

HM thanked by Saudi King

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in response to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Prince Badr bin Abdulmuhsin al Saud. In his cable, King Salman expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased in peace in paradise and protect His Majesty against all harm.

SUNRISE - 05:22 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:58 AM

DHUHR - 12:09 PM

ASR - 03:30 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:50 PM

ISHA - 08:10 PM



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JOINT ACTION

LEADERS TO DISCUSS
ISRAELI AGGRESSION
ON GAZA STRIP

JOINT COORDINATION
ON ISSUES OF
COMMON CONCERN

HM begins state visit to Jordan today



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state visit on Wednesday to the Kingdom of Jordan.

A statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect said: "In affirmation of the fraternal ties and the historical relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state visit to Jordan with effect from Wednesday, in response to an invitation by King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein. The visit reflects the two leaderships' keenness on promoting bilateral relations and pushing them forward to meet the desired objectives of the two countries. His Majesty the Sultan and the Jordanian Monarch will explore areas of cooperation and means of promoting them in various spheres to serve their interests and aspirations."

The two leaders will also exchange views on a set of regional and international issues and developments. They will further touch on topics of concern to the Arab joint action.

The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Jordan seek to maximise the benefits of their distinguished relations based on common historical and cultural strategic aspects. The upcoming state visit of His Majesty Sultan

Haitham bin Tarik to Jordan and his meeting with King Abdallah II will be an important step to augment the level of cooperation between the two countries in various spheres, especially in the economic, tourism, trade and investment areas.

The two leaders' talks in Amman are also expected to address regional and international issues of common interest based on their political consensus, most notably the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, Palestine and the Palestinians in general, as the two countries agree in their political positions on the issues.

GREAT IMPORTANCE

In this context, Fahd bin Abdulrahman al Ojaili, Ambassador of Oman to Jordan, affirmed that His Majesty's visit to Jordan has a great importance, as it is the first official visit of His Majesty to Jordan since assuming the reins of powers in the country.

He said that the visit will address a set of vital files, in addition to discussing the distinguished fraternal relations between the two countries, that extend over 53 years. He described the relations between Oman and Jordan as a vivid example of fraternity, cooperation and understanding. **SEE ALSO P2**



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO YEMEN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Rashad al Alimi, Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council of the Republic of Yemen, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to President Dr Rashad al Alimi. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the almighty for the Yemeni people to realise their aspirations.

SAYYID BADR OFFERS IRAN CONDOLENCES

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday had a phone call with Ali Baqri, acting in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the call, Sayyid Badr offered his condolences on the death of Dr Ebrahim Raisi, late president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hossein Amir-abdollahian, Foreign Affairs Minister, and the delegation that accompanied them.

He expressed the Sultanate of Oman's solidarity with Iran in these hard times. Meanwhile, a number of officials from the Foreign Ministry offered their condolences at the Iranian Embassy in Muscat on the death of Dr Ebrahim Raisi. The officials were received at the embassy by Mousa Farhang, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman.

HM GETS MESSAGE FROM GEN AL BURHAN



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Gen Abdul Fattah Al Burhan, Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council in the Republic of Sudan. The message deals with relations between Oman and Sudan. It was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received in Muscat on Tuesday Envoy of the Chairman of Sudan's Sovereignty Council Hussein Awad, Sudanese acting Minister of Foreign Affairs. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and means of promoting them in various areas to serve the joint interests. — **ONA**

SA FLIGHT HITS SEVERE TURBULENCE

BANGKOK: One passenger died of a suspected heart attack and 30 injured after a Singapore Airlines flight hit severe turbulence on Tuesday, flinging passengers and crew around the cabin and forcing the plane to land in Bangkok, officials and the airline said.

The flight from London and bound for Singapore fell into an air pocket while cabin crew were serving breakfast before it encountered turbulence, prompting the pilots to request an emergency landing, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi airport general manager Kittipong Kittikachorn

told a press conference. The sudden turbulence occurred over the Irrawaddy Basin in Myanmar about 10 hours into the flight, the airline said. The pilot declared a medical emergency and diverted the aircraft to Bangkok, it said without giving further details. Reuters was not able to confirm the sequence of events or whether the medical emergency came before the turbulence. Photographs from the interior of the plane showed large gashes in the overhead cabin panels, gas masks and panels hanging from the ceiling and items of hand luggage strewn around.

ROYAL ORDERS



Blood sugar electronic sensors for children

In implementation of the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Ministry of Health began distribution of electronic blood sugar sensors and insulin pumps to Omani children with Type 1 diabetes from among those aged below 18 years.

These highly advanced devices allow accurate monitoring that helps diminish the symptoms resulting from blood sugar deficiencies.

Although Type 1 diabetes has no cure, but it can be controlled in children, to reduce the occurrence of the ailment's serious complications. Modern technologies used in the devices improve the quality of life of diabetic children and help them lead normal lives. — **ONA**

Sayyid Bilarab briefed on role of Future Fund



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said visits Oman Investment Authority.

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of "Rising Omani Start-ups Programme", on Tuesday visited Oman Investment Authority (OIA) where he was briefed about the role of Future Fund Oman in promoting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and emerging companies (startups).

During the visit, HH Sayyid Bilarab took note of the fact that Future Fund Oman acts as a reliable investment partner for SMEs and startups by allocating 10 per cent of its capital to the firms, thus expanding their access to non-traditional financing. He learnt that the fund also contributes to economic diversification, enters into investment partnerships and attracts investments to targeted sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

HH Sayyid Bilarab was also briefed about OIA's business tasks and investment activities in 2023 that affirm its role in promoting economic development and integration with other sectors in a manner that achieves financial sustainability. — **ONA**



HM’S JORDAN VISIT TO DEEPEN BILATERAL TIES



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik with King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of Jordan in Muscat. – File photo

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT MAY 21

The state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and his meeting with King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein sets a new milestone for bilateral cooperation and coordination.

The foundations of this distinguished relationship were laid by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and late His Majesty king Hussein bin Talal. The eminent relations are continuing between two brotherly countries under the wise leaderships of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Being the first official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Jordan since assuming the reins of power of the Sultanate of Oman, it reflects the progressing relations between Oman and Jordan that extend over 53 years.

Since the start of the diplomatic exchange in 1972, both countries have taken identical stands in tackling regional and international issues. They endorsed dialogue as a successful means of ensuring international peace and security.

Significantly, the visit comes at a time when the region, especially Palestine and the Gaza Strip, is witnessing unprecedented developments, most notably the ongoing Israeli aggression against Gaza. Since its beginning, the two leaders

have not hesitated to make every effort to stop this violence and enable the Palestinian brothers to establish their independent state.

Although the two leaders are expected to discuss regional and international issues of common interest based on their political consensus, the focus will be on further enhancing the good historic ties.

The Omani Ambassador to Jordan, Fahd bin Abdulrahman al Ojaili, confirmed that the

SINCE THE START OF THE DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGE IN 1972, BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE TAKEN IDENTICAL STANDS IN TACKLING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. THEY ENDORSED DIALOGUE AS A SUCCESSFUL MEANS OF ENSURING INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

visit sends messages that Oman and Jordan have a history that speaks for itself and a unique relationship.

“The visit has great objectives, in light of regional and international developments, as it increases the permanent joint coordination between the two countries on issues of common concern, especially the

Palestinian cause,” the Omani envoy was quoted by Oman News Agency.

According to him, the visit is of exceptional importance as it is the first official visit of His Majesty the Sultan after assuming the reins of power in the country.

Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Amjad Al Qahiwi said that the visit coincides with the Kingdom of Jordan’s celebration of the silver jubilee of King Abdullah II assuming the reins of power.

“The visit is an embodiment of the continuity of cooperation and close diplomatic relations between the two countries and represents an opportunity to explore new areas,” he told Oman’s national news agency.

The historic relations between the two culturally close countries also include their common interests in international organisations, such as the League of Arab States and the Arab Monetary Fund, of which they are both members, as well as their shared concern for security and stability in the region.

As part of bolstering cooperation, the two countries have a number of memoranda of understanding, agreements, and executive programmes in different fields, including industry, mining, labour, prohibition of monopolies, archiving, higher education, scholarly research, innovation, consumer protection, tourism, and insurance.

In order to emphasise the cultural and civilisational blending between the two brotherly peoples, a unit for Omani studies was established at Al Al-Bayt University in 1998, to be the first of its kind in the Arab Levant and to form a bridge of research and academic communication between Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman.

The two sides also signed a number of agreements with civil society institutions, the last of which was a memorandum of understanding between the Arab Thought Forum and the Omani Cultural Club.

Cultural cooperation between Oman and Jordan also takes the form of intellectual and literary forums between Omani and Jordanian writers. This is in addition to the two countries’ shared activities during book fairs in Muscat and Amman.

The Jordanian and Omani peoples are characterised by their adherence to authentic Arab customs and traditions, which is evident in the artistic participations that each of them represents in the cultural festivals of the other country, especially the Muscat and Salalah Festivals in Oman and the Jerash Festival in Jordan.

FOR 53 YEARS, OMAN AND JORDAN SHARE COMMON VISION AND VALUES

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Jordan on Wednesday at the invitation of King Abdullah II, is of special importance, since it is the first official visit of His Majesty the Sultan to Jordan since he assumed power in Oman, reflecting the respect and appreciation that both countries and leaders have for each other and indicating the excellent relations that bind the two brotherly countries.

This visit is of great importance in strengthening the mechanisms of coordination and Arab cooperation in the service of the Palestinian cause, and increasing the usual harmony in political visions between the leaders of the two countries, who always emphasise the need to look wisely and persistently at the Palestinian cause and alert the world in all international forums to its importance.

The fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries have continued for 53 years since its foundation was laid by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and late king Hussein bin Talal over many years, and remained a distinctive model for fraternal relations.

In a statement to the Jordan News Agency (Petra), Jordanian Ambassador to Oman, Amjad Qahiwi, emphasised the significance of HM’s visit to Jordan.

Qahiwi highlighted the progress in Jordan-Oman relations under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah II, spanning political, economic, cultural, and social fields.

King Abdullah II’s visit to Oman in 2022 and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik cemented ongoing consultations and coordination efforts. These interactions have played a vital role in deepening relations and expanding cooperation across various sectors, aligning with the aspirations of both nations and their people.

Qahiwi recalled the historical support between the two countries, with Jordan aiding Oman during its Renaissance era by providing qualified human resources. The contributions of Jordanians are still appreciated in Oman, while Oman has consistently supported Jordan



through various challenges, reinforcing their enduring partnership.

He pointed out the alignment in political stances on regional and international issues. Jordan

and Oman meets periodically, with the last meeting being held in Amman recently. Five memorandums of understanding were signed in various fields, and the next meeting is scheduled for Muscat soon. There are also parliamentary committees fostering consultation and cooperation.

He highlighted numerous economic agreements between the two countries, including tax exemption, free trade, investment protection, and industrial cooperation agreements, alongside memorandums of understanding in youth, health, education, environment, and other sectors.

Qahiwi expressed hope that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s visit would open new avenues for cooperation, particularly in economic sectors. Following King Abdullah II’s visit to Oman in 2022, a joint working group was formed to explore investment and economic cooperation opportunities. Since then, mutual visits by economic delegations have taken place, and a joint action plan was agreed upon to enhance cooperation in technology, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, mining, and communications.

values Oman’s diplomatic efforts to enhance regional security and peace, resolve conflicts through negotiations, and bring conflicting parties together. Oman’s long-standing political experience and wisdom have made it a trusted international mediator.

Qahiwi pointed out that the joint committee between Jordan

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ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES AMBASSADORS

Muscat: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Tuesday Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty.

During the meeting, Gen Al Numani thanked the ambassador for the efforts she exerted to promote areas of cooperation between Oman and France, wishing her success in future endeavours. On her turn, the ambassador expressed her thanks for the cooperation extended to her during her duty in Oman.

Gen Al Numani also received Christophe Ceska, Ambassador of Austria to Oman.

During the meeting, they reviewed the cooperation relations between the two countries and underlined the friendship relations between Oman and Austria. They also touched on a set of current regional and international issues.

— ONA



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani with Christophe Ceska



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani with Veronique Aulagnon

Oman to have six new airports by 2029

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman will have six new airports and most of them are expected to be operational by 2028-2029, according to Naif al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority.

In an interview on the sidelines of Future Aviation Forum in Riyadh, he said that as work is underway on the design of these new projects, the number of airports in the country will go up to 13, which will boost tourism.

Al Abri said that with the completion of these airports, the number of passengers using airports in the Sultanate of Oman will go up to 50 million passengers by 2040 from the current 17 million.

Alongside the opening of a new terminal of Muscat International Airport in 2018, which can handle up to 20 million passengers a year, the Sultanate of Oman saw the opening of a new terminal building at Salalah (two



Naif al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority.

million passengers a year) and new airports in Duqm and Suhar.

It has been reported earlier that the new Musandam Airport will be completed by the second half of 2028 with all studies for the project completed and the appropriate site chosen for its construction.

“The new airport can handle Boeing 737 and Airbus 320 size aircraft,” according to the Ministry of Transport, and Communications and Information Technology.

With the budget already

allocated, the new airports will also help to get more international traffic besides giving a boost to the logistics and tourism sectors in places by linking them with industrial areas of Suhar and Salalah.

There are also plans to improve connectivity to the popular tourist destination of Ras al Hadd in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

CAA recently floated tenders from specialised companies for site selection studies, master plans, design and supervision for the proposed development of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Masirah and Suhar airports.

It may be noted that Muscat International Airport received 4,430,119 passengers in the first quarter of this year, an increase of 12.4 per cent from 3,792,212 during the same period in 2023.

Salalah Airport handled 429,181 passengers in the first quarter of this year, while Suhar handled 22,390 passengers and Duqm handled 9,405 passengers during the same period.

Foreign ministry officials offer condolences to Iran

MUSCAT: A number of officials from the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday offered their condolences at the Iranian Embassy in Muscat on the death of Dr Ebrahim Raisi, late president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the delegation that accompanied him in a helicopter crash in Iran’s north-western province of East Azerbaijan.

The officials were received at the embassy by Mousa Farhang, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman, and members of the Iranian diplomatic mission.

They expressed their sincere condolences and sympathy to



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy signs the condolences register at the Iranian Embassy in Muscat on Tuesday.

the embassy members, as well as the government and people

of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They commended the role of the

late president of the Republic and his minister of foreign affairs in strengthening the bonds of fraternity and developing relations between Oman and Iran. They also affirmed the strength of Omani-Iranian bilateral relations.

The Iranian ambassador expressed deep thanks and appreciation for the gesture of the Foreign Ministry, hoping that relations between the two countries would continue to grow and prosper. Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, signed the condolences register.

— ONA

Sayyid Badr makes a phone call with Lebanese Prime Minister

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, made a phone call with the Lebanese Prime Minister, Najib Mikati on Tuesday. They reviewed areas of joint cooperation and means of boosting them to serve the interests of the two countries. — ONA

Haima sees a roll cloud



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

A humongous roll cloud appeared in the sky of the Mukhaizna in the Wilayat of Haima in Al Wusta Governorate on Tuesday.

Haima is coincidentally experiencing the maximum temperature in Oman, which is a maximum of 44 degrees Celsius and a low of 29.

The roll cloud is also known as the morning glory cloud. According to Oman Met Office weather forecaster, this has been experienced before in 2014 and 2015. “It usually occurs in the desert area between Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and Dhofar Governorate as well as in Al Sharqiyah South coastal area.

