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Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations, received Maj Gen Ahmed bin Naser al Raisi, President of the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol), and his delegation. The two sides discussed ways of enhancing cooperation. They also exchanged views and experiences between the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Interpol. The guest and his delegation also visited the ROP's General Department of Criminal Investigation.

SEE ALSO P2

WASHINGTON

VIVEK RAMASWAMY DROPS OUT OF RACE



Vivek Ramaswamy, a multi-millionaire former biotech executive, ended his White House bid and endorsed Donald Trump after his longshot bid caught attention but failed to catapult him high enough in the Republican Party's first nominating contest in Iowa. Ramaswamy, a 38-year-old born in Ohio to immigrant parents from southern India, was one of the surprises of the 2024 Republican race dominated by former president Trump. A fierce defender of Trump throughout the campaign, Ramaswamy likely secured himself a spot in Republican politics going forward with his youthful demeanour, deep pockets and fast-talking, pugnacious campaigning. However, Trump turned on him in the final days leading up to the Iowa caucus, calling him a "fraud" and asserting that a vote for Ramaswamy was a vote for the "other side."

HM CONFERS ORDER OF ROYAL COMMENDATION



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Order of Royal Commendation (2nd Class) on some outstanding Omani individuals in appreciation for their remarkable contribution and active roles in different domains. The medals were handed over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received the honoured persons at his office on Tuesday. **DETAILS ON P3**

OMAN AND SAUDI ARABIA REVIEW BILATERAL COOPERATION



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received on Tuesday Dr Tawfiq Fawzan al Rabiah, Minister of Haj and Umrah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At the outset of the meeting, Dr Al Rabiah conveyed greetings of the leadership and their best wishes of progress and prosperity to the Omani leadership and people. HH Sayyid Fahd then reviewed the march of the relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia, as well as means of boosting them. He also lauded the efforts exerted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in serving pilgrims and providing the best services to them. Further, the meeting highlighted bilateral cooperation in various fields. It also touched on issues of relation to the Islamic world and the stability of its nations. Moreover, the two sides reviewed regional and international developments and discussed matters of mutual interest.

On his turn, Dr Al Rabiah underlined the depth of relations between the two countries. He also shed light on the fact that his visit paves the way for further talks with officials in Oman on all matters that can boost fraternal relations.

The meeting was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

Tobacco use on the rise in Oman: WHO

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday said that the number of people using tobacco has steadily decreased over the years, but six countries including the Sultanate of Oman, Congo, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan and the Republic of Moldova still see a rise in tobacco use.

It may be noted that Oman has been taking several steps to reduce tobacco use, which includes comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and spon-

sorship, increasing excise taxes on tobacco products, smoke-free legislation, tobacco health warnings, labels on plain packaging, and mass media campaigns.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announced that the mandatory standard for plain packaging of tobacco products will be effective from April 2024.

"The ministry requests tobacco companies and local compliance firms to follow Standard OS1655 for plain packaging of tobacco products. This becomes mandatory from April 4, 2024,"

The ministry requests tobacco companies and local firms to follow Standard OS1655 for plain packaging of products. This becomes mandatory from April 4, 2024

MINISTRY OF
Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

the ministry said in a statement.

The standard requires that at least 65 per cent of the packaging includes a public health warning, a picture, and a message to quit, while the rest of the packaging displays the brand name in a standardised font and colour.

The Consumer Protection Authority recently said that a fine of up to RO 2,000 for multiple violations will be imposed on anyone who trades in e-cigarettes, shisha and their accessories in the Sultanate of Oman.

The WHO said that the world will make a 25-per cent relative

reduction in tobacco use by 2025, missing the voluntary global goal of a 30-per cent reduction from the 2010 baseline.

Only 56 countries globally will reach this goal, down four countries since the last report in 2021.

Globally there are 1.25 billion adult tobacco users, according to the latest estimates in the World Health Organization tobacco trends report.

Trends in 2022 show a continued decline in tobacco use rates globally. With about 1 in 5 adults worldwide consuming tobacco compared to 1 in 3 in 2000.

Climate change to cause 14.5m deaths by 2050

DAVOS: Climate change threatens to cause several million deaths in the coming decades as well as serious illnesses and high costs for healthcare systems, according to a report published on Tuesday in Davos, Switzerland.

The greatest risk is posed by flooding, according to the joint report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) - which is being held in Davos this week - and the consulting firm Oliver Wyman. The authors of the study analysed six key consequences of climate change: Floods, droughts, heatwaves, tropical storms, forest fires and rising sea levels.

The study is based on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) medium scenario for temperature rise by 2100, which assumes an increase in the average temperature of 2.7 degrees Celsius. According to the study,



'Life over Growth!', an artwork by British snow artist Simon Beck, created for Greenpeace, is displayed at an undisclosed location near Davos on Tuesday. — Reuters

climate change could then cause up to 14.5 million deaths worldwide by 2050. Healthcare systems would have to bear additional costs totalling \$1.1 trillion.

According to estimates, flooding alone could cause 8.5 million deaths by 2050 - not only directly, but also indirectly through crop damage, increased infectious diseases and higher humidity, which can lead to respiratory diseases.

The Asia-Pacific region, with its heavily populated coastal regions, is likely to bear the brunt of this. The authors expect the second-highest mortality rate of 3.2 million deaths to be caused by droughts - primarily due to the long-term effects of declining water quality and less fertile soils on child mortality. According to the report, heatwaves could cost around 1.6 million lives by 2050, especially among older people. — dpa

→ INSIDE



SPOTLIGHT

SEE P4



School children to get flu vaccines soon

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

School children in the country will be receiving their flu vaccines, the schedule of which will be announced soon.

The Ministry of Health's Department of School Healthcare had earlier urged parents to bring their children to the health institution on time for vaccines that they might have missed earlier.

"We administer vaccines to school children as these shots are critical to the prevention and control of infectious disease outbreak," a source at the department said, adding that "schools will be soon intimated of the dates of their vaccination".

The department also called for vaccination for children aged 24 months and above as it will reduce the risk of influenza infection and



Vaccines reduce the risks of getting a disease by working with human body's natural defences to build protection

complications of influenza.

Vaccination is taking place as guided by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which considers immunisation as a global health and development success story, saving millions of lives every year.

"Vaccines reduce the risks of getting a disease by working with human body's natural defences to build protection. When one

gets a vaccine, his or her immune system responds," according to the WHO.

WHO has further mentioned that there are vaccines available to prevent more than 20 life-threatening diseases, helping people of all ages live longer, healthier lives.

The report further says that immunisation is a key component of primary health care and an

indisputable human right and it currently prevents 3.5-5 million deaths every year from diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, influenza, and measles.

Last year, MoH had, under the slogan 'Let's get vaccination', announced the start of seasonal flu vaccinations for target segments.

Accordingly, the target group included people with chronic diseases such as respiratory diseases and heart, kidney, liver, nervous and blood disorders or metabolism including uncontrolled diabetes mellitus, obesity and immunodeficiency in adults and children over the age of 6 months; health workers and medical students; expecting mothers; children aged 24 months; and senior citizens aged 60 years and above. Citizens and residents who are not in the targeted groups can have the vaccine from the private sector.

Interior Minister meets Saudi Minister of Haj

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior received in his office Dr Tawfiq Fawzan al Rabiah, Minister of Haj and Umrah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting highlighted the role of the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah during the Haj season.

Moreover, Al Busaidy lauded

Saudi Arabia's important role and underscored the Kingdom's keenness to utilise capabilities in service of pilgrims.

The meeting was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Eng Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Yousef Mohammed al Awdah, Charge d'Affaires of the Saudi Embassy in Oman and the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA



The two sides reviewed several matters of mutual interest. — ONA

Oman, Saudi hold meetings on Haj and Umrah

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) and the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah (MoHU) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia held introductory meeting on the government platform 'Nusuk' (nusuk.sa) along with an interactive exhibition with the aim of raising the level of services provided to Umrah performers and visitors to Mecca and Medina for both Omani citizens and residents of the Sultanate of Oman.

During a meeting with the delegation led by Dr Tawfiq bin Fawzan al Rabiah, Minister of Hajj and Umrah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from January 16 to 17 with Dr Mohammad bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and other ministerial representatives, Oman reiterated its efforts to improve the experience of the pilgrims and increasing the number of pilgrims, in line with the goals of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

More than 300 private sector representatives working in travel and Umrah agencies from both countries, along with both the ministerial delegations participated in the introductory meeting of the Nusuk platform starting year 2024.

The interactive exhibition using virtual reality technology of the Nusuk platform was held at the Avenues Mall, which presented to visitors distinctive and immersive experience that narrated Islamic historical stories.

The introductory meeting comes to build partnerships in the Omani market, build bridges of communication, and open horizons of cooperation in order to enrich the journey of pilgrims and visitors for citizens and residents of the Sultanate of Oman, by reviewing the rich information and innovative services provided by the 'Nusuk' platform.

In addition to highlighting opportunities and supporting the private sector in the two countries to enable it to serve the guests of God.

Interior Minister receives Interpol President

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior received in his office on Tuesday Maj Gen Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Raisi, President of the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol).

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed security efforts undertaken by the Interpol on the international level. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Eng Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations and Brigadier Jamal bin Habib al Quraishi, Director General of Intelligence and Criminal Investigation at the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations also



The two sides exchanged views and experiences between. — ONA

received Maj Gen Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Raisi, President of the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) and his accompanying delegation.

The two sides discussed ways of enhancing cooperation. They also exchanged views and experiences between the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Interpol.

The guest and his accompanying delegation also visited the ROP's General Department of Criminal Investigation. During the visit they were briefed on the work mechanisms followed by the National Central Bureau "Interpol Muscat" and its role in collecting, analysing and publishing data on criminal crimes at the level of member states. — ONA

Innovation festival details unveiled



Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi



Najah al Rashidiyah

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) unveiled on Tuesday, during a press conference, the details of the 1st edition of "Oman Innovation Festival". The event will be held during the period from February 5 -10, 2024 at Innovation Park Muscat.

Dr Saif bin Abdullah bin Sulaiman al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation said that the festival aims at stimulating activities among the fields of research,

public sector, private sector and the society.

He added that the festival is a component of the National System for Research and Innovation. The event will be catered for those interested in innovation on all levels.

Al Haddabi noted that Oman Innovation Festival aims at increasing awareness on the culture of research and innovation and its importance, providing a common space for the gathering of innovators and supporting entities (public and private), as well as holding training courses in various fields related to innovation.

On her turn, Najah bint Mohammed

al Rashidiyah, Director General of the Innovation Centre, CEO of the Executive Committee for Oman Innovation Festival said that the festival is expected to attract as many as 3,000 visitors daily and over 1,000 beneficiaries in training courses and workshops.

She added that the festival will include a discussion panel that will highlight challenges facing the innovation system and possible solutions, as well as a panel on the transformation to a knowledge-based economy and investing in the field of innovation. — ONA

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Dr Qassim bin Saleh al Abri (Health)



Dr Ahmed bin Suleiman al Harrasi (Research)



Dr Suleiman bin Mohammed al Balushi (Research)



Dr Mohammed bin Hamdan al Badi (Research)



Dr Jokha bint Mohammed al Harthiyah (Culture)



Zahran bin Hamdan al Qasmi (Culture)

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Order of Royal Commendation (2nd Class) on some outstanding Omani individuals in appreciation for their remarkable contribution and active roles in different domains.

The recipients of the Royal honours

and the domains of action were Dr Khalid bin Humaid al Rassadi (Health), Dr Qassim bin Saleh al Abri (Health), Dr Ahmed bin Suleiman al Harrasi, (Research), Dr Suleiman bin Mohammed al Balushi (Research), Dr Mohammed bin Hamdan al Badi (Research), Dr Jokha bint Mohammed al Harthiyah

(Culture), Zahran bin Hamdan al Qasmi (Culture), Haitham bin Khamis al Farsi (Culture), Ahmed bin Said al Harthi (Sports), Mohammed bin Jameel al Mashaikhi (Sports), Razan bint Hamad al Kalbaniyah (Youth), Said bin Hamdan al Muqaimi (Public Initiatives and Social Responsibility) and retired pilot Abdul-

Salam bin Issa al Rawahi (Institutional Proficiency).

The medals were handed over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received the honoured persons at his office on Tuesday.

Sayyid Khalid said that the conferment

of Royal commendation reflects His Majesty the Sultan's constant follow-up and recognition of efforts exerted by all in serving the nation in all sectors. He hoped that the felicitation would inspire more resourceful contribution to the nation-building process.

— ONA



Haitham bin Khamis al Farsi (Culture)



Ahmad bin Said al Harthy (Sports)



Mohammed bin Jameel al Mashaikhi (Sports)



Razan bint Hamad al Kalbaniyah (Youth)



Said bin Hamdan al Muqaimi (Public Initiatives and Social Responsibility)



Retired pilot Abdul-Salam bin Issa al Rawahi (Institutional Proficiency)



Drugs are considered a chronic disease that undermines societies, emphasising that they are chemical substances that affect the nervous system.

The reasons for youth drifting towards this path include loneliness, bad companions and weak family supervision.

Dr Al Rashdi referred to Royal Decree

No 17/99

as a measure to regulate and combat this scourge in society

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 16

SAY
NO
TO
DRUGS

THE drug problem is currently one of the major challenges faced by countries worldwide, and they are striving vigorously to combat it due to its significant impact on health, social, economic and security aspects. This problem is no longer confined to a specific type of drug, country, or a particular segment of society; it encompasses all types and classes.

In the Sultanate of Oman, the government is working to curb the spread of this scourge through the implementation of strict laws against drug traffickers and intensified awareness campaigns.

Dr Ahmed bin Saeed al Jahwari, a lawyer and legal consultant, pointed out that drugs and psychoactive substances encompass anything that impair the mind and affect the nervous system, leading to addiction. Al Jahwari explained that Omani law deals firmly with this phenomenon, from possession to a person's presence in a drug-use session, emphasising that participation in such a session is a crime punishable by law.

Discussing the types of crimes emphasised in drug control, Al Jahwari affirmed that the law imposes strict penalties for trafficking, selling, using and cultivating drugs, as well as financing those involved or collecting money from drug-related crimes. He noted that the punishments are among the most severe in dealing with this crime, with the final penalty potentially being imprisonment or even death.

Al Jahwari added that if a person is apprehended for the first time on charges of drug use, the law shows flexibility in dealing with the matter. The case may be adjourned in favour of the public prosecutor or the specialised anti-drug team. Even if the case reaches the court, the accused's minimum sentence may be accepted.

He clarified that this flexible approach aims to provide an opportunity for the individual involved in drug use to reconsider their actions and make a positive decision to stop drug consumption. The minimum sentence is considered an opportunity for reflection and improvement, effectively encouraging repentance and abandoning this harmful habit.

Regarding the reasons that drive youth towards this scourge, Al Jahwari pointed to the influence of bad friends and the misconception of experimentation as key factors. Regarding the confession of drug users, he explained that if the accused confesses before being apprehended, they are not legally punished. He highlighted the law's confidential treatment of them, considering them as patients needing treatment.

Dr Abdulaziz bin Mubarak al Rashdi affirmed that drugs are considered a chronic disease that undermines societies, emphasising that they are chemical substances that affect the nervous system. He mentioned that the reasons for youth drifting towards this path include loneliness, bad companions and weak family supervision. Dr Al Rashdi referred to Royal Decree No 17/99 as a measure to regulate and combat this scourge in society.

GOVERNMENT TAKES STRONG STEPS TO COMBAT DRUG ABUSE



Recall

Recall Date: 17 / 01 / 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Bentayga	2017 - 2023	54

Recall consequence

The electrical connectors on the Fuel Supply Module, located in the fuel tank, can overheat and melt the flange material.

