

P13

OIA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO ASSETS REACH RO 12.175 BILLION



P20

KITESURFERS FLOCK TO MASIRAH TO RIDE THE WIND



P11

INDIA WINT20 WORLD CUP



MUSCAT

HIS MAJESTY GREET'S PRESIDENT OF CONGO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his greetings and wishes to the president and people of Congo. — ONA

HM CONDOLENCES TO MOROCCO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to his brother His Majesty King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco on the passing of Her Royal Highness Princesse Lalla Latifa, mother of His Majesty the King. His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the king and the family of the deceased, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest her soul in peace in paradise and to grant her family patience and fortitude. — ONA

72% OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The annual report on digital transformation for 2023, issued by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, revealed key performance metrics. The overall performance of the "Tahwaul" government digital transformation programme reached 53 per cent in 2023. Government entities achieved an average performance of 72 per cent in digital transformation during the same period. Additionally, the governorates attained an average performance of 54 per cent out of 56 government entities, and the governorates participated in evaluating excellence in government digital transformation for 2023. **SEE P3**



The transformation of Dhofar into a green oasis amidst the arid landscape is a testament to nature's wonders, drawing visitors who seek to witness the annual marvel.

PHOTO BY SAID BIN ALI AL MASHAIKHI

DHOFAR'S KHAREEF WEATHER BECKONS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 29

With the onset of Khareef Dhofar, the captivating coastal city of Salalah has begun to welcome an influx of tourists. Drawn by its distinctive climate, which starkly contrasts with the rest of the Arabian Peninsula during the sweltering summer months, visitors arrive to revel in its unique allure. Currently, the cool weather predominantly envelops the mountainous regions, where the crisp, refreshing air provides a stark contrast to the usual heat. Along the coast, the weather remains sunny with a pleasantly moderate level of humidity, offering a perfect escape from the intense sun experienced elsewhere in the region. As the day progresses into the afternoon, temperatures experience a noticeable decline. This transition ushers in a delightful coolness, creating an inviting environment with an average temperature of approximately 25 degrees

Celsius. Such a climate is a rarity in these parts during this time of year, further enhancing Khareef Dhofar's appeal as a prime destination for those seeking respite from the heat. Projections indicate that these favourable weather conditions will persist in the forthcoming days. Anticipated is an increase in fog density over the highlands, which, combined with a general rise in humidity, will contribute to the unique microclimate of the area. This interplay of weather elements is expected to maintain the governorate's cool and refreshing atmosphere, much to the delight of both locals and tourists. The influx of tourists during this period significantly boosts the local economy, as businesses and service providers cater to the diverse needs of international and domestic visitors. Hotels, restaurants and tour operators experience a surge in demand, driving economic growth and fostering a vibrant atmosphere within the city. **TURN TO P2**

Oman an oasis of peace

SUHAIL AL NAHDI
Muscat, June 29

Oman's foreign policy gained the respect of countries and peoples. Oman has become an oasis of peace and a trusted destination to play the role of a mediator to resolve disputes and reach understanding through dialogue. The success of the Sultanate of Oman's policy began from within as the government harnessed the best capabilities to build the people and care for their health, thought and culture and provided them with the means of a dignified life through enacting laws that preserve people's rights in a state of well-established institutions. In light of the changes and events around the world and the conflicts transpiring in the Middle East region, politicians, researchers and specialists in political and security affairs confirm the success of the Sultanate of Oman's policy in dealing with various issues which gained it the trust of governments and peoples as a mediator for peace. Saud bin Ahmed al Barwani, a former ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Iran, says: "The success made by the Sultanate of Oman in resolving the nuclear dispute between Iran, the European countries and America was based on the belief of the late Sultan Qaboos



The policy in dealing with various issues gained Oman the trust of governments and peoples as a mediator for peace

bin Said in the importance of saving the region from a devastating war that would leave nothing behind and the efforts during that period resulted in the avoidance of a third world war. He added that Omani politics always adopts an approach of peace with all countries and embraces a position of non-hostility to anyone which is why Oman has always stood with all the sisterly and friendly countries at an equal distance from all. "The Sultanate of Oman is a neighbouring country to Iran and the relationship between the two countries is strong. **TURN TO P2**

Iran's presidential election heading to runoff

TEHRAN: Masoud Pezeshkian will face Saeed Jalili in Iran's presidential election runoff, authorities said on Saturday, following a vote marred by historically low turnout. Pezeshkian secured 42.4 per cent of the vote, while Jalili, a former nuclear negotiator, came second with 38.6 per cent, according to figures from Iran's elections authority. Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf was next with 13.8 per cent, while the only other candidate, conservative cleric Mostafa Pourmohammadi, got less than one per cent. "None of the candidates could garner the absolute majority of the votes," electoral authority spokesman Mohsen Eslami said. In his first post-election remarks, Pezeshkian thanked his supporters and urged them to vote again next Friday "to save the country from poverty, lies, discrimination and injustice". "I hope your presence will be the basis of a new voice for change in attitude, behaviour, conversation and in the distribution and allocation of



Presidential candidate Masoud Pezeshkian waves to supporters on the day of the presidential election to choose a successor to Ebrahim Raisi following his death in a helicopter crash. — Reuters

resources," he added in a video published on the website of the reformist newspaper Etemad. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had called for a high turnout ahead of Friday's vote. Only slightly more than 40 per cent of the 61 million electorate took part – a record low turnout for the Islamic republic – and more than one million ballots were spoiled. — **SEE ALSO P6**



A session on feminist literature that depicts the daily life of women in Oman and South Korea was also held.

Oman wraps up cultural programme at Seoul Fair

SEOUL: The cultural programme of the Sultanate of Oman concluded at Seoul International Book Fair 2024 in South Korea, on Saturday. The cultural programme included dialogue sessions the first of which entitled 'Omani-Korean Relations 50 Years of Rapprochement and Joint Work', presented by Dr Mohammed bin Khalfan al Yahyaei from the Omani side, and Dr Hee Soo Lee from Hanyang University in South Korea from the Korean side. He is the author of the book 'The Sultanate of Oman: Historical Cooperation and Friendship with the Republic of Korea' which was translated into Arabic to mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani-Korean diplomatic relations. **TURN TO P2**



MILITARY DISCIPLINE PROGRAMME KICKS OFF TODAY

MUSCAT: The Military Discipline Programme hosted by Dhofar Governorate kicks off today (Sunday) and runs until July 24 under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in cooperation with military and security authorities and government institutions.

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) supervises the military training programme while the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) provides air transport for the trainee students. A number of military, security and civil agencies conduct awareness and educational programmes as well as the



comprehensive lecture programme that covers all related aspects.

The programme aims to support national values and enhance cultural, social and sporting patterns while embodying self-discipline and commitment in the individual as well as refining and developing the personality of the Omani youth.

The implementation of the programme comes within the framework of the attention accorded by the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, to develop Omani youth in line with the directives of Oman Vision 2040.

— ONA

Salalah Airport welcomes first direct flight from Baghdad

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 29

In a significant development coinciding with the Khareef Dhofar season, Salalah Airport has welcomed the inaugural direct flight from Baghdad, operated by SalamAir.

This landmark flight carried a delegation of representatives from Iraqi tourism offices and media outlets. They were warmly received by the Assistant Director-General of Heritage and Tourism for Dhofar Governorate, along with several officials from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman Airports and SalamAir.

The visit is strategically timed to promote Khareef Dhofar, a

peak tourist season known for its unique monsoon climate and lush landscapes. The itinerary for the Iraqi delegation includes organised tours of the governorate's prominent tourist and historical sites. Additionally, they will meet with local tourism office representatives to explore opportunities for strengthening relationships and fostering mutual cooperation.

According to the Iraqi News Agency, the new direct flight service operates weekly, transporting 180 passengers per trip.

The Ministry of Transport emphasised that this direct connection eliminates the need for transit stops, streamlining travel between the two countries.

This initiative, coordinated between Iraqi and Omani authorities, is set to enhance tourism and bilateral ties.

Flights will continue on a weekly basis every Friday, with expectations of increased frequency and additional destinations in the near future. Furthermore, direct flights from Muscat to Najaf Airport are anticipated to commence soon, further expanding travel options and connectivity.

This new route not only marks a milestone for Omani-Iraqi aviation relations, but also enhances the accessibility and appeal of Khareef Dhofar to international tourists, promising a boost to the local tourism industry during this vibrant season.

Dhofar's khareef weather beckons

FROM P1

Said Ali Abdullah, one of the visitors of Dhofar, said, "Since my inaugural visit to Khareef Dhofar several years ago, I have been drawn back repeatedly. The enchanting natural beauty, unique ambiance and diverse array of activities collectively compose an unforgettable experience during Khareef Dhofar. Each

visit unveils novel aspects, showcases breathtaking vistas and offers distinctive engagements. On my most recent expedition, I marvelled at the grandeur of Al Mughsail Waterfall, explored Salalah Park and savoured traditional Dhofari cuisine at bustling local markets."

Moreover, the season's unique climatic conditions offer ample opportunities for

outdoor enthusiasts. Hiking in the misty mountains, exploring the lush valleys and enjoying the coastal breezes are just a few of the activities that captivate the adventurous spirit. The combination of natural beauty and favourable weather creates an ideal setting for various outdoor pursuits, ensuring that visitors leave with unforgettable memories.

