in Al Dhahirah Governorate has recorded the highest temperature in the Sultanate of Oman on Monday, 24, 2024, which was nearly 50 degrees Celsius.

Hamra Ad Duru station in Al Dhahirah Governorate has recorded 49.8 degree Celsius as the highest temperature among all the weather stations in the Sultanate of Oman in last 24 hours.

This was followed by Sunaynah station in Al Buraimi Governorate with 49.2 degree Celsius and then Fahud station in Al Wusta Governorate with 48.0 degree Celsius .

While Maqshin station in Dhofar Governorate, Haima station in Al Wusta Governorate and Al Qabil in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate have recorded 47.8 degree Celsius for each and 47.7 degree Celsius in Al Buraimi station, Al Buraimi Governorate

Oman and Russia hold bilateral talks

The two sides exchanged views on several regional and international issues, notably the Israeli war on the Gaza strip and the war in Ukraine

MOSCOW: The Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation yesterday held a session of political talks in Moscow.

The session highlighted bilateral relations, mutual visits and the participation in events held in both countries, namely the latest participation of Oman as a main guest in the St. Petersburg International Forum.

During the session, the Omani side was headed by Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Russian side was headed by Mikhail Bogdanov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Special Representative of the President of Russia for the Middle East and Africa.

Further, the two sides exchanged views on several regional and international issues, notably the Israeli war on the Gaza strip and the war in Ukraine.

On the sidelines of the session, Al Harthy met with Alexander Yakovenko, Rector of the Diplomatic Academyof Russia's Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

During this meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of mutual cooperation in the field of diplomatic training and qualification.

The meeting was attended by Munthir Mahfoudh Al Manthiri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry, Hamoud Salim Al Tuwaih, Ambassador of Oman to Russia and several officials from both sides. -ONA

VIEWS EXCHANGED

NDC Commandant meets Executive Director of Egypt's National Training Academy

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Ali Abdullah Al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) on Tuesday received Dr. Rasha Ragheb, Executive Director of the National Training Academy of the Arab Republic of Egypt and her accompanying delegation.

The meeting took place at the headquarters of the NDC in Bait Al Falaj Garrison.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest, especially in academic and training fields.

Moreover, the guests were briefed about the NDC and its various facilities. They also toured the college's different departments.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Abdullah Hamid Al Harthy, Deputy Commandant of the NDC and Brigadier Mansoor Ali Al Amri, Director General of Programmes and Strategic Direction at the College, as well as the Chargé d'affaires of the Egyptian embassy in Oman.

-ONA

Oman criticises terrorist attack in Dagestan

Oman extended its sincere condolences to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist attack that targeted places of worship in the Republic of Dagestan in the Russian Federation.

Oman extended its sincere condolences to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry today, Oman underlined its firm stance that calls for disseminating the values of peaceful coexistence and the spirit of tolerance and respect among different societies and cultures. The death toll in the attacks by gunmen on the places of worship in Russia's Dagestan has risen to 20, Al Jazeera reported, citing Russia's Investigative Committee.

Following this, three days of mourning has also been declared in Russia's North Caucasus region of Dagestan. At least 15 police officers died alongside several civilians, including a priest. Five attackers were also reported to have been "liquidated". At least 12 people were also injured in the attacks.

The Russian church said its archpriest Nikolai Kotelnikov was also "brutally killed" in Derbent. The Russian news agency TASS, reported citing law enforcement agencies, that the gunmen were members of "an international terrorist organisation". However, the attackers have not yet been identified. -ONA

WILAYAT OF SOHAR

Two held for jewellery theft

Times News Service

MUSCAT : Two persons were arrested for vandalism and theft of gold jewellery from a house in the Wilayat of Sohar. The Royal Oman Police said: "The North Al Batinah Governorate Police Command arrested two people after they vandalised a house and stole gold jewellery kept there in the Wilayat of Sohar."

OMAN

Trump International Resort being set up within 'Aida' project in Yiti

Over 250 school students learn sailing skills during Barka Fort Nights festival

Held at Al Muraisi Beach, 266 men and women learnt the first stages of sailing and windsurfing from qualified Oman Sail coaches

MUSCAT: Oman Sail introduced over 250 school students and visitors to sailing and windsurfing during the five-day Barka Fort Nights festival.

Held at Al Muraisi Beach, a total of 266 men and women took the opportunity to learn the first stages of sailing and windsurfing from qualified Oman Sail coaches and connect with Oman's maritime heritage.

Nawaf Al Ghadani, Oman Sail's Deputy Head of Sailing Schools, said, "We are very proud to be part of the Barka Fort Nights festival and pass on our expertise to visitors of all ages. The festival aimed to show the historical significance of the Barka area and the potential for the growth of tourism, and through sailing Oman Sail is able to showcase our nation's rich maritime history as well as its prosperous future as a sports and adventure tourism destination."

"Oman Sail is committed to making a significant contribution to national objectives for a diverse and thriving tourism sector. By hosting international events, creating opportunities to represent the nation and teaching valuable skills through sport, Oman Sail's Sailing Schools are actively supporting the development of the next generation of Omani sailors. Being part of festivals such as Barka Fort Nights is the perfect platform for organisations to join hands and support regional communities," he added.

Organised by the South Al Batinah Governorate, the Barka Fort Nights festival also featured theatre productions, an operetta illustrating the history of the Wilayat of Barka, an innovation hackathon and forums to share more about the culture of the area as well as plans for the development of tourism.

LEARNING SKILLS

< FROM A1

Best international practices for units

The various learning units will focus on applying the best international practical practices to achieve this goal.

The learning journey includes various modules starting with the 'Discover' module, which focuses on enhancing leadership, followed by the 'Foresee' module to explore successful and advanced international experiences.

Finally, there is the 'Pioneer' module, which helps enhance a business-success-oriented mindset and accomplishment. These modules focus on developing and enhancing future skills and applying international best practices among the participants.

The programme aims to equip young talents with the skills and knowledge to become effective leaders.

It focuses on understanding basic leadership principles, enhancing self-awareness, strengthening cooperative relationships, developing strategies to overcome challenges, enhancing problem-solving skills and creativity, fostering a culture of innovation within teams and institutions, and adopting innovative methods to address issues.

Through these efforts, the programme strives to prepare participants for the future and foster a positive impact on communities.

Registration for the programme will be available to young Omani talents of both genders who meet the requirements through the official accounts of the Royal Academy of Management on various social media platforms.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

Meeting in Tunis

TUNIS: Represented by the Ministry of Information, the Sultanate of Oman took part in the 111th meeting of the Executive Council of the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), held in Tunisia on 25 and 26 June 2024.

The meeting discussed matters related to radio and TV services, media engineering tasks and new media programmes. It also dealt with the 2024 Arab Radio and TV Festival, which takes the slogan "Supporting Palestine."

Topics on the agenda of the meeting include the ASBU training report, in which Oman took second place in terms of attendance and participation in events and workshops. -ONA

COMMENTARY

Income tax is an economic necessity for Oman

SADIQ MOHAMED SAID AL-LAWATY

Corporal (retired)

Income tax is levied in almost all countries of the world; with the exception of a very few, one of which is the Sultanate of Oman, and there was some talk that it was scheduled to be implemented at the beginning of 2024, but it was postponed until a later date, it is expected to enter into force next year (2025).

Income tax is one of the mechanisms aimed at bringing funds to the government to help it cover internal spending, for example paying the salaries of state employees in the administrative apparatus or in the army, police and security, and paying the costs of maintaining various government facilities. Without taxes, it will not be possible to maintain and develop basic services in the future for any country.

There is no doubt that different types of taxes cause some difficulties for citizens who view the income tax and value-added tax system with dissatisfaction. Every country that fixes the price of its national currency or links it to another currency such as the US dollar, is not allowed to print banknotes as much as it wants; it must remain within the limits set by recognised international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.

If at any time a country, for example Oman, needs additional local liquidity to cover its expenses, it is forced to borrow from local financial sources through treasury bills or sell its hard currency to buy the required liquidity, and this is what every country tries to avoid; because hard currency or foreign currency has many exits, and without it countries may not be able to feed their people. It should be noted here that the remittances of expatriate workers abroad negatively affect the foreign reserves.

Bond issuance is also restricted, because the more bonds are issued, the more domestic loans accumulate, which means that a large proportion of the national income goes to paying dividends on bonds. So, what is the solution in such a situation? Governments raise taxes while cutting spending on domestic projects. They may also increase fuel, electricity and water prices and impose increased prices for various services.

Countries collect hard currencies through exports such as oil, gas and various minerals. In many countries, Oman being one of them, governments spend more on imports than on exports. And only when the price of oil approaches $100 per barrel does the government have a surplus in the balance sheet, otherwise it remains in a state of fiscal deficit, here also the government is forced to borrow hard currency from foreign financial institutions and with a number of countries a large proportion of its hard currency income goes to pay debt services.

Income tax is not new, as this tax has been applied in many countries of the world for decades. And if the tax was not applied in the Sultanate throughout those years, this is because Oman was a large country in its area but small in its population. The total population of the Sultanate was estimated at five hundred to six hundred thousand people prior to 1970, and it did not have any modern infrastructure.

Today, the situation is completely different, as its population is close to 5 million, both Omanis and expatriates. By the grace of God, and then the wise policy of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimour, may God rest his soul in peace, Oman has transformed into a modern, developed country with all the necessary facilities. Then came the prosperous era of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, marking the return of the renaissance the beginning of a new honourable era that renewed Oman's historical past, and opened a new chapter of development, prosperity, and social and economic progress. Therefore, we believe that every Omani should accept the new income tax with open arms, when it is implemented.

Countries always need the sacrifices of their citizens, and in the economic matter, citizens are only required to pay a small part of their income. It is a duty of every citizen to pay a limited amount from his/her disposable income to the state's wallet, so that it can pay its expenses and not be forced to borrow. If the people want the state to continue on the path of development and progress they must make every effort to stand behind the government and help pay taxes, and without taxes the government will not be able to fulfill its obligations. So, the people help the government and the government helps the people, and the two are one but with different roles.

How is income tax applied?

I explain that aspect from my experience of what I learned and saw in practice during my studies in England. Some Omanis may think that a certain percentage is deducted from the salaries of all employees as income tax, regardless of the amount earned.

I tell them that this is not the case; as not every employee is subject to income tax, especially those whose salary does not cover their monthly expenses. As for those who earn more than their expenditure, the entire income is not taxed; rather, what is left of the income after determining the monthly expenses in advance, and the expenses are what is related to food and drink, what is spent on electricity, water, telephone, gasoline, insurance, and what is spent on the salary of the housemaid, driver, or farmer, etc. The remaining amount is subject to tax. I give an example: if a person earns Sterling Pounds 8,000 in England, his monthly expenses are 4,000, the remainder 4,000 is subject to tax, and the income tax on the first thousand is lower than on the second, and the rate continues to rise for every thousand pounds sterling. That is, it is not a fixed amount on the saved amount of 4000 pounds. Not all Britons working abroad are subject to income tax at home, so Oman for expats is heaven.