A roll cloud takes place due

to a combination of elements such as warm and cold air, moisture and the sudden change in pressure,” explained Jaiffer al Busaidy, Weather Forecaster at Oman Met Office. He explained that this form of cloud does not bring any rain, instead it stays for a while and then disappears because of the high temperature. “This can also occur during winter and summer,” he noted.

According to the definition by SKYbrary Aviation Safety, a roll cloud occurs with strong inversion conditions with a shallow layer of colder air moving under warm air. “The warm air is lifted up ahead of the leading edge of the cold air and with enough moisture present, a cloud is formed. The air then rolls down behind the leading edge giving the roll appearance.”

DIPLOMATS IN MUSCAT MOURN RAISI, FOREIGN MINISTER

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Embassy of Iran in Muscat began to receive condolences for the late president Ebrahim Raisi, and foreign minister who were killed in a copter crash, at its premises on Tuesday.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, attended the condolences ceremony followed by ambassadors and officials.



Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia, expresses his condolences at the embassy in Muscat on Tuesday.

Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia, said, “The passing of the Iranian president and foreign minister is a tragic loss and keeps many hurt. Deepest condolences to the people of Iran on the loss. Our prayers and thoughts go out to the people of Iran.”

“We received kind gestures of condolences from Oman’s Foreign Ministry represented by the minister and other officials from various ministries and embassies, and other diplomatic

missions since Tuesday morning. We are touched by the condolences paid by both citizens and expatriates in Oman,” said Mohammed Rouhani, the Deputy Ambassador of the Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman. He thanked all those who attended the condolences ceremony.

He further said that a condolences book will be available for registering condolences at the embassy premises on Wednesday.

Drone operators must have CAA training

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Civil Aviation Authority’s (CAA) tightened rules on the use of drones by mandating all drone operators must complete training from organisations approved by the authority.

The regulation comes into effect from December 1, 2024.

A licence is not needed to use a drone indoors whose weight does not exceed 250g and whose maximum height does not exceed 100m above the ground, unless it carries sensors to collect data or photos.

The decision stipulates



that the licensee must ensure there is no danger to people or their property, and should not transport materials or perform delivery services without approval.

The licensee shall be responsible for any damage caused to people, public or private properties and all

other liabilities or expenses. The licensee should notify the concerned parties immediately upon the occurrence of any drone accident.

The licensee is banned from operating drones within a radius of 5 km of airports, ports, protected places, military areas and any other locations determined by the authority. They cannot fly the drone after sunset without permission.

Drones cannot be used during shows or competitions, chase manned aircraft, and fly near them. In the event of a violation of these regulations, the competent authority may cancel the licence

or impose an administrative fine.

A fine of RO 600 will be imposed for not following weather-related or other safety guidelines; RO 500 for flying drones without a licence; RO 300 for failure to follow the time and place in the licence; RO 300 for failure to comply with the actual purpose of using drones; and RO 200 for failure to carry the licence or refusal to present it to the competent authority upon request.

Licences under old regulations shall continue to be valid until the expiry of their term, and renewal shall be done based on new regulations.



SCATTERED STONES WORRY QURUM BEACHGOERS

MOHAMMED AL DIGHAISHI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

REGULARS at Shatti Al Qurum are an aggrieved lot due to scattered stones that hinder exercising and walking. Many people are accustomed to exercising on a daily basis on Shatti Al Qurum. Muscat Municipality has recently made many beautifications on the beach but the contractors who implemented these projects didn't do their job properly.

After cyclone Shaheen, the municipality strengthened the beach by building barriers or breakwaters, with the aim of protecting the beach and coastal infrastructure from water erosion and other negative environmental factors.

After the completion of the project to reinforce Shatti Al Qurum to protect against corrosion, local residents and beachgoers discovered a new problem related to the stones used in the reinforcement. With the tidal movement, these stones began to scatter over the surrounding area. This prevents people from exercising comfortably.

Despite the good modifications made to the beach and the designated walkway, the view of the beauty of the beach is spoiled by these scattered stones, prompting some local residents to demand that this problem be resolved urgently.

Yahya bin Shannoun al Owaisi pointed out that the workers who participated in the process of repairing the erosion of the beach brought soil mixed with clay and small stones, in order to compact the voids and to hold together the trees that almost fell and posed a danger to the neighboring area. Al Owaisi added that the placement of this soil near the sea, the long period of work, and the successive weather conditions led to the waves scattered soil and stones on the beach. Despite the completion of the project, the stones remained in place. Instead of removing the stones from the site, the company left it to be buried in sand.

Hamdan bin Issa al Balushi pointed out that Shatti Al Qurum was considered the most suitable place for exercising, especially in the morning. "You may find a clean atmosphere that stimulates the body, as well as the sand from which we derive positive energy, but in the recent period I have avoided it completely. I go for walks near the house." Al Balushi added that Shatti Al Qurum, especially in the area between the British Embassy and the beachfront, is filled with stones, which makes walking difficult, especially when there is a high tide in the sea. "One of my feet was injured because of the stones on the beach."

– PICTURE FOR
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OMAN TAKES PART IN GCC MEET

Doha: Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, participated in a preparatory session for the 27th meeting of GCC Ministers of Information in Doha on Tuesday. Oman's delegation was headed by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. The officials looked into several topics on the agenda, namely establishing regulatory measures for advertising on social media sites and platforms in member states; drafting a public awareness plan for the protection of morals and social upbringing inculcation of the GCC ethical identity. It also touched on developing an initiative to ensure "digital safety" for children in member states. – **ONA**

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Some motorists resort to honking at traffic lights without any reason, which increases noise pollution and violates traffic laws. It may sometimes spark road rage or quarrels causing nuisance or traffic jams. According to traffic rules, use of horns loudly attracts a fine of RO 10 first time and RO 15 second time. If horns are sounded in no-horn zones like hospital or schools, fine will be RO 10.

The horn is pressed to warn others of the vehicle's presence or approach, or to call attention to some hazard. It is not an instrument to convey your impatience.

Some motorists have no patience and as soon as the light changes to yellow from red, the sounds of horns assail you.

Everybody wants to reach



Honking attracts a fine of RO 10 first time and RO 15 second time. If horns are sounded in no-horn zones like hospital or schools, fine will be RO 10.

everywhere first. But this rush may sometimes cause accidents.

Using car horns has become a normal attitude for most people in daily lives, especially when they want to buy something from eateries. Moreover, using the car horn has become more like a morning and evening greeting for some people.

In Oman, people honk during weddings or celebrations as an expression of joy or happiness. But one's merrymaking must not cause irritation for others.

Road users pointed out in social media that many of those who excessively use horns do not respect the traffic rules. One of them explained that the

unreasonable use of the horn is an irritating and uncivilised behaviour that has begun to spread on a large scale.

Others said the importance of spreading awareness to use horns responsibly. The authorities cannot enforce discipline without the support of road users.

Motorists blame honking on driving slowly on the highway, use of mobile phones at the wheel, hogging the left lane of the road without allowing anyone to pass them, and not moving the vehicle at the traffic lights even after signal turns green.

Unnecessary honking and using shrill horns are a menace. No law or rule will help to control this noise pollution unless the change in mindset. One must be careful to lower the decibel levels and discreetly use horns. Drive defensively, carefully and with discipline to ensure road safety.

SPRAYING TO COMBAT LEAF BEETLE, WHITE FLY

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

A drive campaign to combat leaf beetles and the white fly which attack coconut trees, bananas and other crops was launched in Dhofar which will continue until June 15. The campaign led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) in Dhofar Governorate will continue till June 15.

Dr Amin bin Abdullah of MoAFWR, said, "This is the fifth campaign and these pests are dangerous for plants and trees. The directorate has completed the necessary preparations to implement the campaign, which began early by conducting research diagnostics by specialists in the Department of Agricultural



and Animal Research in Salalah and conducting research experiments to choose the appropriate pesticide that can control several pests at the same time. Field surveys were then conducted by specialists to determine the locations and area of spread and degree of infection in Salalah and Taqah.

The campaign includes ground and aerial spraying using drones. Dhofar Governorate has 150,000 coconut trees distributed over an area of 1,455 acres, and the annual production of coconuts reaches 7,000 tonnes annually.

Officials requested all farms owners to cooperate with field spraying teams. It also urged farm owners to be present when spraying teams visit the farms and shift animals and honey bee hive boxes when spraying is done. They must also cover water sources and fodder from the direct impact of the spraying operation.

This campaign comes within the framework of the programmes implemented by the MoAFWR to support the agricultural sector and assist farmers in combating pests.

SQU's College of Education gets accreditation from US agency

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Sultan Qaboos University's College of Education has received International Academic Accreditation for its undergraduate courses from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

This accreditation is a significant achievement that reflects the college's commitment to maintaining the highest standards in teacher's training. It also confirms the position of Sultan Qaboos University as a leading institution in university education and learning and its continuous efforts to improve academic and professional opportunities for its faculty members and students.

CAEP accredits Educator Preparation Institutions inside and outside the United States of



Prof Saleh al Busaidy

America by providing evidence that confirms quality and supports continuous improvement to enhance the learning of school students.

The College of Education obtains the highest period of accreditation, which is seven years. Thus, the accreditation is valid for the period from 2024 to 2030.

The Dean of the College of

Education at Sultan Qaboos University, Prof Saleh bin Salim bin Mohammed al Busaidy, said that what distinguishes the teacher preparation programmes at the College of Education is the balance between the theoretical and practical aspects where students obtain a broad depth of knowledge in their specialty and at the same time acquire practical skills through field experiences and field training.

Dr Shubair Abdullah, Head of the Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Unit at the College of Education, indicated that preparations for the academic accreditation process began early, and the college adopted the participatory method in managing the accreditation stages. For instance, a main committee was formed to review all requirements for academic accreditation.



Ministry of Health ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2056/2024/ MOH/ DGHSMU-5	Maintenance works in Malaria Office, Watchman Room and Removal works of Existing Overhead Water Tank in Limah Health Center at Governorate of Musandam	04/June/2024	Before 10 am on Sunday 30/June/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
3074/2023/ MOH/ DGHSMU-7- Recall - 1	Construction and Installation of Storm Drainage System at Bukha Hospital, Governorate of Musandam	04/June/2024	Before 10 am on Sunday 30/June/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
2930/2023/ MOH/ DGHSMU-6- Recall - 2	Maintenance Works of Dental Room, Flagpole, EPI Room, MCH Room, Laboratory and Medical Store Extension in Limah Health Center at Musandam Governorate	04/June/2024	Before 10 am on Sunday 30/June/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
2057/2024/ MOH/ DGHSMU-6	Supply & Installation and end user Training for Endoscopy system for ENT Clinic in Khasab Polyclinic in Musandam Governorate	04/June/2024	Before 10 am on Sunday 30/June/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted **online** on the given website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any inquiries in regard to the tender, please contact through the information below:

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

Madayan participates in Saudi Food Show in Riyadh

RIYADH: Madayn (The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates) is participating at the Saudi Food Show 2024, held in Riyadh.

The event features over 1,000 exhibitors from 97 countries.

Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Alawi, Investment Director at Madayn, emphasised the significance of the Sultanate of Oman's participation in the second edition of the Saudi Food Show. The event is an ideal platform to boost international trade relations, explore lucrative business opportunities, and highlight advancements in food industries, packaging, and processing.

"The event plays a key role in facilitating communication between Omani companies and key stakeholders from diverse markets, thereby encouraging collaboration and driving growth in Oman's food industry," Al Alawi pointed out. — **ONA**



TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy
Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/6	Ministry's Site Infrastructure Implementation	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	5/6/ 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



Israeli forces raze Jabalia with air strikes

GAZA: Israeli forces thrust deeper into the Jabalia camp in northern Gaza on Tuesday, laying waste to residential districts with tank and air bombardments, residents said, while Israeli air strikes killed at least five people in the southern city of Rafah.

Simultaneous Israeli assaults on the northern and southern edges of the Gaza Strip this month have caused a new exodus of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes, and sharply restricted the flow of aid, raising the risk of famine.

In Jabalia, a sprawling refugee camp built for displaced civilians 75 years ago, the Israeli army used bulldozers to clear shops and property near the local market, residents said, in a military operation that began almost two weeks ago.

The health authorities and Gaza Civil Emergency Service said dozens of bodies were trapped under rubble of houses and on the roads in Jabalia, but were out of reach of rescue teams.

“Israel is destroying the camp on the heads of the people, the bombardment never stops, and the world is calling for more food to enter Gaza. We want to spare lives not extra food,” said Abu El Nasser, a resident of Jabalia, who fled to Gaza City.

More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war in Gaza, which is now in its eighth month, according to the Gaza health ministry. At least 10,000 others are missing and believed to be trapped under destroyed buildings, it says.

The war has devastated the overcrowded coastal enclave, destroying houses, schools and hospitals and creating a dire humanitarian crisis.

Residents and medical officials said Israeli tanks were besieging the Al Awda Hospital in Jabalia for the third day, and officials at Kamal Adwan Hospital in nearby Beit Lahiya said they were evacuating patients after it was hit by Israeli fire.

In the south, air strikes killed three children in a house in Khan Younis and at least five people including three children in a home in Rafah.

East of Khan Younis, residents said they were fleeing Khuzaa town after Israeli troops began an incursion on the eastern edge of the territory, bulldozing across the border fence.

“Bombing everywhere, people are leaving in panic. It was a surprising incursion,” one resident from Khuzaa said, as he and his family were leaving.

Israel is pushing on with its operations in Rafah on Gaza’s southern border with Egypt, where more than half of the territory’s 2.3 million population had sought refuge after being displaced from areas further north. — **Reuters**



Palestinians evacuate Kamal Adwan Hospital following an Israeli strike, in the northern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

The office of Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas condemned Tuesday’s raid, saying Israel was killing innocent people, doctors, and destroying the infrastructure

Troops kill 7 in West Bank raid

JENIN: Palestinian health officials said seven Palestinians were killed in an Israeli raid on the West Bank city of Jenin, where a correspondent reported masked gunmen later exchanged fire with Israeli forces.

Explosions and gunfire were heard from inside the camp, while at least five gunmen clashed with troops in downtown Jenin city, the correspondent reported.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Israeli military said troops had launched a “operation in Jenin and they were fighting with armed men”, without providing further details.

The Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah said Israeli troops had killed seven Palestinians during the raid that began in the morning in Jenin city.

It said 19 people had also been wounded, including two who were in critical condition.

Palestinian official news agency Wafa reported that among those killed was a surgeon, Usaed Jabareen, from the Jenin government hospital.

A school teacher and a student were also among the dead, Wafa reported, quoting hospital director Wissam Bakr.

Following the raid, all schools in Jenin and its adjacent refugee camp had been evacuated, Wafa said.

In early afternoon, the streets near the camp were deserted, except for Israeli bulldozers moving debris.



Palestinians look on behind burning tyres during an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin. — AFP

The road between the hospital and the camp had been stripped of its asphalt by Israeli troops who said they were looking for concealed bombs. Drones buzzed overhead and sporadic gunfire rang out.

Crowds of mourners including schoolchildren gathered for the funeral of teacher Allam Jaradat.

Jaradat’s body, wrapped in the green flag, was kept at a local mosque where mourners offered prayers.

“The new massacre in Jenin... is conclusive evidence of the criminal mentality that rules the occupying state and its ideological belief in killing our people,” Hamas said in a statement.

The office of Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas condemned Tuesday’s raid in a statement on Wafa, saying Israel was “killing innocent people, doctors, and destroying the infrastructure of Palestinian hospitals, cities and villages.” The Israeli army routinely carries out raids into the city and adjacent camp.

The West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, has seen a surge in violence for more than a year, but particularly since the war erupted on October 7.