Oman an oasis of peace and harmony

FROM P1

The relationship has never affected Oman's relationship with the Gulf countries. From my point of view, Iran does not have any hatred for the Arabs despite some differences that emerged throughout history, but at the present time I do not see any Iranian hostility towards the Arabs. Iran cannot be ignored and that the Iranian government and people have great respect for the Sultanate

of Oman which was manifest in all the occasions that brought us together with the Iranians during my stay in Iran," Al Barwani concluded.

Dr Badriyabint Mohammed al Nabhaniyah, a researcher and lecturer in history, said that Oman's relations with its Gulf and regional surroundings are a model to be emulated especially when it comes to the issues that affect regional security. Oman has always positioned itself as a

moderate country and has been clear in its vision towards Gulf and regional files.

Its continuous call to dialogue and understanding is a starting point for resolving any problems that occur in the Gulf and the wider region. This has qualified it to carry out its good efforts to resolve current issues over the past five decades, which have plagued the region with many wars, disputes and transformations.

Al Batinah North OCCI tackles challenges in stationery sector

SUHAR: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Al Batinah North convened to discuss the challenges facing the stationery and library sector, focusing on Omanisation, censorship and illegal trade.

The meeting, chaired by Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Branch's Board of Directors, included representatives from various government agencies such as the Directorate-General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in the Governorate, the Directorate-General of Labour, Al Batinah North Municipality, and the Directorate-General of Consumer Protection.



Bookstore owners highlighted the major obstacles in the sector, including Omanisation, censorship and illegal trade, which create unfair competition for merchants in the library and stationery sector. They also raised concerns about direct supply from abroad by some institutions.

The attendees emphasised

the need to organise the sector's operations and streamline procedures. Eng Said bin Ali al Abri assured that the issues and demands raised by library owners would be forwarded to the relevant authorities for necessary action, stressing the importance of unified efforts to achieve the desired results.

SAF'S SHOOTING TEAM WINS AT UK ARMY CHAMPIONSHIPS



LONDON: The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Shooting Team has made remarkable achievements in the British army and federation shooting championships which were held in Paisley and Pirbright in the United Kingdom with the participation of several teams from countries around the world from June 14 to 27.

The SAF shooting team



clinched 18 cups and 20 medals in various shooting events.

In the individual competitions, Captain Majid bin Mohammed al Salmani won the King's Medal at the international shooters level which saw the participation of international shooters for the first time in the history of this championship. Warrant Officer 2 Sultan bin Rashid al

Shamli won the Canard Cup, the Advance Competition Cup (500-100), the (Standing) Competition Cup, and the Steven Cup. Sergeant 1 Hamid bin Nasser al Maamari won the Rural Shooting Cup. The Sultan's Armed Forces Shooting Team returned to the country after participating in the shooting championships.

— ONA

OMAN WRAPS UP CULTURAL PROGRAMME AT SEOUL BOOK FAIR

FROM P1

The second session dealt with the feminist literature that depicts the daily life of women in the Sultanate of Oman and South Korea with the participation of Omani novelist Jokha al Harthy and Korean novelist Eun Hee Kyung.

The Omani cultural programme also saw the presentation of a working paper entitled "The Reality of Translation in the Sultanate of Oman and Possible Prospects for Cooperation between



the Arabic and Korean Languages' presented by Dr Hilal bin Said al Hajri in the presence of a number of intellectuals, writers, authors and stakeholders from South Korea.

The Omani pavilion at the Seoul International Book Fair witnessed the signing of the novel Celestial Bodies written by the Omani novelist Jokha al Harthy, and translated into the Korean language following its publication in the Korean capital, Seoul.

— ONA



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Govt entities achieve 72% of digital transformation goals

MUSCAT: The annual report on digital transformation for 2023, issued by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, revealed key performance metrics.

The overall performance of the ‘Tahwaul’ government digital transformation programme reached 53 per cent in 2023. Government Entities achieved an average performance of 72 per cent in digital transformation during the same period.

Additionally, the governorates attained an average performance of 54 per cent out of 56 Government Entities, and the governorates participated in evaluating excellence in government digital transformation for 2023.

The report elaborated that 48 per cent of Government Entities achieved above-average performance (green level) out of the total number assessed for excellence in government digital transformation in 2023.

The Entities that excelled in digital transformation performance for 2023 include the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, Muscat Governorate, ROP, Public Authority for

Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, National Centre for Statistics and Information, Public Authority for Social Insurance, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Labour.

Furthermore, 48 per cent of Entities achieved an average performance level (yellow), while 4 per cent of the assessed Entities performed below average (red level). The report also discussed the efforts made by governorates to achieve digital transformation.

These included launching the first set of digital services for the governorates of Musandam, Al Dhahirah, and Al Dakhiliyah, as well as completing consultancy studies projects about digital transformation in the Al Batinah South, Al Wusta, and Al Buraimi governorates.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, and Chairman of the Technical Committee for the Government Digital Transformation Programme 2021-2025, explained the



Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani

significant factors driving Oman’s strategic shift towards digital transformation.

He pointed improved governance, policy development, national guidance frameworks, and dedicated controls and standards for digital transformation.

He emphasised the readiness of targeted Government Entities to embrace digital environments, leadership awareness of the importance of digital



Eng Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al Kharousi

transformation and institutional change management, and the ministry’s role in providing oversight, support, and guidance across various areas.

Dr Ali further emphasised that the advancements can also be attributed to readiness assessment, measuring digital transformation progress, and the maturity of digital services within Government Entities based on best practices. Supporting and

Dedicated digital transformation teams within Government Entities tasked with implementing and expediting digital transformation plans have played a pivotal role

empowering Entities to develop digital services and solutions and proposing innovative approaches are also critical factors.

He further explained that ‘Manjam’ labs for simplifying government procedures aim to enhance the user journey in accessing government services. This involves a comprehensive approach tailored to different beneficiary needs, ensuring an improved and streamlined experience from initial engagement to final service delivery.

Eng Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al Kharousi, Director-General of Digital Transformation at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, emphasised the ministry’s dedication to continuous improvement within the Government Digital Transformation Programme 2021-

2025.

The report highlighted examples of services that were digitalised in 2023, including updating initial approval for work permits, updating investor data, correcting second/third names along with tribal affiliations in official documents, terminating contracts for Omani workers, requesting aid in cases of damage, death grants, first-time vehicle registration, transferring vehicle ownership for individuals/Entities, transferring non-Omani workforce services, requesting assistance in furnishing a residence for individuals or families, registering/modifying employment contracts for non-Omani workers, registering/modifying lease agreements, updating commercial agencies, requesting legal opinions, seeking artisan support, and renewing/termination usufruct contracts.

— ONA

شانغريلا بر الجصة، مسقط

SHANGRI-LA

BARR AL JISSAH MUSCAT

شانغريلا الحصن، مسقط

SHANGRI-LA

AL HUSN MUSCAT



PHILIPPE KRONBERG APPOINTED AS
RESORT GENERAL MANAGER FOR
SHANGRI-LA MUSCAT, OMAN HOTELS

Shangri-La Muscat is delighted to announce the appointment of Philippe Kronberg as the new Resort General Manager for Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn hotels, effective 24th June 2024.

Philippe Kronberg, a French-Australian dual citizen, brings a wealth of experience to his new role in Muscat. He will oversee the strategic direction and daily operations of the resorts’ 640 suites and rooms, spread across three distinctive hotels on 124 acres along the vibrant shores of the Gulf of Oman.

Joining from Shangri-La Sydney, Philippe is embarking on his third General Manager position within the Shangri-La Group. With over three decades in luxury hospitality, his global career spans roles in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the UK, and Turkey. Philippe completed a Diploma in Hotel Management at the renowned Swiss hospitality school ‘Les Roches’ before beginning his professional journey at London’s famous Ritz Hotel.

He has since demonstrated impressive hands-on leadership and commercial acumen; in Sydney, his leadership led to the hotel’s highest revenue since its opening. Philippe also holds an MBA from the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales and served on the board of Australia’s Tourism Accommodation Association from 2019 to 2023, gaining valuable insights into the industry’s relationship with government.

Philippe is committed to sustainable practices and adherence to compliance directives across all departments. His extensive experience makes him uniquely qualified to lead both Oman’s sole adult-only resort and its beloved family beach resort.

“I am excited to start my journey in Oman, with a talented and dedicated team of hospitality professionals to reinforce the complex’s success and attract a wider international audience. Oman is a hidden gem of the Middle East that deserves wider recognition in the luxury travel sphere. This will be

a wonderful opportunity to expand my experience in the Gulf states,” said Philippe Kronberg.

“The resort is at an exciting point in its growth and development. I anticipate plenty of opportunities to enhance revenue streams, devise strategies alongside the commercial team, and amplify our guest satisfaction while maintaining the standards of excellence Shangri-La is renowned for, across both Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn.”

Outside his professional life, Philippe, a former paratrooper, holds a private pilot’s license and enjoys aerobatic flying. A family man with two teenage children, he is also dedicated to charitable causes through fundraising and outreach initiatives. His adventurous spirit and sense of responsibility align with the ethos of the Shangri-La Group, which combines luxury with sustainability and local elegance to provide guests with their own personal Shangri-La.





Keep reading to avoid ‘summer slide’

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

AS the school students are on long summer vacation, many embark on fun-filled activities and events. However, it is important to keep children’s minds active during this period and encourage them to engage in beneficial activities that enrich their culture and world of knowledge. Hence, reading is the gateway to the world of knowledge.

