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SEE P2



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JAMAICA'S JACKSON SETS FASTEST TIME OF YEAR IN WOMEN'S 100M



P15

KNOWLEDGE OASIS MUSCAT IS HOME TO MORE THAN 200 COMPANIES AND INSTITUTIONS



P18

EMBARKING ON AN ENCHANTING JOURNEY THROUGH OMAN'S WILD WONDERS



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF SOUTH SUDAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Salva Kiir Mayardit of the Republic of South Sudan on his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the president wishing him good health and long life and more progress and prosperity for the friendly South Sudanese people.

— ONA

KYIV

WAR IN UKRAINE ENTERS 500TH DAY

President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed "brave" Ukraine on the 500th day of Russia's war on Saturday, as the fight's toll mounted with eight deaths reported in Russian rocket fire. Zelensky published on social media an undated video clip of a visit to Snake Island in the Black Sea -- a symbol of Ukraine's defiance against Russia. "Today we are on Snake Island, which will never be conquered by the occupiers, like the whole of Ukraine, because we are the country of the brave," he said.

SEE P6

THE HAGUE

DUTCH PM MEETS KING AFTER GOVT FALLS

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte held talks with the king on Saturday after his coalition government collapsed in a row over migration, triggering elections later this year. King Willem-Alexander was out of the country on holiday when the government fell and flew back to the Netherlands to meet Rutte, who is the country's longest-serving premier and has been in power since 2010.

SEE P6

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SUCCULENCE OF SUMMER

A farmer brings down a bunch of dates using ropes in Al Qabil in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate on Saturday. Come July, dates farms across the Sultanate of Oman are abuzz with Al Tabseel or season of harvesting and processing yellow dates or Al Mabsali. The fruits are plucked, cleaned and cooked for 15 to 20 minutes. After that, they are dried in the sun and sold in the markets.

SEE ALSO P2

PHOTO BY KHALED AL MAAWALI

GAME ON, PARENTS WATCH OUT

Summer is sometimes tiring for outdoor activities, but one must not spend too time on gaming



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Parents must make sure children or adolescents don't spend too much time in gaming with mobile phones or consoles during vacations. With scorching heat during the day and humid evenings, one finds it tiring to engage in physical activities or outdoor games.

While a certain amount of gaming can enhance critical thinking, problem solving and cognitive abilities, unrestricted indulgence can lead to addiction, and negative impact on body and mind.

Osama al Sabahi emphasises the importance of parental involvement as a protective measure. Parents must watch out for games that promote violence and encourage interaction with strangers (online games). Exploitation of children and the dissemination of destructive ideas are potential hazards of such games.

"Parents are urged to actively monitor their children's gaming activities, and not prevent them from playing electronic games, as preventing them has become difficult these days. Encouraging parental participation during gaming sessions ensures the safety of children and enables an assessment of the content they engage with," Al Sabahi said.

Al Sabahi says excessive reliance on devices and games may lead children to experience anxiety and stress when they are not engaged in playing. The urge to return to gaming as quickly as possible often results in a lack of interest in communication or

“
Parents are urged to actively monitor their children's gaming activities, and not prevent them from playing electronic games, as preventing them has become difficult these days

OSAMA
AL SABAH

social interactions.

Dr Muna al Kaabi warns about the negative physical impact of prolonged exposure to games on both children and adults. Sedentary behaviour associated with extended gaming sessions can contribute to weight gain or loss. The absence of regular physical activity due to long hours of continuous sitting can lead to muscle atrophy, joint pain and weight-related issues. Some children prefer fast food instead of regular meals with family so that they can play again faster, and this contributes to obesity.

In addition, some games affect vision as they lead to eye fatigue due to rapid movement of eyes. This may upset sleep patterns.

To mitigate the potential risks, parents should allot a specific time for playing these games as well as select games for children. They should also take kids outdoors for physical activities.

Cavendish crash shocks Tour de France

LIMOGES: Mark Cavendish crashed out of the Tour de France on Saturday ending his quest to overtake the all-time record for stage wins as Denmark's Mads Pedersen won a sprint for stage eight in Limoges.

A dejected Cavendish was taken away in an ambulance long before former world champion Pedersen won a bunched sprint ahead of Belgian duo Jasper Philipsen and Wout van Aert in central France.

Pedersen was swift to hail Cavendish who was racing in what is likely to be his final Tour de France in an effort to break the record of 34 stage wins he shares with Belgian great Eddy Merckx. "It's sad a legend like him



Mark Cavendish receives medical attention after crashing during the 8th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 201 km between Libourne and Limoge on Saturday. — AFP

ends his Tour like that," said the 27-year-old Trek-Segafredo rider.

"I hoped so bad he'd get his 35th win on the Tour. It's painful not only for him, but also for so many other people in cycling, riders and fans, everyone."

Italian rider Gianni Moscon was behind Cavendish when he fell. "There was a crash in front of us and Cav had to break because someone changed line," he said. "He just hit the rear wheel of the guy in front of him and went down."

A second crash occurred 5 km from the finish line when an elderly spectator stepped slightly into the road sending Mikel Landa and Simon Yates crashing to the tarmac.

SEE ALSO P12



State Council
to debate
draft Public
Debt Law
tomorrow

MUSCAT: The State Council will hold its 11th ordinary meeting of the fourth annual sitting under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on Monday.

During the meeting, the State Council will discuss the draft Public Debt Law and the vision of the Economic Committee regarding the law.

The State Council will also discuss the study conducted by the ad hoc committee tasked with the issue of traffic congestion in Muscat Governorate, the Education and Research Committee's study on the policies and legislations of distance education and ways to develop it in the Sultanate of Oman. The council will review a number of reports presented by its members.

POETRY EVENING
ORGANISED

A 'poetry evening' was held on Friday at the Al Ashkharah Prosecution in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, as part of the activities of the Al Ashkharah Atmosphere Forum, at the public park. The evening saw a number of Omani poets, who recited their poems in various fields. The forum also witnessed entertainment and artistic programmes, including paragliding shows, a purposeful play by the 'Glories of the East' troupe, and interactive characters' performances.

— ONA

OMAN, PALESTINE HOLD TALKS



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a closed session of talks with Dr Riyad Al Malki, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, at the headquarters of the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ramallah, on Friday. The session dealt with the situation and developments taking place in Palestine, the regional and international conditions, and the means of advancing Arab and international efforts to revive the peace process, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and the vision of the international community with the principle of the two-state solution. — ONA

Oman continues to take
part in G20 meetings

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman continues its participation in the 18th session of the G20 ministerial meetings being held in New Delhi.

The Sultanate of Oman is scheduled to take part in the meeting of the ministers concerned with research, the third meeting of finance ministers, central bank governors and their deputies and the ministerial meeting of the working groups for employment, energy, environment and climate sustainability.

The participation, which comes as a response to an invitation extended to the Sultanate of Oman by the friendly Republic of India, constitutes a significant opportunity to attend the most important meetings by economic bloc due to their impact on



international policies.

Earlier, the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, took part in the G20 Research Ministers' meeting. The meeting was held at Mumbai, India and concluded on July 7.

The Omani delegation was represented in the meeting by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of

Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

During the meeting, Dr Rahma reviewed efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in promoting scientific research and innovation.

She affirmed that the meeting is of vital importance for shaping the future of the countries of the world in general. She added that the meeting provides an effective platform for sharing best practices and knowledge that lead to the improvement of societies.

The minister said that Oman seeks to transform the economy into a knowledge-based economy based on the approach set forth in Oman Vision 2040, which included scientific research as one of the most important national priorities for achieving sustainable development. — ONA

Exhibition on Message
of Peace from Oman
concludes in Paris

PARIS: The exhibition 'Message of Peace from the Sultanate of Oman' concluded at the Unesco headquarters in Paris, on Saturday.

The exhibition was visited by heads of diplomatic missions and permanent delegations to Unesco as well as diplomats and heads of international organisations, associations and centres operating under Unesco from around the world.

The Paris stop of the exhibition saw a number of artistic activities where Omani artists showcased distinct talents with the aim of delivering a message of peace to an international audience.

This stop of the 'Message of Peace from the Sultanate of Oman' followed more than 136 stops around the world during which the exhibition conveyed



the culture of harmony and peace that the Sultanate of Oman is known for.

The event called for promoting constructive dialogue between different religions and sects all over the world based on the Sultanate of Oman's well-established experience in religious tolerance, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. — ONA

Blood donors urged
to help alleviate
summer shortage



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Central Blood Bank in Bausher has issued an urgent appeal to donors to come forward and donate blood units. The demand for blood has increased due to a decline in donations during the summer months.

The Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) released a statement calling on individuals to contribute and save lives. "There is a shortage of blood units due to a decrease in donors during the summer. We urge everyone to donate blood during this time," the statement read.

Anyone who is meeting the eligibility can donate blood from 8 am to 8 pm, from Saturday to Thursday, and from 8 am to 2 pm on Friday at the Bausher Blood Bank.

One can call or whatsapp 94555648, or dial 24591255 and book a slot for them and take part in the national blood donation drive.

According to Ministry of Health statistics, the demand for blood units per day in all the hospitals and clinics is around 140 units whereas the average supply in other months stands at 100 units and there is an increase of nearly 40 per cent.

On an average basis, the demand for blood and

Those desiring to
donate blood can
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the national blood
donation drive

its components has been steadily rising from 10 per cent to 15 and in the recent past, it has jumped four fold, according to the CBB.

The cases that require blood units or one of its components are mostly surgery cases, RTA (Road Traffic Accidents), other accidents related to workplace/home, malignant blood diseases, bone marrow failure, some cases of genetic blood diseases, some cancerous tumours, and in some cases of childbirth.

"More blood donation camps need to be organised, and some are organised by the DBBS itself while some are in cooperation with private organisations," a representative of the Blood Bank told the Observer.

The Department raised the voluntary blood donation rate to 96 per cent at the level of the central blood bank, in addition to increasing the number of collected blood units to 14 per cent last year compared to the previous year.

Tabseel season begins in N Al Sharqiyah

BIDIYA: The annual Tabseel season began in the Wilayat of Bidiya in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The Tabseel of fresh dates contributes to food security, improves the marketing of dates and boosts its revenues.

An event was organised by the North Al Sharqiyah Governor's Office in cooperation with a number of relevant authorities which included a simulation of the Tabseel process starting with the date harvesting all the way to the production of Faghoor on what is locally known as Turkba, a place designated for the cooking of Busoor where the attendees were introduced to the ancient Tabseel methods.

The event will conclude today by organising a scientific symposium titled 'Opportunities for Investing in Faghoor in the Sultanate of Oman'. It aims to encourage scientific research on Faghoor products and overcome the challenges facing farmers, producers, exporters and consumers of Faghoor. — ONA





Unified tourist station opens

AL KAMIL W'AL WAFI: Under the patronage of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, the unified tourist station in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi was inaugurated on Thursday.

The event featured a range of activities at the Creativity Centre, including impressive presentations of student projects, such as the "Young Innovator" initiative aimed at nurturing talents and promoting innovative ideas within the governorate.

The tourist station brought together various government institutions and the Center for Scientific Innovation from South Al Sharqiyah Governorate. Additionally, a heritage tent showcased valuable artifacts,



while an exhibition by productive families, supervised by the Omani Women's Association, highlighted local craftsmanship. Handicrafts

from the old fort in Al Kamil W'al Wafi were also on display.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Ali al Hinai, Deputy Wali of Al Kamil

Tourist station showcases creativity and cultural heritage

W'al Wafi and a member of the main organising committee of the Al Ashkhara Forum, emphasised the station's role in providing visitors with essential services, promotional activities, and recreational experiences. It serves as a gateway to learn about programmes, events, and the most prominent tourist destinations across the other wilayats of the governorate.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah. — ONA

'MASAR' PROGRAMME FOR YOUTH CONCLUDES IN NORTH AL BATINAH

SUHAR: The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, through the Directorate General of Culture, Sports, and Youth in North Al Batinah Governorate, organised the second edition of the 'Masar' programme under the theme of 'Empowerment, Leadership, and Innovation.' The programme commenced on Thursday at the Sports Complex in Suhar and concluded on Saturday.

Fatima bint Rashid al Fazaria, Assistant Director of Sports and Youth Activities at the Directorate General of Culture, Sports, and Youth in North Al Batinah Governorate, highlighted that the objective of the 'Masar' programme is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to venture into the realm of entrepreneurship. The programme aims to motivate participants to apply their newfound knowledge and skills by initiating their own projects.

She further stated, "The programme is part of our ongoing efforts to create an enabling business environment for young talents, fostering fertile ground for investment and the creation of value-added employment opportunities."

Ahmed bin Rashid al Muqbali, Head of the Youth Activity Department, explained that the programme targets 30 young men and women from the governorate. Participants engage in a series of workshops covering topics such as effective leadership, trust-building, ice-breaking exercises, entrepreneurship, distinguishing entrepreneurial qualities, and the art of negotiation and persuasion.

In addition to the workshop sessions, the programme also includes various sports events such as futsal, basketball, and table tennis.

— ONA

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The CDAA stressed that the owners of industrial institutions should abide by the safety regulations including the use of unstable substances in construction, abiding by regular maintenance of alarm and firefighting systems.

Also training the workers on handling minor incidents and appointing a security, safety officer to oversee the safety aspects at the facility and providing a safe environment for the workers to ensure their safety.

Experience Khareef Salalah's culinary season from July 30



MUSCAT: Experience an enchanting culinary journey with Al Mina by Dina, a captivating dining event curated by Dina Macki, a renowned Omani-British culinary expert. This extraordinary culinary experience takes



place during the Khareef season in Salalah from July 30 to August 26, and is hosted at the beach-front restaurant, Al Mina, located within the Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara.

Dina has meticulously crafted lunch and dinner menus that showcase the essence of Omani cuisine, infused with her signature modern twist.

Her dedication to using fresh, local ingredients shines through in every dish. With the mist-shrouded landscape of Salalah during Khareef season, the surrounding farms and markets flourish, providing a bountiful harvest that Dina skillfully incorporates into her delectable creations. Each bite is a celebration of the region's natural abundance and the unique terroir that gives rise to such culinary delights.

OBITUARY

The Board Members, Management Team and All the Employees of the group companies express their profound grief over the sudden demise of our beloved Director



Mr. Amrish Surendra Dhirajlal

A noble soul and a visionary entrepreneur. His lifetime achievements have been an inspiration and have a great impact on the hearts of all the employees.

His sad demise is a tragic loss for the family and entire group companies Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and loved ones during this difficult time.



Surendra Dhirajlal and family
And Employees of
Oman Foodstuff Factory LLC and group companies.
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman



HEALTH RISKS OF NON-SUGAR SWEETENERS

NON-SUGAR SWEETENERS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED
FOR LONG-TERM WEIGHT CONTROL, WARNS WHO

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

New research suggests that relying on non-sugar sweeteners (NSS) for long-term weight control may not be a wise choice for maintaining good health and preventing lifestyle diseases.