Recall Action

The dealer will replace the existing Fuel Supply Module flange with a new, improved design. The new flange is not prone to overheating due to increased electrical wire diameter and connector sizes.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pocp.gov.om>



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Tourism sector on steady growth

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism shared an increase in tourism indicators in the Sultanate of Oman, considering tourism as one of the main sectors in the Oman National Vision 2040, which is relied upon to diversify sources of income, provide job opportunities, enhance local content, and employ sustainability policies.

Tourism indicators in the Sultanate of Oman witnessed an increase during the period from January to November 2023 compared to the same period last year, as the number of visitors coming to the country reached 3.5 million visitors, an increase of 39 per cent.

According to the source from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the number of hotel guests reached about one million and 884 thousand guests out of the total number of



The number of visitors coming to Oman reached 3.5 million visitors from January to November 2023, an increase of 39 per cent

hotel guests with a classification of 3-5 stars during the period from January to November 2023, an increase of 40 per cent compared to the same period in 2022.

RO 204.187 million was the total hotel revenues from the same period which is an increase of 27 per cent. The occupancy rate of hotels with a classification of 3-5 stars reached 61.2 per cent.

Many tourist sites witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of visitors, the most important of which is the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve, where the

number of visitors increased by 21.6 per cent, and in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar the number increased by 53.7 per cent compared to the same month last year.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism works to stimulate tourism by enhancing the position of the Sultanate of Oman in foreign tourism markets by participating in the most prominent tourism events and activities held in various countries, whether in exhibitions, workshops, forums, or forums related to the tourism aspect.

The Sultanate of Oman aims

to increase the contribution of the tourism sector to the gross domestic product to 3.5 per cent by 2030. The Sultanate of Oman is working on many opportunities, including entertainment and attraction areas, as well as adventure tourism, which is gaining growing momentum, and recreational and marine tourism, and the stakeholders concerned with tourism continue by establishing new relationships and connections with holiday providers from emerging markets as well as strong investments.

There is also an increased focus on digital platforms to support reservations for the holiday sector, as well as the cruise ship sector, which is seeing continuous growth and the resulting related opportunities through cruise ship visitors taking tourist tours, which supports the sector's partners.

OJA Board of Directors elections on Feb 12

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Elections for the Board of Directors of the Oman Journalists Association (OJA), the body of journalists working in the Sultanate of Oman, will be held on February 12.

Nominations were invited from incumbent members of the OJA on January 1 and can be submitted until January 20 and any nomination submitted after the indicated date will not be considered.

Two panels comprising 12 members each are vying to the Board of Directors and around 360 members will choose their representatives to the coveted positions of the apex body of journalists whose results will be announced the same day.

The first panel is known as the Al Taawen and the second one is Al Reyadh and one of them will form the Board of Directors of the Omani Journalists Association to represent Oman media for the year 2024 – 2026.

While Hatim al Tai, Saif al Mahrouqi, Abdullah al Shueili, Zainab al Zadjali, Nabil al Hadi, Madreen al Maktoumi, Saleh al Balushi, Noah al Maamari, Khalifa al Rawahi, Hamad al Habsi, and Ahmed al Farsi make one panel, the present Chairman Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araiimi, Salim bin Hamed al Jahwari, Talib bin Saif al Dhabbari, Khalfan bin Saeed al Hasani, Mustafa bin Khamis al Maamari, Yousef bin Abdulkarim al Houti, Hamid bin Hamad al Qasmi, Abdullah bin Saeed al Jahwari, Saeed bin Nasser al Nahdi, Rashid bin Humaid al Rashdi, Zainab bint Khamis al Zadjalayah and Ahmed

The three important international committees in which OJA has membership are, International Journalists Association, Asian Journalists Association, and International Gender federation in International Journalists Association.

bin Thabit al Mahrouqi make the second panel.

The OJA, with its 10 sub-committees namely, Sports Media, Freedoms and International Relations, Photographers, Membership and Member Affairs, Marketing and Investment, Women Journalists Affairs, Public Relations and Events, Media and Culture, Training and Qualification, and Governorate Committee, holds membership in three international committees.

The three important international committees in which OJA has membership are, International Journalists Association, Asian Journalists Association, and International Gender federation in International Journalists Association.

Along with the elections, the existing committee will also present a report on the performance of the board, a draft work plan for the year, the balance sheet and final account for the ending fiscal year and the project, new year budget, auditor's report, and appoint the auditor and determining his remuneration, without prejudice to the provisions in the Bylaw of the Committee.

International pharmacy congress concludes

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Oman International Pharmacy Congress and Exhibition concluded at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, on Tuesday.

The pharmaceutical congress came up with several recommendations including focusing on the clinical role of pharmacy in primary health care institutions, approving the service of a pharmacist who prescribes medication for chronic diseases in primary health care in the presence of skilled clinical pharmacists.

The congress recommended the establishment of an integrated, multidisciplinary system to manage supply shortages, the importance of the GCC cooperation to implement drug safety programmes, the continuation of digital transformation in the pharmaceutical sector in order to achieve the goals of Oman Vision



The Oman International Pharmacy Congress and Exhibition was organized by the Ministry of Health under the theme 'shaping the future of pharmaceutical services'

2040, creating a GCC umbrella for pharmaceutical associations, implementing the project of evaluating technologies and qualifying pharmacists working in the field of procurement and supply chains.

The Oman International Pharmacy Congress and Exhibition was organised by the Ministry of Health under the theme 'shaping the future of pharmaceutical services', guided by the pillars of Oman Vision 2040, the Health Vision 2050, the Sustainable Development Goals, the World Health

Organization's programme on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases and the international agreements for progress towards universal health coverage.

On its final day, the congress reviewed the experience of the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre on implementing automated pharmaceutical solutions. It discussed a number of topics including digital transformation in the pharmaceutical sector and the challenges facing the healthcare sector, how

digital pharmacy contributes to improving pharmaceutical care, toxicology and the vital role of pharmacists in this field, therapeutic effectiveness and safety associated with the discrepancy in anticoagulants doses, among others.

The conferees further approved the establishment of an integrated multidisciplinary system in supply shortage management and called for boosting cooperation among the GCC countries regarding implementation of drug safety programmes. It also recommended continuing with the ongoing Digital Transformation in pharmacy practices to fulfil goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The last day touched upon combating Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Primary Health Care focusing on the role of clinical pharmacists in integrated Primary Care and the factors contributing to non-adherence to prescribed therapy in PCI.

Online Public Auction Announcement

"Mwasalat" announces the organization of a public auction to sell a collection of ferries spare parts on the Oman Auction website (www.mazad.om)

Details of the Items Offered for Sale	Quantity		Batch	
	Inspection Location		Region	
01- MTU 20V1163TB73L	Mwasalat Workshop Building		Muscat (Ghala Industrial Estate)	
02- MAN D2866 LXE30				
03- Rolls Royce Kamewa 11973 90SII				
04- Other Spare Parts & Auxiliary				
05- Special Tools For MTU 1163				
Date of Inspection		Wed 17 th Jan 2024 to Thu 8 th Feb 2024		09:00 AM to 02:00 PM
Date of the Online Public Auction		Sun 11 th Feb 2024 to Thu 15 th Feb 2024		09:00 AM to 02:00 PM

Museum receives 350,000 visitors

MUSCAT: The number of visitors to the Oman Across Ages Museum in 2023 was 350,000, of which 95 per cent were Omanis.

The director-general of the museum said that the museum is strategically located in proximity to many tourist attractions in the governorate and visitors come from all governorates, including those on field trips from schools, colleges and universities.

The museum will soon display new collectibles in the exhibition halls, most notably the stick that was donated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The stick was with late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said when he laid the foundation stone for the museum.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
14/ 2024	Design and Implementation of modifications to the meeting room of his Excellency the Undersecretary	Companies specialized in the field of Supplying communications and information technology devices and accessories/ Supplying furniture/ Supplying construction materials and equipment registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree	Thursday 8-2-2024 03:00 PM	Tuesday 5-3-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Wednesday 17/01/2024.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om



Israeli tanks storm back into north Gaza areas

GAZA: Israeli tanks stormed back into parts of the northern Gaza Strip they had left last week, residents said on Tuesday, bringing back some of the most intense fighting since the New Year when Israel announced it was scaling back its operations there.

Massive explosions could be seen over northern areas of Gaza from across the border with Israel - a rarity over the past two weeks after Israel announced a draw-down of forces in the north as part of a transition to smaller, targeted operations.

The rattle of intense gunfire carried across the border through the night. In the morning, contrails snaked through the sky as Israel's Iron Dome defences shot down rockets fired by militants across the fence, proof they retain the capability to launch them despite more than 100 days of war.

Israel said its forces had killed dozens of Palestinian fighters overnight in clashes in Beit Lahiya on the northern edge



This picture shows smoke billowing over the Palestinian territory during Israeli bombardment as an Israeli tank takes position. — AFP



A Palestinian woman reacts in front of a destroyed building in the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza Strip. — AFP

of the Gaza Strip. Gaza health authorities said the last 24 hours of Israeli bombing had killed 158 people in the enclave, raising their toll for the war, now in its fourth month, to 24,285, with thousands more bodies feared lost in the rubble.

The war has driven nearly all Gazans from their homes, some several times, and caused a humanitarian crisis, with food, fuel and medical supplies

Massive explosions could be seen over northern areas of Gaza from across the border with Israel – a rarity over the past two weeks after Israel announced a draw-down of forces

running low. Under pressure from Washington to reduce civilian casualties, Israel had said it was shifting tactics, transitioning from a full-scale ground assault to targeted

operations in the enclave. It began that shift with a pullback in the north, where its forces had begun their ground offensive in October. On Monday evening, Defence

Minister Yoav Gallant also said the more recent ground assault in the south was drawing to a close.

But any path toward de-escalating the war still seems remote, with Israel saying it will not halt until Palestinian groups are destroyed, and the fighters showing no sign of losing the ability to resist. Israeli officials said rockets hit an electronics shop in southern Israel on

Tuesday morning. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Some of the hundreds of thousands of residents who fled the north earlier in the war had begun returning last week to bombed-out areas where the Israelis had withdrawn. But residents who spoke to

In the south of the enclave, Israeli forces have fought their way to the centre of the main southern city Khan Younis, and into towns north and east of the central city of Deir al-Balah.

Defence Minister Gallant's announcement on Monday that the major ground offensive in the south was soon coming to an end raises the question of whether the Israelis will still try to advance into the remaining southern areas.

Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people are now crowded into the few southern areas that Israeli troops have yet to enter, including Deir al-Balah and Rafah, which is located on the southern edge of the strip.

— Reuters



An Israeli soldier stands by, as a mobile artillery unit fires, near the Israel-Lebanon border. — Reuters

Israel carries out intense strikes in south Lebanon

BEIRUT: Israel unleashed an intense barrage of air strikes on a valley in south Lebanon, Lebanese security sources and the Israeli military said, after a rare Israeli acknowledgment of a special forces operation on the border.

Lebanese security sources said that there were at least 16 airstrikes in quick succession on the Suluki Valley, describing them as the “densest bombardment of a single location” since border-area hostilities began three months ago.

The Lebanese group Hezbollah has been trading fire across Lebanon's southern border with Israeli forces in support of Palestinian ally in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military said it had carried out “aerial and artillery strikes” against emplacements and weapons infrastructure in the forested Suluki Valley “within a short amount of time”.

The Lebanese security sources did not confirm whether targets were hit, but said the heavily armed group has used the valley to launch rockets at Israel.

Israel's Kan radio reported on Tuesday what it described as an unusually large attack by its air force and artillery on dozens of targets in the Suluki Valley. — Reuters

Soldiers use a man as human shield in West Bank

WEST BANK: A Palestinian shop owner said Israeli troops used him as a human shield to protect themselves during a raid on the town of Dura in the occupied West Bank.

Mobile phone footage showed Baha Abu Ras being marched up a street by a soldier who guided him from behind with one hand and kept a rifle resting on his shoulder with the other. Two Israeli soldiers advanced



Mourners attend the funeral of two Palestinians who were killed in an Israeli raid, in Dura, the occupied West Bank. — Reuters

carefully behind them, their rifles raised.

Abu Ras said he had been taken from his mobile phone shop on Monday in Dura, near the city of Hebron, after Israeli soldiers searched the premises during a raid in which Palestinian officials said two Palestinians were shot dead. “He (the first soldier) told me that he will use me as a human shield, that young people shouldn't

hurl stones,” Abu Ras said. “You will walk in front of me. That's what happened and he took me toward the centre of the town.”

Asked about the incident, the Israeli military had no immediate comment. It said in an earlier statement that troops in Dura had used live fire to disperse about 100 people who had thrown stones and fire bombs at them. — Reuters

Saudi FM says Red Sea attacks linked to Gaza, ceasefire needed

DAVOS: Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said on Tuesday that Yemenis attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea are connected to the war in Gaza and there is a need for an immediate ceasefire there.

Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud said during the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos that the kingdom's priority is finding a path to de-escalation through a ceasefire in Gaza. Prince Faisal said securing regional peace through the creation of a Palestinian state was “something we have been indeed working on with the US administration, and it is more relevant in the context of Gaza”.

An empty Malta-flagged bulk carrier was hit by a missile while heading north through the Red Sea, 76 nautical miles northwest of the Yemeni port of Saleef, a security firm and two Greek shipping ministry sources said on Tuesday.

Attacks on ships in the area since November have impacted companies and alarmed major powers, in an escalation of Israel's war



Palestinians wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen amid shortages of food supplies, in Rafah. — Reuters

in Gaza. The Yemenis say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians.

As well as disrupting supply chains, there are fears that the attacks could make it more difficult for policymakers to keep global inflation in check.

British and American ships had become “legitimate targets” due to the strikes launched on Yemen last week, Nasruldeen Amer, a spokesperson for the Yemeni group.

The Ansar Allah group had previously said it would attack only Israeli ships or those en route to Israel.

Underlining concerns, Nippon Yusen, also known as NYK Line, has instructed

its vessels navigating near the Red Sea to wait in safe waters and is considering route changes, a company spokesperson said on Tuesday.

In the latest apparent attack, the US Central Command said forces in Yemen struck the US-owned and operated dry bulk ship Gibraltar Eagle with an anti-ship ballistic missile on Monday. There were no reports of injuries or significant damage.

Container vessels have been pausing or diverting from the Red Sea that leads to the Suez Canal, the fastest freight route from Asia to Europe. Many ships have been forced to take the longer route via South



Attacks on ships in the area since November have impacted companies and alarmed major powers, in an escalation of Israel's war in Gaza

Africa's Cape of Good Hope instead.

About 12 per cent of world shipping traffic transits the Suez Canal via the Red Sea.

Vessels supplying liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Qatar are among the many ships being forced to sail around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope. That diversion can add about nine days to the normally 18-day trip from Qatar to northwest Europe.

— Reuters



Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi attends a press conference with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong in Amman, Jordan. — Reuters

JORDAN SAYS ISRAEL IS PLACING 'BIG IMPEDIMENTS' TO AID FOR PALESTINIANS

AMMAN: Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said on Tuesday Israel was placing many obstacles to the entry of aid into Gaza, worsening the plight of Palestinians there.

Safadi, speaking at a press conference with his Australian counterpart Penny Wong, said the hurdles meant only 10 per cent of the total needs of more than two million Gazans under siege were being covered.

“The reality now is that Israeli measures are preventing sufficient aid from arriving and only a fraction is being delivered,” he said.

Israel, which screens goods going into Gaza and holds back aid it deems to be used for military purposes by its enemy, denies hampering aid.

Israel was also preventing aid from reaching northern Gaza where Israel's bombardment and its occupation for weeks had wiped out infrastructure and much of its residential buildings, Safadi said. The United Nations humanitarian office said that Israeli authorities were systematically denying it access to northern Gaza to deliver aid and this had significantly hindered the humanitarian operation there.

Jordan, which has been in the forefront of Arab neighbours pushing Israel to allow more aid, is the only country that airdrops aid to Gaza to two military field hospitals it runs.

It succeeded in getting Israel to allow the World Food Programme (WFP) to send deliveries to Gaza through another land route that begins from Jordan that has helped to ease pressure on the main Rafah border crossing, which is limited in capacity.