Amidst the diverse summer activities, let’s not forget the importance of encouraging children to read and creating a home environment that stimulates them to explore books and turn them into companions on their journey of learning.

Reading enriches children’s imagination, develops their language skills and broadens their horizons. It also helps them acquire essential life skills such as focus, patience and critical thinking.

Many studies have shown that children who read regularly during the summer maintain their language and cognitive skills and reduce the risk of a ‘summer slide’ that affects some students after the school year ends.

Many educators and parents have emphasised the importance of reading for children during the summer, pointing to its significant benefits for various aspects of their personality.

Abdullah al Maqbali, a parent, shared his experience with reading and his tips for encouraging children to read during summer vacations. He referred to reading as food for the mind and a gateway to the world. He stressed that reading helps children develop their language and thinking skills, broaden their horizons, and stimulate their imagination and creativity.

Among the most practical tips Al Maqbali offered to encourage children to read during the summer is to

provide a suitable reading environment by dedicating a quiet corner in your home equipped with a variety of eye-catching books.

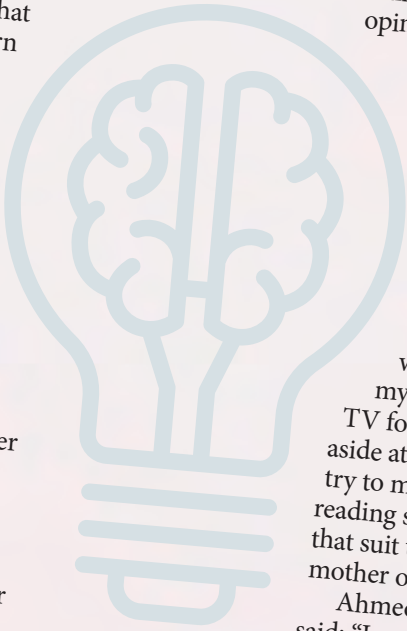
“Choose books that are appropriate for children. Parents can take children to the library or bookstore to choose books that spark their passion,” he said while pointing out that reading aloud to children and sharing the joy of reading with them can make reading more fun. Al Maqbali stressed the importance of discussing what you read with them by talking to them about the content of the books and asking them questions that stimulate their thinking and encourage them to express their opinions.

He also suggested making reading a family activity by setting aside a specific time each day to read together as a family as well as rewarding them with gifts or privileges to encourage them more.

Many parents say there is a need to strike a balance between reading and other activities that children want to engage in, such as video games, watching television, and others. “I allow my children to play video games and watch TV for a limited time, but I make sure to set aside at least an hour each day for reading. I try to make reading an enjoyable activity by reading stories with them or choosing books that suit their interests.” Maryam al Balushi, a mother of two children, said.

Ahmed al Yaqoubi, an educational specialist, said: “I encourage my children to read by linking it to prizes and rewards. For example, I give them a point for each book they read, and when they collect a certain number of points, they can get a gift or a special privilege.”

The Sultanate of Oman provides many libraries that offer a suitable environment for children to spend enjoyable time with books. These libraries are distinguished by their attractive designs and the presence of a variety of books that suit all ages and interests. The most prominent of these is the Children’s Public Library.





Unveiling Oman’s economic hub



DUQM: Nestled between Muscat and Dhofar, Duqm is emerging as a vibrant hub for tourism, propelled by its natural splendor and strategic coastal location overlooking the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.

The region’s allure is amplified by its pristine beaches, featuring soft white sands and unique rock formations resembling natural umbrellas, providing a serene backdrop for leisure activities year-round.

Duqm’s moderate climate further enhances its appeal as a year-round destination for

Duqm has several ongoing investments exceeding two million Omani riyals in tourism projects

travelers. This geographical advantage, coupled with recent infrastructural advancements such as Duqm Airport and an extensive network of roads, has spurred rapid development in hospitality. Today, Duqm boasts a variety of hotels, resorts, and dining options catering to diverse traveler preferences.

Engineer Abdullah bin Salem Al Hakamani, Director of the Technical Affairs Department at the Special Economic Zone in Duqm, told Oman News Agency (ONA) about the ongoing investments exceeding two million Omani riyals in tourism projects. These initiatives encompass vital infrastructure enhancements such as upgraded roads, expanded utilities, and modern drainage systems.

Notably, plans include a dual coastal road to facilitate access to the multi-purpose fishing port and a redesigned tourist



ENGINEER ABDULLAH BIN SALEM AL HAKAMANI

area aligned with contemporary urban planning principles. With over 20 hotel facilities planned or operational, Duqm is poised to accommodate a growing influx of visitors.

There are more than 2,500 rooms provided by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, and they vary between one- and four-star hotels, luxury hotel apartments, regular hotel apartments, and residential units.

As Duqm gears up for increased autumn tourism, efforts are underway to enhance visitor experiences through improved signage, accommodations, and recreational facilities.

This proactive approach underscores Duqm’s commitment to becoming a premier destination for leisure and business travelers seeking an enriching and unforgettable experience amidst Oman’s coastal treasures. — ONA



Airports in Oman see surge in passengers from Sudan

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman reported an increase in the number of inbound and outbound passengers from the Republic of Sudan.

The number of Sudanese nationals entering the nation in March 2024 was 16,015, up 569 per cent from 2,395 in March 2023, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of outbound passengers from Sudan also increased by 304 per cent, from 1,734 in March 2023 to 7,014 in March 2024.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) recently issued approval for Sudanese Tarco Airlines to operate three flights per week between Muscat and Port Sudan, from June 19.

In December 2023, Muscat International

Airport welcomed the first flight of Badr Airlines from Port Sudan International Airport, which operates two weekly flights between the two cities.

Badr Airlines is based in Khartoum, Sudan, operating cargo and passenger air services for humanitarian aid missions and chartered VIP flights. Its main base is Khartoum International Airport. Apart from Muscat, the airline operates regular flights to Dubai, Cairo, Jeddah, Istanbul, Riyadh, Adis Ababa and Riyadh.

Among other nationalities, inbound passengers from Bangladesh dropped by 53.9 per cent, while there was an increase of 46.8 per cent from Iran, 3.7 per cent from Egypt, 6.3 per cent from India, and 5.3 per cent from Pakistan.



White Coat ceremony for Pharmacy graduates held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

42 pharmacy students graduate from National University

MUSCAT: The National University of Science and Technology, through its College of Pharmacy, celebrated the graduation of 42 male and female students in a white coat ceremony held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

The event was graced by Dr Ahmed bin Salim bin Saif al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation.

Dr Khalid bin Ahmed al Balushi, Dean of the College of Pharmacy, emphasised the significance of the white coat, symbolising the professionalism of pharmacists. He noted that this ceremony marks the beginning of the students’ journey into medical professionalism and their role in serving the community.

In his address, Dr Al Balushi highlighted that wearing the white



coat and taking the pharmacy oath is a purposeful tradition, indicating the student’s transition to the clinical years of their pharmacy programme. This tradition underscores the importance of providing clinical

service and patient care, foundational pillars of the pharmacy profession. He urged the students to persevere, emphasising the importance of training, hard work, patience and striving for excellence. Dr Al Balushi also mentioned that the College of Pharmacy has enhanced its training connections both within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Nidaa Wadi, pharmacist Halima al Zadjali, and Dr Abdul Salam Nazmi conducted the white coat ceremony for the graduates.

The event also included the honouring of outstanding students and those on the Dean’s List, as well as recognising the ceremony’s sponsors and various training institutions. A souvenir was presented to the ceremony’s patron. — ONA

Drug awareness seminar held in Taqah

TAQAH: An awareness seminar titled ‘The Scourge of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and Their Impact on Society’ was held at the Omani Women’s Association headquarters in the Wilayat of Taqah. Organised by the Directorate General of Social Development in Dhofar Governorate in cooperation with the Health Committee, the seminar aimed to unite community efforts and relevant authorities in combating drug abuse and educating families about its dangers.

Ahmed bin Muslim Tabuk, a health nurse, presented a working paper on the dangers of various types of drugs and the consequences of addiction. He also reviewed the achievements



of the National Committee, treatment services, and preventive measures against drug use. The event featured a mobile exhibition by the Royal Oman Police, showcasing

models illustrating the dangers and effects of drug addiction. The seminar was sponsored by Shaikh Tariq bin Khalid al Hinai, Wali of Taqah.

— ONA

Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
Re-tender 86/2024	Implementing a professional diploma program in the field of autism spectrum disorder based on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals	Companies specialized in the field of services (education, training and human resources development services) registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent or first grade	Thursday 11-7-2024 02:00 PM	Thursday 25-7-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
244/2024	Providing an intelligent interaction system based on artificial intelligence	Companies specialized in the field of information technology services and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 11-7-2024 02:00 PM	Thursday 25-7-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>**). On **Thursday 27/6/2024**.

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

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

www.mosd.gov.om

Iran’s presidential election heading to runoff

TEHRAN: Iran’s presidential candidate Masoud Pezeshkian, will face Saeed Jalili in a runoff, authorities said on Saturday, following a vote marred by historically low turnout.

Pezeshkian secured 42.4 per cent of the vote, while Jalili, a former nuclear negotiator, came second with 38.6 per cent, according to figures from Iran’s elections authority.

Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf was next with 13.8 per cent, while the only other candidate, conservative cleric Mostafa Pourmohammadi, got less than one per cent.