In Britain, the non-taxable amount depends on the number of family members, so the larger the number of family members, the greater the non-taxable amount. This is how income tax was applied while I was living in the UK, and the system may have changed since then. In this regard, I would like to point out, that all Western countries that levy taxes on income, provide unemployment benefits to their citizens every week, and I hope that this approach will also be applied in Oman.

I must point out to the reader that income tax in Britain does not apply to what a person earns each month only, but rather, the tax applies to every material income a citizen receives. If a person inherits property from his parents, the property is valued, and inheritance tax is paid on that value.

In conclusion, I am fully confident that our wise government will make certain exceptions when imposing the income tax, as it did with the value-added tax, in order to achieve the prosperity of our country, the prosperity of our national economy, and lastly the appreciation and cooperation of the citizens.

The views expressed by the writer are his personal opinions

MEETING

Sayyid Badr bids farewell to ambassador of Cyprus

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister on Tuesday received Andreas Nicolaides, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in enhancing bilateral relations, wishing him success in his future endeavors. The meeting was attended by several officials from both sides. — ONA

TRANSPORT

Batinah Coastal Road project work resumes

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has resumed the first phase of the Batinah Coastal Road project.

The project work includes completing the unimplemented parts of the first phase of the project, with a length of 30 km, including paving 22 km of the remaining parts of the first phase (Barka - Suwaiq Port) and paving 8 km of the remaining portion of Sohar Port - Khatma Milaha, in addition to the implementation of four-valley bridges and 67 box ferries to ensure the smooth flow of traffic during rainfall. It also involves the construction of service roads on both sides of the main road.

The project work also includes the implementation of the duplication of the 4 km long Barka Souq link, and the 6 km long Suwaiq Wilayat link, with the construction of the Suwaiq Bridge on the Batinah Main Road. — ONA

ON 26 JUNE

Oman to mark World Drug Day on Wednesday

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will on Wednesday join the countries of the world in celebrating World Drug Day 2024 (the International Day against Abuse of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances), which falls on 26 June.

The celebration of World Drug Day 2024 seeks to enhance international cooperation in the field of combating the abuse of narcotics and psychotropic substance, review world countries' policies and procedures in this respect, define the common challenges and difficulties, develop appropriate solutions and raise awareness among members of societies about the problems involved in the abuse of narcotics and psychotropic substances. — ONA

SPACE ECOSYSTEM

Pact to help achieve Oman's goals

< FROM A1

Harry O'Hanley, CEO of ABL, expressed his pleasure at signing the MOU, saying, "The Gulf region space ecosystem is growing immensely, with new investment and large ambition in exploration, science missions and constellation deployment. These efforts all benefit from local access to space and we're excited by the opportunity to partner with Etlaq and the Sultanate of Oman to help provide this capability."

His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Kais Al Said, CEO of Etlaq, highlighted the importance of this partnership stating, "We are proud of getting to this milestone with ABL Space Systems, and it reflects our commitment to developing the space sector in Oman. We believe that this MoU is a step in the right direction for us to position our spaceport as a global choice for established rocket companies."

This signing marks a significant step towards achieving Oman's goals in developing the local space sector, as well as enhancing international cooperation in space.

ROYAL HOSPITAL

Lymph node removal surgery conducted

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the University Medical City, a specialised medical team at the Royal Hospital succeeded in performing the first laparoscopic operation of its kind in Oman to remove the sentinel lymph node.

The 2-hour surgery was conducted for a female patient with high-risk of developing malignant tumour in the uterus.

Dr. Thuraya Rashid Al Rawahi, Senior Consultant, Gynaecological Oncology Surgery, at the Royal Hospital, head of the medical team, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the operation constituted a step forward in uterine tumour surgery in the Sultanate of Oman.

Such an operation, Dr. Thuraya said, reduces the risks of complete removal of the lymph nodes and saves time without prejudice to the accuracy of the uterine cancer treatment plan.

Dr. Thuraya pointed out that the lymph node removal technique involves the injection of a radioactive substance into the cervix prior to the operation. Once this is done, only the cancerous node is removed, instead of removing all the lymph nodes in the pelvic area, as was the case in the past.

Dr. Thuraya added that this technique contributes to reducing side effects of surgery, like the swelling of legs, thereby accelerating healing and improving the patient's quality of life. — ONA

WORLD

China's lunar probe brings back samples from moon's far side

Chang'e 6 returns bearing the first samples ever taken of rock and soil from the largely unexplored far side of the moon, the side that is never visible from Earth

Beijing: China's lunar probe landed safely in the remote steppes of northern China's border region with Mongolia on Tuesday.

It returns bearing the first samples ever taken of rock and soil from the largely unexplored far side of the moon, the side that is never visible from Earth.

"I now declare that the Chang'e 6 Lunar Exploration Mission achieved complete success," Zhang Kejian, the director of the China National Space Administration agency said in a televised news conference shortly after the landing. State TV carried live footage of the vessel touching down.

China's President Xi Jinping sent a message of congratulations to the Chang'e-6 team, saying that the mission was a "landmark achievement in our country's efforts at becoming a space and technological power."

The samples were set to be transported by air to Beijing for further study, according to Chinese broadcaster CCTV.

What are researchers hoping to find and learn?

Chinese scientists anticipate that the samples will include volcanic rock that's more than 2 million years old and other materials. Researchers hope to learn more about the differences between the two sides of the moon. They had hoped to collect roughly 2 kilograms (4.5 pounds) of samples.

The probe left Earth on May 3 for what was ultimately a 53-day mission. It both scooped up rocks from the surface and also drilled into the ground for deeper-rooted samples.

The far side of the moon is known to have mountains and impact craters, whereas the side visible from Earth is relatively flat.

Past US and Soviet moon landing missions have gathered samples from the near side of the moon, but only from there.

The payload is "expected to answer one of the most fundamental scientific questions in lunar research: what geological activity is responsible for the differences between the two sides?" said Zongyu Yue, a geologist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, in a statement issued in a journal supported by the academy.

Among other things, scientists are hoping to find evidence of past meteorite strikes.

Longer term, the prospect of identifying usable reserves of ice, and therefore water, on the moon are particularly enticing for the future of space exploration. The resource, crucial to any crewed space mission, is very heavy and cannot practically be launched out of earth's high-gravity atmosphere in large quantities.

As well as being suitable for hydration, water can also be separated into oxygen to breathe and hydrogen that could be used as rocket fuel.

Signs of a new 21st century space race

Several major countries have intensified their space activity in recent years, as more cost effective and simpler launch methods become available. The US, Russia, China, India and others have all shown renewed interest in lunar exploration in recent years. China's Chang'e-5 probe successfully collected samples from the near side of the moon in 2020.

NASA administrator Bill Nelson earlier this year expressed mixed feelings on this renewed interest, saying it was unfortunate that the latest "space race" seemed to be taking place amid intensifying global competition, not cooperation.

"I'm glad there has been a resurgence in this [space] race, but of course I would like to see us racing alongside each other and together," said Neil Melville-Kenney, a technical officer at the European Space Agency (ESA) who is working with Chinese researchers on one of the Chang'e-6 payloads.

— DW

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PLEADS GUILTY IN US COURT

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to return to Australia

LONDON: Julian Assange will plead guilty to violating US espionage laws in a deal with the Justice Department that will see him return to his home country of Australia. Wikileaks said late on Tuesday that Assange had left Belmarsh Prison, where he had been detained for five years, and has flown out of the UK.

"This is the result of a global campaign that spanned grassroots organisers, press freedom campaigners, legislators and leaders from across the political spectrum, all the way to the United Nations," Wikileaks said on social media.

"This created the space for a long period of negotiations with the US Department of Justice, leading to a deal that has not yet been formally finalised."

Later on Tuesday morning, the plane carrying Assange landed in Bangkok to refuel, before it was due to fly the Wikileaks founder to his court hearing in the North Mariana Islands, a US territory in the Pacific.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese welcomed the news in an address to the parliament on Tuesday, saying he wanted Assange brought back home as soon as possible.

Albanese said that, regardless of people's views on Assange's activities, "the case has dragged on for too long."

"There is nothing to be gained by his continued incarceration and we want him brought home to Australia."

Albanese added that the government has continued to provide consular assistance to Assange. He described the proceedings of the deal as "cruicial" and "delicate."

What do we know about the deal?

Assange is due to appear before court in the US territory of the Northern Mariana Islands on Wednesday. In documents filed late on Monday, prosecutors said Assange will plead guilty to a single count of conspiracy to obtain and disseminate national defence information.

The Wikileaks founder is due to be sentenced to 62 months of time that he has already served in the United Kingdom.

A marathon legal battle

Assange founded Wikileaks in 2006. The website went on to release hundreds of thousands of classified US military documents on Washington's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as a trove of diplomatic cables, provided by Chelsea Manning. — DW

Full story @ timesofoman.com/world

EUROPEAN UNION

Is the EU doing enough to prepare for wildfires?

BRUSSELS: Last summer, flames devoured homes and olive groves as they raged uncontrollably for days in Greece, engulfing an area bigger than New York City and leaving white ash and mourning in their wake.

It was the biggest fire ever recorded in Europe.

While wildfires are a natural annual occurrence, rising temperatures and intensified drought periods are creating drier, fire-prone weather that makes them burn faster, longer and more ferociously. In Europe, as around the globe, they are becoming more frequent, intense and widespread. In 2023 alone, they scorched an area around twice the size of Luxembourg, causing more than €4 billion ($4.3 billion) in damages and releasing 20 megatonnes of climate-heating CO2 emissions into the air — equivalent to nearly a third of all annual emissions from international aviation in the EU.

But with rising temperatures expected to increase the risk of wildfires across Europe, is the continent prepared?

Europe is expanding fire response

"Forest fires are getting more and more significant," said Balazs Ujvari, a spokesperson for the European Commission. "More and more we find situations where member states are not able to cope."The focus of the EU's fire response so far has been the expansion of firefighting capabilities through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and RescEU programme, which lend support to countries dealing with extreme wildfires.

Last year, its fleet of planes, helicopters and firefighters doubled in size, with the fire in Greece mobilizing the biggest EU aerial response operation to date.

Ahead of this year's fire season Ujvari said they have 28 planes, four helicopters and 556 firefighters stationed across four fire-prone countries. A further €600 million has been allocated to further expanding the fleet by the end of the decade.

Ujvari added that the EU can also provide images of affected areas from its Copernicus satellite system to help local authorities monitor and tackle blazes.