At least 513 Palestinians have been killed in the territory by Israeli troops or settlers since the Gaza war broke out, according to Palestinian officials. — **AFP**

Cyprus says maritime aid shipments on track

NISCOSIA: Four ships from the United States and France are transporting aid from Larnaca port to the Gaza Strip amid the spiralling humanitarian crisis there, the Cyprus presidency said on Tuesday.

Victor Papadopoulos from the presidential press office told state radio 1,000 tonnes of aid were shipped from Cyprus to the besieged Palestinian territory between Friday and Sunday.

He said the vessels were shuttling between Gaza and the east Mediterranean island, a distance of about 360 kilometres.

Large quantities of aid from Britain, Romania, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and other countries have accumulated at Larnaca port.

Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides told reporters

on Tuesday the maritime aid effort was “on track”.

“We have substantial assistance from third countries that want to contribute to this effort,” he said.

The aid shipped from Cyprus is entering Gaza via a temporary US-built floating pier, where the shipments are offloaded for distribution. Aid deliveries by truck have slowed to a trickle since Israeli forces took control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing with Egypt in early May.

Israel has imposed a siege on the long-blockaded Gaza Strip, depriving its 2.4 million people.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said on Tuesday that food distribution in city of Rafah were currently suspended due to lack of supplies and insecurity. — **AFP**



Displaced Palestinians queue for water at a camp west of Deir al Balah in the Gaza Strip. — AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

In brief

■ NOUMEA



PRESIDENT MACRON TO VISIT RIOT-SCARRED NEW CALEDONIA

French President Emmanuel Macron will visit riot-hit New Caledonia, Paris said on Tuesday, as tourists are evacuated from the Pacific territory that has suffered over a week of unrest.

Macron “will leave as soon as this evening,” government spokeswoman Prisca Thevenot said, hoping to soothe tempers over his government’s voting reform plans rejected by indigenous Kanaks.

Earlier, Australian Air Force transport aircraft evacuated trapped tourists from a small domestic airport in New Caledonia’s capital Noumea, as separatist roadblocks still hinder access to the international hub.

■ MANILA



SLOVAK COALITION BACKS FICO AS LAWMAKERS RETURN AFTER SHOOTING

Slovakia’s parliament returned to work on Tuesday after adjourning in the wake of an assassination attempt on Prime Minister Robert Fico, with the government coalition signalling its contested policy agenda remained on track.

Fico is recovering and no longer in immediate danger, in the first major assassination attempt on a European political leader for more than 20 years.

“We are united, and sending a clear signal of our determination to continue in the (policy) tempo and direction set by Robert Fico,” Deputy Prime Minister Robert Kalinak said in a news conference of Fico’s ruling SMER party. — Reuters

■ MADRID



DIPLOMATIC CRISIS DEEPENS AS SPAIN PULLS OUT ARGENTINA ENVOY

A diplomatic crisis sparked by Argentina President Javier Milei calling Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s wife “corrupt” deepened on Tuesday with the “definitive” withdrawal of Madrid’s ambassador to Buenos Aires.

Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said that the envoy “will remain definitively in Madrid. Argentina will no longer have a Spanish ambassador.” “We did not provoke this situation, but it is the government’s obligation to defend the dignity,” Albares said.

Argentina’s outspoken president caused outrage with an attack on socialism while at a Madrid conference. — AFP

Singapore Airlines flight hits severe turbulence, one passenger dead



The interior of Singapore Airline flight SQ321 is pictured after an emergency landing at Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi International Airport on Tuesday. — Reuters

BANGKOK: One passenger died of a suspected heart attack and 30 injured after a Singapore Airlines flight hit severe turbulence on Tuesday, flinging passengers and crew around the cabin and forcing the plane to land in Bangkok, officials and the airline said.

The flight from London and bound for Singapore fell into an air pocket while cabin crew were serving breakfast before it encountered turbulence, prompting the pilots to request an emergency landing, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi airport general manager Kittipong Kittikachorn told a press conference.

The sudden turbulence occurred over the Irrawaddy Basin in Myanmar about 10 hours into the flight, the airline said. The pilot declared a medical emergency and diverted the aircraft to Bangkok, it said without giving further details.

Reuters was not able to confirm the sequence of events or whether the medical emergency came before the turbulence.

Photographs from the interior of the plane showed large gashes in the overhead cabin panels, gas masks and panels hanging from the ceiling and items of hand luggage strewn around. A passenger said some people’s heads had slammed into the lights above the seats and punctured the

panels.

“I saw things lying everywhere and many air crew injured” with bruising, Kittikachorn said after the most critically injured passengers and crew had been evacuated.

A 73-year-old British man died during the incident, likely due to a heart attack, Kittikachorn said. Seven people were critically injured, some with head injuries. He added people were calm as they were led from the plane.

“Singapore Airlines offers its deepest condolences to the family of the deceased. We deeply apologise for the traumatic experience that our passengers and crew members suffered on this flight,” the airline said.

Some tallies of the injured out of the 211 passengers and 18 crew differed.

The airline said 18 were hospitalised and 12 being treated in hospitals. Samitvej Hospital said it was treating 71 passengers, including six who were severely injured. It was not immediately possible to reconstruct the incident from publicly available tracking data, but a spokesperson for FlightRadar 24 said it was analysing data at around 0749 GMT which showed the plane tilting upwards and return to its cruising altitude over the space of a minute. A passenger who was on

the Boeing 777-300ER plane told Reuters that the incident involved the sensation of rising then falling.

“Suddenly the aircraft starts tilting up and there was shaking so I started bracing for what was happening, and very suddenly there was a very dramatic drop so everyone seated and not wearing a seatbelt was launched immediately into the ceiling,” Dzafran Azmir, a 28-year-old student on board the flight told Reuters.

“Some people hit their heads on the baggage cabins overhead and dented it, they hit the places where lights and masks are and broke straight through it,” he said.

Kittikachorn said most of the passengers he had spoken to had been wearing their seatbelts.

The spokesperson for FlightRadar 24 said regarding data showing a drop in height, “our initial thinking is the turbulence event is prior to the standard descent from 37,000 to 31,000 feet. That appears to just be a flight level change in preparation for landing.”

Suvarnabhumi airport said the plane requested an emergency landing at 3:35 p.m. local time (0835 GMT) and landed at 3:51 p.m. Uninjured passengers disembarked and an another aircraft will fly them onwards. The airline said it landed at 3:45 pm. — Reuters

Small island states secure historic win at UN court

BERLIN: A group of small island states including Antigua and Barbuda and the Bahamas secured a win on climate change in an international court on Tuesday as they seek to combat rising sea levels.

In its first-ever climate-related judgement, The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) said that greenhouse gas emissions absorbed by the ocean are considered marine pollution and countries are obliged to protect marine environments by going further than required under the Paris climate agreement.

The opinion was requested by a group of nine island nations facing climate-driven rises in sea levels.

The opinion is not legally binding but it will be able to help guide countries in their climate policy and will be able to be used in other cases as legal precedent.

“The ITLOS opinion will inform our future legal and diplomatic work in putting an end to inaction that has brought us to the brink of an irreversible disaster,” Antigua and Barbuda’s Prime Minister Gaston Browne said.

The other nations in the group that brought the case were Tuvalu, Palau, Niue, Vanuatu, St.Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines and

St. Kitts and Nevis.

The court said states are legally obligated to take all necessary measures to achieve the goal of keeping global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels according to the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas.

Eselealofoa Apinelu, a representative of the South Pacific island of Tuvalu, said the advisory opinion spells out the legally binding obligations of all states to protect the marine environment and the states against the existential threats posed by climate change.

“This is a historic moment for small island developing nations in their request for climate justice, an important first step in holding the major polluters accountable, for the sake of all humankind,” Apinelu said.

Climate activists and lawyers said the decision could also influence two upcoming legal opinions by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, and the International Court of Justice.

“Now we have clarity on what states are obligated to do which they have failed to do through 30 years ... but this is the opening chapter,” Payam Akhavan, lead counsel for the nine island nations in the proceedings, said of ITLOS’ opinion. — Reuters



Payam Akhavan, lead counsel for the nine island nations, poses with other lawyers, in Hamburg, Germany. — Reuters

Over 14,000 displaced from Ukraine’s Kharkiv

GENEVA: More than 14,000 people have been displaced in recent days from Ukraine’s eastern Kharkiv region, where Russia launched a ground offensive on May 10, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday. The assault has seen Russian forces achieve their largest territorial gains in Ukraine in the last 18 months.

“Over the past two weeks, fighting in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine has severely escalated,” Jarno Habicht, the WHO’s representative in Ukraine, told a press briefing in Geneva, via video-link from Kyiv.

“Over 14,000 people have been displaced in a matter of days, and nearly 189,000 more still reside within 25 kilometres of the border with the Russian Federation, facing



Firefighters rest after extinguishing a fire in a private house destroyed by a Russian drone attack in Kharkiv. — AFP

“Over 14,000 people have been displaced in a matter of days, and nearly 189,000 more still reside within 25 kilometres of the border with the Russian Federation

JARNO HABICHT
WHO’s representative

significant risks due to the ongoing fighting,” he said. He said the UN health agency was using these figures after speaking with local authorities.

“With the worsening security situation, humanitarian needs in the region are growing, and growing fast,” Habicht said.

The conflict in Kharkiv “has significantly increased the number of trauma patients”, he added.

Russia launched its full-scale attack of Ukraine in February 2022. Since then, more than 20,000 amputations have been carried out, said Habicht.

And 200 ambulances per year, on average, have been damaged or destroyed in shelling attacks, “depriving the Ukrainian people of urgent care”, he added.

The UNHCR voiced concerns that conditions in Kharkiv could become even more difficult if the ground assault and aerial attacks continue. — AFP

HM’s visit to Jordan testament to strong ties



Oman and Jordan share a fraternal relationship that binds the two brotherly countries based on trust, welfare of people and peaceful coexistence under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein. This constitutes a unique model of solid brotherhood based on respect and understanding and the convergence of points of view on all issues of the region and the challenges it faces. During his first state visit to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan which begins on Wednesday, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is expected to discuss with King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein regional and international issues, especially the Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip. Oman and Jordan have been stressing the centrality of the Palestinian issue and the need to reach a just solution to it that ends the occupation and fulfils all the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people, on the basis of the two-state solution.

It may be recalled that the Jordan King visited the Sultanate of Oman in October 2022 during which both sides reiterated their keenness on strengthening joint investment in different fields, such as industry, mining, labour, competition protection, prohibition of monopoly, archiving, higher education, scholarly research, innovation, consumer protection, tourism and insurance. Both sides laid emphasis on the genuineness of the Palestinian cause and the need to reach a fair and final settlement to the issue in a manner that meets all legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, based on the two-state solution, which provides for the establishment of a sovereign, independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital based on charters of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. The relations between Oman and Jordan have been characterised by consensus on crucial issues of concern and both countries agree that peace is the only way to resolve differences in the region, and that working to stimulate this to maintain stability is a strategic goal and an opportunity for

OMAN-JORDAN TIES A UNIQUE MODEL OF SOLID BROTHERHOOD BASED ON RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING AND THE CONVERGENCE OF POINTS OF VIEW ON ALL ISSUES OF THE REGION AND THE CHALLENGES IT FACES

future generations in accordance with international resolutions. There has been continuous communication through a series of meetings aimed at strengthening trade and economic relations after the formation of Jordanian-Omani working group to explore investment opportunities and economic cooperation. It may be noted that the number of Omani tourists who visited Jordan in 2023 was 21,738, and in the first quarter of this year it was 6,757. The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicates that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and Jordan witnessed a 25 per cent growth in 2023. Omani exports to Jordan during 2023 increased by 28.2 per cent, to exceed RO 43,850,000, compared to more than RO 34,208,000 in 2022, while the total value of Oman’s imports from Jordan in 2023 amounted to about RO 27, 517,500, an increase of 41.5 per cent compared to 2022, which amounted to more than RO 19,441,300. Preliminary statistics show that the value of direct investments from Jordan in Oman amounted to about RO 241,800,000 at the end of last year.

Milei pulls no punches with left leaders

SONIA AVALOS, LEILA MACOR

The diplomatic furor unleashed by Argentina’s President Javier Milei calling Spain’s first lady “corrupt” over the weekend is just the latest in a series of fights he has picked with leftist leaders. The libertarian Milei, who campaigned wielding a chainsaw and has never been shy to say what he thinks, has sparred publicly with the presidents of Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico and Brazil. Critics say Milei is focused on prioritising diplomatic connections with fellow right-wingers — while lashing out with an undiplomatic tenor at the rest of the world’s leaders, to the detriment of Argentine foreign policy. He has called Colombia’s Gustavo Petro a “murderer” and “terrorist,” Mexico’s Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador “ignorant,” and Venezuela’s Nicolas Maduro, with whom he has traded many insults, a “dictator.” As for Brazil’s Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Milei has branded him a “wild lefty,” though he has eased up on the leader of Argentina’s biggest trading partner since taking office in December. It is not only politicians who have come in for a tongue-lashing by the self-proclaimed “anarcho-capitalist” president. He called Pope Francis an “imbecile” who “promotes communism,” though the two men have since made up. It was on Sunday that Milei set his sights on Spain’s socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, calling his wife “corrupt” without naming her directly. Spain recalled its ambassador to Buenos Aires, as Colombia had done before. “The state of the government’s foreign relations is chaotic,” Alejandro Rascovan, a professor of international security at the University of San Martin, said. “It prioritises the political and personal ties of the president,” he said, and there “does not seem to be state policy behind it.” As president, Milei has left Argentina six times: three of them to the United States. There he twice met tycoon Elon Musk, received a decoration from a Jewish orthodox community, and sat down with former president Donald Trump. Milei, who grew up Catholic but has recently embraced orthodox Judaism, has also visited Israel and the Vatican. According to Roy Hora, a historian at the University of San Andres, Milei’s diplomacy “seems to combine convictions and conveniences.” “This marks the subordination of foreign policy to short-term domestic policy imperatives, and highlights the amateurism of our rulers and their lack of clarity about our long-term interests and our modest, perhaps irrelevant, place on the international stage,” he added. — AFP

Icons in culture, science, history, politics



Dr Khalfan Hamed al Harrasi

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In Oman’s rich history, many talented people have significantly contributed to the nation and the world. These luminaries include scholars, poets, doctors, and historians. Their achievements, recorded in history, are a testament to Oman’s rich cultural heritage. Starting with science and medicine, Dr Rashid bin Omairah was a prominent figure in Omani history who significantly contributed to medicine and pharmacy. He was recognised by Unesco for his influence on Oman’s civilisation during its 37th General Conference in 2013. Dr. Rashid was known for his exceptional medical skills, successfully treating countless patients, some of whom suffered from incurable diseases. People from near and far sought his expertise. Another renowned Omani figure in medicine is Dr Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Abdullah al Azdi, who has made significant contributions to the field of physics. He has advanced our understanding of the universe by studying the fundamental forces of nature. Dr Al Azdi’s interdisciplinary approach has helped to bridge the gap between science and philosophy, making him an eminent figure in the scientific community. His work has had a lasting impact on the field of physics. Shaikh Nour Al Din Abdullah bin Humaid al Salmi’s contributions to the social and religious fields have been recognised by Unesco, which has named him one of the world’s most influential figures. Shaikh Al Salmi was a prolific writer who has contributed substantially to various fields, including religion, jurisprudence, hadith, Arabic language sciences, and history. Women scholars have also helped shape the richness of Oman’s history. Shaikha Aisha bint Rashid bin Khasib al Riyamiyah, despite her visual impairment, was a well-known scholar and jurist from Wilayat of Bahla. She contributed significantly to Omani scholarship, providing jurisprudential answers and writing a multitude of works. She established a library dedicated to preserving various sciences and jurisprudential books and had a school from which many scholars graduated. Like Shaikh Al Salmi and Shaikha Aisha, His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of Oman, is known for his deep knowledge of Islamic culture and religion. Shaikh

Al Khalili has authored several books on interpreting the Holy Quran and general religious matters, such as The Clear Truth. Described as a voice of truth, Shaikh Al Khalili is known for his scholarly stature, bravery, and intense pride in his nation. He always takes advantage of every opportunity to participate in significant events and express his opinions. Many eminent Omani historians have also shaped Oman’s history and culture. One of them is Hamid bin Mohammed bin Raziq, who is not only a historian but also a poet. Through his poetic talent, he has immortalised the struggles and victories of Oman’s people. His pioneering work in lexicography, grammar, and prosody laid the foundation for subsequent developments in these fields. Even today, his contributions to various sciences are recognised and celebrated by his inclusion in Unesco’s programme.