“None of the candidates could garner the absolute majority of the votes,” electoral authority spokesman Mohsen Eslami said.

In his first post-election remarks, Pezeshkian thanked his supporters and urged them to vote again next Friday “to save the country from poverty, lies, discrimination and injustice”.

“I hope your presence will be the basis of a new voice for



Vehicles move past a billboard displaying the faces of the six presidential candidates, in the Iranian capital Tehran. – AFP

change in attitude, behaviour, conversation and in the distribution and allocation of resources,” he added in a video published on the website of the reformist newspaper Etamad.

Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had called for a high turnout ahead of Friday’s vote. Only slightly more than 40 per cent of the 61 million electorate took part — a record

low turnout for the Islamic republic — and more than one million ballots were spoiled.

The poll had been scheduled to take place in 2025 but was brought forward by the death

“

The presidential election was conducted in complete security, in perfect health, with very serious competition and with the valuable presence of people at the ballot boxes

AHMAD VAHIDI
Iranian Interior Minister

of ultraconservative president Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash last month.

The Guardian Council, which vets candidates, had originally approved six contenders. But a day ahead of the election, two of them — the mayor of Tehran Alireza Zakani and Raisi’s vice president Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi — dropped out. After the final results were

released, they both asked their supporters to vote for Jalili in the July 5 runoff.

Ghalibaf followed suit, asking “all revolutionary forces and supporters” to get behind Jalili’s bid for the presidency.

Friday’s vote took place amid heightened regional tensions over the Gaza war, a dispute with the West over Iran’s nuclear programme.

On Saturday, the newspaper Sazandegi ran the headline “Long live hope” on its front page, while the Iran daily hailed what it called a “strong” turnout.

Regardless of the result, Iran’s next president will be in charge of applying state policy outlined by the supreme leader, who wields ultimate authority in the country.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said on Friday’s vote went smoothly. “The presidential election was conducted in complete security, in perfect health, with very serious competition and with the valuable presence of people at the ballot boxes,” he said. — AFP

Fighting rages north Gaza as thousands displaced

GAZA: Explosions, air strikes and gunfire rattled northern Gaza on Saturday, the third day of an Israeli military operation that has uprooted tens of thousands of Palestinians and compounded what the UN called “unbearable” living conditions in the territory.

A correspondent reported ongoing explosions from the Shujaiya area near Gaza City, with a resident saying bodies were visible on the streets.

The armed wings of the Palestinian groups said on Saturday they were engaged in ongoing fighting with Israeli forces in the area.

Israel’s military, meanwhile, said its operations were continuing in Shujaiya where fighting “above and below the ground” left a “large number” of dead people.

A resurgence of fighting in the area comes months after Israel had declared the command structure of Hamas militants dismantled in northern Gaza.

Last Sunday Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the “intense phase” of the war was winding down after almost nine months, but experts see a potentially prolonged next



Displaced Palestinians evacuate the Mawassi area on the outskirts of southwestern Khan Younis. – AFP

phase. The Gaza war has also led to soaring tensions on Israel’s northern border with Lebanon, leading Iran on Saturday to warn of an “obliterating” war if Israel attacked Lebanon.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 37,834 people, mostly civilians, according to data from the health ministry in Gaza. It reported at least 69 deaths over the previous 48 hours. Mohammed Harara, 30, said he and his family, young and old, felt as though they would become part of that toll.

He said they fled from their home in Shujaiya with nothing,

“due to the bombardment by Israeli planes, tanks and drones” that they barely survived.

“We couldn’t carry anything from the house. We left the food, flour, canned goods, mattresses, and blankets,” Harara said.

The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA estimated that “about 60,000 to 80,000 people were displaced” from the area this week.

Images on Saturday showed men moving belongings on a donkey cart. Some people were pushed in wheelchairs. Children walked with backpacks past piles of dusty debris. — AFP

5 bombs found hidden in iconic Iraq mosque



Muslims gathered to pray in the courtyard of the Al-Nouri mosque in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. – AFP file photo

MOSUL: A United Nations agency said it has discovered five bombs in a wall of Mosul’s iconic Al-Nouri mosque, planted years ago by IS group, during restoration work in the northern Iraqi city.

Five “large-scale explosive devices, designed to trigger a massive destruction of the site,” were found in the southern wall of the prayer hall by the UNESCO team working at the site, a representative for the agency said late on Friday.

Mosul’s Al-Nouri mosque and the adjacent leaning minaret nicknamed Al-Hadba or the “hunchback,” which dates from the 12th century, were destroyed during the battle to retake the city from IS. Iraq’s army accused IS, which occupied Mosul for three years, of planting explosives at the site and

blowing it up.

UNESCO, the UN cultural agency, has been working to restore the mosque and other architectural heritage sites in the city, much of it reduced to rubble in the battle to retake it in 2017.

“The Iraqi armed forces immediately secured the area and the situation is now fully under control,” UNESCO added.

One bomb was removed, but four other 1.5-kilogram devices “remain connected to each other” and are expected to be cleared in the coming days, it said.

“These explosive devices were hidden inside a wall, which was specially rebuilt around them: it explains why they could not be discovered when the site was cleared by Iraqi forces” in 2020, the agency said.

Iraqi General Tahseen al-Khafaji, spokesperson for the Joint Operations Command of various Iraqi forces, confirmed the discovery of “several explosive devices from IS group in Al-Nouri mosque.”

He said provincial deminers requested help from the Defence Ministry in Baghdad to defuse the remaining munitions because of their “complex manufacturing”.

It was from Al-Nouri mosque that Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the then-leader of IS, proclaimed the establishment of the group’s “caliphate” in July 2014.

The group took over large swathes of territory in Iraq and neighbouring Syria, which they ruled with brutality. Iraqi forces backed by a US-led coalition drove IS out of Mosul in 2017. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

EU chief in Egypt for joint investment conference

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen was in Cairo on Saturday to kick off a two-day investment conference, where deals potentially worth over \$42 billion are expected to be signed.

“At this conference, European companies are signing over 20 new deals ... which are worth over 40 billion euros,” von der Leyen said at the meeting in the Egyptian capital. The conference comes after a 7.4 billion-euro EU funding package was signed in March. Macrofinancial aid,



a series of medium and long term loans, “constitutes the large majority of the 7.4 billion euros in EU financial support under the partnership,” von der Leyen said. — AFP

ATHENS

Wildfire fanned by strong wind rages near Athens

Dozens of firefighters were battling on Saturday to stop a wildfire from spreading to a nature reserve in a mountainous forest area on the outskirts of the Greek capital.

About 80 firefighters assisted by 10 water-carrying planes were trying to control the fire on Mount Parnitha, some 20 km north of Athens, which was being fuelled by gale-force winds.

A thick cloud of smoke could be seen in the sky over



Athens, but a local governor said no homes were threatened by the fire. “The situation is stable so far,” a deputy governor for part of Athens, Costas Zobos said. — Reuters

KATHMANDU

Nepal landslides kill nine, including 3 children

At least nine people, including three children, were killed after heavy monsoon rains in west Nepal triggered landslides, an official said on Saturday.

Five members of a family were sleeping when their house was washed away by a landslide in Malika village in Gulmi district, about 250 km west of Kathmandu, according to Dizan Bhattarai, a spokesman for the National Disaster Rescue and Reduction Management Authority. In neighbouring Syangja district,



one woman and her three year old daughter died in a landslide that swept away their house, while in Baglung district, which borders Gulmi, two people were killed in another landslide. — Reuters

Russia sends waves of troops to the front



Julian E. Barnes

The writer is a reporter covering the US intelligence agencies and international security matters



Eric Schmitt

The writer is a national security correspondent for The New York Times based in Washington



Marc Santora

The writer has been reporting from Ukraine since the beginning of the war with Russia

May was a particularly deadly month for the Russian army in Ukraine, with an average of more than 1,000 of its soldiers injured or killed each day, according to US, British and other Western intelligence agencies.

But despite its losses, Russia is recruiting 25,000 to 30,000 new soldiers a month — roughly as many as are exiting the battlefield, US officials said. That has allowed its army to keep sending wave after wave of troops at Ukrainian defences, hoping to overwhelm them and break through the trench lines.

At times, this approach has proved effective, bringing the Russian army victories in Avdiivka and Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine. But Ukrainian and Western officials say the tactics were less successful this spring as Russia tried to take land near the city of Kharkiv.

American officials said that Russia achieved a critical objective of President Vladimir Putin, creating a buffer zone along the border to make it more difficult for the Ukrainians to strike into the country.

But the drive did not threaten Kharkiv and was ultimately stopped by Ukrainian defences, according to Western officials.

“President Putin and Moscow have really tried to make big gains, to break through the front lines this spring,” Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato Secretary-General, said in an interview with *The New York Times* editorial board. “They tried and they failed. They made very small gains, and they are paying a very high price.”

Russian casualties have spiked at other times, especially during the assaults on Avdiivka and Bakhmut. But the assaults on those cities were spread out over several months. The push in May, both outside Kharkiv and along the eastern front, involved more intense periods of Russian wave attacks. British military intelligence analysts said Russia’s casualties in May, which they put at an average of 1,200 a day, were the highest of the war.

The fighting last month decimated the town of Vovchansk, about 40 miles from Kharkiv, where Ukrainian and Russian troops are engaged in a grueling battle for control.

Russian soldiers have said on Telegram, the social media and messaging platform, that their units are suffering high casualties. Some say their ranks are being cut down by drones, machine-gun fire and artillery barrages.

