

P10

RED WARRIORS CONCLUDE SPAIN CAMP WITH DRAW AGAINST REAL OVIEDO



P13

ASYAD EXPANDS GLOBAL REACH WITH ACQUISITION OF SFS



P20

THE CULTURAL SECRETS HIDDEN BEHIND EACH CUP OF TURKISH COFFEE



MUSCAT

IRAN’S FM OFFERS CONDOLENCES ON WADI KABIR SHOOTING

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday received a phone call from Ali Bagheri Kani, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran who offered condolences on the martyrdom of a security officer alongside a number of civilians in Al Wadi Al Kabir shooting incident. The two ministers underscored the significance of preserving the values of tolerance, respect and the freedom to perform religious rituals. They discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the ongoing Israeli aggression on the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), reiterating the two countries’ firm stance rejecting terrorism and condemning the aggressive Israeli practices including its recent attacks on Yemen.

MANAH

KHAREEF CAMPAIGN HELD AT OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM



The second edition of the Damak Wasil campaign began at the Oman Across Ages Museum, on Monday. Coinciding with the Khareef Dhofar season, the campaign aims to position the museum as a primary stop-over for visitors heading to Dhofar Governorate as well as enhance the museum’s presence on the map of local and international tourist destinations during this season. The campaign organisers are posting on the museum’s social media accounts in a bid to promote the museum and increase awareness about its historical and cultural significance as well as provide visitors with knowledge about the history of the Sultanate of Oman, its modern achievements and natural and geographical diversity in an interactive manner using the latest technologies in museum display. The campaign includes various marketing methods in various locations inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman to ensure that the message of the campaign reaches as many audiences as possible.



FRENCH AMBASSADOR BIDS FAREWELL

Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, on Monday received 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, HH Sayyid Shihab thanked the ambassador for the efforts she exerted in promoting bilateral cooperation, wishing her continued success. The ambassador lauded the strength of relations between Oman and France. She also expressed her pride and appreciation for the cooperation extended to her during her tenure in Oman. — ONA

RAFO to purchase helicopters from US

MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) signed a contract with the American company (Bell Textron) to purchase a number of helicopters. The move comes within the framework of development and modernisation plans aimed at strengthening the RAFO capabilities. The procurement of this type of aircraft also comes to enhance the level of performance and efficiency enjoyed by the RAFO, in line with the requirements of modernisation and development. This step contributes to supporting

the comprehensive development witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman during the prosperous era of His Majesty the Sultan, the Supreme Commander. The selection of this type of aircraft also meets the elements of flexibility and effective performance that suit the RAFO needs. The purchase of this aircraft will constitute another addition within the framework of the national operational or developmental tasks and duties undertaken by the RAFO especially those related to community service. — ONA

Gazans flee as Israel sets sights on safe zone

GAZA STRIP: Thousands of Gazans fled an Israeli-designated humanitarian zone on Monday after the army ordered them to leave and warned of an imminent operation in response to rocket attacks. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was on his way to Washington to deliver a crucial speech at what he said was a time of “great political uncertainty”, following US President Joe Biden’s decision not to seek re-election. Netanyahu will meet Biden, who has pushed him to agree to a ceasefire with Hamas, more than nine months into the Gaza war ignited by the Palestinian militant group’s October 7 attacks on Israel. Fighting raged in Gaza as the Israeli military ordered Palestinians to evacuate part of a humanitarian zone, just two months after directing them there for their own safety.



A Palestinian boy holds a girl as they flee the eastern part of Khan Yunis to make their way after they were ordered by Israeli army to evacuate their neighbourhoods in Khan Yunis on Monday. — Reuters

The military said it issued the order to leave the eastern Khan Yunis sector of the Al-Mawasi humanitarian zone as it was “about to forcefully operate” to curb rocket fire. Facing yet another displacement, Palestinians filled the dusty streets of Khan Yunis with cars, motorbikes, donkey-drawn carts, and on foot, carrying what belongings they could. Hassan Qudayh said his family

fled in “panic”. “We were happily making breakfast for our children, as we had been safe for a month, only to be stunned by shells, warning leaflets and martyrs in the streets,” he told AFP TV. “This is the 14th or 15th time we’ve been displaced. “We want peace, not war. We want to be united. Enough! We’ve been suffering for 10 months.” Hamas’s October 7 attack on southern Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. They also seized 251 hostages, 116 of whom are still in Gaza, including 44 the Israeli military says are dead. Israel’s retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 39,006 people, also mostly civilians, according to data from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. SEE ALSO P6

RO 1.68 million Nizwa entrance project to be completed soon

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JULY 22

The Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is finalising the development of the entrance to the Wilayat of Nizwa, with the project costing more than RO 1.68 million. Spanning a length of 3,500 metres on both sides, the development stretches from Firq bridge to the traffic lights at Firq. The project, a significant part of the municipal sector’s beautification efforts under the governorate development plan to promte aims to

create a healthier environment at the entrance of the wilayat. Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, said: “The project will contribute to supporting the growing tourism and economic movement in the governorate and create new spaces for entertainment, sports, and improve green cover.” The project includes 23,000 square metres of green spaces, 240 shade trees, and 1,930 shrubs. Pedestrian paths have various lengths and colours of pedestrian paths. It also features cycling tracks and a games area with

a rubber floor covering 660 square metres. Car parking can accommodate 40 vehicles. The area also has a fountain. It has a modern irrigation system utilising treated water for trees and plants. Residents have welcomed the new recreational spaces and the enhanced beautification of their wilayat, expressing their excitement through social media posts. The governorate is also implementing various development and beautification projects across the nine wilayats.





In brief

MUSCAT



OMAN, KUWAIT
ENHANCE ACADEMIC
COOPERATION

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, received on Monday in her office Dr Lamia Al Melhem, Acting Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education in the State of Kuwait. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in academic fields, as well as boosting the cultural exchange between the two countries. Moreover, the meeting touched on a set of relevant topics, including the possibility of connecting higher education institutions in the two countries. — ONA

NEW DELHI



OMAN AT NEW DELHI
UNESCO SESSION

The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee meetings, held in New Delhi, India. The meetings, which will run till July 31, are organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco). Oman's delegation in the 46th session is headed by Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hamami, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to Unesco. — ONA

Rains lash some wilayats on Monday

MUSCAT: The Wilayat of Al Hamra experienced heavy rainfall that was centred on mountain villages in Jabal Shams triggering the flow of Wadi Al Nakhr, on Monday. Other villages located in the centre of the wilayat witnessed medium to heavy rains that continued until the evening causing rainwater to cascade down from waterfalls in the mountainous areas of Jabal Shams especially Sab Bani Khamis. Heavy to medium rains were reported in the wilayats of Al Rustaq and Al Awabi in Al Batinah South Governorate. In the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, rainfall battered the villages of Wadi Al Sahtan, Wadi Bani Ghafir and Wadi Bani Hinai. In the Wilayat of Al Awabi, rains were centred on the villages of Al Alia, Al Muhsina, Hadas, Al Hajar and Senaibei in Wadi Bani Kharous. — ONA



Youth Centre launches summer programmes for 2024

MUSCAT: The Youth Centre has rolled out an extensive package of summer programmes across various governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, targeting the development of youth skills, talents and capabilities. The programmes encompass technical, entrepreneurial, cultural and entertainment activities, tailored to the unique characteristics and youth demographics of each governorate to ensure maximum benefit. Amira al Balushi, programmes Supervisor at the Youth Centre, stated: "The summer 2024 programmes aim to discover and develop the skills of Omani youth, invest their time in their areas of

interest, and enhance their effective participation in various initiatives and projects." She highlighted that these programmes are part of the Youth Centre's initiative to synergise efforts of government and private institutions in supporting youth and to improve their skills. The diverse programmes feature specialised camps in marketing and innovation, entrepreneurship, creative industries and modern technologies. Al Balushi emphasised the Centre's dedication to achieving its goals by providing an environment that nurtures the creativity of young people, hones their skills, and aligns with their aspirations and needs. — ONA

The breakdown of the
programmes in various
governorates are as follows:

- Muscat Governorate: 14 programmes
- Al Dakhiliyah Governorate: 6 programmes
- Al Sharqiyah North Governorate: 3 programmes
- Al Sharqiyah South Governorate: 12 programmes
- Al Wusta Governorate: 8 programmes
- Musandam Governorate: 6 programmes
- Al Batinah North Governorate: 9 programmes
- Al Batinah South Governorate: 3 programmes
- Dhofar Governorate: 14 programmes



Announcement
No. (2024/6)

Driven by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion's concern for regulating the market regarding plastic bags that impact the Omani environment.

the ministry, in coordination with the General Directorate of Customs, is pleased to announce to industrial and commercial establishments the implementation of Ministerial Decision No. (519/2022) regarding the prohibition of importing plastic bags starting from Sunday, September 1, 2024.

 **To view the prohibited HS codes for import, scan the QR code.**

The role of surveillance in modern security

MAJOR THURAYA AL KALBANI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Technology has become fully integrated into many areas of life, raising questions about the benefits of its presence anywhere and anytime. Its ubiquitous presence in various institutions highlights its importance. This integration of technology elevates the level of protection beyond conventional measures, addressing security and work-related concerns. Omair bin Abdulaziz al Rawahi, Director of the Security Police at the General-Directorate of Operations, emphasised the significance of surveillance cameras in providing self-security for buildings and facilities, especially those managed by specialised companies. These cameras play a crucial role in preventing sabotage and aiding investigations by tracking crimes and identifying genetic clues. He further explained that the type of cameras used in various models directly relates to interesting security issues and the discovery of crimes and associated facts.



Omair bin Abdulaziz al Rawahi, Director of the Security Police

The deployment of surveillance cameras has led to significant changes within internal and external teams, such as reducing the number of security personnel, which in turn lowers the costs of security protection. This reduction helps mitigate risks like vandalism and theft. Additionally, surveillance cameras are invaluable in urgent situations, revealing details about the sites, surrounding factors, and assisting in rescue operations. They enable cost-effective measures and facilitate movement from one site to another. Cameras and systems have become vital tools in investigations, providing data,

evidence and audiovisual materials that are crucial for supporting investigations, evidence delegation and crime discovery. These tools also play a significant role in deterring crime and illegal activities. Surveillance cameras monitor movement and traffic, detect legal violations, and help study the causes and factors leading to traffic problems, thus supporting the design of improved solutions. Al Rawahi highlighted that the technical specifications and security requirements for installing surveillance cameras vary based on the building, era and site details. Important features include system height, night or thermal vision capabilities, and resilience to different climatic conditions. Users must be experienced and capable of quickly addressing any malfunctions, whether regular or minor. He also noted the potential misuse of cameras for blackmail and bullying, emphasising that Omani laws, such as the Information Technology Crime Law and Royal Decree No (12/2011), criminalise violations of privacy and protect individuals' private lives.



New beachfront developments add to Dhofar’s allure

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 22

Parts of Dhofar’s seafront, particularly in the Wilayat of Salalah, are undergoing a transformative renaissance driven by innovative projects like the Al Baleed Beach Project.

Spearheaded by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism within the Al Baleed Archaeological Park, this initiative is set to become a premier recreational haven for citizens, residents and tourists alike, especially during the bustling Khareef season when the governorate welcomes a surge of visitors from both Oman and abroad.

Central to this ambitious project is a 1200-metre walkway on a suspended bridge, lined with eight cafes and restaurants offering breathtaking sea views. This meticulously designed

promenade not only provides a picturesque setting for leisurely strolls but also enhances the local dining landscape, establishing a vibrant hub for relaxation and social interaction.

Articulating the project’s strategic vision, Ali bin Salim al Kathiri, Director of the Land of Frankincense Sites at the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, said: “The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is dedicated to leveraging our rich heritage resources to empower the local community. Our collaboration with the Royal International Company aims to rejuvenate cultural heritage sites and cultivate a sustainable tourism sector.”

This collaboration promises to significantly increase visitor numbers to this World Heritage-listed site, celebrating



Dhofar’s coastal cities, with their stunning waterfronts, play a crucial role in attracting tourists

Oman’s profound heritage and culture. The Al Baleed Beach Project stands as a beacon of strategic development, not only promoting tourism in Dhofar but also highlighting the historical significance of the Land of Frankincense.

Local investor Haitham bin Salim al Hadari emphasised the project’s critical role in regional development: “The Al Baleed Beach Project is vital for the area’s growth, enhancing both

economic and social life. It offers an inviting environment for citizens, residents and visitors to enjoy shopping, dining and exploring all elements of the project along the bridge.” Al Hadari described the project as an architectural marvel, featuring shops and restaurants suspended on a bridge with stunning sea views, providing visitors with a unique and unforgettable experience.

Initial visitor data for the Al Baleed Beach Project indicates its substantial potential to attract tourists, thereby benefiting the local community and reinforcing the area’s reputation as a premier tourist destination. Future plans include further development, introducing new attractions to engage a wider audience and maximise the project’s positive impact.

Dhofar’s coastal cities, with

their stunning waterfronts, play a crucial role in attracting tourists. Many people spend their vacations on beaches to enjoy the serene seaside atmosphere. Al Dahariz Beach in Salalah is one of the most popular tourist destinations, known for its silver sands, coconut trees and amenities such as barbecue areas, restrooms and cafes.

Al Dahariz Beach remains a key tourist site year-round. During the autumn tourism season, the Al Dahariz Beachfront Project was inaugurated, spanning over 3,500 square metres. The project features a variety of cafes and restaurants catering to beachgoers, as well as designated areas for activities and events. Its modern design and positive visitor feedback have marked it as a significant addition to Salalah’s tourist attractions.



In Dhofar, the grasslands are considered special as they come to life during the khareef season. – Photo by Mohammed bin Amer al Maashani

GRASSLANDS OF DHOFAR: HANDLE WITH CARE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Holidays are meant to be enjoyed, but not at the expense of the environment.

In Dhofar, the grasslands are considered special as they come to life during the Khareef season under the influence of monsoon drizzle brought in by the Arabian Sea, influenced by the Indian Ocean.

In September, wildflowers bloom and then lie dormant until the next monsoon.

A land of camels and cattle, the grasslands have already faced the challenge of overgrazing. The population of grazing animals was controlled to restore the balance in nature.

The grass is delicate and driving over it

could impact its growth.

When nations are combating desertification due to climate change, one measure that can be taken is to avoid driving over the grass. Hence, regulations were put in place against driving or damaging the grasslands.

During the early years of the Khareef tourism season, visitors had the tendency to drive to picnic spots, leaving behind tire marks. Soon, balding patches became noticeable. Since then, the initiative has been in place.

This week, the Dhofar Governorate Police Command arrested a tourist from the Gulf region after a video clip circulated showing him drifting the vehicle and harming the green landscape environment

in the Dhofar Governorate. Legal measures were taken against him.

Drifting in undesignated areas is an offense and doing so over grasslands is against regulations. The green landscape is a major part of the attraction of the Khareef Season.

In the publication by the Anglo-Omani Society titled “Dhofar,” Andrew Spalon writes in the article “Plants and Mammals,” “Of Oman’s 1407 plant species, 867 are found in Dhofar, including 41 species of plants that are not found anywhere outside Oman.” The species found in the south of Dhofar are influenced by the monsoon drizzle. Across the mountains toward the desert are the species found in other desert areas of Oman.

Dhofar Khareef Book Fair opens in Salalah

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 22

The Dhofar Khareef Book Fair 2024 kicked off on Monday in Salalah, promising a vibrant literary experience for the next two weeks. Organised by the Shiraa Al Janoub Exhibitions Foundation in collaboration with Dhofar Municipality, the event is held under the auspices of Shaikh Tariq bin Khalid al Hinai, Wali of Taqah.

This year’s fair boasts a diverse selection of publications, featuring roughly 20 publishing houses and libraries from Oman and abroad. Additionally, around 15 publishing houses and libraries will be represented through agencies, ensuring a comprehensive range of titles.