Despite being considered a suitable alternative to sugar, NSS usage can potentially lead to adverse effects, including an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and even mortality in adults. To stay healthy and ward off these conditions, individuals are advised to explore other ways of reducing sugar intake, such as consuming naturally occurring sugars in fruits or opting for unsweetened food and beverages.

The World Health Organization (WHO) advises not to use non-sugar sweeteners for weight control in its newly released guideline which recommends against the use of NSS to control body weight or reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

The recommendation is based on the findings of a systematic review of the available evidence which suggests that use of NSS does not confer any long-term benefit in reducing body fat in adults or children.

“Replacing free sugars with NSS does not help in the long-term.

People need to consider other ways to reduce free sugars intake, such as consuming food with naturally occurring sugars, like fruit, or unsweetened food and beverages,” says Francesco Branca, WHO Director for Nutrition and Food Safety. “NSS are not essential dietary factors and have no nutritional value. People should reduce the sweetness of the diet altogether, starting early in life, to improve their health.”

The world over, non-sugar sweeteners have been developed as an alternative to sugars and are widely used both as an ingredient in pre-packaged foods and beverages and added to food and beverages directly by the consumer. Individual non-sugar sweeteners undergo toxicological assessment by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and other authoritative bodies to establish safe levels of intake such as acceptable daily intake or ADI.

While results of randomised controlled trials have generally suggested non-sugar sweeteners may have little impact on glucose metabolism and result in lower body weight when coupled with energy restriction in the short-term, there is no clear consensus on whether non-sugar sweeteners are effective for long-term weight loss or maintenance, or if they are linked to other long-term health effects at intakes within the ADI. This systematic review brings together the



NSS are not essential dietary factors and have no nutritional value. People should reduce the sweetness of the diet altogether, starting early in life, to improve their health

FRANCESCO BRANCA

WHO Director for Nutrition and Food Safety

most current scientific evidence on health effects of non-sugar sweetener use.

The recommendation applies to all people except individuals with pre-existing diabetes and includes all synthetic and naturally occurring or modified non-nutritive sweeteners that are not classified as sugars found in manufactured foods and beverages, or sold on their own to be added to foods and beverages by consumers. Common NSS include acesulfame K, aspartame, advantame, cyclamates, neotame, saccharin, sucralose, stevia and stevia derivatives.

However, the recommendation does not apply to personal care and hygiene products containing NSS, such as toothpaste, skin cream, and medications, or to low-calorie sugars and sugar alcohols such as polyols, which are sugars or sugar derivatives containing calories and are therefore not considered NSS.

The WHO guideline on NSS is part of a suite of existing and forthcoming guidelines on healthy diets that aim to establish lifelong healthy eating habits, improve dietary quality and decrease the risk of NCDs worldwide.

Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist, Internal Medicine at Shifa Hospital, recommended no to use NSS as a substitute for sweeteners and to avoid both for a healthy and enjoyable life, in view of the WHO call.

“The important point to

understand is that for long-term weight management and for chronic health conditions such as the development of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, in future, the use of NSS is not advisable as this artificial sweeteners are mostly used for reducing weight and reducing the risk for diabetes and other NCDs.

“Neither do NSS help much in lowering the weight, nor do they reduce the incidence of NCDs, in fact there is an increase in risk of developing heart disease and diabetes, both in children and in adults,” he adds.

Mini Padikkal, Clinical Dietician at NMC, says “The dangers of non-sugar sweeteners include several digestive issues, increased blood sugar levels, increased blood pressure and a higher risk of cancer. There are many adverse effects on those with pre-existing mood disorders and these artificial sweeteners have an effect on immune systems and its consumption over a period of time can be really dangerous to one’s own health.”

Also, the recommendation has been assessed as conditional, following WHO processes for developing guidelines. This signals that policy decisions based on this recommendation may require substantive discussion in specific country contexts, linked for example to the extent of consumption in different age groups.



Yellen seeks direct talks with China, climate cooperation



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (L) attends a meeting with Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng (R) at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. – AFP

BEIJING: Washington and Beijing should communicate “directly” on concerns about specific economic practices, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Saturday, urging greater cooperation between the world’s two biggest economies despite fraught ties.

Yellen is on a four-day trip to Beijing, as the United States seeks to cool tensions and stress areas of collaboration between the two countries.

In a meeting on Saturday with Vice-Premier He Lifeng, she pointed to record bilateral trade last year as proof of just how intertwined they are.

“There is ample room for our firms to engage in trade and investment,” she told He at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

“Where we have concerns

about specific economic practices, we should and will communicate them directly.”

Vice-Premier He responded that Beijing regretted that “unexpected incidents” had derailed efforts to improve China-US ties following a meeting between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping in November last year.

“There were some problems in the implementation of the consensus reached by the two heads of state,” he said.

But following Yellen’s visit this week and her meeting with Premier Li Qiang on Friday, he added, “China will earnestly implement the consensus reached between you and Premier Li Qiang and turn it into concrete actions.”

Yellen has been keen

throughout her visit to emphasise areas where the two powers need to work together — while also defending US moves to “de-risk” its economy from China, as well as tackling what Washington sees as unfair treatment of American businesses.

She told a roundtable of experts in China that collaboration between the two powers on climate financing was “critical”.

“As the world’s two largest emitters of greenhouse gases and the largest investors in renewable energy, we have both a joint responsibility — and ability — to lead the way,” Yellen said.

“Climate change is at the top of the list of global challenges, and the United States and China must work together to address this

existential threat,” she added.

Saying that “climate finance should be targeted efficiently and effectively”, she pressed China to support existing multilateral institutions like the Green Climate Fund, while urging for the inclusion of the private sector in transitioning towards net zero emissions.

There are signs talks could restart soon, with US envoy John Kerry due to travel to China to discuss cooperation on climate change, a US official said on Friday.

Besides working together on climate, Yellen said that it was also key for Washington and Beijing to closely communicate on global economic and financial affairs while making joint efforts on international challenges such as debt distress. — AFP

Kenya protest death toll climbs to two

NAIROBI: The number of people killed in protests in Kenya rose to two on Saturday, a hospital official said, after opposition leader Raila Odinga urged Kenyans to take to the streets against tax hikes.

Police fired tear gas in the capital Nairobi, targeting Odinga’s convoy, and took similar steps against demonstrations in the cities of Mombasa and Kisumu.

“We had another death at the casualty now bringing the number of deaths to two as a result of demonstrations yesterday,” said George Rae, CEO of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga hospital in Kisumu, an opposition stronghold on Lake Victoria.

On Saturday, police used tear gas on civil society representatives, including former chief justice Willy Mutunga, who were demanding the release of dozens of people taken into custody during the protests, campaigners said.

“It is not justified at all for police to hurl tear gas at us when we have come peacefully to seek the release of innocent activists detained in the cells since yesterday,” said advocate Lempaa Suyianka.

“Some of them were even injured and they require medical attention,” he told reporters.

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights on Saturday called for “a thorough investigation into all reported incidents of police

brutality”, adding to the chorus of condemnation from rights groups including Amnesty International against arrests.

Odinga on Friday said he intended to collect 10 million signatures in a bid to remove his arch-rival from office.

The 78-year-old lost the August 2022 election to Ruto and has repeatedly denounced the poll as “stolen”.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua dismissed Odinga’s petition campaign, saying: “There is no provision in our constitution giving a leeway to remove a sitting president through signatures.”

“The provision is that you vie in an election and win,” he said on Saturday.

Last week, Ruto signed into law a finance bill expected to generate more than \$2.1 billion for the government’s depleted coffers and help repair the heavily-indebted economy.

The Finance Act provides for new taxes or increases on basic goods such as fuel and food and mobile money transfers, as well as a controversial levy on all taxpayers to fund a housing scheme.

The government says the taxes will help create jobs and reduce public borrowing.

The Nairobi high court last month suspended implementation of the legislation after a senator filed a case challenging its constitutional legality. — AFP



Protesters retreat from a cloud of tear gas after police fired canisters during demonstrations against the high cost of living in Nairobi. – AFP

IAEA chief meets top S Korean diplomat amid protest

SEOUL: The head of the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog met with South Korea’s top diplomat on Saturday on a three-day visit marked by protests over Japan’s plan to discharge treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Rafael Grossi, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), arrived in Seoul on Friday after a stay in Japan during which his agency approved Tokyo’s plan to release treated water from the tsunami-hit nuclear plant into the sea over the next few decades.

South Korea conducted its own separate review of Tokyo’s plan and also concluded that Japan would meet or exceed key international standards, with the release having “negligible consequences”.

Despite that, Grossi’s visit encountered resistance in South Korea, where public concern over the planned release has grown.

There has been “no disagreement” among experts involved in the review that gave the green light for a decades-long project, the IAEA chief said in an interview with the Yonhap news agency on Saturday.

“This is the final comprehensive



Rafael Grossi (C), Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), leaves after a meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul. – AFP

report... No experts have come to me saying he or she disagrees on the contents,” he said.

“It was a very thorough process.”

That was not enough to keep hundreds of protesters from taking to the streets in central Seoul, bashing the IAEA’s review as “insufficient” as Grossi met Foreign Minister Park Jin.

Demonstrators held various signs critical of the IAEA and Japan’s plan, one of which read “IAEA is not qualified to verify environmental standards”.

The IAEA report “was drawn up under the influence of Japan”, claimed one protester on a microphone, without giving details.

Opposition MPs have also waged a public campaign in protest of Tokyo’s plan, and some have even been on hunger strike.

Grossi is expected to meet opposition lawmakers on Sunday at the parliament.

Some 1.33 million cubic metres of groundwater, rainwater and water used for cooling has



South Korean protesters hold placards against International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi’s arrival at Gimpo International Airport in Seoul. – AFP

accumulated at the Fukushima site, which is being decommissioned after several reactors went into meltdown following the 2011 tsunami which badly damaged the plant.

The plant operator treats the water to remove almost all radioactive elements except tritium, and plans to dilute it before discharging it into the ocean over several decades.

Since taking power last year, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has sought to bury the historical hatchet with Japan on issues including wartime forced labour. — AFP



Zelensky hails ‘brave’ Ukraine on 500th day of war

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed “brave” Ukraine on the 500th day of Russia’s war on Saturday, as the fight’s toll mounted with eight deaths reported in Russian rocket fire.

Zelensky published on social media an undated video clip of a visit to Snake Island in the Black Sea — a symbol of Ukraine’s defiance against Russia.

“Today we are on Snake Island, which will never be conquered by the occupiers, like the whole of Ukraine, because we are the country of the brave,” he said.

“I want to thank from here, from this place of victory, each of our soldiers for these 500 days,” he said in the video, which showed him arriving on the island by boat and leaving flowers.

Finishing a trip to Türkiye on Saturday, Zelensky prayed for the victims of the war alongside Patriarch Bartholomew, the leader of the world’s Orthodox Christians, after a regional tour to drum up support ahead of next week’s Nato summit. The UN has documented 9,000 civilian deaths since the start of the war on February 24, 2022, including 500 children, although it estimates the real toll could be



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (R) and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) pose as they leave after the celebration of a special mass at the Patriarchal Church of Saint George in Istanbul. — AFP

significantly higher.

That toll went up again on Saturday as Ukraine’s interior ministry said eight people were killed and 13 injured by Russian rocket fire in the eastern town of Lyman.

“At around 10:00 am, the Russians struck the town with multiple rocket launchers,” Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said.

Noel Calhoun, deputy head of the UN’s Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, said the 500th day of the conflict marked “another grim milestone in the war that continues to exact a horrific toll on Ukraine’s civilians”.

In Türkiye, Zelensky secured backing for his country’s Nato aspirations after winning a US pledge for cluster munitions that could inflict significant damage on Russian forces on the battlefield.

Erdogan risked drawing Russia’s ire by delivering unequivocal support for Ukraine’s Nato aspiration.

“There is no doubt that Ukraine deserves membership of Nato,” Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul.

Erdogan also said he would meet Russian President Vladimir Putin next month on what would be the Kremlin chief’s first visit to Türkiye since the dispute.

The Turkish leader said he and Putin will discuss possible prisoner swaps, as well as a potential extension of a deal brokered last year under which Ukraine was able to ship grain to the global market.

The agreement will expire on July 17 unless Russia agrees to its renewal. — AFP

Dutch PM meets king after government falls

THE HAGUE: Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte held talks with the king on Saturday after his coalition government collapsed in a row over migration, triggering elections later this year.

King Willem-Alexander was out of the country on holiday when the government fell and flew back to the Netherlands to meet Rutte, who is the country’s longest-serving premier and has been in power since 2010.

The 56-year-old Rutte drove himself in a grey station-wagon to the royal Huis Ten Bosch palace in a forest near The Hague. He left about an hour and a half later.

“It was a good discussion but I’m not saying anything else because these discussions are confidential,” Rutte, the leader of the centre-right VVD party, told reporters.

Rutte is leading a caretaker government until the elections expected in mid-November.

Europe has faced rising tensions over how to deal with migration and it was the issue that finally tore apart the Netherlands’ shaky coalition government, Rutte’s fourth.

The four coalition parties fell out over Rutte’s plans to tighten curbs on reuniting families of asylum seekers, in a bid to curb numbers following a scandal last year over overcrowded migration centres.

ChristenUnie — a Christian Democratic party that draws its main support from the staunchly Protestant “Bible Belt” in the central Netherlands — and centre-left D66 had strongly opposed Rutte’s plan.



PM Mark Rutte delivers a press conference following a cabinet meeting after the collapse of the Rutte IV cabinet in The Hague. — AFP

Dutch newspapers picked over the carcass of the unstable coalition that only took office in January 2022, after a record 271 days of negotiations.

The Volkskrant daily said that the cabinet “stumbled from the starting blocks and never managed to recover”.

The elections now promise to be some of the most divisive in a generation, with a toxic brew of issues including migration, angry farmers and the cost of living.

The newest challenge to Rutte’s bid for a fifth term comes from an upstart farmers party that opposes EU-backed environmental rules, while the Dutch far-right remains a threat.

“We can make the Netherlands a beautiful country again with fewer asylum seekers and crime, more money and houses for our own people, decent care, plenty of room for our farmers and fishermen,” leader Geert Wilders tweeted.

— AFP

Fresh protests against police violence planned in France

CERGY-PONTOISE: Dozens of marches against police violence in France have been announced for Saturday after authorities banned a memorial rally, fearful of reigniting the recent unrest that engulfed the country.

Seven years after Adama Traore, a young black man, died in police custody, his sister had planned to lead a commemorative march north of Paris in Persan and Beaumont-sur-Oise.

However, with tensions still high following the police killing of 17-year-old Nahel, of Algerian origin, at a traffic stop last week, a court ruled the chance of public disturbance was too high to allow the march to proceed.