OMAN HAS PRODUCED MANY IMPRESSIVE FIGURES WHO HAVE MADE REMARKABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CULTURE, SCIENCE, HISTORY, AND POLITICS. THEY REPRESENT THE NATION’S SPIRIT OF INNOVATION AND INTELLECT

His numerous works, such as Al Ain and Prosody, display his profound knowledge and influence in various disciplines. In literature, Abu Jabal al Habsi was another jurist and poet from Oman. He was born in Al Mudhaibi in 1878 and later moved to Bidiyah. He composed numerous poems, literary treatises, and jurisprudential writings, some of which are documented in the book Al Durr al Nazim. Muhammad bin Al Hassan bin Duraid al Azdi, also known as Abu Bakr, was a famous scholar and poet from Azd Oman belonging to the Qahtan tribe. He is known as one of the most authoritative figures on language and literature. Bin Duraid was said to be the most poetic of scholars and the most knowledgeable of poets. Ahmed bin Majid, born in Julfar in 1421, was a skilled navigator and explorer who gained recognition for his contributions to geography, astronomy,

and maritime navigation. He played a significant role in the development of astronomical measurements. He published more than thirty scientific works, manuscripts, and maps and has greatly influenced the establishment of marine science in the Arab region and beyond. Many influential leaders have helped guide the country through change and transformation throughout Oman’s history. Imam Nasser bin Murshid al Yaarubi founded the Yaariba state and united the country under his leadership. He relentlessly fought against the Portuguese until he finally succeeded in expelling them from the country. Likewise, Ahmed bin Saeed Al Busaidy was one such leader who played an important role in shaping Oman’s political landscape. With his wise and determined leadership during critical moments in Oman’s history, he ensured that the country continued progressing and earning respect from its people. As did his predecessors, Saeed bin Sultan played a critical role in guiding the nation through challenging times. With his unwavering commitment to promoting stability and prosperity, he helped establish Oman as a regional leader, solidifying its identity as a bastion of peace and diplomacy. Not too far ago, and imprinted in the minds of the Omani people, The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos was an influential leader in Oman’s history, known for initiating significant reforms and building the nation. His vision and dedication to Oman’s progress led the country towards prosperity. Capitalising on the current foundations, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is meticulously committed to continuing Oman’s progress and prosperity, embracing innovation and sustainability. His dedication to preserving Oman’s values, peace, stability, and development make him a visionary leader poised to guide the nation toward even greater heights. Oman has produced many impressive figures who have made remarkable contributions to culture, science, history, and politics. They represent the nation’s spirit of innovation and intellect. Their pioneering work has enriched Oman’s heritage and left an indelible mark on the world stage, reminding us that individuals can profoundly impact the course of history.

You’re what you eat...

From the dining table at home to business lunches at hotels, food is at the centre of any gathering. But the food, especially the one that we prepare at home and share together, is much more than something we eat.

Leave the taste aside; family dinners or eating together teach us more than just food-related values and dining conventions. Coming to the dining table together is all about love, care and tradition that have been passed down through generations!

It is a way of bond with and connecting with each other. These memories live with you! It creates a sense of safety in seemingly uncertain circumstances!

We know expressions of nostalgia for the family meal are commonplace. I still remember the joy of gathering around the table, especially during festivals or special occasions. The aroma and taste of those dishes, the laughter, and the chatter are memories that stay with me forever.

Unfortunately, our food menu has transformed over the years, with diets becoming almost distorted compared to those “old good days.” The way we prepare food has changed dramatically thanks to different kitchenware and ingredients.

While convenience is a huge selling point, there has been a visible shift in our eating habits, preferences and attitudes. Factors like income, food prices, individual preferences and beliefs, and cultural traditions have all influenced changes in our food patterns.

It’s a pity that most people are missing out on what could be meaningful time with their loved ones. Although we live as a family, each member is on a different track through life. More and more, we eat alone, whether at work, at home, or even in restaurants.

Look at full-time working spouses; for them, time is a critical factor. They just grab whatever they get on their way. And the children of those parents increasingly eat pre-prepared meals,



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

accompanied only by a television or a tablet!

A report by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development a few years ago revealed that students who do not regularly eat with their parents are significantly “more likely to be truant at school.” The elderly increasingly live on their own and eat in isolation.

Taking advantage of this kind of situation, manufacturers have tapped into our time by making “convenient and comfort food.” Sadly, the variety and convenience of ‘fast food’ have certainly taken a bite out of family mealtimes.

FAST-PACED LIFESTYLE

They know well how to cater to our fast-paced lifestyles by delivering a wide range of food items ‘on the go’ at low cost.

While convenience foods have their place, especially for quick breakfasts and lunches for working people, they are no substitute for family dinners eaten together.

Moreover, as we now enjoy a greater variety of processed foods, do not forget the fact that challenges like obesity and cardiovascular disease worsen our health, especially if you do not have enough physical activity!

Today’s fast life can’t afford to spare much time for cooking.

Today’s young generation asks why they should bother spending hours cooking when they can head to the supermarket and buy everything ready-made.

But one thing they forget is the nutrient value of traditional foods. It cannot be compared with ready-to-eat food, even as many of these processed foods are similar in appearance and flavour to those of the traditional diet.

The all-famous 1825 quote “Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you who you are” by French connoisseur Anthelme Brillat-Savarin reveals it all.

These words mirror the profound connections to the natural environment in which people of those days lived and to the cultural traditions into which they were born!

WHILE CONVENIENCE IS A HUGE SELLING POINT, THERE HAS BEEN A VISIBLE SHIFT IN OUR EATING HABITS, PREFERENCES AND ATTITUDES

IN HONOUR OF RAISI



Indian national flag flies at half mast atop the country's Presidential Palace in New Delhi on Tuesday, in honour of Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi who died in a helicopter crash. – AFP

A big step forward for liver health

In late March, the World Health Organization released new guidelines on the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of chronic hepatitis B (HBV) infection. As a person living with HBV, I welcome the changes, which could significantly reduce deaths from liver cancer in Africa.

The story of Wisdom, a father and the founder of one of the best private schools in his hometown in Nigeria, demonstrates the need for a new approach to treating HBV.

After trying to donate blood to his sick cousin, Wisdom was shocked to learn that he had HBV. But medical staff told him to go home and return in six months, because his viral load was too low to treat based on the 2015 WHO guidelines.

Wisdom never felt the need to return to the hospital, because he appeared healthy, and the doctor had not seemed concerned about his infection. But 13 weeks later, while working on his farm, Wisdom felt a sharp pain in his upper right abdomen, had nausea, and nearly fainted.

After weeks of tests, he was diagnosed with advanced liver cancer. Last August, a mere five months after his initial diagnosis, Wisdom passed away, leaving behind his wife, daughter, and a pile of medical bills.

Outcomes for cases of liver cancer are poor across Africa. Like Wisdom, the majority of Africans are diagnosed late, leaving little time to initiate treatment. The median survival rate in Sub-Saharan



Danjuma Adda

The writer is former president of the World Hepatitis Alliance, is Committee Chair of the 2024 World Hepatitis Summit

BY INCREASING ACCESS TO POTENTIALLY LIFE-SAVING ANTIVIRALS, THIS APPROACH COULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS REDUCING DEATHS FROM LIVER CANCER IN AFRICA

Africa (SSA), where 95 per cent of patients with liver cancer present with advanced or terminal disease, is 2.5 months. By contrast, around 40 per cent of patients in high-income countries are diagnosed at an early stage, when curative or life-prolonging interventions are still possible.

All hepatitis infections cause inflammation in the liver. So it is no surprise that, according to recent cancer statistics, 70 per cent of liver cancer cases are related to HBV and hepatitis C viral infections.

More worrying, the data show a 25-per cent increase in global deaths caused by liver cancer between 2010 and 2019. In 2020, 830,200 people died from liver cancer, and nearly half of those cases were due to HBV.

I was diagnosed with HBV in 2004. As was the case for Wisdom, several tests showed that I had a low viral load, and my clinicians, using protocols developed by liver specialists in Nigeria, Europe and the United States, did not recommend treatment.

The 2015 WHO guidelines would later call for the same approach to patients like me: run a series of diagnostic tests, and forgo treatment if the viral load is low. I felt powerless to make decisions about my own health.

Despite doctors’ assurances that I was healthy, I lived in constant fear of liver cancer; each day I

monitored my body for signs of it developing. My anxiety only increased when I read about the disease and attended scientific meetings on the subject, especially once I learned that men with HBV in Africa are more likely to develop liver cancer, even with low viral loads.

So, some years ago, I started taking the daily oral medication that the WHO recommends for treating HBV.

While these drugs have kept me healthy so far, I pay for them out of pocket — a privilege that not everyone can afford.

Most people with HBV have neither the scientific knowledge nor

the financial resources to advocate for themselves, which is why the new WHO guidelines will help save lives. Under the four new options for meeting treatment eligibility, up to half of people with HBV will be able to receive potentially life-saving antivirals, whereas previously only one-fifth could.

Moreover, the guidelines also identify additional circumstances in which a patient may demand treatment, such as to prevent transmission to family members, and to reduce the risk of liver cancer.

That means almost all patients with HBV could potentially be eligible for antivirals, a sharp

contrast to the previous guidelines, which called for treating only those patients with advanced liver disease.

The new guidelines represent a leap forward by expanding treatment eligibility and allowing for co-decision-making between clinicians and patients, which will undoubtedly lead to more people being treated for HBV.

Nevertheless, there is room for improvement. For example, the recommended use of HBV DNA tests for continued monitoring fails to account for the fact that such tests are not widely available in Africa.

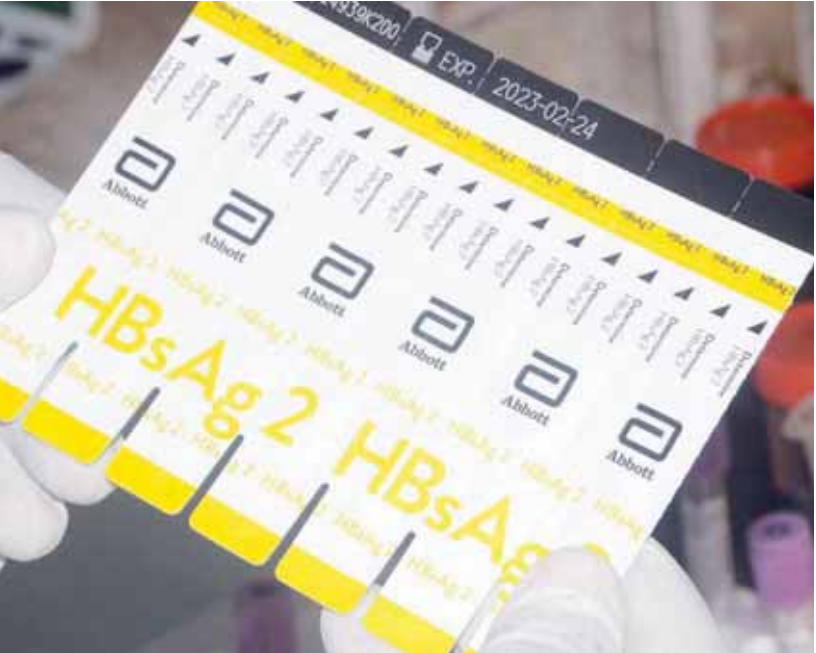
The next step is for governments, especially in SSA, to train healthcare workers and patient advocates on the new guidelines to ensure their implementation.

They must also ramp up testing to detect people with HBV earlier in the disease’s progression and treat as many cases as possible.

To that end, I urge national hepatitis programmes and ministries of health not to let these guidelines gather dust, but rather to act immediately to implement them, which necessitates scaling up testing and treatment.

Swift action is the only way to reduce deaths from liver cancer in Africa and achieve the WHO’s goal of eliminating hepatitis B by 2030.

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All hepatitis infections cause inflammation in the liver.

sport



Salalah clinch OAA Shield, Al Amerat second

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Salalah Club emerged victorious in the Oman Athletics Federation Shield Championship, held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher from May 17 to 18.

Salalah dominated the overall standings, amassing a total of 14 gold, 11 silver and 8 bronze medals. Al Amerat Club finished runners-up with 11 gold, 8 silver and 4 bronze medals, while Al Salam Club secured third place with 5 gold and 1 silver.

A total of 492 athletes representing 17 clubs participated in the championship in the junior category, 16 clubs in the youth category and 22 clubs in the general category. The competitions on the first day included the 100m, 400m, 1500m, 2000m and 3000m steeplechase, medley relay, 4x100m relay, high jump, and shot put. The second day's competitions featured the 200m, 4x400m relay, 3000m, 400m hurdles, 800m and javelin throw.

At the closing ceremony, the event's sponsor, Sayyid Saeed bin Sultan al Busaidy, along with Salim al Amri, Chairman of Oman Athletics Association (OAA), presented medals to the top three finishers in each category of each event.

In the 400m sprint for juniors, Moayad al Badri from Al Salam took first place. In the youth category, Akram al Ghawawi from Masirah Club secured first place. Taha Yassin from Salalah won first place in the general category.

In the 100m sprint, Dim Hamood from Al Amerat won first place in the junior category. For the youth category, Mulham al Shukaili from Al Amerat took first place. Mulham al Balushi from Ibri Club won first place in the general category.

In the 2000m steeplechase for juniors, Ahmed al Riyami from Al Bashayer Club won first place.

In the 3000m steeplechase for youth, Saber al Amri from Salalah secured first place.

Ahmed al Amri from Salalah won first place in the general category.

In the 1500m run for juniors, Osama al Rahbi from Salalah took first place. For the youth category, Mohammed al Ghawawi won first place. Abdullah al Qarini from Al Amerat secured first place in the general category.

In the 110m hurdles for juniors, Saeed al Balushi from Al Salam won first place. In the youth category, Salem al Dighaishi from Salalah took first place. Faisal al Azki from Sohar secured first place in the general category.

AL SAADI WINS 200M

In the 200m sprint for juniors, Ahmed al Jabri from Al Salam took first place. In the youth category, Mulham al Shkaili from Al Amerat won first place. Mohammed al Saadi from Al Amerat secured first place in the general category.

In the 5000m run for the general category, Abdullah al Qarini from Al Amerat took first place.

In the 4x400m relay for youth, Salalah won first place, with Bidiyah Club coming in second.

In the general category, Salalah came first, Al Amerat second and Ibri third.

In the 3000m run for juniors, Al Harith al Jabri from Salalah secured first place. In the youth category, Abdullah al Qarini from Masirah Club won first place.