“Even the aid that is arriving is not reaching all of Gaza, some of it is arriving to the south and when we talk of the north there are big Israeli impediments preventing the delivery of aid there,” he said

Safadi also blamed Israel for not heeding a call by a UN Security Council resolution that was adopted last month that called for allowing safe unhindered and expanded humanitarian access.

“Unfortunately this has not happened till now and this is due to the Israeli position which rejects allowing enough aid and refusing to adopt more effective ways to speed up delivery of aid,” Safadi said. — Reuters

The reality now is that Israeli measures are preventing sufficient aid from arriving and only a fraction is being delivered

AYMAN SAFADI

Jordanian Foreign Minister



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In brief

■ TOKYO



KOREAN AIR PLANE STRIKES CATHAY AIRCRAFT IN JAPAN

A Korean Air airliner “struck” an empty Cathay Pacific plane while taxiing at a snow-hit Japanese airport on Tuesday, with both airlines saying there were no injuries.

The incident at New Chitose Airport serving the northern Japanese city of Sapporo came two weeks after a near-catastrophic collision at Tokyo’s Haneda Airport between a Japan Airlines aircraft and a smaller coast guard plane.

“Our aircraft, which was stationary at the time with no customers nor crew onboard, was struck by a Korean Air A330 which was taxiing past,” Hong Kong’s Cathay Pacific said in a statement. — **AFP**

■ WARSAW



POLISH TRUCKERS SUSPEND BORDER BLOCKADE

Polish truckers will suspend their longstanding blockade of the Ukrainian border following an agreement with the government, authorities said on Tuesday, in a move that could resolve a source of friction between the allies.

The hauliers confirmed the suspension until March but warned that they would return to the border if their demands were not met.

The Polish hauliers have been blocking the border since November to demand the reintroduction of restrictions to enter the European Union for their Ukrainian competitors. — **AFP**

■ NAIROBI



KENYA TO CHARGE CULT LEADER WITH MURDER, TERRORISM

Kenyan prosecutors said on Tuesday they intend to charge a suspected cult leader and dozens of other suspects with murder and terrorism over the deaths of more than 400 of his followers, after a court warned it may have to free him.

Self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie is alleged to have incited his followers to starve to death in order to “meet Jesus” in a case that shocked the world. Mackenzie was arrested in April last year after bodies were discovered in a forest near the Indian Ocean coast.

His pre-trial detention has been extended on several occasions as investigations draw out. — **AFP**

Ukraine’s Zelensky urges Western unity to stop Russia

DAVOS: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged the West on Tuesday to show a united front against Russian President Vladimir Putin and to step up its support for Kyiv to ensure that Moscow did not prevail in the war.

Western hesitation in its backing for Kyiv and fears of an escalation in the war with Russia were costing time and could prolong the fighting by years, he told the World Economic Forum in Davos.

“In fact, Putin embodies war... He will not change... We must change. We all must change to the extent that the madness that resides in this man’s head or any other aggressor’s head will not prevail,” Zelensky said.

Nearly two years after Russia launched its full-scale war, Zelensky told the forum he strongly opposed freezing the conflict along its current lines.

The forum comes as Kyiv’s troops are going onto a more defensive footing after a major counteroffensive last year was unable to break through Russian defensive lines in Ukraine’s occupied south and east.

Kyiv is now focused on trying to secure Western assistance held up by political wrangling in the US Congress



We all must change to the extent that the madness that resides in this man’s head or any other aggressor’s head will not prevail

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

Ukrainian President

and Brussels, reforming its conscription effort to replenish manpower and addressing artillery shortages at the front.

In a question-and-answer session after his speech, Zelensky said he had received “positive signals” about the unlocking of financial support from the European Union.

He said he hoped that the United States would approve further aid within weeks.

Zelensky met senior officials earlier on the sidelines of the forum, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg and international investors such as executives from JPMorgan.

Meanwhile, residents of the Russian-held city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine lined up on Tuesday to register their support for Vladimir Putin in a presidential vote where he is sure to win re-election.

Russia claimed Donetsk and three other Ukrainian regions as its own territory in September 2022.

Conducting the March election in these areas is important for Moscow as a means of demonstrating that it has integrated them as “new territories”, even though it does not fully control them militarily.

Nearly two years into the conflict, there is no sign of an end to it and neither side has made any significant breakthrough for many months. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told the World Economic Forum in Davos on Tuesday that every reduction of pressure on Russia would add years to the war. — **Reuters**



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky meet during the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. — **Reuters**



Celeste Saulo, UN climate agency chief

UN climate chief wants more action on greenhouse gas

GENEVA: The world needs to take far more action to slash greenhouse gas emissions, with soaring temperatures a huge concern, the new head of the UN’s climate agency warned on Tuesday.

Celeste Saulo said humanity was facing one of its toughest challenges and has the duty to sculpt a brighter future.

“We are far from having enough action in terms of reducing greenhouse gases, and that is really a concern,” she said in her first press conference as secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

“Humanity is facing one of its most complex challenges -- climate change,” she said.

“Over the next years, we have an opportunity, a duty, and a possibility, to shape the narrative on climate action. She said adapting to climate change was no longer a choice but a necessity, as is building up the capacity to resist and recover from climate-related disasters.

“Under my leadership, we will fortify early warning systems, enhance data accessibility, and make science and timely, life-saving information accessible to all,” said Saulo.

“It will not be an easy road, but if we have strength and determination, we will ride it for our global family and for generations to come.”

Saulo wants to make sure everyone on the planet is covered by first-class early warning systems for incoming weather hazards, and improve global greenhouse gas monitoring through integrated space- and surface-based observations. “If we fail at implementation we would be failing the world. Here is where my strength will be focused,” the WMO chief said.

Saulo said 30 countries were particularly prone to climate hazards and needed rapidly-improved early warnings. They are mostly small island states and countries in Africa.

“By the end of 2024, we will show you concrete results at the level of those 30 countries,” she pledged. — **AFP**

UK parliament braces for Rwanda migrant law battle

LONDON: Britain’s plan to send migrants to Rwanda returns to the spotlight on Tuesday, when lawmakers debate the controversial scheme, testing leader Rishi Sunak’s authority with a general election around the corner.

The prime minister has staked his political future on slashing record levels of regular and irregular migration.

His government’s Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill is key to that pledge.

But the legislation has reopened schisms in his ruling Conservatives between right-wingers and moderates.

The plan is Sunak’s answer to a unanimous UK Supreme Court ruling in November that deporting asylum-seekers to Rwanda is illegal under international law.

It would compel judges to treat Rwanda as a safe third country and proposes giving UK ministers powers to disregard sections of international and British human rights legislation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reiterated this week that the legislation and a recently signed treaty with Kigali designating Rwanda “safe” were “not compatible” with international refugee law.

Meanwhile, the bill has triggered deep factional Tory infighting not seen since the wranglings over Brexit.

Sunak faced down party rebels last month and won a knife-edge parliamentary vote on the Rwanda legislation. He must do so again, in a vote expected on Wednesday night.

First, beginning on Tuesday, MPs will debate a series of



Britain’s PM Rishi Sunak delivers a ministerial statement in the House of Commons, in London. — **Reuters**

amendments to the legislation. They are unlikely to be passed but will reveal the extent of opposition that Sunak faces.

More than 50 Tory MPs have publicly backed right-wing amendments that toughen up

the bill, including by disapplying international law and restricting asylum-seekers’ rights to appeal against deportation.

They include two Tory deputy chairmen, who are testing Sunak’s mettle for party discipline amid

calls for their dismissal from the roles. If the UK leader agrees to right-wingers’ demands, then the bill would almost certainly be scuppered by party centrists, who oppose any violations of international law and say the legislation already pushes the limits.

Sunak said on Monday he was “talking to all my colleagues” and was “determined to get this new legislation on to the statute book so we can get our Rwanda scheme up and running”.

“I’m confident that the bill we have got is the toughest that anyone has ever seen and it will resolve this issue once and for all,” he told reporters.

Sunak says the law is essential to deter migrants from considering travelling to the UK via unauthorised routes, particularly on small boat crossings from France. — **AFP**

Why Israel ignored Egyptian warnings?



AbdulMalik al Arami

Whenever I think about the situation in Gaza, and the rest of occupied Palestine, five questions rush to my mind - Why did the Israeli government not give attention to the Egyptian warning about the possible attack by Hamas?

Why did the Israeli government ignore the symbolic importance of the 50th anniversary of their war with Egypt back in 1973? Why did the Israelis not take action immediately, especially that television channels were there broadcasting scenes of the attacks? Is Netanyahu gaining any personal advantage from a war like this? and What are the similarities between October 7, 2023 and September 11, 2001?

The war between Israel and Palestine has been around for decades. Since the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the declaration of the Israeli state on Palestinian land in 1948, clashes are going on between various groups. Nonetheless, what has been happening in Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023 reminds me of the US reaction to the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US. The following lines provide a perspective.

The Egyptian warning: Right before October 7, Egyptian intelligence authorities warned the Israeli government about a possible surprise attack. “Something big” they said, which put a big question mark on the Israeli intelligence’s failure to predict such an event. Having the most effective intelligence protection systems in the world, this event made people criticise it for being “not good enough”. In addition, the Prime Minister of Israel suspiciously ignored all warnings, as if he was waiting for something to happen so that he could do something about it, to save himself from prison. The prime minister denied receiving any warnings, saying that they were “fake news”.

The symbolism of October 7: Back on October 7, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israeli forces in the Sinai and the Golan

Heights. The war continued and caused both sides huge financial and human losses, which at the end resulted in the victory of the Egyptian army which gained full control of Sinai. Although there are still different opinions about the winner of that war, the important thing is the question: Why did the Israeli intelligence systems not predict and prepare for such an event? People still remember the day and realise what could or might happen. How come the prime minister didn’t remember such an event, and get ready for it?

Wait, ready, GO!: Operation Toofaan Al Aqsa by Hamas started approximately at 6:31 am in the morning. Hamas launched the attack by sending a huge number of rockets and bombs to the centre of Israel, causing more than 800 deaths of Israelis and holding a couple of hundred as captives. Moreover, they aggressively continued attacking Israel for hours. Meanwhile, TV channels and news reporters had already got there and started broadcasting the scenes live, which raises many questions: Why did the Israeli government not take action immediately? Why did Netanyahu wait so long to declare war against Hamas? He could have easily blocked all the roads preventing Hamas from escaping and could immediately have told Israeli soldiers to get them while they were out of their tunnels. This, in fact, was a very tactical move by Netanyahu.

He wanted to hold Hamas accountable for what they have done as evidence and a justification to attack Gaza as hard as he can and kill as many civilians as possible and cause the surviving ones to leave their land. Netanyahu wanted Hamas to take time attacking Israelis, to cause more destruction so that he could attack back without having to worry about what the world thinks. It seems that his plan was a genocide in Gaza Strip.

A sneaky way out!: Right before October 7, huge protests were going non-stop in the centre of Israel. It was going on for months against the judicial reforms

RIGHT BEFORE
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that Netanyahu was trying to implement. The prime minister had many allegations of corruption that he was continuously denying, and he had no other way to dodge them than the judicial reforms, which are meant to reduce the Supreme Court’s power in making laws and policies, and limiting its power to review laws, giving the government more control over choosing judges. This resulted in taking the 15 judges of the Supreme Court down. Netanyahu badly needed a diplomatic victory that would help him stay away from his corruption allegations and also give him support with regard to personal life. In addition, his calling it a “war” against Hamas is just to sugarcoat the fact that he wanted to get international support to destroy Gaza, kill its people, and drive them away to Egypt, demolishing the two state solution.

Another 9/11?: Now let’s compare what is happening in Gaza to what happened back on September 11, 2001. We can clearly see how similar both situations are. Back in the day, America had the ultimate goal which was invading Afghanistan and destroying Al Qaeda, as well as invading Iraq and taking down Saddam Hussein. Their strategy was allowing the September 11 attacks to happen, with many evidences such as the Larry Silverstein’s sudden insurance deal on twin towers. Records show that some people knew that the attacks would take place there before filming the scenes of the towers coming down.

Conclusion: Netanyahu’s strategy to save himself the corruption allegations against him (as well as the war crimes he committed in Gaza) by sacrificing both Israelis and Palestinians reminds me of the old French saying which may be translated as “Let me survive and let the flood take everyone else”, which is usually translated into Arabic as “Anaa wa man ba’dii al-Toofaan”. In other words, Netanyahu was waiting for a flood or a toofaan that can delay his judicial problems, which may save him and sweep anyone else, even the so-called Israeli citizens. And he found a flood or a toofaan, which is Toofaan Al-Aqsa, which is the name of the operation that started on October 7, 2023.

Mauritius mops up after storm Belal wreaks havoc

Mauritius was on Tuesday assessing the damage wrought by tropical storm Belal as it rolled away from the Indian Ocean island nation, allowing international flights to resume.

Belal has claimed the life of one person in the remote tourist paradise, left thousands without power, flooded buildings and caused traffic chaos, with cars washed away by a deluge of water or piled up on streets.

Mauritius Meteorological Services (MMS) had announced early on Tuesday it was raising its cyclone alert to the maximum level four but at 2:10 pm it said “all cyclone warnings for Mauritius are being waived”.

Belal had already battered the French overseas territory of Reunion, leaving one person dead. The authorities there announced on Tuesday that a red alert had been lifted.

The operator of the international airport in Mauritius announced it would resume operations at 3:15 pm after closing on Monday as the cyclone approached, leaving a number of flights cancelled.

“However, intending passengers are strongly advised to contact their respective airlines for further information on the status of their flights and not to proceed to the airport, unless receiving confirmation of the revised departure time,” it said in a statement.

Tourism is a key contributor to the country’s economy, with visitors wooed by its spectacular white beaches and turquoise waters. More than one million visitors travelled to Mauritius in 2022, according to official figures.

“We have some tourists who need to catch their plane this afternoon, and we still don’t know if we can drive or if the plane will take off,” Ram Mahadea, a taxi driver who works at a hotel in the south of the island, had said earlier. — AFP

Republican election race kicks off in frigid Iowa, testing Trump



Camille Camdessus

US politics and Congress correspondent for AFP

Voters in a brutally cold Iowa kick off the US Republican presidential nomination race on Monday — the first major test of whether Donald Trump’s runaway poll lead will deliver an early knockout victory.

If the predicted landslide is forthcoming, Trump’s grip on the nomination would appear unshakeable, but a sub-par winning margin could open the door to his main rivals Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis — currently locked in a battle for distant second. “I think we are going to have a tremendous night tonight,” Trump said in a video posted on social media. “The people are fantastic and I’ve never seen spirit like they have.”

For the first time since he lost his 2020 reelection bid, the former US president — who is being prosecuted in four criminal cases, ranging from taking top secret documents to trying to overthrow his election loss -- will face voters.

Trump is expected to win the Midwestern state’s first-in-the-nation contest handily as he bids to oust Democrat President Joe Biden in November. But observers have not ruled out a surprisingly strong showing by Haley or DeSantis.

Adding uncertainty, Iowans will have to contend with blizzards and a potential wind chill in some areas of -42 degrees Celsius, potentially throttling turnout.

“I’m asking you to go out, brave



Former US President and Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump speaks at a watch party during the 2024 Iowa Republican presidential caucuses in Des Moines, Iowa. – AFP

the cold and support me in the Iowa Caucus,” DeSantis posted on X, formerly Twitter. “You will never have an opportunity to have your vote make more of an impact than you will

TRUMP IS EXPECTED TO WIN THE MIDWESTERN STATE’S FIRST-IN-THE-NATION CONTEST HANDILY AS HE BIDS TO OUST DEMOCRAT PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN IN NOVEMBER

tonight!” “The biggest question I’m getting right now is: ‘Is the caucus still going to take place?’ There is going to be a polar vortex,” warned Maci Arjes, part of a student Republican group at the

University of Iowa. Caucuses will begin from around 7:00 pm, when voters gather in schools, libraries and fire stations across the state.