In a video posted on Twitter, Assa Traore, Adama’s older sister, confirmed that following the court order “there will be no march in Beaumont-sur-Oise”.

“The government has decided to add fuel to the fire” and “not to respect the death of my little brother”, she said in the video.

Instead of the planned event, she said she would attend a rally on Saturday afternoon in central



Riot mobile gendarmes face protesters during the “March for Adama Traore” at Gare de l’Est in Paris. — AFP

Paris’ Place de la Republique to tell “the whole world that our dead have the right to exist, even in death”.

However, this “march for justice” will also be banned, according to the Paris police headquarters. Around 30 similar demonstrations against police violence are scheduled across France this weekend, including in the cities of Lille, Marseille, Nantes and Strasbourg.

Several trade unions, political parties and associations had called on supporters to join the march for Traore this year as France reels from allegations of institutionalised racism in its police ranks following the police shooting of Nahel M.

Traore, who was 24 years old, died shortly after his arrest in 2016, sparking several nights of unrest that played out similarly to the week-long rioting that erupted

across the country in the wake of the point-blank shooting of Nahel during a traffic stop.

The teenager’s death on June 27 rekindled long-standing accusations of systemic racism among security forces, and a UN committee urged France to ban racial profiling.

The foreign ministry on Saturday disputed what it called “excessive” and “unfounded” remarks by the panel. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

GUATEMALA CITY

Officials urge parties to respect election

Guatemalan electoral officials urged political parties to respect the outcome of the June 25 presidential election, after concluding a court-ordered review of the vote that reaffirmed the initial results.

The review had sparked international consternation over the possible undermining of democracy.

It confirmed that two social democrats — Sandra Torres and Bernardo Arevalo — came out on top of last month’s first voting



round.

“We reiterate the call to the representatives of political organisations, affiliates and sympathisers to accept with maturity the electoral results,” said Gerardo Ramirez. — AFP

KOLKATA

7 killed in village election clashes

At least seven people were killed and dozens more injured in India on Saturday after clashes over local polls in West Bengal, a state notorious for political violence during election campaigns.

Voters are currently casting their ballots in a fierce contest to elect municipal leaders, with more than 200,000 candidates across the state of 104 million people.

“Seven people have been killed and dozens wounded in poll-related violence in different



villages across the state,” Jawed Shamim said, a senior officer in West Bengal’s police force.

Another police official said five of the dead were from the state’s ruling Trinamool Congress party. — AFP

TEHRAN

Grenade attack leaves 2 police dead

A grenade attack and gun battle in Iran’s southeast near Pakistan left four assailants and two Iranian policemen dead on Saturday, local media said.

It was the latest violence in Sistan-Baluchistan province, where unrest has involved drug smuggling gangs.

There was no immediate indication of who carried out the attack.

“Four unidentified armed individuals attacked and entered police station Number



16 of Zahedan”, the province’s deputy head of security Alireza Marhamati said. The attackers used grenades to blast open the gates of the police station, and an exchange of fire occurred, said Marhamati. — AFP

Prigozhin is said to be in Russia, as Wagner mystery deepens



Valerie Hopkins

The writer is an international correspondent for The New York Times.

Mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin is in Russia and is a “free man” despite staging a rebellion against Moscow’s military leadership, the leader of Belarus said on Thursday, deepening the mystery of where Prigozhin and his Wagner group stand and what will become of them.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko told reporters that Prigozhin was in St. Petersburg, Russia, as of Thursday morning, and then “maybe he went to Moscow, maybe somewhere else, but he is not on the territory of Belarus.”

It was Lukashenko who brokered a deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prigozhin to end the brief mutiny. He said days later that the Wagner leader had gone to Belarus, although it is not clear whether that actually happened.

Prigozhin is at liberty for now, Lukashenko said, although he conceded that he “did not know what would happen later,” and he brushed off the idea that Putin would simply have Prigozhin — until recently a vital ally — killed.

“If you think that Putin is so malicious and vindictive that he will kill Prigozhin tomorrow — no, this will not happen,” he said.

If Prigozhin is, in fact, free and in Russia less than two weeks after staging what the Kremlin called an attempted coup, it would be one of the more perplexing twists in a story full of them. On Wednesday, a prominent current-affairs television show broadcast video of what it claimed was a police search of his opulent mansion in St. Petersburg, where it said large amounts of cash, firearms, passports, wigs and drugs had been found. A spokesperson for Prigozhin denied that the house was his.

Some Russian news outlets reported that Prigozhin was in St. Petersburg on Wednesday or Thursday. A Pentagon official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence, said the Wagner leader had been in Russia for much of the time since the mutiny, but the official said it was not clear whether he had been in Belarus, in part because Prigozhin apparently uses body doubles to disguise his movements.

The Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, deflected a question about Prigozhin’s whereabouts, saying the government had “neither the ability nor the desire” to track his movements.



President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus arrives to speak to reporters in Minsk, the capital, July 6.

In a rare news conference with local and foreign journalists at the marbled presidential palace in Minsk, Lukashenko, always eager to be seen as an international statesman, clearly enjoyed the limelight cast on him by the most dramatic challenge to Putin’s authority in his 23 years in power. But days after offering a haven to Wagner fighters and their leader in his country, Lukashenko gave no clarity about where they would go or what role they would play.

Although Lukashenko, has ruled his country for 29 years, continued to boast of his mediation and peacemaking, he also made clear his deference, even subservience, to Russia and Putin, whom he referred to multiple times as “big brother.”

“The main question of where Wagner will be deployed and what will it do — it doesn’t depend on me; it depends on the leadership of Russia,” he said. He added that he had spoken to Prigozhin on Wednesday and that Wagner would continue to “fulfil its duties to Russia for as long as it can,” although he did not elaborate.

Putin has long sought to pull Belarus deeper into the Russian political,

economic and military orbits. For years, Lukashenko, whose power depends heavily on managing that relationship, did well enough to maintain some independence and even tried to build trade ties to the West.

But that faded after Putin helped him brutally suppress opposition protests in 2020, starting a period of increased repression in which critics of the government were jailed or fled into exile. Under Western sanctions and increasingly treated as an international pariah, Belarus has become ever more reliant on Russia for economic aid, energy, high-tech imports and diplomatic support.

In February, when Putin thanked him for travelling to Moscow for a meeting, Lukashenko, in a remark caught by television cameras, replied: “As if I could not agree.”

A year earlier, Lukashenko had allowed Putin to launch one thrust of his war of Ukraine from Belarusian soil, and this year, he allowed Russia to station nuclear-armed short-range missiles there. But he has so far resisted efforts to pull Belarus’ military directly into the war.

During the Wagner uprising, Lukashenko played go-between, speaking

with Prigozhin and Putin. He later boasted that he had made peace between them, persuading the Wagner leader to stand down and the Russian president “not to do anything rash,” such as having Prigozhin killed or the mutiny crushed in bloody fashion. His claims could not be verified.

Wagner’s mercenaries have made up some of the most brutal and effective units fighting in Ukraine for Russia, and they took the lead in capturing the city of Bakhmut after a long and very brutal battle. But Putin and his government have opted to end Wagner’s independence, requiring its fighters in Ukraine to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defense — a main cause of Prigozhin’s mutiny.

Lukashenko said last week that he had offered Wagner fighters an “abandoned” military base in Belarus, and satellite images showed temporary structures being built at a deserted base about 80 miles from Minsk.

But on Thursday, he said members of Prigozhin’s mercenary force remained in their “permanent camps,” believed to be in the Luhansk region of eastern Ukraine.

“Whether they will come here, and if so, how many of them will come, we will decide in the future,” he said.

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Cluster weapons US is sending Ukraine often fail to detonate



John Ismay

The writer is a Pentagon correspondent in the Washington bureau.

When the White House announced on Friday that it would agree to supply Ukraine with cluster munitions, it came after assurances from Pentagon officials that the weapons had been improved to minimise the danger to civilians.

The weapons, which have been shunned by many countries, drop small grenades that are built to destroy armoured vehicles and troops in the open, but also often fail to immediately explode. Years or even decades later, they can kill adults and children who stumble on them.

The Pentagon said the weapons they would send to Ukraine had a failure rate of 2.35% or less, far better than the usual rate that is common for cluster weapons.

But the Pentagon’s own statements indicate that the cluster munitions in question contain older grenades known to have a failure rate of 14% or more.

They are 155-mm artillery shells that each can fly about 20 miles before breaking open midair and releasing 72

small grenades that typically explode on impact along the perimeter of an oval-shaped area larger than a football field.

Pentagon officials have said the shells they will send to Ukraine are an improved version of a type used in 1991’s Operation Desert Storm. But the reality is slightly more complicated. The shells being sent to Kyiv can fly farther than the earlier versions, but they contain the same grenades, which had dud rates the Pentagon has characterised as unacceptably high.

Al Vosburgh, a retired Army colonel trained in bomb disposal, said that once the shooting stops in Ukraine, it will take a massive educational campaign to warn civilians of the risks of unexploded grenades before they can safely return home.

The biggest operational concern for Ukrainian soldiers, he said, is that dud grenades left on the ground by these shells cannot safely be moved by hand.

“You have to take great pains to clear those because you’re not supposed to move them,” said Vosburgh, who now runs the mine-clearance nonprofit group Golden West. “In an area that’s been saturated with them, you’re going to find a lot of duds, so it’s a slow and methodical process to dispose of them.”

But Biden administration officials said they had little choice but to provide cluster munitions despite their lasting danger as Ukraine burns through artillery rounds and tries to make gains in a gruelling counteroffensive



Ukrainian soldiers fire a self-propelled howitzer near Bakhmut on March 2.

Pentagon officials have said the shells they will send to Ukraine are an improved version of a type used in 1991’s Operation Desert Storm.

against Russian troops.

National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan defended the use of the weapons and said that Russia had been using them since the beginning of the war. Ukraine has also used Russian-made cluster munitions, and had repeatedly asked for American-made ones, knowing the United States maintains large reserves.

“Ukraine would not be using these munitions in some foreign land,” Sullivan said. “This is their country they’re defending. These are their citizens they’re protecting and they are motivated to use any weapon system they have in a way that minimises risks to those citizens.”

Weapons of this type are banned by more than 100 countries, in part because more than half of those killed or injured by them are civilians. Neither the United States nor Russia or Ukraine has signed the treaty prohibiting their stockpiling or use.

Analysts say that as many as 40% of the bomblets from Russia’s cluster munitions have resulted in duds.

Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman, said the Defense Department does comprehensive testing of cluster munitions in its stocks, and “the ones that we are providing to Ukraine are tested at under a 2.35% dud rate.”

Such a rate would mean that for every two shells fired, about three unexploded grenades would be left scattered on the target area. But the dud rate for these grenades has been observed at rates seven times higher in combat.

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

A psychologist commenting on this obsession explained that it stems from the fact that many people related to the feeling of the five passengers who were trapped inside the titan as some of us may have experienced a degree of uncertainty in our lives and we could imagine being helpless with other

In other words, such people are so rich that activities taken by other people no longer interest

Overall there is an element of using our obsession with current news as a way of escaping our daily struggles, believing that others are worse off than us, and muttering that too much money would not buy you happiness and may in fact kill you if you misuse it.

The trend has continued. — AFP

The writer is a
Palestinian
journalist



The writer is the Istanbul bureau chief for NYT

The Palestinian Authority employs tens of thousands of security forces charged with law enforcement in Palestinian communities. While the forces are expected to rein in



A man walks past pictures of Palestinians killed in the decades-long Palestinian-Israeli conflict, after the Israeli army's withdrawal from the Jenin camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

– Reuters

Maj Gen Akram Rajoub, the most senior Palestinian Authority official in Jenin, acknowledged the frustration but accused Israel of undermining the body.

The West Bank is ultimately controlled by Israel, where Netanyahu heads one of the hardest-line government in the country's history, packed with officials who oppose Palestinian political aspirations. Peace talks aimed at ending the conflict and creating a Palestinian state fizzled nearly a decade ago with no solution, and world powers such as the United States, which had long pressured both sides to keep them going, seem to have given up.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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Get out of bed!

Why do you get out of bed in the morning? Because you must... to go to work, or school, or to care for your family, maybe cooking breakfast, or make coffee? We do tend to get up because we have to, don't we? We rarely get out of bed because we want to, do we? And would you really sleep all day if you could? One social media wag has suggested that he can't get out of bed. That his blankets have accepted him as one of their own, and if he leaves at that moment, he may lose their trust.

Amusing, and an excuse of sorts, but I doubt that any boss would accept it as a reason for not going to work, would they? American poet Charles Bukowski, does hint at less amusing perspectives, and the genuine challenges that many face in today's societies, writing: "The courage it took, to get out of bed each morning to do the same things, over and over, was enormous." He could have been referring to those suffering from depression, those in repetitive, assembly line type jobs, those in toxic workplaces, those suffering from bullying or harassment, those with money troubles, anyone doing exams or tests, or suffering under unfair expectations.

But again, genuinely, if we don't deal with those kind of challenges. If we are oppressed by them... they will still be there tomorrow! The pessimists among us would say that to get out of bed every day is a demonstration of your strength of character, and purpose, but I believe that's a really low bar to set, and if that's the extent of your ambition and enthusiasm you are wasting an almighty opportunity. Did you get that wordplay there? Nora Roberts is a romantic, and an author of over 200 romantic novels. She says: "If you don't go after what you want, you will never have it, and if you don't ask, the



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The writer is a media consultant

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answer will always be no." She is adamant that if you don't take the first step, your destination will not only not get closer, but will get further away.

In balancing romanticism with reality, Roberts is taking off the rose-tinted glasses many wear.

Most of us would say yes, we could stay in bed and sleep all day. Yet the reality is that it, bed, would soon lose its attraction after a while wouldn't it? Your pillows would stop being comforting, you would get thirsty, or hungry, and the bedclothes don't feel the same when they have been overused, do they? I love the smell and feel of fresh bedding myself... but I digress. Why would you want to stay in bed when there is another day God gave us to celebrate and enjoy, another day to do what you want with, and another day to share? Finding purpose, finding what matters to us, and for many of us, that's what matters to those around us can keep us 'on track,' and give us the 'why (?)' to our lives. Why we live, love, work and play! Speaking of those around us, we can't share our beds with everyone, so we must get out and about! Our relationships with others determine whether our lives are good, are positive, or not. The thing is, that we do tend to take our strongest relationships for granted, and as much as we offer joy and personality to new relationships, we must be careful, and caring, to nurture these foundations of who we are, have become, and will be in the future. Lose the phone and openly engage, don't do TV, but talk, and take the time to re-engage with those you may have allowed to fall by the wayside.

Love yourself, body and soul, and in loving yourself the best version of you will emerge consistently, and your relationships will be so much better... and it all starts with just getting out of bed... Who knew huh?