Salim bin Mohammed al Yafei, Dhofar Khareef Book Fair supervisor, emphasised the fair’s significance. He highlighted its perfect timing, coinciding with the tourist-heavy Khareef season and its potential to foster a love for reading within the community. The fair caters to a wide audience with publications targeting various demographics and participation from Arab publishers further enriches the selection.

Beyond browsing a vast collection of



books, visitors can also partake in a variety of cultural activities. Seminars, workshops and other events are planned, with participation from the Dhofar Governorate branch of the Writers Association, the Al Jazer Social Development Association, the Omani newspaper Al Roya and the Ithraa Cultural Initiative.

Dr Hamdi Mohamed Abdelaziz, representing the Egyptian Academic Center, expressed his enthusiasm. “This is our third time participating in an exhibition here in Oman,” he said. “The 12-day event provides a valuable opportunity to connect with readers and showcase our latest publications that contribute to enriching the cultural and intellectual lives of visitors.”

JobVacancy

كفاءةCOMPETENCE

Our client an SAOG company is looking to hire a qualified communications professional with versatile experience in managing shared services and corporate affairs of a major public listed company in Oman. The position is for a Chief Communications & Corporate Affairs Officer reporting to the CEO.

Key Responsibilities

- Leadership:** Oversee corporate affairs, shared services and stakeholder engagement.
- Strategic Planning:** Develop and implement comprehensive corporate affairs strategies aligned to our business goals and corporate values.
- Corporate Governance:** Be accountable for driving best practices, processes and procedures in compliance with international standards.
- Reporting:** Collate and produce Monthly Management Reports, quarterly Board Packs and the annual Sustainability Report.
- Shared services:** Oversee and manage support staff (Admin, Legal, Fleet, etc.)
- Stakeholder Engagement & Communications:** Build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including government agencies, media, non-governmental organisations, community etc.
- Crisis Management:** Lead the organization’s crisis communication efforts, ensuring timely and effective responses.
- Brand Management:** Enhance and protect the company’s reputation through proactive media and public relations efforts.
- CSR & Sustainability:** Implement and significantly enhance the company’s CSR initiatives and programmes. Should be able to drive the company’s commitment to sustainability.

Qualifications

- Minimum of 5-8 years of proven C-Suite experience in corporate affairs, public relations or a related field. Should have overall work experience of at least 15 years.
- Excellent leadership, management and communication skills with a well demonstrated track record of successful project execution.
- Must have excellent language skills.
- Ability to align corporate goals with Oman’s strategic vision and development.
- Ability to analyse and interpret financial statements and write quarterly and annual Chairman’s statements.
- Must be able to use design software like Adobe InDesign/Illustrator/Photoshop.
- Indepth knowledge of CSR & Sustainability best practices and procedures.
- Omani nationals will be given preference.

How to Apply

Ready to make a difference? Send your resume and a cover letter in word format outlining your experience and vision for the role to vacancies.competencehr@gmail.com by 1st August 2024.



KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF **SMART BUS** PLATFORM

- 1 COMPREHENSIVE CHILD SAFETY AND MONITORING
- 2 CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY
- 3 USER-FRIENDLY AND EFFECTIVE
- 4 OPTIMISED OPERATIONS
- 5 ENHANCED SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION
- 6 POSITIVE FEEDBACK, INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The Smart Bus platform, to be launched during the next academic year in government schools, is an advanced electronic system designed to manage, track and ensure the safety of children on school transportation.

It monitors students from the moment they leave home until they return, offering comprehensive services to guardians, school administrations and bus drivers. This platform is the world's first artificial intelligence school transportation management and tracking system.

The implementation process is swift, taking less than two hours. It involves registration of the school on the Smart Bus platform, uploading data and sending activation messages to parents.

The system was conceptualised by Smart Bus founder and CEO Ahmed bin Hamad al Kharousi in 2019, initially using traditional tracking devices. However, recognising their impracticality, especially for young children, Al Kharousi revamped the approach.

By 2020, after thorough planning and trials, the Smart Bus platform was officially launched in 2022, proving highly effective and user-friendly.

Guardians benefit from real-time updates on their children's bus trips, including boarding, drop-off, and any changes in schedule. They can communicate directly with the school administration, bus supervisors and drivers via the Smart Bus application.

The system allows guardians to report absences, saving time and resources by optimising bus routes. Additionally, guardians can upload their children's photos and will soon be able to submit absence excuses and behavioural notes through the app.



STUDENT
REACHED
SCHOOL

Schools access the Smart Bus platform via a web interface, allowing them to monitor bus locations, student attendance and permissions electronically.

They can generate detailed reports on trips, absences and bus operations. The platform enables instant communication with parents and bus staff and features a QR code safety system to ensure no child is left on the bus. Schools can easily manage and redistribute students across buses.

Parents and school administrators have expressed high satisfaction with the Smart Bus system.

Zainab al Kharousi, a parent, appreciates the reassurance provided by the detailed trip information. Khawla al Harthy, a school administrator in Muscat, highlights the time and effort saved for school staff.

Al Kharousi plans to expand the Smart Bus system internationally. The system currently supports Arabic and English, with more languages to be added.

Leveraging high-tech infrastructure, including servers in Oman and services from Google Cloud and Oracle, Smart Bus aims to provide a robust and responsive global solution, establishing Oman as a pioneer in smart school transportation.

The system saves significant time and effort for school staff,
Khawla al Harthy

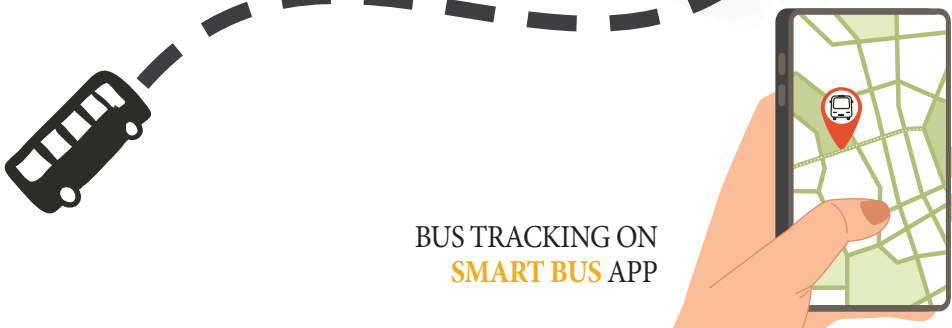
SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATOR
Muscat

TRACK
YOUR
SCHOOL
TRANSPORT

SCHOOLS ACCESS THE SMART BUS PLATFORM VIA A WEB INTERFACE, ALLOWING THEM TO MONITOR BUS LOCATIONS, STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND PERMISSIONS ELECTRONICALLY



BUS
PICKED UP
STUDENT



BUS TRACKING ON
SMART BUS APP



EA co-hosts GCC workshop on biodiversity conservation



The Environment Authority inaugurated a sub-regional workshop on 'Biodiversity Conservation' in Salalah

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 22

In a significant step towards regional environmental cooperation, Oman's Environment Authority, in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity, inaugurated a sub-regional workshop on 'Biodiversity Conservation' here on Monday.

Held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, the workshop brings together participants from GCC countries, government agencies, environmental experts and representatives from the United Nations.

In his opening remarks, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Akhzami, Director-General of Nature Conservation, highlighted the country's rich biodiversity and the diverse ecosystems found within its borders.

He emphasised the Environment Authority's significant achievements, including the establishment of 30 nature reserves and ongoing initiatives like tree-planting programmes and the MartilCommando project for marine turtle protection. These efforts have propelled Oman to 99 positions in the 2024 Global

Environmental Performance Index, securing a commendable 50th place ranking.

Oman boasts a unique biodiversity due to its strategic geographical location in the Arabian Peninsula, making it rich in diverse ecosystems and species. The latest surveys revealed the presence of 1,453 species of plants, 530 species of resident and migratory birds, 111 species of reptiles and 87 species of mammals.

The workshop delved into Oman's updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, meticulously aligned with the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

This comprehensive approach, achieved through collaboration across government sectors, NGOs and the private sector, prioritises combating invasive alien species, a growing threat to global ecosystems.

The workshop also specifically tackled the issue of invasive alien birds, particularly the myna and Indian crow. Al Akhzami highlighted the remarkable success of national campaigns launched in 2022, resulting in the eradication of over one million of these invasive birds in several governorates. Plans for programme expansion to other regions, in collaboration with stakeholders, are underway.

The workshop emphasised

the crucial role of regional cooperation among GCC countries in addressing the trans-boundary challenge of invasive species. Sharing best practices and harmonising legislation and control measures are identified as critical steps to effectively curb the spread of this threat.

Majid bin Saleh al Aqeel, Head of the Wildlife Protection Section at the GCC General Secretariat, commended Oman for hosting the workshop, aligning with the decisions made by GCC environment ministers in 2023.

He further highlighted the importance placed on environmental protection and sustainable development by the GCC leaders, emphasising their commitment to the Green Middle East Initiative.

Other topics on the agenda of the workshop focus on reviewing and updating national biodiversity strategies and action plans; building capacity and securing national biodiversity financing; understanding the Convention on Biological Diversity's work on invasive alien species and establishing national strategies for their control.

The sub-regional workshop is expected to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among GCC countries, paving the way for more effective strategies to protect biodiversity and combat invasive species in the region. — ONA

Joint Command and Staff College celebrates graduation of 37th batch

MUSCAT: The Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies on Monday celebrated the graduation of the 37th batch from the Joint Command and Staff College. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

Moreover, the batch included several officers from the Ministry of Defence, the Sultan's Armed Forces and other military and security units. It also included officers from GCC, Arab and friendly



countries.

The graduation ceremony was attended by ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces and other



military and security units, senior officers, military attachés of various embassies in Muscat and academic staff members from the academy. — ONA

CPA launches 'Edrak' campaign for safety

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) is set to launch its awareness campaign 'Edrak' today. The campaign aims to enhance consumer awareness across different segments of society and improve the legal understanding of suppliers regarding the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations.

The campaign's objective is to foster a consumer environment that upholds the principles of safeguarding consumer rights in various commercial transactions.

Spanning four weeks, the campaign seeks to empower consumers of all categories with knowledge about their rights

and responsibilities during shopping. It aims to raise public awareness about prohibited goods and their dangers, as well as educate the public about commercial fraud, its various forms and the penalties for those involved.

Additionally, the campaign aims to enhance the social responsibility of both suppliers and consumers to create a safe marketplace, while increasing awareness among beneficiaries about the services provided by the Consumer Protection Authority.

Throughout the campaign, a range of awareness activities and programmes will take place in all governorates of Oman. Knowledge-sharing meetings

will be organised for consumers from different backgrounds, and sessions will be conducted with providers and owners of electronic stores to familiarise them with their obligations. The CPA will also actively participate in events organised by various entities, particularly during the summer vacation period.

Additionally, the CPA will collaborate with law enforcement officers to directly deliver awareness messages to shop workers.

The campaign will be further supported by the dissemination of awareness messages through various advertising channels, including street displays and social media platforms.

CPA signs agreement with Muscat College

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) and Muscat College signed a cooperation agreement aimed at strengthening collaboration between government agencies and educational institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement, signed by Khalid bin Eisa al Amri, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at CPA, and Dr Khalfan bin Abdullah al Masrouri, Dean of Muscat College, aims to enhance integration between government agencies and

educational institutions in Oman and achieve the shared objectives of both parties.

The agreement encompasses several areas of cooperation, including leveraging the expertise of CPA employees in consumer protection to benefit the students of Muscat College.

It also involves coordinating training programmes based on the available specialisations of both parties.

Additionally, the agreement facilitates mutual participation in conferences and events, exchange of

public awareness materials, and organisation of joint workshops and educational training programmes.

Furthermore, the agreement emphasises the utilisation of the Scientific Research Centre at Muscat College and the data available at CPA for research projects and scientific purposes.

This collaboration between the Consumer Protection Authority and Muscat College represents an important step towards fostering integration between government entities and educational institutions.

Al Sharqiyah varsity hosts student exchange programme

SUHAR: Al Sharqiyah University received 27 female students from Misr University for Science and Technology, Tanta University, Obour Institutes, Modern Academy for Science and Engineering/ Modern Academy for Engineering and Technology in Egypt, Al Quds University, Al Quds Open University, Palestine Ahliya University, and Modern University College from Palestine.

This comes within the framework of strengthening international cooperation in the student exchange field between the Omani and Arab universities.

The aim of the exchange is for training at the university



Al Sharqiyah University received students within the framework of strengthening cooperation in the student exchange field between Omani and Arab universities

during the period from July 14 to August 10. The university sent 21 of its students to the Arab Republic of Egypt to Tanta University, the Modern Academy for Engineering and Technology, and Obour Institutes, as part of the student training exchange programme

supervised by the Arab Council for Training and Student Creativity. The programme will ensure easy accessibility and accommodation for female students and provide them with all the necessary needs in order to ensure maximum benefits.

The university also organised

an introductory programme for Egyptian and Palestinian students that included a simplified introduction to the university and an introductory tour of campuses, colleges and some university facilities, such as the Student Services Centre, the Learning Resources Centre,

and other facilities.

A schedule has also been set to supervise the programme's progress through several meetings in which the relevant university units meet to provide all means necessary to support the success of the programme.

Hamid al Wahaibi,

Director of the Planning and Development Department, Al Sharqiyah University, the programme supervisor, said: "The training programme contributes to developing the students' abilities, refining their personalities, activating their youth creativity, developing their skills in various fields, providing scientific training in their specialisations and getting to know different work environments."

Al Wahaibi noted that the programme includes trips to a number of governorates and wilayats, including Muscat, Sur and Nizwa to learn about the most important historical and cultural monuments and the culture and history of Oman.



Settlers
beat foreign
volunteers in
West Bank

NABLUS: Israeli settlers attacked a group of foreign volunteers helping Palestinian farmers in the occupied West Bank, injuring some who needed hospital treatment, the activists and Israeli army said. Eight mainly American volunteers were working with the farmers in an olive grove near the Palestinian village of Qusra when settlers came after them, said David Hummel, an American-German in the group. “We were standing there peacefully, not a threat to anyone, when they started coming towards us and pushing us down the path,” Hummel said. “They started attacking and beating us all with sticks and metal pipes and they were throwing rocks as well at us,” he said. “I was attacked on my legs, on my arms and here on my jaw as well and it was ... very violent,” added the volunteer, showing bruising to his face.

Attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank have increased since the Gaza war erupted on October 7. Tensions have been further fuelled by an International Court of Justice ruling on Friday that Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 was illegal.

The volunteers are from the International Solidarity Movement, a group that says it deploys people to form a “protective presence” for Palestinians at risk of facing violence in the West Bank.

Israeli troops arrived and fired warning shots in the air to chase away the volunteers and farmers.

The volunteers from the ISM, which says it was set up “to resist the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land”, have been in Qusra for about a month. About 10 people from the nearby Esh Kodesh Israeli settlement arrived to confront the farmers and foreign activists. Several ISM volunteers have been injured in the West Bank and Gaza since it started work. Some have also been arrested. — **AFP**



Foreign volunteers receive treatment at Nablus's Rafidia Hospital. — **AFP**

ISRAEL ISSUES EVACUATION
ORDERS, KILLS DOZENS



Palestinians flee the eastern part of Khan Younis as they make their way following Israeli army orders to evacuate their neighborhoods. – Reuters

GAZA: Israeli tank shelling and air strikes killed at least 37 Palestinians near Khan Yunis, Gaza medics said on Monday, after Israel issued new orders to evacuate some neighbourhoods following what it said were renewed attacks from those areas.

The Palestinians were killed by tank salvos in the town of Bani Suhaila and other towns just east of the southern city of Khan Yunis, with the area also bombarded by air, they said.