In the 400m hurdles for the general category, Nawaf al Azki from Al Amerat claimed the top spot.

In the 800m run for juniors, Al Yazan al Shamsi from Salalah came on top. For the youth category, Mohammed al Ghawawi from Masirah Club won first place. Jihad al Mahrami from Al Amerat claimed first place in the general category.

In the long jump for juniors, Tariq al Subhi from Al Musannah Club took first place. In the youth category, Hussein al Maawali from Salalah won top spot. Salem al Rawahi from Al Amerat won first place in the general category. In the high jump for juniors, Al Yaqzan al Abdllali from Al Amerat took first place.

In the youth category, Ayham al Hosni from Al Salam came on top.

In the shot put for juniors, Al Yaman al Hinai from Al Salam secured first place. In the youth category, Mahad al Hajri from Salalah took first place. Khamis Said from Salalah won first place in the general category.

In the javelin throw for juniors, Hamad al Ghasani from Ibri came on top. In the youth category, Qasim al Saadi from Salalah won first place. Hamid al Mahrouqi from Salalah Club secured first place in the general category.

SALALAH DOMINATED THE OVERALL STANDINGS, AMASSING A TOTAL OF 14 GOLD, 11 SILVER AND 8 BRONZE MEDALS.

AL AMERAT CLUB FINISHED RUNNERS-UP WITH 11 GOLD, 8 SILVER AND 4 BRONZE MEDALS.

AL SALAM CLUB SECURED THIRD PLACE WITH 5 GOLD AND 1 SILVER.

A TOTAL OF **492** ATHLETES TOOK PART

17 CLUBS PARTICIPATED IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP IN THE JUNIOR CATEGORY

16 CLUBS IN THE YOUTH CATEGORY

22 CLUBS IN THE GENERAL CATEGORY





Oman U17 team to take on Uzbekistan in second friendly



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Oman under-17 football team suffered a 3-1 loss against hosts Uzbekistan in their ongoing training camp in Tashkent. Aseel al Habsi scored the lone goal for the Omani side in the 35th minute of the first half. The team, coached by Anwar al Habsi, will have another friendly match against Uzbekistan on Wednesday to conclude the camp, which began last Friday and will end on Thursday. Oman chose Tashkent for their preparation due to the rapid development of Uzbekistan's junior national teams. Notably, the Uzbekistan U20 team won the AFC U20 Asian Cup last March, defeating Iraq 1-0 in the final. The Uzbekistan U17 team reached the semifinals of the AFC U17 Asian Cup Thailand 2023 last June, losing 1-0 to South Korea. Additionally, the Uzbekistan U23 team were runners-up in the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024, losing 1-0 to Japan in the final. Besides the friendly matches, the Oman U17 team has been undergoing extensive training sessions in Tashkent,

focusing on technical and tactical practices. These sessions aim to enhance the players' skills and include the application of several tactical drills. The purpose of this camp is to prepare the team for upcoming assignments, including the AFC U-17 Asian Cup qualifiers starting in October. The AFC U17 Asian Cup will be held in April 2025, with the qualifiers draw taking place in June. Oman may be one of the hosts for the qualifiers. The goal is to secure a spot in the finals by topping their group or being one of the best four second-placed teams, alongside the host nation, which will be announced next month. Oman U17 team includes: Ahmed al Omrani, Fahad al Mashaykhi, Ziyad al Mataani, Osama al Maamari, Qais Ameen, Ali al Awaini, Riyadh al Tarshi, Mudathir al Batrani, Muath al Hinai, Yazen al Khadli, Abdullah al Saadi, Al Yazen al Balushi, Firas al Saadi, Al Waleed al Braidee, Aseel al Habsi, Sulaiman al Mahrouqi, Ali al Shizawi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Tamimi, Sulaiman al Kharousi, Al Hassan al Qasmi and Mohammed al Mashaykhi.

OMAN START WITH DEFEAT AGAINST MALAYSIA



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Oman national hockey team lost the opening match against Malaysian team, the last edition champions, at Men's Indoor Asia Cup hockey championship on Tuesday, being hosted by Kazakhstan from May 21 to 26, with participation of eight teams namely: Oman, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Iran, Singapore, Tajikistan and Thailand. Oman suffered a 10-2 loss against Malaysia in the first match of Group B. Other teams in the group include Kazakhstan and Indonesia. Oman players did not perform at the level required due to many mistakes made throughout the four quarters of the match, while Malaysia benefited from those mistakes and took advantage of most of the penalty corners and kicks. Oman team started well with focusing in the defence line, but quick movements of the Malaysian players resulted in a goal due to the defender mistake. Then Malaysian pressure continued and they got some penalty corners as the first quarter ended 1-0 for Malaysia. The second quarter witnessed changes by the Oman coach.



However, individual mistakes caused Malaysia to receive three penalty corners and a penalty kick. Oman team was able to score a goal through Osama Ramadan, but Malaysia were in firm control with three more goals as the quarter ended with Malaysia leading 4-1. In the third quarter, Omani players sought to reduce the score, but Malaysian defence was holding up well. And again, Malaysian players succeeded in

benefiting from Oman players mistakes and scored three goals to end the quarter with a commanding 7-1 score. Oman players lost hope and focus after receiving seven goals, despite this, they tried to benefit from the match when they score a goal through Rashid al Fazari, but the Malaysian team was able to widen the gap with a score of 10-2. Oman will play two matches on Wednesday, first against Indonesia

at 12:30 pm, and second and final match in the group stage against Kazakhstan at 7 pm (Oman time). Oman hope to compensate loss against Malaysia and keep their hopes for advancing in the tournament with a win against Indonesia. The last group match against hosts Kazakhstan will also be crucial. Kazakhstan are one of the favourites for the championship title.

AI HARRASI NAMED AS TOURNERY DIRECTOR
The Asian Hockey Federation chose Omani official Abdullah al Harrasi to manage Men's Indoor Asia Cup hockey championship as tournament director, which is the highest position in the tournament. The Asian Hockey Federation had previously entrusted Al Harrasi with many tasks in the management of several tournaments. The International Hockey Federation (FIH) had also assigned Al Harrasi to manage the world championships. Al Harrasi has good experience after he started officiating as a judge in local competitions, then he obtained international stadium judge certificates. He participated in the first international tournament in 2012, until he gradually obtained a number of international certificates.

Oman taekwondo team feted for GCC Youth Games show

KABEER YOUSUF
@KABEERYOUSEF

The South Korean Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman feted the Oman youth taekwondo team members for their outstanding achievement at the GCC Youth Games held in UAE in April. Brigadier (retired) Abdulmalik bin Ghassan al Mazroui, Chairman of Oman Taekwondo Committee, Mohammed bin Salim al Harthy, Member of State Council and former Oman Ambassador to South Korea and other top officials were hosted by Kiejoo Kim, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, on Tuesday. The Oman taekwondo team grabbed five medals on the opening



day of the first GCC Youth Games competitions, hosted by the UAE from April 16 to May 2 where participants of all GCC countries competed in 24 games. Oman Olympic committee participated with around 200 athletes competing

in 15 games, includes sailing, football, golf, taekwondo, water sports, athletics, handball, volleyball, basketball, chess, fencing, table tennis, billiards, snooker and equestrian, in addition to the para athletics team. The taekwondo team



fetched home five medals, including four gold and one silver. Oman's Dawood al Yousifi succeeded in snatching the first gold medal in the 33-37 kg weight competition after defeating UAE's Hamid Mohammed to become the first

player to win a medal in this tournament's record. Ziyad al Balushi won the second gold in the 37-41 kg, after defeating Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Abdulrahman. Muhannad al Hajri claimed the third gold medal in the weight

of 49-53 kg after his victory over UAE's Yousef al Antali. In girls category, Oman's Dania al Abdalia won the fourth gold in the 37-41 kg weight, after defeating UAE's Magda Rashid. And finally, Yousef al Zadjali won the silver in the weight of 45-49 kg, after he lost to UAE's Nasser al Muhairi in the final. "This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Korea and Oman and Omani team winning laurels at an international event gives us immense pleasure. This reception is held to congratulate the Oman national youth taekwondo players for their outstanding performance in the GCC Youth Games in UAE in April," said Kiejoo Kim.



Real Madrid's Toni Kroos applauds fans after the La Liga match against Deportivo Alaves at Santiago Bernabeu, Madrid, Spain, on May 14, 2024. — Reuters

Real, Germany midfielder Kroos to retire after Euro 2024

MADRID: Germany's Toni Kroos, 34, will retire after this year's European Championship, the Real Madrid midfielder announced on Tuesday, adding that next month's Champions League final against Borussia Dortmund will be his last game for the Spanish club.

"My career as an active footballer will end this summer after the Euro championship. As I have always said: Real Madrid is and will be my last club," Kroos said in a statement on Instagram.

"July 17th, 2014 — the day of my presentation at Real Madrid, the day that changed my life. My life as a footballer — but especially as a person.

"It was the start of a new chapter at the biggest club in the world. After 10 years, at the end of the season this chapter comes to an end. I will never forget this exciting and successful decade!"

Kroos has made 463 appearances for the club since joining in 2014 and will leave as one of the most decorated players in Real's 120-year history, winning more than 20 trophies, including four European Cups.

In addition to his titles with Real, the midfielder won the 2014 World Cup with Germany and another Champions League title with Bayern Munich in 2013.

Kroos is in the final year of his contract with Real and in February announced his return to the Germany side after three years of international retirement and ahead of the June-July European Championship on home soil.

"I would particularly like to thank everyone that welcomed me with an open heart and trusted me. But especially I would like to thank you, dear Madridistas, for your affection and your love from the first day until the last one," Kroos said.

Real also issued a lengthy statement praising Kroos and his legacy with the club.

His departure comes after winning La Liga and ahead of a potential sixth Champions League title at Wembley.

"Real Madrid would like to express their gratitude and affection to Toni Kroos, a player who is already part of Real Madrid's history and who is one of the great legends of our club and of world football," the club said.

"Toni Kroos will forever remain in the hearts of all Madridistas for the excellence of his football and for being a player who has given everything for this shirt, always representing the values of Real Madrid." — Reuters

In addition to his titles with Real, the midfielder won the 2014 World Cup with Germany and another Champions League title with Bayern Munich in 2013

Juventus score three late goals to salvage draw at Bologna



Juventus' Arkadiusz Milik celebrates scoring their second goal with Danilo. — Reuters

ROME: In a match that might have been a test of Thiago Motta's credentials to take over Juventus, his Bologna team made a blazing start but collapsed at the end and drew 3-3 with the Turin giants on Monday.

Former Italy midfielder Motta's contract with Bologna, where the 41-year-old has been since 2022, expires at the end of the season.

His team have been a revelation this season and are already qualified for next season's Champions League.

Monday's draw preserved third place, ahead of Juventus on tie-break.

Juventus, playing their first match since Massimiliano Allegri was fired following a spectacular tantrum as his team won the Italian Cup last week, started in a daze.

After two minutes, Riccardo Calafiori side-footed into the roof of net as the ball dropped to him in space following a corner.

On 11 minutes, Argentinian Santiago Castro, a 19-year-old making his first Serie A start, headed in at the near post. The only challenge he had to survive was from teenage team-mate Kacper Urbanski, also eager to nod in from close range.



Bologna's Riccardo Calafiori celebrates scoring their first goal with team-mates. — Reuters

With Juventus seemingly uninterested in running or tackling, unmarked Jens Odgaard then smashed home a 13th-rebound but was deemed offside. Juventus showed more bite after their half-time encounter with interim coach Paolo Montero, the former Uruguay defender who had been managing the club's Under-19 team.

With the visitors pressing, Castro pinched the ball in midfield in the 53rd minute and launched a Bologna counter-attack. It finished with centre back Calafiori running in alone on goal and chipping Wojciech Szczesny.

After both coaches made five changes, Bologna imploded in five chaotic minutes. Federico Chiesa pounced on an error by Jhon Lucumi

to pull a goal back for Juventus after 76 minutes. Motta had taken off both goalscorers. Montero, it turned out, had sent on two.

Substitute Arkadiusz Milik added the second for the visitors from a deflected free kick after 83 minutes. A minute later another replacement Kenan Yildiz skipped through the home defence and levelled.

Montero danced in the rain on the touchline. He is in charge for the last two games of the season.

Motta has been rumoured for weeks to be joining Juve next season, with Allegri's sacking on Friday only heightening the speculation.

"I haven't decided, nor signed anything," Motta told reporters ahead of Monday night's game.

"Next week I'll sit down with the president (Joey Saputo) to take a decision together. Then we will make an announcement together." — AFP

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS On Monday
Salernitana 1 (Maggiore 90) Verona 2 (Suslov 22, Folorunsho 45+3)
Bologna 3 (Calafiori 2, 53, Castro 11)
Juventus 3 (Chiesa 76, Milik 83, Yildiz 84)



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Tenders worth over RO 584m issued through Esnad system

MUSCAT: The General Secretariat of the Tender Board announced that during Q1 of this year 3,056 tenders were issued through the electronic tendering system Esnad for entities subject to the Tender Law, with a total value exceeding RO 584 million.

These tenders encompassed several developmental and service projects across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Among the most notable tenders issued this year are the expansion of the Muscat Expressway, the construction of Al-Falah Hospital in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, and the implementation of the dual carriageway connecting Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

Additionally, a unified municipal system and the creation of a resource market in the Wilayat of Sinaw in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate were included, as well as the rehabilitation of the existing road from Al Hazm to Al Washil in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq.

By the end of Q1 2024, approximately 22 tenders were awarded, amounting to over RO 136 million, compared to the same period last year, where 20 tenders were awarded.

Key tenders awarded this year include the completion of the remaining works on the Al Sharqiyah Expressway Project (Part Two - Phase Two) from Al Kamil W'al Wafi to Sur in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, consultancy services for the design and supervision of the proposed development of Musandam Airport and the supply of laboratory materials for the Ministry of Health.

The national programme for CEOs and the provision of high-quality buses for government entities (framework agreement)



Key tenders awarded this year include the completion of the remaining works on the Al Sharqiyah Expressway Project.



The Secretariat has worked on enhancing tender procedures, developing models related to boosting local content in contracts and tenders, and monitoring their implementation to ensure local value addition from government project and procurement spending.

ENG BADR AL MAAMARI

Secretary-General of the Tender Board

were also significant. Additionally, the tenders

included a framework agreement for the printing and supply of textbooks for four academic years for the Ministry of Education, the design and construction of a 40-classroom basic education school for girls in Al Tayyib in the Wilayat of Ibri, Al Dhahirah Governorate and a co-educational basic education school with 36 classrooms for grades (1-4) in Hay Al Baraka, Barakat Al Mouz, the Wilayat of Nizwa.

The completion of additional works on the Al Batinah Expressway Project (Fifth Package) and the Sohar Gate Road (Free Zone Link) was also part of the tenders awarded.

The tenders also included support and maintenance of the water licensing system for the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources and legal arbitration services for the Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport Project (Twelfth Package).

The design and construction of 12 school buildings in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and the construction of 20 housing units and maintenance of 32 housing units in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands,

Dhofar Governorate, were also included.

Eng Badr bin Salem al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, stated that the Secretariat has worked on enhancing tender procedures, developing models related to boosting local content in contracts and tenders, and monitoring their implementation to ensure local value addition from government project and procurement spending.

This includes activating unified procurement procedures to achieve the best value and service, and applying various frameworks and methodologies to ensure efficiency and speed in project execution, reduce change orders, and adhere to approved financial budgets.

