

HM sends greetings to King of the Belgians

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Philippe Léopold Louis Marie of the Belgians on his country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to King Philippe wishing him good health and happiness and further progress and prosperity for the friendly Belgian people. – ONA

SUNRISE - 05:32 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:07 AM
DHUHR - 12:18 PM
ASR - 03:40 PM
MAGHRIB - 07:00 PM
ISHA - 08:19 PM



P13

ASYAD GROUP REVENUES REACH RO 465 MILLION IN 2023



P11

NADAL MAKES FIRST FINAL IN TWO YEARS IN BASTAD



P20

MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS, GEMSTONES SPEAK VOLUMES ABOUT OMAN'S GEODIVERSITY



His Majesty receives phone call from Egyptian President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Saturday received a phone call from President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

During the call, the Egyptian President expressed the solidarity of his country's leadership, government and people with the Sultanate of Oman on the incident that took place in Al Wadi Al Kabir in Muscat.

He also expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people on the martyrdom of a security serviceman and death of some civilians.

On his turn, His Majesty thanked President Sisi of his noble feelings and condolences. His Majesty commended the historical and fraternal relations binding the two countries and their peoples. — ONA



DHOFAR BECKONS AS KHAREEF GAINS PACE

SALALAH: With the misty weather and salubrious nature wearing green blanket, the captivating Dhofar began welcoming an influx of tourists. Drawn by its distinctive climate, which starkly contrasts with the rest of the Arabian Peninsula during the sweltering summer months, visitors arrive to revel in its unique allure. As the days progress into the afternoons, temperatures experience a noticeable decline. This transition ushers in a delightful coolness, creating an inviting environment. Such a climate is a rarity in other parts of the Gulf, further enhancing khareef Dhofar's appeal as a prime destination for those seeking respite from the heat.

PHOTO BY AJI GEORGE

ISRAELI OCCUPATION 'ILLEGAL': UN TOP COURT

OMAN WELCOMES ICJ'S OPINION



The UN's top court handed down its view declaring "illegal" Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967, amid growing international pressure over the war in Gaza. – AFP

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman followed the opinion delivered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding the request of the United Nations General Assembly to the ICJ on the Israeli practices that undermine the rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) including East Jerusalem.

The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the ICJ's confirmation of the illegality of the Israeli practices in the occupied territories as well as its affirmation of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Saturday, the Sultanate of Oman welcomed the opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the legal consequences of the practices of the occupying state, calling at the same time on the international community to enforce the international resolutions and charters and urging for an immediate end to the illegal occupation and an end to settlements and the cycle of violence in the Palestinian territories.

Meanwhile, the UN's top court, in a sweeping opinion, said that Israel's decades-long

occupation of Palestinian territory was "illegal" and needed to end as soon as possible.

The ICJ's statement, called an "advisory opinion", is not binding, but it comes amid mounting concern over the death toll and destruction in Israel's war against Hamas sparked by the group's brutal October 7 attacks.

It is also likely to increase diplomatic pressure on Israel, whose lawmakers on Thursday voted to oppose a Palestinian state, calling it an "existential threat".

In The Hague, ICJ presiding judge Nawaf Salam said: "The court has found... that Israel's continued presence in the Palestinian Territories is illegal." Israel is "under the obligation to bring to an end its unlawful presence as rapidly as possible," the judge said in its finding, read at the Peace Palace, seat of the ICJ.

The ICJ added that Israel was "under an obligation to cease immediately all new settlement activities and to evacuate all settlers" from occupied land.

— Agencies



A handout picture shows a huge column of fire erupting following reported strikes in the Yemeni port city of Hodeidah on Saturday. – AFP

ISRAELI JETS STRIKE TARGETS IN YEMEN

CAIRO: The Israeli military said on Saturday that its fighter jets struck Ansar Allah military targets in the area of Hodeidah port in Yemen in response to hundreds of attacks carried out against Israel in recent months.

Al Masirah TV, the main television news outlet run by Yemen's Ansar Allah movement, reported that the strikes were directed against oil facilities in the port and caused fatalities.

Hodeidah residents said that explosions were heard throughout the city during an intensive bombardment.

On Friday, a long-range drone hit the centre of Tel Aviv in an attack claimed by the Ansar Allah which killed one man and wounded four others, the Israeli military and emergency services said.

"IDF fighter jets struck military targets of the Ansar Allah in the area of the (Hodeidah) port in Yemen in response to the hundreds of attacks carried out against the state of Israel in recent months," Israel's military said.

— Reuters

Gaza doctors deliver unborn baby after pregnant mother killed

GAZA: Rescue workers in central Gaza have saved the unborn baby of a heavily pregnant woman who was killed in an Israeli attack, Palestinian media reported on Saturday.

The Palestinian news agency WAFA said that the child had been delivered in an emergency operation at the Al Awda Hospital in Nuseirat. The newborn is now being treated at the hospital and is said to be in a stable condition, DPA reported.

Palestinian media reported that a total of eight people had been killed in the Israeli army attack on a residential building in the refugee neighbourhood in the coastal strip.

An Israeli army spokesperson said on enquiry that the army had



Baby Yasine, who was reportedly delivered by cesarean section after his 9-month pregnant mother succumbed to her injuries sustained during an overnight Israeli strike on Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip, is caressed by his grandfather. – AFP

attacked "terror targets throughout the Gaza Strip during the night, including terrorists and terror infrastructure in the Nuseirat area."

Ola Adnan Harb al Kurd, who was nine months pregnant, barely survived a punishing night of missile strikes that rescue services across the Hamas-run territory said killed more than 24 people, including six members of the same family. But by the time Kurd reached Al Awda Hospital, she was "almost dead", according to surgeon Akram Hussein. Doctors were unable to save the mother, but performed an ultrasound that detected the baby's heartbeat. – Agencies

Ambitious flagpole in Al Khuwair to be ready by 54th National Day

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

With a large space dedicated to a plethora of activities, Oman's ambitious project, the 126-metre-tall flagpole, is scheduled to be erected in the Ministries District in Al Khuwair. This iconic project will offer leisure and complete family entertainment, while different brands and businesses will make their presence felt at the adjacent business bay.

Termed an architectural icon symbolising Oman's aspirations for progress and success in line with Oman Vision 2040, the project flagpole features a plaza, large lawn, walkways, a skate park, cycle path and cafeteria, along with a variety of entertainment and sports facilities. This will transform it into a vibrant community hub, according to Pacificblue, the main contractor overseeing the monumental project.



Dubbed 'Oman's tallest man-made structure', a huge Omani national flag measuring 18 metres in length and 31.5 metres in width will flutter on top of the flagpole

"Construction on Al Khuwair Square project is nearing completion, and plans are afoot to inaugurate the flagpole coinciding with the country's 54th National Day celebrations in November," a source associated with the construction said.

This 18,000-square-metre development project will be centred around the flagpole. The project is a result of a successful public-private partnership,

fostering collaboration between the Muscat Municipality and Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel.

The project is progressing at a desired pace targeting the inauguration, and while the flagpole is expected to be complete by September, the remaining projects will be handed over in the following months, with the official inauguration likely to coincide with Oman's National Day celebrations.

TURN TO P2



SMEs get training on renewable energy, green hydrogen

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

An ongoing training programme titled ‘Renewable, Sustainability, and Green Hydrogen,’ is being organised by the SME Development Authority. The training designed for SMEs and startup companies aims to keep pace with the rapidly evolving industry.

The five-week programme concludes on July 24, 2024.

About 15 companies from the renewable energy and green hydrogen sectors are taking part. This initiative focuses on renewable energy sources and green hydrogen, emphasising business development to help participating entrepreneurs achieve commercial success.

Oman, recognised as one of the top countries for renewable resources due to its economic and political stability, presents an



SME Development Authority is holding a training programme on green energy

attractive destination for investors. The government’s commitment to the renewable energy industry further enhances this appeal.

Australian Ambassador to Oman, Mark Lawrence Donovan, highlighted the programme as a valuable opportunity for Omani businesses to develop skills

and gain valuable education in the sector. The programme is delivered by a highly regarded Australian education provider, in collaboration with leading companies, guest speakers, and technical experts.

Participants will undertake modules on renewable energy,

sustainability, climate change, biomass, fossil fuels, solar, hydrogen, fuel cell electric vehicles, business development workshops, international business, and business matching exercises. These modules will be conducted by the Tamara team, TAFE NSW, various international guest

speakers, and local workshops.

Tamara Overseas Company, in partnership with TAFE NSW, is responsible for delivering vocational training to an international standard in Oman. This initiative also aims to strengthen bilateral relations between Oman and Australia by promoting each country’s strengths across various sectors.

Mubaraka, an adviser from Tamara Overseas Group, said, “This programme is the first of its kind in Oman. Delivering it with an Australian partner ensures high-quality education. The focus is on achieving commercial outcomes that will benefit the Omani economy, building a knowledge base, and ensuring SMEs achieve their goals.”

Haitham al Rasbi, General Manager of Afaq Engineering Consulting Company and a participant, stated, “Participation in this training programme is

beneficial for SMEs, providing us with valuable insights into the green hydrogen sector and its opportunities.”

The training programme prioritises practical industry outcomes, ensuring that participants and SMEs achieve commercial success. Graduates will gain industry-relevant skills, and the follow-on course in Australia will offer practical fieldwork and site visits, providing insights into the industry’s internal workings.

This initiative is expected to lead to direct employment opportunities for Omanis and an increase in successful SMEs in Oman’s growth sectors. Graduates and SMEs will have the chance to work with international companies entering Oman and access significant commercial opportunities in the \$37 billion renewable energy industry.

Dermatology Forum spotlights advances in skin care, diseases

MUSCAT: Al Khuwair Dermatology Centre at the Directorate-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate, in cooperation with the Oman Dermatology Society (ODS), organised the first Muscat Dermatology Forum at the Movenpick Hotel Muscat, on Saturday.

Sulaiman bin Nasser al Haji, Under-Secretary of the Health Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, presided over the opening of the forum in the presence of many officials from the Ministry of Health and specialists from healthcare centres.

The forum discussed many topics related to dermatology that doctors encounter in health centres, training on how to reach the correct diagnosis early and opt for the appropriate treatment for skin diseases such as atopic eczema, psoriasis, acne or acne vulgaris, urticaria, vitiligo, bacterial and fungal skin infections, venereal diseases and skin emergencies.



The first Muscat Dermatology Forum was held in Muscat on Saturday.

The forum provides an opportunity for participants to learn about recent research and scientific developments thus contributing to a better understanding of skin diseases and their treatment methods and to the correct and early diagnosis.

Dr Aisha bint Abdullah al Ali, Consultant Dermatologist and Head of Al Khuwair Dermatology Centre, said that the forums aims at exchanging knowledge and expertise and providing continuous education and training to improve the quality of healthcare provided to skin diseases

patients and coping up with the international standards in patient care and safety in terms of early access to the correct diagnosis and choosing appropriate treatment for each case.

The forum will be addressed by 22 experts and doctors working for primary healthcare centres from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The forum is accompanied by an exhibition that showcases therapeutic and cosmetic products and modern medical devices used in the treatment of skin diseases, she said. — ONA



PAKISTAN PM RECEIVES OMANI AMBASSADOR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, on Friday received His Excellency Ambassador Fahd bin Sulaiman bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and ways to enhance and develop them in all fields. The meeting was attended by His Excellency Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, His Excellency Muhammad Sajid Qazi, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and His Excellency Syed Fatemi, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs. — ONA

Ambitious flagpole to be ready by 54th National Day

FROM PAGE 1

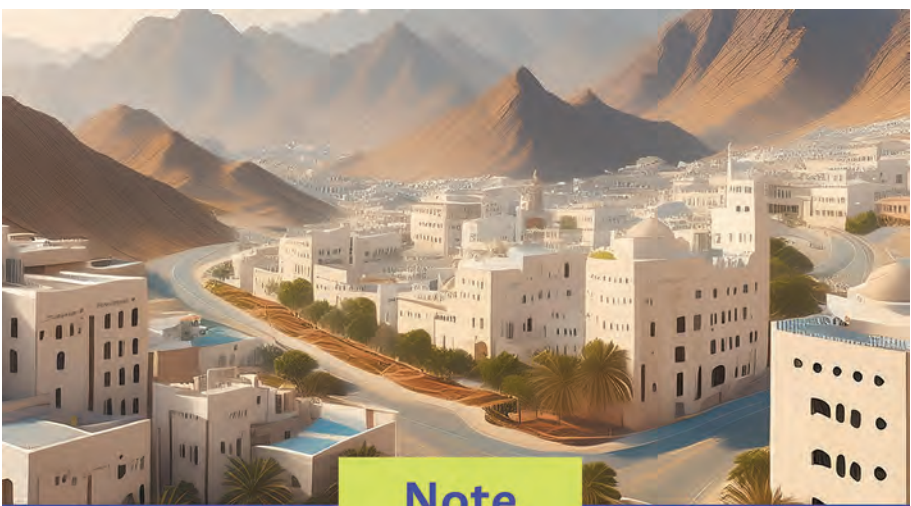
Among the vast range of recreational amenities that will complete the concept of Al Khuwair Square are vast, lush green spaces, palm trees, walking and cycling paths, an outdoor arts and crafts exhibition, a skate park and designated sports

areas. These will adorn the project, along with a number of activities and facilities to make it a vibrant hub for leisure and outdoor activities. Various public facilities, such as restrooms and a parking lot with 107 spaces, will ensure convenience for visitors.

Dubbed ‘Oman’s tallest man-made structure’, a huge Omani

national flag measuring 18 metres in length and 31.5 metres in width, will flutter on top of the flagpole, which is being made using 135 tonnes of steel with an outer diameter of 2,800mm at its base and 900mm at the top.

The flagpole is equipped with a warning light system for aircraft using the airspace.



Note

With reference to Administrative Circular No. **2/2023** issued by the Real Estate Registry Secretariat regarding stopping cash trading for real estate transactions of amounts exceeding (OMR **6,000**) six thousand Omani Rials.

We would like to draw the attention of all real estate mediation companies to the necessity of **attaching proof of the method of payment of the sale amount by the buyer (check, transfer, bank transfer, deposit receipt) when submitting sale transactions to the Ministry via Amlak platform.**

Geological wonders of Hajar Mountains range

TEXT & PHOTO
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

There is a chain of high mountains that extend from Musandam Governorate in the north to Al Sharqiyah South Governorate in the south, for about 650 kms. Behind these mountains, water flows into dozens of valleys that represent a source of biodiversity in the Sultanate of Oman. The geology of the Al Hajar Mountains range in northern Oman is diverse, as it includes all types of rocks from different eras, starting from the Precambrian era (542 million years ago) to the Cenozoic era (from 65 million years ago to this era).

The group of rocks of the Precambrian era is among the oldest rocks.