The Gaza health ministry said the dead included several women and children and that dozens of other people had been injured by Israeli fire. The Gaza ministry does not distinguish between militants and civilians in its death tallies.

Around 400,000 people are living in the targeted areas and that dozens of families have begun

Around 400,000 people are living in the targeted areas and that dozens of families have begun to leave their houses, not given time to leave before the Israeli strikes began

to leave their houses, Palestinian officials said, adding they were not given time to leave before the Israeli strikes began.

Some families fled on donkey carts, others on foot, carrying mattresses and other belongings. At Nasser Hospital some people stood outside the morgue to bid farewell to dead relatives.

There was no immediate Israeli comment on the strikes east of Khan Yunis. In nearby Deir Al Balah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are

sheltering, an Israeli air strike hit a tent used by local journalists inside Al Aqsa Hospital, killing one journalist and wounding two other people, the Hamas-run Gaza government media office said.

The new death raises the number of Palestinian journalists killed in the Israeli offensive to 153, it added.

Earlier, an Israeli military statement said the new evacuation orders were given due to renewed Palestinian groups attacks, including rockets launched from the targeted areas in eastern Khan Yunis. The orders did not include health institutions, Palestinians said.

The military said it was adjusting the boundaries of a designated humanitarian zone in Al Mawasi - to the west of Khan Yunis - to keep the civilian

population away from areas of combat with Palestinian gunmen.

The Gaza Civil Emergency Services said Israel's new orders showed it had downsized the humanitarian-designated areas in southern and central areas, where 1.7 people were sheltering, to 48 square km, from 65 square km in the past.

The Palestinians, the United Nations and international relief agencies have said there is no safe place left in Gaza.

Health officials at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis urged residents on Monday to donate blood because of the large number of casualties being rushed into the medical centre.

The death toll among Palestinians in Israel's retaliatory offensive since then had reached at least 39,006 as of Monday, Gaza health authorities said. — **Reuters**

Netanyahu to
send team for
new talks

TEL AVIV: Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that a negotiating team would be sent this week for new talks on a deal to free captives held by Palestinians in Gaza.

Netanyahu said the team would leave on Thursday — the day after he gives a speech to the United States Congress — but he did not say where they would go.

Qatar and Egypt, with US support, have been mediating indirect talks between Israel and Palestinian groups, which hold the captives and have been at war with Israel for more than nine months.

International mediators have been trying for months to seal an accord between Israel and Hamas movement. A deal would involve a six-week ceasefire during which some captives seized by groups would be exchanged for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

“Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu today held an in-depth discussion on the issue of the hostages with the negotiation team and senior security officials,” said a brief statement released by his office.

Meanwhile, Israeli campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum announced on Monday that two captives held in Gaza had died.

The deaths of Yagev Buchshtab, 35, and Alex Dancyg, 76, who were abducted during the October 7 attack, are a “stark reminder of the urgency” to bring the captives home, the forum said in a statement. It did not provide any information on how they had died.

“Their bodies are being held by the Hamas terror organisation,” the Israeli military said in a separate statement. “The circumstances of their death in Hamas captivity are being examined by all the professional authorities.”

Demonstrators in Israel, who have taken to the streets sometimes in the tens of thousands to demand new elections and a captives-release deal, accuse Netanyahu of prolonging the war. — **AFP**



A person walks past posters of captives, in Tel Aviv. – **Reuters**

Harbour still ablaze days after Israel strikes on Yemen

HODEIDAH: Firefighting teams on Monday were struggling to contain a massive blaze at Yemen's Hodeidah port, days after a deadly Israeli strike damaged oil storage facilities and endangered aid ships in the harbour.

Heavy flames and black smoke were seen spiralling into the sky for a third consecutive day following the strike on Saturday, said a correspondent in Hodeidah.

Firefighting teams appear to have made little progress, with the blaze seemingly expanding in some parts of the port, the correspondent said, amid fears it could reach food storage facilities.

High-resolution satellite images taken by Maxar Technologies showed flames consuming a heavily damaged fuel storage area at the Hodeidah harbour.

Analysis of satellite imagery from Planet by Dutch peace organisation PAX showed at least 33 destroyed oil storage tankers, said Wim Zwijnenburg, a project leader with the organisation.



Thick smoke billows from a raging fire at oil storage tanks after Israeli strikes on the port of Hodeidah, Yemen. — **AFP**

Heavy flames and black smoke were seen spiralling into the sky for a third consecutive day, with the blaze seemingly expanding in some parts of the port

“We expect to find more damage, as not all storage tanks are visible because of heavy smoke” from the fire and burning fuel, Zwijnenburg said.

The fuel depot is run by the Yemen Petroleum Company which said late on Sunday that the six people killed in the Israel strike were its employees.

The Yemenis say more than 80 others were wounded in the attack, many of them with severe burns. With black smoke billowing overhead, a funeral ceremony was held on Monday for the victims of the strikes. Their coffins were carried through the streets of Hodeidah, flanked by crowds and led by a marching band.

Yemeni port authorities said

Hodeidah “is operating at its full capacity”, the rebels' Saba news agency reported. “We are working around the clock to receive all ships and there is no concern about the supply chain and supplies of food, medicine, and oil derivatives,” port official Nasr al Nusairi was quoted by Saba as saying on Sunday.

But the US-based Navanti Group said the strikes on Hodeidah destroyed five cranes and reduced the port's fuel storage capacity from 150,000 to 50,000 tonnes.

The World Food Programme on Monday said that there had been “minor” damage to a crane on one of its aid vessels in the port and that its fuel storage facility was impacted.

The ship “remains operational,” but “all 780,000 litres of fuel stock was likely destroyed,” said Pierre Honnorat, WFP's Yemen country director.

Hodeidah's port is a vital entry point for fuel imports and international aid for several areas of Yemen. — **AFP**



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In brief

■ MADRID



SPANISH PM TO TESTIFY IN GRAFT PROBE CASE AGAINST WIFE

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will testify on July 30 in a preliminary corruption inquiry into his wife Begona Gomez's business ties, a Madrid court said on Monday, an issue that caused him to consider resigning three months ago.

The investigation over alleged corruption and influence peddling has infuriated Sanchez, who has characterised the allegations as an effort to undermine him and his left-wing government.

Judge Juan Carlos Peinado will hear Sanchez as a "witness" at his official residence on July 30. He will be questioned over suspected influence peddling by his wife. — AFP

■ BELGRADE



GUNMAN KILLS SIX IN CROATIA NURSING HOME SHOOTING

A gunman entered a nursing home in northwestern Croatia on Monday shooting dead five people, including his mother, and injuring six others, a government minister said.

One of the wounded later died in hospital taking the death toll to six, while four remain in critical condition. One of the victims was a nursing home employee, Marin Piletic, minister for labour, pension, family and social policy, told journalists. "According to the information we have the mother of the killer had been in the nursing home for 10 years," Piletic said. The killer fled the scene, but was later arrested by the police. — Reuters

■ KAMPALA



TROOPS BLOCK UGANDAN OPPOSITION HQ AHEAD OF PROTEST

Soldiers and police sealed off the headquarters of Uganda's biggest opposition party on Monday in what a police spokesperson called a precautionary move ahead of anti-government protests planned for Tuesday despite a ban.

National Unity Platform party chief Robert Kyagulanyi said security personnel had surrounded NUP headquarters in the capital Kampala, barring anyone from entering or exiting.

Kyagulanyi said several NUP leaders had been arrested.

"The military and police have raided and surrounded the National Unity Platform offices ...," he said. — Reuters

World leaders pay tribute to Biden

WASHINGTON: World leaders lined up to pay tribute to Joe Biden after he announced on Sunday he was dropping out of the US presidential race. Biden notified the public of his decision in a letter, a stunning move that upends the 2024 race for the White House. He endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's new nominee.

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky thanked Biden for taking "bold steps" in supporting his country, praising the US president's "tough but strong decision" to end his reelection bid.

"He supported our country during the most dramatic moment in history, assisted us in preventing (Russian President Vladimir) Putin from occupying our country, and has continued to support us throughout this terrible war," he said.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he respected Biden's decision. "I know that, as he has done throughout his remarkable career, he will have made his decision based on what he believes is best for the American people," said Starmer.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also paid tribute to "my friend". "Joe Biden has achieved a lot: for his country, for Europe, for the world," he said. "His decision not to run again deserves respect."

Japan's premier said he recognised that Biden's announcement is one "he feels is the best political decision he can make". Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese thanked



US President Joe Biden speaks next to VP Kamala Harris, in brief remarks at the White House. — Reuters file photo

Biden's decision came after a period of enforced isolation, with family members and aides to consult at his Rehoboth Beach home, as he nursed a Covid infection

Biden "for your leadership and ongoing service.

Former president Barack Obama, with whom Biden served two terms as vice president, praised his record in office.

"Internationally, he restored America's standing in the world,

revitalised Nato, and mobilised the world to stand up against Russian aggression in Ukraine," he said. While he had every right to run for reelection, Biden's decision to drop out of the race was testament to his "love of country", Obama added.

The stunning move throws Democrats into fresh turmoil ahead of the November 5 election. But it could also reenergise the demoralised party, with Harris swiftly confirming her goal to become America's first woman president and to "defeat

Donald Trump."

Biden's decision came after a period of enforced isolation, with only a few family members and aides around him to consult at his Rehoboth Beach home, as he nursed a Covid infection. First Lady Jill Biden reacted by simply reposting his statement, along with two hearts.

Biden spent more than three weeks resisting calls to step down following the shock of the June 27 debate, during which he often lost his train of thought and stood with mouth agape. — AFP

Ukrainian drone attacks Russian refinery



Rescuers put out a fire in a private house destroyed during a missile attack, Donetsk, Ukraine.

KYIV: A barrage of Ukrainian drones sparked a blaze overnight at an oil refinery and separately killed one person in southern Russia, officials in Russia and Ukraine said on Monday.

Kyiv and Moscow have intensified fatal cross-border missile and drone attacks over recent months with both sides primarily targeting energy infrastructure.

Authorities in the Russian Black Sea town of Tuapse in the Krasnodar region said debris from one downed drone sparked a fire at an oil refinery.

The governor of Russia's southern Belgorod region meanwhile said one person driving a tractor was killed by a

Ukrainian drone and his wife had been injured.

A source in the Ukrainian defence sector said drones linked to the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine were behind the oil refinery attack and that the facility was operated by Russian state energy giant Rosneft.

"The extent of the damage to the aggressor state's military-industrial complex is currently being clarified," the source said in written comments.

Russia its forces had downed 75 Ukrainian drones overnight, with nearly 50 destroyed over the southern Rostov region.

Air defence systems intercepted 47 drones over Rostov, 17 over the Black and

Azov seas and 11 in other areas including one over the frontier region of Belgorod, the defence ministry said.

Russia almost daily announces the interception of Ukrainian drones which Kyiv says are a response to Russian attacks aimed at military and civilian targets since Moscow launched its special military operation in February 2022. Ukraine said its forces had downed 16 Russian drones overnight. Meanwhile, Russia said its forces had captured two frontline villages in Ukraine, Andriivka in the eastern Lugansk region and Pishchane in the northeast Kharkiv region.

The two villages Russia claims to have taken are less than 20

kilometres from each other on a section of the front-line where Moscow has made grinding advances in recent weeks.

Russian army units "liberated" the settlements of Andriivka and Pishchane "as well as occupied more favourable lines and positions," Russia's defence ministry said in a statement.

Andriivka was one of the last settlements in the eastern Lugansk region that Kyiv still controlled and had been a key target for Moscow.

Pishchane has also been in the Kremlin's sights because its capture could pave the way for Russia to reach the Oskil river that lies about 10 kilometres away. — AFP

Bangladesh protests pause for 48 hours

DHAKA: Streets appeared calm in Bangladesh's capital on Monday a day after the Supreme Court agreed to scrap most government job quotas that had angered student-led activists and led to deadly protests.

Late on Sunday, protesters gave Bangladesh's government 48 hours to meet a string of new demands, including a public apology from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the violence, and the restoration of Internet connections disrupted during the unrest.

But on Monday, most appeared to be obeying a curfew in cities that had seen regular demonstrations after a high court in June reinstated old quotas that reserved many state jobs for descendants of freedom fighters and other groups.

At least 147 people have died in the violence, according to information from hospitals. A public holiday declared over the last two days was extended to Tuesday. "Normalcy will return within one or two days," Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan told reporters.

Experts have blamed the unrest on stagnant job growth in the private sector and high rates of youth unemployment that have made government jobs, with their regular wage hikes and other privileges, more attractive.

Army tanks were seen stationed at several places in the streets of Dhaka, the capital, while armed security patrols directed the few motorists who ventured out.

The Supreme Court's Appellate Division on Sunday ruled in favour of an appeal from the government, overturned the lower court's decision and scrapped most of the quotas, directing that 93% of government jobs should be open to candidates on merit.

Hours after that ruling, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement issued a statement demanding the government reopen campuses and end restrictions imposed as protests raged.

It also called for the resignation of some ministers and university officials and the dismissal of police officers deployed in the areas where students were killed.

"We are giving an ultimatum to the government to fulfil our eight-point demand within 48 hours," one of the Movement's leaders, Hasnat Abdullah, told reporters. He did not say what would happen if the government did not meet the demands. The government did not immediately comment.

Thousands were injured in last week's protests as security forces fired tear gas, rubber bullets and sound grenades to scatter the demonstrators.

— Reuters



Security personnel walk past damaged vehicles of a government owned organisation, in Dhaka. — Reuters

Championing peace amidst regional turmoil



DESPITE the recent flare-up in violence in Al Wadi Al Kabir that resulted in the deaths of five people, the martyrdom of a police officer and the killing of three perpetrators, in addition to injuring 28 people of different nationalities, Oman’s swift action and measured approach has allowed it to maintain its reputation as a neutral mediator and protector of regional security.

While Oman is protected by a highly trained police force and a strong army equipped with the latest weapons and armament, the security and armed services of Oman are sufficient to deter those who think they could harm the well-being and tranquillity of the country.

While other nations grapple with conflict and instability, Oman’s unwavering dedication to peaceful relations and cooperation has earned it the respect and admiration of its neighbours and the international community.

As tensions continue to simmer in the region, Oman stands tall as a shining example of what can be achieved through diplomacy,

dialogue and determined leadership. Oman has distinguished itself as a peacemaker and mediator, making it a role model for peaceful coexistence with the world.

Oman’s role is crucial, and a simple ‘thank you’ is insufficient to express appreciation for its tireless efforts to enhance security and stability in the region, efforts that are respected by all international institutions and organisations.

Oman’s expertise in promoting dialogue and cooperation among countries stems from the country’s friendly policies, which are a result of the strong pillars laid down by its leaders.

Oman has been working tirelessly to cultivate good and equal relations with other countries, adopting a policy of good neighbourliness and non-interference in others’ internal affairs, and demonstrating respect for international law, conventions and customs.

There is a strong desire among the leadership and the people of Oman to nurture and further strengthen friendships with the

OMAN
CONTINUES
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ROLE IN
CREATING A
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IN NOT ONLY
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BUT ALSO THE
WORLD OVER

people of the world.
With its firm foundations and principles supporting the rights and justice of the people, and a desire to work together with other peace-loving countries to promote peace and stability, Oman has built a foreign policy that countries around the world admire and respect.

During these challenging times when the world is grappling with regional chaos, Oman has taken a commendable stance to play a role in peacemaking among nations.

Oman’s strategic geographical location has an impact on linking it with many countries overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. To this date, Oman continues to play a ‘constructive’ and ‘proactive’ role in creating a sustainable environment for peace and security in not only the region, but also the world over.

In conclusion, Oman’s neutrality is positive and proactive in creating a sustainable environment for peace, security and stability, allowing the people of the world and future generations to prosper.