Russia’s use of infantry in wave attacks reflects one of its advantages in the war: Its population is much larger than Ukraine’s, giving it a bigger pool of potential recruits.

But the casualties have forced Russia to ship new recruits to Ukraine relatively quickly, meaning that the soldiers sent to the front are poorly trained.

The lack of structured training and the need to commit new recruits to combat operations have limited Russia’s ability to generate more capable units. It also increases casualties.

Ubiquitous drones have made it easy for both sides



A heavily damaged residential neighbourhood in Marinka, in the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

to spot and target enemy forces. And mines and cluster munitions make movement across open ground a nearly suicidal endeavour.

US estimates of casualties in the war are based on satellite imagery, communication intercepts, social media and news media dispatches from reporters, as well as official reporting from Russia and Ukraine. But such estimates vary, even within the US government.

Reliable estimates of Ukraine’s casualties are more difficult to come by. Ukrainian officials guard those numbers carefully. Several US officials insist they do not have an accurate account. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine has said that 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in the first two years of the war, but American officials say that number appears to understate Ukraine’s losses.

Russia conducted a partial mobilisation in September 2022, which led to tens of thousands of young men fleeing the country. But Western intelligence analysts say Russia will not need to conduct another such mobilisation or draft this year.

Russia appears to be able to sustain its current campaign by offering financial incentives to recruits,

drawing on convicts and bringing in some Russian mercenaries from Africa.

But the major question for this year will be whether Russia’s current strategy can best the Ukrainian military, which is finding its defensive footing. Arms and ammunition from a new \$60 billion US aid package are finally reaching the front lines, and Ukrainian commanders are no longer having to ration rounds. Russia still outguns Ukraine, but not by as much.

Ukraine has shifted its posture, building fortifications and laying minefields to slow the Russian advance. War favours the defender, and Ukraine is focusing on holding its lines, American officials said.

Ukraine has still been able to use longer-range US weapons to strike into Russia because of a policy shift by the Biden administration that allows the Ukrainian military to use US missiles to strike military targets just over the border.

But for all of Ukraine’s success around Kharkiv, there are more challenges ahead. In the weeks to come, US and Western officials expect the fighting to shift back to the east and the south, as Russia continues to appear willing to expend forces to make incremental gains.

The vanishing islands that failed to vanish



Raymond Zhong

The writer is a reporter focusing on climate and environmental issues for The New York Times

On a wisp of land in the Indian Ocean, two hops by plane and one bumpy speedboat ride from the nearest continent, the sublime blue waves lapping at the bone-white sand are just about all that breaks the stillness of a hot, windless afternoon.

The very existence of low-slung tropical islands seems improbable, a glitch. A nearly seamless meeting of land and sea, peeking up like an illusion above the violent oceanic expanse, they are among the most marginal environments humans have ever called home.

And indeed, when the world began paying attention to global warming decades ago, these islands, which form atop coral reefs in clusters called atolls, were quickly identified as some of the first places climate change might ravage in their entirety. As the ice caps melted and the seas crept higher, these accidents of geologic history were bound to be corrected and the tiny islands returned to watery oblivion.

Then, not very long ago, researchers began sifting through aerial images and found something startling. They looked at a couple dozen islands first, then several hundred, and by now close to 1,000. They found that over the past few decades, the islands’ edges had wobbled this way and that, eroding here, building there. By and large, though, their area hadn’t shrunk. In some cases, it was the

opposite: They grew. The seas rose, and the islands expanded with them.

Scientists have come to understand some but not all of the reasons for this. Which is why a team of them recently converged in the Maldives, on an island they’d spend weeks outfitting with instruments and sensors and cameras.

They were there to learn more about how the steady collision of blue waves and white sand does surprising and seemingly magical things to coastlines, both destroying land and extending it. Really, though, they were trying to answer a bigger question: If atoll nations aren’t facing certain and imminent erasure, then what are they facing? For having a future is not the same thing as having a secure future.

Swaying palms, unspoiled beaches and abundant sunshine are the main draws for most visitors to atolls. Not for scientists. No, to understand what really beguiles them about these islands, you need to take a dive into the surrounding sea. Or you need to gaze down from a plane. Or, for the very best view of all, you should really find a way to peer back into the past.

There, you would see the island volcanoes that once stood in the atolls’ place. Fast-forward a bit, enough to let the tectonic plates shift, and you would see the volcanoes start to cool and subside. As they sank, corals would colonise their flanks, growing higher



Curt Storlazzi, a coastal researcher with the US Geological Survey, installs a device to measure currents in the waters off Dhigulaabadhoo Island in the Maldives.

Researchers found that over the past few decades, the islands’ edges had wobbled this way and that, eroding here, building there

and higher. In time, the volcanoes would be no more and all you’d see was the ringlike reefs, each one encircling a lagoon. Where the reefs poked up high enough, wind and waves would toss up sand and rubble, forming slender islets.

To understand what had happened to the atolls since this acceleration began, two researchers, Arthur Webb and Paul Kench, decided to look down at them from above. The scientists collected aerial photos of 27 Pacific islands from the middle of the 20th century. Then, they compared them to recent satellite images. “I’m not sure we really knew what we would find,” Kench recalled.

Webb and Kench’s study, which came out in 2010, inspired other scientists to hunt for more old photos and conduct further analysis. The patterns they’ve uncovered in recent years are remarkably consistent across the 1,000 or so islands they’ve studied: Some shrank, others grew. Many, however, were stable. These studies have also added to the intrigue by revealing another pattern: Islands in ocean regions where sea level rise is fastest generally haven’t eroded more than those elsewhere. The issue is whether people can wait. Whether their needs for modern services, for better lives, will lead them to demand sea walls and breakwaters and land reclamation, the very things that could diminish the islands’ natural resilience. Or whether they will simply leave.

The man who believes he is being followed



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Ahmed (not his real name) is in his late twenties, and worked at a private company for the past 4 years. He believes that someone is always watching him.

His family tried to reassure him and check for evidence, but he kept saying that the people watching him were part of a “highly trained organisation”.

When asked why they are watching him specifically he would not answer. At work, he would be very vigilant going through the surveillance system at the end of every working day looking for the person he believes is following him.

A few months back he got engaged and started to believe that his fiancé was “a member of the organisation following him” so he decided to end the relationship.

This alerted the family to seek help from a psychiatrist. Talking with Ahmed was not easy as he believed strongly that he was being followed and would try to dismiss any attempt to reason with him.

In the above example, Ahmed appears to suffer from what is known as delusional disorder which is a mental health condition where a person has persistent, false beliefs (delusions) that aren’t based in reality and not shared by other members of the community.

These beliefs can last for a long time yet in most cases they do not affect the person’s life. This is different from schizophrenia where a person has delusions and hallucinations (hearing voices that do not exist) which leads to impairment in his daily activities.

Delusions may involve situations that can occur in real life like being followed, poisoned, infected or loved at a distance. Or they may be very unlikely to occur, like the person who believes that he has no heart or internal organs or that he was abused by aliens.

Sometimes a delusion is not easy to detect because the person can convince those around him and ‘brainwash’ others to follow him or her, which we often see in some cults.

In 1970 a Saudi man called Juhayman al Otaibi led the Grand Mosque seizure in Mecca

‘DELUSIONS ARE PERSISTENT, FALSE BELIEFS THAT ARE NOT BASED IN REALITY AND NOT SHARED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY’

as he believed that the Mahdi, a messianic figure in Islamic eschatology, had arrived in the form of his brother-in-law, Muhammad bin Abdullah al Qahtani. Juhayman and his group aimed to proclaim Al Qahtani as the Mahdi and sought to overthrow the Saudi regime.

They managed to convince around 200-300 people to follow them to take control of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. They pretended to join the early morning prayers then used weapons for a siege that lasted for two weeks and hundreds of people were killed. Although it is difficult to say that Juhayman had mental illness as there is no record of him being assessed by a psychiatrist, we can conclude from the belief he had and the way he acted by killing fellow Muslims in a holy place that he may have suffered from a dangerous delusion.

The same could be said about some cult leaders who claim to have religious powers and end up killing their followers. Finally, people need to be aware that delusional beliefs can drive different forms of destructive behaviours and think before following other’s ideologies.

Sudan faces famine risk in 14 areas: global hunger monitor

There is a realistic chance of famine in 14 areas across Sudan if the war that began in April last year escalates, a global monitor said, in a sharply worsening hunger crisis that the World Food Programme called the world’s largest.

The areas listed by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) as at risk of famine are those that have seen the heaviest fighting: the capital Khartoum, the regions of Darfur and Kordofan, and El Gezira state.

It said the findings marked a “stark and rapid deterioration of the food-security situation” in Sudan since December, and the worst levels of hunger observed in the country since the IPC was formed 20 years ago.

According to the assessment, the number of people experiencing a hunger crisis rose by 45 per cent to 25.6 million, or more than half the population, in the lean season lasting to September, when less harvested food is available.

Some 8.5 million people - nearly a fifth of the population - face food shortages that could result in acute malnutrition and death or require emergency coping strategies. As previously reported, some 756,000 people are projected to be in “catastrophe”, the most severe level of extreme hunger, up from zero in December.

“This disaster is man-made and was preventable,” Mohammed Qazilbash, Sudan country director for humanitarian group Plan International, said in a statement.