Firefighting alone isn't enough

Yet some scientists and policy experts argue the EU could do more to prevent fires starting in the first place.

Around 90% of EU funding for tackling wildfires goes into response, and only 10% into prevention, according to one estimate from German EU lawmaker Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg.

The occurrence of fires that are extremely difficult to bring under control — such as those during Portugal's 2017 wildfire season that burned a total of 500,000 hectares and claimed over 100 lives — highlight the limits of prioritizing fire response, said Alexander Held, senior expert at the European Forest Institute.

"Science and experience tell us that to prevent these disaster fires, it's no use investing in fire suppression because they can't be suppressed. The only thing you can do is avoid them happening or ensure that they don't burn with intensities beyond the threshold of control," said Held.

To do this, the EU needs to push more land-based fire prevention and nature-based solutions, he said. "The more climate change we observe, the more we should actually invest in making the landscape less burnable."

Forest management needs to be ramped up

There are many methods available to establish more sustainable land management and increase the resilience of forests, explained Julia Bognar, head of the land use and climate programme at the sustainability think tank Institute for European Environmental Policy.

This includes thinning and spacing trees properly, and reducing floor vegetation through prescribed burning or introducing more grazing animals like cattle and goats that eat the dry shrubs, which act as fuel and help a fire to spread.

Shifting away from monocultures, such as the eucalyptus plantations that ignited during Portugal's severe 2017 fires, would also make forests more resilient.

"With more diversity of trees and older growth trees, they have a better capacity for storing water and preventing drought," said Bognar.

Approaches need to be tailored to the climates of individual countries, said Held, explaining in hotter places like southern Spain it would involve prescribed burning while the weather is mild and establishing a mosaic of different land use, including grazed land that keeps the biomass — which turns into fuel when it is dry and hot — at a low level.

"Here [in Central Europe] resilience means promoting broad-leaved forest, mixed forest, shady and wet forests," said Held, adding that technical measures like fire breaks or fuel buffer zones with reduced fuel out along routes in the forest would also help. He added encouraging more people back into rural areas to manage the land — to engage in practices such as organic farming or continuous cover forestry — is also key.

More coordination and long-term solutions needed

There is an increasing amount of fire prevention best practice being shared in Europe, said Bognar. This includes guidelines for sustainable forest management published by the European Commission in 2023. "But there's not necessarily a concerted effort at the EU level to be pressing for these types of changes... so it's really inconsistent across the EU," she said.

Bognar said rethinking the EU approach to rising wildfire threats needs to include more long-term solutions, such as pushing through the proposed Forest Monitoring Framework — which would give a clearer picture of Europe's forests — and implementing the Nature Restoration Law which, despite being watered down and facing resistance from some member states, aims to support fire resilience by increasing forest biodiversity.

While wildfire experts have long lamented how much more financial support there is for firefighting, there are some funds that can be used for prevention, said Held. But he explained there is too little understanding and coordination in how to access this support, and a lack of solid wildfire prevention strategy at the national level.

One notable exception to this, he said, is Portugal.

Since its devastating 2017 fires, the country has shifted its approach to emphasize forest management, including promoting the plantation of native fire-adapted species as well as fuel breaks — artificial areas with less vegetation that act as barriers to stop or slow down fires — and buffer zones around new and existing buildings in risk areas. France has also made changes, introducing legislation last year cracking down on landowners that fail to clear their forests of undergrowth. — DW

‘Gaza is entering its most critical humanitarian phase since Oct. 7’

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s media observatory has identified three main elements worsening the crisis

JEDDAH: The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s (OIC) media observatory on Israel’s crimes against the Palestinians warned that the Gaza Strip has entered a critical stage since mid-June 2024. This period is considered the worst compared to previous months.

The OIC Observatory identified three main elements worsening the crisis.

The first of which is the continued aggression of the Israeli forces against the Gaza Strip through complete control over it, targeting all its areas, and refusing to cease military operations.

The second element represents the destruction of approximately 70% of Gaza’s urban infrastructure, especially water networks, sanitation, and roads, as well as the destruction of most of the health sector, making most areas of Gaza uninhabitable.

The entry of limited quantities of humanitarian aid, fuel, and water is the third element that prevents any significant recovery, exacerbates the humanitarian crises, and increases its devastating effects more than ever before.

Daily statistics of casualties and targeted areas indicate that Israel aims to normalize this dire situation in Gaza.

The ongoing direct killings appear to be part of a harsher collective punishment strategy, according to the weekly report of the OIC Media Observatory on Israel’s crimes against the Palestinians between the period of June 18 and 24, 2024.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 67% of water and sanitation facilities in Gaza have been destroyed after about nine months of continuous war.

This destruction has led to the spread of infectious diseases, particularly with high summer temperatures and polluted drinking water.

The Khan Yunis municipality confirmed that 170-200 kilometers of water networks have been destroyed, said the reort.

The drinking water crisis in Gaza coincides with the starvation of its population due to Israel’s blocking of the entry of goods and humanitarian aid, while Palestinians warned that 3,500 children were at risk of starvation, in light of the lack of regular vaccinations and medicines. Save the Children confirmed that 21,000 children have died due to Israeli military operations.

Between June 18 and 24, 2024, the OIC Media Observatory recorded the killing of 265 Palestinians and the injury of 680 others. From October 7, 2023, to June 23, 2024, 38,151 Palestinians were killed and 91,232 were injured.

In the West Bank, five Palestinians were murdered by Israeli forces and 212 were detained. There were 33 attacks by Israeli colonists on cities, towns and villages, including raids on two mosques in Jericho and Hebron, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

Colonists carried out activities in repeated attempts to establish colonial outposts in Hebron and Nablus, in addition to grazing their sheep on Palestinian agricultural lands, burning other lands, and attacking agricultural greenhouses in Nablus, Salfit, Tulkarm, and Hebron, and stealing sheep from Palestinian barns, in addition to trying to obstruct aid convoys coming from Jordan to Gaza Strip.

The total number of Israeli crimes against Palestinians during this period reached 1,576, said the report.

Dialysis patients face death and denial of medical transfer in Gaza

Medical sources in the Gaza Strip warned of a real threat to the lives of a thousand dialysis patients due to the acute shortage of medicines and medical supplies, as the service provided to them is limited to palliative treatment.

The sources said that due to the continued aggression, hospitals and health centers are suffering from a severe shortage of medicines and medical supplies necessary to continue providing the necessary medical services to save the lives of patients and injured.

Among the most prominent medications that are about to run out are reception, emergency, anesthesia, intensive care, operations, and treatments for oncology patients and dialysis.

The occupation forces continue to close the Rafah border crossing, after they controlled the Palestinian side of it on May 7, the day after the start of their ground invasion of the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

— WAFA

GERMANY

Rare Rothschild giraffe born at Berlin zoo

BERLIN: A Rothschild’s giraffe gave birth to a calf at the Tierpark Berlin zoo on Monday, with some visitors witnessing the rare event.

“Experiencing a giraffe birth live is something very special in every respect — especially as there are only 1,400 adult Rothschild giraffes in their natural habitat,” said Dr. Andreas Knieriem, the director at the zoo.

“Today, Monday, numerous Tierpark zoo guests were able to witness this wonder of nature in our savannah landscape with their own eyes,” he said.

The yet-unnamed calf was born a few days after World Giraffe Day — which is celebrated on June 21. The sex of the animal is not yet known.

Baby giraffes weigh around 60 kilograms (132 pounds) and are approximately 1.80 metres (5 feet 11 inches) at birth.

The newcomer was still a little wobbly on arrival, but appeared very lively, according to the zoo. A giraffe is able to stand up after around an hour after birth and even run a little later on.

The baby giraffe was visibly without the ossicones, or the distinct horns of a giraffe. They do not form until about a week after birth.

Because a female giraffe gives birth while standing, her calf falls from a height of around two meters — a literal hard introduction to life for the calf.Amalka, the mother, had three calves before she gave birth on Monday.

Why the birth is so important

Scientists only recently discovered that there are four distinct types of giraffes, rather than one as they had previously believed.

Although giraffes as a whole are not endangered, some giraffe subspecies are, according to conservationists.

The Rothschild giraffe falls into the category of the Northern giraffe — the most endangered giraffe species. The International Fund for Animal Welfare reports that there are only 1,399 Rothschild’s giraffes left in the wild.

“Rothschild’s giraffes are threatened in their homeland in Kenya and Uganda, primarily by illegal hunting and the expansion of agriculture,” said Maren Siebert, the curator at the Berlin zoo.

There are approximately 117,000 giraffes left in the wild more generally, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species classifies the species as vulnerable.

Some conservationists refer to the decline in the number of giraffes as a “silent extinction” because the decline has been so slow that it’s almost gone unnoticed.

— DW

HAINAN AIRLINES

Direct flights resume between Beijing and Prague

PRAGUE: Direct flights between the capital cities of China and the Czech Republic officially resumed on Monday, with the arrival of a Hainan Airlines aircraft at the Prague Airport in the early morning after a 10-hour flight.

Noting at a ceremony held at the airport that this year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Chinese Ambassador to the Czech Republic Feng Biao expressed the hope that the renewed flight service will promote exchanges and interactions between the peoples of the two countries, as well as revitalising bilateral tourism cooperation.

— Xinhua

HISTORIAN, JOURNALIST

Anne Applebaum wins German Peace Prize for 2024

BERLIN: Historian and journalist Anne Applebaum has been named by the German Publishers and Booksellers Association as the winner of the German Book Trade Peace Prize for 2024.

“At a time when democratic values and achievements are increasingly being caricatured and attacked, her work embodies an eminent and indispensable contribution to the preservation of democracy and peace,” the award citation said of Applebaum.

The Polish-American journalist is a writer for US magazine, The Atlantic, and has written extensively about Central and Eastern Europe.

According to Appelbaum’s biography, she is considered an expert in Eastern European history and “warned early on of Vladimir Putin’s possible violent expansion policy.”

Appelbaum is the author of The Gulag (2003)”, “The Iron Curtain” (2012), “Red Hunger” (2019) and “The Lure of Authoritarianism” (2021), in which she delves into authoritarian power.

She has received several awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 2004 and the Carl von Ossietzky Prize in 2024.

The award is presented annually at the end of the Frankfurt Book Fair and will be presented this year on October 20. — DW

DRAFT DECISION

Great Barrier Reef under ‘serious threat’: UNESCO

PARIS: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has warned that Australia’s Great Barrier Reef “remains under serious threat,” directing the country to take immediate action to protect the world’s largest coral system.

“Urgent and sustained action is of utmost priority,” the United Nations’ cultural organisation said in a draft decision released late on Monday.

UNESCO asked Australia to update its protection efforts by early next year, but did not recommend placing the reef on its endangered heritage list.

The organisation praised Australia’s steps on water quality and restrictions on gill-net fishing. It nevertheless expressed concern over land clearing and urged more ambitious emission reduction targets.