Nuclear wildcard reignites Australia’s climate wars

PETER HOBSON

A plan by Australia’s federal opposition that would slow the roll-out of renewable power and build a network of nuclear reactors has set the scene for a divisive confrontation on climate policy ahead of an election expected next year. The opposition policy, unveiled last month, would replace the current government’s emphasis on accelerating construction of solar, wind and batteries with one that envisages a greater role for fossil fuels while seven state-owned nuclear plants are built.

Energy analysts say this would lead to significantly higher emissions for at least two decades before significant nuclear power could come onto the grid — a claim the opposition rejects. The governing Labour Party says the idea threatens investment in wind and solar and is a costly, environmentally damaging fantasy for a vast, sparsely populated and sunny country whose laws currently prohibit nuclear generation.

“It is a ploy to keep coal running longer, at a massive cost to reliability and emissions,” energy minister Chris Bowen said last week. “It is a betrayal of those Australians who have suffered from bushfires, floods and cyclones in the critical decade for climate action.”

The opposition Coalition of Liberal and National Parties is betting on anger among people who do not want wind or solar farms near their land or coastline and polls that show around half of Australians support nuclear power.

Labour is under pressure amid a cost of living crisis, and the Coalition promises its nuclear plan will achieve net-zero by 2050 more cheaply and safely than Labour can. Many analysts say that is unlikely even with Australia being a major producer of uranium needed for fuel, given the huge cost of nuclear plants.

Weakening Australia’s momentum towards renewables appears to be a key goal of the nuclear policy, according to some political and energy analysts. While supported in some areas, the plan is not popular enough in marginal seats to sweep the Coalition to power, said Kos Samaras at political consultants RedBridge.

But it offers a clear alternative that could easily gain support if the renewables rollout does not go smoothly, he said.

“If Labour doesn’t get it right, that’s when the coalition walks right in.”

The widening policy divide between Labour and the opposition has echoes of the so-called climate wars of the 2010s, when scepticism of climate change fuelled by some Coalition politicians became a key election issue. — Reuters



Zahir Al Mahrooqi

The author is a writer and author of ‘The Road to Jerusalem’

Unravelling the Wadi Al Kabir incident

THE Wadi Al Kabir incident brought to mind a joke: Why doesn’t IS fight Israel? The answer was: We will fight them if they convert to Islam.

This is not merely a joke but rather a reflection of the reality of this organisation, which has fought Muslims everywhere, committing heinous crimes against humanity by beheading innocent people, bombing places of worship, and tarnishing the reputation of Islam with its immorality, arson and slaughter.

They kill in the name of religion. It is well-known that IS and similar groups are products of Western intelligence, funded by Arab sources, as we have written numerous times before.

To illustrate the link between this organisation and foreign intelligence, we cannot ignore the statement made by former US president Donald Trump on August 11, 2016, during his presidential campaign, when he described president Barack Obama as the “founder” of IS.

In the same speech, he attacked Hillary Clinton, the former US secretary of state, labelling her as a “co-founder” of the organisation. Trump reiterated the following day that Obama and Clinton were the “most valuable players” for IS.

Furthermore, an unprecedented statement by an Israeli official regarding the organisation was reported by French and international media.

Moshe Ya’alon, the former Israeli defence minister, stated in a meeting in Tel Aviv on January 19, 2016 that “if he had to choose between IS and Iran, he would prefer IS.”

This statement resonated strongly in international media. Some might argue that Ya’alon’s statement does not explicitly clarify the relationship between Israel and IS, but Aida Touma-Sliman, a former member of the Israeli Knesset, was candid in her statement on February 13, 2018, accusing Israel of cooperating with and buying oil from IS.

She criticised Israeli policies, saying, “I am against any racist policy that targets sovereign countries in the region or in the world, and against cooperation with extremist and terrorist groups that slaughtered people, such as IS.” She noted that links between Israel and extremist groups are well documented by the United Nations.

Additionally, on October 19, 2018,

news reports indicated that the Syrian army found large quantities of weapons, ammunition and explosive devices, some of which were Israeli-made, during a sweep of the city of Al Mayadeen in Deir ez Zor, in warehouses belonging to IS.

In trying to unravel the mystery of IS, a recurring question is: Why does it not target the Zionist entity?

Is there a more opportune moment than now, as Gaza resists a fierce global Zionist attack? Ten heavy months have passed since the Zionist war on Gaza began, yet IS remains indifferent to the thousands of martyrs and the dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza.

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Their focus is on killing peaceful Muslims who have come to seek a livelihood in a safe country.

The incident at the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque in Al Wadi Al Kabir, though a crime, pales in comparison to the major atrocities committed by this terrorist organisation in various places, far from the Israeli entity.

This clearly indicates that the organisation is a tool of global powers to implement specific agendas; for example, using IS to pressure regimes that do not comply with the policies of its founders and financiers, as seen in the Wadi Al Kabir incident.

In truth, while I was shocked by the Wadi Al Kabir incident. I anticipated that these honourable Omani stances would cause trouble.

I recall wondering, during an interview with my colleague Abdul Aziz Al Sa’adoun on the ‘Wednesday Forum’ programme on the ‘Majan’ satellite channel on January 17, 2024, about the price we might pay for these positions.

The Wadi Al Kabir incident has raised many points for discussion, but I believe now is not the time to address

them. The competent authorities are investigating the matter, but it is certain that the independent and honourable Omani positions are troubling many.

The authorities must remain vigilant, and no one will fault them for taking strict measures to maintain security and peace in the country, to prevent a recurrence of the incident.

In general, it is well-known that IS has nothing to do with Islam and is not connected to any religion or belief. It is merely a tool used by global security services to achieve their interests and to intimidate anyone who deviates from their agenda.

These agencies have succeeded in making it a source of destruction, igniting sectarian strife, and fanning the flames of hatred among Muslims to serve the interests of those who created and financed them. The era of colonialism and direct control has passed, necessitating the use of agents.

There is an undeniable fact: those who resort to terrorism to kill innocent people who differ in religion, race, or region suffer from psychological disorders. It is impossible for a sane person to deliberately kill innocent people of any religion.

Dr Jamal Farweez, a consultant psychiatrist in Egypt, explained to the newspaper *Youm7* that some individuals join IS and terrorist groups because they feel inferior, seeking to become leaders with followers.

Others join to atone for past immoral acts by carrying out martyrdom operations, making them easy targets for terrorist recruitment.

If I emphasised the necessity of taking strict measures against anyone who threatens the country’s security and citizens’ safety, I believe the incident requires in-depth study from multiple perspectives to find appropriate solutions for Omani youth before the situation escalates.

Some discussions on social media may not be promising, but they offer a golden opportunity to gauge public sentiment. This article presents my immediate thoughts on the Wadi Al Kabir incident, acknowledging that the issue requires extensive studies, research and articles.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
(The original version of this article was published in Arabic in the print edition of Oman newspaper on July 22)

Knowing your North Star

Walking late at night is not so comfortable anymore. Could see clear discomfort when a slow car moved towards a person. He looked back, hesitated, and walked on. Nothing seems to be the same since the Al Wadi Al Kabir incident on July 16. Something changed since that day. A friend expressed how she becomes nervous if the door to the house is left open.

There is a sense of betrayal of trust and a feeling of being let down. Most people are still wondering what it was all about. Oman is the land of tolerance and cases of violence might be a norm in international news but not at home front.

Even the mental health experts seemed to need time to write about it because they have not been able to come to terms with it.

But we have to move on. We must learn from experiences and as the late Shaikh Khalfan al Esry, Oman's popular life coach and Islamic scholar used to say, 'Accept the situation, and move on.'

We need not be in denial. There is so much an individual can do, and much more as a family and as a society and as a nation.

During these days we also went through judging people and communities. We were shaken from our comfort zone. The loss of lives has taken its toll too. Sentiments are deep and the wounds can be difficult not to leave a scar but we must collectively heal and maybe one of the best ways is to talk about it and let it out from our mind.

Left alone in the mind these thoughts can build strength that can leave an impact. As people continue to search for answers, the values and sentiments of Oman can bring comfort and that is why the roots are so important. They give direction and they let us stay aligned to our North Star.

In the modern world people often ask why the roots are so important. In times of uncertainty, the roots give us a chance to regain our balance. This education does not just come from school and educational institutions, it is nourished from home, environment



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

STAY CONNECTED WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND THERE IS NOTHING LIKE HAVING SOULFUL CONVERSATIONS. AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IS TO LISTEN IN AND REFLECT

and society. We can judge and blame others but we must have patience to look beyond and bring back normalcy in our thoughts. There might be questions like what about others who have gone through so much more? Each with their own battle. We cannot measure and compare because human capacity differs. Overcoming shocks in life differs too. And we might totally forget and overlook what young minds are going through. When we look back at our own childhood, we might be able to recollect how we gathered bits of information from here and there while older people discussed it.

Of course the difference is today that same age group would have their older siblings being updated with information from social media - with endless discussions and reels.

Where we stand is important and to know that one of the best ways could be to have open discussions within the family first.

According to experts, 'resilience building involves increasing the capacity of communities potentially exposed to hazards to resist, adapt and recover.' The hazard here of course is the incident itself, which turned out to be a traumatic experience.

Al Wadi Al Kabir, a place filled with childhood memories, a gentle town, was for a few hours under a shocking experience.

But each situation is different and each community has its own sequence to recovery and we are in the midst of that.

One thing is important and that is to stay connected with family and friends. There is nothing like having soulful conversations.

Of course, an important element is to listen in and reflect. But that requires calmness with plenty of patience thrown in.

We need to look at the bright side again and hope for the best. Most importantly we have all learned lessons since that day because we have had a flood of thoughts and sure all of us have gone through analysis and self-analysis. And we will continue to do that until one fine day before we know we will move on.

For now, the question is, 'What could take our minds off it?'

MOONLIT GALATA MAJESTY



The full moon rises behind the Galata Tower in Istanbul. – AFP

Kamala Harris has a chance to make history again

JAZMINE ULLOA

President Joe Biden's decision to drop out of the 2024 presidential race and endorse Vice President Kamala Harris to be the new Democratic nominee gives Harris, already the first woman and person of colour to be vice president, another opportunity to make history.

In a letter announcing his withdrawal, Biden offered his thanks to Harris "for being an extraordinary partner in all this work." He endorsed her in a separate post on social media that included a photo of the two of them on the White House grounds.

"My very first decision as the party nominee in 2020 was to pick Kamala Harris as my Vice President. And it's been the best decision I've made," he wrote in the post.

Before she was chosen as his running mate, Harris had clashed with Biden during her short-lived 2020 presidential campaign. Biden vowed during that race to pick a woman as his vice presidential candidate, as well as someone with experience and who would be "simpatico with me, both in terms of personality as well as substance," he said. Earlier in her career, Harris had served as a senator representing California and the state's attorney general.

In speeches and event appearances,

THE NEWS OF HARRIS' POTENTIAL CANDIDACY ELECTRIFIED THE NETWORK OF ORGANISATIONS AND MEMBERS WHO HAVE PUSHED FOR INCREASING THE RANKS OF WOMEN IN POLITICS AND HAVE PREPARED TO SUPPORT HER

Harris, who has long been seen as the embodiment of a country growing more racially and ethnically diverse, has often nodded to her mother and the generations of women of all races who paved the way for someone like her. Her selection as vice president was also seen as an acknowledgment of the critical role Black women have played in Democratic victories since 2016.

The news of Harris' potential candidacy electrified the network of organisations and members who have pushed for increasing the ranks of women in politics and have prepared to support her. Harris, they said, had substantial leadership experience and offered to be a powerful voice at a time when democracy and women's rights are under assault.

"This is a historic opportunity that has the potential for exciting and mobilising young voters in a way we haven't seen in a long time," said Shaunna Thomas, co-founder and executive director of UltraViolet, which focuses on educating voters about digital disinformation. "It would be hard to overstate how meaningful it is in a year when the Republicans are coming for women."

Christina Reynolds, a spokesperson with the abortion-rights-focused political action committee EMILY's List, which has spent millions to promote Harris, said she had struggled to break through because vice presidents tend to receive less media attention, and because as a woman and a woman of colour, she is subject to criticism based on race and gender that other vice presidents have not faced. "She gets racist attacks that are not just about the administration and their work," she said. But she said EMILY's List and other organisations had been

working to combat that negative attention since they began the online campaign #wehaveherback in the hours after Biden selected her as vice president.

Harris was a constant target last week at the Republican National Convention. In panels and onstage, speakers tied her to an administration that they say has led to increases in crime and inflation.

They cast her as an enabler of an aging and ineffective president. They blamed her for record levels of migrant crossings at the border, repeatedly labelling her Biden's "border czar."

Attacking Harris served several functions, Republican and Democratic strategists said. Republicans saw her as a possible alternative to lead the Democratic ticket should Biden step aside.

And Harris has long been seen as an important figure with the potential to energise the parts of the coalition seen as up for grabs: women, young people and voters of colour. Harris, a former San Francisco district attorney, was elected in 2010 as the first Black woman to serve as California's attorney general. Her election to the US Senate in 2016 made her only the second Black woman in the chamber's history.

The daughter of an Indian mother and a Jamaican father, Harris became a barrier-breaking pick for vice president at a time when many voters were demanding change and equality for Black people as civil-rights protests rocked the nation after the murder of George Floyd.

But her extensive record in law enforcement — formed through the tough-on-crime 1990s — was seen as liability for her among Democrats who were pushing for aggressive criminal justice reforms.

— The New York Times



US Vice-President Kamala Harris makes her way to board a plane before departing from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. – AFP File

SPORT

Red Warriors conclude Spain camp with draw against Real Oviedo

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The Oman national football team concluded the three weeks external camp in Spain with a 1-1 draw against Real Oviedo FC on Sunday. The first preparatory match for the Red Warriors ended with a 5-0 win against Racing Murcia City.

The only goal scored in the second warm up match was scored by Salah al Yahyaiei in the 45th minute.

Oman's head coach Jaroslav Silhavy began the second friendly match against Spanish club with a line up featuring Fayez al Rushedi as a goalkeeper.

The defence line up comprised Amjaad al Harthy, Khalid al Buraiki, Mohammed al Musallami and Ahmed al Kaabi. Harib al Saadi monitored the centre line and he was accompanied by Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaiei, Zaher al Aghbari and Jameel al Yahmadi.

The only striker in the front



line was Abdulrahman al Mushefri. Many substitutions were made during the match. The Red Warriors were supposed to play their third warm up match against CD Leganés FC on Wednesday but this match was cancelled.

Oman's goalie Ahmed al Rawahi suffered a major injury during the opening friendly game against Racing Murcia City. The player went under Magnetic

Resonance Imaging (MRI) scanning. The medical staff of the team are following up for the medical tests.

The overseas camp completion meant the coaching staff are in a good position to know each player's technical status and performance.

Moreover, the head coach and his assisting team put their final touches on the starting line up for the upcoming matches during the



AFC Asian qualifiers — Road to 26. During the external camp in Spain, Oman's striker Mohsin al Ghassani left the external camp and travelled to Thailand as he joined the training of his new team at True Bangkok United FC. Seeb former player signed a contract with the Thai club for the next season after successful seasons with Seeb club.

The midfielder player Arshad al Alawi also left the camp due to



some private reasons.

Oman will look for a bright start in their third appearance in the third round of the AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26 for the second successive edition as the qualifiers will begin in September.

The Red Warriors are very optimistic this time as the draw brought them in Group B, which comprised South Korea, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Kuwait.

The team will commence their

campaign in the qualifiers against Iraq in Basra city on September 5.

The second match is against South Korea in Muscat on September 10 and it will be a crunch game.

Later, the Red Warriors will face Kuwait on October 10 in Muscat followed by a match with Jordan on October 15 in Amman. Then, the first leg matches will be concluded with a match against Palestine on November 14.