The sedimentary rocks that appear in Oman are found in the nucleus of the Dome of the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Mountain and Saih Hatat,



The Western Al Hajar Mountains range is considered the highest and steepest mountain range in Oman.

and the rocks of the Mistal component are the oldest sedimentary rocks found in the Sultanate of Oman, which are sandy, volcanic, and pillow lava rocks whose thickness exceeds 1,000 metres. Most of the rocks of the Al Hajar Mountains range consist of rocks from the Al Hajar which are carbonate rocks, and rocks from the Al Hawasna

and Ophiolite groups, whose formation dates back to the Mesozoic era.

The Al Hajar rocks and ophiolites are the most exposed rocks on the surface.

The Western Al Hajar Mountains range is considered the highest and steepest mountain range in Oman. It was formed by violent tectonic movements

accompanied by folding and cracking, and water erosion increased its discontinuity to make its shapes sharp. Most of its rocks consist of ophiolite rocks.

As soon as you walk or hike on a reconnaissance tour in one of the valleys, you will often see different types of rocks that are decorated in gray and white, and these rocks are often smooth and slippery. These types of rocks can be clearly seen in more than one area, including, for example, Wadi Dima, Wadi Al Arbiyeen and Wadi Al Hooqain. These rocks are formed in these valleys in unique shapes. These rock formations add an aesthetic touch to these natural sites. Many tourists, especially those specialising in the field of eco-tourism, who go to these sites to document them and enjoy their beauty.



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Road network enhancement in Dhofar reaches advanced stages



SALALAH: Construction works on road network enhancement projects in Dhofar Governorate have reached advanced stages.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said in a statement to ONA: “One of the most prominent road projects being implemented in Dhofar Governorate is the project to design and implement slope stabilisation and lane change on the (Arjot-Sarfit) road in the Wilayat of Dhalkout, at a total cost of RO 11 million. The completion rate of the project has reached nearly 79

per cent, and it is expected to be completed by the end of 2024.”

He added that the completion rate of the “Harweeb-Al Mazyouna-Miten” road project has reached 15.22 per cent as planned, at a total cost of RO 30 million. He stressed the importance of the road, which extends for a distance of 210 kilometres, in facilitating the flow of traffic in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna, strengthening social ties, and activating commercial and tourism movement with the rest of the wilayats of Dhofar Governorate.

He also pointed out that the completion rate of the asphalt road network

construction project in the Wilayat of Maqshin has exceeded 15 per cent at a total cost of approximately RO 13 million. The project includes the implementation of a paved road with a length of 170 kilometres starting from the centre of the Wilayat of Maqshin, passing through Mander Al Dhabyan, Al Mashash and Marsoudd. The project work is expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

He also explained that the consultancy services for the design of the Saih Al Khairat-Al Shisr road in the Wilayat of Thamrait have been completed, as well as the road of the Niyabat of Shahab Asaib in the Wilayat of Rakhayout with the wilayat centre, in addition to awarding the contract for the construction of the Al Mughhsail Bridge in Salalah.

Regarding the Haima-Thamrait Road dualisation project, the under-secretary indicated that the technical analysis has been completed and work is underway to complete the financial analysis procedures. The project is in its final stages of awarding and implementation, with a length of approximately 400 kilometres.

Through these projects, the ministry seeks to develop the road network in Dhofar Governorate and enhance the principle of traffic safety by raising the efficiency of roads in order to achieve a safe and integrated infrastructure that contributes to accelerating development.

— ONA



DHOFAR TRAFFIC SAFETY INSTITUTE TACKLES ROAD ACCIDENTS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 20

The Traffic Safety Institute in Dhofar stands out as one of the premier institutions dedicated to traffic safety in Oman. It is instrumental in bolstering road safety in the governorate. Staffed with a team of highly qualified trainers and experts, the institute offers top-tier training and qualification programmes catering to various segments of the population.

During a recent exhibition at the Salalah Free Zone, Khalifa al Musalhi from the Royal Oman Police shed light on the pivotal role of the Traffic Safety Institute in Dhofar. In an interview with *Observer*, Al Musalhi emphasised the pressing issue of traffic accidents in Oman and the comprehensive efforts made by authorities to mitigate these incidents and their associated risks.

The institute’s primary objectives are raising awareness about the importance of adhering to traffic rules; promoting a culture of road safety; reducing the risks associated with traffic accidents; training drivers of all types of vehicles to ensure safe driving practices; and contributing to the development of a community well-versed in traffic regulations.

In support of these goals, the Traffic Safety Institute provides a range of specialised training



The Traffic Safety Institute in Dhofar is instrumental in bolstering road safety in the governorate.

programmes. The Preventive Driving Programme, for example, is tailored for both light and heavy vehicle drivers, and focuses on teaching safe driving skills and accident avoidance techniques.

Likewise, the Bus Drivers Qualification Programme is designed specifically for bus drivers, and imparts safe driving skills and emergency handling techniques. Similarly, the Motorcycle Drivers Qualification Programme emphasises safe driving practices for two-wheels, and risk management on the roads.

For driving instructors, there’s a Qualification Programme that equips driving instructors with the necessary skills to teach safe

and effective driving. Other specialised programmes include the Traffic Engineering and Traffic Safety Skills Development Programmes, which cater to more specific needs within the realm of traffic safety.

Importantly, the institute leverages state-of-the-art educational technologies to enhance the training experience. Driving simulators provide a safe environment for trainees to experience various driving situations.

Educational videos effectively illustrate traffic rules and highlight the dangers of traffic accidents. Other interactive materials engage trainees and facilitate a deeper understanding of the information.

Dhofar Governorate: A seasonal paradise of agricultural riches

SALALAH: Tourists and visitors to Dhofar Governorate are keen to visit kiosks selling local fruits and vegetables spread across various neighbourhoods and suburbs of Salalah, especially during the khareef season.

They flock to these kiosks to drink coconut water (‘mashli’, as it is locally called) and buy quantities of coconut fruits and tropical delights such as bananas and papaya, which the governorate is renowned for.

The seasonal climatic conditions that characterise Dhofar Governorate, and Salalah

plain in particular, provide a bounty of diverse crops year-round. Coconut occupies the largest cultivated area in the Salalah plain.

Among the most distinctive agricultural products of Dhofar Governorate are coconuts (locally known as mashli), bananas, lemons, guavas, papayas, tomatoes, zucchini, and other fruits and vegetables.

These are displayed in seasonal fruit kiosks, attracting visitors and residents of Salalah, especially in khareef. They prefer to buy fresh fruits picked from



trees along the roads that cut through the orchards and farms.

Salalah plain is also characterised by the abundance of other agricultural crops, including papaya and bananas. Bananas are extensively cultivated due to the favourable climatic conditions.

The papaya tree, another significant crop, is evergreen and fast-growing, producing high-quality fruit varieties. Khareef is the best season for planting and cultivating papaya, which boasts numerous health and nutritional benefits.

Notably, the Salalah agricultural plain produces various other agricultural products and crops that contribute to food security. Additionally, it aids in the marketing and export of some agricultural products both within and outside Oman.

These products include lemons, guava, papaya, tomatoes, zucchini, sugar cane, pomegranate, berries, avocado, custard apple (locally called mustafel), corn, peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, watercress, lettuce, sweet potatoes and legumes.

— ONA

NUTRITION

H, WITH ITS NUTRITIONALLY RICH
ENTS, HOLDS POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVELY
HE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF
TH DEPRESSION

TALBINAH, WITH ITS NUTRITIONALLY RICH COMPONENTS, HOLDS POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVELY IMPACTING THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DEPRESSION

1

ANTI-INFLAMMATORY AND ANTIOXIDANT PROPERTIES

2

BOOSTS HAPPINESS-RELATED HORMONES LIKE DOPAMINE, SEROTONIN, AND GABA

5

ENHANCING PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

4

IMPROVES GUT HEALTH AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

3 OFFERS ANTIOXIDANT EFFECTS

RUQAYA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Recent studies have underscored the impact of good nutrition on enhancing psychological well-being.

Several studies have examined the effects of Talbinah, a traditional broth in Islamic culture, on patients with depression. Historical accounts suggest that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) recommended Talbinah to alleviate sadness and depression, particularly for those grieving the loss of loved ones.

Barley and honey in Talbinah primarily consist of carbohydrates, which are known to enhance the secretion of happiness-related hormones like dopamine, serotonin, and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in the brain

DR ZAAIMA AL JABRI
Assistant Professor of Microbiology
and Immunology, SQU

The Prophet's (PBUH) wife Aisha once quoted him as saying, "The Talbinah brings rest to the patient's heart and makes it active, relieving some of his sorrow and grief."

Talbinah is a simple yet nourishing broth made from ground barley cooked in water. Fresh milk or fermented milk (laban) is then added, along with a touch of honey for sweetness. Adding nuts and raisins can further enhance its nutritional value.

Studies have shown that Talbinah can help alleviate depression symptoms due to its rich nutritional profile. Whole grain barley is packed with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant components.

Talbinah made with whole grain barley is a rich source of B vitamins, such as folate, riboflavin (vitamin B-2), pyridoxine (vitamin B-6), and cobalamin (vitamin B-12), all essential for the nervous system. It also contains vital minerals like zinc, magnesium, sodium, calcium and iron, making it a well-balanced food in terms of mineral content.

Dr Zaaïma al Jabri, Assistant Professor of Microbiology and Immunology, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), says barley and honey in Talbinah primarily consist of carbohydrates, which are known to enhance the secretion of happiness-related hormones like dopamine, serotonin, and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in the brain.

Barley is also rich in tryptophan, a branch chain amino acid (BCAA) with mood-boosting benefits. Additionally, natural honey in Talbinah is rich in polyphenols, known for their antioxidant effects.

When fermented milk is added to Talbinah, it provides a probiotic boost. Probiotics, beneficial bacteria that help ferment the milk, are known to improve gut health and overall mental well-being.

Research indicates that probiotic-rich foods significantly affect the molecular signals between the gut and the brain (the gut-brain axis) and influence neurotransmitter release in the brain.

Furthermore, Dr Al Jabri notes that barley endosperm contains beta-glucan, a soluble dietary fibre that improves gut and overall health. Beta-glucan also reduces blood cholesterol, enhancing cardiovascular health.

Talbinah, with its nutritionally rich components, holds the potential to positively impact the mental well-being of individuals with depression.



Summer programme equips youth with maritime skills

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JULY 20

The Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy is hosting a unique summer programme under the supervision of the office of Al Batinah North Governor. The programme aims to prepare the youth for future, equipping them with essential maritime skills and preparing them for future careers.

The four-day programme will see over 100 participants engaging in a series of promising training sessions and field activities.

The programme features an impressive simulation system used for firefighting training, enhancing participants' emergency response capabilities. A set of informative lectures highlighted the academy's pivotal role in training and preparing maritime professionals. Participants are divided into



The Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy hosted a summer programme to prepare the youth with essential maritime skills

two groups in which males and females will have equal chances to participate and learn from the experience.

Dr Abdullah bin Said al Busaidy, head of the Executive Committee for Summer Centres in Al Batinah North Governorate, emphasised the programme's significance and said the importance of providing equal opportunities for youth

towards new fields such as the maritime sector. "We have targeted 100 youth from Al Suwaiq to participate in the programme. This initiative serves as a new centre of knowledge in maritime sciences, opening new horizons for today's youth. We are committed to offering specialised programmes where youth experience smart simulations based on advanced technologies."



The training includes hands-on experience with light weapons, stressing the importance of such training. Field visits to the Sailing Centre will introduce participants to fundamental sailing skills, while trips to the Diving and Mine Countermeasure School will offer insights into diving techniques. Participants also will have the opportunity to embark on Oman Sea Project ships,

providing a practical glimpse into maritime life.

Expressing their enthusiasm, several participants noted that the programme offers a unique chance to acquire new skills and understand the critical role of the naval forces in national protection.

A diverse sports programme was also organised, featuring activities aimed at enhancing

physical fitness and teamwork. This initiative aligns with the vision of the Al Batinah North Governor's Office to promote the importance of education and training among youth, fostering skill development and guiding them towards a promising future. Through such comprehensive activities, the programme aims to empower students with practical and theoretical knowledge, cultivating a generation capable of shouldering responsibilities efficiently. By participating in these innovative maritime training sessions, the youth are not only prepared for local challenges but also equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for international maritime endeavours. The region's commitment to youth development and future readiness in the maritime domain can be seen in such programmes.

Cultural event at Bait Al Zubair showcases Syrian film, art



MUSCAT: Bait Al Zubair Foundation hosted the cultural event 'Syrian Days at Bait Al Zubair' on Saturday, featuring a variety of segments, including the premiere screening of the film 'Al Matran' in the Sultanate of Oman. The film, written by Hassan Youssef and directed by Syrian-Palestinian Basil Al Khatib, stars Rashid Assaf alongside a notable cast of Syrian drama actors.

Set in Kapuji, 'Al Matran' portrays the aftermath of the Nakba of 1948. The protagonist, a Greek Catholic Melkite bishop, returns to his homeland of Syria, and after 17 years, specifically in 1965, he goes back to Palestine, particularly to the city of Jerusalem. There, he witnesses the hardships faced by Palestinians under Israeli occupation. The bishop navigates a dual role during

this period, serving both as a spiritual leader and an advocate for Palestinian rights. The Syrian Days event also includes a poetry session featuring poets Hilal al Siyabi and Yaqeen Junoud, along with musical performances by artists Ahmed Sakmani, Dila Ammar and Dr Samia Asfour. Additionally, the event features an exhibition of Syrian visual arts and a tasting experience of Syrian cuisine. — ONA

Summer 2024 activities begin at Al Wusta Governorate

HAIMA: The activities of the Al Wusta Summer 2024, which will be held at the Haima Entertainment Station until August 5, kicked off on Wednesday in the Al Wusta Governorate.

The opening of the events was sponsored by Shaikh Mohammed

bin Ali al Ghafeeli, Wali of Haima and Chairman of the Main Committee for the Central Summer Events, in the presence of a number of officials from civil and military government institutions in the governorate and a large number of citizens, residents and visitors.