TALLEST BONFIRE



Bonfire builders top off the 11th night bonfire on the Craigyhill estate in Larne, Northern Ireland on Saturday, claimed to be the tallest in the world by the builders. The bonfire, will be lit in the annual commemoration of the victory of Protestant King William III of Orange against Catholic King James II at the battle of the Boyne on July 12. — AFP

Legacy admissions benefit poor students

Just four days after the Supreme Court rejected racial preferences in college admissions, a consortium of Black and Latino interest groups filed a complaint against Harvard concerning a different kind of preference: the special consideration given to the children of alumni. The filing notes that the practice of legacy admissions disproportionately benefits white applicants. If racial considerations are to be strictly limited, the plaintiffs argue, other considerations that effectively favour some racial groups must also go.

It's a powerful argument. In 2018, Princeton University, my employer, accepted around 5 per cent of applicants overall, yet for legacies the rate was around 30 per cent.

Why set aside a special access lane for predominantly white children who are already the beneficiaries of so many social and economic advantages? Factor in the evidence that legacy admissions don't even increase alumni giving — presumably the strongest rationale for the preference — and the policy starts to seem not just immoral but downright nonsensical.

Yet before the dismantling of affirmative action, legacy admissions had some unexpected and surprising effects.

Legacy students got a leg up in the admissions process, but they were already on the path to success, just by virtue of being born into privilege. In



Shamus Khan

The writer is a professor of sociology and American studies at Princeton University

FOR STUDENTS
FROM
UNDERPRIVILEGED
BACKGROUNDS
AN ELITE COLLEGE
EXPERIENCE
CAN BE
TRANSFORMATIVE

fact, there's considerable evidence that going to an elite school like Princeton, as opposed to a less selective college, made no difference to their earnings later in life.

One group, however, got a big economic boost from going to elite schools: poor students, students of colour and students whose parents didn't have a college degree. And that's because elite colleges connected them to students born into privilege — the very kind of student that legacy preferences admit in such large numbers.

We might assume that legacy admissions help privileged students at the expense of underprivileged ones. But I would wager that legacy students, if eliminated, are far more likely to be replaced by other kinds of privileged students than by underprivileged ones. And in ways that are far less obvious, legacy students, with their deep social and cultural connections, are part of the reason less advantaged students get so much out of elite schools.

With the end of affirmative action, this is all moot. Estimates suggest that the percentage of Black, Latino and Native American students at selective colleges will drop significantly in the coming years, in some cases returning to 1960s levels. Colleges

and universities that are serious about fairness should eliminate all preferences — not just legacy ones — that advantage the privileged. But as they redesign their systems, it's worth taking time to consider how the presence of privilege can aid the disadvantaged.

Start by asking yourself what students get out of elite schools. I would like to believe that the most important benefit of these colleges is the exceptional knowledge that professors can deliver in the classroom.

But if elite schools delivered special intellectual growth and professional training — what social scientists call human capital — privileged students would benefit greatly from them. And there's no good evidence that they do.

OTHER CAPITAL

Instead, other forms of capital play a bigger role: symbolic capital (the value of being associated with prestigious institutions), social capital (the value of your network) and cultural capital (the value of exposure to high-status practices and mores). Graduating from an elite school pays off on all three counts: It affiliates you with an illustrious organisation, offers you connections to people with friends in high places and acculturates you in the conventions and etiquette of high-status settings.

Students who come from privileged backgrounds arrive for freshman year having already accrued most of this capital. Attending an elite college doesn't add much for them. But for students from underprivileged backgrounds — students who are less likely to have a ready-made network of rich, influential connections, or to have a shared set of cultural references over which to bond with powerful gatekeepers — an elite college experience can be transformative.

Research repeatedly bears this out. Your odds of getting a job at any given workplace increase considerably if your social network links you to it, and the more prestigious the school, the more rarefied the network.

The sociologist Lauren Rivera, a professor at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, has also shown the effect of "cultural matching" when you apply for a job: Elite recruiters respond favourably to the kinds of cultural "similarities" — shared literary references, playing the "right" sport — that students pick up in fancy colleges, precisely because these shared traits remind hiring partners of themselves.

Likewise, the Boston University sociologist Anthony Abraham Jack has shown that students from underrepresented communities

can become relatively privileged as a result of attending elite schools, where they develop relationships with socially advantaged peers and pick up on valuable cultural cues.

Of course, no college ever set up a fast lane for legacy applicants just as a favour to minority and low-income students. But the fact remains that if elite colleges decided to admit only minority and low-income students, this effect would be much less pronounced. With the end of affirmative action, the peculiar upside of legacy admissions fades away — and the policy becomes impossible to justify.

I would be glad to see legacy admissions go. But I don't imagine getting rid of them would do much to balance the scale in favour of those from historically marginalised and excluded backgrounds.

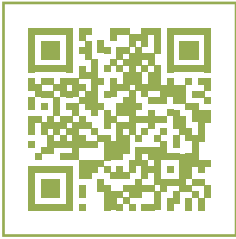
Legacy students are just a tiny proportion of the pool of privileged kids who are rich in symbolic, social and cultural capital.

Even without the extra boost legacies currently get, it would be almost impossible to offset the advantages of wealthy families who can pay for all the experiences and qualities that make their children seem miraculously, naturally, qualified.

— The New York Times

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OOC TAKES PART IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING IN BANGKOK

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

The Oman Olympic Committee participated in the meeting of the general assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia in Bangkok on Saturday.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), accompanied by Taha bin Sulaiman al Kushari, Secretary-General, represented OOC in the 42nd meeting.

Shaikh Talal Al Fahd al Sabah was elected as president of the Olympic Council of Asia for the period 2023-2027, after beating Hussein al Musallam, Director-General of the Olympic Council of Asia and chairman

of the International Aquatics Federation. Al Sabha got 24 votes and al Musallam 20.

Shaikh Talal before the vote raised the slogan “One Asia, One Family” and focused on key points represented in good governance, financial sustainability, a plan to develop sports, activities and educational programmes, and a high-level organisation of the Asian Games.

He also pledged to increase funding for the 45 Olympic Committees that are members of the Olympic Council of Asia until 2023, and to bring about positive change in the coming years.

In the elections of the Vice President of the Olympic Council of Asia for West Asia, Dr Thani



al Kuwari, Vice President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, defeated his Emirati rival, Osama al Shafar, chairman of the Asian Cycling Federation, by 26 votes to 18.

The meeting also witnessed the election of vice-presidents for East Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and South-Central Asia, in addition to the appointment of chairmen of the standing committees.

The Board of Directors of OOC approved five international participations for 2023. The first one is the 15th Arab Sports Games hosted by Algeria during the period from July 5 to 15. The second event is the 2nd World Beach Games, in Bali, Indonesia, from August 5 to 12.

The third one is in 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, which will be held from September 23 to October 8. The fourth is the 6th Asian Indoor Games, which will be hosted

by Bangkok from September 17 until November 26. The last event is the 1st GCC youth sports tournament, to be held in the United Arab Emirates in December.

The Board, in coordination with sports federations and committees had previously defined technical standards for external participations, circulated and formed a specialised technical team in this regard.

The team coordinated with sports federations and committees to determine the level of participation for each round, competition, teams and players for individual games in light of technical levels, credits and allocations for each of them.

National team returns from ICC World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe



Oman team on arrival at Muscat airport from Zimbabwe

MUSCAT: With four Test-playing nations in fray and few other Associate nations having previous World Cup experience, Oman's showing at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier received a thumbs up from none other than their coach Duleep Mendis.

Team Red, skippered by Zeeshan Maqsood, stunned the cricketing world in their opening match of the qualifier when they upset Test-playing and fancied Ireland side to begin their campaign on a rousing note. The Qualifier concludes on Sunday with a final match between Sri Lanka and Netherlands with both teams already securing a spot in the ODI World Cup to be played later this year in India.

And as if to send a message that the win over Ireland was no fluke, Oman defeated neighbouring UAE team for making it two wins in a row. Following those successive victories, Oman managed to earn a place in the Super Six, “an achievement to be proud of” in the words of former Sri Lankan great Mendis.

Mendis, who has been with the national team for the past decade and more, has been instrumental in leading Oman to two T20 World Cups and the sixth-place finish in the ODI World Cup Qualifier is the best result for the team in their history. Oman had previously competed in



Aqib Ilyas



Ayaan Khan celebrates his century

World Cup Qualifier twice in 2005 (Ireland) and 2009 (South Africa).

In Ireland, Oman finished ninth among 12 participating nations while in South Africa, Oman ended 11th among 12 nations. The Zimbabwe Qualifier was the third time Oman had reached the final round of the World Cup qualification.

The latest showing in

Zimbabwe where Oman were one of the three Associate nations (Netherlands and Scotland being the other two) to make it to the Super Six stage was something that Mendis is proud of and termed his team's show in the Qualifier as “super performance”.

Speaking after the team's return to Muscat on Friday morning to a warm welcome by Oman Cricket board members at the Muscat International Airport, Mendis said: “When we departed for Zimbabwe Qualifier, we were one of the teams least expected to make it to the Super Six stage. We surprised all by upsetting Ireland, a Test-playing nation in the opening clash to have a dream start to our campaign. It was a historic win, first against a Test-playing nation in an ODI”

“We had a wonderful and successful tour in Zimbabwe. I think all the cricket fans of Oman can be proud and happy of the boys' show in the Qualifier,” Mendis signed off.

During the ICC World Cup Qualifier, there were individual milestones achieved by Oman cricketers with vice-captain Aqib Ilyas becoming the fastest Associate batter to reach 1,000 ODI runs. Aqib also the tenth fastest in the world, Aqib reached 1,000 runs in just 22 innings.

Ayaan Khan achieved the milestone of reaching 1,000 runs in ODI during the Super Six match and mark in 31 innings.



LONDON: World number three Daniil Medvedev defeated close friend Marton Fucsovics to reach the Wimbledon last 16 for the second time on Saturday.

Medvedev came through 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 against the muscular 67th-ranked Hungarian, recording his best Slam performance this year after a third-round exit at the Australian Open and first-round loss at the French Open.

Fucsovics, a quarter-finalist in 2021, saw his faltering challenge unravel when broken early in the fourth set, before calling a medical time-out to treat a right foot injury.

Despite that setback, he still made Medvedev work for the victory, saving a clutch of match

Medvedev defeats friend Fucsovics at Wimbledon

points before the third seed prevailed.

“It was a very tough match,” said the 27-year-old former US Open champion. “Marton plays well on grass and has made the quarter-finals here, which I haven't done.

“I was more decisive after the first set, saved some break points and I'm happy to be through.”

He added: “I want to do well here. It's my worst Grand Slam in terms of results so I have a big motivation to do well here.”

Medvedev, who was banned from Wimbledon in 2022 following the Russian attack of Ukraine, will face either US 16th seed Tommy Paul or unseeded Jiri Lehecka of the Czech Republic for a place in the quarter-finals. — AFP

INTER MIAMI ANNOUNCE ‘THE UNVEIL’ AHEAD OF MESSI ARRIVAL

MIAMI: Lionel Messi’s next club, Inter Miami, announced on Friday it will hold a presentation event, called ‘The Unveil’, on July 16 at its home stadium.

Argentine seven-time Ballon d’Or winner Messi said last month that he was moving to the Major League Soccer club after allowing his contract at Paris Saint-Germain to run out.

“The major unveiling event will include exciting entertainment, speeches on the pitch and more,” the club said in a press release, which did not mention Messi by name.

Messi, who won the World Cup with Argentina in December, is expected to be joined at Miami by his former Barcelona team-mate and ex-Spain international midfielder Sergio Busquets and the pair could be presented together.

The club recently appointed former Barcelona and Argentina coach Gerardo “Tata” Martino to take charge of the team.

Messi is expected to make his debut on July 21 against Mexican club Cruz Azul in the new Leagues Cup -- a

tournament between top flight clubs from MLS and the Mexican league.

Inter Miami majority owner Jorge Mas has said the club could make “three to five signings” during the current transfer window.

Inter Miami is at the bottom in MLS’ Eastern Conference and ranked 28th of 29 clubs in the league.

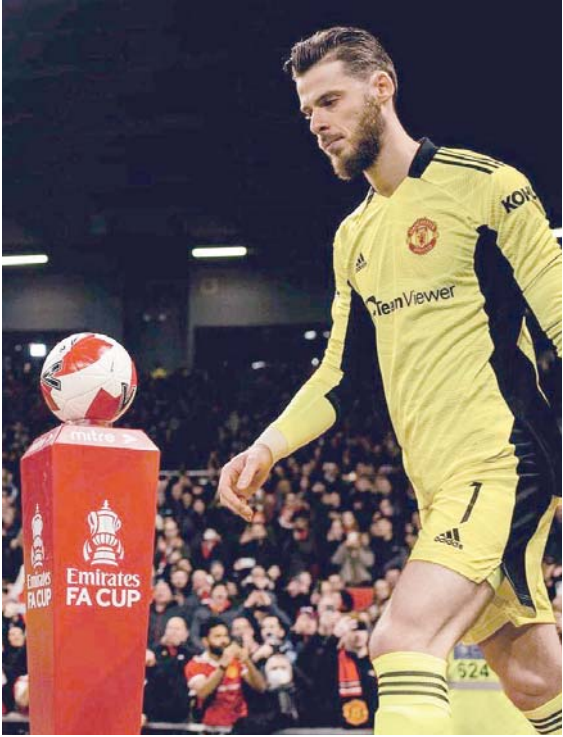
Martino said, upon his appointment, that he had spoken to Messi and Busquets about their impending move to the MLS club. “Sometimes in our world you associate United States and Miami with holidays. And it’s not that. They are coming to compete.”

“They are coming from winning world titles, Spanish league titles. They are not going to relax. They will compete because it is in their blood,” he said.

“The Unveil” will be conducted at the club’s DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, north of Miami.

Former England and Manchester United midfielder David Beckham, a co-owner of the club, is also likely to appear at the event.

— AFP



David de Gea announces Man Utd exit

LONDON: David de Gea announced on Saturday he is leaving Manchester United after 12 years, saying “it’s the right time to undertake a new challenge”.

The Spanish goalkeeper, who won the Premier League Golden Glove award for most clean sheets last season, was criticised for a number of high-profile errors in the final weeks of the campaign.

His contract with United expired at the end of June, with no new deal agreed despite talks that took place throughout the season.

United have been linked with a move for Inter Milan keeper Andre Onana.

In a message on social media, De Gea, 32, thanked United fans for their support, but said: “Now, it’s the right time to undertake a new challenge, to push myself again in new surroundings.”

“Manchester will always be in my heart, Manchester has shaped me and will never leave me.” When De Gea’s contract expired last Friday, United said they remained in talks with the Spanish international goalkeeper.

De Gea wrote: “I would like to express my unwavering gratitude and appreciation for the love from the last 12 years. We’ve achieved a lot since my dear Sir Alex Ferguson brought me to this club.”