Al Noor crush UAE team in GCC goalball thriller

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Oman's Al Noor defeated UAE 10-0 in the Gulf Clubs and Associations Challenge for Blind Goalball in Oman on Monday. The championship organised by the Al Noor Association for the Blind and the Oman Paralympic Committee witnessed the dominance of teams from Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

The match started off with a kick-off in favour of the Al Noor team, which was saved by Emirati player Nawaf Al Masmari who sent a weak shot that was returned strongly by Emad Al Haji to the Emirati goal to score the first goal. Within seconds, Rasheed Al Siyabi scored the second goal for Noor, followed by Younis Khteebe.

After an exchange of shots between the two teams, Al Noor was awarded a penalty kick, which Emad Al Haji converted into the fourth goal in the 50th minute. Khteebe returned to score another goal, making the score 5-0. The UAE players tried to reduce the deficit with several shots that were saved by the Noor players before



Rasheed Al Siyabi fired a powerful shot to score the sixth goal in the last seconds of the first half.

The second half started with a kick in favour of the Emirati team, which was executed by Loay Alaay, but the Noor players saved it. After several exchanges of shots, Rasheed Al Siyabi doubled the score for Noor with a powerful shot. Then Emad Al Haji added another goal in the third minute



to make the score 8-0.

Omani coach Asil Al Sulaimi made two substitutions; Saqer Al Qasmi for Khteebe and Abdullah for Al Siyabi. The Noor players returned to score two more goals, sealing the match before the end of regular time by eight minutes, to end with a score of 10-0 with some excitement added to it.

In the other match, the match started quickly with Saudi Arabia's

Ibrahim Nasser scoring the first goal of the match from the first shot on goal for Bahrain. The two teams then exchanged shots and careful saves until the seventh minute, when Ibrahim Nasser returned to double the score for Saudi Arabia with a powerful shot. Bahraini player Mohsin Abdulrazaq responded with two quick goals to level the score at 2-2 in the middle of the first half.



The competition intensified after the draw, and Mubarak Al Shaherani scored the go-ahead goal for Saudi Arabia, but Mohammed Al Sawad of Bahrain responded quickly with a powerful shot to equalise the score. In the last minutes of the first half, Saudi Arabia relied on shots from Ibrahim Nasser, who scored two goals to double the score for his team. Mohsin

Abdulrazaq narrowed the gap with the last shot, to end the first half with Saudi Arabia leading 5-4.

The second half started with a kick in favour of Bahrain, which was saved by Ibrahim Hassan. The excitement continued with the Bahraini team's attempts to come back into the game, but Mubarak Al Shaherani and Ibrahim Nasser of Saudi Arabia were able to double the score to 7-4. After halftime, the Bahraini team's level dropped, allowing the Saudi Al Ahli team to score four consecutive goals to make the score 11-4 in favour of Saudi Arabia.

Bahraini team coach Hussein Mishem tried to make changes to get back into the match, but the high experience of the Saudi team prevented that, adding three more goals, and the match ended before the end of regular time by a margin of ten goals and a score of 14-4.

In the last matches of the morning session of the second day, the Qatari team managed to defeat the Kuwaiti Al Basira team 12-2, as they were able to finish the match before the end of its first half.

Shooter Al Khatri aims for strong show in Olympics debut

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Oman's shooter Said al Khatri will aim for top show in his debut Olympic presence in Paris. Al Khatri arrived in Châteauroux city, France, on Sunday to undergo training for his latest preparations for the Men's Trap event. He will compete against several world-ranked shooters, providing him with an ideal environment to gain technical experience and required skills.

The preliminary qualifications for Men's Trap Shooting event will take place on July 29 and 30 at the Châteauroux Shooting Center. Shooters will be divided into several groups, with the top-ranked shooters advancing to the final rounds to compete for the Olympic medals.

Al Khatri will be trained under the watchful eyes of the Italian coach, Luca Marini, who recently joined the national shooting

team. Marini is well known for his expertise in the shooting sport, having coached renowned teams and shooters. This is the first time in the Olympics that shooters are allowed to train at the Châteauroux Shooting Center more than ten days before the competition. The centre, located 200 km south of Paris, is the largest of its kind in Europe, offering Al Khatri an excellent opportunity to train in top-notch facilities and acclimate to the Olympic atmosphere.

The attendance of Al Khatri at the Paris Olympics came after he met all the requirements and points needed to obtain the Olympic invitation. Additionally, the positive relations of the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) with the Olympic Solidarity Committee and international sports federations played a role. Al Khatri is a prominent shooter on the national team who managed to achieve numerous significant accomplishments and titles in his



Oman shooting team arrived Paris

sporting career. He had won first place in the Kuwait Emir's Open Shooting Championship last year and qualified among the top eight shooters in Asia and advanced to the Asian finals and secured seventh place in the 2023 Asian Cup held alongside the open

championship in Kuwait, among other achievements.

Meanwhile, Ali bin Salim al Busafi, Oman's chief de mission, arrived on Monday to ensure all preparations and arrangements are in place ahead of the arrival of national team representatives

in the coming days. Al Busafi will participate in the first meeting of chief de missions, which will be held at the Olympic Village on Tuesday. The meeting is expected to discuss various topics related to accommodation arrangements for Oman's

delegation and requirements for the official Olympic opening ceremony which is scheduled on Friday. Other relevant matters will be reviewed in the meeting including the timing for collecting accreditation cards for all delegation participants.



Salalah (A) Club crowned chess champions

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Salalah (A) Club was crowned champion of the seventh edition of the General Chess Clubs Championship, while Masirah (A) Club came in second place and Salalah (B) Club third place. The closing ceremony held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher was attended by Hisham al Sinani, Director- General of Sports Care and Development at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Ahmed al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Chess Committee.

120 players from 24 teams representing 17 clubs from different parts of the Sultanate of Oman participated in the championship. These clubs are Al Shabab, Al Suwaiq, Qurayat, Bausher, Al Seeb, Al Musannah, Al Khabourah, Al Salam, Bahla, Nizwa, Bidiyah, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, and Nakhal. Salalah, Sohar, Al Nahda, and Masirah each participated with two teams.

The championship witnessed exciting competitions and tough confrontations that lasted for hours.

The Oman Chess Committee aims, through the organisation of these competitions, to provide a platform for interaction and gaining more experience, in



Salalah (A) Club crowned champion. – Photos by Mohammed al Jasasi



addition to enhancing the confidence of the national team's technical staff in discovering talented players and ensuring the Sultanate of Oman's representation in upcoming international tournaments.

The committee also looks forward to the participation of

Omani players in the Amateur World Championship, which will enhance their capabilities and give them the opportunity to obtain advanced international rankings and titles and contribute to strengthening the Sultanate of Oman's international position in chess.

VINGEGAARD TO MISS VUELTA AFTER GRUELLING TOUR DE FRANCE

FRANCE: Jonas Vingegaard will not be competing at the Vuelta a Espana, the Visma-Lease a Bike rider said after finishing second in an "exhausting" Tour de France.

Slovenian Tadej Pogacar became the first rider since 1998 to achieve the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France double, winning his third tour title on Sunday by defeating the defending champion Vingegaard.

The Dane, who won the last two tours, entered this year's event after a three-month hiatus following multiple serious injuries, including a collapsed lung and fractured rib. He

sustained in a crash at the Tour of the Basque Country in April.

The 27-year-old never really appeared like he could retain his title after the injuries, though he did secure a stage win.

"I'm tired, I don't think I've ever been this tired after a Grand Tour before. To be honest, I'm exhausted," Vingegaard told Eurosport. "Of course I want to come back and win it again. I think now I need a bit of rest."

"Unfortunately I will not be at the start of the Vuelta a Espana. I have different priorities this year, but for sure I will be there again in the future.

"It's been quite some journey

because it's only three and a half months ago I had the worst crash of my career, breaking almost every bone in the upper right side of my body, and puncturing both lungs," he said.

Vingegaard's teammate Sepp Kuss will look to defend his title in the Vuelta, which begins on August 17, after missing the Tour de France due to COVID.

Vingegaard will not be competing at the Paris Games either, starting on Friday. Mads Pedersen, Mattias Skjelmose, Michael Morkov and Mikkjel Bjerg will make up the Danish men's road cycling team.

— Reuters



Tadej Pogacar cheers Jonas Vingegaard (L). – AFP

Giron wins Hall of Fame Open for first ATP title

NEW YORK: Marcos Giron captured his first ATP title on Sunday, defeating fellow American Alex Michelsen 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 7-5 to win the Hall of Fame Open final.

Paris Olympics-bound Giron, who turns 31 on Wednesday, saved a match point in the third set before becoming the ninth player to win his first ATP title this year, the first to do it on grass.

"Yeah I turn 31 but I feel young, I feel good and I'm hungry for more," Giron said. "Hopefully we can go to the Olympics and bring back a title and make deep runs."

Giron fired 13 aces, the 12th to save a match point in the 10th game of the final set and the last to capture the match after two hours and 37 minutes at Newport, Rhode Island.

"You know where I pulled that out of. That was insane," Giron told pal Michelsen after the match. "You've got a great career in front of you. I'm sorry I had to win today."

By outlasting 19-year-old Michelsen, a Newport runner-up for the second consecutive year, Giron will advance from 46th to 38th in the new world rankings on Monday.

Giron broke in the opening game of their first ATP meeting, but Michelsen broke back in the sixth game to pull level at 3-3. Giron saved three break points in the eighth game to reach 4-4.

Michelsen, ranked 61st, saved two break points in the 11th game for a 6-5 edge on the way to a tie-breaker, in which Michelsen seized a 5-1 edge and cruised home,



Marcos Giron celebrate with his first ATP title

taking the set after 59 minutes on a forehand winner.

Giron broke in the fourth game of the second set and held from there to force a third.

Giron saved a match point in the 10th game with an ace, then reversed the script by holding, then breaking in the 11th game when Michelsen netted a backhand volley and holding a final time for the title.

"Super happy for you to get this one," Michelsen told Giron. "Can't believe you got it with an ace on match point."

Giron lost his only prior ATP finals in 2022 in San Diego and this past February in Dallas.

Michelsen lost to France's Adrian Mannarino in last year's Newport final, his only prior ATP championship match. — AFP

Macron says France is ready to host Paris Olympics

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday that France was ready to host the Paris Olympics as he visited the Athletes' Village four days before the Games begin.

"We are ready and we will be ready throughout the Games," Macron said.

"We have been working on these Games for years now and we are at the start of a decisive week which on Friday will see the opening ceremony and then the Olympiad which will be held in Paris, 100 years since the last one."

He added: "This is the fruit of an immense amount of work which has profoundly changed the country, in particular the area" of Seine-Saint-Denis, where the Athletes' Village is situated.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach also visited the Village to the north of the French capital, where thousands of athletes and officials are arriving, with up to 14,500 expected there at the peak of the Games.

Comprising 40 different low-rise housing blocks, the complex has been built by employing innovative construction techniques using low-carbon concrete, water recycling and reclaimed building materials.

It was also intended to be free of air-conditioning with a natural cooling system, but some Olympic delegations are unconvinced and have ordered around 2,500 portable cooling units for their athletes. Seine-Saint-Denis, where the main athletics stadium for the Olympics is also situated, is the poorest area in France and is hoping to reap benefits from the sports extravaganza.

Macron promised the area would not be forgotten after the Olympics.



French President Emmanuel Macron meets with French athletes. – Reuters

"I will come back after the Games to see the legacy with you and to see how life has changed," he said.

Between 6,000 and 7,000 athletes are to sail down the river on 85 barges and boats, with

a backdrop of world-famous monuments including Notre-Dame cathedral, currently being renovated after a devastating fire in 2019.

The athletes will disembark for the culmination of a ceremony at

the Trocadero opposite the Eiffel Tower that organisers promise will be spectacular.

Up to 300,000 ticketed spectators will watch from stands and on the river banks and another 200,000 are expected

to watch from the overlooking apartments. Turning to the sport, Slovenian cyclist Tadej Pogacar is setting his sights on Olympic gold in the road race after winning the Tour de France for the third time on Sunday.

"We are living in the golden age of cycling," Pogacar said after completing a commanding victory in Nice, where the finish was moved to because of the Olympic preparations in Paris. — AFP

Athletes, officials pouring in as venues get finishing touches

PARIS: Paris Olympics supremo Tony Estanguet said on Sunday that the city was "ready" for the Games as he played down complaints from some residents and businesses about the impact of the event.

"We are ready as we head into the final phase," Estanguet told a press conference in Paris, five days from the opening parade next Friday. He added: "For as long as the closing ceremony hasn't finished, we need to remain vigilant. But today we are exactly where we would have dreamed of being a few years ago."

Finishing touches are being applied to the venues across the City of Light and thousands of athletes and officials are pouring in, while the weather has also brightened up after months of rain.

In a further boost for organisers, the water quality of the river Seine — which is set to be used for outdoor Olympic swimming events — has also improved dramatically since the start of July.

"All the indicators for the Seine are positive at this stage," Estanguet added.

The river is set to host the opening ceremony next Friday which will see 6,000-7,000 athletes sail down it on 85 barges and boats. It will be the first time a Summer Olympics has opened outside the main athletics stadium, with up to 300,000 ticketed spectators set to watch from stands and on the river banks and another 200,000 expected to watch from the overlooking apartments.

Around 4,000 tickets are still available, Estanguet said.

"We've always tried to maintain as high a level of ambition as possible so that these Games make France shine," Estanguet added.



Ship hosting surf athletes ahead of the opening ceremony. – AFP

DISRUPTION

The vast security operation required for the opening ceremony is causing some friction, however, with large parts of central Paris along the banks of the river and around Olympic venues off-limits for most people.

Trade groups representing Paris shops, restaurants, bars and clubs complained on Friday that they were facing an "unprecedented slump in business and footfall", blaming in part the "heavy security measures".

"It always a choice made in full



Tony Estanguet during a press conference. – Reuters



Eiffel Tower bearing the Olympics rings. – AFP



Deck of the Aranui 5 cruise ship hosting surf athletes ahead of the opening ceremony. – AFP

conscience that the success of Paris 2024 would mean having the Games in the city," Estanguet explained. "That was the completely unprecedented concept for Paris 2024." As well as the opening ceremony in the heart of the city, much of the sport is set to take place at temporary venues around Paris, with beach volleyball at the Eiffel Tower, archery at the Invalides and skateboarding at the Place de la Concorde.

"We can't do it without some disruption. We can't do it without some restrictions," Estanguet said. "We tried to anticipate these restrictions and we communicated them a

long time in advance."

He thanked "those who have understood this because it's really to honour our country in the most beautiful way."

EXTENSIVE SECURITY

Around 45,000 members of the French security forces are set to be on duty on Friday evening when the Olympics kick off at 7:30pm (17:30 GMT).

"Security was the number one priority for Paris 2024," Estanguet said.

Cybersecurity is also a major concern, with a global IT outage last Friday caused

by an update to CrowdStrike software leading to temporary disruption to accreditation system used for the Games.

The International Olympic Committee said it was bracing for disinformation attacks targeting the sporting extravaganza following recent incidents blamed on Russia. Just 15 Russians and 17 Belarusians are accredited to compete as neutrals as most sports have banned Russians and their allies in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

"Clearly there is a campaign of some sort going on," IOC spokesman Mark Adams said on Saturday.

"It's not the first or last time that the IOC will be targeted with misinformation. It's getting more and more sophisticated."

Adams was responding to a question concerning a feature-length fake documentary that emerged in 2023 titled "Olympics has Fallen" which used AI-generated audio to impersonate Hollywood star Tom Cruise.

The film, falsely purporting to be a Netflix documentary, was apparently designed to erode global support for the Olympics.

Elsewhere, the star-loaded USA men's basketball team came close to a stunning defeat to South Sudan in a warmup game in London on Saturday. LeBron James scored the decisive points on a driving layup with eight seconds remaining to secure a 101-100 win at the O2 Arena.

"The ending was good for us — just to feel that, to feel what it's going to feel like in Paris," USA coach Steve Kerr said.