The entertainment station includes a number of corners, namely for the government institutions, for the craftswomen, productive families, the desert corner, in addition to the Arabian Oryx Reserve corner. — ONA



The Al Wusta summer activities in the governorate conclude on August 5

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/10	Maintenance of the Ministry of Economy Buildings	LO: 300 SME: 30 RE: 300	29/8/ 2024

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om

The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
 + 96824402200

Fish farming forum held

MANAH: Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah organised hosted a forum on integrated fish farming. It dealt with the latest technologies used in the aquaculture sector. The forum was held by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, to enhance the role of the fish farming sector. Eight working papers presented by experts and specialists in the field dealt with local and international fish farming methods, investment in commercial fish farming projects and the quality and safety of freshwater fish. The participants explored important modern practices that guarantee the safety of fish products, marketing methods, successful experiences in this field and the challenges posed to the fish farming sector. — ONA

TENDER

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Grade	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NEGC/2024/07	Hiring of Continuous Load Rental Power for Nama Generation Power Stations	Specialist Companies	24 July 2024	5 August 2024	1,575/- (including VAT)

- Collection of Tender:** Interested and specialized Companies and Establishments registered with the Rural Areas Electricity Company, Tender Board may obtain the tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Section, the Rural Areas Electricity Company at Wilayat Al Seeb, AL Mabelah, or via email: tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om during the working days between 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. The payment of documents mentioned above is non-refundable.
- Bank Guarantee:** Bid should enclose a temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee issued by any bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman, for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the bid value and valid for a period of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to the Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C). Bids that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- Offers Submission:** Bids should be submitted in three separate sealed red waxed envelopes (Pre-Qualification, Technical & Financial) and addressed to the Chairman of Minor Tender Committee, the Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C), and marked with the tender number and name. No indication or reference about the bidder identity is permitted on the envelop.
- Submission Location:** The original hard copy of bid bond should be dropped in in the Tender Box at the main office of the Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) at Wilayat Al Seeb, no later than 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.
- Site visit:** For bidders requesting site visits, scheduling will occur upon receipt of an official request from bidders.
- The Rural Areas Electricity Company, without mentioning the reason, is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

nama
الإنتاج الكهربائي
ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Nama Electricity Generation
Al Maabillah, Al Seeb
P.O Box 1166, Post Code 113, Sultanate of Oman.
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ISRAEL KILLS DOZENS IN GAZA BOMBARDMENT

CAIRO: Israeli forces pounded several areas across the Gaza Strip on Saturday, killing at least 30 Palestinians, according to health officials, as tanks advanced deeper into western and northern Rafah.

Among those killed on Saturday were local journalist Mohammad Abu Jasser, his wife, and two children, in an Israeli strike on their house in the northern Gaza Strip, a medic said.

Gaza's government media office said Abu Jasser's death raised to 161 the number of Palestinian media personnel killed by Israeli fire since October 7.

Israeli military strikes across Gaza killed 37 Palestinians in the past 24 hours and destroyed several houses. In Al Nuseirat camp in central Gaza Strip, an air strike on a multi-floor building, wounded several people, including two local journalists, rescue workers said.

In Rafah, where Israel said it aimed to dismantle the last battalions of Palestinian Hamas' armed wing, residents said tanks advanced deeper into northern areas of the city and took control of a hilltop in the west, amid fierce gun battles with gunmen.

The army said troops continued operations in Rafah, eliminating many gunmen over the past day in the area of Tel Al Sultan on the western side of the city. In Central Gaza, the military said it conducted raids on groups' infrastructure.

The military also said it hit a structure used by Palestinian gunmen in Deir Al Balah in central Gaza Strip, saying they were operating from a



An explosion occurs following an Israeli air strike on a residential building, in Nuseirat. — Reuters

Israeli military strikes across Gaza killed 37 Palestinians, an air strike on a multi-floor building wounded several people, including two local journalists

humanitarian area, and accused Gaza fighters of exploiting civilian structure and population for military purposes, an allegation Hamas and other Palestinian groups reject as false to justify such attacks.

A ceasefire effort led by Qatar and Egypt and backed by the United States has so far failed due to disputes between the combatants, who blame each other for the impasse.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday a long-sought ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas was within sight, saying negotiators were "driving towards the goal line." Israel vowed to eradicate Hamas after its Palestinian fighters killed 1,200 people and took more than 250 captives in

an October 7 attack, according to Israeli tallies. At least 38,919 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's retaliatory offensive since then, Gaza health authorities say.

Israel said it had eliminated half the leadership of Hamas' military wing and killed or captured about 14,000 fighters since the start of the war. Israel says 326 of its soldiers have been killed in Gaza. Hamas does not release casualty figures and said Israel exaggerates its reports to give the impression of a "fake victory". — Reuters

French police clear demonstrators from port blockade

LA ROCHELLE: French police removed demonstrators from the western port of La Rochelle with tear gas on Saturday, as environmentalists and small farmers mobilised against massive irrigation reservoirs under construction.

Around 200 people had entered the La Pallice port terminal at dawn, including farmers with old tractors, setting up a street party with music and drinks outside a major grain trader's facility.

More than a dozen police vans and an armoured vehicle pushed them out during the morning in a cloud of tear gas, while other police vehicles blocked off access to the port.

The protest in the city on France's Atlantic coast was intended to show that new "reservoirs aren't being built to grow food locally, but to feed international markets," said Julien Le Guet, a spokesman for the Bassines Non Merci movement. Activists charge that the reservoirs, set to be filled from aquifers in winter

to provide summer irrigation, benefit only large farmers at the expense of smaller operations and the environment.

Several dozen are under construction in western France, with backers saying that without them farms risk vanishing as they suffer through repeated droughts.

Last year, mass clashes between thousands of demonstrators and police in Sainte-Soline, around 90 kilometres inland from La Rochelle, left two protesters in a coma and injured 30 officers.

France's top court later overturned an attempted government ban on the Soulevements de la Terre (Uprisings of the Earth, SLT) group involved in organising the protests.

Throughout this week more than 3,000 police have been deployed around a "Water Village" protest camp in Melle, a few kilometres from Sainte-Soline, with authorities warning of a risk of "great violence". — AFP



A demonstrator throws back a tear gas canister at riot police officers during a rally in La Rochelle, western France. — AFP

Bangladesh army out to handle cities growing unrest

DHAKA: Soldiers were patrolling Bangladeshi cities on Saturday to quell growing civil unrest sparked by student demonstrations, with riot police firing on protesters who defied a government curfew. This week's violence has killed at least 123 people so far, according to a count of victims reported by police and hospitals, and poses a monumental challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's autocratic government after 15 years in office.

A government curfew went into effect at midnight and the premier's office asked the military

to deploy troops after police again failed to subdue widespread mayhem.

"The army has been deployed nationwide to control the law and order situation," armed forces spokesman Shahdat Hossain said. The curfew will remain in effect until at least 10:00 am Sunday, private broadcaster Channel 24 reported.

Streets in the capital Dhaka were almost deserted at daybreak, with troops on foot and in armoured personnel carriers patrolling the sprawling megacity of 20 million.



Bangladeshi soldiers disembark armoured vehicles as they patrol the streets to disperse the anti-quota protesters in Dhaka. — AFP

But thousands returned to the streets later in the day in the residential neighbourhood of Rampura, with police firing at the crowd and wounding at least one person. Hospitals have reported a growing number of gunshot deaths since Thursday.

"Hundreds of thousands of people" had battled police across the capital on Friday, police spokesman Faruk Hossain said. "At least 150 police officers were admitted to hospital. Another 150 were given first aid treatment," he said, adding that two officers had been beaten to death. "The

protesters torched many police booths... Many government offices were torched and vandalised."

Staff at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital said that another two police officers were killed on Saturday, while four people admitted to intensive care succumbed to their injuries.

The main group organising the protests said that two of its leaders had been arrested since Friday.

Hasina had been due to leave the country on Sunday for a planned diplomatic tour but abandoned her plans after a week of escalating violence. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING

Xi urges all-out rescue efforts after bridge collapse

President Xi Jinping urged all-out rescue efforts after a highway bridge collapse in Shaanxi province in China's northwest killed 11 people, state media reported on Saturday.

The incident occurred in Shangluo city on Friday when a highway bridge collapsed due to a flash flood, causing some vehicles to fall into the river.

As of 10 am on Saturday, five vehicles were confirmed to have fallen into the water and 30 people were reported missing, state



media said.

Xi said China is in a critical period for flood control and local governments must take responsibility to enhance monitoring and early warning. — Reuters

MOSCOW

Russia downs 26 Ukrainian drones in Rostov

Russia shot down 26 Ukrainian drones overnight in the southern Rostov region, several hundred kilometres from the front line.

"Last night, air defence forces intercepted and destroyed a total of 26 UAVs in Rostov region.

"There were no casualties as a result of the attack," governor Vasily Golubev posted on Telegram.

"Emergency services are on their way to the site where the UAV wreckage fell," he said.

Last Saturday, an oil depot in



the Rostov region caught fire after a Ukrainian drone attack.

Ukraine has targeted energy sites deep as well in towns and villages across the border and in Crimea. — AFP

SYDNEY

Australia warns of websites after cyber outage

Australia's cyber intelligence agency said on Saturday that "malicious websites and unofficial code" were being released online claiming to aid recovery from Friday's global digital outage, which hit media, retailers, banks and airlines.

The Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) said "a number of malicious websites and unofficial code are being released claiming to help entities recover from the widespread outages caused by the CrowdStrike technical inci-



dent". The agency said its cyber security centre "strongly encourages all consumers to source their technical information and updates from official CrowdStrike sources only". — Reuters

Biden stews at allies’ pressure to drop out



Michael D Shear

The writer is covering President Biden and his administration



Katie Rogers

The writer is a White House correspondent for The New York Times



Peter Baker

The writer is the chief White House correspondent for The New York Times

The friction between the sitting president and leaders of his own party so close to an election is unlike anything seen in Washington in generations

Sick with Covid and abandoned by allies, President Joe Biden has been fuming at his Delaware beach house, increasingly resentful about what he sees as an orchestrated campaign to drive him out of the race and bitter towards some of those he once considered close, including his onetime running mate Barack Obama. Biden has been around politics long enough to assume that the leaks appearing in the media in recent days are being coordinated to raise the pressure on him to step aside, according to people close to him. He considers Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker, the main instigator but is irritated at Obama as well, seeing him as a puppet master behind the scenes.

The friction between the sitting president and leaders of his own party so close to an election is unlike anything seen in Washington in generations — especially because the Democrats now working to ease him out were some of the allies most critical to his success over the last dozen years. It was Obama who elevated Biden from a presidential also-ran to the vice presidency, setting him up to win the White House in 2020, and it was Pelosi and Sen. Chuck Schumer, the Senate Democratic leader, who pushed through Biden’s landmark legislative achievements.

But several people close to Biden, who insisted on anonymity to discuss internal matters, described an under-the-weather president coughing and hacking more than 100 miles from the corridors of power as his presidency meets its most perilous moment.

He has watched with rising exasperation as a succession of news stories appeared, one after the other, reporting that Schumer, Pelosi, Obama and Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the House Democratic leader, all had warned of a devastating defeat for the party in November.

And he certainly noticed that Obama has not done anything to help him in recent days even as his own former aides publicly have led the way in calling on Biden to withdraw in what was interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as a message from the former president’s camp. The unseen but clearly felt presence of Obama, in particular, has brought a Shakespearean quality to the drama now playing out, given their eight-year partnership.

While Biden and his team publicly insist that he is staying in the race, privately, people close to him have said that he is increasingly accepting that he may not be able to, and some have begun discussing dates and venues for a possible announcement that he is stepping aside.

In privately railing about Obama and even aides to former President Bill Clinton, Biden has made clear that he finds it particularly rich that the architects of historic Democratic losses in the 1994 and 2010 midterm elections would be lecturing him about how to save the party after he presided over a better-than-expected midterm in 2022. While one person



After testing positive for Covid, President Joe Biden boards Air Force One to depart Las Vegas.

said Biden is not irked at Clinton himself — in fact, he is grateful the former president has been pressing donors to keep giving — others said that Obama is another story.

“We have to cauterise this wound right now, and the sooner we can do it, the better,” said Rep. Gerald E. Connolly, D-Va., who has not publicly called for the president to step aside. He said the barrage of criticism must be difficult for Biden. “I mean, to me, this is very painful. I think it just shows the cold calculus of politics.”

More congressional Democrats publicly called on the president on Friday to pass the torch to another candidate to take on former President Donald Trump in the fall. Among them were Sen. Martin Heinrich of New Mexico, Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio and at least nine House Democrats, including Rep. Zoe Lofgren, a close ally of Pelosi, her fellow Californian.

The fact that Pelosi’s allies have been coming out is seen as no coincidence at the president’s vacation

house in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. When another of her allies, Rep. Adam B. Schiff of California, spoke out earlier this week, a Biden administration official noted that it might be Schiff’s lips moving, but it was Pelosi doing the speaking.

Biden’s pique at his former partner, Obama, represents the latest chapter in a complicated relationship.

While not close when they teamed up to run in 2008, they became friends over their two terms in the White House together, bonding especially when Biden’s son Beau died in 2015.

But Biden has nursed a grudge ever since Obama gently discouraged him from running for president in 2016, steering the Democratic nomination to Hillary Clinton, who lost to Trump.

So Obama’s advice may not be particularly welcome in Rehoboth at this point, which is perhaps one reason the former president is not offering it directly, according to people close to him.

AI’s insatiable energy use drives electricity demands



David Gelles

The author is a reporter on the New York Times climate team

A few weeks ago, a small group of reporters met for a wide-ranging conversation with Bill Gates about climate change, its causes and potential solutions. When the topic turned to the issue of just how much energy artificial intelligence was using, Gates was surprisingly sanguine.

“Let’s not go overboard on this,” he said during a media briefing on the sidelines of an event he was hosting in London.

AI data centres represent a relatively small additional load on the grid, Gates said. What’s more, he predicted that insights gleaned from AI would deliver gains in efficiency that would more than make up for that additional demand.

While it’s too early to draw a definitive conclusion on the issue, a few things are already clear: AI is having a profound impact on energy demand around the world, it’s often leading to an uptick in planet-warming emissions, and there’s no end in sight.

AI data centres have a big appetite for electricity. The so-called graphic processing units, or GPUs, used to train large language models and respond to ChatGPT queries, require more energy than your average microchip and give off more heat.

With more data centres coming online

almost every week, projections about how much energy will be required to power the AI boom are soaring.

One peer-reviewed study suggested AI could make up 0.5% of worldwide electricity use by 2027, or roughly what Argentina uses in a year. Analysts at Wells Fargo suggested that US electricity demand could jump 20% by 2030, driven in part to AI.

And Goldman Sachs predicted that data centres would account for 8% of US energy usage in 2030, up from just 3% today.

Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Meta have all recently announced plans to build new data centres in Indiana, developments that Inskeep said would strain the grid.

Tech giants are scrambling to get a grip on their energy usage. For a decade now, those same four companies have been at the forefront of corporate efforts to embrace sustainability.

But in a matter of months, the energy demands from AI have complicated that narrative. Google’s emissions last year were 50% higher than in 2019, largely because of data centres and the rise of AI. Microsoft’s emissions also jumped for the same reasons, up 29% last year from 2020. And Meta’s emissions jumped 66% from 2021 to 2023.



Inside a data centre in San Jose, California.

AI is having a profound impact on energy demand around the world, it’s often leading to an uptick in planet-warming emissions, and there’s no end in sight

In statements, Google and Microsoft both said that AI would ultimately prove crucial to addressing the climate crisis, and that they were working to reduce their carbon footprints and bring more clean energy online. Amazon pointed to a statement detailing its sustainability efforts.

There are two ways for tech companies to meet the demand: tap the existing grid, or build new power plants. Each poses its own challenges.

In West Virginia, coal-fired power plants that had been scheduled to retire are being kept online to meet the energy needs of new data centres across the border in Virginia.