He added the General Secretariat of the Tender Board has provided many facilities for companies, including measures to facilitate tendering for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local companies, such as exemption from registration fees of SMEs, symbolic prices for purchasing tender documents, and exemption from providing temporary insurance in tenders.

— ONA

Oman gears up for first export of copper-gold concentrate from new mine

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Marking a significant milestone in Oman's efforts to commercialise its promising mineral resources, a maiden shipment of copper-gold concentrate from a newly commissioned mining project in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate is being prepped for export from Sohar Port and Free Zone next week.

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, an Omani-Australian joint venture, announced on Tuesday that the first consignment of concentrates from its Al Wash-hi Majaza mine in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi is scheduled to set sail on May 27, 2024.

It marks the culmination of a years-long effort by the JV to explore, appraise and develop the copper-gold resources of the mine ever since its Australian partner, Alara Resources (51 per cent), became the first international mining company to secure a mining license from the Omani government in June 2018 under the country's modernised mining laws.

The inaugural shipment also comes amid a strong uptrend in the international prices of copper fuelled by investor concerns that the ongoing global energy transition may cause significant shortages of the strategically important metal.

Earlier this week, copper futures on the London Metal Exchange surged 4.1 per cent to reach \$11,104 per tonne, surpassing a previous record set in March 2022.

Global commodities group Trafigura is the off-taker of copper concentrate from the Al Wash-hi Majaza project under an agreement signed with Al Hadeetha Resources committing all output for a period of eight years from the start of production.

Pricing is based on the official London Metal Exchange cash settlement quotation for Grade A copper at the time of delivery.

Muscat-headquartered



Copper prices are currently witnessing historic highs in commodity markets.

Al Hadeetha also revealed that technical problems associated with a 'tailing filter press' within its newly commissioned 1 million tonne per annum capacity copper concentrator plant are being addressed by a team of engineers.

The glitch has been hampering the optimal performance of the plant.

Meanwhile, in a further boost for its growth strategy in Oman, Alara Resources announced that its Omani joint venture company Awtaq Copper LLC has been granted a renewal of its exploration license of Block 8 in the Samail Ophiolite.

Copper and gold mineralisation is thought to occur in the volcanic rock units of the ophiolite, according to Alara.

More than 150 volcanic massive sulphide (VMS) prospects have been discovered along the 500 km length of the Samail Ophiolite.

Alara Managing Director Atmavieshwar Sthapak said: "With the grant of a mining concession over Block 22B and the renewal of this license, Alara and partners now have the right to explore more than 1900 km2 ground in Oman.

These are exciting times for the global copper mining sector, which is urgently seeking new deposits around the world.

Alara, which has recently begun producing copper concentrate in Oman, is eager to collaborate with its joint venture partners to explore Oman's promising geology in the hope of making additional copper-gold finds."

Oman hosts UN tourism meeting and 'Investment in Tourism' conference



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

MUSCAT: Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will host the 50th meeting of the Regional Commission for the Middle East of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the 'Investment in Tourism' conference today, Wednesday, at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel. The event will last for two days.

The opening ceremony of the conference will be under the auspices of HH Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, stated that hosting this meeting and conference is an opportunity to promote Oman's

tourism assets and products.

It reflects the significance of Oman's tourism sector in the Middle East and worldwide, as Oman has become a promising destination due to its diverse tourism offerings.

He added that this event would enhance the promotion of Oman as a destination for international meetings and conferences and highlight its efforts to develop the tourism sector, in addition to exchanging expertise and knowledge in this field.

The selection of Oman to host this meeting reflects the organisers' appreciation of its continuous efforts in developing the tourism sector, aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The contribution of tourism

to the GDP has risen to 2.4 per cent, with ongoing investments in tourism projects.

Meanwhile, the conference is titled 'Investment in Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges of Sustainable Financing.'

Al Mahrouqi said the conference will address the challenges and opportunities related to sustainably financing the tourism sector to raise awareness about the importance of directing funds towards tourism projects that contribute to economic and social growth sustainably.

Additionally, it will explore new innovations and solutions in tourism financing and enhance cooperation between the public and private sectors to achieve sustainable development goals in the tourism sector. — ONA

Toyota Oman announces final raffle draw winner of Biggest Excitement campaign

MUSCAT: Recently Toyota Oman announced the 5th and final raffle draw winner. Sayyid Ahmed bin Badr al Busaidy from Muscat who purchased a Toyota Camry 2.5 Premium won the Toyota Crown.

The popular campaign — The Biggest Excitement had many benefits for customers opting to buy a Toyota.

Customers has a chance to enter the raffle draw & win one from 5 Toyota Crown cars and avail exclusive benefits including service from 3 years / 30,000 km up to 10 years / 100,000 km (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and free registration.

Apart from that customers could also avail attractive instalments. The campaign that begun on March 3, 2024 lasted up to May 1, 2024.

Building on the legacy of one of the world's best-loved vehicles since the 1950s the Crown has been built to provide an intuitive driving experience that will exceed expectations and establish a new benchmark.

When the first generation was launched, the Crown came to symbolise “innovation” and “pushing the limit” within Toyota. Since then, it has gained recognition in Japan as Toyota's premium sedan.

The Toyota Crown is built



around the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA-K) platform. The new Crown comes exclusively with a choice of two environment friendly powertrains.

The first hybrid electric powertrain consists of a front electric motor and Toyota's first-ever 2.4-litre inline four-cylinder turbo engine with All Wheel Drive, paired with direct shift six-speed automatic transmission with a combined power of 340 hp and 40.7 kg.m. torque.

The second hybrid electric powertrain consists of two electric motors and a 2.5-litre four-

cylinder petrol engine, generating a total power of 222 hp. The hybrid-electric system, paired with an Electric Continuously Variable Transmission (e-CVT), achieves the lowest fuel efficiency, with a consumption rate of 21.6 km/L.

The Toyota Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options.

They include a 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg.m of torque which is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift Multi-mode automatic

transmission.

A 3.5-litre V6 engine with D-4S fuel injection system that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg.m of torque and which is mated to an eight-speed multi-mode automatic transmission.

And an electrified hybrid system, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors.

The combined power of the two power sources is 208 hp.

It is also paired with an Electrically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (ECVT), delivering heightened driving pleasure.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications. For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/.

OQ hosts leadership in internal audit training programme

MUSCAT: OQ, the global integrated energy company, partnered with the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) - Oman Chapter to deliver a training programme on 'Leadership in Internal Audit.' Held from May 19 - 21, 2024 at Sheraton Oman Hotel, the programme attracted over 100 participants from different companies across various business sectors.

Abdulrahman al Harthi (pictured), Chief Executive Assurance at OQ delivered the keynote address and inaugurated the event.

The programme was delivered by the National Academy for Training and Development and facilitated by the president of the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors in UK and Ireland, Sandor Boeri.

This event is part of a series of programmes and activities organised by the Assurance Function at OQ to commemorate the Internal Audit Awareness Month which is celebrated globally every May.

'Navigate Excellence' is the



chosen theme by OQ for this year's awareness campaign and initiatives in view of evolving stakeholder expectations and emerging risks facing the organisations.

The training aimed to explore and transfer knowledge on world-class leadership practices in the profession of internal auditing. 16 CPE (Continuing Professional Education) hours are awarded to the attendees at the end of the three-day course.

BankDhofar continues to empower national competencies with 92% Omanisation rate



Dr Khalid bin Salim al Hamadani
Chief Human Resources Officer at BankDhofar

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, a leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, announced the new organisational structure for the executive management members of the bank. The management team now consists of 16 Omani top talent members with a diverse background across departments. This is aligned with the Oman Vision 2040, and the directives of the Central Bank of Oman in supporting the banking sector with national talents. BankDhofar has demonstrated a successful Omanisation model in the banking sector by hiring, nurturing and placing talented Omani professionals in various management, administrative and operational roles.

Alongside this model, the bank has witnessed a robust growth in its operational profit as well as an expansion in its branch network that has resulted in taking the Bank even closer to its customers. The bank is pleased to share the promotion of three leaders to the senior management cadre.

Maryam bint Yousef al Balushiyyah, a seasoned professional with a wealth of experience, has assumed the role of Assistant General Manager for Large Corporates.

Maryam is a strong corporate banker who will surely bring in growth and innovation in serving corporate clients. Ezideen bin Juma al Mazroui, has been elevated to the level of Assistant General Manager and Deputy Chief Risk Officer

(DCRO). With his extensive expertise, Ezideen will play an important role in enhancing risk management frameworks and robust and secure information systems.

Saleh bin Mohammed al Hadhrami, a legal expert at BankDhofar is appointed as the Assistant General Manager, Head of Legal, and Board Secretary. Saleh's leadership will be instrumental ensuring governance and sound legal practices.

Dr Khalid bin Salim al Hamadani, Chief Human Resources Officer at BankDhofar said “The bank employed numerous competent Omani talent who have acquired the experience and skill qualifying them to be at the pinnacle of success and greatness in alignment with the Bank's next future phase. This also comes in line with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to empower Omanis for leadership positions in all sectors, especially the banking sector, due to its vital role in driving economic growth.”

“The bank has made significant progress in Omanising its workforce, with 80% of leadership positions now held by Omanis. In recent months; the bank has further recruited around 250 highly qualified and talented Omanis in various departments, raising the overall Omanisation ratio to 92%,” he added.

National Finance, Abraj Muscat Electronics unveil financing options

MUSCAT: In a move that underscores its customer-centric ethos, National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, has forged a strategic partnership with renowned home appliance and electronics retailer Abraj Muscat Electronics.

The collaboration extends hassle-free financing solutions to consumers purchasing an array of products, including electronics, household appliances, central air conditioners, Turkish interior and exterior doors, and natural marble.

As part of its consumer durables financing, National Finance extends tailored finance solutions to Abraj Muscat Electronics' customers, enabling them to prioritise the quality and durability of their purchases. Elevating affordability and convenience,



these bespoke solutions allow homeowners to integrate fashionable materials into their spaces, alongside fitting out their homes with cutting-edge electronics and domestic appliances, efficiently

blending comfort and sophistication.

Commenting on the partnership, Saam al Habsi, Chief Operations Officer at National Finance, said, “Our carefully designed finance solutions are centred on the ever-evolving needs of our valued customers, and take into consideration their unique preferences.

At National Finance, we understand the importance of providing accessible financial solutions that empower individuals to make fast and flexible purchases without undue financial strain.

Through this collaboration with Abraj Muscat Electronics, we endeavour to simplify the process of acquiring consumer durables while ensuring affordability and convenience for patrons.”

MHD ACERE introduces exclusive summer promotion on Hongqi cars

MUSCAT: MHD ACERE, the distributor of Hongqi cars in Oman, introduces an exclusive limited-time summer promotion promising unmatched luxury driving experiences. Since its establishment in 1958, the renowned “Hongqi” brand has embodied opulence and distinction in the automotive industry. As temperatures climb, indulge in a journey of comfort in sophistication and style with Hongqi, celebrated for its exquisite craftsmanship and innovative technology.

Explore the Hongqi Ousado and HS5 Series: Delve into sophistication with the Hongqi Ousado series, beginning at RO 9,900. Crafted with meticulous attention to detail, the Ousado series blends luxury with performance to elevate your driving experience. Alternatively,

elevate your status with the Hongqi HS5, starting from RO 12,800. With its commanding presence and unmatched comfort, the HS5 sets new standards of excellence in luxury driving.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, expresses enthusiasm about the offer, stating, “As the exclusive distributor of Hongqi cars in Oman, we are thrilled to introduce this special summer offer, designed to enhance the luxury driving experience in the country.

At MHD ACERE, we are dedicated to delivering excellence and exceeding expectations, and this promotion underscores our commitment to providing unparalleled service and value.”

Offer highlights:

- 7 years/155,000 km service package: Enjoy comprehensive service coverage for seven years



or up to 155,000 kilometres, ensuring your Hongqi vehicle remains in prime condition.

• 7 Years roadside assistance: Drive with confidence knowing that help is readily available with just a call.

• 7 Years unlimited mileage warranty: Enjoy the luxury of Hongqi with complete peace of

mind.

• Complimentary insurance and registration: Seamlessly transition into ownership with complimentary insurance and registration services.

• Special gift vouchers: Receive RO 250 worth of gift vouchers & RO 100 fuel cards as a token of appreciation.

Infoline celebrates 20 years of unparalleled service in Oman



MUSCAT: This year, Infoline, a trailblazer in digital business process outsourcing and technology-driven solutions, marks its 20th anniversary. A journey that began in 2004 as a modest venture has flourished into a beacon of innovation and excellence, profoundly impacting the business landscape across Oman and beyond.

Founded in 2004 as a visionary venture managing Gulf Air's contact centre, Infoline has significantly broadened its services and market presence. Among its notable achievements, Infoline introduced the 1318 Omantel Directory, now known as Daleel 1010, and launched Oman's first Cloud Contact Centre, transforming communication solutions in the aviation and banking sectors.

Infoline's history is marked by strategic alliances and significant technological advancements that have propelled the company to the forefront of the industry.

The introduction of ERP and CRM practices, partnerships with major national projects, and ISO certifications underscore Infoline's commitment to quality and innovation.

Infoline's dedication extends beyond business innovation to profound community engagement and development, particularly through its Omanisation policy, which has significantly contributed to the employment and training of Omani youth. Infoline's efforts have been recognised by the Ministry of Labour, highlighting its role in national development.

Looking ahead, Infoline is poised to continue its legacy of excellence. The company is driven by a vision to cultivate technology-driven connections that transcend boundaries, nurturing limitless possibilities for progress and innovation.

Kuwait inks pact to import power from Gulf Electricity Market

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy has announced the signing of an agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) to import electrical energy from the Gulf Electricity Market — a move that will ensure power exports from the Oman network as well.

The agreement aims to streamline the importation of electrical energy from the Gulf market to Kuwait, ensuring the provision of required quantities at competitive rates, as per the Gulf market prices.

This initiative will see Kuwait being supplied with the contracted electrical energy via the Gulf electrical interconnection network, utilising the Gulf



electrical energy trade platform managed by the GCCIA.

In a statement, Eng Ahmed al Ibrahim, CEO of the GCCIA, emphasised the significance of the Gulf electrical market, describing it as one of the most efficient in the region. He highlighted that

the GCC market coordinates through an electronic platform that allows member countries to submit competitive bids in terms of quantities and prices. Deals are concluded via this platform, which also oversees energy scheduling and financial settlements.

Al Ibrahim underscored that the primary goal of trading electrical energy is to foster societal growth by providing sustainable and competitively priced electrical energy. This trade mechanism also reduces the high costs associated with producing

electrical energy and constructing new power stations.

By importing or exporting electrical energy, system operators can significantly cut costs and enhance operational efficiency, benefiting member countries in terms of operational safety and effectiveness.

He noted the global importance of electrical energy trading, particularly in light of the rising integration of renewable energy sources. This trend necessitates short-term trading to mitigate the fluctuations inherent in renewable energy systems.

Al Ibrahim pointed to the European experience as a benchmark, where all European nations engage in electrical energy trading through electronic systems for next-day and intra-day energy products.



OAB and U Capital sign pact to launch liquidity provider service

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) signed a strategic partnership agreement with Ubhar Capital (U Capital), who has been appointed as a Liquidity Provider for OAB shares listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

Sulaiman al Harthi, Chief Executive Officer of OAB, and Abdulaziz al Saadi, Chief Executive Officer of U Capital, signed the agreement.

The agreement embodies the objectives of OAB in contributing to the development of the capital market and ensuring a liquid and efficient trading environment for its shares on the MSX.