"Good reminder that when we play against teams, it's the biggest experience of their lives and we have to expect everyone to play like that." — AFP





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OIA targets opportunities across Oman’s hydrogen value chain

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) says it is poised to play a significant role across key facets of the hydrogen value chain with the goal of unlocking its full potential for investment and economic development in Oman.

According to OIA Chairman Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, various subsidiaries and affiliates of the integrated sovereign wealth fund are gearing up to play their respective parts not only in the hydrogen production elements of the industry, but also in opportunities linked to the onshoring of manufacturing capacity and technological expertise linked to this pivotal sector.

“OIA and its companies are also working on projects across the H2 industry value chain, such as electrolyzers, storage, and shipping. The aim is to localise the technologies and industries needed to produce, store, utilise, and export hydrogen,” the official stated in remarks featured in The Business Year’s Oman 2024 report.



Those opportunities are linked to investments totalling an estimated \$48 billion that are expected to flow into Oman over the next ten years in support of eight large-scale green hydrogen projects that will materialise in areas around Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates.

These projects are anticipated to offer an aggregate green hydrogen production capacity of 1.4 million tonnes per annum starting from 2030.

Al Murshidi also underlined Oman’s commitment to decarbonisation across all sectors

of the economy by 2050 in line with Paris Climate Accords. Sectors targeted for carbon neutrality include electricity, real estate, construction, transport, industry, and oil and gas.

“The decarbonisation efforts include short-term initiatives such as efficiency projects; medium-term projects such as renewable projects for utilities and oil and gas, green mobility, and green hydrogen developments; and long-term projects currently being evaluated, such as carbon capture, utilisation, and storage

(CCUS), CO2 export, and nature-based carbon capture solutions,” he said.

Accordingly, carbon emission levels currently estimated at 105 million tonnes of CO2 per annum will be reduced in line with Net-Zero targets by 2050.

The immediate priority is to cut emissions by 50%, he said, adding that further initiatives would be necessary to tackle emissions linked to challenging sectors such as hydrocarbons.

Turning to OIA’s divestment strategy, Al Murshidi said the process has delivered significant results in the energy, logistics and infrastructure sectors.

This has been achieved via direct sales, as well as through three successful IPOs of indirectly owned assets Abraj Energy, OQ Gas Networks and Pearl REIF.

“By transitioning these assets to the public through IPOs, there has been an infusion of fresh capital and a diversification of investment portfolios.

This not only increases liquidity in the market but also democratises ownership, allowing a wider section of the populace to partake in the nation’s economic growth,” he added.

Oman LNG contracts restructured in keeping with energy transition trends: Al Aufi

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The transition to clean and renewable energy is one of the main factors behind Oman’s restructuring of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) contracts, according to Oman’s Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (pictured).

Speaking to a local Arabic news portal recently, Al Aufi shared that the Sultanate of Oman has switched from long-term contracts usually lasting 15 to 20 years to shorter-term contracts.

“Many countries are transitioning to renewable and clean energy, and this technology is advancing rapidly. They do not want to commit to long-term liquefied gas purchase contracts only to find halfway through that they need to exit the contracts.

This could be due to moving to different energy [sources], such as hydrogen or renewable energy. So, buyers try to reduce the commitment period,” he shared.

According to Al Aufi, Oman LNG’s contracts are for 10 years, while Qalhat LNG contracts are for 5-year terms. He also revealed that the previous contracts have been



dissolved in favour of these shorter agreements.

“These are new agreements from scratch, and we negotiated all the details. We took all the observations and lessons learned from the old contracts. The current situation is different since the company has recovered most of its capital costs, giving the government the ability to compete better compared to a new plant where the capital costs are still high. This allowed us to maximise the added value to the country from selling gas,” he stated.

Term-sheet agreements signed recently by Oman LNG commit up to 10.4 million tonnes of its capacity annually, Hamed bin Mohammed al Numani, CEO – Oman LNG, had affirmed in media statements. He also revealed that the company’s spot market deals yielded over \$1 billion in additional revenues to the company in 2023.

Asyad expands global reach with acquisition of SFS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Asyad Group, Oman’s leading logistics provider, has acquired UAE-headquartered Skybridge Freight Solutions (SFS) in a move that significantly enhancing Oman’s connectivity with vital global trade routes.

With the acquisition of SFS, Asyad is now poised to offer its customers unparalleled access to global markets, leveraging its strategic position in Oman.

The acquisition aligns with Asyad’s expansion strategy, aiming to provide customers with seamless multimodal logistics solutions across air, sea, and land.

The deal grants Asyad access to SFS’s extensive network, which spans over 90 geographies across six continents, strengthening its capability to serve diverse industries ranging from food and energy to automotive and pharmaceuticals.

SFS, known for its financial health and wide-ranging logistics services, brings to the table its long-established relationships with global freight networks, government bodies, shipping



The acquisition grants Asyad access to SFS’s extensive network, which spans over 90 geographies across six continents.

lines, and airlines.

Serving over 1,400 customers, including numerous Fortune 500 companies, SFS has built a strong reputation for reliability and excellence in the logistics sector.

The integration of SFS into Asyad’s operations is expected to drive significant advancements in various facets of the logistics ecosystem, including supply chain management, e-commerce, and port and container line operations.

This move will enable Asyad

to provide comprehensive end-to-end logistics solutions, thus enhancing its competitive edge in the global marketplace.

Its strategic expansion into critical cargo origin economies such as China, India, Europe, and the United States, alongside its existing operations in the GCC, underscores its commitment to becoming a global logistics powerhouse.

This acquisition is expected to open new avenues for growth and

innovation, reinforcing Asyad’s mission to connect the world through Oman’s central location on the global trade map.

Additionally, Asyad will now have active operations in key cargo origin economies, leveraging SFS’ capabilities and network of associates. This acquisition will bolster Oman’s connectivity with vital global trade routes, unlocking new connections and strengthening existing ones with the world’s biggest markets.

All logistics players will benefit from unrestricted multimodal access and amplified trade opportunities. With these targeted moves, Asyad aims to redraw the global trade map.

The SFS acquisition marks a significant milestone for the group, reinforcing its integrated logistics model that consistently sets new industry standards.

This strategic step aligns with Asyad’s portfolio diversification

plans and commitment to increasing global service coverage.

Integrating SFS’s capabilities and market access will open new avenues for growth and cement Asyad’s position as a reliable global logistics powerhouse.

Future plans focus on long-term financial returns and enhancing globally competitive logistics solutions for trade communities worldwide.

Both Asyad and SFS customers will benefit from improved reach and service excellence through multimodal freight forwarding solutions.

Asyad will enhance GCC market connectivity to major cargo origin markets via SFS’ network of associate offices in key global trade locations, from China and India to the United States and Europe.

The group’s year-over-year growth reflects a robust commercial mindset and dynamic decision-making. In 2023, Asyad reported a 21% compound annual growth rate in revenue and a 73% rate in profits. The SFS acquisition will support continued double-digit growth, ensuring sustained success and market leadership.

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Double up on savings with 1-year free insurance or a cash gift in lieu ranging from RO 125 to RO 450 and 3-month EMI holiday opportunity, exclusively brought to you by Toyota Oman.

Moreover, relish the summer fun by getting a chance to enter the Grand Raffle draw and win an all-paid Turkiye holiday for a family of four.

Grab the limited-time opportunity before the campaign ends on August 1, 2024.

Toyota Yaris delivers a dynamic driving experience



with its four-cylinder engine that is equipped with 16-valve DOCH and dual VVT-I.

The vehicle is available with a 1.5-litre capacity engine that delivers smooth acceleration and a quick response, producing 105 horsepower and 138 Nm of torque with fuel consumption of 20.5 km/l.

This is paired with Continuously Variable

Transmission (CVT), which simulates a seven-speed sequential shift transmission to deliver powerful, smooth acceleration from start-off and at low speeds, and quiet, efficient transmission at higher speeds with excellent fuel efficiency and optimal performance output.

Experience the luxe spacious cabin that is designed to

provide greater comfort and convenience for both the driver and passengers.

Load your belongings in the back with the spacious 475-litre capacity for everyone. The vehicle is utilitarian and exhibits simplicity, yet maintains its class.

It features an 8-inch multimedia screen with Apple CarPlay & Android Auto

together with a USB port on the head unit and two ports at the rear console that enable passengers to connect external media devices.

Additional features include a four or six-speaker sound system and an automatic air conditioning system with two rear vents for extra passenger comfort.

Meanwhile, parents benefit from the added peace of mind provided by Toyota's ISOFIX safety system, which attaches baby seats securely using specially designed tethers.

The all-new Yaris maintains Toyota's sterling safety standards.

Its safety system is complemented by Toyota Safety Sense, an advanced safety technology package that includes a Pre-Collision System (PCS), Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC), Lane Departure Alert (LDA), Lane Departure Prevention (LDP), as well as a new Front Departure Alert (FDA) feature that gives drivers a visual and audible warning when a stationary vehicle in front begins to move forward.

In addition, the vehicle comes with a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its driver and occupants.

These include SRS airbags, with options available based on the grade for either two or six airbags (including front airbags for the driver passenger, side airbags for the front seats, and side-curtain airbags for the front and rear seats), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist (BA), Electric Parking Brake (EPB) with Brake hold function, Traction Control (TRC), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC) and many others.

Specifications of vehicles imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions and fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to the fitment of dealer-installed accessories.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.



MALABAR GOLD & DIAMONDS INAUGURATES 3 NEW SHOWROOMS IN INDIA

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 350 showrooms across 13 countries, has just launched 3 new showrooms in Tamil Nadu, India.

The showrooms were virtually launched by Malabar Group Chairman M P Ahammed. Tamil Nadu Tourism Minister K Ramachandran unveiled the Velachery store to the public, Mayor of Karur district, Kavitha Ganesan, unveiled the Karur store, and Amman K Arjunan, the Member of Legislative Assembly from Coimbatore North, launched the R S Puram store.

530,000 km and thriving: The unbelievable journey of a Geely Emgrand X7 Sport

MUSCAT: Geely, the renowned automotive brand and Towell Auto Centre LLC (TAC), the exclusive distributor of Geely vehicles in Oman, celebrates a monumental achievement with one of our amazing customers in Oman. Muhamed Muhsin, the proud owner of a Geely Emgrand X7 Sport Trendy SUV, has just crossed a mind-blowing milestone for a whopping 530,000 kilometres.

That's right, you read that correctly, half a million kilometres on a Geely! That's an incredible feat achieved by our happy Geely customer here in Oman. Muhsin purchased his SUV in November 2017, because of its testament to reliability and performance built.

He added that he has been cruising across Oman's diverse landscapes for over six years now, and his Geely is still going strong.

He even shared his experiences and feedback with the Geely team, reflecting on the vehicle's remarkable features and the outstanding support he received.

To gain further insight into what makes Geely the perfect travel companion for him, let's hear from Muhsin himself.

Superior features at unbeatable prices
Muhsin wasn't just looking for



a car, he was looking for a partner for the road. Geely impressed him with the perfect blend of modern features, competitive pricing and sleek design.

Boasting modern features like a user-friendly touchscreen infotainment system keeps him well-connected and entertained on the roads.

The competitive price tag made it a smart choice, making it a fantastic value-for-money SUV.

But what truly sealed the deal was the sleek design. The

Emgrand X7 Sport turned heads wherever he travelled, making every journey a stylish adventure.

It's a winning combination for Muhsin proving one doesn't have to break the bank to experience a feature-rich and head-turning driving experience. His X7 offered him a blend of practicality, affordability and undeniable flair all-at-once.

Outstanding service and support

This incredible feat wasn't just about the car, but also the

dedicated service. Owning a car is a journey, and just like any good road trip, reliable support by your side makes all the difference.

That's what Muhsin experienced with Towell Auto Centre and Geely's innovative after-sales programme, forever IP (Infinite Possibilities).

"The service has been fantastic, which is why my car has successfully covered so many kilometres. I am extremely happy with the service," Muhsin shared.

"Forever IP goes beyond basic maintenance. They offer transparent pricing and explain everything clearly. Plus, their 24x7 roadside assistance provides peace of mind on long journeys."

This commitment to exceptional service, coupled with genuine parts guaranteed by Forever IP, is a key reason why Muhsin's Geely Emgrand X7 Sport is still cruising strong after half a million kilometres.

What amazes Muhsin is the vehicle's remarkable durability. He emphasises the car is cost-effective, stating, "I drive long distances for business, and the maintenance costs are quite reasonable."

Adding to the praise, he states, "The vehicle's performance has been very well, and I find it highly durable."

NBO Muzn unveils innovative Sharia-compliant alternative to bill discounting

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its commitment to innovation, National Bank of Oman Muzn Islamic Banking has announced the launch of its ground-breaking product, Term Wakala Finance an alternative for bill discounting.

This Sharia-compliant financial solution offers customers a hassle-free way to settle their financial obligations across various sectors. This pioneering product marks

a significant advancement in Islamic banking, highlighting Muzn's dedication to providing innovative financial solutions.

Salima al Marzooqi (pictured), Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Muzn, said: "The Term Wakala Finance an alternative for bill discounting offers our customers a unique combination of convenience and compliance with Sharia principles.



"By choosing this product, customers can efficiently manage their financial obligations across various sectors, ensuring smooth transactions with both local and international merchants.

"This solution, which is available to all Muzn customers now, not only simplifies bill settlement processes, but also aligns with our commitment to ethical and transparent banking

practices.

"With this launch, Muzn continues to lead the way in Islamic banking innovation, providing tools that enable our clients to manage their financial responsibilities with ease and confidence."

Muzn's Term Wakala Finance an alternative for bill discounting, which is based on the concept of Wakala bil

Istithmar, offers customers an efficient bill discounting module, allowing them to effortlessly settle their dues across a variety of sectors.

Whether dealing with local and international merchants, managing export bills, or handling contractor payments, this new product ensures that customers can efficiently manage their financial commitments.



Silal Market receives over 1,100 refrigerators since launch

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 22

Since its inauguration on June 29, the Silal Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits has welcomed over 1,100 refrigerators, with a collective capacity exceeding 26,000 tonnes of goods sourced from the country of origin, the local market, and neighbouring markets.

Situated in the Wilayat of Barka, the market aims to elevate wholesale trade in the fruit and vegetable sector through its array of equipment, facilities, and services catering to traders, importers, and exporters.

Othman bin Ali al Hattali, the Director of Operations at Silal Market, highlighted the market's current capacity of over 25,000 tonnes of fruits and vegetables. He underscored that the market's facilities are designed to uphold the quality of produce, thereby reducing spoilage rates



The market features a 30,000 square metre air-conditioned wholesale hall and 90 refrigerated warehouses, each 126 sqm.

by ensuring goods are stored in optimal conditions.

Notably, the market features an air-conditioned wholesale hall spanning 30, 000 square meters and 90 refrigerated warehouses, each with an area of 126 square meters. All the available refrigerators have been rented out, indicating the market's

importance among merchants and the strong demand for its services.

Silal Market distinguishes itself by offering an integrated system of regulatory and administrative services.

It provides customs inspection, quarantine procedures, and food safety services through a unified inspection station and

a comprehensive laboratory for swift sample analysis.

To facilitate smooth operations, the market has been designed to accommodate truck entry efficiently, particularly during peak times, with seven modern gates tailored to handle various types of trucks.

The truck entrances are kept



Othman bin Ali al Hattali
Director of Operations

separate from those designated for light vehicles, ensuring streamlined traffic flow.

Emphasising the significance of local products, Al Hattali noted that Silal Market serves as a comprehensive hub for Omani agricultural goods.

The market receives products from diverse governorates, redistributing them to major markets across the country.

Additionally, Silal Market actively encourages Omani

farmers to expand their agricultural activities by offering a facility for receiving and inspecting local products, thereby enabling Omani companies to export their goods internationally and enhance the economic value of Omani products.