“Our time to act was six months ago - it is unconscionable that there are now more than 8 million people on the brink of famine.”

War between Sudan’s army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted more than 14 months ago in the capital, and quickly spread to other parts of the country.

It has triggered ethnically-driven violence in the western region of Darfur, caused the world’s biggest internal displacement crisis and split control of the country between the rival camps.

A hunger crisis, which the WFP said on Thursday was the worst in the world, has already pushed some Sudanese to eat leaves and soil. A Reuters report last week included analysis of satellite imagery that showed cemeteries expanding fast as starvation and disease spread.

The IPC is a collaboration that includes UN agencies, national governments and aid groups, and is the main global system for measuring the severity of food crises. — Reuters



Katie Rogers

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

Jill Biden could make or break Biden’s campaign. She says she’s all in

President Joe Biden knew immediately after stepping off the stage in Atlanta on Thursday night that the debate had gone wrong.

In those first stricken moments after a raspy, rambling and at times incoherent performance, he turned to his wife, Jill Biden.

Whatever was going to happen next in Joe Biden’s last presidential race, after perhaps the worst moment of his long political life, was always going to come down to her. His wife of 47 years had entered his life all those decades ago, reluctant to get into politics but fully embracing his dreams and his belief that he would one day reach the White House.

Now, her 81-year-old husband looked at her after a disastrous 90 minutes onstage.

The First Lady’s message to him was clear: They’d been counted out before, she was all in, and he — they — would stay in the race. Her thinking, according to people close to her, was that it was a bad night. And bad nights end.

“To say they’ve been in foxholes together doesn’t even begin to explain their bond,” said Elizabeth Alexander, the First Lady’s communications director, who has been with Joe Biden since his Senate days.

So Jill Biden spent the 24 hours after the debate putting her decades as a political spouse to the test, projecting confidence and normalcy while effusively praising her husband. But, like the president, she is an intuitive political messenger who can sense the mood of a crowd. She knows that along with the cheering supporters, there are legions of people suddenly accusing her of forcing an old man to put one weary foot in front of the other.

If Joe Biden were to seriously consider departing the race, allowing a younger candidate to replace him, the First Lady would be the most important figure — other than the president himself — in reaching that decision.

“Jill is the final and most important voice. She knows him and loves him with a passion. She also knows everything about him. Most big



US First Lady Jill Biden speaks at the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center grand opening ceremony in New York. — AFP

IF JOE BIDEN WERE TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER DEPARTING THE RACE, ALLOWING A YOUNGER CANDIDATE TO REPLACE HIM, THE FIRST LADY WOULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURE — OTHER THAN THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF — IN REACHING THAT DECISION

decisions are made with Valerie and Jill in the end,” said John Morgan, one of Joe Biden’s top donors, referring to the president’s younger sister, who has run nearly all of his political campaigns.

After nearly a half-century in politics, the Bidens view themselves as long-game people. And right now, neither wants the story of the president’s long political career — one defined by tragedy, resilience and unceasing ambition — to end on a stage in Atlanta, across the podium from former President Donald Trump, a man they both revile.

“He wants to win and she wants that for him, and for the country,” Alexander said. “She’s his biggest supporter and champion, because she believes in him, and she fears for the future of our country if it goes the other way.”

In front of supporters on Friday, the

First Lady embraced the talking points espoused by Democratic Party leaders, including the vice president, Kamala Harris, that Joe Biden’s bad performance did not erase years of successful legislating.

“As Joe said earlier today, he’s not a young man,” Jill Biden told a group of donors assembled in Manhattan on Friday afternoon, her third stop since leaving Atlanta. “After last night’s debate, he said: ‘You know, Jill, I don’t know what happened. I didn’t feel that great.’ I said, ‘Look, Joe, we are not going to let 90 minutes define the four years that you’ve been president.’”

Jill Biden understood that the debate night had amounted to a serious misstep. The president had needed to walk into the debate hall and address concerns about his age. Instead, he walked onstage after six days of preparations and mock debates at Camp David and had little other than a raspy voice to show for it.

She listened as Trump mocked him. “I really don’t know what he said at the end of that sentence,” Trump said when Biden blundered an answer on immigration. “I don’t think he knows what he said either.”

And she watched as her husband looked wide-eyed and slack-jawed as Trump went on, angrily absorbing what was happening but largely unable to hit back.

Afterward, Jill Biden held hands with the president, who walked gingerly down the stairs. The moment quickly went viral. At a campaign-organised watch party the Bidens visited shortly after the debate, she praised her husband for his performance. But critics elsewhere saw her giving him a virtual pat on the head for simply making it through the debate.

“You answered every question, you knew all the facts,” she said. “And what did Trump do?”

“Lie!” the crowd shouted.

Suddenly, a first lady who had skirted major controversies over the past 3 1/2 years found herself in the crosshairs of people who believe she has been trying to hide his diminished faculties.

— The New York Times

Just where did our humanity go wrong?

Have we become so entrenched in our comfortable lives that our humanity no longer has meaning?

In 1989, Omar al Bashir, backed by the National Islamic Front, wrested power from the Sudanese leadership of the Al Khatim dynasty's President Ahmed al Mirghani, whose rule had been characterised by corruption and violence.



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Al Bashir was, in 2019, himself unseated by a popular revolt in the wake of the Panama Papers revelations of his enormous personal wealth, human rights violations, numerous war crimes, and genocide in Darfur, against the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa tribal groups.

His reign was also notable for the fomenting of antagonism between South Sudan and the remainder of the country. The South eventually took control of its own destiny in 2015, but Al Bashir was somehow able to control its purse-strings for another four years, and reap the benefits.

His successor, was Sudanese Armed Forces General Ahmed Awad ibn Auf, who then immediately handed effective power to a military junta under the leadership of Lt General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan, who in turn established a Sovereign Council, with a civilian Prime Minister in Abdallah Hamdok. Almost unsurprisingly, this council, and the semi-civilian government, were dissolved by Burhan, and since late in 2021, a parade of fractured 'governments,' have been formed, dismissed, reformed, dismissed again with eventually Hamdok, several of his cabinet, politicians, and academics, being 'detained' without access or representation.

Little though, for this tragic nation's people, has changed. Its population of 50 million continues to face tribal and ethnic conflict, with casualties over the last two decades conservatively expressed in the millions.

Though it looks like a game of bomb and bullet snakes and ladders, the absurdity of the fatalities, and the scope of the humanitarian crisis, make it very clear that the Sudan is no joke.

The brutal campaign of violence in Darfur alone has accounted for over

one million either killed or displaced, mostly between 2003 and 2005, while famine, cholera, chickenpox, malaria, and measles are the cost this nation will face in perpetuity if a solution is not found quickly!

What reeks of astonishing cruelty within this distressing dynamic is the denial of access to aid by the current warring factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and the dangers posed by armed gangs taking advantage of a dire situation.

A total of 38 humanitarian workers have perished, more than 200 of their vehicles have been destroyed or stolen, at least seventeen warehouses and distribution points have been looted, during recent years. We could question how they can do this to their own, but it seems, again tragically, tribal allegiances and run much deeper than nationality. These aren't real soldiers though, just bullies with guns!

Humanitarian organisations are united in their belief that, as in any complex humanitarian situation before, that security, shelter, food, water and healthcare are the basic requirements of the most vulnerable among the population, the 12 million children, 4 million mothers, and 5 million other women.

So that's 21 of 25 million who could starve or die of thirst. Add in the health issues the women face from the violence, and it's so incredibly cruel, as, for them, their future offers only the prospect of a harsh, painful, undignified, demise.

I don't have any answers, because whoever, or whichever nation, seeks to intervene will be crucified, and anyway, no nation today wants to expose its sons and daughters to potential fatalities in a 'Wild West' environment, do they?

So, in reality, how do we help? Clearly, throwing money at the problem won't help, because someone will steal it. Aid will get stolen, robbed, or 'appropriated' by one of the antagonists, and those poor people, those tragic women and children, are the ones paying the price.

It's a humanitarian tragedy, one we must surely find a solution to, or our own humanity becomes pointless.

THE BRUTAL CAMPAIGN OF VIOLENCE IN DARFUR ALONE HAS ACCOUNTED FOR OVER ONE MILLION EITHER KILLED OR DISPLACED, MOSTLY BETWEEN 2003 AND 2005

VET TREATS RESCUED CAT



A vet checks a male Asian golden cat for treatment after he was seized from an illegal animal hunter by Indonesian nature conservation agency (BKSDA) in Banda Aceh. – AFP

Amputations soar in Gaza, but prostheses and painkillers scarce

There is little Gaza's doctors can do to alleviate the pain that three-year-old Suhaib Khuzaiq still feels from a shrapnel injury that caused his leg to be amputated above the knee in December.

"He is in pain and in need of painkillers and a prosthetic limb that is only available outside Gaza", his father Ali Khuzaiq, 31, said from Gaza City's Al Ahli hospital where Suhaib receives treatment.

On December 6, an Israeli air strike on their neighbourhood of Tal Al Hawa, southwest of Gaza City, injured Suhaib and destroyed their home, displacing the family who are now staying with relatives, Khuzaiq said.

The war and Israel's blockade have caused a shortage of medicines and destroyed much of Gaza's medical capacity.

As a result, amputations have become a key way of handling injuries that in other circumstances might have been treated differently, causing their number to soar further.