Caucus participants will listen to speeches on behalf of candidates, before writing their preferred name on a piece of paper and submitting their vote. Trump plans to attend several of the caucuses over the evening, his campaign said.

As the first primary contest, Iowa has an outsized impact, often setting momentum and media narratives ahead of the next states in the calendar.

Trump’s margin of his victory will be under scrutiny, with anything less than a crushing margin denting the sense of inevitability that he has worked hard to create.

In the pursuit of social reforms

Social reform or development is a term that is always thrown around us. It is almost everywhere, almost all the time. They are happening, and we accept them. However, too often, we talk about reform in vague terms without specifying what we mean.

According to Collins, a reform consists of changes and improvements to a law, social system, or institution. A reform is an instance of such a change or improvement.

When income and income-related inequalities reach a certain level, those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder are no longer in a position to enjoy many of their basic rights.

In the Sultanate of Oman, social development has been identified as a core component of the country's Five-Year Plans. Its social security system is well established and far-reaching.

The country's leadership recognises the importance of rationalising the distribution of benefits and also strengthening coordination of social assistance with in-kind services and with other sectors such as employment and housing policy.

Oman's launch of its comprehensive, integrated, and progressive social protection system aligns with Oman Vision 2040, the 10th Five-Year Development Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Since the very first day of his accession to the throne, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has confirmed his sincere endeavour to set up a new phase of Oman's renewed Renaissance that fulfils the aspirations of the Omani people as well as preserves the achievements that took place over the past five decades.

In his Royal speech at the opening of the first annual sitting of the 8th Term of the Council of Oman, His Majesty the Sultan said, "We envisage that the Social Protection System will be comprehensive, extending its benefits to all segments of society, thereby guaranteeing a dignified life for all."

By all metrics- from rapid economic growth rates to improved social indices- Oman today is a high-income, developing country. In the World Social Progress Index for 2022, Oman has won the 80th position globally, obtaining 67.7 points, and has ranked among



Samuel Kutty
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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

IN OMAN, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A CORE COMPONENT OF THE COUNTRY'S FIVE-YEAR PLANS

the five best Arab countries in social progress.

With the issuance of Royal Decree No 52/2023, the Government of Oman embarked on a new Social Protection Law, setting a new regional benchmark for alignment with international labour standards in the area of social security and the progressive realisation of a rights-based universal social protection framework.

The law entails government-funded universal social protection benefits, including a cash benefit for all children under the age of 18, a universal old age pension for senior citizens over the age of 60, and a universal disability allowance.

In a bid to increase efficiency and coherence, all government and contribution-funded social protection benefits will be administered by the Social Protection Fund, a newly established unified social protection agency.

The new law also significantly expands protection for migrant workers in Oman, who represent over three-quarters of the country's working population. Migrant workers will be covered for employment injury, maternity, and sickness under the same terms as national workers.

For the first time in the region, a national provident fund will also be established to administer end-of-service benefits to migrant workers.

Even in the pursuit of equality, justice, and freedom, moderation and reason should prevail. This was reflective when His Majesty made mention of the value of the family unit in Omani society.

"As we discern the challenges pervading our society and recognise their intolerable impacts on its ethical and cultural fabric, we underscore the imperative to assiduously address, scrutinise, and continuously monitor these issues," he told the Council of Oman.

"It is imperative to accord paramount attention to the family, the cornerstone of our society, which acts as a bulwark in safeguarding our progeny from harmful ideologies that are in direct opposition to the tenets of our venerable religion and core values," he said.

After all, families are essentially the building blocks of society. Family units serve as the nursery for the citizens that become the population of a society!

A FALL FROM THE SKY!



■ A kitesurfer loses control of his board, on a sunny day at Bloubergstrand beach in Cape Town, South Africa, on Tuesday. – Reuters

What it takes to build democratic institutions

There are plenty of good models around to help both developing and industrialised countries build better democratic institutions. But with its abortive attempts to draft a new constitution, Chile is offering a lesson in what to avoid.

Though it is one of the richest countries in Latin America, Chile is still suffering from the legacy of General Augusto Pinochet's brutal dictatorship and historic inequalities. The country has made some progress in building democratic institutions since the 1988 plebiscite that began the transition from authoritarianism, and education and social programmes have reduced income inequality. But major problems remain. There are deep inequalities not just in income, but also in access to government services, high-quality educational resources, and labour-market opportunities. Moreover, Chile still has the constitution that Pinochet imposed in 1980.

Yet while it seems natural to start anew, Chile has gone about it the wrong way. Following a 2020 referendum that showed overwhelming support for drafting a new constitution, it entrusted the process to a convention of elected delegates. But only 43 per cent of voters turned out for the 2021



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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS ARE BUILT BY DELIVERING WHAT ORDINARY VOTERS EXPECT AND DEMAND FROM GOVERNMENT, AS THE HISTORY OF NORDIC SOCIAL DEMOCRACY SHOWS

election to fill the convention, and many of the candidates were from far-left circles with strong ideological commitments to draft a constitution that would crack down on business and establish myriad new rights for different communities. When the resulting document was put to a vote, 62 per cent of Chileans rejected it.

A second attempt repeated the same failings, only from the other direction. A right-wing convention majority, emboldened by the public's reaction to the first version, drafted a constitution that also was rejected as a step too far. This experience should sound familiar, because Chile is hardly the only country where an activist body has pushed for measures that a majority of voters oppose. Similar episodes are occurring around the world – not least in the United States – and trust in institutions is suffering as a result.

Can support for democracy be rebuilt? My own recent work with Nicolás Ajzenman, Cevat Aksoy, Martin Fiszbein, and Carlos Molina may provide some clues. We find that people who have experience with democratic institutions tend to support them, but only if they deem democracies

to be successful in delivering the kinds of economic performance, public services, and other outcomes that they expect.

What people appear to want from democracies is telling. Support for democracy wanes during economic crises, wars, or other periods of instability, and improves when the public enjoys the benefits of good public services, low inequality, and limited to no corruption. The lessons seem clear. If we want to build a better democracy, we must start with democratic institutions' ability to deliver what people want.

With inequality rising in many countries and global corporations

becoming more powerful, it is reasonable for democracies to offer more redistribution and stronger protections for disadvantaged groups. But, again, the right and the left will go about this in different ways.

In Chile's case, the left's hardline anti-business agenda seems ill-advised. A better alternative is the model pioneered by Scandinavia's social democratic parties, which rose to power after the 1929 stock-market crash and the Great Depression, when there was a palpable need for major institutional changes and policies to restore the economy to health and curb inequality.

There are many misperceptions about the origins of Nordic social democracy. While some commentators seem to believe that these countries were always predisposed toward equality and cooperation, others view them as "democratic socialist" role models. Neither perception seems to be true. Both Sweden and Norway were highly unequal at the beginning of the twentieth century. Norway's pre-tax income Gini coefficient (a measure of inequality on a scale of zero to one) was 0.57 in 1930, which means that it was more unequal than anywhere in Latin America today.

Both countries also experienced frequent industrial conflict. The workers' parties that later became social-democratic parties were rooted in Marxism. But by the time they came to power, they had started moving away from their earlier commitments to revolution and rigid ideology. Instead, they campaigned under a broad umbrella, promising sound macroeconomic management and egalitarian reform of the labour market and education.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



Chile is still suffering from the legacy of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship and historic inequalities.

SPORT



Monster Energy Honda Team's French biker Adrien Van Beveren competes in the dunes during Stage 8 between Al Duwadimi and Hail on Monday. – AFP

FRENCH DOUBLE AT DAKAR RALLY

LOEB, VAN BEVEREN CLAIM STAGE 9 WINS

AL ULA, Saudi Arabia: Sebastien Loeb (Prodrive) claimed his fourth victory of this year's Dakar Rally on Tuesday, taking the honours on stage nine in Saudi Arabia, while Adrien Van Beveren (Honda) made it a French double by winning on the bikes. Neither, however, has control of the overall standings with Carlos Sainz (Audi) leading the cars and Ricky Brabec (Honda) the bikes.

Stage nine included 400km of special stage, which featured dunes, complicated navigation and rocky, sandy tracks as the competitors made their way between Hail and Al Ula. Nine-time world rally champion Loeb clocked up his 27th stage victory on the Dakar, clawing back 4 minutes 14 seconds from Sainz. But he remains provisionally 20min 33sec behind the 61-year-old Spaniard with time running out before Friday's final stage finish in Yanbu, on the shores of the Red Sea. "It was a good day for us, a long stage," said Loeb. "We had two punctures in the middle of the stage so at the end I had to be a bit careful and not have a third one. "The gap is still big, but we still have three stages to go. So, we'll see and we'll continue to push for the next three days." Another Frenchman Mathieu Serradori (Century) took a fine third place, 4min 43sec behind Loeb. French biker Van Beveren claimed his second victory on this year's rally, finishing just 42sec ahead of his Honda team-mate Ricky Brabec who retains the overall lead. "It was a tough day but a



Bahrain Raid Xtreme's French driver Sebastien Loeb and his Belgian co-driver Fabian Lurquin steer their car, during Stage 9 of the Dakar Rally 2024 between Hail and Al Ula, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday. – AFP

good day," said Van Beveren. "It was really, really difficult. I tried my best, I really tried to be consistent and I think it was a good stage. I gave my all. I have no regrets for today." Brabec finished strongly and widened the gap to Ross Branch (Hero), running second in the

overall, to 7min 9sec. "I lost my rear brakes just before refuelling, so another stage with no rear brakes was a little bit tough but, all in all, it was good," said Brabec. The American now has his eyes on a decisive performance on Wednesday's 10th stage

when the competitors will have to slalom their way through the stunning monumental rocks of the Al Ula region over a 371km special. "I think tomorrow we're probably going to have to open, but if I can clean up tomorrow..."

Van Beveren rode at the front for much of the stage, claiming bonuses that moved him up to third place overall, 11min 16sec behind Brabec. The race was more complicated for Chile's Ignacio Cornejo (Honda), who finished 10min 07sec behind Van

Beveren and dropped to fourth overall, 13min 46sec off the lead. Pablo Quintanilla was too far back to challenge the front two but completed a Honda sweep of the podium, finishing 4min 29sec behind the winner. — AFP

Kiwis hold Germany, Chile revive semi hopes

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 16

The tight clash between Germany and New Zealand ended at a 2-2 draw at Oman Hockey Stadium in Pool B of FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier which is underway in Muscat. New Zealand, coached by Greg Nicol, began the match perfectly as they managed to earn an early goal by Findlay Sean in the first minute through a field goal. The rivals awaited for more than 15 minutes to bring the match into parity as Peillat Gonzalo equalised in the 17th minute from a penalty corner. The equaliser gave the world champions better encouragement as they took the lead for first time in the match after Grambusch Tom netted the second goal in the 17th minute from a penalty corner. In the third quarter of the game, Phillips Hayden made it 2-2 for New Zealand with a field goal in the 43th minute. The draw meant Germany will



New Zealand and Germany players fight for the ball at Hockey Oman Stadium.

remain on top with four points and New Zealand are in second place with goal difference while Chile are third and Canada in fourth place. In an earlier Pool B match on Tuesday, Chile revived their hopes to advance into the semifinals after they defeated Canada 3-2. Chile began their campaign at FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier event with a 3-1 loss against New Zealand. Both teams started strongly

as they needed a win to keep alive their hopes to make it into the last 4. Canada's Johnston Gordon opened the scoring with a penalty corner goal in the seventh minute. Seven minutes later, Chile's Renz Felipe equalised from a brilliant field goal to end the first quarter at 1-1. Maldonado Jose added another field goal in the second quarter for Chile in the 28th minute to make it 2-1. Jose found the target in the 45th minute to



Canada and Chile players during the Olympic Qualifier in Al Amerat.

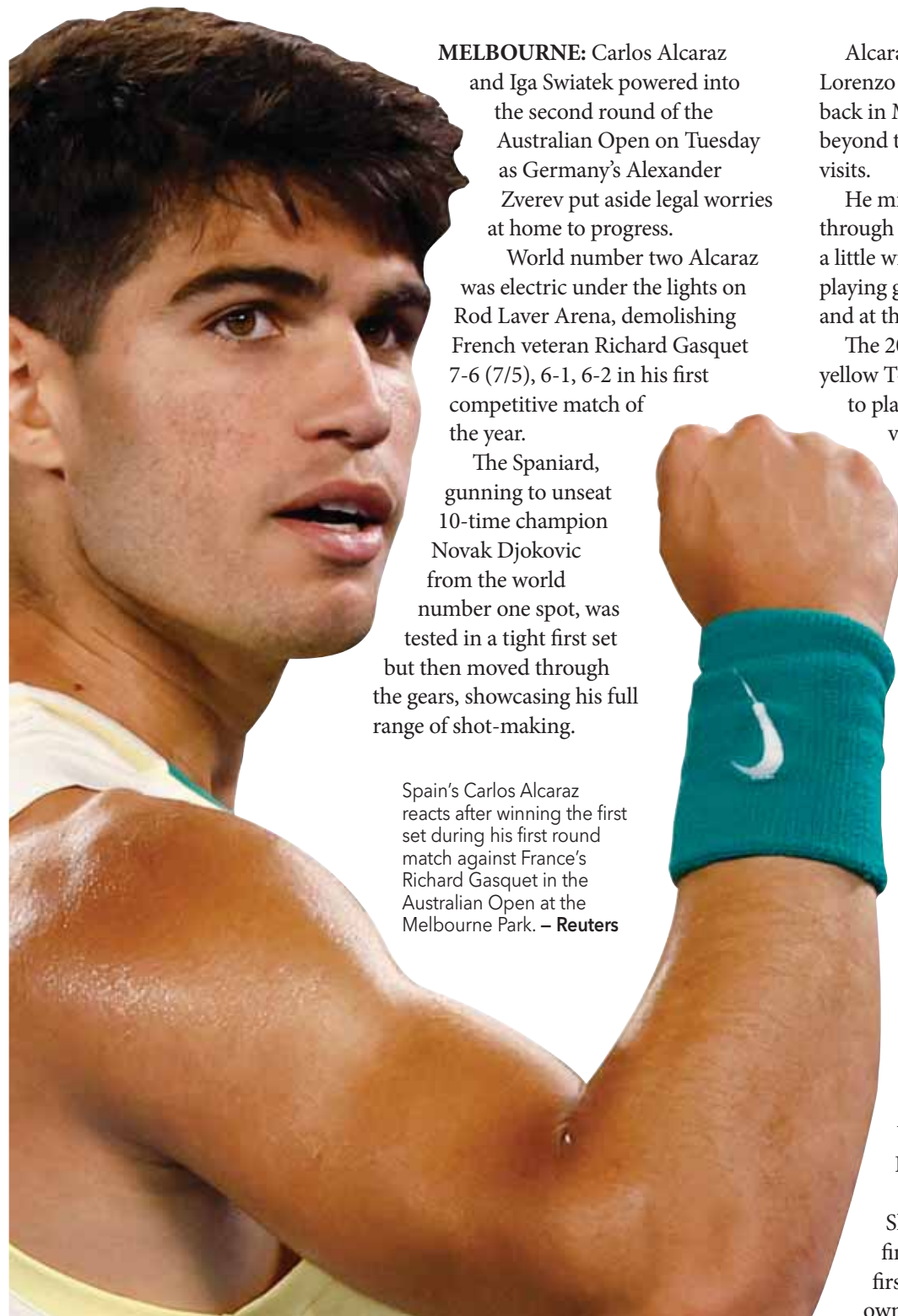
extend his team's lead. Canadian players missed the focus and concentration as they did not convert many scoring attempts to goals. Before the match end, Canada's Johnston Gordon reduced the gap to make it 3-2. The second successive loss for Canada meant their chances to move into the next round dashed as they suffered a 9-0 loss against Germany in the opener. **CHINA, GBR WIN** In late matches of Monday,

China registered a strong come back to beat Malaysia who were ahead in the second quarter. Chinese players managed to end the match at 3-2 in the dying moments after they rallied to lead 2-1 heading into the final quarter. Gao Jiesheng fired the all-important goal and took the full advantage of a penalty corner and won it for China 3-2 in the final moments of the game to clinch crucial three points in their first match.