“I took incredible pride every time I pulled on this shirt, to lead the team, to represent this institution, the biggest club in the world was an honour only bestowed upon a few lucky footballers.”

United boss Erik ten Hag thanked De Gea for his service to the club in a statement.

“It takes great quality and character to reach the level of even playing one game for Manchester United,” he said. “To do it 545 times over 12 years is a special achievement, particularly in the goalkeeping position where every game puts you in the spotlight.”

“To have won player of the year awards from both the fans and his team-mates, each on four occasions, shows the level of his performance and he will always be remembered as one of the very best goalkeepers in the history of the club.” — AFP

Al Riyami defends national TT Championship title

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Ibri’s player Ahmed al Riyami retained the national junior (U-18) singles table tennis championship after he defeated his team-mate Loqman al Farsi 3-0 in the finals at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Friday.

It was a similar scenario of the final match for the U-16 tournament which concluded two weeks before when Al Riyami claimed the title after he had registered a 3-0 win over Loqman in the concluding fixture.

Moreover, Ahmed al Riyami was the last year champion representing Seeb club and he managed to defend his title this year successfully with Ibri club.

Ibri’s paddlers dominated in the national Junior (U-18) Singles Table Tennis Championship as the third place award went to Turki al Abri after he outclassed Mohammed al Mutaa from Yanqul club.



The two-day event, which was organised by Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA), featured participation of more than 30 players representing different domestic clubs namely: Ibri, Saham, Nakhl, Qurayat, Al Rustaq, Al Ittfaq, Salalah and Yanqul. The players were distributed into eight groups where the top two winners from

each group progressed into the finals which played in knockout stages.

The winner of the tournament topped his first group in the preliminary rounds as he registered three victories against: Abdullah al Rawahi from Yanqul, Qais al Hadhrami from Nakhl and Al Muhanna al Ghassani from Al Ittfaq. In the

knockout stages, he won against Abdul Samad al Harrasi from Nakhl club 3-0 in the last 16 round before defeating Nasser al Zaabi in the quarterfinals. He outclassed Turki al Abri 3-0 in the semis before lifting the title through winning Loqman al Farsi in the final match with the same result.

The tournament was monitored by the coaching staff of the national TT team represented by coach Omid Shamasharbaki, head coach of the national team, and coach Fatemeh Kivani, head coach of women team. The local event showed many promising faces who will get their chances soon to join the national team camps. Oman Table Tennis team will take part in the Asian Youth Table Tennis Championship which will be held in Qatar during July 17 to 22 and WTT Al Maty in Kazakhstan during July 25 to 28 beside Asian TT Championship for senior in Korea Republic in September.

Jamaica’s Jackson sets fastest time of year in women’s 100m

KINGSTON, Jamaica: Shericka Jackson threw down the gauntlet with a personal best and world-leading 10.65 seconds, the fifth-fastest ever, as she retained her women’s 100m title at the Jamaican championships on Friday.

Jackson, who won the silver medal at last year’s World Championships in Oregon, is tied with American Marion Jones for fifth on the all-time list and eclipsed the previous fastest time of the year, the 10.71 set American Sha’Carrie Richardson at the US championships on Thursday.

With Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who did not compete in Kingston, holding a wild card as defending world champion, Jamaica will

have four runners in the event at the World Championships in Budapest in August.

Jackson won in a legal wind of 1.0m/sec while Shashalee Forbes ran a new personal best 10.96 for second place and Natasha Morrison was third in 10.98.

Two time Olympic sprint double champion Elaine Thompson-Herah was fifth in 11.06 seconds.

Relative unknown Rohan Watson stunned the large crowd when he won men’s 100m in his first ever final at any level, running a personal best 9.91 seconds (1.1m/s), tied for ninth best in the world and 10th best ever by any Jamaican.

It was his second sub-10 seconds in 24 hours after running



9.98 in Thursday’s first round.

Ryiem Forde was also under the 10-second mark with a personal best 9.98. World Championships finalist Oblique Seville was third in 10.00.

Roshawn Clarke equalled the world under-20 record in the men’s 400m hurdles, running

47.85 seconds.

Clarke, the world under-20 bronze medallist, tied the world mark held by American Sean Burrell. He also surpassed his previous personal best 48.91 set in Thursday’s semifinals and is the second Jamaican man to run under 48.

Last year’s winner, Jaheel Hyde, was second in 48.45 while Assinie Wilson was third in a personal best 48.50.

Clarke and Wilson joined Hyde as qualifiers for the World Championships.

Janieve Russell won a thrilling women’s 400m hurdles final, her third straight national title and fifth overall, after she ran 43.75 seconds, just beating Andrenette Knight, who ran 53.78, and Rushell Clayton in 53.81, all three running season-best times.

US college (NCAA) double champion Romaine Beckford and middle distance runner Adelle Tracey won their first national titles in the men’s high jump and 1,500m respectively

Beckford cleared 2.23m, the

same mark as second placed Christoff Bryan, with last year’s winner Lushane Wilson third at 2.15m.

Beckford jumped a personal best 2.27 earlier this year and is tied for 16th in the world while Wilson is ranked 22nd with his personal best 2.26.

Tracey, the American born daughter of former Jamaican runner Nicholas Tracey and who represented Great Britain up to last year, ran 4:19.23 seconds to win the women’s 1,500m as she looks to represent Jamaica in the 800m/1,500m double at the worlds.

Former Commonwealth Games steeplechase champion Aisha Praught-Leer was second in 4:23.05. — AFP

STAGE WINNER PEDERSEN SAD FOR ‘LEGEND’ CAVENDISH AFTER TOUR DE FRANCE CRASH



Trek's Danish rider Mads Pedersen celebrates his victory on the podium. – AFP

LIMOGES: Mark Cavendish crashed out of the Tour de France on Saturday ending his quest to break the all-time record of stage wins as Denmark's Mads Pedersen won a sprint for the eighth stage.

Cavendish was taken away in an ambulance as Pedersen won a bunched sprint ahead of Belgian duo Jasper Philipsen and Wout van Aert.

Former world champion Pedersen was swift to hail Cavendish who had been bidding to overtake the record of 34 stage wins he shares with Belgian great Eddy Merckx.

"It's sad a legend like him ends his Tour like that," said the former world champion.

Sprint specialist Cavendish, 38, was forced to exit after

suffering a suspected broken collarbone in a fall about 60km from the finish line.

The Astana rider remained on the road for a couple of minutes rolling in agony every time he reached towards his right shoulder.

Former world champion Pedersen was swift to hail Cavendish who had been bidding to overtake the record of 34 stage wins he shares with Belgian great Eddy Merckx.

duo on the slopes of the Puy de Dome volcano.

"It was really sad indeed to hear that news," said defending champion Vingegaard of Cavendish's exit. — AFP



Trek's Danish rider Mads Pedersen celebrates as he cycles to the finish line to win the 8th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 201 km between Libourne and Limoges, in central western France, on Saturday. – AFP

Cavendish loses bid to break all-time record of 34 stage wins

LIMOGES: Mark Cavendish crashed out of the Tour de France on Saturday ending the star British cyclist's quest to break the all-time record of stage wins.

The 38-year-old sprint specialist was forced to exit after suffering a suspected broken collarbone in a fall about 60km from the finish line in stage eight.

Cavendish was racing in what is likely to be his final Tour de France in an effort to break the all-time record of 34 stage wins he shares with Belgian great Eddy Merckx.

The Astana rider remained on the road for a couple of minutes rolling in agony every time he reached towards his right shoulder.

Medics were swiftly on the scene and lifted him into an ambulance placing smelling salts under his nose and applying balm on his road burns.

Cavendish was ashen-faced as doctors closed the ambulance door with organisers later confirming his withdrawal.



Astana Qazaqstan Team's British rider Mark Cavendish receives medical attention after suffering a crash during the 8th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 201 km between Libourne and Limoges, in central western France, on Saturday. – AFP

On Friday, his bid to set the new record escaped him by a whisker on stage seven at Bordeaux. The exit is all the sadder given the peloton was speeding up to over 50kph attempting to catch an escape with another bunch sprint possible at Limoges.

Cavendish burst on to the Tour de France map in 2008 with his first four wins when he was just 23-years-old.

His celebrations made such good television he attracted a new generation of fans to the sport.

A student of the fine art of the sprint lead out and a bullish competitor the Isle of Man native matched Merckx on 34 wins in 2021.

He missed the cut in 2022 but changed teams for 2023 where he appeared capable of clinching the all important stage for which he strived so hard.

Although Cavendish originally said this would be his final Tour de France he left the door open to another year on the eve of this tour.

"I'm still racing, still loving it, and I'll keep doing it until I stop," he said.

"The biggest thing I can say is never give up, do what you want and enjoy it, but commit to it. It's a good rule to live by."

Cavendish appeared to be about to bag a record-breaking 35th win on Friday at Bordeaux where he hit almost 75kph before a chain slip allowed Jasper Philipsen to burst back past him.

He was also in the mix on the two other stages that ended in mass bunch sprints.

The Manx Missile reached 73kph at one point on the first bunch sprint on stage three in Bayonne, where he came sixth. No rider had gone faster on the Tour until he himself smashed that on Friday.

At the Nogaro motorbike racetrack on stage four he came fifth, and said he had been blocked by a fall as the 25-year-old Philipsen won a second straight stage.

A Netflix television crew for a series to be aired in August has been following Cavendish's every move. — AFP



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Pact signed for new hazardous waste plant in Sohar Freezone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

SOHAR Port and Freezone signed a land lease agreement with Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC), to set-up a Hazardous Waste Treatment Plant in SOHAR Freezone. The agreement aims to enhance waste management practices in the region, while promoting sustainability and enhancing the circular economy cluster in SOHAR Port and Freezone.

With a total investment of \$3.5 million, the plant-with an area of 10,000 sqm, designed to treat industrial waste, will ensure compliance with local and international regulations for a pollution-free environment.

The plant's produced end products will include heavy oil for utilisation in slow-moving machines, as well as low-contamination carbon dust



suitable for cement and road construction industries.

Commenting on this agreement, Shiv Sood, Co-Owner of Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC) said, "Our agreement with SOHAR Freezone marks a significant milestone in our journey towards sustainable waste management.

By harnessing our cutting-

edge technology and sustainable practices, we are determined to contribute to the circular economy cluster and lead the way towards a greener future."

Omar al Mahrizi, CEO SOHAR Freezone, DCEO SOHAR Port said, "This constitutes a significant milestone that further strengthens SOHAR Freezone's position as a premier destination for leading

waste management solutions. By attracting Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC) to establish their business in SOHAR Freezone, we are reinforcing our steadfast commitment to sustainable development and boosting our role in driving a more environmentally responsible future.

This agreement further bolsters our dedication to resource efficiency and supports the circular economy principles outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

With an initial production capacity of 40 tonnes per day, projected to increase to 80 tonnes per day within one year, the agreement signifies the strong commitment of Elite Hazardous Waste Management Solution (FZC) and SOHAR Freezone towards advancing waste management practices and fostering economic growth in the region.

Revenues of RO 500m/ year seen from key Oman copper-gold mining project



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 8

A promising mining project targeting copper and associated gold ore in Al Dhahirah Governorate has the potential to generate annual revenues of around RO 500 million when it is fully operational.

According to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, exploration work in Block 10 in the Wilayat of Yanqul has so far uncovered five sites with commercial quantities of copper and gold ore. Development of these sites — at Bishara, Hail Al Safl, Al Jadeed, Al Raki, and Asghar — is being undertaken by Mazoon Mining LLC, an Omani joint venture established in April 2018.

"The project aims to extract copper and gold, with an estimated annual copper production of 1.6 million tonnes

and annual revenues of RO 500 million," the ministry said in its 2022 Annual Report, issued earlier this week.

Significantly, the Block 10 project is among eight major initiatives that were progressed during the year, according to the report.

Included in the list is Al Washihi Copper Ore Mining Project in Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi. It targets the production of copper concentrates with 24 per cent copper per tonne. The targeted copper ore resource is estimated at 16 million tonnes.

At the Ghuzayn Copper Ore Mining & Concentration Project in Wilayat of Al Khabourah, around 6 million tonnes of copper ore with a 2 per cent copper concentration is planned for development over a six and a half year period, the report stated.

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Registrations for GCC investors in Oman reach 7,859

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) said that the number of commercial registries that recorded for investors from GCC countries in the Sultanate of Oman during 2022 reached 527 registries, up by 16.3% compared 2021 when it reached to 453 registries.

The cumulative number of registries for Gulf investors by the end of 2022 reached 7,859 registries.

The Department of Information, Data and Statistics at MoCIIP added that the number of commercial registries recorded for Emirati investors during last year reached 164 registries, bringing up their cumulative number to 3, 695 registries till end of 2022.

The number of commercial registries recorded for Saudi investors during the last year reached to 185 registries, bringing up their cumulative number by the end of 2022 to 1,504 commercial registries .

The number of commercial registries recorded for Bahraini investors during last year, reached to 61 registries , bringing up their cumulative number by end of 2022 to 1,078 registries. The

number of commercial registries that recorded for Kuwaiti investors during last year reached 76 registries, bringing up their cumulative number by the end of 2022 to 1,043 registries .

Lastly, the number of commercial registries recorded for Qatari investors during the last year reached 41 registries , bringing up their cumulative number by the end of 2022 to 539 registries.

Market Maker initiative to help revitalise MSX

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

The Market Makers initiative, introduced by the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), aims to revitalise trading and establish stability in the stock exchange. This initiative is part of a set of six initiatives announced by the exchange, which includes services related to market makers and liquidity providers.

The primary objective of the Market Makers initiative is to facilitate liquidity provision for securities and maintain a balance between supply and demand. It also aims to curb the presence of unfulfilled buy or sell orders in the market.

By implementing this initiative, the Muscat Stock Exchange intends to create an environment that ensures continuous trading

activity and enhances the efficiency of pricing processes for listed companies.

Mustafa bin Ahmed Salman, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the United Securities Company, which is one of the licensed market makers, expressed his belief that these initiatives would contribute to revitalising trading and fostering stability within the stock exchange.

He emphasised that these initiatives align with the strategies of several brokerage firms operating in the Muscat Stock Exchange.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he said United Securities is eager to actively participate in expanding activities and services that contribute to the overall revitalisation of the stock exchange, he said.

The role of a market maker is



United Securities is eager to actively participate in expanding activities and services that contribute to the overall revitalisation of the stock exchange

MUSTAFA BIN AHMED SALMAN
BoD Chairman
United Securities Company

crucial in this initiative, Salman stated. Market makers have the ability to place various orders at different levels consistently. This activity aids in creating depth in the stock exchange and generating interest in the listed companies.

The presence of market makers provides assurance to investors that there are continuous buy and sell requests for the securities, thus facilitating liquidity and enabling investors to enter or exit the market at the appropriate time.