Citing data from Unicef, the chief of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said that in Gaza "every day 10 children... are losing one leg or two

legs on average," adding that it meant "around 2,000 children" had lost legs since the start of the war.

Unicef's spokesman Jonathan Crickx later said that difficulties in gathering data in a war zone meant the figures were only "estimates" that would take time to verify, but that the agency "has met many children who have lost limbs".

Mahmoud Basal, a spokesman for Gaza's Civil Defence agency, said that the estimate seemed realistic, because "as the civil defence crews work in the field, with every strike they recover children, many of whom lose either legs or arms, sometimes requiring amputations reaching high points on the limb".

Medical sources said that amputations are often the only available option, but they have to be performed in inadequate conditions.

"There are moments when anaesthesia is not available, but in order to save the lives of citizens, we resort to amputation, and this causes severe pain for the wounded", doctor Maher, a

surgeon at Al Ahli hospital, said.

"Every day, there are attacks that result in amputations of legs or arms for children, adults, and women."

In May, nonprofit Save The Children said that "thousands of child amputees and injured children are struggling to recover without adequate pain relief and devices like wheelchairs".

Proper prostheses are in short



A woman carries salvaged items following an Israeli raid in Rafah on the southern Gaza Strip, on a road damaged by Israeli bulldozers, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. – AFP

supply in the Gaza Strip, which is subject to a tight blockade that does not automatically allow medical equipment and medicines to enter the territory.

"God willing, the crossings will open and Suhaib will receive treatment outside Gaza. Hospitals here have neither treatment nor medicines", Khuzaiq said.

The situation at his hospital is particularly dire because northern

Gaza is harder to access, making shortages there graver while most hospitals are "going out of service due to direct targeting by the Israeli army", he said.

Marwa Abu Zaida, 40, and her eight-year-old son Nasser Abu Drabi also hope to travel abroad to get access to treatment and prostheses. Her leg and his arm were amputated after they were injured when an Israeli strike hit their home in the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahia.

"I hope that the war will end, that the crossing will be opened, and that facilities will be provided to us so that we can travel, install (artificial) limbs, and live our lives normally", she said from Al Ahli hospital.

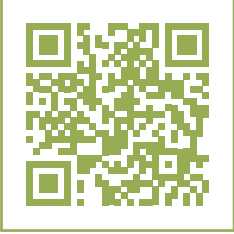
"My son and I worry when we need to change the wound dressing because of the pain we are experiencing", she said, because they have no painkillers.

Medical evacuations are needed but are rare in Gaza, including for other patients such as those in need of cancer treatment, said Bashar Murad of the Palestinian Red Crescent in Gaza. — AFP

PROPER PROSTHESES ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY IN THE GAZA STRIP, WHICH IS SUBJECT TO A TIGHT BLOCKADE THAT DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY ALLOW MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AND MEDICINES TO ENTER THE TERRITORY

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VINICIUS

BRACE HELPS BRAZIL TO 4-1 COPA AMERICA WIN OVER PARAGUAY

Glendale, United States :Brazil's Vinicius Jr scored twice in his side's 4-1 Copa America victory over Paraguay in a Group D clash in Nevada on Friday, bouncing back from a lacklustre display in his first game of the tournament.

Colombia, who have qualified for the quarter-finals, top Group D with six points after two matches, with Brazil in second on four points.

Costa Rica are third with one point and Paraguay, who are bottom with zero after two defeats, have been eliminated from the competition in the group stage for only the second time since 2001.

This victory marked Brazil's first win in six competitive matches and their maiden competitive win under the management of Dorival Jr, who took charge of the team in January.

From the whistle, Vinicius' pace and trickery posed a constant threat to Paraguay down the left flank, a far cry from his performance in Brazil's 0-0 draw with Costa Rica in their opening group stage match, in which he was largely ineffectual.

Despite Brazil's strong start, it was Paraguay who almost went ahead in the 15th minute as Damian Bobadilla's goal-bound effort took a massive deflection off Eder Militao and nearly wrongfooted Brazil goalkeeper Alisson Becker, who showed quick reflexes to keep out the strike.

Brazil earned a 28th-minute penalty for a handball, which was fired wide by Lucas Paqueta, but the midfielder made up for his miss seven minutes later as he set up Vinicius with a first-time pass to cap off a flowing team move.

Girona winger Savio doubled Brazil's advantage after pouncing on a rebound inside the box, before Vinicius stuck out a boot to divert a clearance from Omar Alderete into the net for his second goal of the night in first half stoppage time.

Paraguay got a goal back after the break as Alderete netted a superb long-range, but any hopes of a comeback were swiftly dashed when Brazil were awarded a penalty in the 68th minute after a handball by Mathias Villasanti.

Despite his earlier miss, Paqueta stepped up and made no mistake at the second time of asking to send Brazil's fans at the Allegiant Stadium into delirium.

Towards the end of the match, tempers flared and Andres Cubas was shown a red card after kicking out at Douglas Luiz, with Brazil using their man's advantage to comfortably see out the game and clinch the three points.

"In particular the first half, up to the 40 minutes, it was very even," Paraguay coach Daniel Garnero told reporters.

"I think we created some opportunities. Unfortunately, in the three minutes we got a bit distracted and they scored two goals that made a great difference in the result. And Vinicius is an elite player, no doubt about it."

Brazil next face group leaders Colombia in California on Tuesday, where a draw would be enough to secure qualification for the quarterfinals.

Paraguay face Costa Rica, who retain a slim chance of progressing to the quarter-finals, in Texas. — Reuters



Vinicius Junior celebrates after scoring first goal. – AFP

Verstappen wins Austrian sprint to stretch F1 lead



Max Verstappen celebrates after sprint session. – AFP

SPIELBERG, Austria: Red Bull's Max Verstappen held off a lively early challenge from McLaren to win the Austrian Grand Prix sprint race from pole position on Saturday and stretch his Formula One lead to 71 points.

Australian Oscar Piastri finished second, 4.616 seconds behind, with McLaren team mate Lando Norris, Verstappen's closest championship rival, ending up third after starting on the front row.

Norris passed Verstappen going into turn three on the fifth of 23 laps but could not hold the advantage and lost out to both drivers at turn four.

"That was spicy, wasn't it," said Verstappen over the team radio after taking the chequered flag for his third sprint win out of three this season and fifth in a row.

Austria has the shortest lap on the calendar, in terms of time, and

Verstappen found it hard initially to pull sufficiently clear to deny his rivals a drag-reduction advantage.

"Once we cleared the DRS, I could do my own race and it was better," he said.

"You could see they had two cars pushing flat-out trying to make it difficult for me."

George Russell was fourth for Mercedes and Carlos Sainz fifth for Ferrari. Their respective team mates Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc were sixth and seventh with Red Bull's Sergio Perez eighth.

The top eight finishers in the 100km sprint score points, with the winner taking eight.

Qualifying for Sunday's main grand prix follows later on Saturday.

The first start was aborted because photographers standing behind the barriers at turn one were judged to be posing a safety risk. There was a second formation

lap and the number of race laps was reduced to 23.

Verstappen got away cleanly, with Sainz passing Russell to move up to fourth, but Norris was right behind and soon enjoying the advantage of drag reduction.

The Briton dived down the inside at turn three but Verstappen hit right back, with both running slightly wide at the exit to turn four as Piastri sensed his opportunity and seized it.

Russell later passed Sainz for fourth on lap eight.

"Probably some things I definitely should have done a bit better in my battle. I understand that and the pace of the car was very strong, especially at the end of the race," said Norris, who said before the start that he was not feeling great.

"I had a good battle trying to get past Oscar but just didn't have enough speed. — Reuters

INDIA WIN T20 WORLD CUP

AFTER THRILLING BATTLE WITH SOUTH AFRICA



India players celebrate after winning the T20 World Cup. – REUTERS

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS: India won the T20 World Cup title with a thrilling seven run victory over South Africa in a classic final at Kensington Oval on Saturday.

Virat Kohli's 76 led India to a strong 176-7 but after Heinrich Klaasen blasted a superb 52 from 27 balls South Africa were closing in on victory only to be halted by some outstanding Indian bowling at the end.

South Africa ended on 169-8 with

Hardik Pandya taking 3-20 for India to the delight of the huge Indian following at the stadium.

Kohli had struggled in the tournament but he delivered his best innings at the perfect moment with his balanced batting.

It was just what was needed for India who had slipped to 34 for three after their captain Rohit Sharma won the toss and opted to bat.

In what has been a low scoring

tournament, the total looked to be a daunting one for South Africa but then Quinton de Kock (39) and Tristan Stubbs (31) set the Proteas on their way before Klaasen turned the game in their direction in the 15th over, smashing Axar Patel for 24 including two fours and two sixes.

When Klaasen was finally removed, caught behind off Hardik Pandya, the Proteas needed just 26 off the last 23 balls.

Knowing they had to take the initiative, Rohit turned early for Jasprit Bumrah's final over and he answered the skipper's call perfectly, bowling Marco Jansen and conceding just two runs in the 18th over.

That meant South Africa needed 20 from the final two overs and Arshdeep Singh bowled a superb length to allow just four.

With 16 to win off the last over, Pandya bowled a full-toss at Miller

who smashed it high straight down the ground but Suryakumar Yadav produced a breath-taking catch on the boundary, throwing the ball back into play before he crossed the ropes and then returning to complete the catch.