AlHarthisaid: "This agreement with Ubhar Capital represents a new step in OAB's efforts to support innovation in financial services, and comes within the framework of the bank's strategic directions towards providing the highest value to investors

and shareholders. With this agreement, the bank continues its commitment to sustainable growth and contributes to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 by supporting efforts to revitalise the Muscat Stock Exchange and foster the investment culture."

He added: "After completing the merger of Oman Arab Bank and Alizz Islamic Bank in 2020, OAB emerged as leading financial institution publicly listed on the MSX with a market cap today of \$0.6 billion.

"We had several successful local and international bond issuances, attracting local and foreign investors. All of these milestones contributed to the development of the capital and debt markets. The partnership with U Capital underscores our commitment to ensure a seamless trading experience and liquid listing of OAB's stock."

Vodafone set to transform business connectivity in Oman with new enterprise services

MUSCAT: Committed to lead the transformation of business connectivity in Oman, Vodafone has unveiled the initial phase of its ground-breaking enterprise services with the launch of BLACK for Business postpaid plans.

Flexible and tailored to meet the diverse needs of businesses, the new plans bring the beloved features of BLACK to business customers, offering even greater value, convenience and scalability.

Steadfast to deliver on its promise to "Make it Happen", Vodafone is harnessing the global prowess of the Vodafone Group and tailoring it specifically for Oman through several first in the market product and service-features.

The company is also leveraging its local strength in data allowance, award-winning network reliability, advance technologies and best-in-class customer care to enable businesses to grow and revolutionise their operations.

Eng Mohammed al Alawi, Head of Enterprise at Vodafone Oman, said: "Oman's economic growth trajectory is underpinned by diversification and technological advancement.

"As we navigate this transformation, we at Vodafone Oman recognise the critical need for adaptable communication solutions that empower enterprises to thrive in a dynamic marketplace. Our mission goes beyond connectivity; it's about enabling Oman's businesses to access and implement best international practices and use cases to allow local enterprises to compete



Eng Mohammed al Alawi, Head of Enterprise at Vodafone Oman, explains the features of the BLACK for Business postpaid plans.

globally and drive economic empowerment."

True to its digital-first DNA, Vodafone business customers can easily sign up for the plans via a newly launched business website.

BLACK for Business offers five postpaid plans, Business Expand, Business Explore, Business Elite, Business Pioneer and Business Prime, catering to companies of all sizes.

In addition, Vodafone has integrated some of its best-selling features including, data rollover, data and voice roaming to over 154 destinations as well as the ability to take the plans abroad to 29 Vodafone countries, to name just a few.

In addition, Vodafone Oman is offering advanced SMS solutions to enable businesses to reach and connect to wider audiences.

Beyond the plans, Vodafone has addressed key mobile service challenges within the business community.

Focusing on simplicity, useability, predictability and above all value for money, all five BLACK for Business postpaid plans offer unprecedented control and consumption monitoring capabilities for both business owners and their employees.

Through a fully-customizable Self-Service Portal, businesses can manage their unique mobile communication requirements quickly and digitally with full autonomy over billing and administration, giving them the agility they need to make fast and sound decisions.

The introduction of BLACK for Business postpaid plans represents a strategic step forward in Vodafone's journey in Oman. Underscored by the company's drive to be at the forefront of technological developments, the new plans set the stage for what is to come in the world of enterprise telecommunications from Vodafone.

\$1.8-billion UK tax fraud accused says he acted honestly

LONDON: Sanjay Shah, a UK hedge fund founder accused of masterminding a 1.44 billion pound (\$1.83 billion) dividend tax fraud against Denmark, told a London court on Tuesday he was an honest man and good trader but had relied on others for tax and legal advice.

Testifying by video-link from Denmark, where he faces parallel criminal proceedings in the "cum-ex" dividend trading case, Shah alleged a legal "defect" had allowed the trading strategy that became

so successful that he bought a Ferrari and paid himself a 19 million pound bonus when he turned 40.

"A defect in the law allowed such trades to be legal," the 53-year-old, dressed in a dark blue T-shirt and dark trousers, said on the first day of three weeks of cross-examination by a lawyer for Denmark's tax authority Skatteforvaltningen (SKAT).

SKAT alleges Shah's Solo Capital Partners and others ran a fraudulent scheme that involved submitting wrongful



Sanjay Shah

applications for dividend tax refunds on behalf of investors and companies around the

world between 2012 and 2015.

Shah denies wrongdoing. Asked if he was an honest man, Shah said "yes".

"I believe that what I was doing at the time - and those working for me at the time - was lawful and following legal advice," he told London's High Court.

So-called "cum-ex" schemes, which flourished following the 2008 financial crisis, involve trading shares rapidly around a syndicate of banks, investors and hedge funds to exploit the tax

systems of countries such as Denmark, Germany and Belgium.

Investigations led by Germany and Denmark have triggered bank raids, arrests and prosecutions. Denmark has charged a number of British and U.S. citizens over the schemes.

Laurence Rabinowitz, a London lawyer for SKAT that has been doggedly pursuing Shah in London, said that by 2011, major banks and a big auditor had stopped working with Solo Capital because of

perceived risks.

"You appear to wish to represent yourself as someone incapable of understanding detail and as someone who lacks intelligence," he said.

"I am not holding myself out to be an expert in the tax field," Shah responded. "At the time, I was a good trader and I was able to obtain knowledge from competitors ... and assess risks for myself and execute trades. I was good at some things but I was not good at everything."

— Reuters

Eurozone dodges recession amid German recovery



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

The eurozone grew faster than expected in the first quarter 2024 thanks to a recovery in Germany, bringing a shallow recession to an end. According to figures released by Eurostat, the eurozone grew 0.3 per cent between January and March, ahead of the 0.1 per cent expansion expected by economists.

This meant the single currency area moved out of a shallow recession recorded in the second half of 2023 after growth was revised down at the end of last year.

The improved performance at the beginning of 2024 largely came thanks to an improvement in Germany's performance. Having shrunk 0.5 per cent in the final quarter of last year, German GDP rose 0.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2024.

The French economy meanwhile showed a marginal improvement. Growth picked up from 0.1 per cent last quarter to 0.2 per cent. Spain continued to be the strongest performing large economy, notching a 0.7 per cent

expansion.

Senior Europe economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, Melanie Debono, said: "Growth is finally picking up and the rebound is even stronger than we thought as past revisions show it was actually in a shallow recession at the end of last year."

Although headline inflation was flat, there was progress on both services and core inflation. Services inflation fell to 3.7 per cent in April, down from 4.0 per cent in March, while core inflation dropped to 2.7 per cent from 2.9 per cent.

FX markets analyst at Ballinger Group, Kyle Chapman, commented: "A long awaited capitulation in services inflation is notable and should give rate-setters a dose confidence, given that concerns about persistent pressures in the sector had been

touted as a significant hurdle to rate cuts." With inflation approaching the two per cent target, traders think the European Central Bank (ECB) will start cutting interest rates in June.

Away from matters of the Eurozone — Firms in London lost some faith in their own trading prospects in April, which contributed to a significant drop in business confidence, a new survey showed.

According to Lloyds Business Barometer, business confidence in the capital dropped nine points to 43 per cent in April, largely due to declining confidence in firms' own trading prospects.

Business confidence in their own trading prospects fell 12 points to 45 per cent, while confidence in the wider economy dipped six points. This potentially reflects changing expectations on

which the Bank of England will cut interest rates, with markets now expecting that rate reduction will start in August and fewer cuts priced in this year.

Regional director for London at Lloyds, Paul Evans, said: "London businesses are still facing a fair amount of economic uncertainty, but as we head into springtime, they should expect a seasonal boom in hospitality and tourism."

Although London business confidence declined, business confidence across the country as a whole remained unchanged for the third month in a row at 42 per cent.

While the headline figure was unchanged, firms were slightly more confident in the wider economy and slightly less confident in their own trading prospects.

April's figure was comfortably above the long-term average of 28 per cent, with only January 2024 seeing businesses report higher levels of confidence in the last twelve months.

Senior economist at Lloyds, Hann-JU Ho, said: "We are beginning to see a consistent trend emerge from our Barometer results in recent months. Businesses are feeling increasingly confident about the economy, coinciding with falling inflation and hopes that interest rates will start to fall this year."

Easing price pressures and the prospect of interest rate reductions have contributed to an improving economic picture. Figures out last month showed that GDP grew 0.2 per cent over the past three months — the first time it has grown on a quarterly basis since last summer.

The influence of governance, risk and compliance on banking sector



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The writer is an academic lecturer and adviser at Oman College of Management and Technology.

Uncertainty, often synonymous with risk, has become a growing concern for economists, policymakers, and financial institutions since the 2008 global financial crisis.

Many experts attribute the crisis primarily to uncertainty. I feel compelled to write this article due to my personal experiences with poor governance, which encompasses corruption, conflicts of interest, economic instability, and financial losses for companies. The necessity for robust corporate governance has never been more critical.

To address these issues, I firmly believe that Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) education should be regularly provided to all employees, regardless of their position, in both the public and private sectors. Without such education, transparency and control are unattainable.

Al-Thaqeb and Algharabali (2019) emphasise that raising awareness is the most effective way to handle uncertainty. It is essential for all stakeholders to possess the knowledge and understanding of GRC principles.

Lundqvist (2015) explores the relationship between risk management practices and firm performance, finding that companies with mature risk governance structures tend to outperform their peers in terms of profitability and market valuation. It is well indicated from this theory that the practices of risk management is vital. Unfortunately, it has been observed that many bankers lack awareness of GRC.

They tend to focus on their routine tasks without staying updated on market trends and GRC-related cases. This is a significant oversight by management.

For banks, enhancing the risk awareness of all employees is crucial, as regulatory bodies like the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS, 2015) and the Financial Stability Board (2017) mandate stricter risk governance mechanisms.

Neglecting GRC can severely impact a country's economy, as evidenced by instances of fraud, conflicts of interest, and corruption. Consider the infamous Enron scandal of 2001, where widespread fraud led to the company's bankruptcy.

This event resulted in significant financial losses and job cuts, severely affecting the business ecosystem and economy. What lessons can today's stakeholders learn from such past events to prevent economic downfall? The Enron case revealed that the company's accounting fraud led to its downfall.

At its peak, Enron's bankruptcy was the largest in US history and marked a significant audit failure. This scandal raised critical questions about the independence and vigilance of auditors, the effectiveness of financial controllers, and the ability of compliance and risk teams to identify and report internal and external risks accurately.

Enron's collapse saw its top executives, including the CEO and CFO, imprisoned for fraud and other offenses. Shareholders filed a \$40 billion lawsuit, and the company's auditor, Arthur Andersen, went out of business.

This case underscores the importance of risk governance in monitoring and managing bank risks. Effective risk governance directly influences bank performance and stability (Lundqvist, 2015).

Banks are the cornerstone of the monetary system; mismanagement can lead to systemic collapse.

The banking industry must implement a balanced GRC framework to prevent such failures. One of the fundamental aspects of GRC is maintaining balance.



AHMED AL RAISI

The writer has over 16 years of experience in economics and business strategy. He combines his academic background in economics with practical experience in data analysis, project management, and consulting to create clear and engaging economic articles

The world's energy landscape is undergoing a seismic transformation.

Driven by concerns over climate change and the falling costs of renewable technologies, a global shift towards cleaner, sustainable energy sources is gaining momentum.

For the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including Oman, which have long been dependent on fossil fuel revenue, this presents a complex set of challenges — and equally significant opportunities.

Historically, competition within the GCC has played a critical role in spurring economic growth, technological advances, and the region's rise as an energy superpower. Yet, the energy transition requires a more nuanced approach.

While healthy competition will continue to drive innovation, collaboration is the linchpin enabling the GCC states to not just navigate this change but emerge as prominent leaders in the new energy order.

Consider these compelling advantages of a collaborative approach, especially for Oman and its GCC partners: Pooling Resources and Accelerating Innovation: Oman's potential for solar and wind power, combined with the UAE's burgeoning clean energy technology sectors, Saudi Arabia's solar plans, and Qatar's pioneering work on green

Collaboration is key to GCC's success in global energy transition



hydrogen, demonstrates the GCC's power as an innovation powerhouse. Members can pool resources, knowledge, and infrastructure by forming strategic partnerships and accelerating the entire region's clean energy development and adoption.

Strengthening market position and global influence: Collaboration allows GCC nations to present a united front in the evolving global energy market. They can maintain their role as influential, reliable energy providers by coordinating production strategies, pricing, and sustainable energy initiatives.

This translates to a more powerful voice at international forums, creating a stronger bargaining position and enabling the region to shape the emerging clean energy economy.

Risk mitigation and diversification: Investing in new energy technologies often carries significant upfront costs and uncertainties. GCC states can effectively distribute their financial risk through joint ventures and shared funding schemes, making ambitious projects possible.

Collaboratively exploring energy sources like green hydrogen, solar-powered desalination, and advanced battery storage solutions strengthens our energy portfolio, ensuring resilience against fluctuations in the global market.

Economic diversification and future-proofing: Collaboration paves the way for economic diversification on a regional scale. Sharing resources and expertise on renewable industries, carbon capture and storage, and sustainable technology hubs can create a ripple effect.

This attracts foreign investment, stimulates high-tech job sectors, and positions Oman and its GCC partners as leaders in industries of the future, securing economic prosperity far beyond the era of fossil fuels.

Expanding horizons and market reach: The GCC Power Grid provides a robust foundation for the Gulf states' clean energy ambitions. Yet, the potential for collaboration extends far beyond the GCC.

Integrating with the larger Pan-Arab Electricity Market (PAEM) would facilitate cross-border energy trade with other nations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), significantly expanding the market for GCC-produced sustainable energy.

Building bridges to Europe and beyond: Exploring strategic partnerships and energy export agreements with the European Union aligns with the EU's goals of diversifying its energy sources and accelerating its clean energy transition.

This potential collaboration allows the GCC states to become significant players in the burgeoning global market for green hydrogen and other clean energy technologies.

Success stories like the European Union's collaborative energy projects and the Energy Transitions Commission demonstrate the potential of knowledge-sharing for climate action and clean energy development.

Even closer to home, the GCC Power Grid exemplifies the benefits of cross-border energy infrastructure. Collaboration in energy transition isn't about discarding the competitive spirit that has propelled GCC states but about intelligently adapting to evolving global conditions.

By leveraging our collective strengths, working together to mitigate shared risks, presenting a united front, and seeking strategic partnerships beyond our borders, Oman and the GCC nations can secure a position as leading players in the sustainable energy revolution, creating a prosperous future for future generations.