As a result, trading in the shares becomes more efficient, and the pricing process for these companies improves.

To initiate the market maker activity, companies need to establish a specialised team trained to monitor the listed companies and develop trading mechanisms.

It is also necessary to employ

electronic systems that can rapidly and automatically place multiple orders at different levels, based on equations determined by the team after observing news and information that may impact the direction of the company.

Furthermore, continuous studies are required to assess technical analysis levels such as stability, support, and resistance. This information is utilised to determine the appropriate times and levels at which orders should be placed, considering margin ratios.

Companies typically develop a procedural guide that governs the trading process, ensuring adherence to specific goals and ethical standards.

The allocation of a RO 100 million fund to support the stock exchange is a positive step that

instills investor confidence in the availability of liquidity, the official said. When investors participate in public markets, they expect to have the ability to sell and exit their investments when the time is right.

Liquidity plays a crucial role in attracting investors to the stock market, and the establishment of this fund provides reassurance to both local and foreign investors.

This development also improves the evaluation and pricing of companies, gradually eliminating any discounts applied to their valuation due to low trading volume.

The revitalisation of the stock exchange is expected to have a positive impact on new listings, encouraging more companies to convert into public shareholding entities and list their shares on the stock exchange, he added.

Oman-Syria business forum on July 11

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Taking the bilateral relations to further heights between the Sultanate of Oman and Syria, a high-level Syrian business team will be visiting Oman and present a Business Forum which will be held on July 11 at the Kempinski Hotel, according to the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The Oman-Syria Business Forum with the Syrian delegation visiting the country, aims to enhance the trade balance and explore areas of cooperation and partnership in sectors worthy of exchanging experiences and transferring knowledge in the light of Oman's Vision 2040.

This B2B session will focus on a wide variety of sectors which include food industries, import, export and contracting, clothing and cotton industry, textile, tourism, veterinary medicines, feed and fertiliser, medicines and chemical, and plastic industry.

"We are happy to be co-hosting along with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a high level business forum seeking to enhance the bilateral relations to newer heights the outcome of which will prove to be a great milestone in the history of both nations," Siraj Saqr, representative of the embassy told the *Observer*.

The bilateral relations between

Oman and Syria, both members of the Arab League, have been promising despite many challenges and both countries maintain diplomatic relations, in sharp contrast to other Arab states of the Arabian Gulf who have cut off diplomatic ties with Syria and closed their embassies.

According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, Oman's exports to Syria, as of June 2023, touched \$8.71 million during 2021.

As per the reports published by Trading Economics, Oman Exports to Syria electrical, electronic equipment, animal, vegetable fats and oils, cleavage products, plastics, meat and edible meat offal, works of art, collectors' pieces and antiques, edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers, iron and steel, machinery and the like.

On the other hand, Oman Imports from Syria reached \$7.77 million during 2021, and it includes edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons, edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers, articles of apparel, knit or crocheted, animal, vegetable fats and oils, cleavage products, live trees, plants, bulbs, roots, and cut flowers.

Earlier this year, Oman's Foreign Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic discussed bilateral relations between the two countries.

Remittances into Mena dip 3.8% to \$64 billion in 2022

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Remittance inflows into countries of the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) fell by 3.8% to \$64 billion in 2022 after posting strong growth of 12.2% in 2021, according to a key report. Economies in the region that saw slight gains in remittance flows included several Maghreb countries.

In 2023, remittance inflows are projected to grow by 1.7% with the outlook differentiated across regional subgroups depending on dominant host countries and the degree of exposure to higher inflation and financial volatility.

Sending \$200 to the region cost on average 6.2% in the fourth quarter of 2022, down from 6.4% a year ago. The World Bank's latest Migration and Development Brief focuses on remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), with a specific emphasis on the Middle East and GCC countries.

According to the report, officially recorded remittance flows to LMICs are estimated to grow by 1.4% to reach \$656 billion in 2023. However, economic activity in the remittance source countries is expected to soften, which may limit employment and wage gains for migrants.

In 2022, remittance flows



experienced significant growth, with an 8% increase to \$647 billion.

This growth was driven by several factors, including strong oil prices in the GCC countries, large money transfers from Russia to Central Asian countries, and a robust labour market in the United States and other advanced migrant destination economies.

Remittance inflows in different regions varied: East Asia and the Pacific grew by 0.7%, Europe and Central Asia saw a remarkable 19% increase, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced an 11.3% growth, South Asia saw a growth of 12.2%, while Sub-Saharan Africa grew by 6.1%.

However, remittance inflows to the Middle East and North Africa region declined by 3.8%.

The top five recipient countries

for remittances in 2022 globally were India, Mexico, China, the Philippines, and Pakistan.

Notably, remittance inflows played a significant role in funding current account and fiscal shortfalls in countries where they represented a substantial share of GDP.

Examples of such economies include Tajikistan, Tonga, Lebanon, Samoa, and the Kyrgyz Republic.

Remittances have become crucial for countries and households, particularly during the post-Covid period of slower economic growth and reduced foreign direct investments.

They serve as a resilient source of external financing, especially for LMICs burdened with high levels of external debt.

The World Bank recognises

the importance of remittances and actively works on facilitating their flow, reducing associated costs, and leveraging them for development purposes. Looking ahead, the World Bank projects that remittance inflows to the Middle East and North Africa region will grow by 1.7% in 2023.

However, the outlook varies across subgroups within the region, depending on dominant host countries and exposure to inflation and financial volatility.

The average cost of sending \$200 to the region was 6.2% in the fourth quarter of 2022.

In conclusion, remittances play a crucial role in the Middle East and GCC countries, providing external financing, supporting households during times of need, and contributing to economic development.

Revenues of RO 500m/year seen from key Oman copper-gold mining project

FROM PAGE 13

One notable mining-related project of the past year centres on an initiative to identify commercially viable marble and building material quarries for public auction.

"The main objective of the project is to create competitive investment opportunities for marble and building materials through a transparent and fair bidding system.

The project aims to achieve financial and technical efficiency while promoting the principles of transparency and equality," the

ministry noted.

Further, in a bid to optimise value creation from the country's mineral resources, the ministry has initiated a Mining and Minerals Innovation project.

It explained: "The objective of the project is to evaluate the various stages and processes involved in mining and mineral production, from testing the raw materials to producing the final product.

The project aims to enhance the value and quality of the mining and minerals sector by applying innovative tools and techniques to

increase the value-added."

Also cited by the ministry report is a study into the economic feasibility of producing around 3 million tonnes of dolomite ore per year. Once proven to be feasible, high grade dolomite will be used to produce magnesium. At the same time, low-grade dolomite and aggregate containing less than 1 per cent of silica will be used for the steel industry.

"The scoping study suggests that the volume of resources present in the region could reach more than 250 million tonnes of dolomite ore," it added.

Omantel launches new initiatives for SMEs

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication & ICT services in the Sultanate of Oman, is intensifying its focus on the SME sector through a slew of enhanced offerings, to underline the vital importance SMEs hold in Oman's economy.

Among the key initiatives that were announced recently is the upgraded Aamali service under the tagline 'More business, less worries', which includes various bundles and tailored services to SMEs to kickstart their journey.

The service gives unlimited Internet and free mobile and fixed line calls within a company.

In addition, Omantel launched



a "Lucky Draw" promotion for SMEs, rewarding them with travel vouchers, smart devices, and other valuable prizes in four weekly draws and a grand draw.

The promotion targeted new subscribers to enterprise products (such as Postpaid Mobile line, Fixed Broadband packages, Aamali, ICT services & etc.) and existing customers who upgraded their plans.

Special workshops tailored for SMEs are being conducted on a

regular basis to create awareness on using the latest technologies for enhancing their productivity & business operations efficiency.

Two main workshops held so far dealt with the Internet of Things (IoT), Strategic Thinking, Innovation in Business and Key to Financial Management.

Prizes were given in lucky draws, including 100,000 free SMS marketing messages using the Oman first big data marketing platform "TASIL," as an incentive for SMEs to use ICT solutions and sign up for the different services.

Omantel is the Sultanate of Oman's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider.

Bank Muscat recognised by Wells Fargo for excellence in fund transfers

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was awarded with the Operational Excellence Award by Wells Fargo, one of the four largest banks in the United States and is headquartered in San Francisco.

This award recognises institutions for their usage of Wells Fargo services, expertise, and commitment to achieving an exceptional level of operational excellence, which results in higher efficiencies and cost reductions.

Most importantly, it acknowledges institutions, who meet the evolving needs of their own customer base by consistently demonstrating improvement in the quality and excellence of operational service levels in



international fund transfers which has resulted in a very high straight-

through processing (STP) rate throughout the year.

Zuwaina bint Abdullah al Sharji, Assistant General Manager

— Central Operations & Change Management, Bank Muscat, said: "We are delighted to receive this award once again, which reflects the bank's commitment to meeting the highest standards of quality in fund transfers.

The bank consistently maintains high SWIFT standards, which are backed by our customer-centric services and a state-of-the-art in-house payment architecture."

She also thanked customers for their trust and confidence in the bank, which has led to several innovations being launched over the years to enhance banking convenience and keep pace with global trends.

Cross-border payments are a critical component of banking relationships in today's global

economy and the need for fast, efficient and predictable processing is a shared responsibility by all the financial institutions involved.

Wells Fargo, which is among Bank Muscat's prominent correspondent banks for dollar payments, provides the bank with high quality payment processing, seamless and efficient servicing and outstanding customer service, thereby greatly enhancing the overall customer experience.

As for the bank, the Central Operations Department, the Treasury Office, and the Global Trade Services Department handle money transfer operations, while the Systems and Procedures Department handles technical and security issues related to these operations.



CBO foreign assets reach RO 6.568 bn



MUSCAT: The total foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman at the end of April 2023 increased by 1.5 per cent, registering a value of RO 6.568 billion compared to the same period last year with RO 6.473 billion.

The preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the domestic liquidity increased by about RO 688 million, to reach RO 21.069 billion, an increase of 3.4 per cent, compared to the same period in 2022.

The total cash issued by CBO decreased by 9.1 per cent, recording RO 1.750 billion at the end of April 2023, compared to RO 1.924 billion end of April 2022.

On the other hand, the deposits of the private sector in commercial banks and Islamic windows at the end of April 2023 reached RO 17.877 billion, an increase of 3.7 per cent over the same period in 2022, which witnessed deposits of the private sector amounting to RO 17.246 billion.

Meanwhile, the total loans and financing in commercial banks and Islamic windows increased at the end of April 2023 by 6.3 per cent, to reach RO 30.025 billion, compared to RO 28.245 billion in 2022. The average interest rate on total loans decreased by 1.9 per cent, and was recorded at the end of April 2023, at a rate of 5.367 per cent.

— ONA

Knowledge Oasis Muscat is home to more than 200 companies and institutions

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oasis Muscat, affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), is home to more than 200 governmental and semi-governmental companies and institutions, including international companies in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, with an investment size of RO 266 million, and a workforce of 3,958 employees with an Omanisation rate of 67 per cent.

Engineer Jaafar bin Mohammed al Ajmi (**pictured**), Director-General of Knowledge Oasis Muscat, said that the Oasis is currently witnessing the implementation of a number of investment and strategic projects and other projects that are expected to enter the construction phase during this year.

One of these projects is the satellite communications station with an investment exceeding RO 4 million. This project is classified as one of the promising economic projects for the Sultanate of Oman in general and for the Oasis and the company in particular.

This project is making shifts in the telecommunications services sector, banking, oil, commercial, educational, government and other services, stimulating initiatives and innovation, and encouraging the introduction and adoption of modern technologies in these sectors in the Sultanate of Oman during the next stage.

He said: "The satellite communication station project has entered the construction phase, and it is expected that the station will be ready for operation during the third quarter of this year."

"Among the projects is the construction of an international school on the Oasis campus on an



area of 43,000 square metres, with an investment exceeding RO 8 million. Construction work on the project will start during the third quarter of this year," he added.

Al Ajmi added that there is a multi-storey parking building project in the Oasis on an area of 12,000 square metres, with a capacity of 1,500 parking spaces in the first phase.

It can be increased in the future to 2,500 parking spaces, in addition to shops for car accessories, workshops for car service and care, and facilities that serve parking users. It is expected that the



implementation of the project will start during Q4, in addition to the implementation of a bus station for passenger transport and a cafe that provides a drive-through service.

The Oman Towers Company will also implement the first decorated tower in Knowledge Oasis Muscat, based on the agreement signed by Madayn with the company to build decorative towers in the cities affiliated with Madayn. The completion of the

tower is expected before the end of this year.

Engineer Jaafar bin Mohammed al Ajmi, Director-General of Knowledge Oasis Muscat, said: "The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has completed the implementation of the ring road project in the Oasis at a total cost of more than RO 6.6 million.

"This project contributes to raising the efficiency

of the infrastructure and accommodating more investment projects in promising economic sectors, such as technology, communications and knowledge-based businesses, in addition to educational institutions, advanced training centres and other projects supporting these sectors.

"This project is relied upon to transform the Oasis into a more attractive environment for growth and attracting investments, in a way that enhances the Oasis's competitiveness locally and regionally, and enhances Madayn's vision to provide world-class business cities."

The project included the implementation of an internal road network with a total length of 7.7 km, which was covered with the latest surveillance systems, as the number of cameras reached 51, in addition to providing it with 286 solar-powered poles to illuminate all streets for bicycles with a length of 5.9 km, and the implementation of green spaces on about 12 square metres.

The project also included a water network with a length of 5.4 km, rainwater drainage channels with a length of 5.8 km, a sewage network with a length of 4.8 km, and a fire extinguishing network with a length of 5.5 km. More than 75 per cent of the materials and components used in the project are locally produced.

Al Ajmi explained that among the international companies in ITC sector operating in the Knowledge Oasis Muscat are Microsoft, Oracle and Motorola, in addition to leading local companies in this sector such as Ithca Group and its subsidiaries, Awasr Oman, and Oman Data Park, Azyan Telecom and the Information Line Communications Centre. — ONA

MoCIIP to strengthen the commercial sector in South Al Batinah Governorate

AL RUSTAQ: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) is working to develop the economic sector in South Al Batinah Governorate, in cooperation with the various authorities. In 2022, 26,657 commercial records were registered in the governorate, compared to 23,915 records in 2021, an increase of 11.5 per cent.

Tariq bin Nasser al Harrasi, Director of the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in South Al Batinah Governorate, explained that the governorate enjoys many elements for the growth of the economy and the increase in the volume of investments.

Due to its geographical location in the middle of the governorates of Muscat, North Al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah, it has all the necessary services and a high population density that qualifies it to attract local and foreign investment opportunities in various sectors, such as the tourism, logistics, manufacturing and fishing sectors.