Great Britain finished the first day's matches with an outstanding show as they thrashed Pakistan 6-1. World No 4 Great Britain players did not get much difficulty to end their match with a comfortable win. Waller Jack took the lead from a penalty corner in the 10th minute before Ward Sam doubled the lead in the 28th minute with a field goal. He came back again to score the third goal in the 41st minute. Two minutes later, Calnan Will increased the margin to make it 4-0. The first actual presence of Pakistani team were in the 50th minute as Shahid Hannan reduced the scoring gap in the 50th minute with a field goal. Wallace Zachary and Bandurak Nicholas sealed the victory for the Great Britain as they netted the fifth and sixth goals. Great Britain topped Pool A with China in second place with goal difference while Malaysia are in third place. Pakistan will be looking to register a comeback as they are placed fourth and last place in the pool.

ALCAREZ DOMINATES ON AO RETURN

S W I A T E K S U R V I V E S T O U G H T E S T A G A I N S T K E N I N



MELBOURNE: Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Swiatek powered into the second round of the Australian Open on Tuesday as Germany's Alexander Zverev put aside legal worries at home to progress.

World number two Alcaraz was electric under the lights on Rod Laver Arena, demolishing French veteran Richard Gasquet 7-6 (7/5), 6-1, 6-2 in his first competitive match of the year.

The Spaniard, gunning to unseat 10-time champion Novak Djokovic from the world number one spot, was tested in a tight first set but then moved through the gears, showcasing his full range of shot-making.

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts after winning the first set during his first round match against France's Richard Gasquet in the Australian Open at the Melbourne Park. — Reuters

Alcaraz, who will next face Italy's Lorenzo Sonego, said it was good to be back in Melbourne, where he has not been beyond the third round in his previous two visits.

He missed last year's tournament through injury. "In the first set I struggled a little with his game," he said. "He was playing great but I played better and better and at the end I reached quite a good level."

The 20-year-old, clad in a sleeveless yellow T-shirt, admitted he sometimes tries to play "impossible shots", including volleys and dropshots, to please his fans.

SWIATEK RUN

Earlier, Swiatek survived a tough test against former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin to progress.

The Polish world number one came through 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 against the player she beat to win her first Grand Slam title, at the French Open in 2020.

In-form Swiatek, 22, twice came back from a break down in a gruelling first set lasting 68 minutes but stepped on the gas in the second set, winning the final five games to finish with a flourish.

The four-time major winner, now on a 17-match winning streak, next faces unseeded American Danielle Collins, who beat former winner Angelique Kerber.

"It wasn't the easiest first round. She played really well. I tried to find my rhythm, especially in the first set," said the top seed, who owns three Roland Garros crowns



Poland's Iga Swiatek prepares to serve during her first round match against Sofia Kenin of the US. — Reuters

and another at the US Open. "I'm happy at the end of the set I could win the most important points."

Zverev took to Margaret Court Arena in the evening against fellow German Dominik Koepfer under the shadow of a looming court case.

The world number six will go on trial at the end of May for allegedly assaulting his former girlfriend in 2020. Zverev, who has strenuously denied the allegations, is accused of "physically abusing a woman and damaging her health during an argument", according to the court.

The German, who beat Koepfer in four sets, said he sees no reason to step down as an ATP Tour player representative over the issue, believing players had confidence in him.

"I mean, I think so," he said. "Nobody has said anything to me. I don't have a reason not to believe that."

Third seed Elena Rybakina, now firmly established in the women's elite, overcame a slow start and saved three set points to beat former world number one Karolina Pliskova 7-6 (8/6), 6-4. The 2022 Wimbledon champion, last year's beaten finalist, will face unseeded Russian Anna Blinkova in the second round.

Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu said it was "amazing to be playing pain-free" after an impressive 6-3, 6-2 win over American Shelby Rogers.

The British player, 21, stunned the tennis world when she triumphed at Flushing Meadows in 2021 but her record since then is patchy and she has only just returned from a injury-enforced eight-month break.

There were also wins for former US Open champion Sloane Stephens, fifth seed Jessica Pegula and American 27th seed Emma Navarro, fresh from her Hobart triumph. — AFP

Roma idol De Rossi succeeds sacked Mourinho

ROME: Daniele De Rossi began a new adventure at Roma on Tuesday as the World Cup winner took over at his boyhood club following the sudden sacking of Jose Mourinho.

The former Italy midfielder, who spent almost the entirety of his playing career at Roma, signed a deal "until 30 June 2024" with the Serie A club hours after Mourinho was dismissed.

"I know no other way but dedication, daily sacrifices, and giving everything I have in order to face the challenges that await us from now until the end of the season," said De Rossi in a statement.

"The excitement of being able to sit on our bench is indescribable. Everyone knows what Roma means to me."

A series of disappointing results which have the capital club way off the pace in the Italian top flight this term did for Mourinho, who left Roma's Trigoria training ground on Tuesday afternoon.

Mourinho was met by a scrum of reporters and a handful of fans as he was driven out of the gates, saying "thank you for these two years" to supporters who chanted his name.

De Rossi is an idol for Roma fans as a local boy done good who played in some of the club's best teams of the last two decades, alongside fellow icon Francesco Totti.

The 40-year-old, who grew up in a rough and ready beachside suburb of Rome, played for Roma for nearly two decades, winning over fans who saw in his passionate style of play one of their own on



Daniele De Rossi during his role as Italy assistant coach on March 25, 2021. — AFP



AS Roma coach Jose Mourinho during the Europa League semifinal against Bayer. — Reuters

the pitch. He won two Italian Cups and the 2007 Italian Super Cup, before finishing his career at Boca Juniors in early 2020 after less than a season in Argentina.

It is a huge job for someone with little pedigree as a coach however, his only job at SPAL lasting just four months last season.

He was sacked in February last year in a season which finished with SPAL being relegated to the

third-tier Serie C.

Mourinho, who has been linked with a job in Saudi Arabia, left Roma after an emotional two-and-a-half years in which he won Europa Conference League in 2022, ending a 14-year trophy drought.

MOURINHO SHOWN THE DOOR

His contract was due to expire in June and although he had repeatedly stated that he wanted to stay on, talks about an extension to his deal never materialised.

Rumours of his departure grew more persistent after Roma were knocked out of the Italian Cup by local rivals Lazio and Sunday's dismal 3-1 defeat at AC Milan which left them ninth in Serie A, five points adrift of the Champions League positions.

The 60-year-old Portuguese

was a shock appointment in 2021, Roma's announcement of his arrival as the replacement to Paulo Fonseca coming almost completely out of the blue.

He immediately became a huge fan favourite, with his image popping up on walls around Rome as supporters dreamed of success under one of football's greatest ever coaches.

And in his first season he guided Roma to the inaugural Conference League, a triumph which brought Mourinho to tears on the pitch and made him an almost God-like figure to one of Europe's most passionate and success-starved fan bases.

He then came to within a penalty shoot-out of winning back-to-back European finals, Roma falling at the last hurdle against Sevilla in last season's Europa League.

That was a defeat which both enraged Mourinho and supporters, who attacked referee Anthony Taylor with chairs at Budapest's Ferenc Liszt airport in anger at what they considered bad decisions which cost their team the trophy.

However the magic between Mourinho and the fans began to wear off this term, with poor results and performances partly due to a raft of injuries and summer transfers which haven't worked out.

Roma have failed to qualify for the money-spinning Champions League under Mourinho's charge, a big problem for a club operating under Financial Fair Play constraints which struggles to balance its books. — AFP

Bangladesh CC, Jotun Anchery, OCT Al Hail B triumph in OC League

MUSCAT: Bangladesh CC beat Team Coorg Muscat in the E Division League 2023-24 powered by Credit Oman at the Municipality Grounds in Al Amerat.

Bangladesh CC posted a total of 216 courtesy Mohammad Saiful Islam's squash buckling 85 and Miraj Hossain's 59. Raguvaran Selvam picked 3 wickets. In response, Team Coorg Muscat were bundled for a paltry 90 as Alam Mamtaz and Mohd Saiful Islam took two wickets each. Prabhakaran R scored 24.

In the F Division League 2023-24, Jotun Anchery Blasters edged past Mazoon Dairy at the Municipality Grounds.

Jotun Anchery Blasters scored 115 as Washial Shamas picked 3 wickets along with Mohammed Ghafoor and Amal Piyasanka scalping 2 wickets each. Hussan Pambalath was the top-scorer scoring 31. In reply, Mazoon Dairy crippled down to just 85 courtesy 2 wickets each from Manikandhan S, Jebin Jarnish and Abhilash K.

In the H Division League 2023-24, OCT Al Hail B beat Friends XI Muscat by 62 runs at the Municipality Grounds. **BRIEF SCORES** Bangladesh CC 216-5 in 20 overs (Mohd Saiful Islam 85 (51b); Raguvaran Selvam 3-28) beat Team Coorg Muscat 90 all out in 18.3 overs (Prabhakaran R 24 (31b); Alam Mamtaz 2-13) by 126 runs. Jotun Anchery Blasters 115-9 in 20 overs (Hussan



Mohd Saiful Islam hit 85 runs for Bangladesh CC



Manikandhan S of Jotun Anchery Blasters

Pambalath 31 (21b); Washial Shamas 3-22) beat Mazoon Dairy 85 all out in 15.5 overs (Muhammed Ali Syed 17 (33b); Manikandhan S 2-10) by 30 runs. OCT Al Hail B 159-5 in 20 overs (Younis al Balushi 66 (53b), Mohammed Haneef Balushi 53 (44b); Pramod Chellan 1-17) beat Friends XI Muscat 97 all out in 16.5 overs (Franklin Johny 43 (44b); Asim Qadeer 3-14) by 62 runs.



SAUDI STRIKE IT LATE TO BEAT OMAN



Saudi Arabia's Mukhtar Ali and Saud Abdulhamid in action with Oman's Ahmed al Kaabi and Ali al Busaidy during the AFC Asian Cup Group F match between Saudi Arabia and Oman at Khalifa International Stadium, Al Rayyan, Qatar. – Reuters

WALEED AL JAHWARI
DOHA, JAN 16

Oman launched their Asian Cup Qatar 2023 campaign on a losing note against three-time champions Saudi Arabia in Doha on Tuesday. Saudi Arabia beat Oman 2-1 in the Group F match at Khalifa International Stadium in Qatar capital of Doha on Thursday. The match started with great enthusiasm from the Oman team. Saudi defender Hassan Timbukti received a yellow card in the first half when he collided with Omani forward Mohsen al Ghassani, to cause a penalty to Oman after a VAR review following Oman players' appeal. Salah al Yahyai scored from the spot kick in the 14th minute to give 1-0 lead for Oman. Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic brought in midfielder Moataz Saleh Abd Rabbo in place of striker Esam al Subhi in 46th minute. The second half began with clear Saudi pressure, with continuous shots that did not reach the Omani net, while Saudi coach Roberto Mancini made a change by replacing midfielder Sami Khalil with striker Abdullah Hadi Redeef. On Oman part, Salah al Yahyai tried to reach the Saudi net with a shot that went over the bar narrowly in the 74th minute. The Saudi team returned in the 78th minute and succeeded to reach the Omani net through Abdulrahman Gharib after

receiving a pass from Ali al Awjani to draw the match. In the 90th minute Saudi defender Ali Hadi Mohammed al Bulaihi scored the winner to give Saudi the lead. With this result Saudi Arabia and Thailand earned three points each in Group F with Thailand on top over the goal difference. Oman are third and Kyrgyzstan are fourth and last. Oman will meet Group F toppers Thailand on January 21 at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha. **THAILAND WIN** Thailand won 2-0 in the first match of Group F of the Asian Cup against Kyrgyzstan held at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha on Tuesday. Supachai Chaidid scored a goal in each half to lead Thailand over Kyrgyzstan. Thailand controlled the match from the beginning, without any real threat from Kyrgyzstan, who are participating in the finals for the second time. Subanat Muinta almost gave Thailand the lead in the 22nd minute, but his shot from close range hit the crossbar. But four minutes later, Chidid scored his first goal. After conceding a goal, Kyrgyzstan tried to equalise with counterattack tactics, but failed to create a proper scoring opportunity. The 25-year-old striker added the second goal in 3 minutes into the second half, to end the match with Thailand lead.



Saudi Arabia's midfielder #18 Abdulrahman Ghareeb celebrates with teammates after scoring their team's first goal. – AFP



Omani fans cheer for their team in Doha. – Hussain al Muqbal



Oman players greet their fans after the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group F match against Saudi Arabia. – AFP



Oman's midfielder #12 Abdullah Fawaz is marked by Saudi Arabia's midfielder #16 Sami al Najei. – AFP

business

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National Product Loyalty Programme to empower private sector in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16

A number of officials expressed their appreciation for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for endorsing the Council of Ministers' approval of the 'National Product Loyalty Programme'. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment (MoCIIP) oversees this programme in coordination with relevant authorities and the private sector.

They emphasised the empowerment of the private sector in its leading role in driving national economic growth in alignment with the targets of Oman Vision 2040.

The programme aims to support, promote and raise awareness about Omani products, while urging consumers to choose local goods.

At the same time, the campaign urges local manufacturers to maximise their competitiveness in the local market. Consequently, the programme is expected to offer significant opportunities to enhance the confidence of citizens and local consumers in the quality, efficiency and priority of locally produced goods in their daily consumption.

According to statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the manufacturing sector contributes 8.1 per cent to the total Gross Domestic Product at current prices and 9.3 per cent at constant prices (as of the end of the third quarter of 2023).

The MoCIIP affirmed that Omani products are experiencing widespread and positive acceptance among both citizens



The 'Made in Oman' campaign has played a significant role in enhancing societal awareness of the importance of buying Omani products.

and residents.

This is attributed to several factors, including the quality and standard specifications that make Omani products competitive in both the local and global markets.

Purchasing Omani products is seen as a support to the national economy, contributing to increased economic returns for the Sultanate of Oman and a rise in the local GDP.

The 'Made in Oman' campaign has played a significant role in enhancing societal awareness of the importance of buying Omani products, supporting Omani producers and exporters, and bringing global attention to the quality of Omani products.

The combined efforts of local and international companies investing in Oman have been

instrumental in the success of the campaign.

The 'Made in Oman' campaign aims to introduce and promote national products in the local market, endorse the new national product identity logo, encourage industrial establishments to obtain the national product identity licence, enhance local consumer confidence in national products as a primary choice, highlight their quality and competitiveness, create a standardised image of the diversity of Omani industries, and increase collaboration between industrial establishments and small and medium enterprises.

Additionally, it aims to strengthen consumer loyalty to local products, establish communication channels between producers and consumers, and

promote the diversification of the national economy.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said consumers bore a collective responsibility in supporting local industries.

But he stressed the need for all-round collaboration, starting from the government side by providing more facilities and incentives for Omani industrial establishments.

Omani factories, for their part, should ensure product quality and promote innovation, while consumers must play a pivotal role in choosing local produce over imports.

The chamber also plays a crucial role in developing the Omani industry by conveying the



Omani factories, for their part, should ensure product quality and promote innovation, while consumers must play a pivotal role in choosing local produce over imports

SHAIKH FAISAL
BIN ABDULLAH
AL RAWAS

Chairman of the Board of Directors
Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

perspectives and proposals of industrialists to relevant authorities and contributing to attracting and localising investments in the industrial sector, said Al Rawas.

Sultan al Khadouri, Head of the ICV office at the MoCIIP, stated that adopting a national policy for local content will contribute significantly to enhancing the transformative industries sector in the Sultanate of Oman. This contribution is pivotal in achieving sustainable development and boosting the national economy.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Suhar Investment Forum to spotlight 100 investment opportunities



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16

The first edition of Suhar Investment Forum, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in North Al Batinah Governorate, will take place during February 26-27, 2024 at the Radisson Blu Hotel – Suhar.