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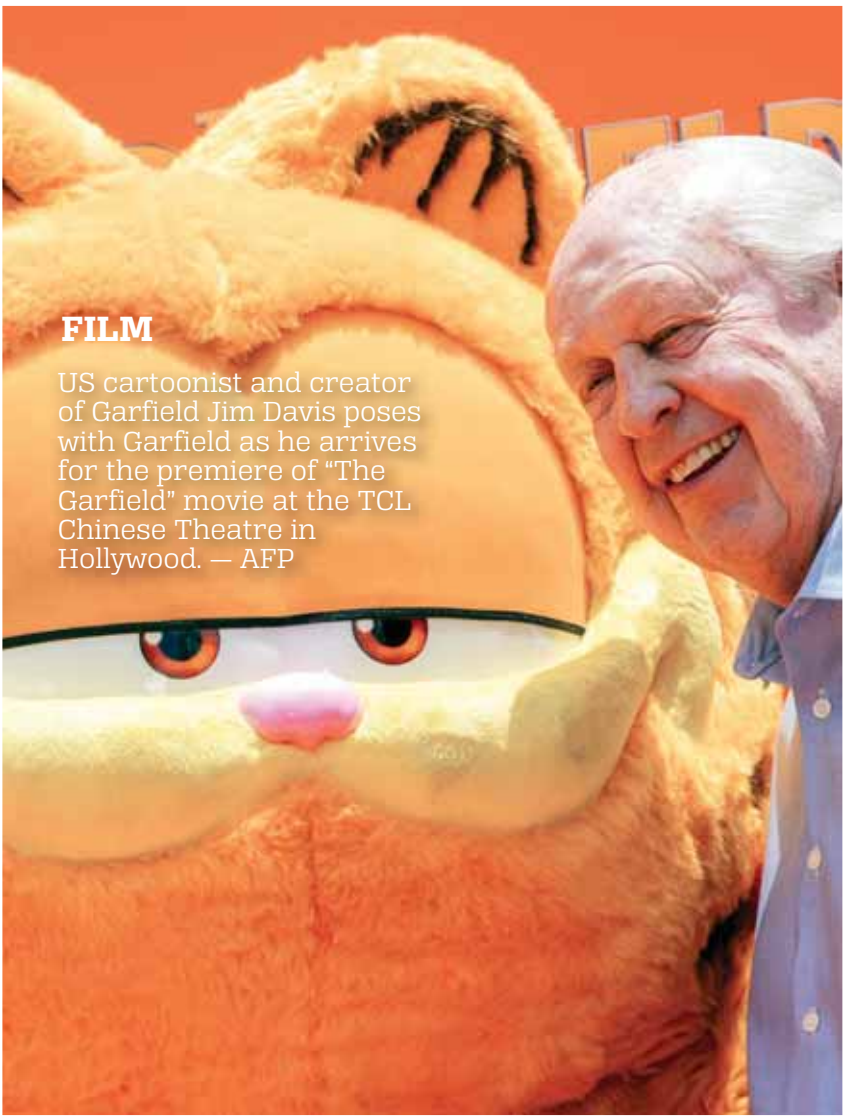
LIFESTYLE

A woman sells fruit on a street in a neighbourhood known as "Little Haiti" in Santo Domingo. — AFP



DINING

A chef slicing whale meat at a 'Nisshinmaru' whale meat restaurant in Shimonoseki city, Yamaguchi prefecture. — AFP



FILM

US cartoonist and creator of Garfield Jim Davis poses with Garfield as he arrives for the premiere of "The Garfield" movie at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. — AFP



MUSIC

Mexican singer Ana Gabriel poses on her Hollywood Walk of Fame Star during a ceremony in Hollywood, California. — AFP



CULTURE

People visit The RNLI 200 Anniversary flower display during the preview day at the RHS Chelsea Flower show, in London. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | MAY 22, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 14, 1445 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

OMANI HERBS OFFER NATURAL ALTERNATIVES TO TOXIC BEAUTY PRODUCTS

Many everyday products contain harmful toxins, contributing to chronic health issues despite dietary improvements. Dr Zaaïma al Jabri warns against chemicals like parabens and phthalates, urging scrutiny of product labels. Natural Omani herbs offer safer alternatives for skincare and personal hygiene, emphasising a shift towards healthier choices...

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A LOOK AT THE ACADEME



DR. ZAINAB AL-AJMI

Dr Zainab al Ajmi, an erudite academic and dedicated educator, brings insightful perspectives to her columns. With a wealth of experience in teaching and research, her writings delve into the intersection of academia and societal issues, fostering intellectual discourse with clarity and depth. For feedback, you can email her at zeinbf@moe.om

Teacher Shortages

IN RECENT YEARS, the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of births with a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in schools, which has led to an increase in the demand for teachers. Globally, education systems across the world face an ongoing teacher shortage, and the reasons behind this are many, including: increasing workloads, difficult working conditions and low salaries. These concerns result in fewer graduates wanting to enter the profession and often drive those already in the classroom to other jobs. Moreover, the projections estimate 44 million additional teachers are needed globally to meet universal primary and secondary education by 2030.

Globally we need to increase the number of teachers by 50 per cent by 2030. Teacher gaps can stem from either needing to fill newly created posts or replacing vacant positions caused by attrition. (<https://teachertaskforce.org/news/teacher-shortages-are-global-challenge-why-improving-attractiveness-profession-critical-ensure>). A series of studies reported severe shortages in specific subject areas like mathematics, science, and special education. Studies defined shortages as an "inadequate quantity of qualified individuals willing to offer their services for available jobs under prevailing wages and conditions" (Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). According to (Wiggin & Smith, 2021) address this issue, it is crucial to examine the reasons for the shortage of teachers in public K-12 schools. In general, male teachers leave the teaching profession at a higher rate than their female colleagues. For example, global male attrition rates in 2021 were 9.2 per cent for primary teachers compared to 4.25 per cent for female primary teachers. At the

lower secondary level, males had a 5.9-per cent attrition rate while the female rate was 5.6 per cent (UIS, 2023). On the other hand, the causes of men leaving the profession vary by context, but they often have more employment opportunities than women in other fields such as business, or manufacturing. Teaching at lower levels of education is also often viewed culturally as a profession for women. In 2022, women made up 94 per cent of pre-primary teachers and 68 per cent of primary teachers globally (UNESCO, 2022). Few countries track data about when teachers leave the profession, however, some studies show that younger teachers are more apt to leave the profession than older ones. Furthermore, an OECD study found that across systems, attrition rates were much higher for teachers younger than age 35 than those aged 35 to 54. (OECD, 2021) (<https://teachertaskforce.org/news/teacher-shortages-are-global-challenge-why-improving-attractiveness-profession-critical-ensure> (<https://teachertaskforce.org/news/teacher-shortages-are-global-challenge-why-improving-attractiveness-profession-critical-ensure>)).

improving-attractiveness-profession-critical-ensure. Hammond & Podolsky (2019) point out that to break the cycle of teacher shortages a set of high-quality reform plans must be taken to improve teacher recruitment and retention and tackle the root causes of the unequal distribution of qualified educators. Additionally, emphasis on enhancing school leadership in hard-to-teacher areas and incentivising teachers to work in high-need schools and subjects through increased compensation and support programmes. This shift towards high-quality strategies holds promise for creating a more equitable education system by attracting and retaining qualified educators where they are most needed. In summary, understanding the factors that lead teachers to leave the profession is crucial for predicting future teacher needs, which in turn informs efforts to make teaching more attractive and retain educators, ultimately contributing to an attractive and stable career in support of education sustainability.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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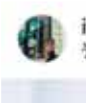
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NATIONAL MUSEUM DISPLAYS DISTINCTIVE COLLECTIONS ON LOAN FROM LOUVRE ABU DHABI

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM is showcasing two distinctive objects on loan from the Louvre Abu Dhabi for one year, the objects are a "Bowl with a two-colour Inscription" adorned with the beauty of Arabic calligraphy and an iconic "Homage to the Square" reflecting contemporary abstract art.

Showcasing the objects offers visitors an insightful exploration into Islamic art and modern abstraction and an immersing experience in the rich tapestry of art, culture, and history that binds the world together.

The "Bowl with a Two-colour Inscription" is displayed in the "Splendours of Islam" gallery dating back to Samanid dynasty (10th - 11th century) hails from Khorasan and Transoxiana, regions traversed by the ancient Silk Roads. Adorned with Arabic proverbs (amthall), it reflects the wisdom of the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib and the Islamic hadith. The contrasting black or brown slip decoration on a white slip base showcases the skill of an adept calligrapher, while the circular composition and the sobriety of the decorative and lexical vocab-

ulary enhance the power of the inscription.

The art piece "Homage to the Square," is displayed in the "Oman and the World" gallery, by the painter Josef Albers, a master of colour relationships. He created this iconic piece in 1963. Josef Albers' "Homage to the Square" series, initiated in 1950 in the United States, encapsulates his exploration into colour theory and optical effects through simple yet profound compositions of nested squares. Utilising a distinctive technique of oil on masonite panels, these paintings—marked by their subtle textures and the illusion of spatial depth—serve as a pivotal study in colour dynamics. Albers' approach, particularly through this series and his seminal book "Interaction of Colour," highlights his contribution to abstract art as a universal language, redefining art's relationship to reality amidst the challenges of the twentieth century.

It is worth noting that this loan embodies the close bilateral collaboration between the National Museum and the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which was established in



2017, when a collection of Omani artefacts was loaned to be displayed at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, introducing visitors to the civilisation of the Land of

Frankincense and Oman's cultural role on the maritime Silk Road.

The two museums previously collaborated on the "Gardens of

Paradise: The Language of Flowers in Iznik Ceramics" exhibition at the National Museum, which was inaugurated in December 2021. The objects presented the art of Iznik ceramics decorated with flowers and the special symbols it embodies related to evoking Quranic descriptions that recall the gardens of Paradise, showcasing pieces loaned from the Louvre Abu Dhabi, including 6 beautiful Iznik ceramics from the 16th century.

In reciprocation, the Louvre Abu Dhabi also received loans from the National Museum, including a beautifully crafted Omani dagger (Al Busaidy dynasty, 1800-1900), an intricately designed copper inkwell (1905) displayed in the Grand Vestibule, and a rare shell-shaped incense burner from the 12th - 14th centuries. — **ONA**

ENTERTAINMENT

Scarlett Johansson says OpenAI chatbot voice 'eerily similar' to hers

SCARLETT JOHANSSON on Monday accused OpenAI of creating a voice for the ChatGPT system that sounded "eerily similar" to the actress after she declined to voice the chatbot herself.

Johansson made the comments in a statement released hours after the artificial intelligence company said it was taking down the voice, called 'Sky.'

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said in a statement e-mailed to Reuters on Monday that Sky's voice was not an imitation of Johansson, but belonged to a different professional actress.

"The voice of Sky is not Scarlett Johansson's, and it was never intended to resemble hers. We cast the voice actor behind Sky's voice before any outreach to Johansson," Altman said. "Out of respect for Johansson, we have paused using Sky's voice in our products. We are sorry to Johansson that we didn't communicate better."

The fight over rights to actors' voices and images has become a focus in Hollywood as studios consider how to use AI to create new entertainment



and as the computer-produced images and sounds become difficult to distinguish from those of humans.

Johansson in the statement said Altman had approached her last

September and offered to hire her to voice a ChatGPT voice — an offer she declined.

"Nine months later, my friends, family and the general public all noted how

much the newest system named 'Sky' sounded like me," she said.

"When I heard the released demo, I was shocked, angered and in disbelief that Mr. Altman would pursue a voice that sounded so eerily similar to mine that my closest friends and news outlets could not tell the difference."

Johansson added that Altman had "insinuated that the similarity was intentional" by tweeting a reference to "her," the 2013 movie about a man who develops a relationship with an AI assistant voiced by the actress.

Johansson's note was published by journalists from NPR and other news outlets. Her publicist also shared it with Reuters.

She said that she had hired legal counsel to ask about the process of creating the voice.

OpenAI showed off its newest AI model, called GPT-4o, last week, with audio capabilities that let users speak to the chatbot and obtain real-time responses, marking a significant advancement in more realistic sounding AI conversations.

OMANI HERBS OFFER NATURAL ALTERNATIVES TO TOXIC BEAUTY PRODUCTS

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

The main culprit behind many of the health issues plaguing people and leading to chronic diseases is frequent contact with environmental toxins. Despite investing significant resources in enhancing the quality of their diet to promote better health, a lot of people are stuck in a perpetual cycle of suffering. This is often due to the presence of toxins in their home environment.

"Many of the chemical preservatives used in products affect the function of our cells and distort our body's natural biochemical pathways. The body's systems are so interdependent that it is impossible to isolate the causes of some diseases, so these chemicals remain unquestioned," explained Dr Zaaïma al Jabri, Assistant Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at SQU.

"Most high-street skincare products, for example, contain some very nasty chemicals that can be very disruptive to the thyroid gland and wreak havoc with your hormonal health," she shared.

Some very commonly used chemicals are particularly problematic, therefore, make sure to check your daily routine products and make sure that they are free from toxic substances.

"Parabens, a preserving agent, for example, is used in many conventional skincare products. What a lot of people

don't know is that it can mimic estrogen in the body," she shared. Most spray products, she added, "include PVP/VA copolymer, which can damage the lungs when inhaled and then travel around the body through circulation. Synthetic fragrances often cause rashes and lung problems and disrupt the precious thyroid gland."

Next time you go to buy shampoos, shower gels, soaps, and other kinds of toothpaste, as she noted, "Make sure that they are free Sodium Lauryl Laureth Sulfate which is a foaming agent that can cause rashes, skin problems, and deeper disruptions in the body, such as the endocrine system. Synthetic Colours as well are often listed as FD&C or D&C and are followed by a number; these make products look pretty but can be carcinogenic."

The fresh and nice scents in your favourite product are likely to be caused by chemicals such as Phthalates. "Sadly, they don't have to be declared by the manufacturers, so they are just labelled as 'fragrance'. A study by Parlett (2012) found that women who used perfume 24 hours before the experiment had phthalate urine concentrations 2.9 times higher than those who hadn't. It makes you wonder about those advertisements with beautiful women looking sensual as they spray themselves with hazardous chemicals," she pointed out.

Be careful not to put antibacterial products in your shopping cart. Triclosan is a substance found in antibacterial soap, but a lot of other products are now carrying this

ingredient too, including make-up, deodorants, clothing and kinds of toothpaste. "This antibacterial and antifungal agent gives a lot of cleaning products their ability to boast about killing germs and bacteria, though the ingredient does not affect viruses. According to an FDA report, there is no evidence that antibacterial products protect people any better than regular soap and water. It's known to disrupt the thyroid, and the endocrine systems and be the cause of many allergies," she explained.

If you are happy because your favourite deodorant makes you sweat less in the hot summer, make sure it is aluminium-free, which gives it this privilege. "Aluminium is an antiperspirant, and it is a heavy metal that the body has trouble eliminating. It has also been linked to breast cancer in women," she shared.

There are always natural alternatives that smell good and make you feel as luxurious as the chemical options. If you visit your local health shop product, as she warned, "Do not be misguided with labels like "organic" or "natural" because they can be made of a few organic ingredients but still have parabens (as an emulsifier), phthalates (as fragrance) added to them. Therefore, ingredients still need checking."

The herbs available in the Omani environment, which Omani women relied on in the past, are useful, healthy, and can be an ideal alternative. "For example, you can make a natural Sidr (Ziziphus spina-christi

leaves) shampoo at home by simply mixing three tablespoons of Sidr powder with 500ml of water. Then strain the ingredients together to get a frothy mixture that can be immediately used to shampoo the hair. Adding a few drops of Luban (frankincense) essential oil would make the perfect anti-dandruff shampoo," she mentioned.

You can also use Waras herb (scientifically called Curcuma aromatica) to restore the balance of your skin. "Mix Waras powder with oil like olive, al-Shu', or sesame oil, then keep the mixture in a bottle and use it from time to time by applying it to the entire face. The Omani brides in the past used to apply it to the whole body and were kept unwashed for four to five days to give the body a white colour and a good smell," said Maryam al Kharousi, Omani researcher and author of the book Recipes and Documentation from the Omani Heritage, The Omani Woman's Decoration of Plants.

Sandalwood powder (scientifically called santalum album) as well is used for face care by mixing it with rose water. "These scrubs are still used by Omani women for the skin because they whiten its colour, reduce dark spots, treat acne and skin melasma, and give a pink colour to the cheeks naturally," Maryam mentioned.

The Waras plant is also used to perfume clothes. "The Omani women in the past soaked their clothes in Waras oil for days to absorb it and wear it in the high summer heat," Maryam noted.