He said, "The Governorate of South Al Batinah contains Khazaen Economic City in the Wilayat of Barka, which is one of



the economic cities that attracts foreign investments as it provides many facilities for investors. There is also the Sandan Industrial City in the Wilayat of Nakhl, which provides many facilities and incentives for various commercial and industrial activities."

"The Governorate of South Al Batinah is characterised by a unique nature and important historical and archaeological sites, and is a tourist destination in the Sultanate of Oman," he added.

Oman Vision 2040 works to develop the tourism sector in the governorate, and encourage investment through the establishment of hotels, tourist resorts, and other recreational and tourism facilities.

Al Harrasi said that within the framework of 'Made in Oman' campaign, which aims to support the industrial sector and promote national products, the department organised in 2022 four exhibitions of national products in a number of different commercial centres in the governorate.

The ministry seeks to expand the base of national products, in order to enhance local production and marketing of national products in the local and international markets.

He pointed out that the building and construction sector and the export and import offices sector witnessed a great growth in 2022 in South Al Batinah Governorate.

The two sectors had the highest

recorded activities, reaching 3,147 activities.

The number of foreign investors registered in 2022 reached 2,486 investors, which reflects the governorate's attractiveness to foreign investments and the importance of the measures and facilities that have been taken and provided to investors.

Al Harrasi explained that the number of automatic licence applications that were submitted through the 'Invest Easy' portal in the governorate reached more than 50,000 applications, since the start of the service in April 2021 until the end of 2022.

This confirms the great demand for this service, stressing that the 'Invest Easy' platform



The Governorate of South Al Batinah is characterised by a unique nature and important historical and archaeological sites and is a tourist destination in Oman

TARIQ BIN NASSER AL HARRASI

Director of the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in South Al Batinah Governorate

contributed to facilitating and accelerating the procedures for establishing and operating companies in Oman.

— ONA

RO 426.3m traded on MSX in 1H

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded in the first half of this year the first decline in trading value after two years of recovery, to fall to RO 426.3 million, compared to RO 573.6 million in the first half 2022 and RO 468.2 million in 1H of 2021.

Trading in the first half of this year fell below the level of investors' ambition amid a state of calm.

MSX is working during the current period to restore activity to the stock exchange through 6 initiatives aimed at attracting investors, increasing liquidity levels and stimulating trading.

In the first half of this year, the Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed the listing of Abraj Energy Services Company, which attracted investors and contributed to raising the trading value in the months of March and April.

The month of April witnessed the best value of trading during the current year at RO 122.4 million, but trades declined after that to RO 59.6 million in May and to RO 52.8 million in June.

— ONA

Solar and wind energy for Oman’s renewable future



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As Oman continues to focus on sustainable development, it is interesting to explore options for renewable energy. This article aims to address the merits of solar and wind energy, the challenges associated with

their production, storage, and trading, as well as the potential for these renewable resources to bolster Oman’s trade relations with regional and global partners. Solar energy is derived from capturing sunlight and converting it into usable electricity. The following factors make solar energy a strong contender for Oman: Oman’s geographic location provides an advantage in terms of receiving ample sunlight. With its vast expanses of desert and clear skies, solar energy has significant potential for large-scale deployment. Solar power systems can be installed on rooftops, in the form of solar farms, or integrated into infrastructure such as buildings and car parks. This versatility enables distributed generation and minimises transmission losses.

Solar energy generation produces no greenhouse gas emissions or air pollutants. While solar energy has numerous advantages, there are challenges associated with its production, storage, and trading: Solar energy production is dependent on sunlight availability, resulting in intermittent power generation. Efficient energy storage systems, such as advanced batteries, can help store excess solar energy during peak generation periods for use during cloudy days or at night. Deploying solar energy infrastructure requires significant investments in solar panels, inverters, and grid connections. Collaborative efforts between the government and private sector can help facilitate the necessary infrastructure development.

Wind energy involves harnessing the kinetic energy of wind and converting it into electricity through wind turbines. While Oman has not been traditionally associated with wind energy, recent advancements have demonstrated its potential in the region. Consider the following factors: Oman’s coastal areas, including Dhofar and Al Wusta, boast favourable wind conditions. Wind power exhibits complementary characteristics to solar energy. Wind tends to blow stronger during the night and winter seasons, which offsets the intermittent nature of solar power, enabling a more consistent supply of renewable electricity. Despite its potential, wind energy faces certain challenges: Large-scale wind farms require significant land space and proper infrastructure, including

transmission lines. Careful planning and coordination with relevant stakeholders are crucial to address land-use concerns and ensure smooth integration into the grid. Integrating wind energy into the existing power grid can present technical challenges. Strengthening the grid infrastructure and implementing advanced grid management systems are necessary to maintain grid stability and accommodate the intermittent nature of wind power. Both solar and wind energy can contribute to Oman’s trade relations in the following ways: Surplus electricity generated from renewable sources can be transmitted to neighbouring countries, fostering stronger trade relationships and contributing to energy security in the region.

Oman could establish joint ventures and partnerships with other countries in the region and beyond to develop renewable energy projects. Renewable energy, particularly solar and wind, can be utilised to produce green hydrogen through electrolysis. The development of a robust renewable energy sector can contribute to Oman’s economic diversification goals, by attracting investments and creating job opportunities. While both solar and wind energy hold promise, leveraging Oman’s abundant solar resources and complementary wind potential can pave the way for a greener future. Addressing challenges related to production, storage, and trading of solar and wind energy will require collaborative efforts and investments.

India can aim lower in its chip dreams

India’s semiconductor dreams are facing a harsh reality. After struggling to woo cutting-edge chipmakers like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing to set up operations in the country, the government may now have to settle for producing less-advanced chips instead. Yet that’s no mere consolation prize: the opportunity to grab share from China in this commoditised but vital part of the tech supply chain could pay off. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to “usher in a new era of electronics manufacturing” by turning India into a chipmaking powerhouse. So far, the government has dangled \$10 billion in subsidies but with little to show for it. Mining conglomerate Vedanta’s \$19.5 billion joint venture with iPhone supplier Foxconn has stalled; plans for a separate \$3 billion manufacturing facility appear to be in limbo, media reported in May. In a small win for the government, US-based Micron Technology last week announced it will invest \$825 million to build its first factory in India in Modi’s home state of Gujarat, though the facility will be used to test and package chips, rather than to manufacture them. Even so, the Micron investment could pave the way for the country to move into the assembly, packaging and testing market for semiconductors, currently dominated by firms like Taiwan’s ASE Technology and China’s JCET. It’s not as lucrative as making or designing them but global sales are forecast to hit \$50.9 billion by 2028, according to Zion Market Research. An even bigger opportunity awaits in manufacturing what are known as trailing-edge semiconductors. Recently, New Delhi expanded fiscal incentives for companies to make these lower-end products in the country. It’s a far more commoditised part of the market but there’s much to play for. Analog chips, for example, are vital for electric cars and smartphones. Last year, sales grew by a fifth to \$89 billion, per estimates from the Semiconductor Industry Association, outpacing growth for memory, logic and other types of chips. The majority of the world’s trailing-edge semiconductors are currently made in Taiwan and China. So rising geopolitical tensions between Washington and Beijing, as well as worries of military conflict in Taiwan, will make India an attractive alternative for companies like US-based GlobalFoundries that specialise in this segment. Booming domestic demand is another factor: the Indian market is forecast to hit \$64 billion by 2026, from just \$23 billion in 2019. Aiming lower could be just what India’s chip ambitions need. — Reuters

Reforming the global debt architecture



HANAN MORSY

The author is Deputy Executive Secretary and Chief Economist at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

One in five people globally live in countries that are in debt distress or at risk of it. Two-thirds of low-income countries – most of them in Africa – fall into this category, while eight of the nine countries currently in debt distress are on the continent. A confluence of factors has created this mounting debt crisis. With booming populations and massive infrastructure needs, coupled with the declining availability of official development assistance and concessional financing, African governments took advantage of historically low interest rates in the 2010s and borrowed heavily from international capital markets and China. Consequently, debt stocks more than doubled between 2010 and 2020. But that debt has become a lot more expensive. Since 2020, the continent has been hit by a series of exogenous shocks. Covid-19, the Ukraine war, and worsening climate conditions have confronted many African governments with credit-rating downgrades, which rapidly increased their borrowing costs and made tapping international debt markets prohibitively expensive. Moreover, the US Federal Reserve’s massive interest-rate hikes since March 2022 have dealt a double whammy to African countries, whose loans are mostly denominated in dollars: their debt-service costs have gone up and their currencies’ dollar exchange rate has gone down. In 2024, African countries will spend around \$74 billion on debt service, up from \$17 billion in 2010. Two states – Ghana and Zambia – have already defaulted, while Chad and Ethiopia are in restructuring talks. The implications of this crisis are clear: African countries face the specter of a lost decade of development. Kenya has been forced to withhold civil servants’ salaries to meet coupon payments. Other countries have



THE SOVEREIGN-DEBT CRISIS IS HITTING AFRICA PARTICULARLY HARD AND COULD LEAD TO A LOST DECADE OF DEVELOPMENT. WHILE THE G20 HAS TRIED TO EASE THE BURDEN, ITS COMMON FRAMEWORK HAS PROVEN INEFFECTIVE AND NEEDS TO BE FIXED, AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS MUST MAKE ROOM AT THE POLICYMAKING TABLE FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

reduced education and health-care financing. Debt service now averages 10.6% of GDP in Africa, compared to 6% for spending on health. In the wake of a default, increased borrowing costs inhibit a country’s ability to invest in much-needed infrastructure, much less the clean-energy transition. Efforts to remedy this situation have been made more challenging by the increased complexity of the creditor landscape. The G20’s Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), which paused debt payments for eligible countries between May 2020 and December 2021, provided some temporary relief. The G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments, a process through which low-income countries can request debt restructuring, was then established in November 2020 to complement the DSSI. While Chad, Zambia, and Ethiopia requested relief under the Common Framework in early 2021, Ethiopia still has not had its debt restructured. Chad concluded a tentative arrangement at the end of 2022, and Zambia reached a debt restructuring deal only last month. Given these delays, the Common Framework has not lived up to expectations. As one policymaker put it, “It is neither common nor a framework.” In response to the Common Framework’s deficiencies, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the G20 Presidency

(currently held by India) established the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable. The IMF and the World Bank agreed to share macroeconomic projections and debt-sustainability analyses with creditors, who in turn agreed to find a solution to distributing the burden of debt reduction. China, which had previously refused to participate in debt restructuring unless multilateral development banks (MDBs) shared the burden alongside other creditors, agreed to MDBs increasing concessional lending rather than taking a haircut. The Roundtable seems to be paying off: progress on Ghana’s restructuring has unlocked a \$3 billion IMF loan and has paved the way for a potential restructuring of a third of its debt. But this is by no means a systemic solution. In line with UN Secretary-General António Guterres’s call for an “SDG Stimulus,” strong action must be taken in three areas before the next G20 Summit. First, the G20 Common Framework must be fixed. Middle-income countries, which are also struggling with unsustainable debt, should be eligible to apply. Applicants should be given a transparent timeline, and their debt-service payments should be suspended immediately to create fiscal space. Ideally, the IMF would provide debtor countries with a line of financing for essential spending during restructuring negotiations. Moreover, clear comparability

of debt-treatment formulae would minimise future technical disputes. Second, the legal framework for public debt needs to be strengthened. Specifically, the inclusion of enhanced collective-action clauses in all future sovereign-debt contracts would address the coordination challenges posed by restructurings. New York State, whose laws govern more than half of sovereign-debt contracts with private creditors, is well-positioned to lead this process, which would prevent vulture funds from preying on distressed debtors. To address the challenges of cascading crises, state-contingent debt instruments that link a country’s debt-service payments to its capacity to pay should also be considered for future debt contracts. In particular, climate contingency clauses should be embedded in future debt contracts to defer debt repayment in case of major climate shocks or natural disasters. Finally, international bodies should make room at the table for African countries and other developing economies. If the African Union had a permanent seat in the G20, for example, the continent could participate fully in discussions on G20 initiatives such as the Common Framework. In the absence of better mechanisms for debt-distressed countries, more governments will struggle to service their obligations and will stop investing in the future. The resulting damage would have significant implications for the fight against climate change. Dealing with unsustainable debt burdens now will cost far less than dealing with unsustainable environmental burdens later. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **North Desert Trade and Oil Services (SPC)**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1227870**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 250,000.000 to 25,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.



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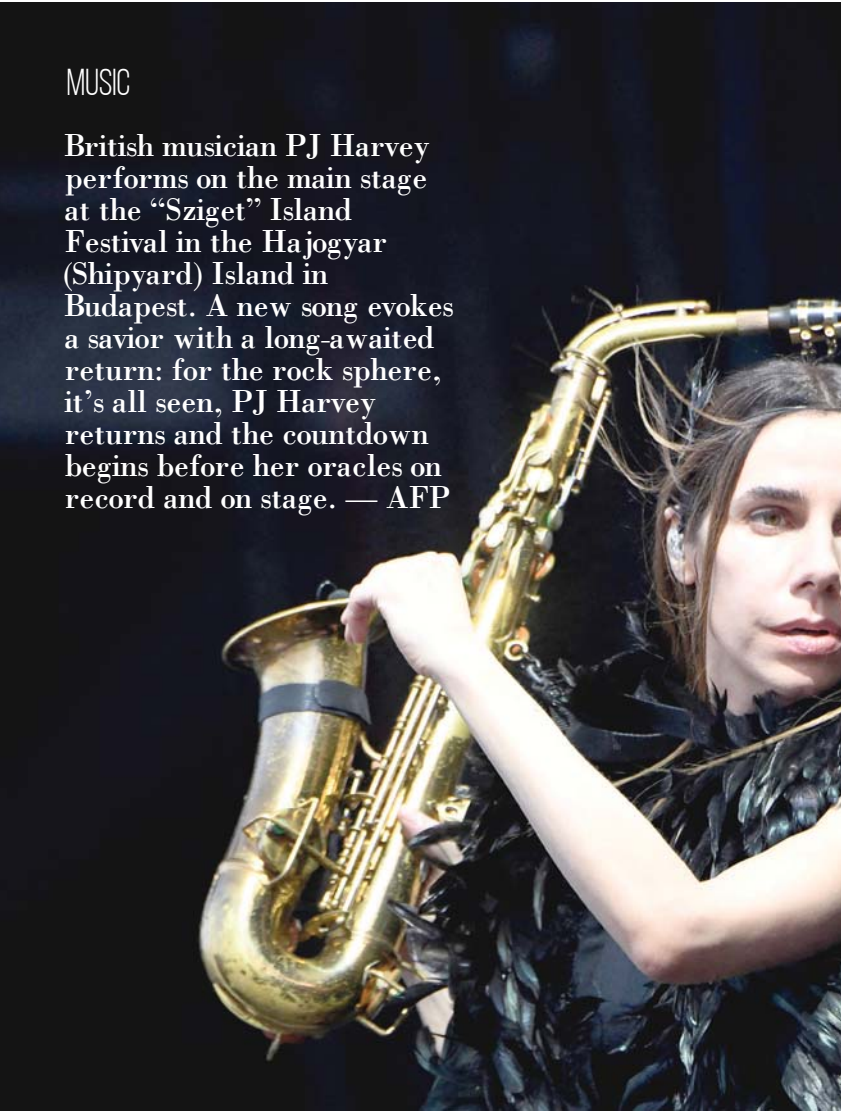
LIFESTYLE