Details about the event were shared during a media briefing on Tuesday attended by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, Eng Saeed bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of OCCI's branch in North Batinah Governorate, and local business leaders.

Also supporting the forum are the Office of the Governor of North Al Batinah, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Madayn, Invest Oman, Nazdaher, and Sohar Port and Free Zone.

The forum will focus on the promising opportunities in North Al Batinah Governorate, showcasing its vast untapped potential. It will also train the spotlight on Suhar, a city poised for transformative growth.

Eng Saeed bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of OCCI – North Al Batinah branch, said the opening session will showcase around 100 investment prospects.

"We eagerly anticipate collaborating with officials, investors and business leaders from across the globe."

"Together, let us explore the kaleidoscope of investment possibilities and forge partnerships that will propel the governorate towards a future of robust economic growth and flourishing social prosperity," he added.

Hidden trade in Oman: All firms must open bank accounts

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JAN 16

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has urged all institutions and commercial companies to open a bank account in one of the licensed banks in the Sultanate of Oman.

This is mandatory as per the Commercial Companies Law issued by Royal Decree No 18/2019 and its executive regulations issued by Ministerial Decision 146/2021 and Ministerial Decision 412/2023 regarding combating hidden trade.

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) also stressed the need for all

commercial institutions and companies to commit to opening a bank account in one of the banks licensed to operate in the Sultanate of Oman as per the provisions of the Commercial Companies Law and ministerial decisions to combat hidden trade. Decision 412/2023 was issued in July 2023 in response to successive appeals from citizens over the past years to stop hidden trade, which has economic and social repercussions on business owners and society.

The ministry said it wanted to avoid the negative effects of hidden trade on the national economy and local markets, which include cases of commercial fraud, impact on labour market



regulations, unequal competition with entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, and tax evasion, among others.

MoCIIP is urging citizens and residents to contribute to reducing cases of hidden trade and reporting them.

The hidden trade is seen as enabling a non-citizen (expatriate) to practice business and commercial activities while he is not authorised to do so, through the use of licences, commercial registers, and approvals issued to the concealed person — be it a natural or legal person (company).

The decision states that every person who becomes aware of any person's conduct of concealed trade must inform MoCIIP of that immediately.

MoCIIP may impose one of the following penalties — striking off the activity from the commercial register or an administrative fine of RO 5,000 or an administrative fine of RO 10,000 in case the

violation is committed for the second time.

There will be a suspension of the activity for a period of three months, or an administrative fine of RO 15,000 in the event of committing the violation for the third time, with the activity being struck off from the commercial register, and the activity may not be re-registered except after one year has passed from the date of the cancellation.

The ministry said that the decision to combat hidden trade came as part of the implementation of the executive regulations of the Foreign Capital Investment Law and to create an attractive investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

Discover impressive luxury with Lincoln Aviator

MUSCAT: The Lincoln Aviator makes an impressive presence with its stylish design and detailed luxury that makes ownership experiences exceptional. The Aviator is one of Lincoln’s popular models that is engineered to offer heightened experiences.

The Aviator is equipped with a standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine that is paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission.

This helps the Aviator dish out an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration.

The three-row luxury SUV is equipped with all-wheel drive capability.

Maximising the driving



experience is the Lincoln Drive Modes’ five signature settings — Normal, Conserve, Excite, Slippery and Deep Conditions.

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Adaptive Suspension with Road Preview uses an advanced forward camera to constantly scan the road, seamlessly adjusting the suspension as needed. All Lincoln

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Active Park Assist 2.0 removes the stress from parking by taking over steering, shifting, braking and acceleration functions with the touch of a button to navigate parallel and perpendicular parking spaces with ease.

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Open children and minor accounts conveniently with Maisarah’s App

MUSCAT: Maisarah Islamic Banking Services continues to offer innovative banking solutions within its Mobile Banking Application that meet the various financial requirements of customers, with exclusive features and added value benefits.

Maisarah has recently announced added features to its Mobile Banking Application; the new feature enables customers to open a new Children and Minor Accounts at their convenience, with easy steps.

Commenting on the launch, Marwan bin Mohammed al Zadjali, Head of Digital Banking at Maisarah, said: “We have constantly been working to improve the App features and services to fulfil the needs of our customers and even exceed their expectations.

We are glad to announce the Children and Minor accounts opening service, which enables



users to complete the account opening process in a few minutes, saving them time and effort, and thus enhancing their banking experience with Maisarah. We look forward to introducing further services and features which will be available for our customers at their fingertips.”

In addition to opening a Savings Account via the App; customers willing to open a new Children and Minor Accounts may download Maisarah’s Mobile Banking App, which is available for IOS, Android and Huawei – App Gallery mobiles or smart

devices, and follow the steps. In addition to the account opening, users may follow-up on the status of their application through Maisarah’s mobile App.

This option is available for all Omani and non-Omani residents of the Sultanate of Oman.

Upon successful account opening, customers may request to get the debit card delivered to wherever they are in the Sultanate of Oman.

Maisarah’s innovative Mobile Banking App is a full-fledged smart banking platform designed thoroughly with the utmost attention to detail to offer 24/7 convenience to users at their fingertips.

New services and features are introduced constantly to give customers the ultimate banking experience they deserve.

The App is highly secure and is periodically enhanced with more safety and security measures.

Excitement builds for Ooredoo’s next Manzili raffle draw

MUSCAT: Ooredoo’s Home Raffle Draw is offering one lucky customer the chance to win a brand new dream home.

Upgrade or subscribe to an Ooredoo 5G or Fibre Home Internet plan of just RO 28 and above, and you will automatically be entered into Ooredoo’s Home Raffle Draw to win your dream home and a whole host of other exciting prizes!

But be quick, the next draw is in February!

This first draw saw winners taking home a new PlayStation 5, a Smart TV, a mesh device, as well as a free 3, 6 and 9 month Home Internet subscription and even a lifetime subscription!

Every Ooredoo Home Internet plan comes with generous data allowances to suit every need and budget, from 600GB per month to unlimited, with speeds up to 1024 Mbps.



Customers can also receive complimentary access to STARZPLAY, OSN+ and YouTube on selected plans to add even more value to their monthly plan.

Don’t miss out on this incredible chance to upgrade your world, visit the Ooredoo website, log on to the award-winning App or head to one of the many stores across Oman to find out more to be in with

a chance of scooping the grand prize.

Full details of the prizes and terms and conditions, as well as the full range of Ooredoo’s available Home Internet plans, are available here <https://shop.ooredoo.om/home-broadband/> and you could be enjoying high-speed digital connectivity on Ooredoo’s nationwide 5G network and win one of the many amazing prizes.

National Finance drives business excellence at forum in Suhar

MUSCAT: Affirming an unwavering dedication to fostering the growth of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, participated in the prestigious Finance and Insurance Forum – ‘Empowerment & Sustainability’, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries’ (OCCI) Sohar branch.

The event was held under the patronage of His Excellency Abdullah bin Salem Al Salmi, Chief Executive Officer of Capital Market Authority; in strategic partnership with several governmental and private sector institutions.

The forum also witnessed the presence of esteemed dignitaries, C-suite executives and industry experts. Centered on the themes of empowerment and sustainability within the business sector, the Finance and Insurance Forum served as a platform for insightful sessions delving into the importance of cultivating a conducive environment for



business growth and development. The event sought to familiarise SMEs and business owners with the wide range of banking and financing services, and insurance solutions available to them in the market.

The forum also highlighted the indispensable role of financial institutions in bolstering businesses and SMEs, with discussions emphasising the need for tailored financial instruments that enable businesses to scale and achieve sustainable success.

In line with this, National Finance showcased its extensive range of finance solutions designed to meet the unique needs of businesses of all sizes, and fuel their growth and expansion.

The company’s booth at the event provided a range of consultations to visitors interested in developing new ventures, and strategising the expansion of their enterprises.

It is worth noting that National Finance’s wide range of offerings is characterised by impressive

speed of service, and flexible tenures and repayment schedules, aiming to provide a distinctive experience for customers that reflects the innovative approach the company operates under.

The company’s participation in OCCI’s Finance and Insurance Forum — ‘Empowerment and Sustainability’ exemplifies its commitment to contributing to the development and sustainability of businesses in the country, while driving excellence in the business sector.



Vodafone Oman gains ISO 45001 certification

MUSCAT: Vodafone Oman has obtained the international ISO 45001 certificate, further underlining the company’s commitment to customer experience and care.

This standard in occupational health and safety management systems provides a framework for organisations to establish, implement, maintain, and continually improve occupational health and safety performance.

Having launched its operations in 2021, Vodafone Oman met the criteria of the ISO 45001 standard in an impressively quick time frame.

Eng Bader al Zidi, CEO, Vodafone Oman, said: “At Vodafone Oman, we continue to strive to set and maintain the highest levels of service that

benchmark ourselves against international standards.

Achieving the ISO 45001 certificate in such a short period since our inception reflects our strong commitment to operational excellence and our focus on prioritising people’s wellbeing.”

The ISO 45001 certificate was developed to construct a system that safeguards the health and safety of employees as well as enhance a company’s reputation and business continuity.

Its core objective is to prevent accidents and injuries that could disrupt workflow and compromise employee wellbeing, reaffirming Vodafone Oman’s commitment to upholding industry standards and best practices throughout all of its operations.



National Product Loyalty Programme to empower private sector in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

Al Khadouri pointed out that the ministry is working on developing the industrial sector by leveraging national industrial capabilities as a primary driver for the desired economic diversification outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Additionally, governance of sectors related to employing national labour is crucial for investment, he said.

Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Chairman of the Board of the Omani Industrialists Association, said the initiative aims to enhance consumer confidence in local products, support national industries, and increase employment opportunities.

He emphasised that loyalty to Omani products is a national duty for every citizen, contributing to various economic and social goals such as supporting national industries, creating new job opportunities, increasing added value to the national economy, and promoting self-sufficiency.

Additionally, supporting local products contributes to the competitiveness of Omani products in both local and international markets, leading to increased exports and reinforcing self-sufficiency by reducing reliance on imported goods.

Dr Rajab bin Ali al Owaisi, Social and Educational Researcher at the State Council, expressed that the National Product Loyalty Programme is a significant turning point in building a responsible national sentiment. The programme is seen as an excellent opportunity to redirect attention to local products and strengthen their presence in the consumer culture, promoting a deeper understanding of food security.

Furthermore, he added that this qualitative step will have its positive impact and qualitative implications not only on the national consumer in the path of confidence, as he turns towards Omani products but also in the sense of pride and satisfaction in the ability of these local products to compete.

It proves their qualitative presence and competence in the market, establishing their excellence as the preferred choice for citizens.

Promising use of Omani silica sand in energy storage for green hydrogen

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JAN 16

A key study led by Omani scientists underscores the potential for the Sultanate of Oman to capitalise on the abundance of high-quality silica sand for cost-competitive thermal energy storage - a prerequisite for the large-scale production of green hydrogen and green ammonia in the country.

Publication of the study, titled 'Silica Sand as Thermal Energy Storage for Renewable-based Hydrogen and Ammonia Production Plants,' comes as Oman prepares to embark on a landmark transition to clean energy production and export.

A portfolio of clean energy projects lined up for implementation in the coming decade envisage around \$50 billion worth of investment inflows to achieve a production of 1 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen by 2030.

Muscat-based researchers Nasser al Rezeiqi (PhD candidate at Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology) and Mariam Jedda participated in



Oman has an abundance of high-quality silica sand suitable for thermal energy storage. Picture for illustration only.

the study, supported by Peng Yen Liew, Associate Professor of Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology.

It delved into the potential for silica sand - an abundant, thermally stable and low-cost and low-cost method for storing thermal energy at temperatures as high as 1,200 deg C.

The technology is particularly effective in addressing intermittency challenges associated with renewable energy.

Thus, after sundown for example, when solar power is no longer available to harness, heat stored in silica sand can be discharged and converted into electricity by driving an electric power system, the paper points out.

Silica sand-based thermal energy storage can be particularly advantageous for Oman, according to the researchers.

"The silica sand in the Sultanate of Oman was found

to be ultra-pure; a composition National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) [part of the US Department of Energy] has proven to have ideal thermal properties for its use as a

Thermal Energy Storage system. NREL has also proposed a standalone sand-TES concept, which offers ample storage capacities, longer discharging hours and meagre cost compared to other commercial energy storage technologies," they noted

in their paper.

Simulations conducted by the researchers found that the silica sand-based thermal energy storage system offers far greater economic benefits in comparison with commercial lithium batteries in maintaining the full-day operation of a 500 MW solar-based green ammonia production plant in Duqm.

"The result shows that using silica sand as a TES system significantly reduced the unit production cost of green hydrogen and green ammonia by 59% and 48%, compared to the use of lithium-ion batteries, where the green hydrogen and green ammonia lifetime normalised costs fell to 0.60 US\$/kgH₂ and 0.16 US\$/kgNH₃.

"The sand TES system is thus a promising solution for intermittent renewable energy storage. The low cost and abundance offered through a sand TES system will contribute to ramping up renewable energy projects, thus driving down the costs of clean energy and renewable energy-based products," the paper added in conclusion.

Chinese refiners hunt for oil to replenish stocks

SINGAPORE: Chinese refiners are actively booking crude oil cargoes for delivery in March and April to replenish stocks, locking-in relatively low prices and in anticipation of stronger demand in the second half of 2024, trade sources said.

Global benchmark Brent futures have stayed under \$80 a barrel since December despite rising tensions in the Middle East, making oil attractive, while Beijing has issued fresh quotas for crude imports and fuel exports to refiners, allowing them to boost purchases and operations.

Robust demand from the world's top crude importer is underpinning spot premiums for Middle East crude exports even as Asian refiners plan seasonal maintenance for the second



Oil tankers at Sinopec Yaogang depot in Nantong, China. — Reuters

quarter that typically reduces the region's oil demand.

"There will be a stock-building spree over the Q1-Q2, in preparation for the summer," said Kpler analyst Viktor Katona, repeating a trend seen by Chinese refiners in 2023.

"This has worked wonders for them last year and this year it seems to have an even better delineation between a weaker H1 and a stronger H2."

China bought record volumes last year to build its biggest ever oil stockpile of more than 1 billion

barrels.

Refiners started drawing down stocks from late July, helping China to sail through a price rally powered by voluntary output cuts by Organisation of Petroleum exporting Countries (Opec) kingpin Saudi Arabia last year.

China's crude stocks fell to 933-951 million barrels last week, data compiled by analytic firms Vortexa and Kpler showed, after refiners ramped up crude processing in the fourth quarter.

"Chinese refiners, led by Unipet, are moving quickly this month... They snap oil from all over the world, except for the US due to high freight rates," said an oil trader with a Chinese refiner, referring to the trading arm of Asia's largest refiner Sinopec.

— Reuters

Russian rouble stabilises after reaching a six-month high



One Russian rouble coin pictured in front of a Kremlin tower in Moscow. — Reuters

MOSCOW: The Russian rouble stabilised on Tuesday, consolidating sharp gains made in the previous session when the currency soared to a more than six-month high, buoyed by increased state forex sales.

At 0742 GMT, the rouble was unchanged against the dollar at 87.58, not far from 87.3725, its strongest point since June 30.

It had gained 0.3% to trade at 95.69 versus the euro and firmed 0.1% against the yuan to 12.13. State FX sales, carried out by the central bank, are set to amount to the equivalent of 16.7 billion roubles (\$190.7 million) of foreign currency a day until the end of January, after the finance ministry switched to making sales from purchases after December oil and gas revenue was lower than expected.

That, along with existing capital controls obliging exporters to convert foreign currency revenues, is supporting the rouble.

"For now we continue to expect rouble strengthening, possibly with the (rouble-dollar) pair moving towards the stronger hurdle of 85," said Alor Broker's Alexei Antonov.