And across the country, utilities are building new natural-gas infrastructure to support data centres. Goldman Sachs anticipates that “incremental data center power consumption in the US will drive around 3.3 billion cubic feet per day of new natural gas demand by 2030, which will require new pipeline capacity to be built.”

The energy demands from AI are only getting more intense. Microsoft and OpenAI are planning on building a \$100 billion data centre, according to reports. Initial reporting suggests it may require 5 gigawatts of power, or roughly the equivalent of five nuclear reactors.

Helping loved ones with severe mental illness



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

If you are a mental health professional or have a family member with severe mental illness, then you would understand the struggle that one goes through to convince them to take medication even when they are aware that it helps in managing their symptoms.

This can be explained by the fact that the person denies having a problem.

Denial is a defence mechanisms people use to cope with distressing feelings and it involves not acknowledging reality or ignoring its consequences. People refuse medication because they have experienced side effects or their friends and family are reinforcing common beliefs that psychiatric medications are addictive even when this only applies to a small group of medication.

Some doctors might cause their patients to refuse medication by not thoroughly explaining the benefits and drawbacks of the medications, while others use an authoritarian style when communicating with their patients.

This interruptions in medication leads to worsening of the patient's symptoms which affects the person's social functioning and quality of life leading to repeated hospital admissions. The book *I am not sick, I don't need help* by Dr Xavier Amador, a clinical psychologist from the US, presents a new way of improving communication with people experiencing severe mental health problems.

Dr Xavier invented this method after years of frustration when dealing with his younger brother who had schizophrenia but refused taking medication. The module he suggests is summarised in the acronym 'LEAP' short for Listen, Empathise, Agree and Partner.

This module stems from the fact that people experiencing severe mental health problems such as delusions and hallucinations believe their thoughts to be true and may act on them. So the person who believes that people can read his thoughts by looking him in the eyes may stop going out or wear sunglasses all the time and becomes very distress

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when those around him don't believe him or laugh at him, so listening to the person in a non-judgmental way is the first step to take.

The second step is to show empathy by understanding and sharing the feelings of another person, which can help build trust and rapport. Use statements such as 'I can see that this is really difficult for you' or 'It sounds like you're feeling very frustrated.'

The third step is to find common areas of agreement to reduce conflict and build a sense of collaboration. Try focusing on shared goals and values, such as wanting the person to feel better or to achieve certain personal aspirations.

The fourth step is collaborating with the person and involving them in their own treatment and care. Finally using the above approach is likely to improve communication and reduce conflict between the patient and his family members, but we need to remember that it is not a magical solution to all problems and may not work for all patients.

Tense talks as Unesco mulls heritage sites at risk

Tensions are simmering ahead of summer talks on which Unesco World Heritage sites are deemed to be endangered, with countries battling against featuring on the UN cultural body's list.

Terse language can be expected among diplomats at Unesco's talks starting on Sunday in New Delhi as they discuss cases as varied as Britain's prehistoric Stonehenge circle or Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha in Nepal, ahead of a deadline at the end of July.

The battles to come contrast with the usual suspense over which locations may be added to the prestigious World Heritage classification, which can be a lucrative driver of tourism.

Unesco, the UN body for education, science and culture, insists that being placed on the narrower list of endangered sites is not a black mark.

But many countries affected, especially in the West, see it differently, fighting fierce rearguard actions against their inclusion.

Venice has been on Unesco's World Heritage List since 1987, but under threat from climate change and over-tourism, it recently imposed a fee on visitors staying only a day at peak times of year after risking addition to the unhappy club in 2023. And after years facing down Unesco over its Great Barrier Reef, Australia has pumped billions into improving water quality, cushioning the impacts of climate change on the coral and protecting endangered species.

London, meanwhile, had long pushed for construction of a highway tunnel passing near Stonehenge, which joined the World Heritage list in 1986 as "the most architecturally sophisticated prehistoric stone circle in the world" according to Unesco.

British courts blocked an initial plan for the tunnel in July 2021 over concerns about the environmental impact on the site dating to between around 3,000 and 2,300 BC.

The recently elected Labour government of Keir Starmer has "a different line" on the project, said Lazare Eloundou, head of World Heritage at Unesco — although he is in the dark about what London will propose in New Delhi.

In Nepal, the Buddha's birthplace of Lumbini — rediscovered in 1896 after long being lost to the jungle — is another sore point.

Added to the World Heritage list in 1997, it is now visited by millions of people each year.

"The site is endangered because many of the monuments are not well maintained and are being seriously degraded," Eloundou said.

Also afflicted with "many completely inappropriate projects", the site's "universal value" is at risk, he added.

"All of southeast Asia is watching this with great concern," Eloundou said. — AFP

Oman's unwavering stance against terrorism: A beacon of peace, tolerance



Dr Mohammed bin
Awad al Mashikhi

The writer is an academic and researcher specialising in public opinion and communication

THE entire world is feeling resentment and shock over the criminal act that targeted innocent worshipers in the Imam Ali Mosque, in Al Wadi Al Kabir in the Wilayat of Muttrah, on Monday.

That day was not an ordinary day in the history of the Sultanate of Oman which rejects all forms of extremism and terrorism.

This is because Oman is an oasis of peace, harmony and tolerance not only in the region that witnesses tensions and unrest from time to time, but also at the level of the whole world.

The Sultanate of Oman has recorded zero terrorism over the past decades thanks to Allah Almighty and the sincerity of the people of Oman and their loyalty to Allah Almighty, the country and His Majesty the Sultan. No Omani has been registered in the record of terrorist organisations at all.

The question that should be raised is: why was the Sultanate of Oman chosen for the first time to be the stage for such a criminal act that is rejected by all members of Omani society?

The answer to this question revolves around the sovereign decisions of this dear country that stands up for the people's right and defends the oppressed especially when it comes to the Sultanate of Oman's stance on the cause of the occupied Palestine and its call to try the leaders of the

Zionist entity for the crimes they committed in the Gaza Strip such as the extermination of innocent women and children as well as the Omani leadership's refusal to side with others in conspiring and igniting sedition between brothers and neighbours.

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Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, may Allah Almighty rest his soul in peace, since the beginning of the 1970s laid down the basis of the modern state followed by His Majesty Sultan Haitham, the founder of the renewed Omani Renaissance who impressed everyone with his unique determination and courage in building the state and moving on with the national project and the unity of Omani society under the umbrella of one homeland that does not accept division into two but rather one homeland for all.

The Omani society is a model of peaceful coexistence and tolerance among the three Islamic sects.

There is no doubt that the most

crucial gain for the Sultanate of Oman over the past decades has been a successful national project which is considered the safety valve for national unity among the various spectra of this peaceful society that managed to preserve its values and morals.

The government and people of the Sultanate of Oman are well-known for respecting others regardless of differences in views between them and the others.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "If you were to come to the people of Oman, they would never have insulted or abused you."

Such is the lofty Oman with its people are seen by all as an example and an embodiment of noble values.

However, the wise leadership of the Sultanate of Oman has not ignored building a strong, advanced army and security forces safeguarding the sacred national land and the economic achievements.

This was evident during the clashes between the assailants who attacked the mosque and the different forms of security forces including the Royal Oman Police (ROP) who were able to contain the situation and neutralise the attackers thereby reducing the human losses in this heinous crime.

It should be emphasised that no country is immune from the criminal acts witnessed by some Arab countries and the whole world as the gullible who can easily be brainwashed tend to harm and kill innocent people.



Work/life balance: Two pennies’ worth

We hear so much today about achieving a work-life balance, don’t we? However, there is a problem with the concept in that unless we have absolute commonality, a ‘line in the sand’ so to speak, we are never going to achieve a definitive perception that works for us all, are we?

The mosaic-like, the crossword puzzle, snakes-and-ladders like lives we lead are incredibly difficult to juggle, let alone balance, as we can say and do as we wish, but then someone else comes along, and what they do tips us over the edge of our master plan. So while the concept has merit, I’m going to say that it is a Nirvana, a Xanadu, a myth, a fairy tale, as far distant as unrequited love is always destined to be, our, and others’ imperfections and failures doing to our desire for a work-life balance that works, doing to us what icebergs did for unsinkable ships.

The problem, from a really basic perspective, is that, in seeking a work-life balance, is that it’s all a one-way street isn’t it? I mean, who would choose work over life anyway? However, if we look deeper, it’s not usually a question of choosing one over the other, but how much you are willing to put into each: the level of commitment.

Whatever we are doing, we only have a certain amount of that commitment – petrol, if you like – to use, and the distribution of it is what we need to work on. That’s my view anyway. As you’ll see though, in life and even literature, as Angie Wade says in her best Teeside accent, “Everyone has their two penneth.”

I firmly believe the quest for a work-life balance can never work, and not because I don’t want it to, but because our intent will surely fall at the first hurdle, either our spouse, our family, or our boss, because as sure as ‘eggs is eggs,’ they will all have very different ideas as to how the ‘line-in-the-sand,’ of your work-life balance must move to accommodate



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THE QUEST FOR A WORK-LIFE BALANCE CAN NEVER WORK, AND NOT BECAUSE I DON’T WANT IT TO, BUT BECAUSE OUR INTENT WILL SURELY FALL AT THE FIRST HURDLE

theirs. Like one of my favourite literary characters, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, you are tilting at windmills from the very outset.

Like him, you have an impossible dream, for which you will fight an unbeatable foe, bear unbearable sorrow and run where only brave men go. Fighting a wrong that cannot be assuaged you will love pure and chaste, but from afar, and keep trying with the weariest of arms.

You will continue your quest, however hopeless, however far, without question, without pause, willing to confront Shaitan in heaven’s name. You will know you have given of your best in a glorious quest, and you will be at peace, calm, maybe scorned and scarred, having given your last ounce in seeking to reach the unreachable star, that line-in-the-sand.

Novelist Nora Roberts reflects that achieving balance is about recognising we all must all be jugglers or plate spinners and that “the trick is to know which of them are rubber and which are glass,” while Irish comedian Dave Allen succinctly observed that the key is to, “do anything, but not everything.”

Country and Western star Dolly Parton displays a similar eloquence, saying “Never get so busy living that you don’t have a life.” More caustic is one of the world’s richest men in Warren Buffet, who espouses that “You have to keep control, of your time, and that means saying no! If you can’t say no you’re letting others rule your life, and that’s the worst kind of investment.”

So, I regret it is a journey that can only end in tragedy, as our deeply personal, evolutionary journey, becomes mired in the failures and machinations of those around us. In fact, let’s just forget about the ‘unreachable star,’ leaving that to Josh Groban, Andy Williams and the others. Instead, let’s be mature enough to strive, reflect, learn and grow individually. After all, we are all individuals, why waste it?

TRIBUTE TO FAILED HEROES



The memorial plaque and a wreath of flowers are pictured during a ceremony on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the failed assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler in Berlin. Germany pays tribute on July 20, to the perpetrators of the failed attack on Hitler 80 years ago and their controversial leader Claus von Stauffenberg, at a time when the far right is trying to take over their legacy. – AFP

Conspiracy theories take off after global IT crash

From fearmongering about a looming “World War III” to false narratives linking a cabal of global elite to a cyberattack, a torrent of online conspiracy theories took off on Friday after a major IT crash.

Airlines, banks, TV channels and financial institutions were engulfed in turmoil after the crash, one of the biggest in recent years that was the result of a faulty software update to an antivirus programme operating on Microsoft Windows.

The proliferation of internet-breaking conspiracy theories on social media platforms — many of which have removed guardrails that once contained the spread of misinformation — illustrates the new normal of information chaos after a major world event.

The outage gave way to a swirl of evidence-free posts on X, the Elon Musk-owned site formerly known as Twitter, that peddled an apocalyptic narrative: The world was under attack by a nefarious force.

“I read somewhere once that ww3 (World War III) would be mostly a cyber war,” one user wrote on X.

The IT crash also stirred up an unfounded theory that the World Economic Forum — long a magnet for wild falsehoods — had plotted a global cyberattack.

To make that theory appear credible, many posts linked an old WEF video that warned about the possibility of a “cyberattack with Covid-like characteristics.”



ANUJ CHOPRA

The writer is a global disinformation correspondent at AFP

THE OUTAGE GAVE WAY TO A SWIRL OF EVIDENCE-FREE POSTS ON X THAT PEDDLED AN APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVE: THE WORLD WAS UNDER ATTACK BY A NEFARIOUS FORCE

The video, available on the WEF’s website, had cautioned that the only way to stop the exponential spread of the cyber threat would be to disconnect millions of vulnerable devices from each other and the internet.

The WEF has long been a target for conspiracy theorists pushing the idea of a shadowy cabal of elites working for private gain under the garb of solving global issues.

Also gaining rapid traction online were conspiratorial posts using the hashtag “cyber polygon,” a reference to a global training event aimed at preparing for potential future attacks.

“The proliferation of conspiracy theories in the wake of major global events such as the outage is a sad testament to the volatile nature of the information ecosystem,” Rafi Mendelsohn, vice president at the disinformation security company Cyabra, said.

“What is unique to events like these is how social media platforms, forums and messaging apps facilitate the rapid dissemination of content, allowing theories to gain traction quickly and reach a global audience.”

The trend demonstrates the ability of falsehoods to mutate into viral narratives on tech platforms, which have scaled back content moderation and reinstated accounts that are known purveyors of misinformation.

During fast-developing news

events, confusion now often reigns on major tech platforms with users scrambling to obtain accurate information in what appears to be a sea of false or misleading posts that rapidly gain traction.

“This poses the larger question of combatting mis- and disinformation,” Michael W. Mosser, executive director of the Global Disinformation Lab at the University of Texas at Austin, said.

“The level of trust that is required to accept information from reputable sources has declined to such an extent that people are more willing to believe wild conspiracies that ‘must be true’ rather than the factual information

related to them.” The global outage, which brought myriad aspects of daily life to a standstill and sent US stocks falling, was linked to a bug in an update to an antivirus programme for Windows systems from American cybersecurity group CrowdStrike.

Assurances by the Austin-based company’s chief executive, George Kurtz, that CrowdStrike had rolled out a fix and was “actively working” to resolve the crisis did little to stem the spread of online conspiracies.

“Combating this misinformation with factual rebuttals is difficult, because the issue is so technical,” Mosser said.

“Explaining that the fault was in an improperly configured system file and that a fix is in process may be accurate, but it is not believed by those who are predisposed to see nefarious motives behind failures.”

Meanwhile, security experts said CrowdStrike’s routine update of its widely used cybersecurity software, which caused clients’ computer systems to crash globally on Friday, apparently did not undergo adequate quality checks before it was deployed.

The latest version of its Falcon Sensor software was meant to make CrowdStrike clients’ systems more secure against hacking by updating the threats it defends against. However, faulty code in the update files resulted in one of the most widespread tech outages in recent years for companies using Microsoft’s Windows operating system. Global banks, airlines, hospitals and government offices were disrupted. CrowdStrike released information to fix affected systems, but experts said getting them back online would take time as it required manually weeding out the flawed code.