Australia’s Minister for the Environment and Water Tanya Plibersek called the cultural body’s decision a “huge win.”

“We are acting on climate change, improving local water quality, protecting our marine life, dealing with invasive species, and investing a record amount of money into reef programmes,” she said in a statement on Tuesday.

The UN body still asked Canberra for an update on Australia’s actions regarding the reef by next February. The country had requested that UNESCO wait until 2026.

Environmental groups call for stop to new fossil fuel projects

However, Australian environment group, the Climate Council, criticised Plibersek’s positive spin on UNESCO’s warning, highlighting the reef’s repeated bleaching events and calling for a phase-out of fossil fuels.

“Every new coal and gas project adds harmful climate pollution into the atmosphere and further endangers the reef. The Government must build upon their clean energy plans by also planning to phase out fossil fuels,” Climate Council chief executive Amanda McKenzie said.

Environmental groups such as Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature also urged Australia to reduce emissions further and stop new fossil fuel projects.

The Great Barrier Reef, on the northeast coast of Australia, boasts the world’s largest collection of coral reefs. It features 400 types of coral, 1,500 fish species, and 4,000 mollusc varieties.

It is also home to endangered species such as the dugong (sea cow) and the large green turtle.

Known for its biodiversity, the reef attracts around 2 million visitors annually. — DW

SPORTS

SUPER 8: ROHIT'S KNOCK VS AUSTRALIA

Captain fantastic sets the tone, shows India the way to glory

ST LUCIA: Rohit Sharma, the India captain, blasted 92 from 41 balls that saw him dominate one of the best attacks, Australia, at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup to set his team up with a controlling position inside the first powerplay as they defeated Australia by 24 runs to secure their spot in the semi-finals on Monday.

This was more than just a good innings; it was the sort of batting display that breaks spirits. And it looked at times to have done just that to an Australian team who rarely appear to wilt under pressure on the field.

Rohit's knock featured eight sixes and set the tone for India to push on, even when he was dismissed short of his century in the 12th over.

"It felt like a dream, he batted beautifully," said a beaming Suryakumar Yadav during the innings break, having spent the last part of Rohit's innings out in the middle with him.

"Before coming here we sat together, we talked about it, how we want to approach and what brand of cricket we want to play, and he showed us the way."

World-class performers such as Rohit have a tendency to make genius look straightforward, and his comments following India's win hinted at some of the strategic thinking that made an innings that had appeared almost effortless in its brilliance possible

"I thought right from over number one that there was a strong breeze blowing across," Rohit said, of a Gros Islet venue where the weather conditions have played a part all tournament. "They changed their plan, bowling against the breeze, so I realised I had to open up the off-side as well.

"When you keep an open mind and not just think of one shot, you can access all areas of the field," Rohit continued.

"It was a good wicket, and you want to try and back yourself to play those kinds of shots. I've been trying to do that for a few years now, and I'm glad it came off today.

"You want to make big scores, yes, but at the same time you want to make the bowlers think where the next shot is coming, and I think I managed to do that today."

His teammate Arshdeep Singh – who took 3/37 on the day – said that it was little surprise to see the skipper light it up on the big stage.

"Sir, as a team, we always talk in the dressing room that personal scores don't matter much as long as the team is doing nice," Arshdeep replied to a question during his post-game media conference.

"We knew he is a legend and the big knock was around the corner all the time. So, we were not surprised by the way he played today and it came off really well, and even in the coming games we just hope he does the same for us."

India's next "coming game" is against defending champions England in the second semi-final in Guyana on 27 June, with the winner progressing to the final in Barbados two days later.

And Rohit's tone-setting knock has given India their attacking blueprint for how to win those two matches and go all the way in the Caribbean.

Brief scores: India 205/5 (Rohit 92, Suryakumar 31, Shivam Dube 28, Hardik Pandya 27; Mitchell Starc 2/45) beat Australia 181/7 (Travis Head 76, Mitchell Marsh 37; Arshdeep 3/37, Kuldeep Yadav 2/24). (www.icc-cricket.com)

Afghanistan reach historic ICC World T20 semi-finals

The tense win over Bangladesh also knocked Australia out of the tournament

ST VINCENT: Afghanistan qualified for the semi-finals of a World Cup for the first time by beating Bangladesh by eight runs in a tense low-scoring classic on Monday.

The victory sees them progress as runners-up from Super 8s Group 1, while knocking Bangladesh as well as heavyweights Australia out of the tournament.

They will now play South Africa in Trinidad on Thursday, and are one match away from facing either defending T20 champions England or India in Saturday's final.

Needing a win to advance to the knockout stage, Afghanistan underperformed with the bat, scoring 115/5.

A rollercoaster, rain-interrupted run chase ensued, in which both sides and then Australia looked to be favourites to progress at different stages.

Ultimately it was Afghanistan who emerged triumphant, with captain Rashid Khan and Naveen-ul-Haq taking four wickets apiece to secure a famous victory.

Bangladesh, who were also seeking to reach their first World Cup semi-final, needed to win by a large margin to qualify on net run-rate (NRR).

They successfully throttled the dangerous Afghanistan opening pair of Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran, who both fell to leg-spinner Rishad Hossain (3-26), but skipper Rashid hit three late sixes to boost the total.

Bangladesh's target was revised to 114 off 19 overs, but they knew they had to knock off the runs in 12.1 overs to turn their overall NRR in the group in their favour.

Opener Litton Das anchored the innings, ending on 54 not out, but they lost veteran Shakib al Hasan and captain Najmul Hossain Shanto to successive balls from Naveen in the third over.

Despite failing with their own quest, the Tigers remained in contention for a consolation win that would have seen Australia qualify ahead of Afghanistan on NRR.

But Naveen took the final two Bangladesh wickets in successive deliveries, either side of a short rain delay, to begin rapturous celebrations.

For Afghanistan, qualification for the semi-final is another step on the remarkable journey they have taken since first qualifying for a T20 World Cup in 2010.

Brief scores: Afghanistan: 115/5 in 20 overs (Gurbaz 43 (55); Rishad 3-26) beat Bangladesh 105 all out in 17.5 overs (Das 54* (49); Rashid 4-23, Naveen 4-26). Afghanistan won by eight runs (DLS method).

'Semi-final like a dream for Afghanistan'

ST VINCENT: Captain Rashid Khan says Afghanistan qualifying for the T20 World Cup semi-finals is "like a dream".

"It's unbelievable," said Rashid. "Back home everyone is so, so happy for us.

"It's like a dream for us to be in a semi-final."

"We had to push ourselves for the people back home, for their happiness and to make the country proud," Rashid, 25, added.

"It is a massive celebration back home now, I'm sure. It is a big achievement for us.

"I'm so happy with the way we have delivered as a team. We have to go in [to the semi-final] with a very clear mind, keep things simple for ourselves and make sure we enjoy it."

Rashid played a starring role in the victory over Bangladesh, hitting three sixes to lift Afghanistan to 115-5. The leg-spinner then took 4-23 with the ball as they defending a low total.

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MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE

OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES

The price of Oman oil has increased, with prices for delivery by August 2024 reaching $85.16, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil rose by 65 cents from the price of Monday, which was $84.51. - ONA

MSX INDEX ENDS LOWER

The MSX index closed at 4,598.32 points, down by 0.52% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.74% at 450.74 points. National Gas, up 1.85%, was the top gainer while Muscat Gases, down 7.86%, was the top loser.

Agreement signed to establish OMR10 million poultry project

The establishment of the poultry project aims to enhance food security and achieve self-sufficiency by meeting the entire need for chickens in the Sultanate of Oman, and thus reduce imports

MUSCAT: Osool Poultry Company signed an agreement with Aviagen (Ross) company to establish a major poultry project codenamed "Jaddat" (mother hens), an investment worth OMR10 million. Aviagen will provide full technical support to Osool in setting up and running the project.

The establishment of the poultry project aims to enhance food security and achieve self-sufficiency by meeting the entire need for chickens in the Sultanate of Oman, and thus reduce imports.

The agreement was signed by Dr Hadi Mohsen Al Lawati, CEO of Osool Company, and Bulent Tanyildizi, Aviagen Business Manager for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The project, which constitutes an essential component of the poultry industry chain, enables the company to produce fertilised eggs, quality chicks and other poultry products.

By establishing this vital project, Osool Poultry Company also seeks to reduce the risks involved in poultry imports' potential of conveying disease pathogens to the Sultanate of Oman. The project also helps overcome common logistical problems.

Osool Poultry Company is currently operating its project with a production capacity of 150 million eggs, per annum, from fertilised eggs, mainly by importing one-day-old chicks from different countries.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources undertakes a pivotal role in consolidating the poultry industry in the Sultanate of Oman, notably by transferring and localizing global knowledge and expertise in the field of raising and developing poultry projects. The ministry also contributes to training Omani national cadres and empowering them to help enhance food security and self-sufficiency.

It is worth noting that the poultry project, "Jaddat", requires careful monitoring to ensure the health of the mother hens and the quality of the eggs produced. The project paves the way for the establishment of private farms that will henceforth be equipped with the latest technologies for raising mother hens and producing hatching eggs. - ONA

TECHNOLOGY

Google to develop artificial intelligence chatbot

WASHINGTON: Google is working on developing chatbots that operate with artificial intelligence (AI), and are distinguished by their ability to simulate the personalities of celebrities and influencers.

These robots will be supported by Gemini models, and users will also be able to determine the robot's personality and appearance. This product is expected to be launched during the current year as an independent project.

Google is discussing the possibility of integrating these robots into YouTube in the future, in order to provide an experience similar to what Meta already provides to users on its various platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Messenger.

Users can benefit from ready-made custom Gems templates, such as a yoga instructor, math teacher, recipe expert, and other ready-made custom templates that Google will provide to all users.

The company will also give Gemini Advanced subscription holders the ability to create custom Gems bots according to their specific needs, similar to the benefits OpenAI is giving to ChatGPT Plus subscribers. -ONA

FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

FSA organises introductory programme on innovative bonds and Sukuk

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority (FSA) is organising an introductory programme on the national roadmap for aligning the non-financial banking sector with green and sustainable financing principles titled, Innovative Bonds and Sukuk.

The two-day programme which started yesterday will end today. On the first day, the programme targeted the FSA employees to enhance internal communication by exchanging knowledge and highlighting new legislative projects. As for the second day, the programme targets representatives of the entities licensed by the FSA and issuing entities from public joint stock companies.

It will also focus on green and sustainable bonds, sukuk and disclosure controls

This programme is part of the efforts made by the FSA regarding raising awareness of the employees and entities involved in the application of the provisions of the Bond and Sukuk Regulation issued by decision no. (E/21/2024). This regulation regulates long-term debt instruments as one of the financing options offered by the Omani Capital Market to meet financing needs like expansion of projects or realising new investment initiatives led by the private sector.