"But there may be a light correction before this movement." — Reuters

Salalah Mills acquires 50 per cent stake in Yemeni food company

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, JAN 16

Salalah Mills Company SAOG, a publicly traded company listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has signed an agreement to secure a 50% stake in Al-Rayyan Grain Mills and Silos Company of Yemen - a move that solidifies its commitment to regional expansion and addressing Yemen's pressing food challenges.

Building upon the momentum from their earlier disclosure in August 2023, Raysut-based Salalah Mills has made a strategic investment of approximately RO 2.5 million in acquiring the stake in Al-Rayyan Grain Mills, strategically located in the



Salalah Mills' complex at Raysut in Dhofar Governorate.

Hadhramaut Governorate's city of Mukalla, Republic of Yemen.

The agreement, signed on January 10, 2024, follows Salalah Mills' announcement in November 2023, wherein the company revealed plans to

establish 'Yemeni Omani Food Company LLC,' a joint venture headquartered in Yemen.

This new company, in which Salalah Mills will hold a 50% stake, is set to import and distribute grains, addressing the growing

demand for food in Yemen, a country with a population exceeding 30 million.

The authorised capital for this joint venture stands at \$25 million, with an initial paid-up capital of 50%, to be financed through commercial loans.

By entering into this partnership, Salalah Mills aims to contribute significantly to improving food accessibility in Yemen and providing the local population with high-quality food products sourced from Oman.

Beyond the business aspect, the joint venture is expected to deepen economic ties between Oman and Yemen, fostering a positive trajectory for both nations.

Equality department pay is now less, for men



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our
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UK.

While there is increasing emphasis on equality and fair pay in the workplace in the UK and in the European Union states, recent figures show the difference in government departments in Ireland, an EU country. The gender pay gap at the Department of Equality has widened since last year.

Women at the department, which falls under Minister Roderic O’Gorman, were already paid slightly more than men on average, last year.

The difference has now risen to -5.2 per cent from -3.6 per cent last year, the Department said in its 2023 gender pay gap report. A negative pay gap is one

where the pay difference is in favour of women. It means that every 1 euro a man earns in the department, a woman earns 1.05 euros.

The reason for the gap appears to be the fact that there are more women than men among the top 25 per cent earners in the Department. More than half (55 per cent) of the department’s almost 700 staff are women.

When measured in median terms the mid-point between the highest and lowest salaries, which can strip out distortions at the top or bottom of the pay scale — the gap widens even further to -13.1 per cent.

That means for every 1 euro a man earns, a woman earns 1.13 euros. The pay gap in the wider economy was 9.6 per cent

last year, in favour of men, the Central Statistics Office said, meaning for every 1 euro a man earns, a woman earns 0.90 euros.

Ireland’s new pay gap legislation, which was overseen by the Department of Equality, is now in its second year of operation, requiring companies with more than 250 staff to report on differences in average hourly pay between males and females across the business.

People who do not identify as either male or female are not included in the calculations. Of all the public bodies that have filed reports so far, Clare and South Dublin County councils have the biggest pay gaps in favour of women, both at -9.9 per cent.

Both gaps have widened on last year in favour of women.

County Councils in Tipperary, Dun Laoghaire, Rathdown, Mayo and Cork also have pay gaps in favour of women.

Tipperary and Cork County council swung from pay gaps in favour of men last year. Within the public service, the largest pay gaps in favour of men are in the Office of Public Works, which looks after flood protection, public buildings, and monuments and Transport Infrastructure Ireland which runs the Luas tram and is responsible for road tolls.

Pay gaps in both organisations exceed 16 per cent, though both have improved slightly on last year. That means women earn 0.84 euros for every 1 euro men earn.

Teagasc, the agriculture and food development authority,

also has a high pay gap in favour of men, at 11 per cent. Meath County Council and the National Transport Authority which runs the country’s bus and rail services, both saw their pay gaps widen in favour of men in 2023.

The revelations come after the Financial Services Union called on Ireland’s three main retail banks to urgently address their “very worrying” gender pay gaps.

The average gap across the three banks — AIB, Bank of Ireland and PTSB — is almost 19 per cent, falling to just under 14 per cent in median terms. Pay gaps can swing from year to year depending on when and how many people are hired, as the calculations are based on a snapshot of company pay data on one day in the month of June.

Why are so many companies ‘rightsizing’?



Various companies have used the term to describe job cuts, but some criticise the language as opaque. – The New York Times



EMMA GOLDBERG

The writer is a business reporter covering workplace culture and the future of work for *The New York Times*.

BUT EXPERTS CAUTION THAT AVOIDING THE PHRASE “JOB CUTS” DOESN’T SOFTEN THE BLOW FOR EMPLOYEES.

Some layoffs were announced in the strange, isolating environment of remote work settings — with workers shutting down their laptops, in their living rooms, knowing they might never speak to their teammates again.

When Wayfair, the furniture retailer, announced last January that it was laying off 1,750 employees, or 10 per cent of its workforce, the company said it was part of a “rightsizing” plan. That same month, when PayPal eliminated 2,000 full-time roles, or 7 per cent of its overall staff, the company also discussed “rightsizing our cost structure.”

But experts caution that avoiding the phrase “job cuts” doesn’t soften the blow for employees.

“This language can dehumanise the process,” Lee said, “and perhaps have the unintended effect of making the employee feel that the company doesn’t fully realise the real impact the decision has.”

Sandra Sucher, a Harvard University professor of management who has studied layoffs, said using euphemisms during a layoff process could reflect the psychological phenomenon of “moral disengagement,” in which business leaders rely on squishy language to distance themselves from the ethics of their decisions.

But for workers, the term “rightsizing” means one thing: They’ve been laid off.

— The New York Times

Flush with investment, new US factories face a familiar challenge



ANA SWANSON

The author writes about trade and international economics for *The New York Times*. She previously covered the economy, trade and the Federal Reserve for *The Washington Post*.



JIM TANKERSLEY

The writer covers economic policy at the White House for *The New York Times*.



Workers perform a quality check on a solar panel production line at a factory in Suzhou, China. – The New York Times

the West.

The Chinese imports mirror a surge that undercut the Obama administration’s efforts to seed domestic solar manufacturing after the 2008 financial crisis and drove some American startups out of business. The administration retaliated with tariffs on solar equipment from China, sparking a dispute at the World Trade Organization.

Some Biden officials are concerned that Chinese products could again threaten the survival of US factories when the government is spending huge sums to jump-start domestic manufacturing. Administration officials appear likely to raise tariffs on electric vehicles and other strategic goods from China, as part of a review of the levies President Donald Trump imposed on China four years ago, according to people familiar with the matter. That review, which has been underway since Biden took office, could finally conclude in the next few months.

Congress is also agitating for more protections. In a Jan. 5 letter to the Biden administration, bipartisan members of a House committee expressed concerns about China flooding the United States with semiconductors.

Lawmakers asked whether the government could establish a new “component” tariff that would tax a chip imported inside another finished product.

That followed a November

letter in which members of the same committee advised the Biden administration to consider a new trade case over China’s electric vehicle subsidies, which could result in additional tariffs on cars.

Katherine Tai, the US trade representative, told the lawmakers that she shared concerns about China’s practices in the electric vehicle industry.

Tai told the committee that the administration needed “to work with US companies and unions to identify and deploy additional responses to help overcome China’s state-directed industrial targeting in this sector.”

The United States has maintained tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars of Chinese products over the past five years, viewing that as a way to offset Beijing’s ability to undercut American manufacturers by selling cheaper products in the United States.

Biden has tried to further help American companies with billions in subsidies intended to boost US manufacturing of clean energy technology such as solar panels and electric vehicles along with semiconductors.

Yet Chinese industrial policy spending still far outstrips that of the US. Facing an economic slowdown and a gradual bursting of the property bubble, the Chinese government has recently redoubled efforts to promote exports and support its factory

sector.

Beijing is particularly focused on investment in high-tech products with strategic importance, such as electric vehicles and semiconductors, said Ilaria Mazzocco, a senior fellow in Chinese business and economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

“Those are also the kinds of industry the rest of the world wants as well,” she said.

Some of China’s success stems from its larger market — which gives Chinese firms the scale and opportunity to hone their products — along with its vast pool of talented engineers. China sold about 6.7 million all-electric vehicles last year, for example, compared with around 1.2 million units in the United States.

The Chinese government has said that it competes fairly and described US trade measures as protectionist.

But Wendy Cutler, the vice president at the Asia Society Policy Institute and a former trade negotiator, said China’s clean energy and semiconductor industries had received a lot of state assistance, in the form of tax credits, access to cheaper energy and equity infusions.

“The list goes on and on,” she said. “As Chinese companies avail themselves of these types of systems, it just leads to overcapacity.”

— The New York Times



Oil prices mixed amid broad economic concerns

NEW YORK: Oil prices were mixed on Tuesday, after posting losses the previous session, as broad economic concerns outweighed continued tensions in the Middle East that led to more tanker diversions.

Brent crude futures gained 3 cents, or about 0.04 per cent, to \$78.15 a barrel at 0647 GMT. The contract had settled 14 cents lower on Monday.

US West Texas Intermediate crude was down 23 cents, or 0.32 per cent, at \$72.45 per barrel after a US public holiday on Monday.

"Fears of weaker economic growth weighed on sentiment across the commodity complex. This was despite rising tensions in the Red Sea," ANZ analysts said in a client note.

Asian shares dropped to a one-month low, US stock futures fell and the dollar rose on Tuesday as hawkish remarks from central bankers tempered expectations for interest rate cuts, ahead of an economic outlook speech

by the US Federal Reserve's Christopher Waller at 1600 GMT on Tuesday.

Some concerns over how China's demand could pan out in the near-term after the country's central bank left the medium-term policy rate (MLF) unchanged on Monday, also weighed on oil prices.

"Yesterday's refusal of China's central bank, PBoC, to enact a cut on its 1-year MLF rate has dampened the expectations of more pronounced stimulus measures from China's top policymakers which in turn led to a weaker demand narrative for oil that capped further potential upside," said OANDA's senior markets analyst Kelvin Wong.

Meanwhile, extremely cold weather in the US that could curb oil production and also affect major refinery operations was in focus as well, analysts said.

North Dakota oil production has already fallen by 400,000 to 425,000



Illustration shows miniatures of oil barrels and rising stock graph.

barrels per day on extreme cold and related operational issues.

"At present, the wait-and-see sentiment in the oil market is relatively heavy, with the escalation of geopolitical conflicts offset by the (earlier) accumulation of inventory (in the US)," said CMC Markets' analyst Leon Li.

Official inventory data from the US Energy Information Administration is expected on Thursday, delayed by one day this week due to the holiday on Monday.

In the Middle East, Yemen's Ansar Allah will expand its targets in the Red Sea region to include US ships, an official from the Iran-allied group said on Monday, as it vowed to keep up attacks after US and British strikes on its sites in Yemen.

More oil tankers were steering clear of the southern Red Sea on Monday due to the disruptions, increasing the cost of shipping and the time it takes to move oil from one place to another. — **Reuters**

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■ ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Global Creation Edge LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1207158**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **250,000,000** to **50,000,000**. 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 and Industry within 30 days from the date hereof.

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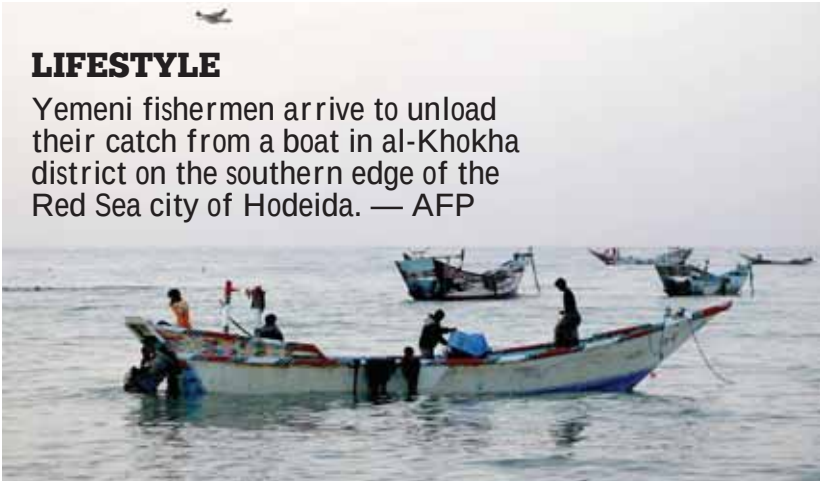
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LIFESTYLE
Yemeni fishermen arrive to unload their catch from a boat in al-Khokha district on the southern edge of the Red Sea city of Hodeida. — AFP



MUSIC
Sudanese guitarist Elzain Ali performs during a concert at the Goethe institute in the Egyptian capital Cairo .— AFP



FILM
South Korean director Lee Sung Jin, winner of the Best Limited Series award for “Beef,” Santa Monica, California. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
A participant tries to control a bull during an annual bull-taming festival ‘Jallikattu’ in Palamedu village. — AFP



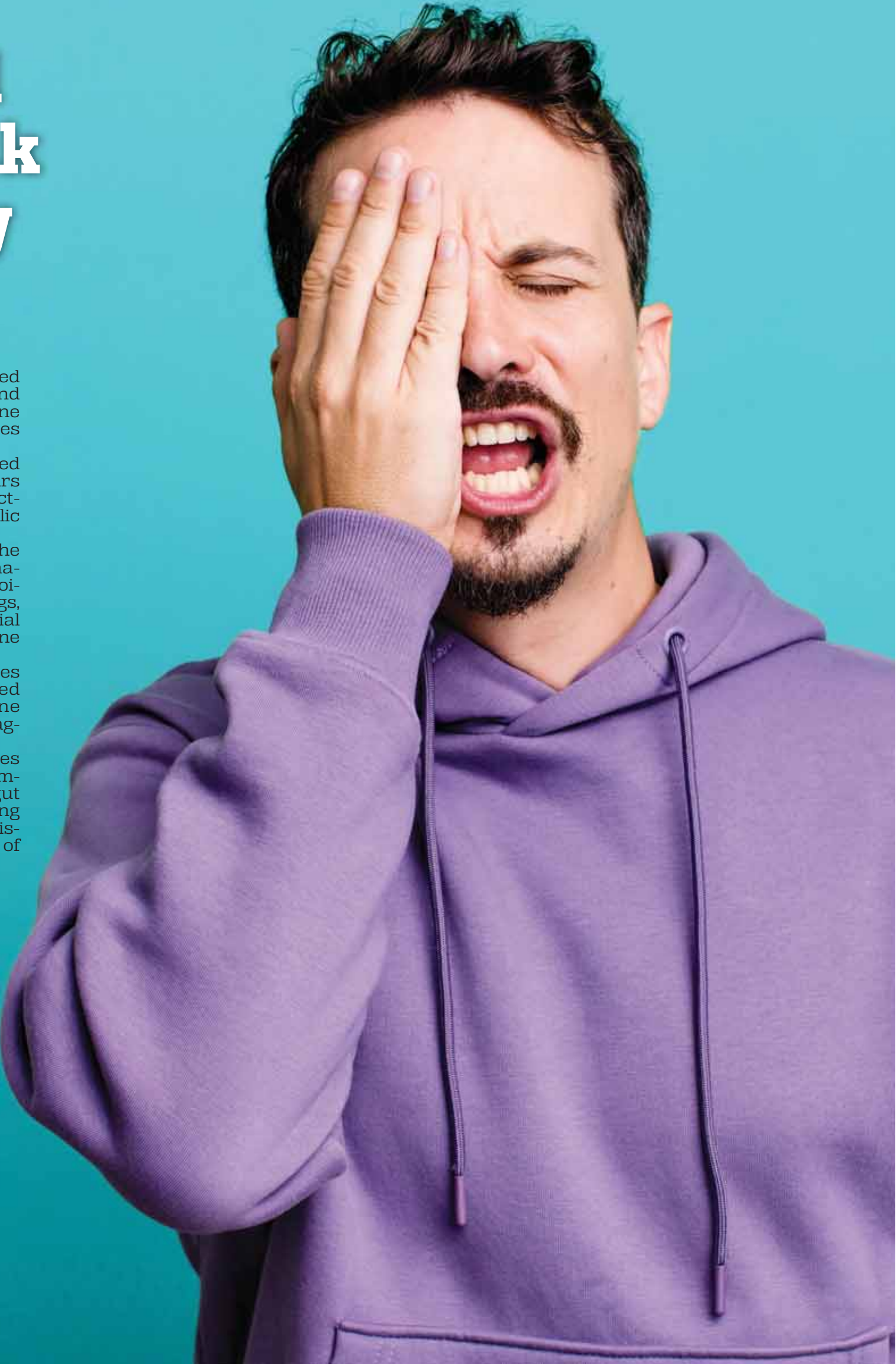
ENVIRONMENT
Forest conservationist Joseph Garrigue poses in the Massane forest nature reserve in the Pyrenees-Orientales department of southern France. — AFP

art & life

Migraine linked to increased risk of inflammatory bowel disease

A RECENT SCIENTIFIC reports explored the potential link between migraine and the development of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), encompassing Crohn’s disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC). Migraine, a neurological disorder causing painful headaches, is often associated with gastrointestinal symptoms and has been linked to irritable bowel syndrome and IBD, suggesting a connection with the gut-brain axis. Utilising data from the South Korean National Health Insurance Service, the study involved 10,131,193 individuals who underwent routine health screenings in 2009. Migraine prevalence was higher among seniors, females, low-income individuals, and rural residents. Migraineurs had a 1.3-fold increased risk of developing IBD compared to the general population.