Al Hattali reaffirmed Silal Market's open invitation to retailers from all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The market has provided ample parking spaces and numerous services to enrich the shopping experience for buyers sourcing products from wholesalers within the market.

The early success of Silal Market in the fruit and vegetable sector is anticipated to advance the wholesale trade industry in Oman, promote re-exports, and position the market as a preferred destination for merchants seeking to conduct their business operations efficiently and effectively.

Oman oil price reaches \$82.33 per barrel

MUSCAT: The official price of Omani oil yesterday for next September delivery reached \$82.33. The price of Omani oil witnessed a decrease of \$2.6 compared to last Friday's price of \$84.39.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery this July amounted to \$83.89 per barrel, down \$5.41 compared to the price for delivery last June.

Meanwhile, international



oil prices fell on Monday after Joe Biden announced he would not seek a second term as US president, while investors considered the possibility of US interest rate cuts.— **Agencies**

DCO urges immediate talks on global IT outage impact

MUSCAT: The Digital Cooperation Organization's (DCO) Secretariat General has called for urgent discussions with Member States and digital economy experts to address the wide-reaching implications of a recent global IT outage that disrupted critical operations worldwide, affecting sectors such as airlines, banks,

broadcasters, and software providers.

The DCO Secretariat General stated, "The significant impact observed globally due to this unfortunate outage is alarming and underscores the urgent need for more effective and agile international digital cooperation."

The incident has raised serious

questions about continuity and sustainability in an increasingly digital world. It is imperative for the international community to develop robust policies and protocols to mitigate the risks of such disruptions and ensure the continuity of essential operations.

In response, the DCO Secretariat General has called for immediate

deliberations among its Member States and digital economy experts to "capture the lessons learned from this incident, assess its impact on national digital transformation plans in Member States, and plan practical steps to ensure that relevant stakeholders across sectors are aligned and prepared to handle such crises."

Muscat Municipality signs lease for modern park and sweets factory

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 22

Muscat Municipality finalised an agreement yesterday with Saud bin Hilal al Sabri LLC to lease municipal land in the Al Mawaleh South area of the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

The purpose of the lease is to develop a modern park with a wide range of public and commercial facilities, along with the Diwaniya Omani Sweets Factory.

The signing ceremony took place at the municipality building in Darsait, attended by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and Saud bin Hilal al Sabri, the owner of the Diwaniya Omani Sweets project.

Under the terms of the agreement, Saud bin Hilal al Sabri LLC has been granted a 20-year lease on a plot of municipal land spanning 31,182 square metres.

The development plans include the establishment of a public park featuring amenities such as walking and cycling paths, children's play areas, green spaces, sports courts, table tennis facilities, an amphitheatre, event spaces, kiosks, cafes run by small and medium enterprises, as well as service facilities like restrooms, car parking, and prayer areas.

Furthermore, a section of the project facing the public street will be designated for the construction of the Diwaniya Omani Sweets Factory.

This factory will incorporate a visitor experience centre where guests can learn about traditional Omani sweets manufacturing



Under the terms of the agreement, Saud bin Hilal al Sabri LLC has been granted a 20-year lease on a plot of municipal land spanning 31,182 square metres.



The signing ceremony was attended by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and Saud bin Hilal al Sabri, owner of Diwaniya Omani Sweets project.

techniques and ingredients.

In his remarks, Al Humaidi emphasised Muscat Municipality's commitment to leveraging its assets for broader societal benefits,

beyond mere financial gains.

He described the agreement as a prime example of purposeful collaboration between the public and private sectors, aimed at

enhancing social responsibility initiatives, fostering city and province development, creating job opportunities for local talents, maximising local value addition, and contributing to economic and social development objectives.

Muscat Municipality remains dedicated to enhancing partnerships between the public and private sectors and engaging with local community entities to spearhead projects and initiatives that promote sustainable growth.

The Municipality's efforts are focused on providing essential resources for regional service, urban planning, and neighbourhood development to bolster tourism, boost the economy, facilitate overall development, and enhance residents' quality of life, all in harmony with the goals set forth in Oman Vision 2040.

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO 13.6m

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman has announced that the total value of government treasury bills allocated this week amounts to RO 13.600 million.

In a statement yesterday, the bank detailed that treasury bills with a 28-day maturity were allocated RO 5.000 million, with an average acceptable price of RO 99.660 and a lowest acceptable price of RO 99.660 per RO 100.

The average discount rate was 4.43214 per cent, and the average return was 4.44726 per cent.

Bills with a 91-day maturity were allocated RO 4.600 million, with an average acceptable price of RO 98.736 and a lowest acceptable price of RO 98.730 per RO 100.

The average discount rate was 5.07129 per cent, and the average return was 5.13623 per cent.

For bills with a 182-day maturity, RO 4.000 million was allocated, with an average acceptable price of RO 97.455 and a lowest acceptable price of RO 97.455 per RO 100.

The average discount rate was 5.10398 per cent, and the average return was 5.23727 per cent.

The statement also noted



that the interest rate on repurchase operations (repo) with the Central Bank of Oman for these bills is 6 per cent, while the discount rate on treasury bill facilities is 6.50 per cent.

Treasury bills, issued by the Ministry of Finance, are a secure short-term financial instrument providing investment opportunities for licensed commercial banks, with the Central Bank of Oman managing the issuance. These bills can be rapidly liquidated through discounting with the Central Bank or through repo transactions. Licensed commercial banks can also conduct repo operations among themselves in the interbank market.

This instrument helps establish short-term interest rate benchmarks for the local financial market and offers the government a flexible means to finance some of its expenditures. — **ONA**

Is a smart professional who is not culturally fit a healthy addition to an organisation?



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is founder of Knowledge Oman knowledgeoman.com

IF YOUR ORGANISATION HAS A STRONG CULTURE WHERE EMPLOYEES ARE ALIGNED AND CONGRUENT (TO THE VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS), THEN THE OVERALL RESULT, MOST OF THE TIME, IS SATISFACTORY

The answer to this question really depends on what stage your organisation is in and, specifically, on the team in which the talented or smart professional in question would be working with or is part of.

The new hire (or expected team player per se) can either be a genius and a great asset to the team and organisation, or a culture clash is waiting to happen with the ultimate sinking of your team and the organisation as a whole.

Having worked in various organisations as both a team leader and part of a team, I founded a community platform, Knowledge Oman (presently running over 16 years), that consists of multinational members (male and female from different cultures).

I can definitely share some practical knowledge and experience that can aid you in making productive decisions. First things first, let's define what a company culture is, so we are on the same page.

Quite simply, the shared beliefs, behaviours, and values

that define how employees in an organisation interact, work, and do business with each other are called company culture.

This culture helps shape the work environment in the organisation in question.

If your organisation has a strong culture where employees are aligned and congruent (to the vision, mission, and goals), then the overall result, most of the time, is satisfactory.

I've experienced both sides of the fence and have seen the extreme results, from boom to bust.

To illustrate what I am saying, let me share with you two cases for your kind perusal and sake of reference.

Case #1: Dawood is a talented and smart professional with rich experience who joins an already established organisation with a team that works in a collaborative way.

Dawood, despite having impressive skills, gets into occasional conflicts with the members of the team. Reasons include an independent working style, non-mutual timelines, miscommunication, and/or

non-commitment to project deliverables.

Clearly, there is a cultural misfit in this case due to Dawood's and team members recurring conflicts and clashes, which are obviously not healthy for the operation of the business.

Case #2: The same Dawood joins an organisation that is going through serious challenges, and the members of the team in this organisation are not optimal.

Dawood's addition may end up disrupting the team (positively due to his impressive skills and rich experience).

Dawood's addition in both of the cases is risky for the organisation due to a misfit in culture; nevertheless, it's clear which of the two cases you may consider keeping Dawood (as a value).

Later (case #2), the team in fact needed a change or enhancement. That's my humble opinion, if a satisfactory result is the end goal. Why?

Keeping Dawood on the first case will result in serious friction, communication struggle, misunderstandings, and unnecessary working/office/team

politics and drama that would impact the overall performance of the already established team and organisation as a whole.

Simply because the workflow will be distrusted negatively, collaboration will be reduced dramatically, and positive productivity will be impacted as a result.

On the other hand, introducing Dawood to a disfunctional (or non-performing) team in an organisation can yield fruitful results, since a change was required in the first place anyway.

You would hardly go wrong with this approach, and the risk is something that one should really opt for.

Is there a way to handle Dawood in a first-case scenario?

Definitely, let me share a brief guide that team leaders in such a scenario can follow.

First, identify the issue between the team and specifically the new member (Dawood in this instance). Look at it objectively and try to address it individually and as a team.

Next, have open communication so as to share crystal clear expectations with

Dawood on what is required, by when, and at what quality.

Lastly, keep a tab while supporting Dawood to jell with the team, for his success is ultimately everyone's success.

If issues still persist, then Dawood may not be the best fit for the already established organisation, and you, as a leader, need to take the necessary positive action for the benefit of the organisation as a whole.

In conclusion, would you introduce, hire, appoint, or include a smart and talented professional who is not culturally fit for your team and organisation?

A decision is subjective and really dependent on the organisation in question (be it established or poor).

Many studies recommend prioritising culturally fit individual hiring in order to create and enforce an already harmonious, productive, and successful work environment.

Whatever decision you make, take accountability, for the outcome will impact you personally as well. Until we catch up again next week, work smart and remain positive.

LNG markets still vulnerable to shocks as large volumes remain uncontracted



PETER ABDO

The author is the Chief Commercial Officer LNG & Global Origination, Uniper Global Commodities SE.

ONE CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN THE RAPID EXPANSION OF LNG INFRASTRUCTURE IN EUROPE, PARTICULARLY IN GERMANY. BEFORE THE CRISIS, GERMANY HAD NO LNG REGASIFICATION CAPABILITIES.

Over the past couple of years, the global energy markets have experienced several significant impacts driven by geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions and evolving trade patterns.

Reflecting on these developments, the most notable change has been the rebalancing of LNG trade flows. The European energy crisis, exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, necessitated a dramatic shift.

Historically, a significant portion of LNG cargoes was destined for Asia.

However, in response to the European energy crisis, many of these cargoes were redirected to Europe to offset the loss of Russian pipeline gas.

This was crucial in stabilising European gas supplies. As I experienced this first hand, the positioning of global portfolios required the joint efforts of policymakers, commercial participants and infrastructure providers to rebalance trade flows at a record speed.

One critical development has been the rapid expansion of LNG infrastructure in Europe, particularly in Germany. Before the crisis, Germany had no LNG regasification capabilities.

By 2023, several LNG terminals had been commissioned, significantly enhancing Germany's capacity to import LNG. This infrastructure build-out is expected to continue, with projections indicating that Germany could meet 40-45 per cent of its gas demand through LNG by 2030.

High energy prices and supply shortages also led to



significant demand destruction across Europe. Many industrial consumers either reduced their consumption or shut down operations.

The long-term impact of this demand destruction remains uncertain, and it is unclear how much of this demand will return.

The energy markets experienced unprecedented volatility during this period.

For instance, at the height of the crisis, TTF (Title Transfer Facility) gas prices exhibited volatility exceeding 150 per cent.

More recently this volatility had reduced to around 50 per cent, indicating some stabilisation but still reflecting significant market uncertainty.

What has transpired over the last 24 months is unprecedented. Commercial activity in the form of LNG has skyrocketed to deal with this crisis.

Over 100 bcma of new LNG contracts were signed in each

year from 2021-24, with a sizable portion originating from the United States.

Even if some of these contracts are non-binding or projects abandoned, we are witnessing a seismic shift none of us in the industry have ever witnessed; a 45 per cent increase in market size within the next 5 years.

Interestingly, many of these contracts were signed with portfolio players and traders rather than traditional importers. This shift in market dynamics highlights the increasing role of traders in the LNG market.

Disruptions in global supply chains and the development of new export projects also played a critical role in reshaping the energy landscape.

The market is still assessing the long-term consequences of these developments, which include potential shifts in

global trade routes and supply dependencies.

These factors collectively highlight the resilience and adaptability of the global energy markets in response to significant disruptions.

The industry has made substantial adjustments to infrastructure and trade flows, which have been crucial in maintaining supply security and market stability.

While it is fair to say that natural gas trade flows have stabilised to a certain extent, especially in Europe and Germany, we cannot definitively say that there will be no future gas shocks.

The recent crisis necessitated a significant repositioning of LNG cargoes, and Europe, particularly Germany, has been effective in addressing supply challenges.

Europe has seen a dramatic shift from historically 20 per

cent to currently 40 per cent of its gas being LNG.

Achieving price stability is another matter, and to me this is key to attract industry and provide a stable energy price for households.

Despite the stabilisation in trade flows, there are still many factors that contribute to price volatility. One question facing the industry is how much of Europe's gas should be contracted long-term.

The answer to this question needs to be balanced with Europe's decarbonisation goals, and this is a key criteria to its long-term gas sourcing agenda.

Certainly, the new LNG supply capacity coming onstream in the Gulf will likely lead to increased trading within the region and has the advantage of balancing the Atlantic and Pacific regions due to their close proximity to both.

Middle Eastern producers are well-positioned to play a significant role in this shift, given their trading capabilities and the volume of supply they can manage flexibly.

I do believe we will see more trading among Gulf companies as they leverage their new capacities and strategic investments to balance and optimise their global portfolios.

This shift will enhance their trading flexibility and market influence both regionally and globally. Europe has shown great resilience in solving the crisis at hand.

The great challenge we now face is overcoming a delicate balance between today's decisions on security of supply with the decarbonisation challenges we face into the next decade.

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Indian male 14 years experience light/ heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman. Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

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Customers are hereby informed that all such items must be collected within 15 days from the date of this announcement on submission of the official job card copy and/or notification slip. Items not collected on or before 10/08/2024 will be disposed of as deemed by us and recover the cost of work, storage and the company will not accept any claim whatsoever in this regard. The cost and consequences are at customer's responsibility and our rights are expressly reserved.