The programme title, Innovative Sukuk and bonds, indicates the resilience of the regulation and its support for innovation since the financing products covered in the regulation are diverse in terms of type and purpose. Such products include green and sustainable bonds and sukuk and Waqf Sukuk. The regulation encourages innovative and diversified financing products in accordance with the nature of the financing needs of the investor and the issuer.

It will also focus on green and sustainable bonds and sukuk and disclosure controls.

MARKET

MSX index ends lower

National Gas, up 1.85 per cent, was the top gainer while Muscat Gases, down 7.86 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,598.32 points, down by 0.52% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.74% at 450.74 points. National Gas, up 1.85%, was the top gainer while Muscat Gases, down 7.86%, was the top loser. Shares of Sohar International Bank were the most active in terms of number of shares traded while Oman Cables Industry were the most active in terms of turnover.

A total number of 1005 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of RO 3.29 million, with more than 14.7 million shares changing hands.

Out of 54 traded securities, 3 advanced, 29 declined, and 22 remained unchanged. At the session close, foreign investors were net sellers for RO 889K while domestic investors were net buyers for RO 825K, followed by GCC & Arab investors for RO 64K worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 7,566.27 points, down 0.93%. Prices of were up by respectively. Prices of Oman Arab Bank, Al Madina Investments, Takaful Oman, Muscat Finance, DIDIC were down by 4.00%, 3.57%, 2.13%, 2.08%, 1.72% respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,928.63 points, down 1.06%. Prices of Muscat Thread Mill were up by 1.01% respectively. Prices of Oman Cables Industry, Oman Flour Mills, Construction Materials, Galfar Engineering, Jazeera Steel Products were down by 2.78%, 2.20%, 1.89%, 1.80%, 1.79% respectively.

Services Index was down by 0.37% before closing at 1,755.65 points. Prices of National Gas were up by 1.85% respectively. Prices of Muscat Gases, Muscat Desalination, Al Suwadi Power, Dhofar Generating, Al Batinah Power were down by 7.86%, 4.05%, 4.05%, 1.49%, 1.43% respectively.— United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff	Diff %
Industry Index	5,994.33	5,918.81	5,928.63	5,991.91	-63.28	-1.06
Services Index	1,769.54	1,752.45	1,755.65	1,762.22	-6.57	-0.37
FINANCIAL TR IDX	8,698.73	8,564.55	8,577.03	8,657.77	-80.73	-0.93
SERVICES TR IDX	2,052.14	2,032.32	2,036.02	2,043.64	-7.62	-0.37
FIXED INCOME INDEX	1,069.10	1,069.10	1,069.10	1,069.10	0.00	0.00
MSX Shariah Index	454.46	450.74	450.74	454.09	-3.35	-0.74
MSX TR INDEX	6,432.92	6,378.28	6,385.13	6,418.33	-33.20	-0.52
FINANCIAL INDEX	7,673.63	7,555.26	7,566.27	7,637.49	-71.22	-0.93
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	6,916.03	6,828.90	6,840.24	6,913.24	-73.01	-1.06
MSX 30 INDEX	4,632.74	4,593.39	4,598.32	4,622.23	-23.91	-0.52

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
14,706,300	3,294,815	1,005	24,129,941,383	3	29	22	54

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR TUESDAY, JUNE 25

REGULAR MARKET

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RO)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	22,615	5,722	2	0.253	0.253	0.253	0.253	0.253	0.000	0.000	0.253	0.251	0.253	0.100	25,300,000
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	4,698	1,706	8	0.375	0.375	0.360	0.360	0.360	0.000	0.000	0.360	0.340	0.370	0.100	240,611,553
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	55,000	4,470	4	0.082	0.082	0.081	0.081	0.081	0.000	0.000	0.081	0.081	0.084	0.100	9,871,875
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	13,250	5,036	5	0.382	0.382	0.380	0.380	0.380	0.000	0.000	0.380	0.380	0.390	0.100	125,731,630
OM0000002275	SHELL OMAN MARKETING	960	767	2	0.800	0.800	0.790	0.790	0.790	0.000	0.000	0.790	0.790	0.850	0.100	75,050,000
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIYA INVESTMENT HO.	275,644	20,718	19	0.076	0.076	0.075	0.076	0.076	0.000	0.000	0.075	0.075	0.076	0.100	6,840,000
OM0000004735	SEMBCORP SALALAH	172,500	16,677	12	0.100	0.100	0.096	0.096	0.096	0.000	0.000	0.096	0.096	0.105	0.100	91,638,907
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	103,682	8,115	14	0.079	0.080	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.000	0.000	0.078	0.076	0.079	0.100	13,650,000
OM0000008934	ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	240,540	70,626	46	0.294	0.294	0.293	0.294	0.294	0.000	0.000	0.294	0.293	0.294	0.100	226,438,800
OM0000009072	OQ GAS NETWORKS	990,455	139,663	164	0.142	0.142	0.141	0.141	0.141	0.000	0.000	0.141	0.141	0.141	0.100	610,617,973
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	338,145	97,422	29	0.288	0.289	0.288	0.288	0.289	-0.001	-0.346	0.288	0.288	0.289	0.100	187,471,938
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	292,134	293,913	45	1.015	1.015	1.003	1.005	1.010	-0.005	-0.495	1.005	1.010	1.005	0.100	753,750,000
OM0000003398	SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	2,593,765	343,227	49	0.133	0.133	0.131	0.132	0.133	-0.001	-0.752	0.132	0.133	0.132	0.100	736,196,508
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	802,399	204,409	35	0.255	0.255	0.252	0.253	0.255	-0.002	-0.784	0.253	0.253	0.255	0.100	411,364,428
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	1,024,964	253,476	69	0.247	0.250	0.246	0.247	0.249	-0.002	-0.803	0.247	0.247	0.259	0.100	1,854,080,074
OM0000001152	OMAN NATIONAL ENGINEERING & INVESTMENT	299,000	34,405	14	0.115	0.116	0.115	0.115	0.116	-0.001	-0.862	0.115	0.114	0.115	0.100	17,250,000
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	224,663	81,035	35	0.360	0.362	0.352	0.358	0.362	-0.004	-1.105	0.358	0.358	0.360	0.100	84,634,780
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	393,753	27,390	41	0.070	0.070	0.069	0.069	0.070	-0.001	-1.429	0.069	0.069	0.073	0.100	46,567,233
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.	219,174	15,031	9	0.069	0.070	0.068	0.068	0.069	-0.001	-1.449	0.068	0.068	0.069	0.100	13,600,000
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	64,000	11,817	14	0.187	0.187	0.182	0.185	0.188	-0.003	-1.596	0.185	0.183	0.185	0.100	40,700,000
OM0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS	130,510	36,286	11	0.277	0.279	0.275	0.275	0.280	-0.005	-1.786	0.275	0.275	0.275	0.100	34,346,939
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	395,492	28,099	33	0.074	0.074	0.070	0.071	0.074	-0.003	-4.054	0.071	0.071	0.074	0.100	50,722,850
Total	22	8,657,343	1,700,010	660												

Parallel Market

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RO)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	565,531	61,586	34	0.107	0.110	0.105	0.110	0.108	0.002	1.852	0.110	0.110	0.110	0.100	9,350,000
OM0000002036	MUSCAT THREAD MILLS	1,422	142	2	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.001	1.010	0.100	0.000	0.100	0.100	1,639,411
OM0000001426	OMAN REFRESHMENT	1,200	1,440	3	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.200	0.000	0.000	1.200	1.200	0.000	0.100	60,000,000
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	1,652,821	145,060	58	0.088	0.088	0.086	0.088	0.088	0.000	0.000	0.088	0.088	0.088	0.100	18,128,000
OM0000002200	AHLI BANK	27,248	4,138	6	0.155	0.155	0.150	0.150	0.150	0.000	0.000	0.150	0.150	0.155	0.100	352,448,620
OM0000003000	Al MAHA PETROLEUM PRODUCTS MARKETING	850	914	1	1.075	1.075	1.075	1.075	1.075	0.000	0.000	1.075	1.050	1.080	0.100	74,175,000
OM0000003661	VOLTAMP ENERGY	2,000	628	3	0.314	0.314	0.314	0.314	0.314	0.000	0.000	0.314	0.306	0.314	0.100	25,560,464
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	10,000	3,130	2	0.313	0.313	0.313	0.313	0.313	0.000	0.000	0.313	0.295	0.312	0.100	62,485,943
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	44,300	8,063	4	0.182	0.182	0.182	0.182	0.182	0.000	0.000	0.182	0.182	0.184	0.100	10,010,000
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	170,505	9,879	18	0.058	0.058	0.057	0.058	0.058	0.000	0.000	0.058	0.058	0.058	0.100	84,830,885
OM0000008868	THE PEARL REIF	1,000	118	1	0.118	0.118	0.118	0.118	0.119	-0.001	-0.840	0.118	0.000	0.119	0.100	59,956,218
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	331,733	34,135	31	0.102	0.105	0.102	0.102	0.103	-0.001	-0.971	0.102	0.102	0.105	0.100	228,169,209
OM0000003281	TAAGEER FINANCE	68,300	6,905	3	0.102	0.102	0.101	0.101	0.102	-0.001	-0.980	0.101	0.101	0.000	0.100	27,380,140
OM0000008447	OMAN REIT FUND	7,000	497	2	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.071	0.072	-0.001	-1.389	0.071	0.071	0.073	0.100	34,849,383
OM0000007407	DHOFAR GENERATING	31,250	2,063	5	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.067	-0.001	-1.493	0.066	0.066	0.073	0.100	14,667,840
OM0000001509	DHOFAR INTERNATIONAL DEV. & INV. HO.	180	41	1	0.229	0.229	0.229	0.229	0.233	-0.004	-1.717	0.229	0.000	0.229	0.100	93,717,406
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING	2,191,621	359,926	97	0.166	0.166	0.163	0.164	0.167	-0.003	-1.796	0.164	0.164	0.169	0.100	33,289,777
OM0000001368	CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL INDUSTRIES	20,000	1,040	1	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.053	-0.001	-1.887	0.052	0.048	0.058	0.100	3,250,000
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	140,000	6,580	12	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.048	-0.001	-2.083	0.047	0.045	0.050	0.100	14,435,877
OM0000004776	TAKAFUL OMAN	202,440	9,328	13	0.046	0.048	0.046	0.046	0.047	-0.001	-2.128	0.048	0.048	0.048	0.100	11,500,000
OM0000001400	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	500	223	2	0.445	0.445	0.445	0.445	0.455	-0.010	-2.198	0.445	0.000	0.445	0.100	70,087,500
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	293,214	847,298	3	2.890	2.890	2.800	2.800	2.880	-0.080	-2.778	2.800	2.800	2.890	0.100	251,160,000
OM0000001962	AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING	111,599	6,046	9	0.055	0.055	0.054	0.054	0.056	-0.002	-3.571	0.054	0.053	0.054	0.100	4,590,000
OM0000005260	OMAN ARAB BANK	851	123	1	0.144	0.144	0.144	0.144	0.150	-0.006	-4.000	0.144	0.144	0.145	0.100	240,395,040
OM0000007084	MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION	22,407	1,588	3	0.070	0.071	0.070	0.071	0.074	-0.003	-4.054	0.071	0.070	0.078	0.100	11,044,078
OM0000001178	MUSCAT GASES	5,000	645	1	0.129	0.129	0.129	0.129	0.140	-0.011	-7.857	0.129	0.127	0.141	0.100	3,870,000
Total	26	5,902,972	1,511,535	316												

INDIA TRADING

Sensex tops 78,000 mark, Nifty breaks 23,700 milestone

NEW DELHI: The stock indices of India closed in green after the day's trade on June 25. At the end of the trading day the Sensex closed at 78,053.52, up 712.44 or 0.92 per cent and Nifty closed at 23,721.30 up 183.45 or 0.78 per cent touching a new lifetime highs in trade.