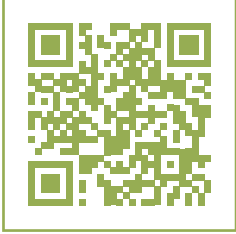
“What it looks like is, potentially, the vetting or the sandboxing they do when they look at code, maybe somehow this file was not included in that or slipped through,” said Steve Cobb, chief security officer at Security Scorecard, which also had some systems impacted by the issue. — AFP



Photograph shows a screen displaying a logo of ‘CrowdStrike’ cybersecurity technology company in Munich amid a massive global IT outage. – AFP

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KARATE COURSE CONCLUDES AT WOMEN ASSOCIATION

SPORT REORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 20

The karate and self-defence course concluded at the Women's Association Hall in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, held from June 23 to July 16. The course was conducted by trainer Hilal bin Mohammed al Abdali from the Shotokan Karate Centre.

It targeted school students in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, focusing on enhancing physical fitness by improving strength, flexibility, and endurance. It also aimed at boosting self-confidence, as children learn to trust their abilities and develop self-esteem.

The course emphasised self-control and discipline, with karate relying on rules and discipline, helping children learn self-control and commitment.

The course provided children with the necessary skills for self-defence to protect themselves in

dangerous situations. Social interaction was encouraged by promoting interaction with others and forming new friendships. The sport also helps improve concentration and attention span.

Additionally, karate teaches values and ethics, instilling respect, humility, and perseverance. Mental activation is achieved through performing the basic Kata movements (Kihon Kata). These benefits make karate a comprehensive sport that promotes both physical and psychological growth in children.

It is noteworthy that the Women's Association of the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, in collaboration with the Shotokan Karate Centre, has been organising the course for the second consecutive year for two different batches of school students in the wilayat during the summer vacation period, as part of the association's annual summer programmes.

The remarkable rise of young Omani footballer Ahmed Al Salmi

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Amidst the rapid development witnessed by sports in Oman and the world of football, a young star emerges with his exceptional skills and amazing achievements despite his young age.

Ahmed bin Said al Salmi, the eight-year-old child who plays as a striker and playmaker, and is considered one of the most prominent rising talents in Oman.

Ahmed al Salmi, is distinguished by his love and passion for football, and has shown a remarkable talent in this sport since an early age. He started his football journey at the age of six at the Al Shamali Academy in the Wilayat of Seeb, where his first start was after winning the championship and being chosen as the best player in the academy championship.

Says Ahmed's father, "From a young age, he would leave electronic games and focus on the only game that is football. During summer vacation, I looked for an academy to enroll Ahmed so that he could practice his hobby. From the first week in Shamali Academy, at the age of six, he was praised by all the coaches at the academy. In the first tournament he participated with the academy, he won the championship and scooped the best player in the tournament." Ahmed's father added, "I developed a development plan for Ahmed, to see Ahmed



achieve a better stage. I started working on special exercises for him on the days when there are no exercises in the academy to develop his talent."

Career and achievements

Ahmed's passion took him to different location, including the Leader Academy and the Future Academy, where he went on to participate in various tournaments at the invitation of the Al Wasati Sports Academy and the Al Oud Sports Academy

in Al Suwaiq. Thanks to his skills and outstanding performance, Ahmed achieved many achievements both domestically and internationally.

Ahmed al Salmi's achievements highlight his talent and distinguished abilities.

Domestically, he won first place and was chosen as the best player at the Al Shamali Academy at six years. He also won first place with the Al Wasati Sports Academy and the

Al Oud Sports Academy in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq.

At the Leader Academy, he won first place and was chosen as the top scorer of the tournament after scoring 15 goals. He also won second place with Sporta Sport Academy in the 'One Goal' tournament in Muscat, and third place in the Future Academy in the Ramadhan tournament in Muscat, in addition to winning first place with Seeb Club in the Gulf Academies Championship in UAE.

At the global level, despite his tender age, Ahmed was chosen to represent Sporta Sports Academy in the Madrid tournament in Spain, where he played against Valencia CF and Rayo Vallecano, with the participation of Real Madrid, Barcelona, and Paris Saint-Germain.

Ahmed gave a distinguished performance in this tournament, which increased his status as a rising talent. This experience was one of the most prominent one that Ahmed benefited from, as he received an offer from Atlético Madrid to train with the club for a month. His training period can be extended for a year for a paid amount, which is what Ahmed is striving for to train him in the best clubs in the world and raise the name of Oman.

Al Salmi also indicated that there is an upcoming meeting with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to discuss Ahmed's file to extend his training period for a year with Atlético Madrid.

Ahmed al Salmi's ambition does not stop at these achievements, as he aspires to continue developing his skills and achieving higher success. He seeks to be a part of the national team and represent the Sultanate of Oman in many international forums, and contribute to raising the name of Oman in the sports field in general and football in particular.

Sprinter Ali, shooter Said to make debut at Paris Olympics

- SWIMMER ISSA IN GOOD SHAPE FOR SECOND STRAIGHT PRESENCE IN OLYMPIC GAMES
- MAZON TO REPRESENT WOMEN ATHLETES IN HER THIRD OLYMPIC APPEARANCE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) is set for its 11th participation in the Summer Olympic Games, with four athletes representing three different sports disciplines in Paris 2024.

Among them is young sprinter Ali bin Anwar al Balushi, making his Olympic debut, and female sprinter Mazoon al Alawi, competing in her third Olympics after Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020.

Both will participate in the 100-metre race. National shooter Said Ali al Khatri will make his Olympic debut in the Men's Trap Shooting category, while swimmer Issa bin Sameer al Adawi will compete in the 100-metre freestyle event for the second consecutive Olympics, following his appearance in Tokyo 2020.



Ali al Busaifi, delegation manager

The Paris 2024 Olympic Games will commence this Friday and runs until August 11.

Ali al Balushi secured his place in the 100-metre event by qualifying directly among the top 56 sprinters, a position confirmed by World Athletics, the global governing body of the sport. The other athletes from Oman were granted international invitation cards, a result of the OOC's strong network and connections with



Ali bin Anwar al Balushi

the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Olympic Solidarity Commission, and various international sports federations.

Last Thursday, OOC Secretary General Taha al Kishry met with the athletes to congratulate them on the honour of representing Oman on the world stage. He encouraged them to perform their best, aiming to bring honour to Oman through positive and advanced results



Said Ali al Khatri

that reflect the nation's sporting progress.

Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of the OOC, will lead Oman's official delegation to the Paris Olympics. The delegation will also include His Highness Sayyid Azan bin Qais al Said, Vice Chairman of the OOC; Taha bin Suleiman al Kishri, Secretary-General of the OOC; Ali bin Salim al Busaifi, Oman's delegation manager, Amer al Zeidi, a physiotherapy



Issa Sameer al Adawi

specialist; and Adil al Balushi as the media reporter. Additionally, the team will feature Shuaib al Zadjali, an anti-doping official, and Abdulmoneim al Alawi, a FINA open water referee.

Ali al Busaifi will depart for Paris on Monday to finalise preparations ahead of the athletes' arrival. He will attend the Chef-de-Mission meeting at the Olympic Village on Tuesday, which will address accommodation arrangements

for the national team, the logistics for the Olympic opening ceremony, and the issuance of accreditation cards for all delegation members.

"I have been in close contact with the Paris 2024 Olympics coordinators over the past months. It is essential to arrive in Paris a few days before the national team to ensure all arrangements are in place," said Ali al Busaifi. "The Chef-de-Mission meeting will cover various topics to ensure a smooth entry and comfortable stay for our athletes in the Olympic Village."

"We extend our gratitude to the Paris 2024 Organising Committee and our national team members for their cooperation and support. We wish our athletes the best as they arrive in Paris to commence their training ahead of the competitions," he added.



NEWCASTLE SIGN TEENAGE DEFENDER PIVAS FROM SERBIA

NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United have signed 19-year-old defender Miodrag Pivas from Serbian side Jedinstvo Ub, the Premier League club said on Saturday.

The Serbia youth international, who can also play as a box-to-box midfielder, spent most of his youth career in Austria, playing for Siezenheim and Grodig, before joining Jedinstvo last year.

“Miodrag is a promising talent with high potential,” Newcastle’s CEO Darren Eales said in a statement. “I see the project of the club and it looks great which helped convince me to sign for Newcastle,” Pivas said.

The Magpies start their league campaign against promoted side Southampton on August 17. — **Reuters**



MEUNIER JOINS LILLE ON A TWO-YEAR DEAL

BELGIUM: Belgium defender Thomas Meunier has joined Lille on a two-year contract, the Ligue 1 club said on Friday.

Meunier, 32, had joined Turkish side Trabzonspor in February from Borussia Dortmund. He previously won the Ligue 1 title three times with Paris St Germain and was in the Belgium squad that finished third at the 2018 World Cup.

“Lille was the perfect choice from a sporting and family point of view. With its proximity to Belgium, it’s like being at home,” Meunier said in a statement.

“My experience in the various European Cups will enable me to coach the youngest members of the dressing room and ensure that they’re 100% focused on the club’s sporting success.”

Lille will be in the Champions League qualifiers after finishing fourth in Ligue 1 last season. They begin their league campaign at Reims on August 18. — **Reuters**

NADAL

MAKES FIRST FINAL IN TWO YEARS IN BASTAD



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action.

BASTAD, Sweden: Rafael Nadal reached his first final on Saturday since winning the 2022 French Open, defeating Croatian qualifier Duje Ajdukovic in a three-set tussle in Bastad ahead of the Paris Olympics.

A day after his four-hour quarter-final victory, the 22-time Grand Slam champion was again tested by Ajdukovic, the world number 130 who had won just two tour-level matches before this week.

The Spaniard rebounded from dropping the opening set to prevail 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, returning to the final of a tournament he won as a teenager on his last appearance in 2005.

“It was a very tough match. It was very difficult honestly, but I found a way to survive and be

through to the final after a long time without being in a final, so that’s great news and I’m very happy with that,” said Nadal.

The 38-year-old will play Portuguese seventh seed Nuno Borges or Argentina’s Thiago Agustin Tirante on Sunday as he goes in search of the 93rd singles title of his career.

His most recent triumph came two years ago at Roland Garros, when he won the tournament for a record-extending 14th time.

“It’s always a great feeling to be back in the final. I won four matches in a row, something I wasn’t able to make happen since two years ago,” said Nadal, whose ranking has tumbled to 261 after a string of injuries.

“A lot of things happened... I’m still in this process of recovering a lot of things I lost

because I had a very important hip surgery almost one year ago, so things are not going that easy.

“But I’m fighting. I’ve fought during the whole tournament to be where I am today. Matches like yesterday and today help to improve a lot of things on court, so I’m happy with that. Let’s see if I’m able to play a little bit better tomorrow.”

Nadal struggled early against the 23-year-old Ajdukovic as he fell 3-0 and a double break down in the opening set, but he fought his way back with two breaks in the second after another poor start.

The former world number one appeared in complete control in the third set when he surged 3-0 ahead only to lose his serve twice in succession, suffering a repeat of the stumble that nearly cost him on Friday.

He broke again in the seventh game and then resisted two more break points in the next, eventually securing victory with a comfortable hold two games later.

Nadal is using the event in Bastad as a tune-up for the Olympic Games, where the tennis will be played on the clay at Roland Garros. He won gold in the singles in Beijing in 2008 and gold in the doubles at Rio 2016.

He only returned to action this week for the first time since losing in the first round of the French Open in late May.

Nadal was also due to play in the doubles later on Saturday alongside Casper Ruud but announced he was pulling out as a precaution after spending six hours on court over his past two singles matches. — **AFP**

POGACAR
WINS

5TH

STAGE ON
TOUR DE
FRANCE AS
VICTORY
NEARS



COL DE LA COUILLOLE, France: Tadej Pogacar inched closer to securing his third Tour de France title after outwitting his main rival, defending champion Jonas Vingegaard, to win the penultimate stage on Saturday. The Slovenian claimed his fifth stage win of this year's edition by outsprinting Vingegaard in the final metres of the 132.8-km mountain trek from Nice after the Dane had run out of steam while looking to cement his second place overall in the final kilometres.

There was no mercy from UAE Emirates rider Pogacar, who stayed in Vingegaard's slipstream in the final kilometres, and put the hammer down 250 metres from the line.

Overall, Pogacar, who won the Tour in 2020 and 2021 before being toppled by Vingegaard in the last two editions, leads the Dane by five minutes and 14 seconds with Belgian Remco Evenepoel in third place, a further 2:50 behind.

It was a cruel end to the stage for Vingegaard, who had been looking to gain time over Evenepoel, whose earlier attack in the Col de la Couillole backfired. The Tour ends on Sunday with an individual time trial between Monaco and Nice — the first time in the 121-year history of the race that it will not end in Paris due to the upcoming Olympics, which start on July 26 in the French capital.

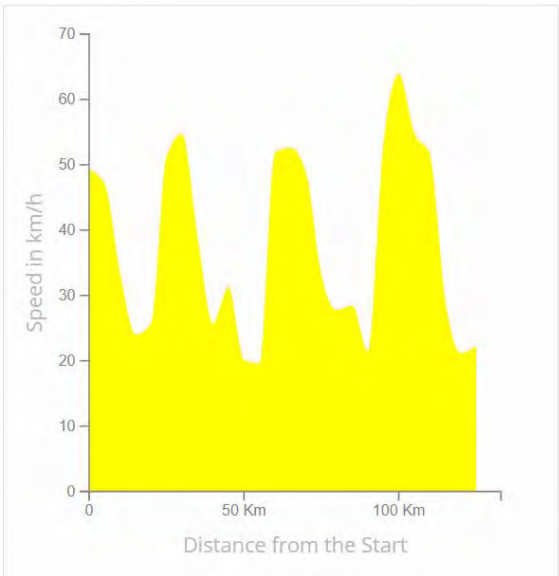
Ecuador's Richard Carapaz, who featured in the day's breakaway and took third place on the stage with another bold ride, made sure he would take home the polka dot jersey for the mountains classification, while Biniam Girmay of Eritrea secured the green jersey for the points classification.

Evenepoel attacked eight kilometres from the finish but it was too brief an effort for the Belgian to have a hope of leapfrogging the defending champion in the general classification.

Vingegaard later countered and only Pogacar could follow, leaving Evenepoel glued to the tarmac.

Pogacar was content to stay on Vingegaard's wheel, and finished him off with a brutal acceleration, leaving his fierce rival to cross the line with his head down. — **Reuters**

LEADING GR. AVERAGE SPEED



GENERAL RANKING

1.	T. Pogacar		UAD	82h 53' 32"
2.	J. Vingegaard		TVL	+ 05' 14"
3.	R. Evenepoel		SOQ	+ 08' 04"
4.	J. Almeida		UAD	+ 16' 45"
5.	M. Landa		SOQ	+ 17' 25"

STAGE RANKING

Stage ranking				
1.	T. Pogacar		UAD	04h 04' 22"
2.	J. Vingegaard		TVL	+ 00' 07"
3.	R. Carapaz		EFE	+ 00' 23"
4.	R. Evenepoel		SOQ	+ 00' 53"
5.	E. Mas		MOV	+ 01' 07"



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Asyad Group revenues reach RO 465 million in 2023

MUSCAT: Asyad Group is progressing steadily towards its strategic goals by enhancing the commercial, financial, and operational performance of all its assets, which amounted to RO 1.600 billion in 2023, while bolstering the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a vital global logistics centre.