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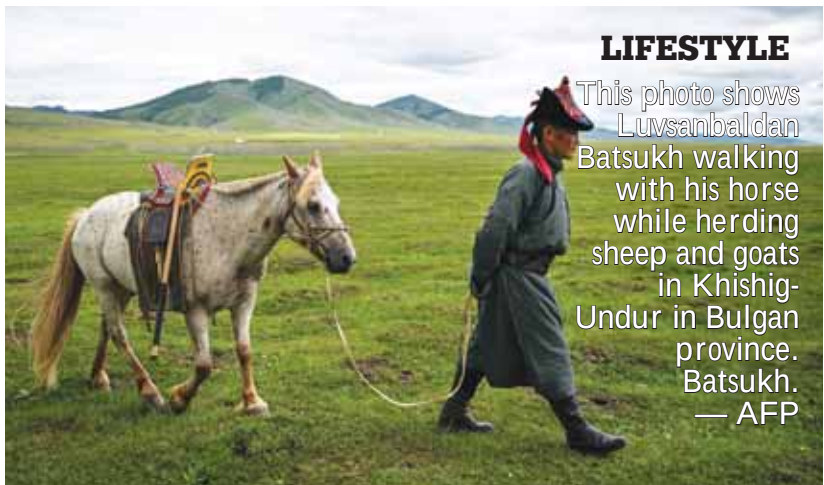


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LIFESTYLE

This photo shows Luvsanbaldan Batsukh walking with his horse while herding sheep and goats in Khishig-Undur in Bulgan province. Batsukh. — AFP



FILM

Allaith Hajjo, a Syrian film director, poses during a photo session in Damascus. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation from the summer-winter collection, 'El Velerio' by designer Mayorca, during the 81st edition of Intermoda in Guadalajara, Jalisco State, Mexico. — AFP



WEATHER

School students ride a bicycle amid a rainfall in Jalandhar. — AFP



MUSIC

The Brazilian E o Tchan! group's singers, Beto Jamaica and Compadre Washington, perform at Marina da Gloria in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

art & life

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The cultural secrets hidden behind each cup of Turkish coffee

A lot of people would already have heard of Turkish coffee. It is so popular that it has been recognised by Unesco as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, further boosting its international profile and appeal. Turkish coffee is deeply embedded in Middle Eastern culture and history, often associated with hospitality and social gatherings... **P20**



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

Addressing the learning loss in students

AS IS KNOWN, every summer, students across the world eagerly anticipate a break from their academic journey. However, this period of respite comes with a hidden educational challenge known as the summer learning loss (SLL), often labelled "summer slide" or "summer brain". This is a phenomenon where students lose a significant portion of knowledge and skills, they acquired during the school year. Recent studies have highlighted this issue's results, revealing that students lose half of the information and skills they acquire during

the school year. Surprisingly, there is significant variability among students in SLL rate, with declines accruing to the same students over time. Brokensha points out that summer learning loss refers to the decline in reading and other academic skills experienced by some students over the long summer break. Previous research suggests that this reduction in achievement levels over summer particularly affects those students who are most likely at risk of lower attainment levels generally, and especially the very young from these groups. In fact, this decline in skills over summer can have a lasting effect with studies showing that around (80 per cent) of the difference in reading achievement levels between low SES and high SES students can be attributed to cumulative losses over summer. Atteberry & McEachin's study (2020) findings revealed that achievement variation increases significantly from grade (1) to grade (8). Additionally, summer learning shows much more dramatic varia-

tion compared to school-year learning. Furthermore, student achievement disparities may grow dramatically during these summer months when children's experiences appear most diverse, and student learning slows during the summer. Summer reading setback occurs when students return to school after summer vacation with diminished reading skills, presumably from a lack of adequate reading practice. Summer setbacks affect children from families of different socioeconomic groups differently. Available research indicates that the reading achievement of poor children, as a group, typically declines during the summer vacation period, while the reading achievement of children from more economically advantaged families holds steady or increases modestly. Once again, the current preferred intervention designs seem to focus on the youngest students and the development of basic phonological skills the extent of summer learning loss is predominantly concentrated in languages and skills among all students.

In this context, literature offers numerous and varied reasons for summer learning loss. As previously noted, most research indicates a correlation between low socioeconomic status (SES) and declining achievement over the summer. Some researchers, such as Graham, McNamara, and Van Lankveld (2011), attribute this decline to the lack of available books at home. In an educational experiment, the five-week interventions focused on teaching the children reading and phonemic awareness, and knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, resulting in significant gains. The study recommended that these skills can be practiced confidently at home and contribute to addressing summer learning loss to some extent. To sum up, there is scientific evidence of learning loss among students, and this loss is concentrated in language and skills specifically. This decline may be explained by students' engagement with tablet devices, which consume all their time, in addition to their low interest in reading and writing.



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Exhibition showcases astonishing, rare artworks by European artists in Delhi

A new exhibition in Delhi showcasing rare artworks by European artists gives insights into how the British ruled the country.

Called Destination India: Foreign Artists in India, 1857-1947, the show focuses on artists who travelled to colonial India from around the world.

The representation of India through the European and British artists has "long been a subject of intrigue and exploration", writes Indian MP and author Shashi Tharoor, in an introduction to the show, BBC news reported.

He writes this eye-catching phrase, "The fascination with India's unique landscapes, grand monuments, vibrant traditions and rich history has drawn many to its shores, seeking to capture the essence of this multifaceted nation."

Tharoor notes that the show is "refreshing and essential" as it explores the less-explored, yet a compelling period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, rather than just the early pioneers.

The exhibition showcases artworks, including from British artist William Carpenter, that give glimpses into not only the royal courts, but also daily life in the Empire.

Many interesting artists visited India from England and other European countries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

They were mainly conventional artists working in oil and watercolour and various print media.

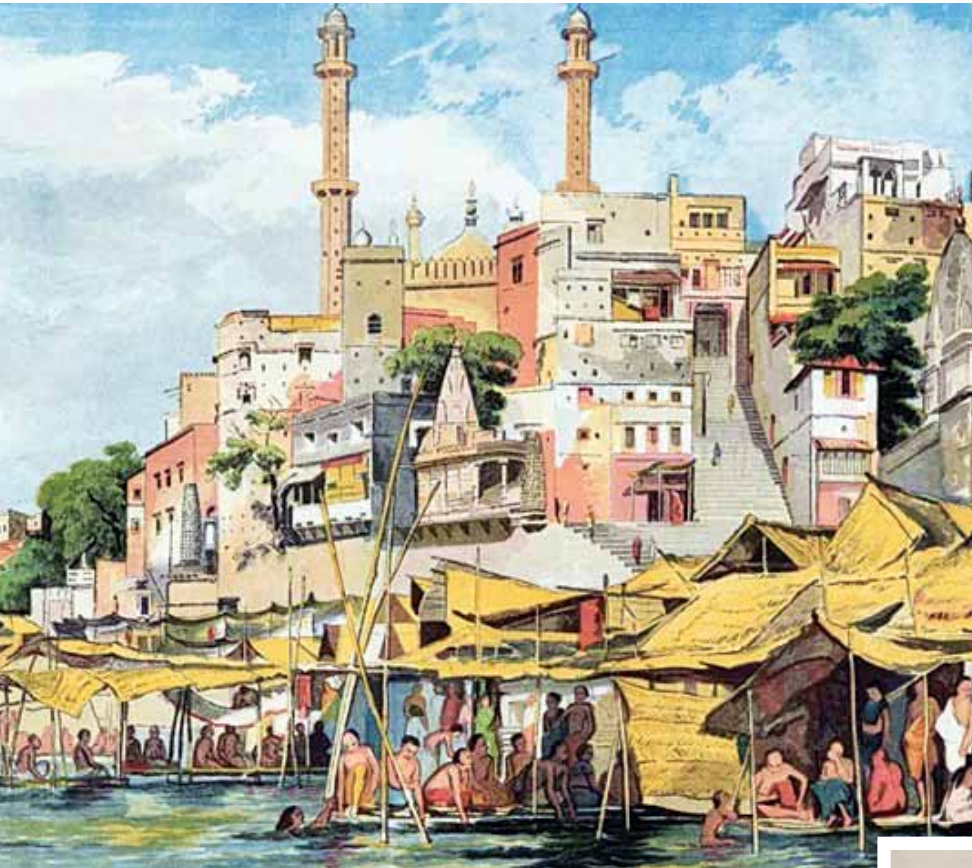
"They were attracted to the people, and not just to the grandees, but to ordinary people in the streets. If there was still an element of the picturesque, it was a more intimate and animated version of that aesthetic," says Ashish Anand, managing director of DAG, a leading art firm which has put together the show.

"In their works we find an India — if we can put it this way — that we do not just see, but that we can hear and smell."

Mainly a war artist, Simpson was sent to India in 1859 by a publishing company to illustrate the aftermath of the violent uprising two years earlier. Indian soldiers, known as sepoys, had in 1857 set off a rebellion against the British rule, often referred to as the first war of independence. Simpson's project halted when the publishing company went bankrupt. He called it the "biggest disaster of my life". Nonetheless, he continued travelling and sketching his expeditions across the sub-continent.

A significant European artist, Olinto Ghilardi shaped modern Indian art in the early 20th Century.

He mentored Abanindranath Tagore — nephew of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and founder of the Bengal School of Art, which shaped modern Indian



painting. Ghilardi encouraged him to experiment with watercolours, gouache and pastels, which he extensively used later in his work. Ghilardi also served as the vice-principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta (now Kolkata).

Not much is known about the life of the Italian painter before he arrived in Kolkata. His association with Tagore indicates his acceptance as an artist among Kolkata's Bengali elite.

Much later, in 1911, Ghilardi became a prominent member of an avant-garde group of Italian artists.

British artist Carlton Alfred Smith lived in India between 1916 and 1923. He often painted landscapes along with por-

traits of people. A painter of the late Victorian period from Camden Town in London, Smith began as a lithographer before switching to painting. A member of the Royal Academy of Art, he's known for drawing interiors of cottages and the English countryside.

A gifted student from Surrey, George Strahan was a British army engineer and artist. He joined the army and arrived in India in 1860, working in towns of Roorkee and Haridwar.

Two years later, he joined the Topographical Survey of India and started mapping central India, Rajasthan and the Himalayas.

In 1888, he became superintendent of

the Great Trigonometrical Survey, which mapped the Indian subcontinent.

At the Survey, Strahan drew relief maps before colour printing was introduced.

After retirement, he lived in the hills of Dehradun and travelled to Kashmir every summer.

A historical painter and illustrator, German artist Woldemar Friedrich spent much of his career teaching at prestigious German art academies. In the late 1880s, he travelled to India and created a series of landscapes and illustrations, and published in 1893 a book "Six Months in India".

Trained at the Royal Academy Schools in London, he became a renowned 19th-century portrait and landscape painter.

Arriving in India in 1850, he travelled extensively, painting rulers, street scenes, landscapes and locals across Bombay (now Mumbai), Rajasthan, Delhi, Punjab, Kashmir, Lahore, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Afghanistan.

English artist Charles William Bartlett was one of the world's leading Japanese woodblock painters, and later switched to fine art.

In 1913, he travelled to India, Indonesia



and China. He designed 38 woodblock prints for his Japanese publisher from 1916 to 1925, including many scenes from his travels in South Asia.

American artist Edwin Lord Weeks painted colourful oil on canvas of a bull-ock-cart in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, in 1882.

Born in Boston to a wealthy family, Weeks was among the first American artists to visit India. His business family supported his artistic endeavours.

Weeks first travelled to India between 1882 and 1883, painting places mainly in Rajasthan. He returned in 1886, when he visited at least seven cities. Known for his realist style and attention to detail, Weeks also wrote a travel account of his journeys through Persia (present day Iran) and India in 1896.

Soldiers' gallows graffiti revealed for first time at English castle

HELEN ROWE

MACABRE DEPICTIONS OF hangings carved by soldiers guarding England's biggest medieval castle at a time of looming war with France went on display on Monday. The graffiti-covered door — part of a new exhibition at Dover Castle on the country's south coast — dates from the late 18th century when soldiers garrisoned there faced the threat of invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte's French forces.

Historian Paul Pattison said scaling a ladder to the top floor of the castle's St John's Tower and seeing the carvings on the long-forgotten door had been an "astonishing discovery".

He said the soldiers' fascination with public execution gave "a unique glimpse into the minds of these soldiers, especially during such a charged period of time".

The door features some 50 pieces of carved graffiti including nine hangings, many initials and two surnames.

There are also a number of dates



A door found in the tower of an English castle has been found with more than 50 etchings on it, thought to be carried out between 1789 and 1855.

including 1789, the year of the French Revolution, and 1798.

Pattison, a historian with English

Heritage which manages Dover Castle, said the threat of impending invasion would have made strategically important

Dover a hive of activity with ships filling the harbour and soldiers a constant presence.

Dover is the closest port to continental Europe and has been a prime target for invaders down the centuries.

Researchers believe the "strange and macabre repetition" of hangings carved into the door could depict an actual execution in Dover where they would have provided a form of public entertainment during the late 18th century, attended by thousands of people.

In one of the carvings, however, the figure is dressed in military uniform and one of Napoleon's trademark two-cornered bicorne hats, making it possible it was intended to be the French military and political leader himself.

Also carved into the door is a detailed and accurate depiction of a single-masted sailing ship, thought to be an 8-gun cutter which was in use by Britain's Royal Navy at the time.

"What makes this door such an extraordinary object is that it is a rare

and precious example of the ordinary person making their mark, whether that be simply for the purpose of killing time or wanting to be remembered," Pattison added.

Dover Castle, which is now visited by more than 350,000 people a year, underwent a wide-ranging modernisation in the 1970s to transform it from an ageing medieval castle into a modern military garrison.

With the ultimately unrealised threat of an invasion from the other side of the Channel growing, it became home to thousands of soldiers.

St John's Tower, with its commanding view over the vulnerable northern end of the castle, would have been guarded by between six and 12 men at any one time, leaving them hours to kill time by carving graffiti with knives or possibly bayonets, according to English Heritage.

The door has been painstakingly conserved and features in the castle's new "Dover Castle Under Siege" exhibition.

— AFP



The cultural secrets hidden behind each cup of Turkish coffee

By Khalid al Balushi
@khalid_albalushi94

A lot of people would already have heard of Turkish coffee. It is so popular that it has been recognised by Unesco as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, further boosting its international profile and appeal. Turkish coffee is deeply embedded in Middle Eastern culture and history, often associated with hospitality and social gatherings. This coffee therefore is not just about the beans but refers to the whole ritual of preparation.

Originating from the Middle East, its unique brewing process and rich flavour have endeared it even in Oman. In Turkish coffee preparation, finely ground coffee beans are combined with water and sugar (optional) in a special pot called a cezve (or ibrik). The mixture is heated until it froths, then poured into small cups, often leaving a layer of ground at the bottom.

A quick visit across different cities in Muscat would reveal several shops specialising in Turkish coffee. Over time, it collected its own followers and fans that an event recently held in the capital made it as one of the highlights of the celebration.

During this event, Ahmed Korkut, a teacher at one of the Turkish institutes in the Sultanate of Oman, reminded me of a famous Turkish saying that goes, "If you make me coffee, it is a well-known act that will not be forgotten for 40 years."

At the heart of this celebration held recently, coffee lovers emphasised that Turkish coffee is more than just a drink – it embodies a rich historical and social culture.

With the coffee culture having originated from Yemen, Haji Hanafi, a Turkish teacher who lived in Oman, said, "In 1543, Wali Ozdemir Pasha brought the coffee from Yemen to Istanbul, and he admired its taste."

The traditional process of making Turkish coffee, from grinding the beans to heating and serving, is considered an art form and is cherished for its ritualistic

value. The coffee is used as a symbol of hospitality and social interaction. Additionally, the culture of coffee is present in the lives of Turks, as it is consumed while reading beautiful books and articles at all hours of the day, during chess and backgammon games, and in meetings and conversations. Turkish coffee has left its mark on different strata of social life.

Further explaining how Turkish coffee is deeply embedded in Middle Eastern culture and history, often associated with hospitality and social gatherings, Turkish teachers explained that there is also a form of symbolism in bringing coffee and water together as one prepares Turkish coffee. If a guest drinks water, it is an expression of hunger. But if he drinks coffee, it is an expression of satiety.

In Türkiye, the coffee tradition takes an even more revered form in important events. During weddings, when there's a groom in the house, the tradition of serving coffee takes on a special significance. This moment is crucial, signifying a welcoming and respectful gesture towards the guest. As it was in the past, it was an opportunity to express acceptance or rejection of the proposal.

In the past, before the advent of phones and social networking sites, communication between men and women was challenging due to social norms of modesty. A girl couldn't directly speak to a young man, but once he proposed, she could indicate her acceptance or rejection through a coffee ritual. If she put salt in his coffee cup, it signalled rejection without anyone else knowing. Conversely, if she added sugar, it meant he was accepted.

Nowadays, these connotations have changed, so putting salt in coffee is a joke, meaning that if the suitor drinks a cup of coffee filled with salt, it signifies that he can bear life despite its problems and challenges.

As earlier mentioned, the preparation of Turkish coffee demands precision and skill. Intense espresso is used, prepared in a special pot called a 'cezve,' where coffee is



mixed with water and sugar if desired. It is served in small cups with sugar cubes. This experience provides an opportunity for people to sit together, share moments of conversation, and relish the rich flavour of this iconic beverage.

In a short time, thanks to both the mer-

chants and travellers who came to Istanbul, the taste and fame of Turkish coffee spread first to Europe and then to the whole world.

In Oman, Turkish coffee is a celebrated drink not only to communicate hospitality but also one of the best ways that Middle Eastern culture is shared with the world.