During the trade, Sensex surged over 600 points to cross 78,164.71 level for the first time and Nifty crossed 23,700. The Bank Nifty surpassed the 52,500 mark for the first time, highlighting strong momentum in the banking sector.

"Private banks led the Sensex and Nifty up with the real estate stocks seeing correction," said Ajay Bagga, Banking and Market Expert.

Among the sectoral indices Banking, Financial services, IT, PSU banks, and Private Banks surged while the sectoral stocks of FMCG, Auto, Media, Metal, Pharma, Reality, Healthcare, Consumer Durables, and Oil and gas closed in red at the National Stock Exchange (NSE).

Banking stocks at BSE also shone as stocks of Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank saw a surge during the trading hours.

Major banking stocks remained the top gainers during the day along with L&T, SBI, Tech Mahindra,Bajaj Finserve, Infosys and UltraTech Cement following the trend.

The stock market opened in green on Tuesday with Sensex opening at 77507.32, up by 166.24 points and Nifty opening 41.55 points up at 23579.40. -ANI

NEW ROLE

Philippe Kronberg appointed as Resort General Manager for Shangri-La Muscat, Oman Hotels

MUSCAT: Shangri-La Muscat announced the appointment of Philippe Kronberg as the new Resort General Manager for Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn hotels, effective June 24, 2024.

Philippe Kronberg, a French-Australian dual citizen, brings a wealth of experience to his new role in Muscat. He will oversee the strategic direction and daily operations of the resorts' 640 suites and rooms, spread across three distinctive hotels on 124 acres along the vibrant shores of the Sea of Oman.

Joining from Shangri-La Sydney, Philippe is embarking on his third General Manager position within the Shangri-La Group. With over three decades in luxury hospitality, his global career spans roles in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the UK, and Turkey. Philippe completed a Diploma in Hotel Management at the renowned Swiss hospitality school ´Les Roches´ before beginning his professional journey at London's famous Ritz Hotel.

He has since demonstrated impressive hands-on leadership and commercial acumen; in Sydney, his leadership led to the hotel's highest revenue since its opening. Philippe also holds an MBA from

the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales and served on the board of Australia's Tourism Accommodation Association from 2019 to 2023, gaining valuable insights into the industry's relationship with government.

Philippe is committed to sustainable practices and adherence to compliance directives across all departments. His extensive experience makes him uniquely qualified to lead both Oman's sole adult-only resort and its beloved family beach resort.

"I am excited to start my journey in Oman, with a talented and dedicated team of hospitality professionals to reinforce the complex's success and attract a wider international audience. Oman is a hidden gem of the Middle East that deserves wider recognition in the luxury travel sphere. This will be a wonderful opportunity to expand my experience in the Gulf states," said Philippe Kronberg.

"The resort is at an exciting point in its growth and development. I anticipate plenty of opportunities to enhance revenue streams, devise strategies alongside the commercial team, and amplify our guest satisfaction while maintaining the standards of excellence Shangri-La is renowned for, across both Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn."

Outside his professional life, Philippe, a former paratrooper, holds a private pilot's license and enjoys aerobatic flying. A family man with two teenage children, he is also dedicated to charitable causes through fundraising and outreach initiatives. His adventurous spirit and sense of responsibility align with the ethos of the Shangri-La Group, which combines luxury with sustainability and local elegance to provide guests with their own personal Shangri-La.

SPORTS

Last-gasp equaliser sends Italy through, breaks Croatian hearts

Zaccagni scored in the final minute of stoppage time for defending champions as they drew 1-1 against Croatia in Euro 2024

LEIPZIG: Mattia Zaccagni scored in the final minute of stoppage time as Italy broke Croatia's hearts with a late equaliser that ensures the defending champions progress to the last 16 of Euro 2024 on Monday.

Luka Modric had thought he had won it for Croatia to send them through as runners-up in Group B when he slammed a shot into the roof of the net early in the second half.

That came after he had seen a penalty saved, but the swift response to that setback looked like it would be enough for the Croatians.

But Italy levelled in stoppage time when Zaccagni curled home in the 98th minute to ensure they go through with group winners Spain.

It was a cruel blow for Croatia, who had been minutes away from progressing but two points is now unlikely to be enough to finish as one of the best third-placed teams.

The result means Italy will play Switzerland in the last 16 on Saturday, 29 June.

Croatia's players collapsed to the ground at the final whistle, while their fans stood motionless in the stands, staring in disbelief at what had just unfolded.

The 2018 World Cup finalists had been far from their best in the first two games of this tournament, losing comprehensively to Spain and then drawing with Albania.

That meant they went into this game against the defending champions as underdogs, a label they often relish, and they certainly appeared to thrive off it with their start to this game.

They had Italy firmly on the back foot but as the match wore on it looked like their struggles in the final third would be their undoing.

But up stepped Modric. The 38-year-old recovered seconds after seeing his penalty following a handball saved to drive a shot into the roof of the net and send Croatian fans wild. From then on they managed the game superbly but, with almost the last kick of the game, Zaccagni saw space for the shot to devastate the Croatian fans. It now remains to be seen what happens to Croatia's ageing stars, with Modric and others who had taken them to a World Cup semi-final two years ago now in their mid to late 30s.

Italy beat England to win Euro 2020 but they have looked far from defending champions so far in this tournament. They had to come from behind against Albania in their opener and were then deservedly beaten by Spain.

As a consequence, boss Luciano Spalletti made changes for this game, but once again they were largely second best.

They had a good spell after weathering a strong start by Croatia when they had a number of chances, but after Modric's strike they saw plenty of the ball without truly threatening.

But, to Italy's credit, they kept going until the very end, even though they would probably have progressed as one of the best third-placed sides.

Long after the final whistle their fans were still celebrating in the stands and they will hope this will be the spark that brings them to life at Euro 2024. - Agencies

GROUP B

Torres nets goal as Spain stay unbeaten at Euros

DUSSELFORF: Spain maintained their 100% record at Euro 2024 as they defeated and eliminated Albania – a result that meant England, France and the Netherlands all secured last-16 places on Monday.

Former Manchester City forward Ferran Torres, now at Barcelona, gave a much-changed Spain side the lead in the 13th minute, finishing low first time from Dani Olmo's pass with the ball bouncing in off the post. Kristjan Asllani's powerful 25-yard strike for Albania drew a fine save from Spain goalkeeper David Raya, who spent last season at Arsenal on loan from Brentford.

Raya also did well to keep out Fulham striker Armando Broja's shot on the turn, as Albania could not find an equaliser and finished bottom of Group B.

Spain have won all three of their matches at Euro 2024, scoring five goals and conceding none

Three-time European champions Spain had already secured top spot thanks to wins over Croatia and Italy, so coach Luis de la Fuente was able to make 10 changes to his starting line-up.

The substitutions he later made ensured every outfield player in their 26-man squad featured during their opening three matches.

Ex-Manchester City man Jesus Navas, now 38 and an attacking right-back, produced a fine cross and Mikel Merino, formerly of Newcastle, had an effort parried.

Joselu, a Champions League winner with Real Madrid after earlier spells with Stoke City and Newcastle, also went close before Spain's first goal. After Torres struck, Spain had chances to kill off the game but Olmo, Torres, Merino and Joselu missed opportunities.

Albania realistically needed to win to progress, but this loss, along with Italy's 1-1 draw against Croatia, meant Sylvinho's side ended up bottom of the group.

It also meant certain progression to the last-16 phase for England from Group C plus France and the Netherlands from Group D, with those three already having taken four points from two matches. Out of 24 nations at Euro 2024 only two – Spain and Portugal – have won all their matches, with Portugal playing their third group match on Wednesday when they face Georgia. - Agencies

GROUP D

Brazil begin Copa America campaign with a draw

LOS ANGELES: Brazil began their Copa America campaign with a disappointing goalless draw against Costa Rica in Los Angeles on Monday.

The nine-time winners had 74% of possession and 19 shots but could not break through in their Group D opener.

Marquinhos had the ball in the net in the 30th minute after he tapped in at the back post following a Raphinha free-kick but the Video Assistant Referee ruled it out for offside.

Brazil boss Dorival Jr brought youngsters Endrick, who has signed for Real Madrid, and Savio off the bench but they could not find a winner.

Lucas Paqueta hit the woodwork just after the hour mark and spurned two late chances from good positions at the SoFi Stadium in Hollywood Park.

The West Ham United midfielder acknowledged his side must improve when they play Paraguay on Saturday.

"We played a great game, we fought until the end, I had three chances myself, we were frustrated not to win, but we leave with confidence," Paqueta said.

"We played our game, we have to improve our finishing, myself in particular, so that we can win."

Costa Rica coach Gustavo Alfaro made a film analogy to emphasise how much his side had been written off before the match had started. "We were Bruce Willis in 'The Sixth Sense', where the only one that did not know he was dead was him, right?" he said.

"Well, everyone thought we were dead before the movie started in our case."

Colombia's James rolls back the years

Colombia took the early initiative in Group D with a 2-1 win over Paraguay as attacking midfielder James Rodriguez produced an eye-catching performance.

The 32-year-old, who has played just a handful of minutes for Brazilian club Sao Paulo in the two months leading into the Copa America, had a hand in both of Colombia's goals.

Rodriguez flighted a pinpoint cross to the far post that picked out Daniel Munoz to head in Colombia's opener in the 32nd minute.

The former Real Madrid and Everton playmaker provided another assist just before half-time with a free-kick that was glanced in by Crystal Palace midfielder Jefferson Lerma.