The annual report issued by Asyad Group revealed that during 2023, the group achieved net profits amounting to RO 64 million, a growth rate of 43 per cent compared to 2022, when profits amounted to RO 45 million.

The report indicated that the group’s revenues grew by 5 per cent in 2023 to reach RO 465 million.

This confirms the continuous growth path pursued by Asyad, with the compound annual growth rate of revenues reaching



The group has activated freight forwarder services, resulting in the implementation of over 2,000 shipments in its first year of operation from various land, sea and airports.

21 per cent, while the compound annual growth rate of profits has reached 73 per cent since the

group’s establishment. Asyad has maintained its distinguished record in the field of occupational safety, with the group’s Omanisation rate reaching 85 per cent, providing about 400

job opportunities in 2023, and adding 84 Omani sailors to its naval fleet.

The report highlighted that Asyad Dry Dock achieved a 4 per cent growth in its business volume compared to 2022, by implementing 230 projects and providing services to commercial clients from more than 40 countries around the world.

The group has activated freight forwarder services, resulting in the implementation of over 2,000 shipments in its first year of operation from various land, sea and airports.

Warehousing activities increased by 32 per cent, and warehouse capacity by 16 per cent in 2023.

In 2023, the group also launched partial shipping solutions, linking the Indian markets with the local Omani market through the integration

of its assets, aiming to enhance commercial movement and empower local companies and small and medium enterprises.

Oman Post and Asyad Express expanded their network to include 6 new countries, bringing their services to a total of 12 countries.

The volume of operations grew by 81 per cent compared to 2022, and 9 international companies have transferred their regional distribution operations to the Sultanate of Oman.

In the small and medium ports sector, which includes Al Suwaiq Port, Khazaen Land Port, Sultan Qaboos Port, Asyad Terminal in Al Duqm, Duqm Marsa Port, and Asyad Container Terminal, the volume of cargo handled increased by 4 per cent compared to 2022.

Additionally, it received 134 cruise ships carrying more than 432,000 passengers. — ONA

Oman witnesses 0.7% increase in inflation

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

The latest inflation report released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information reveals a 0.7 per cent increase in the general inflation index compared to June 2023 and June 2024, the same month of the previous year.

In June 2024, the inflation index across the Sultanate of Oman and its governorates displayed notable variations.

The highest inflation rate was recorded in Al Wusta Governorate at 1.8 per cent, closely followed by Musandam Governorate at 1.6 per cent and Al Sharqiyah North Governorate at 1.5 per cent.

Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and Dhofar Governorate both experienced an inflation rate of 1.4 per cent, while Al Batinah North Governorate saw a rate of 1.2 per cent. Al Batinah South Governorate reported a 0.9 per cent inflation rate, with Al Buraimi Governorate slightly lower at 0.8 per cent.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate experienced a 0.7 per cent inflation rate. The lowest rates were observed in Muscat Governorate and Al Dhahirah Governorate, each at 0.4 per cent.

These figures highlight the diverse economic conditions across the different regions of Oman, with some areas experiencing more pronounced inflationary pressures than others.

A breakdown of inflation by sector offers additional insights



Food prices were stable during the period under review.

into the economic landscape.

The housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels sector, which carries the highest weight of 31.7, saw a modest inflation rate of 0.0 per cent, indicating that prices in these essential areas have remained steady over the past year.

The transport sector, with a weight of 14.5, reported a negative 2 per cent inflation rate, reflecting lower costs for commuting and logistics.

These figures provide a glimpse into the stability of essential services and the decreasing costs associated with transportation, which can significantly impact household budgets and overall economic conditions.

The inflation report for July 2024, based on the 2018 index, paints a detailed picture of economic trends in Oman. While the overall inflation rate remains low at 0.7 per cent, the variation across different regions and sectors highlights areas of concern and stability.

OQGN boosts local economy and achieves 43% emissions reduction

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Oman’s sole gas transmission operator and owner, OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), last year embarked on an ambitious sustainability journey, achieving significant milestones across environmental stewardship, workforce development, local economic engagement and governance practices.

This transformative endeavour underscores OQGN’s steadfast commitment to driving positive impacts across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) fronts, setting a benchmark for sustainable practices in the energy sector.

In its recently published OQGN 2023 Sustainability Report, one of the standout achievements in OQGN’s sustainability efforts is its remarkable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Between 2021 and 2023, the company achieved a 43% reduction in overall Scope 1 and 2 emissions. This accomplishment is part of OQGN’s broader decarbonisation strategy, which includes a Net-Zero emissions target and significant flare reduction initiatives.

By leveraging innovative technologies like Intelix for incident management and the Process Information (PI) Vision software for operational insights, OQGN demonstrates its dedication to operational



In 2023, we made significant progress towards our goal, reducing our overall emissions by nearly 43% and vented gas by 94% since 2021. These efforts are pivotal in our journey towards achieving Net-Zero emissions by 2050.

MANSOOR AL ABDALI
CEO, OQGN

excellence and environmental sustainability.

“Our commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing energy efficiency is unwavering,” said Mansoor al Abdali, CEO of OQGN.

“In 2023, we made significant progress towards our goal, reducing our overall emissions by nearly 43% and vented gas by 94% since 2021. These efforts are pivotal in our journey towards achieving Net-Zero emissions by 2050.”

OQGN’s focus on its workforce has yielded impressive results as well. The company reported a 75% employee satisfaction score in 2023, surpassing its targets two years ahead of schedule.

With a 94% Omanisation rate and the completion of 23,000 hours of employee training, OQGN has shown a strong commitment to the professional growth and well-being of its employees.

Additionally, the absence of any employee fatalities or injuries in 2023 highlights the company’s robust safety culture.

The employees are at the heart of everything the company does.

“Achieving a 75% employee satisfaction score and a 94% Omanisation rate reflects our dedication to supporting our team’s professional growth and well-being.

Ensuring a safe and empowering work environment is a top priority for us.”

OQGN’s contributions to local economic development have also been noteworthy.

In 2023, the company increased its direct economic value in Oman to RO 174 million and engaged with 277 local suppliers, significantly boosting the local economy.

By partnering with local stakeholders such as the Directorate General of Education and the Directorate General of Health Services, OQGN has demonstrated its commitment to driving positive social impact and sustainable development within the region.

Furthermore, OQGN increased its local procurement spending from RO 14.93 million in 2022 to RO 18.45 million in 2023, resulting in 31% in-country value (ICV) within Oman.

“Our efforts to support local economic development are reflected in our increased local procurement spending, which rose to RO 18.45 million in 2023,” noted the CEO.

“This resulted in 31% ICV within Oman, reinforcing our commitment to the country’s economic growth.”

OQGN’s governance practices in 2023 have set a new standard for transparency and ethical conduct. The establishment of a new Board of Directors Nomination and Remuneration Committee and zero instances of reported corruption underscore the company’s commitment to good governance practices.

ahlibank showcases mission, vision & core values at ‘Partner in Excellence’ media event

MUSCAT: In a significant stride towards solidifying its position as the ‘Partner in Excellence’ to all, ahlbank recently held a special media networking event at the Bank’s Head Office in Al Wattayah, highlighting its mission, forward-thinking vision, and integral values.

The event took place on Wednesday, July 17, 2024, witnessing the attendance of key personnel from leading media institutions and news agencies in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event highlighted ahlbank’s core values of innovation, integrity, responsibility, sustainability and most significantly, the Bank’s commitment to excellence.

Being the ‘Partner in Excellence’, ahlbank shed the spotlight on its vision to be a vibrant and innovative centre for banking; one that is committed to surpassing

its customers’ expectations, and contributing tangibly to the country’s socio-economic growth agenda. In addition, the event underpinned ahlbank’s mission to deliver outstanding value to its shareholders through its comprehensive banking solutions, guaranteeing access to excellent products and services.

During the event, Jumana al Hashmi, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at ahlbank, said, “We would like to express our gratitude to all government and private institutions for accepting our invitation to our annual media event and for their invaluable support in helping us achieve our goals.

We have refined our approach and enhanced our framework to be more customer-centric, aligning with our commitment to



delivering a comprehensive range of banking products and services, which has further strengthened our relationships with all our customers.

At ahlbank, we are dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of excellence. As we continue our significant growth journey, we will adapt to emerging developments

in the banking sector in Oman.

With our cutting-edge technologies and diverse offerings, ahlbank will set new benchmarks and make a meaningful impact

on the lives of individuals and communities we serve.”

During the event, the attendees learned about ahlbank’s achievements during the past period, which included many significant milestones in the Bank’s history. Ahlbank also showcased its media strategy and highlighted the many initiatives it intends to undertake, in addition to the many goals it seeks to achieve.

The event included an introductory tour of the new main building; a vibrant centre for banking excellence, and a staple in architecture for its grandiose design and pleasant views.

Moving forward, ahlbank anticipates the future’s opportunities, as it continues its operations within the banking sector, embarking on an exciting journey of momentous growth and substantial excellence.

Bank Muscat launches online easy payment plan

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of an online Easy Payment Plan (EPP) which provides the option to pay in instalment for online shopping through integration with Bank Muscat’s Payment Gateway System.

The Easy Payment plan facilitates affordable purchases of products and services with interest-free repayment instalments of up to 12 months using Bank Muscat Credit Cards. It is noteworthy that Sharaf DG is the Bank’s first merchant partner under the Online EPP plan service.

Customers can benefit from the new payment plan by visiting the merchant’s website and adding to the cart the items they would like to purchase. They can then use Bank Muscat’s credit card to complete their purchase by selecting Instalment Payment Plan on the online payment gateway.

The credit card limit will be reduced by the purchase amount. The minimum



purchasing value using this service is RO 100 and is applicable to all active Bank Muscat credit cards.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager – Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “In line with the bank’s customer-centric vision to provide excellent financing facilities, Bank Muscat’s online Easy Payment

Plan will allow customers to avail goods and services and pay conveniently over a period of 12 months without interest.

The Bank is planning to enhance the list of merchant partners who provide this service in the coming period. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our valued customers for their continuous trust in the services and products which are designed to enhance their banking experience.”

Bank Muscat confirms its keenness to enhance secure digital payments through developing various payment options to meet customers’ needs and aspirations. The Bank’s credit cards are a preferred mode of payment in Oman, and the online EPP scheme reiterates the bank’s commitment to promoting secure digital payments in Oman.

These credit cards witness great turn out and their state-of-the-arts features enhance digital payment solutions to complete different types of transactions from anywhere, safely.

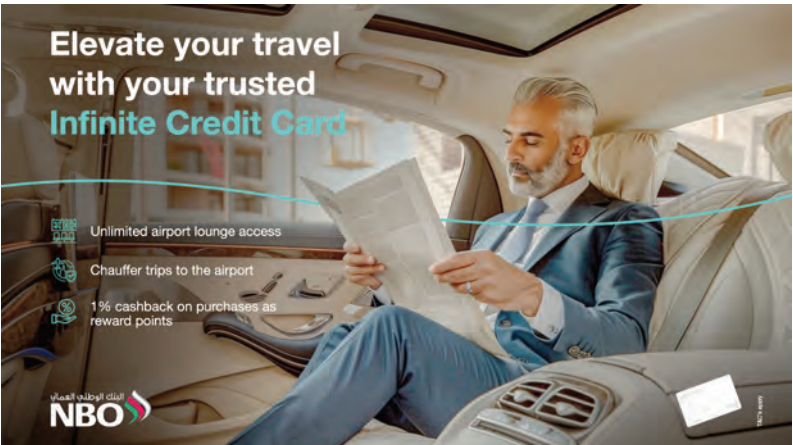
Elevate your lifestyle with NBO’s exclusive credit card benefits

MUSCAT: In its commitment to enhancing the banking experience for its customers, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) provides a comprehensive suite of credit card benefits, focusing on luxury and convenience and delivering value through exclusive offers designed to meet a variety of lifestyle needs.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager & Head of Products at NBO, states, “At National Bank of Oman, we believe that loyalty should be rewarded. That’s why our credit card benefits are more than just a payment tool; they are a passport to a variety of exclusive luxuries and everyday conveniences.

They reflect our commitment to providing exceptional value to our customers, whether they’re travelling the world or making local purchases.

From cashback and airport lounge access to travel insurance and chauffeur services, NBO’s credit cards offer an elevated



experience tailored to the needs of today’s customers.

We aim to ensure that every transaction with our credit cards feels like a reward in itself.”

The Infinite, Signature and Platinum credit cards come with premium benefits that cater to travellers and those seeking entertainment and rewards. For frequent travellers, the Infinite Credit Card provides unlimited access to global airport lounges.

Signature Credit Card holders

receive up to 12 complimentary airport lounge visits per year, while Platinum Credit Card users are entitled to 6 visits annually.

The NBO Rewards Program offers credit card holders a competitive 1 per cent cashback on purchases made with Infinite, Signature, and Platinum Credit Cards, and 0.5 per cent cashback on the Gold Credit Card.

In addition to these benefits, cardholders can enjoy exclusive Entertainer offers and travel portal

discounts, adding substantial value to their experiences.

NBO also provides complimentary international travel insurance and chauffeur services for Infinite and Signature Credit Card holders. The chauffeur service, which provides airport transfers in Muscat and Salalah, ensures a smooth and luxurious journey for customers, from doorstep to destination, exemplifying NBO’s dedication to exceptional convenience and value for premium cardholders.

Moreover, cardholders can elevate their entertainment experience with an exclusive 50 per cent discount on VOX Cinema tickets, adding value and enjoyment to their leisure activities. Additionally, NBO Visa Credit cardholders receive a complimentary BookingBash subscription, unlocking up to 50 per cent off on experiences around the world alongside other special offers.

Elevate your driving experience with Lincoln’s latest summer offer



MUSCAT: Indulge in the exquisite timeless elegance and refined craftsmanship of Lincoln’s premium SUV range. Experience Lincoln’s latest summer promotion with additional service and registration incentives across Lincoln models.

New Lincoln owners can now benefit from upgraded service of up to 100,000 kms and free first-year registration. The offer is valid from June 2 to August 1, 2024.

Head to the Lincoln dealership in Muscat (Al Wattayah) to experience outstanding designs and performance-oriented vehicles. Owning a Lincoln is a premium-power experience.

The new offer entitles customers to additional service benefits and a registration fee waiver for the first year.

A Lincoln representative commented, “We aim to enhance the luxurious ownership experience. Customers can benefit from our exclusive after-sale service and state-of-the-art service facilities by trained professionals,” he further added.

Lincoln’s premium range includes the Nautilus, Aviator, Corsair and Navigator.