A boy stands on an artisanal fisherman's canoe at the Port-Bouet beach in Abidjan on July 4, 2023. The Ivorian government has decided to introduce periods of closure of fishing at sea to curb to decline in the number of fish. — AFP



FOOD

A general view of a fruit and vegetable stand on a weekly market in Berlin, Germany — Reuters



MUSIC

British musician PJ Harvey performs on the main stage at the "Sziget" Island Festival in the Hajogyar (Shipyards) Island in Budapest. A new song evokes a savior with a long-awaited return: for the rock sphere, it's all seen, PJ Harvey returns and the countdown begins before her oracles on record and on stage. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by designer Giorgio Armani as part of his Haute Couture Fall/Winter 2023-2024 collection show for fashion house Giorgio Armani Prive in Paris, France. — Reuters



ART

An elderly man waves a ribbon for morning exercise at a square in Jiamusi, in northeastern China Heilongjiang province — AFP

art & life

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Embarking on an enchanting journey through Oman's wild wonders

Embarking on an enchanting journey through Oman's wild wonders, Rashid al Maqbali emerges as a true master of wildlife photography. His captivating images showcase the country's diverse and extraordinary creatures in a way that's both creative and awe-inspiring



FASHION

Revealing debut for first Saudi in Paris Fashion Week

PARIS FASHION WEEK welcomed its first Saudi designer into the fold on Thursday, with a haute couture show full of daringly revealing looks. Ashi Studio has been a big name in fashion for years, dressing celebrities including Beyonce, Lady Gaga and Deepika Padukone. But Thursday was the first time its founder Mohammed Ashi was included in the official Paris Fashion Week line-up, marking "the peak of his career," he told AFP. Modest and unassuming, he has rarely put his Saudi national-

ity up front. His designs certainly challenge popular notions of Saudi dress, with highly revealing transparent fabrics, or coiled collars and cutouts that clasped the breasts. "I am a global citizen but I have also always been proud to be Saudi," Ashi said backstage. The show was inspired by perfumes and used organic fabrics that are used to extract the essence from flowers, along with plenty of velvet. "It's a dark romance story — it's about extracting beauty from deep within and putting it on the



outside," Ashi said. It incorporated some of the feathered looks and long silk trains for which he is known. "The first look was a simplified version of what I usually do and often the most simple thing is the most difficult," he said.

"There was a lot of pressure but once that was done, the collection clicked and I could move forward." Ashi has forged his own path, having left Saudi Arabia decades ago to work with international labels before setting up his own



in 2007. But since the social changes in the kingdom under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Paris-based Ashi has been welcomed back to mentor young designers



as part of plans to develop its own fashion industry. His promotion to fashion's top league is neatly timed as Riyadh announces its own fashion week in October and says new freedoms will boost retail sales to \$32 billion a year. Fashion is just one strand of a strategy that has seen de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman divert oil wealth into movies, sports, video games and tourism. — AFP



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Keeping a constant connection with nature

By Siham Al Saidi

FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHERS HOLD the power to capture the essence of life through their lenses. They are the modern-day storytellers, armed with a camera and fuelled by boundless creativity. With an artistic vision that knows no limits, these unsung heroes freeze moments in time, allowing us to relive emotions, experience cultures, and discover the extraordinary in the ordinary. Embarking on an enchanting journey through Oman's wild wonders, Rashid al Maqbali emerges as a true master of wildlife photography. His captivating images showcase the country's diverse and extraordinary creatures in a way that's both creative and awe-inspiring. Each photo reveals a world filled with unique and fascinating animals, gracefully captured in their natural habitat. Rashid's deep knowledge of wildlife brings an authentic touch to his stunning portraits. What makes this remarkable freelancer unique from others is his ability to capture rare birds and animals, which attracted environmental and tourism authorities to his work. Not only that, by sharing his photos on Instagram, he also managed to capture the interest of popular publications like National Geographic magazine. He shared, "One of my achievements that made me feel proud was getting some of my photos featured on professional international pages on social media like National Geographic. It was a photo of an "Indian shikra," who was holding tightly a small reptile with his

coloured long beak." He added, "I have also captured images of rare species of animals and birds that attract attention in Oman. For example, I photographed a Gordon cat, which is considered a rare breed. This documentation helped draw the attention of certain government entities concerned with the environment. Additionally, I captured sightings of rare bird species in Oman, such as the Egyptian goose and some birds of prey."

Wildlife photography is known to be a bit expensive because it requires certain cameras, lenses, and other equipment compared to other types of photography in general. Rashid said that this is an investment on his part, and he has to be creative as to how he can get the funds to pursue his passion professionally. Some people would wonder how Rashid can find such gorgeous and incredible birds and animals. It can be challenging for the average person to easily find such a variety and quantity of birds and animals. But as a wildlife photographer, he builds a constant connection with nature and spends a considerable amount of time exploring the wilderness and natural habitats of animals and birds. Moreover, he relies on his knowledge and experience in tracking and monitoring specific species and identifying their potential times and locations of presence. He sometimes relies on local sources of information and contributions from the local community to gather valuable insights about wildlife locations. Thus, he was clever enough to involve locals too into the journey of tracking such animals and birds which shows the cooperation ethics shown to showcase Omani environments with its beautiful species. The significance of supporting Rashid in his journey was a demand that reflects citizens' loyalty to the deserts and mountains. Capturing animals and birds requires patience, focus, and the ability to adapt to changing conditions and pre-prepare



for potential situations. Motion-sensing devices and local information sources can also be utilised to aid in identifying and documenting wildlife. Despite the difficulty in finding some rare and elusive species, the great joy lies in facing these challenges and achieving success in capturing these beautiful and unique creatures. Al Maqbali faced difficulties and challenges in his journey. Some animals and birds may be rare or live in remote and hard-to-reach areas. It takes sometimes days to find them and locate their proper habitats. Additionally, natural environments can be tough and harsh, such as mountainous regions or deserts, and photographers must deal with harsh weather conditions and



challenging terrains while ensuring their safety and the safety of their equipment. When asked about interesting and breathtaking moments while capturing such scenes, he replied, "Sometimes, I have to spend a full day, two, or even more, in a specific area to capture unique photos. And sometimes, I revisit the same location multiple times to succeed in obtaining publishable and attention-grabbing images." Al Maqbali shared that being a nature



photographer also pushes one down a dangerous road, especially since some species of animals can be very vicious. He said proper knowledge about the subject is important, and it is also necessary to know exit strategies when dealing with wild creatures. Al Maqbali suggested having a mutual collaboration between photographers and environmental authorities in general. Annual exhibitions could be organised for photographers, and they could be provided with some financial support to encourage their continuity and excellence. Adding to that, he wishes to find financial and moral support for freelance wildlife photographers since the outcome of this work ultimately serves the interests of Oman and showcases its wildlife to the world. He advises those interested in starting wildlife photography to explore and learn more about nature. Before diving into photography, visit different natural areas and learn about the wildlife and organisms living there. Understand the environmental aspects and get familiar with various species.

FASHION

Dior's Kim Jones sends models rising up from the floor at Paris Fashion Week

DIOR MEN'S ARTISTIC director Kim Jones took to a sparse, futuristic setting at the Ecole Militaire in central Paris, kicking off his summer show with an army of models that rose up from a metallic catwalk. A whining blast of scratchy electronic sounds set the runway presentation in motion, and the catwalk lit up as floor panels rolled back. Models emerged slowly, filling the room in rows. One by one, they moved off the squares and paraded around the room to a somber beat, in textured suits with an androgynous bent, embellished with pearls and sequins. — Reuters



CONSERVATION

Colombian researchers unveil rare footage of nursing humpback

A TRAIL OF MILK disperses in the depths of the Pacific off Colombia's coast as a whale calf breaks away after nursing on its mother in rare footage scientists hope will contribute to humpback conservation. The 900-kilogramme calf is then seen rising to the surface to breathe in the Gulf of Cupica. Such feedings have only ever been captured on camera twice before, said biologist Natalia Botero, whose team at the Macuaticos Foundation filmed the intimate moment between mother and calf last August. "Despite decades of efforts by thousands of researchers, hours of work, collaborations, lactation recordings are extremely rare," she



said at the first public presentation of the video in Medellin last month. "From a scientific point of view this is an important step, but also for conservation," she added. The feat was made possible with sensors installed for just a few hours on the back of the calf with suction cups, so as not to hurt it. The system included a camera and GPS as well as a device to record the sounds the whales make. After feeding for several months

off the Antarctic Peninsula and the Strait of Magellan in Chile, thousands of whales make the long journey every year to the warm waters of the tropics to breed along a stretch of the Pacific from Costa Rica to Peru. From June to November, the waters off Colombia play host to humpbacks — giant cetaceans that can grow up to 17 meters (55 feet) long, weigh about 40 tons and travel some 8,500 kilometres (5,280 miles) every breeding season. — AFP



CULTURE

Violins in the sun: Stradivari's home workshop reopens in Italy

FOR OVER THREE centuries, music lovers the world over have been trying to unlock the secrets of Antonio Stradivari's prized string instruments.

Budding luthiers and young musicians can now get a step closer to the master by honing their skills in his original house and workshop, which have been transformed into a centre of learning and a musical pilgrimage site in northern Italy.

"The Stradivarius myth was born between these walls, and it was here that (Stradivari's) vision of the violin's perfect resonance began to germinate", said violinist Fabrizio von Arx, who set up the foundation which restored the house in Cremona.

"It's magic, I feel the vibrations", the 47-year-old Italian-Swiss violinist told AFP as he walked around the medieval building, home to the famous luthier, whose instruments took the Latin form of his name, Stradivarius, between 1667 and 1680. The centre opened to visitors this week.

The original beams in the living room have been restored. Gone, however, are traces of Stradivari's workshop on the ground floor, which was moved to another house in Cremona and later demolished.

Two work benches have now been set up in its place, which fledgling stringed instrument craftsmen and women will be able to use. Young musicians will also attend masterclasses here.

A highlight of the house — where Stradivari lived with his first wife and their six children — is the covered terrace on the roof, which has entered into folklore.

"This is where he hung his violins to dry them in the light of the setting sun. Hence the enigmatic colour of their varnish, between red, brown and orange", von Arx said.

Cremona is home to luthiers from all over the world, and Stradivari used the same varnish as others in the town, von Arx said.

One of the secrets of the



Stradivarius sound is believed to be the violins' exposure to the elements on this terrace, explained von Arx.

"With the heat and humidity that prevails in Cremona, the wood of the violins moves a lot and then stabilises better," he said.

After work, the master "spent

time in the living room with his musician friends to listen to his violins, and perfect them with their help."

UNEQUALLED MASTER

Of the 1,100 violins, cellos, violas and other stringed instruments

made by Stradivarius, who died in 1737 aged 93, some 650 survive.

The "Lady Blunt" Stradivarius, which sold for \$15.89 million in 2011, holds the record for the price fetched by a violin at auction.

French violin maker Benedicte Friedmann, 48, is one of more than 180 luthiers based in Cremona, a city with fewer than 70,000 inhabitants.

Chisels, pairing tools, bandsaws and small planes hang on the wall above her workbench where she carefully finishes a violin neck, and prepares to apply the varnish to the instrument, string it, and add the bridge.

It usually takes Friedmann around six weeks to finish her creations, using the same techniques as 300 years ago.

"The only thing that has changed are the tools, which have been slightly modernised," said the trained violinist, who tests her creations herself. Friedmann told AFP there was no "miracle formula" for a Stradivarius, but perhaps the master's success lay in how he varnished his creations.

"The varnish is very important from an acoustic point of view, because if it is too hard, it prevents the violin from vibrating," she said.

Stradivari achieved "acoustic and aesthetic perfection," said Friedmann, calling him the "unequaled master."

Fausto Cacciatori, curator of Cremona's nearby Violin Museum, said the secret was Stradivarius himself, "his extraordinary abilities, his craftsmanship."

"He was a man who never stopped experimenting, always searching for the perfect sound."

— AFP



The UK botanist who helped revive Japan's seaweed industry

EACH YEAR in southern Japan, dozens of people gather at a seafront shrine to honour a British botanist who never visited the country but is credited with revitalising its crucial seaweed industry.

Kathleen Drew-Baker made groundbreaking discoveries about the reproduction of "nori" seaweed — the crispy dried sheets that encircle sushi rolls — helping kick-start its farming on a commercial scale.

Her studies at the University of Manchester allowed Japan to ramp up production in the difficult period after World War II, when small-scale growers were having trouble meeting demand.

But she carried out her most influential work as an unpaid research fellow, having lost her academic post after marriage because of the university's policy at the time against employing married women.

Although Drew-Baker died in 1957, her memory lives on in the city of Uto in Kumamoto, one of Japan's largest nori-growing regions.

Dozens of people from local fisheries, as well as scientists and history buffs, gather each April in the leafy grounds of a shrine by the ocean, where a stone plinth displays an embossed metal plaque of her face.

Large Japanese and British flags are raised at the event, where a Shinto priest "gives thanks" to Drew-Baker, organiser Fumichi Yamamoto, 86, told AFP.

"Seaweed producers were happy and grateful" for the ability to grow more nori seaweed in the aftermath of the war, "when people were struggling with food shortages," he said.

The crop has been harvested from Japan's coastline for centuries, and farmed for 500 years.

Apart from its use in sushi, it is also a key ingredient in "onigiri" rice balls, a staple snack food in Japan, and is used to garnish bowls of ramen and other classic dishes.



But the seaweed is notoriously fragile, and easily wiped out by typhoons and pollution.

In 1949, Drew-Baker published a landmark study in the scientific journal *Nature* about laver, another name for nori. The crop grows off the coast of Wales, and is used to produce a traditional dish called laverbread.

"Up until that point, the life cycle of nori wasn't well known," Yamamoto said.

The research gave new insights into how the plant bores into seashells where it produces new spores.

Drew-Baker made contact with a professor at Kyushu University, and "sent over an academic paper to him with a question: isn't Japanese seaweed like this too?" he said.

Japanese scientists and nori farmers then began experimenting with using oyster shells to help the marine plant thrive.

"It was a success," said Yamamoto, the son of a seaweed wholesaler, who has run the memorial event for 50 years.

Now, "nori is one of the essential foods of Japan". — AFP