Brighton's Julio Enciso pulled a goal back for Paraguay in the 69th minute with an angled volley but Colombia held on to claim the points.

Colombia play Costa Rica in their second group game on Friday before facing Brazil on 2 July. - Agencies

FANATEC GT WORLD CHALLENGE POWERED BY AWS ENDURANCE CUP

Al Faisal hopeful of a podium finish at 24 Hours of Spa

MUSCAT: The regular Al Manar Racing by Getspeed trio of Oman's Al Faisal Al Zubair, Austrian Dominik Baumann and Canadian Mikaël Grenier will be joined by new Swiss racer Philip Ellis for this weekend's Crowdstrike 24 Hours of Spa, the flagship second round of the 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup at the Belgian circuit of Spa-Francorchamps.

The quartet are entered in the Gold category in their Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo and will be bidding for a podium finish and a class victory. Al Zubair, Baumann and Grenier began the season as a three-driver line-up to finish second in the Gold category at the opening round at the Paul Ricard circuit in France in early April.

Ellis, 31, will be driving alongside Al Zubair for the first time, although the Munich-born Swiss racer has considerable experience across GT World Challenge America, the IMSA SportsCar Championship, the International GT Challenge and the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup.

He began this season with Winward Racing in the IMSA SportsCar Championship and has planned programmes in GT World Challenge America, the Intercontinental GT Challenge, in addition to his tie-in with Al Manar Racing by GetSpeed.

Ahead of the race, Al Faisal said: "I am really excited to get this weekend's Spa 24 started. It's definitely one of the biggest events in the endurance racing calendar. It is definitely the biggest GT race of the year. It won't be easy. There are 67 cars, I believe, across all the classes so the field will be extremely competitive throughout.

"Nonetheless, our package is very strong with the drivers, the car and the team. It's looking good so far. The track has been resurfaced since the recent test and it definitely won't be easy. We are committed to perform our best and hopefully we can come back with a podium position or a win in class. I am really looking forward to it."

Rivals in the Gold category are the current class-leading Saintéloc Racing Audi R8, the 2 Seas Motorsport Mercedes-AMG, a Haupt Racing Team Mercedes, a Tresor Attempto Racing Audi and the CSA Racing Audi R8. Saintéloc Racing is a former winner at Spa.

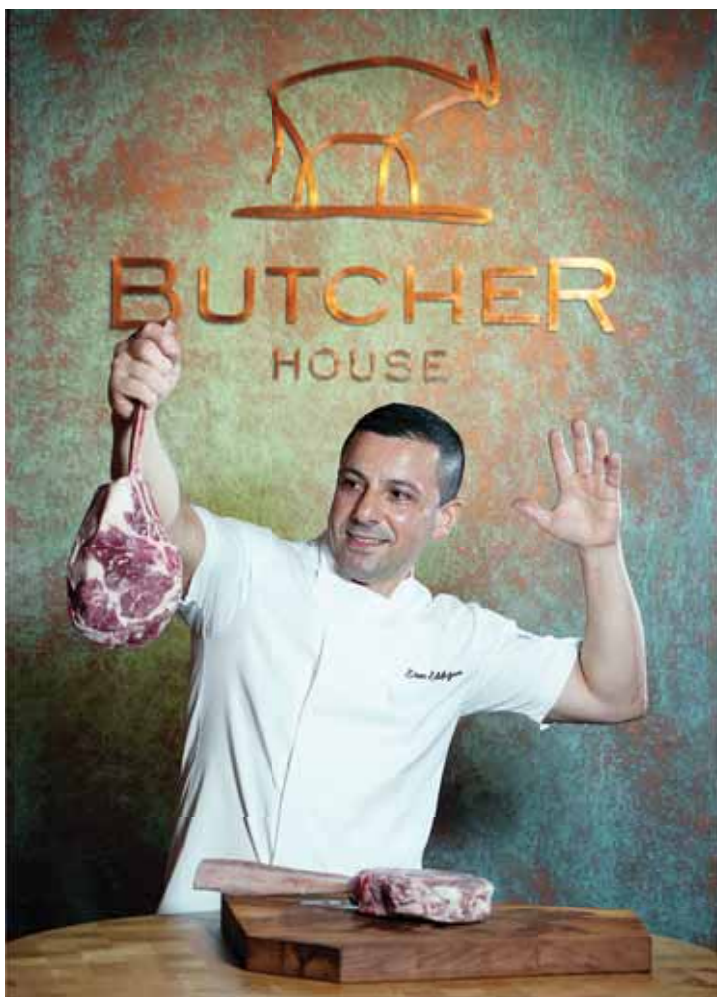
A hectic weekend's action gets underway with a free practice session on Thursday morning and will be followed by a pre-qualifying stint later in the day along with three qualifying sessions in the night. Night practice will also be permitted after the qualifying sessions.

Friday's action features a Super Pole session in afternoon and an evening warm-up.

The Crowdstrike 24 Hours of Spa fires into life at on Saturday on the famous Belgian 7.004km circuit and finishes on Sunday (June 30). Belgian racing legend Jackie Ickx will officially flag the cars away from the start.

The Butcher House: A modern twist on classic steakhouse in Oman

The Butcher House is a unique concept that prioritises high-quality meat and minimises waste



MUSCAT: The Butcher House is redefining the traditional steakhouse experience with a fresh, modern approach that prioritises both quality and sustainability. Here's a closer look at what makes The Butcher House unique and how it's setting itself apart in Oman's culinary scene.

Tell us about the inspiration behind the Butcher House launch in Oman. What exactly is the modern take you are bringing to the classic steakhouse?
The Butcher House is a unique concept that prioritises high-quality meat and minimises waste. Unlike typical restaurants where chefs strive to craft dishes, our chief butcher honours the process by ensuring the highest quality and minimising waste. This new approach transforms the traditional steakhouse experience, allowing guests to feel the passion in every plate and taste.

Before developing our concept, we conducted a market study, which reaffirmed our belief that there is, indeed, a lack of truly high-quality steakhouses in 5-star hotels.

Another aspect that we have focused on is the décor. Traditional steakhouses often feature dark, heavy furniture. We have moved away from this concept with brighter colours, more light, and a family-style dining area, appealing to younger generations, while catering to the typical mid-age and older guests of classic steakhouses.

Given Butcher House's focus on high quality meats, where do you source meats from, and how do you ensure the quality meets your standards?
We currently source our beef from premier producers in Australia, and are actively expanding our offerings to include cuts from South Africa, the United States, New Zealand, Brazil, and Japan.

Every meat delivery undergoes a rigorous inspection by our expert butcher. Only cuts that meet our exacting standards are accepted, ensuring an unparalleled dining experience for our guests. We work very closely with our suppliers to guarantee highest quality of meat.

The Movenpick brand is known for its global sustainability program called SHINE, which it plans to adopt in Oman. How does the Butcher House hope to adapt sustainable practices for example using locally sourced ingredients in the menu?
At The Butcher House we embrace sustainable practices whenever possible. We have established strong partnerships with local organic farmers, ensuring fresh ingredients and chemical-free produce. Oman's vast coastline allows us to source seasonal fish and seafood products locally as well, further minimising our environmental footprint.

How will you differentiate yourself from other steakhouses in the city? Apart from great food, how will Butcher House provide a unique dining experience?
The Butcher House boasts a variety of innovative features to elevate our guests' dining experiences. For the first time in Oman, we will be offering a selection of premium beverages by the glass. Towards this end, we have invested in a machine that preserves the freshness of our drinks, allowing guests to indulge in wider options.

For intimate gatherings, we offer a private dining room that comfortably accommodates up to eight guests. Additionally, The Butcher House will be a hub for exciting culinary events, featuring unique experiences never before seen in Oman.

We understand that not everyone is a steak aficionado. To cater to a wider audience, we will have a dedicated section on our menu featuring a variety of delicious seafood, vegetarian, and poultry options.

Personal experience with master Butcher Eren Eldogan

Tell us how your life experiences have shaped you as a chef. We hear you have been cooking since you were 11 years old!
I was introduced to butchery at a very young age. By the time I was 11, I was deeply involved in our family-owned butchery, a legacy passed down through generations. I learned the craft by observing my grandfather and father. They instilled in me the importance of respecting the animal. This early exposure ignited my passion for the field, and even today, whenever I go on vacation, I return to our butchery to lend a hand and reconnect with my roots.

Could you share a memorable personal food experience or dish from your past that has significantly influenced your culinary journey and approach to cooking?
I hail from the region of Adana, globally renowned for its kebabs. Like any butcher from my area, it was only natural that I started my culinary journey mastering the art of kebab making. However, I always felt there was more to explore. Back then, I would order my steaks well-done, as that was how I was accustomed to eating meat. My perspective changed dramatically the first time I was served a medium steak. The tenderness and the incredible burst of flavors were a revelation. To this day, I am grateful to the chef who refused to prepare my steak well-done, as that experience taught me how to truly enjoy a steak.

Apart from meats, which are clearly your area of expertise, what other cuisine do you find yourself gravitating towards, when you personally dine out?
I do like my Turkish cuisine, and it is not just about the amazing meats; we also have some great fish dishes. But frankly, I am drawn to the flavours of Arabic and Omani cuisine which have similarities to the Turkish ones. Wherever I travel, I enjoy exploring new cuisines and incorporating those influences into my dishes, creating a more globally inspired menu.

USP for guests

What are the top 3 dishes you would recommend to guests looking forward to dine at Butcher House?
Ribeye Steak is our most sold steak. Its rich buttery flavour and the melt-in-the-mouth tenderness is a perfect choice.

For those who seek a truly unique experience, my recommendation is the Tomahawk steak. In my opinion, it is one of the best steaks with the bone in; thicker cuts give it a total different feeling. What makes it extra special is that the meat itself is a ribeye with the rib bone left inside. The butcher doesn't have to make additional cuts into the meat to take the bone out and that's why it is considered more natural than the ribeye.

Finally, for those who prefer leaner options, tenderloin is a great choice. This cut, sourced from a muscle rarely used by the animal, boasts incredible tenderness and a delicate, buttery texture that practically melts in your mouth.

How do you plan to ensure that guests keep returning for future dining experiences?
As mentioned earlier, we will offer special events to our guests to give them a unique dining experience. We are always looking to keep things exciting at The Butcher House and have lined up truly unique dining experiences for our guests. We are also on a quest to source some of the finest cuts from around the world, which will translate as new additions to our menu.

We are constantly striving to elevate our guests' dining experiences and have planned new promotions and regular menu updates.

ROUND-UP

MG Oman celebrates 100 years with unbeatable price offers

Customers can drive home in select brand-new MG SUVs, with prices starting from an incredible OMR7,349

MUSCAT: MG Motor, a symbol of British automotive heritage and innovation, marks its 100th anniversary with an incredible celebration in Oman. To honour this milestone, MG Motor Oman announced unbeatable offers on its SUV range, promising exceptional value for all customers.