Select from a range of powerful SUVs, built with premium craftsmanship, high-technology safety and connectivity features. The Lincoln is the perfect choice for a summer getaway with family and off-roaders.

Embark on the next road trip in the 5-seater mid-size **Nautilus** powered by a turbocharged 2.0-litre engine that produces 250 horsepower and 380 Nm torque mated with an 8-speed automatic

transmission.

The **Navigator** is powered by a twin-turbo V6, 3.5L GTDI engine that produces a thrilling 440 horsepower and 691 Nm of torque and is paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift paddle activation.

Easily switch between driving modes with a beautiful animation display, ambient lighting and daytime running LED lights.

The Lincoln **Aviator**, a mid-sized 4x4 makes a bold presence with an inspiring design and sleek profile.

The Aviator offers premium capability in a three-row 7-seater setting. Under the hood, the Aviator is powered by a twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission.

It delivers an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration.

The **5-seater Lincoln Corsair** SUV is engineered to deliver a remarkable driving experience carving a perfect balance between comfort, safety and technology adaptations. Its power is packed with a turbocharged four-cylinder engine, an 8-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift, Pilot360TM driver-assist features, and other integrated technologies for the driver’s assistance.

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No new aircraft orders on anvil, but pending deliveries awaited: Oman Air CEO

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JULY 20

A four-year transformation plan adopted by national carrier Oman Air to enable a return to operational profitability by 2027 does not envision any immediate plans for investments in new aircraft, a top official has revealed. Regardless, at least eight new aircraft deliveries are anticipated over the next 12 months under the company's existing order book, says Oman Air CEO Con Korfiatis.

The Australian national, who joined Oman Air in May this year, is helping the financially beleaguered carrier's transformation strategy, which prioritises the rightsizing of operations and efficiency improvements across the board.

"There is a master plan, which has been signed off," remarked Korfiatis in an interview to AeroTime, a global multi-channel aviation digital hub providing news, events and advisory services to the aviation world.

"I was brought in to lead the



We've got to focus on our transformation and on fixing our foundations. There's nothing we want to get in the way of that

CON KORFIATIS

CEO, Oman Air

team and build the capabilities that allow us to deliver on this within the terms of the

national tourism and economic agenda and Oman's Vision 2040 programme."

The transformation plan was already underway when Korfiatis joined wholly state-owned Oman Air two months ago. "Some good steps were taken during 2023 and what I'm working on now is accelerating that. That's what we're going to be pushing through the balance of this year and into 2025 and 2026," noted.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, who is also Chairman of Oman Air Board of Directors, recently warned that "radical improvement" is critical to the goal of returning the carrier to profitability.

The carrier lost around RO 185.6 million in 2023, adding to a cumulative loss of RO 2 billion at the operating level since 2011, Al Maawali revealed in the company's 2023 Annual Report. Following loans of RO 392 million taken by the company over the last five years, the airline's

debt position as of December 2023 remains "unsustainable".

Long term liabilities (debt and leases) reached RO 1.6 billion in 2023 versus RO 0.8bn-RO 0.9bn in 2018-2019, and future cash flow projections are insufficient to fund operations and investment requirements without further state cash injections, he said.

"Equity is negative at RO 1.4 billion, and the value of Oman Air's asset base has nearly halved since 2019 as challenged prospects have driven heavy impairments.

"The business needs to achieve financial sustainability by getting to a position of generating positive cash flow, and it is now imperative that Oman Air swiftly evolves from a business run as a state-sponsored carrier to a self-sufficient commercial enterprise," the minister stressed.

In his interview to AeroTime, the new CEO underlined the need for a "measured" approach in improving the carrier's financial and operational performance. While rightsizing is integral to this strategy,

investments in new jets are not on the immediate horizon, he cautioned.

"Don't expect any new aircraft orders, not in the next six months or 12 months at least," he said.

"We've got to focus on our transformation and on fixing our foundations. There's nothing we want to get in the way of that."

As part of the rightsizing strategy, Oman Air phased out its aging fleet of widebody Airbus A330s in March this year.

As for the rationalisation of the rest of the fleet, Korfiatis stated: "We will look at the product going forward, over the next six months. Whether there's anything that comes out of that, we'll see.

"We do have some deliveries still pending in our existing order book: three B787s and three B737 MAX arriving this year, and two more MAXs arriving in the first six months of 2025.

"We'll also think about the future of our existing 787 fleet, particularly our -8s, because we've got two of those. We certainly will be keeping our -9s. It's a work in progress."

Private bank deposits in Oman increase by 8.8 per cent



MUSCAT: Omani private deposits in commercial banks saw a noteworthy increase of 8.8 per cent by the end of April 2024, reaching a total value of RO 16,038.700 million, compared to RO 14,733.800 million in the same period of 2023.

According to the latest monthly bulletin from the Central Bank of Oman, these deposits comprised term deposits amounting to RO 5,296.600 million, savings deposits amounting to RO 5,540.900 million, and demand deposits worth RO 4,840.300 million.

The total deposits included RO 14,058.300 million and RO 1,980.500 million in foreign currencies.

Looking at the banking indicators of Omani commercial banks as of March 2024, the ratio of total cash and clearing to Omani rial deposits stood at 7 per cent, while the ratio of total cash and clearing to overall deposits was at 5.9 per cent. The ratio of total loans to deposits was at 100.2 per cent.

The percentage of foreign currency deposits to total deposits was 16.7 per cent, and the percentage of foreign assets to total loans reached 11.4 per cent.

Foreign assets to total assets stood at 12.6 per cent, while foreign liabilities to total liabilities were at 10.3 per cent.

The proportion of private demand deposits to total private deposits increased to 30.8 per cent, capital and reserves to total deposits reached 22.4 per cent, and allocations and retained interest to total credit amounted to approximately 6 per cent.

— ONA

OHB approves 2,762 housing loans worth RO 120 million

MUSCAT: In 2023, the Oman Housing Bank approved approximately 2,762 housing loans, amounting to RO 120 million.

Musa bin Masoud al Jadidi, CEO of the Oman Housing Bank, stated that the bank aimed to extend its services across the various governorates in Oman, focusing particularly on areas outside the Muscat Governorate.

The number of loans granted to citizens in these governorates reached 2,072, with a total value of RO 88.798 million, constituting 74 per cent of the bank's total lending activity.

The total number of loans approved in Muscat Governorate amounted to 690, with a total value exceeding RO 31 million. In Dhofar Governorate, 105 loans were approved with a total value of more than RO 4 million.

Al Batinah North Governorate saw housing loans worth over RO 15 million for 381 loans, while Al Batinah South Governorate had 712 approved loans with a total value exceeding RO 29 million.

The approved housing loans in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah



The total number of loans approved in the Muscat Governorate amounted to 690, with a total value exceeding RO 31 million.

North and Al Sharqiyah South amounted to 267, including 111 loans in Al Sharqiyah North and 156 loans in Al Sharqiyah South, with a total value of RO 11.5 million.

In Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the number of approved loans reached 362, with a total value exceeding RO 16 million.

The CEO noted that Al Buraimi Governorate registered 203 housing loans worth over RO 9 million, while Musandam Governorate witnessed an increase to 42 housing loans with a value exceeding RO 1.5 million.

Al Jadidi also mentioned that the total subsidised loans provided by the bank to citizens since its founding in 1977 until the end of 2023 across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman amounted to 65,778 loans, with a total value of more than RO 1.5 billion.

He emphasised that the Oman Housing Bank achieved positive results by recording good growth rates in most financial indicators.

The bank's total assets increased by eight per cent by the end of 2023, reaching RO 791.600 million compared to RO 729.700 million at the end of



Musa bin Masoud al Jadidi
CEO, Oman Housing Bank

2022. This growth in assets was primarily due to the housing loan portfolio, which totalled RO 770 million compared to RO 693 million at the end of 2022, reflecting a growth rate of eleven per cent.

He pointed out that the Board of Directors of the Oman Housing Bank, in collaboration with the executive management, prepared a development plan for the bank with strategic dimensions and an action plan (2024-2026).

This plan aims to achieve financial sustainability by continuing to provide housing

loans and expanding the bank's activities and services.

The CEO mentioned that the bank recently launched the "Housing" programme to provide housing financing to citizens on the waiting lists of the bank and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning through local banks. Additionally, the "I Will Continue with You" campaign was launched to enhance the bank's developmental roles in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and address citizens' inquiries regarding financing application procedures, loan provider roles, financing amounts, and more.

The campaign will tour several governorates and wilayats, including the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate, the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq in Al Batinah North, the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South, the Wilayat of Bausher in Muscat Governorate, and the Wilayat of Salalah in the Dhofar Governorate. — ONA

Mobile phone subscriptions in Oman reach over 7 million

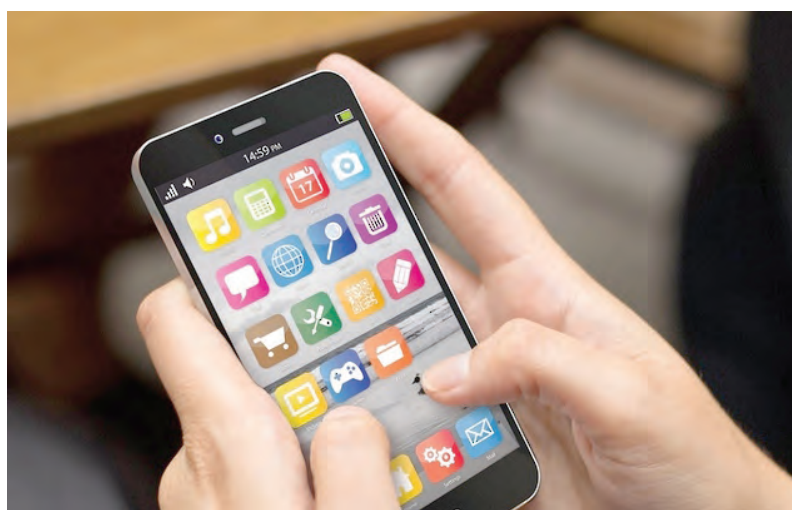
MUSCAT: The total mobile phone subscriptions in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 3.1 per cent by the end of March 2024, reaching 7,201,500 subscriptions, compared to 6,842,800 subscriptions in the same period in 2023.

The report issued by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority stated that this growth was accompanied by an increase in the penetration rate among the total population by 4.13 per cent, an increase in the average usage

per subscription by 4.19 per cent, and an increase in the average revenue per subscription by 1.77 per cent.

Total mobile broadband subscriptions decreased by the end of last March by 1.41 per cent, accompanied by a decrease in average usage per subscription by 7.60 per cent and a decrease in average revenue per subscription by 1.56 per cent.

As for fixed telephone, total subscriptions increased by 3.03 per cent to reach 596,809



subscriptions compared to 562,419 subscriptions, while average usage per subscription decreased by 11.16 per cent and average revenue per subscription decreased by 5.98 per cent.

Total subscriptions for fixed broadband also increased by the end of the first quarter of this year by 1.86 per cent, reaching 572,450 subscriptions, compared to 539,334 subscriptions in the same period in 2023, accompanied by a decrease in the average usage per subscription

by 0.68 per cent, while the average revenue per subscription increased by 0.87 per cent.

Regarding international calls, the report indicated that the total international minutes issued witnessed by the end of the first quarter of 2024 an increase of 6.03 per cent, and the average revenue per minute by mobile phone decreased by 7.76 per cent, while the average revenue per minute by fixed phone also decreased by 10.32 per cent.

— ONA

Crypto summer rebound as innovation shifts towards compliance



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The author is a member of the International Press Association-

The cryptocurrency market is buzzing with excitement as Bitcoin's price recently surged once again past \$67,000. However, the market wasn't without its turbulence, as a significant uptick in liquidations occurred, particularly among traders who had bet on price declines. Market analysts attribute last week's price surge to a confluence

of factors, including diminishing market fears, expectations of rate cuts, and the resolution of issues like Germany's Bitcoin sell-off and the lingering uncertainty around the Mt Gox repayments. Meanwhile, Grayscale, a major player in the crypto investment landscape, has unveiled a strategic move with its Bitcoin holdings. The company is spinning off 10% of its Grayscale Bitcoin Trust (GBTC), a fund launched back in 2013 that currently holds over \$17 billion in assets, into a new exchange-traded fund (ETF) called Grayscale Bitcoin Mini Trust (BTC). Existing GBTC shareholders will receive shares in the new ETF proportionally to their current holdings, effectively diversifying their exposure while maintaining their overall Bitcoin investment. I see this as a smart move by Grayscale, offering investors more flexibility and potentially lower fees through the new ETF

structure. This move mirrors a similar strategy employed with Grayscale's Ethereum Trust (ETHE), where a Mini Trust with significantly lower management fees was created. Industry experts anticipate a similar fee reduction for the BTC Mini Trust, potentially benefiting current GBTC shareholders. Binance is also making waves with its recent step into on-chain identity verification. The exchange introduced the Binance Account Bound Token, a non-transferable soulbound token (SBT) designed to streamline KYC procedures. This innovation allows users to prove their identity across various crypto and DeFi platforms, aligning with Binance's increased focus on regulatory compliance after facing a substantial fine for violating US anti-money laundering laws. I think this could be a game-changer in the way we approach identity verification

in the crypto space, potentially leading to a more seamless and secure user experience. BAPT's unique features, such as non-transferability and revocability, have sparked both interest and scepticism within the crypto community. Concerns about linking addresses to KYC-verified individuals and potential regulatory challenges have been raised. However, Binance's initiative represents a notable step in the ongoing exploration of decentralised identity solutions. On another front, EigenLayer, a pioneer in Ethereum's restaking sector, has experienced a recent cool down after an impressive start to the year. The total value locked (TVL) in EigenLayer has decreased by 20% since its June peak, impacting associated liquid restaking protocols. This dip is attributed to reduced incentives, specifically the points-based loyalty rewards used to

attract users and allocate tokens in airdrops. Despite this temporary setback, EigenLayer remains a major player in the Ethereum DeFi ecosystem, and the upcoming introduction of AVS rewards is expected to stabilise the market. I think this presents an interesting opportunity for savvy investors to potentially benefit from the future growth of this sector. The crypto community is also abuzz with the upcoming launch of a Mini App store and a Web3-enabled in-app browser on the popular messaging platform Telegram. This move by Telegram, known for its massive user base and commitment to privacy, aims to enhance the platform's functionality and tap into the growing interest in decentralised applications. Additionally, Telegram is taking measures to address scams by

displaying registration details for public accounts and allowing Mini Apps to label channels for added verification. I believe that this integration of Web3 features into a mainstream platform like Telegram could significantly accelerate mainstream adoption of cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology. The Telegram platform, along with the associated blockchain network The Open Network (TON), has gained significant traction due to the viral success of blockchain games like Hamster Kombat, showcasing the potential of blockchain gaming to generate income for players. However, this success has also attracted scammers looking to exploit users through phishing attacks. The open-source nature of TON, while fostering innovation and accessibility, also necessitates heightened vigilance from users to protect themselves in this evolving landscape.