Sub-group analysis revealed a higher risk of both CD and UC development in migraine patients, particularly in males with UC. The risk of CD increased significantly after five years among migraineurs, unaffected by sex, age, or metabolic comorbidities. Dietary factors, such as the Western diet, and pharmaceutical agents like nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, were identified as potential contributors to both migraine and IBD. This research underscores the need for IBD-related awareness in migraine patients, enabling early diagnosis and intervention. The study also explores mechanisms like proinflammatory cytokines and gut microbial dysbiosis linking migraine with IBD, emphasising the multifaceted nature of their association. —ONA





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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

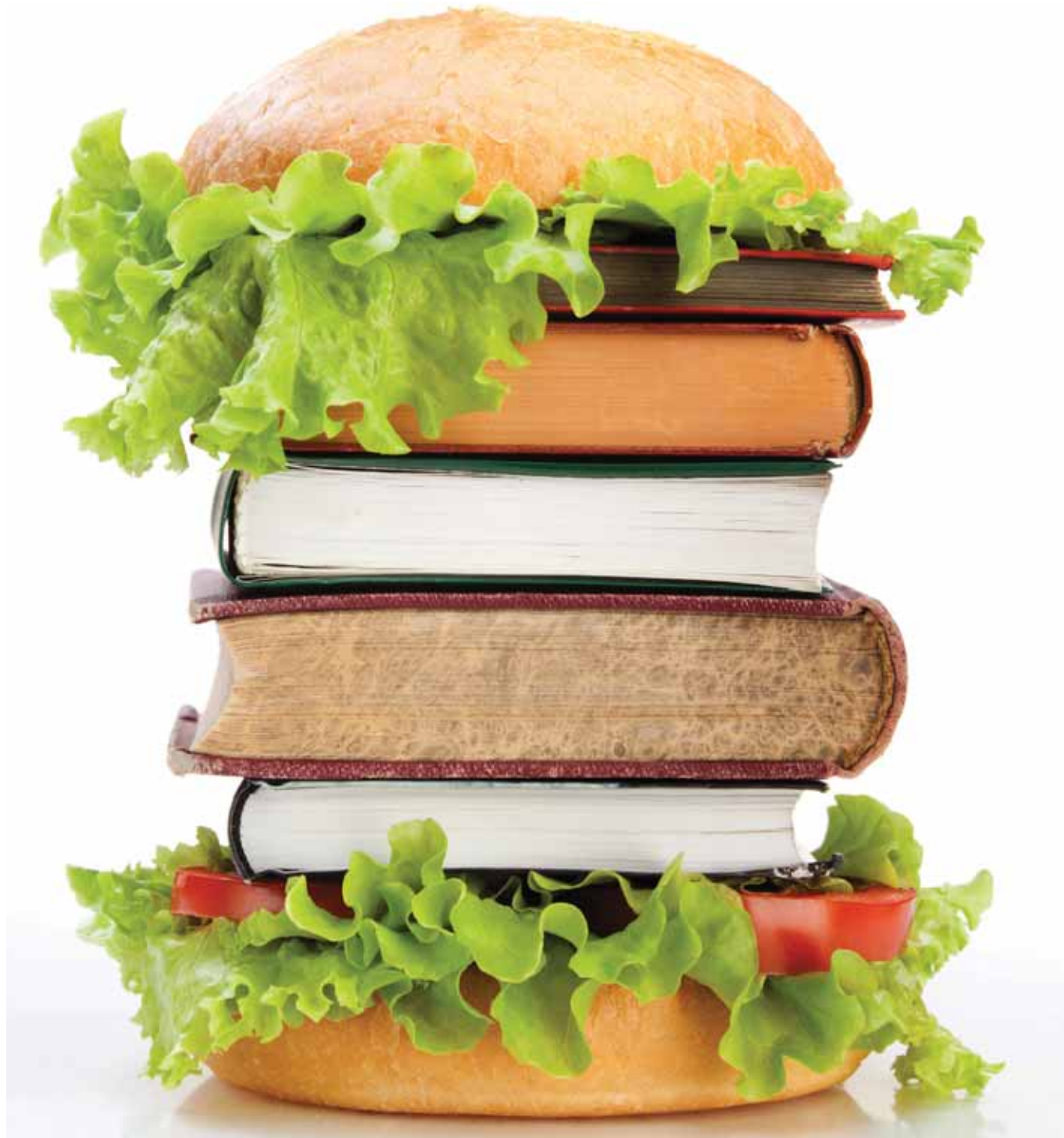


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These books will help heal your relationship with food



HOW IS YOUR relationship with food these days? For many of us, the honest answer is "it's complicated." Perhaps you stress-eat more than you'd care to admit or are always on the latest diet. Maybe you just spend too much mental energy on food and have a nagging sense that it's supposed to be, well, easier.

If you're looking for a reset, you might start with some reading — we're in something of a heyday for books about food and bodies. We asked nine experts in psychology, nutrition and body image for their recommendations. These picks will help you understand why many of us relate to food the way we do, and how to shift into a healthier way of thinking about food.

'INTUITIVE EATING: A Revolutionary Anti-Diet Approach,' by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch

Most of the practitioners we consulted mentioned this bible of intuitive eating. "It's a classic for a reason," said Christy Harrison, a registered dietitian and author who hosts the podcast "Rethinking Wellness."

The authors are dietitians with a bold claim: We were all born knowing how to nourish ourselves, and we get into trouble when we start trusting the voices around us instead of our bodies. They walk readers through the process of unlearning "diet mentality" and reconnecting with their internal cues about hunger and satisfaction.

While intuitive eating is somewhat well known today, the book was truly "ground-breaking" when first published in 1995, said Shelly Russell-Mayhew, a psychology professor and director of the Body Image Research Lab at the University of Calgary.

'GENTLE NUTRITION: A Non-Diet Approach to Healthy Eating,' by Rachael Hartley

Part intuitive eating guide, part cookbook, "Gentle Nutrition" teaches readers to take care of their bodies through nutrition without strict rules or diet dogma. "This is one of the few nutrition books that I can confidently recommend," said Alissa Rumsey, a registered dietitian and certified intuitive eating counsellor.

"It's full of really approachable information about health and nutrition science," Rumsey added, along with 50 nutrient-packed recipes — without calorie counts or punishingly restrictive ingredient lists.

'IN DEFENCE OF FOOD: An Eater's Manifesto,' by Michael Pollan

In this practical follow-up to "The Omnivore's Dilemma," journalist Michael Pollan expands on his dietary mantra: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." He also makes an elegant critique of "nutritionism," or the modern, widely accepted notion that the value of food can be reduced to its constituent nutrients.

It's that mechanistic view of food that keeps so many of us confused about what to eat, said Christopher Gardner, a nutrition researcher and professor of medicine

at Stanford University. Pollan's book points to flaws in this approach and puts forward a way of eating where we're "not at the mercy" of complex diets and contradictory headlines, Gardner said.

'FEARING THE BLACK BODY: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia,' by Sabrina Strings

Four of our experts endorsed this accessible academic title by the sociologist Sabrina Strings; the book "masterfully traces the history of fatphobia and its intersections with anti-Black racism," said Alexis Conason, a clinical psychologist and certified specialist in eating disorders.

Strings makes a heavily cited case that modern society's idolisation of thinness is less rooted in medical science than in racist ideas born during the Enlightenment. "Spoiler alert: It's not all about health," Conason said.

'SALT SUGAR FAT: How the Food Giants Hooked Us,' by Michael Moss

This bestselling exposé from a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist (and former Times investigative reporter) reveals how the processed-food industry manipulates our taste buds and exploits our biology to keep us eating foods that make us feel lousy. Translation: Polishing off a sleeve of cookies when you're barely hungry isn't a personal moral failing — it's a carefully engineered result.

Understanding this can help us off-load some of the guilt we have around food, Gardner said. "It's not just that I don't have any willpower," he said, explaining that the "food industry is doing this on purpose."

'WHAT WE DON'T TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FAT,' BY AUBREY GORDON

Writer and podcaster Aubrey Gordon takes a social justice lens to our treatment of people living in bigger bodies. And she illuminates how much of the way we may relate to food is not about our health so much as our culturally indoctrinated fear of being fat.

Questioning the default aversion to fatness is a critical step if we hope to find a less fraught perspective on food, said Virginia Ramseyer Winter, director of the Center for Body Image Research and Policy at the University of Missouri. "When we can come to terms with our own internal anti-fatness, then we can approach food differently," Winter said. Plus, she added, Gordon is a "really brilliant writer."

'INTUITIVE EATING FOR LIFE: How Mindfulness Can Deepen and Sustain Your Intuitive Eating Practice,' by Jenna Hollenstein

Jenna Hollenstein is a nutrition therapist and meditation teacher. (She also shared suggestions for this list.) Here, she leans on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, a classical Buddhist teaching, as a framework for eating with satisfaction, ease and joy.

The awareness and curiosity cultivated through mindfulness can support us on our food healing journey, Rumsey said. It's a fruitful path — and we don't have to walk it alone. —**NYT**

FASHION

Artificial intelligence to hit 40% Of jobs: IMF

A NEW ANALYSIS by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reveals that artificial intelligence (AI) is projected to impact nearly 40 per cent of all jobs.

IMF's Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva, highlights the need for policymakers to address this trend to prevent social tensions.

While AI is expected to enhance productivity for some workers, in other cases, it may replace tasks currently performed by humans, impacting wages



and job availability.

The IMF estimates that AI will affect 60 per cent of jobs

in advanced economies, compared to 26 per cent in low-income countries. — **ONA**

FLOWER

Global flowering plants face extinction threat: Study

IN A RECENT STUDY, scientists from the Royal Botanic Gardens, in the United Kingdom, utilised artificial intelligence (AI) to assess the extinction risk of flowering plants globally.

The study's objective was to enhance the representation of plants on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, a vital tool for conservation funding.

With the goal of increasing representation on the IUCN Red List, the AI iden-



tified a staggering 45 per cent of the 330,000 assessed species as threatened.

Lead researcher Steven Bachman emphasises the urgency of prioritising plant conservation, as only 18 per cent of plant species have made it onto the Red

List, raising concerns about the potential consequences for biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Conservation efforts are crucial, as the study highlights the impact of potential extinctions on food sources and medicine development. — **ONA**



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A ride back to past with national geographic team



KHALED ABDUL MALAK

It was last year when Marianne Tames-Demauras, an archeologist, sent me a message asking if I was interested in participating in a National Geographic episode on Oman for the series "Lost cities revealed" with Albert Lin. It was an unexpected and great offer, one that I could not refuse, so I responded with a big "YES". It was not the first time that I participated in a TV show about Oman but being part of a production by Nat Geo was the ultimate experience. A couple of months following the first contact, the director, Pete Chinn and the health and safety officer Graeme Douglas came to Oman to meet with me in order to check the sites I proposed for the episode. Albert was interested in the Bronze Age period when Oman was known as Majan and was trading in copper with Mesopotamia. The first site we visited was Wadi Al Hijri, one of the main branches of Wadi Tanuf, which

originates in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. In this Wadi that I visited many times in the past, I had seen many petroglyphs and beehive tombs dating back to the bronze age. Wadi al Hijri is, as well, home to many abandoned villages where I met my belated friend Musabah al Jamoodi when he was living in Dmeitha with his wife Nasra around 17 years ago. Along with Pete and Graeme we drove early morning on 26 October, 2022 to Wadi Al Hijri to check the site. We parked our car at the junction of Wadi Hijri and Wadi Qasheh, the two branches of Wadi Tanuf and started our hike in the Wadi where the tombs and petroglyphs are located. On our way we passed by an abandoned village called Al Hobe which some shepherds still use as a shelter. The stone houses were built in the caves in the cliff on the right bank of the canyon. After approximately one hour and a half of trekking we reached the place where we had to climb on the mountain to reach the old beehive tombs. They were situated at the edge of the cliff overlooking the Wadi below with a

breathtaking panoramic view! Pete and Graeme were very happy with what they saw and decided to shoot one sequence of the documentary in that spot when they returned to Oman in January with Albert. They took plenty of pictures of the sites we visited before returning to Muscat. On the next day I decided to take them to the Selma plateau to Aaqabat Khashal aka the Seventh Hole, one of the 4 sinkholes that forms the 12 kilometres Selma plateau cave system. The drive took around 3 hours from Muscat, in the direction of Sur on the coastal highway. When we reached the village of Fins we had to drive up the mountain to approximately 1400 meters of altitude on one of the most spectacular dirt roads in the country. The track is very steep with plenty of tight curves to take! It took us around one hour to reach our destination after leaving the highway. On the way we passed by the village of Al Marfas where my friend Yusuf al Ghadani used to live

before moving to Fins recently. I had met Yusuf around 23 years ago when I visited the resurgence of the 4 sinkholes. He was watching his goats at the entrance of the gigantic cave Al Tahri. The first time I came to the 7th hole was in 2004 with a couple of French professional climbers and an English journalist visiting Oman to write an article about outdoors activities in the country. It is an impressive 120 metres deep sinkhole draining 3 canyons on the plateau. The chamber of the sinkhole is huge and looks like a massive cathedral. Pete and Graeme were impressed by the site and decided to use it as well for the documentary in the part where Albert would be talking about the aquifer in Oman. In the next few days, they went to visit other archeological sites in Ras Al Hadd and Bissiah. Peter and Graeme were very enthusiastic to come back in January with a team of 14 people including Albert Lin, an archeologist and the technical personnel for the shooting of the documen-

tary titled "Miracle in the desert." The whole crew was in Oman by the end of December 2022 and I joined them to start the shooting of the documentary on Selma plateau. A team from the company I work with 'Change Your Routine' joined me to set up the ropes needed to take down Albert Lin and the filming crew in the Seventh hole. Albert was the first to abseil down the sinkhole and I was the second. The filming crew went into the cave using another route and they were ready inside to film our descent (Albert and me) of the 120m free drop. It took the whole day to finish the shooting after which we headed to our campsite to spend the night and move the next day to Wadi Hijri. It took us two more days to finish filming the petroglyphs and the beehive tombs in Wadi Hijri after which I left the team who continued shooting in Ras Al Hadd and Bissiah for 5 more days. I was so proud to be part of such a prestigious project and happy to work with a great professional team.