This summer, customers can drive home in select brand-new MG SUVs, with prices starting from an incredible OMR7,349. Customers can enjoy the following special offers on select models: the MG RX8 starts from OMR 8,999, the MG HS from OMR 9,999, the MG RX5 from OMR 7,999, the MG ZS from OMR 7,349, and the MG T60 from OMR 9,799.

These offers come with added benefits, including free insurance and registration, 10,000 km free service, and comprehensive roadside assistance, ensuring a hassle-free ownership experience for all cars mentioned, except the T60, which includes free registration only. These exclusive benefits are designed to provide customers with a hassle-free and enjoyable driving experience, further highlighting MG's commitment to customer satisfaction.

A century of excellence

Founded in 1924, MG has a rich heritage of producing stylish, reliable, and performance-driven vehicles. Over the past 100 years, MG has continually evolved, embracing cutting-edge technology and design to meet the needs of modern drivers.

This limited-time offer is a testament to MG's enduring legacy and a celebration of its journey from a historic British marque to a globally recognised brand.

MG Oman invites all car enthusiasts and prospective buyers to visit its showrooms and take advantage of this exceptional offer. Its knowledgeable and friendly sales team is ready to assist you in choosing the perfect MG model to suit your lifestyle and preferences.

Mohsin Hani Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked, "As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of MG (Morris Garages), we are excited to launch a special price campaign to mark this historic milestone. This limited-time offer is our way of saying thank you to our loyal customers and inviting new ones to experience the legacy and excellence of MG. We are proud to honour a century of automotive heritage and look forward to driving into the future with you."

RECOGNITION

Meethaq wins Oman's Best Domestic Bank Award from Euromoney

MUSCAT: In recognition of its leading role in providing banking services that comply with Islamic Sharia principles, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat received the Best Domestic Islamic Bank Award in the Sultanate of Oman 2024 at the Euromoney Awards for Excellence.

The award was received on behalf of the Bank by Mohammed Sultan Al Habsi, Chief Representative of the UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, at a recent ceremony held in Dubai in the presence of prominent industry figures from the Middle East and across the world.

"This achievement represents outstanding recognition by a reputed global organization and serves as a distinctive accolade to Meethaq's record of success," stated Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Personal Banking.

He added, "This award reaffirms Meethaq's leadership in providing various facilities and services compliant with the Sharia, catering to the needs of different society segments. It gives us a greater responsibility to continue developing products, services and banking facilities for our valued customers."

LARGE ORDER

GAC delivers fleet of Fuso Canter Euro 5 trucks to Gulf Construction

MUSCAT: Gulf Construction Company (GCC), a major infrastructure service provider for Oman's Oil and Gas sector, has expanded its fleet by inducting large number of Fuso Canter Euro 5 trucks from General Automotive Company (GAC), the authorised Fuso distributor in Oman.

A formal handover ceremony of the first lot of vehicles was held recently in presence of senior representatives from both companies.

This significant fleet induction shows GCC's lasting trust in products (Fuso Canter trucks) as well as After-sales Service of General Automotive Co. GCC cites Fuso's dependability, safety, and sustainability in the tough & challenging oil field conditions of Oman as well as GAC's nationwide After-sales network, equipped with OPAL Certified workshops in Oil & Gas areas, as key factors for its decision for buying Fuso Canter trucks. Over the past few years, GCC has acquired a fleet of over 70 Fuso trucks, underscoring their trust & reliability in the FUSO brand's sales & aftersales performance as well as the cost-effectiveness.

Commenting on the new acquisition, Amur Al Mahri of GCC stated, "We are delighted to continue our successful partnership with GAC. Fuso trucks have proven to be a reliable choice, offering cost-effective solutions and ensuring minimal downtime through their excellent after-sales service network & highly trained staff. The new TF Canter Euro V trucks perfectly complement our existing fleet, offering outstanding fuel efficiency, cleaner emissions, and the latest safety features to keep our operator safe and comfortable."

The TF Canter Euro V is a recent addition to the Fuso product lineup and it is powered by a 2998 cc, Turbocharged Diesel Engine that delivers outstanding performance with a maximum power output of 150 PS at 3500 RPM and a peak torque of 370 Nm at 1320 RPM. This engine is not only powerful but also clean and extremely eco-friendly.

Safety remains a top priority for GCC, with operations demanding vehicles that can withstand harsh conditions while maintaining high performance and comfort. The Fuso TF Canter Euro V perfectly fits this requirement - disc brakes with ABS and EBD (Electronic Brakeforce Distribution), dual airbags for driver and co-driver, and a Brake Overdrive System ensure maximum control and occupant protection. This combination of power, efficiency, and safety makes the Fuso TF Canter Euro V the ideal choice for GCC's demanding operations.

"We are proud to deliver these exceptional new-technology Fuso trucks to our long-standing business associate, Gulf Construction Company and are glad to be living up to their trust through our excelled sales & after-sales support," said Manoj Ranade, General Manager of GAC. "Their continued trust in our brand is a testament to the quality and capabilities of our vehicles as well as wide network of after-sales facilities across the Sultanate of Oman. We look forward to supporting & being a part of GCC's success for many years to come."

GCC, known for its extensive services to Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and its contractors, has consistently chosen Fuso trucks due to their exceptional ability to operate in rugged environments.

SPORTY CROSSOVER

Special EMI offer now available on Changan CS85 Coupe

MUSCAT: Own Changan CS85, a sporty crossover that merges sleek coupe aesthetics with robust SUV capabilities. Now available with an enticing EMI of just OMR 148, the 2024 Changan CS85 blends luxury and performance, offering you an unrivalled driving experience with its dynamic handling and stylish design.

This EMI is calculated on a 20% down payment with a loan tenure of six years, pending credit approval. This exclusive offer applies to personal vehicle purchases only and is subject to the lender's terms and conditions.

The premium Changan CS85 Coupe SUV (2.0L Turbo Engine, 224 hp, 8-speed AT) stands out with its striking appearance, exceptional quality, and cutting-edge technology, including advanced radar capabilities. At its core, a turbocharged direct injection engine delivers a powerful 224 HP and a peak torque of 360 Nm. This impressive powertrain is paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission, enabling the CS85 to accelerate from 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.5 seconds. With four adaptable driving modes, the CS85 redefines driving sophistication and agility.

A spokesperson for AGAE said, "Now is the ideal time to book the 2024 Changan CS85 Coupe with its sporty crossover design. The 2024 Changan CS85 Coupe SUV features a 2.0L Turbo GDI engine, delivering 224 hp and 360 Nm of torque, paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission. This 2WD vehicle measures 4720x1845x1665 mm, has a wheelbase of 2705 mm, and comes with a 58-litre fuel tank."

COMMITTED TO EMPOWERING OMANI YOUTH

Bank Nizwa signs agreement to support Entrepreneurship & Innovation Award

MUSCAT: Continuing its support for Omani youth and fostering an environment that promotes innovation, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most-trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, formalised a partnership and support agreement with the Office of the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah to support the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The award aims to align entrepreneurship strategies with Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on a diversified and sustainable economy. Furthermore, the award seeks to provide a suitable environment for building networks and knowledge exchange among entrepreneurs; thus enhancing the country's position on the regional and international entrepreneurship map.

The agreement was signed by Sheikh Hilal bin Saeed bin Hamdan Al Hajri, the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah and Salim Rashid Ali Al Maharbi, Chief Financial Officer of Bank Nizwa.

Bank Nizwa's support for the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate aligns with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to focus on the small and medium enterprises sector and the entrepreneurship sector. This support embodies the active role and significant contributions of the bank in supporting the progress of this sector through providing innovative banking services and products that are grounded in the principles of Islamic Sharia.

Al Maharbi said, "The signing of the agreement is part of Bank Nizwa's ongoing efforts to support and empower the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship in the Sultanate, believing in the pivotal role entrepreneurs play in supporting the country's sustainable development efforts to achieve the national aspirations outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

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LIFESTYLE

ALMOST TWO-THIRDS OF HOME FIRES ARE DUE TO HUMAN ERROR. HERE'S HOW TO PREVENT

The threat of a home fire is greater than most people think. In fact, 40% of people believe they are more likely to win the lottery or get struck by lightning than experience a home fire, yet residential fires are the most common disaster people face in the United States, according to the American Red Cross. Here's how to help prevent fires, and how to prepare for the worst:

Be Informed that 60% of home fires are due to human error. It's important to realise that humans are flawed. We forget things, we mess up, and we're often distracted. Accepting the fact that a house fire is a real possibility is an important step in the right direction. There are simple actions you can take to help prevent accidents. For starters, cooking is the leading cause of house fires. Never leave cooking unattended. Keep the cooking area free of flammable items such as potholders, towels and packaging, and always maintain a 3-foot safety zone free of pets and kids.

Update Your Smoke Detection Devices: While taking safety precautions is critical, having the latest fire safety technology can provide an extra layer of detection. Pioneers in the home safety field are providing new solutions that give homeowners more control over their safety, and like many technologies, today's smoke and carbon monoxide detectors have come a long way. In fact, the new Kidde Detect devices provide over 25% faster smoke detection (29% faster average smoke detection based on internal testing of smoldering wood fires for Kidde 9th Edition vs. leading competitor 8th Edition products) that's three times more precise (in terms of consistency and range of obscuration rate, based on internal testing for Kidde 9th Edition vs. leading competitor 8th Edition products). This is a critical improvement, as statistics show that people have less than 2 minutes to safely escape a house fire, so every second counts.

Tech expert Marc Saltzman explains, "This technology is revolutionary because it features enhanced sensing technology to reduce nuisance alarms."

"Nuisance alarms," also known as false alarms, refer to when smoke alarms beep but there is no threat of fire. They are often caused by cooking activities and lead many consumers to disconnect their devices out of frustration. Upgrading your safety devices to Kidde Detect Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors means your alarms are more likely to remain installed, so both you and your home can be as safe as possible. All Kidde Detect devices include a self-testing feature that when combined with routine manual testing and maintenance, ensures the alarm is always operating as expected (self-testing is not a substitute for a manual push test of the alarm), and the devices go above and beyond the latest UL 8th edition standards to meet 9th edition. Once you have your new detectors, be sure to install them on every level of your home, in hallways, and both inside and outside every sleeping area.

Be Prepared: A working smoke alarm can double the chance of escaping from a home fire safely, but that's just the first line of defense. It's also important to create a home fire escape plan. Kidde's fire safety toolkit is a great resource to help families prepare for a fire emergency.

For more fire safety tips and information on how to upgrade your devices, visit Kidde.com.

While many people assume that a fire can't happen to them, the truth is that everyone makes mistakes. Having the right life-saving tools can help protect you and your family. -StatePoint

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