UK growth fix can start with pampered rich savers

NEIL UNMACK

Keir Starmer's growth plans can start with pampered savers. To "take the brakes off Britain", the new UK prime minister needs infrastructure investment in areas like wind farms, housing and grids. A smarter and fairer policy on savings might help. Ideas for improving the UK's relatively low savings rate have tended to focus on channelling a larger chunk of domestic pensions towards more growth-enhancing investments. Yet plans to consolidate smaller schemes will likely take time. A quicker fix would be to shake up Britain's personal savings market, which has two problems. The government wastes a lot of money on superfluous tax incentives for wealthy savers, and the resulting cash pile is then not invested productively. Take individual savings accounts, which allow UK citizens to invest 20,000 pounds a year in cash or shares and shelter it from income and capital gains tax. The generous scheme has seen ISA holdings swell from 388 billion pounds in 2012 to 742 billion pounds a decade later, UK government statistics show. On the face of it, that's a good thing. Yet it comes at a rising cost: in 2024 the UK government reckons ISAs will account for 6.7 billion pounds of foregone tax revenue. ISAs also favour

wealthier Britons: the average saver on earnings of over 150,000 pounds had 94,303 pounds squirrelled away, nearly four times the amount of the median-earning ISA investor. Around 23 million citizens have barely any savings despite mushrooming ISA balances. Starmer could scale back the 20,000 pound annual allowance without hurting poorer savers, and potentially boost tax revenue. The second fix is to deploy the cash pile better. Currently, the vast majority of ISA assets reside in idle cash or company shares and funds. Yet many of those companies are listed or invested offshore, giving limited benefit to the UK economy. Starmer could instead introduce a new tax-exempt savings product that funnels cash directly into the safer end of UK infrastructure, such as green energy projects, or new rental housing. Some 34 billion pounds was invested into equities in 2022 via ISAs, according to the government. Diverting even a fifth of that annual flow into wind farms and battery schemes would more than match current commitments in the PM's scaled-back green energy plan. Savers would need to understand that investments in green infrastructure could go down in value as well as up. But share ISAs already contain that risk. For a government less focused on pandering to the rich, it's a logical step. — Reuters

The global outage: A wake-up call for diversification in technology systems



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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The entire globe was recently rocked by a significant technical issue involving Microsoft systems. The resulting outage sent shockwaves across various sectors, from airlines and airports to railways, banks, media, healthcare, emergency services like 911, and other businesses. This was no ordinary glitch but a disruption of enormous proportions, all stemming from a routine software update by a cyber security company called Crowd Strike. The update, which contained an error that clashed with the Windows system and services, led to widespread disruption. To put it into perspective, a company that provides essential software updates to many organisations worldwide released an update with a mistake. Microsoft's Windows operating system is used on a staggering 1.6 billion active devices globally, holding a dominant market share of 72% in the operating system market space. The global technical outage affected only the Windows operating system, leaving



United Airlines employees wait by a departures monitor displaying a blue error screen, also known as the "Blue Screen of Death" inside Terminal C in Newark International Airport in Newark, New Jersey. – Reuters

Microsoft's other operating systems, like Xbox and Windows IoT, unaffected. Several airlines reported significant disruptions, including American Airlines, Delta, United, Ryanair, AirAsia, Cebu Pacific Air, Qantas, Singapore Airlines, and LATAM Airlines. 2,400 flights were cancelled, and 24,000 flights were delayed worldwide. Worldwide airports faced challenges in bookings, reservations, and check-in processes. In India, many airlines had to issue manual, handwritten boarding passes to passengers. This incident highlights the dependence of the aviation industry on IT infrastructure and cloud services. The disruption has affected the entire global air travel network. The technical outage affected banking operations, making accessing online banking services and other financial transactions difficult. News and broadcasting organisations were not spared from the fallout. Broadcasters like Sky News, RNS News, and ABC went off the air as their studio equipment stopped working,

severely hampering their ability to broadcast live TV and publish news. This incident laid bare the vulnerability of the global information dissemination system when faced with large-scale technical failures. The National Health Service (NHS) in the UK and other healthcare providers were thrust into a state of emergency as their medical computer systems faltered. The impact was immediate and severe, disrupting patient appointments, treatments, surgeries, prescriptions, and referrals and potentially jeopardising patient care. Hospitals in countries like India, Japan, and Singapore reported difficulties with their IT systems, impacting patient management and clinical operations. In several African countries, disruptions were experienced in patient health records access, medical care, and challenges in their vaccination programmes. The outage began on July 18, 2024, at 6:00 pm ET, lasted approximately 12 hours, and is being rectified with many systems showing improvements.

The global technical outage disruption perfectly exemplifies the 'brittle' in the BANI world construct. The construct states that we live in a world that has brittle systems. They appear robust, but even the slightest deviation or disruption can lead to a sudden and catastrophic failure. A single software update issue has triggered a domino effect that has rippled across sectors worldwide. The speed of the disruption spread highlights the brittleness of our technological infrastructure and intricate global interconnectedness. This incident is an early cautionary warning signal alerting everyone to reconsider the resilience of our digital infrastructural foundations. Cyber security measures must be heightened to protect against accidental and potentially intentional future attacks. The world must not put all its eggs in one basket and rely on one company or system. Still, it must consider diversification and have a robust contingency plan to deal with incomprehensible and unpredictable eventualities with far-reaching consequences.

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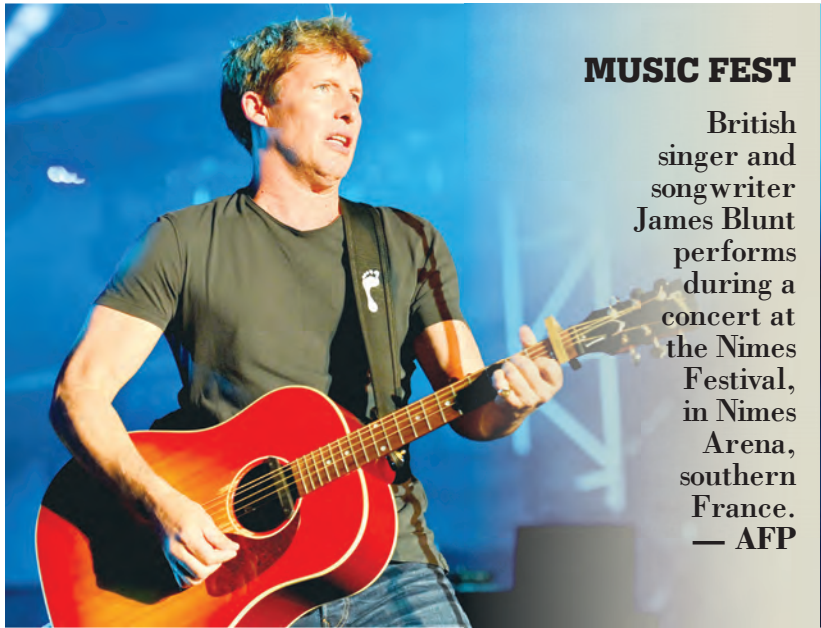
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ROCK BAND

Co-founder of Canadian indie rock band Arcade Fire, Regine Chassagne, performs with the rest of the band in the Iconica Fest Sevilla music festival. — AFP



MUSIC FEST

British singer and songwriter James Blunt performs during a concert at the Nîmes Festival, in Nîmes Arena, southern France. — AFP



AWARD CEREMONY

French singer Zaho de Sagazan performs during the 39th Victoires de la Musique, the annual French music awards ceremony, at the Seine Musicale concert hall in Boulogne-Billancourt, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP



ON STAGE

Colombian singer-songwriter Carlos Vives performs on stage during a concert at the Starlite Festival in Marbella. — AFP



CONCERT

A violinist performs with other members of the Palestine Youth Orchestra (PYO) of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music during a concert focused on Gaza at the Amman Academy Theatre in Amman. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | JULY 21, 2024 | MUHARRAM 15, 1446 AH

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Ancient silk road underground tombs museum opens in China

About eight metres underneath a bustling street in Kuqa in northwestern China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, a complex of tombs has lain dormant for more than 1,700 years. However, the tombs, which date back to the ancient Silk Road, brought back to life, thanks to a unique museum.

The underground museum of the Wei and Jin dynas-

ties (220-420) ancient tombs opened in Kuqa County today, an area that previously belonged to the ancient Qiuci State. The Qiuci State, which commenced in the second century BC and existed for more than 1,000 years, was one of the 36 states in the Western Regions, a term used in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) for areas west of the Yumen Pass, including present Xinjiang

and parts of Central Asia. This in-situ museum with an exhibition space of 5,000 square metres was built to protect 15 brick tomb chambers discovered in 2007 during the construction of the Youyi Road underground pass. The discovery was one of China's top ten new archaeological discoveries that year, Xinhua news agency reported. The tomb complex was built in consistence with the

Han Dynasty style brick-chambered tombs found in the central China region and along the Hexi Corridor, stretching over a distance of nearly 1,000 kilometres in northwest China's Gansu Province, which is home to five Unesco World Heritage Sites and 53 grottoes. In the tombs, some of the deceased were buried with coins in their hands or mouths, a burial custom also seen in the central

China region. A large cache of pottery and bone ware and coins unearthed from the tombs are also on display in the museum. "The museum makes full use of the original appearance of the tombs, as well as digital exhibition, VR technology and touch screens to offer the audience an immersive experience of the ancient Qiuci," said Feng Wei, Deputy Curator of the museum.

According to the Xinjiang regional institute of cultural relics and archaeology, four excavation rounds were carried out from 2007 to 2023 at the site in Kuqa, which led to the discovery of more than 2,000 relic sites. In addition to the tombs, there are wells, cooking stoves and other relics dating from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) up to the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911). — ONA



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A blend of taste and tradition with grilling skills

By Zuwaina al Suleimani

CHEF AHMAD AL SAADI has embarked on a passionate culinary journey, blending traditional Omani recipes with his unique touches. Five years ago, driven by his love for travel and outdoor gatherings, Chef Ahmad began exploring a distinctive fusion of Omani cuisine and innovative grilling techniques. His transformation from an outdoor cooking enthusiast to a renowned chef is nothing short of inspirational. The joy of sharing meals with others fuelled his passion for creating extraordinary Omani dishes.

Initially, Chef Ahmad faced challenges in conceptualising unique ideas, executing them flawlessly, photographing his creations, and mastering lighting to showcase his dishes beautifully. His unwavering determination, however, enabled him to overcome these obstacles.

A pivotal moment in his career was the creation of his first unique

grill, a ground-breaking achievement in the culinary world. This invention catapulted him into the spotlight, establishing him as a celebrated Omani chef.

Ahmad al Saadi deeply respects traditional Omani recipes, using them as the foundation of his culinary philosophy. One of his favourite dishes to prepare is Omani 'Shuwa', a traditional method of slow-cooking meat in an underground sand oven. This distinctive cooking style, unique to Oman, has captivated audiences both locally and internationally, earning Chef Ahmad widespread acclaim. Ahmad draws inspiration for his culinary creations from various sources, including park attractions and everyday experiences. His creativity allows him to transform simple ideas into extraordinary dishes, particularly through his unique grilling techniques. He emphasises the importance of using fresh ingredients, favouring high-quality meats, fish, and greens to ensure the best flavour in his dishes.

To aspiring chefs, Ahmad offers valuable advice: "Embrace the limitless and enjoyable world of cooking. Utilise YouTube as a resource for learning and honing your skills, and continually innovate and develop your unique culinary style."

Chef Ahmad's journey exemplifies the power of passion, innovation, and tradition. His ability to blend the rich heritage of Omani cuisine with unique grilling techniques has inspired a new generation of chefs. His story is a testament to the endless possibilities in the culinary world, driven by creativity, dedication, and a deep respect for one's roots.



Brazilian researchers discover dinosaur fossil after heavy rains in Rio Grande do Sul

A TEAM OF BRAZILIAN scientists has discovered a fossilised skeleton of what they believe is one of the world's oldest dinosaurs after heavy rains in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul accelerated the natural process of erosion.

The fossil found next to a reservoir in the municipality of Sao Joao do Polesine is around 233 million years old, according to paleontologist Rodrigo Temp Müller, who led the team from the Federal University of Santa Maria that found the bones in May.

The researcher believes the dinosaur lived during the Triassic period, when all continents were part of a single land mass called Pangaea. Dinosaurs are thought to have first evolved at that time.

The apex predator discovered in Rio Grande do Sul belongs to the group known as Herrerasauridae — a family of dinosaurs that used to wander across lands that now make up present-day Brazil and Argentina.

The size of the bones reveals that the dinosaur would have reached around 2.5 metres (8.2 feet) in length, according to the document.

After around four days of excavations, the group of researchers transported a block of rock containing the specimen back to the laboratory, where they ran tests.

The expert hypothesises that their discovery is the second most complete skeleton for this type of



dinosaur.

Researchers will now try to determine whether the fossil belongs to an already-known species or a new kind. That work is expected to take several months, as the process is

meticulous to ensure no damaged is caused.

Fossils are more likely to appear after rains, as water exposes the materials by removing the sediment that covers them, in a phenomenon known as weathering.

Rio Grande do Sul saw record amounts of rainfall earlier this year (2024).

That caused devastating floods in May that killed at least 182 people, according to a toll published by the state's civil defence on July 8, 2024.

Extreme weather events are made more likely by climate change, principally caused by the burning of oil, gas and coal. — **ONA**



Majestic mountains, gemstones speak volumes about Oman's geodiversity

BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

Oman is known for its stunning geographical diversity, with unique geological features that embody both contrast and harmony. Many tourists visiting Oman often express their amazement at finding a mountain standing right in the middle of a beach.

Omanis have various reactions to their country's geological diversity. Some are dedicated to studying and documenting the geological landscape, often engaging in outdoor sports, while others find inspiration in it to fuel their creativity.

The geological diversity of Oman goes beyond the mere existence of different geographical features; each feature has its own unique variations. Oman is renowned for its majestic mountains, which are a testament to this geological diversity. These mountains are rich in precious and semi-precious stones,

minerals, and fossils, sparking a wide interest in the natural world.

This natural exhibition attracts visitors, serves as a source of inspiration, and provides a peaceful retreat for many. In recent years, people have begun sharing their interactions with these stunning mountains in various ways—whether through videos of their hiking adventures, photography, paintings, or even entrepreneurial ventures based on the resources found in Oman's mountains.

Loqman al Hooti, an Omani researcher and explorer, is passionate about studying Oman's geological diversity. His interest was sparked by a simple question: Why don't we know more about Oman's gemstones?

"Gemstones reveal beauty and hold a unique inspirational power, often driving people to create jewellery," Al Hooti explained.

"Oman's geographical



diversity inspires me to discover and research more about these gemstones," he said.

His journey has convinced him that Omani gemstones are worthy of being crowned in jewellery, and he carefully selects them to ensure they meet the highest standards of quality.