Kagiso Rabada came in and edged a four and Pandya showed some nerves with a wide but the seamer kept his cool to ensure silverware for India after they lost in last year's 50-over World Cup on home soil. — AFP



UEFA EURO2024 GERMANY



Switzerland's
Ruben
Vargas
celebrates
scoring their
second goal.
— Reuters

SWITZERLAND STUN HOLDERS ITALY TO REACH EURO 2024 QUARTERS

BERLIN: Switzerland dumped reigning champions Italy out of Euro 2024 with a stunning 2-0 victory on Saturday to reach the quarterfinals for the second time in their history. Murat Yakin's supremely well-drilled side outplayed the flat two-time winners in the last 16 clash in Berlin and will face England or Slovakia in the next round.

Ruben Vargas teed up Remo Freuler for Switzerland's 37th minute opener before curling home superbly himself right at the start of the second half to deservedly double their lead.

A new-look Italy, short on star power and without many of the key figures that led them to Euro 2020 glory, offered little in response to Switzerland's energetic display.

Former Arsenal midfielder Granit Xhaka, arriving at the Euros after a stunning season with German champions Bayer Leverkusen, pulled the strings as the Swiss rarely looked like letting the lead slip away.

Italy coach Luciano Spalletti dropped Jorginho after his worrying group stage performances, bringing in Nicolo Fagioli in defensive midfield among a hefty six changes which failed to bring the Azzurri to life.

The 23-year-old started a major tournament match for the first time, having missed most of the season with Juventus after a seven-month ban for gambling on football matches.

Italy scraped through the first phase thanks to Mattia Zaccagni's last-gasp strike in the 1-1 draw with Croatia and Spalletti said his team had no alternative but to improve in the knock-out rounds.

However it was Switzerland who grew in confidence and pulled off their best display yet, making a bright start at the Olympiastadion in a sweltering Berlin, where a far more impressive Italy won the 2006 World Cup.

Former goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, now Italy's delegation head, has been regaling the squad with stories from that triumph but it did not inspire a convincing performance — apart from by his modern day counterpart, Gianluigi Donnarumma.

The Paris Saint-Germain goalkeeper, key in Italy's Euro 2020 conquest, made a fine save to thwart Breel Embolo midway through the first half as Switzerland created the first real chance by playing him through.

FREULER OPENER

Donnarumma could not stop Freuler from firing Switzerland ahead after 37 minutes when the midfielder controlled Vargas' low cross and drilled home at the near post.

Switzerland kept the ball for well over a minute in the build-up, stringing together 33 passes before Freuler, who plays for Serie A side Bologna, applied the finishing touch.

Donnarumma produced a fine save to tip Fabian Rieder's free-kick on to the post before the break as the Swiss sought to equal their best ever Euros performance by reaching the last eight.

Hosts Germany needed a late leveller to avoid defeat against the Swiss in the group phase, while at the previous Euros they knocked out much fancied France in the last 16, so Italy cannot say they were not warned. — Reuters

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Silal Central Market commences trial operations at Khazaen



Loading bays at Silal Market.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

The Central Fruit and Vegetable Market (Silal) commenced trial operations at Khazaen Economic City on June 29, 2024. It serves as a national and international platform for the marketing, exporting, importing, and re-exporting of vegetables and fruits. It also acts as a marketing outlet for local agricultural products, benefiting agricultural companies and farmers in the area.

The Silal Market is equipped with various facilities that will revolutionise the food logistics sector, including central cold storage, a wholesale market, dry warehouses, sorting workshops, customs inspection areas, agricultural quarantine facilities, a food safety laboratory, and spaces dedicated to the sale and marketing of local products. These facilities will not only strengthen cold and supply chains but also reduce agricultural losses, ensure product quality and safety, and streamline post-harvest transactions.

Moreover, the Silal Central Market offers business opportunities for small and medium enterprises, while also creating job opportunities for national workers.

By providing a comprehensive infrastructure for the handling and distribution of vegetables and fruits, this market is set to play a crucial role in the development of the food industry in Khazaen

Economic City.

Significantly, the Silal Central Market will also have a lasting impact on the food security sector. Its state-of-the-art facilities and services will not only benefit local farmers and businesses but also contribute to the overall growth and sustainability of the agricultural industry in the region.

Eng Salim bin Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, said: "Today marks a historic milestone in the development of Khazaen Economic City. The launch of the commercial and operational activities of the Silal Market within Khazaen Food City, entirely developed by the private sector, signifies a significant achievement.

We take pride in the Omani professionals who have played a pivotal role in leading this project from its inception to its current operational phase."

He further added: "Silal Market stands as a national project that not only enhances the Sultanate of Oman's position in the marketing and production of vegetables and fruits but also provides valuable investment opportunities for local businesses.

This initiative underscores our commitment to promoting economic growth and sustainability within the region. We look forward to the continued success and growth of Khazaen Economic City, as we strive to create integrated investment environment for all promising industries."

OIA’s National Development Portfolio assets reach RO 12.175 bn

MUSCAT: The National Development Portfolio, managed by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), significantly boosted economic diversification in Oman throughout 2023.

This was achieved by launching and announcing local projects across several key sectors, including energy, industry, tourism, food and fisheries, financial services, communications and IT, logistics, aviation, and mining.

In 2023, the portfolio increased its assets to approximately RO 12.175 billion, generating profits exceeding RO 1.200 billion, with an investment return of eleven and a half per cent. This bolstered the general budget with RO 800 million and increased capital investment spending on projects to RO 2.1 billion, surpassing the target of RO 1.9 billion.

Six national projects were completed with a combined investment value of over RO 4 billion.

Hisham bin Ahmed al Shidi, Director General of the Economic Diversification Directorate at OIA, highlighted that these investments align with the Oman Vision 2040, aiming to foster economic growth, attract foreign investments, enhance the private sector's contribution, and create job opportunities.

Major projects were implemented across various governorates, serving both



The Asyad Group awarded contracts and purchase orders to more than 496 SMEs, totalling over RO 68 million.



Hisham bin Ahmed al Shidi, Director General of the Economic Diversification Directorate at OIA.

economic and social dimensions.

Key projects included the OQ ammonia factory in Dhofar Governorate, which reached a production capacity of 1,000 metric tonnes per day with exports to Turkey, Morocco, and India. Other significant projects were the operation of the

container terminal at Duqm Port, the first phase completion of the electricity connection project, and the signing of a tender for the copper and gold project in Yanqul.

Additionally, projects in solid waste management were completed in Barka, Al Khaboura, and Al Suwaiq, and the Qurayyat fish farming farm expanded to a capacity of 5,000 tonnes annually.

The Khuwaimah fish farming farm began harvesting, and the first Omani tuna fishing ship, Acila, initiated operations in the Indian Ocean. The Oman Adventure Centre in Musandam and several tourist projects were also completed, enhancing local tourism.

Efforts to attract foreign investments saw substantial

success.

Foreign direct investments worth over RO 1 billion were secured across free and economic zones. In the Salalah Free Zone, agreements worth RO 727.500 million were signed with foreign investors.

The Sohar Free Zone secured projects worth RO 135.800 million, while Khazaen Economic City saw agreements worth RO 56.600 million. Additionally, a strategic partnership for shrimp farming projects valued at \$1.6 billion was underway with a global company.

To support small and medium enterprises, OIA companies allocated a significant share of their purchases and tenders to these institutions. **TURN TO P15**

Oman maintains inflation rate within the target limits

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has successfully maintained its inflation rate within the target limits outlined in the Tenth Five-Year Plan, aligned with its economic and financial objectives.

According to the consumer price index, the inflation rate in Oman remained below one per cent in 2023, rising by just 0.12 per cent from January to April compared to the same period in the previous year.

The Ministry of Economy attributes this stability to several governmental measures, including the stabilisation of fuel prices based on October 2021 rates and support for basic foodstuffs.

Additionally, a global decline in prices, particularly for food commodities, played a significant role. The Food and Agriculture Organization reported a 7.4 per cent drop in its food price index in April 2024 compared to April 2023. Examining the components

of the Consumer Price Index, the food and beverages group, which constitutes 20.615 per cent of the index, saw a 2.13 per cent price increase between January and April this year.

Conversely, the clothing and footwear group decreased by 0.05 per cent, the Restaurants and Hotels group by 0.04 per cent, and the Furniture and Home Appliances group by 0.14 per cent. The transportation group experienced a notable decline of 3.4 per cent. Other groups saw marginal increases, such as the housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels group, which rose by 0.01 per cent, making up 31.7 per cent of the index.

Inflation rates varied across different regions. The highest rate of increase was in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate at one per cent, followed by Al Wusta Governorate at 0.71%, Dhofar Governorate at 0.63%, Musandam Governorate at 0.52%, Al Sharqiyah South



Inflation rate in Oman remained below one per cent in 2023, rising by just 0.12% from January to April compared to the same period in the previous year.

Governorate at 0.47%, Al Batinah North Governorate at 0.45%, Al Dhahirah Governorate at 0.43%, Al Buraimi Governorate at 0.39%, and Al Batinah South Governorate at 0.29%. Meanwhile, inflation decreased in Muscat Governorate and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate

by 0.25 per cent and 0.10 per cent, respectively. The Ministry underscored the role of the Governorate Development Programme ME, implemented under the Tenth Five-Year Plan to support decentralisation and balanced growth. A key initiative is the Governorate

Competitiveness Index, which tracks development efforts and guides investment priorities based on each governorate's needs. This index integrates the governorate inflation rate index to monitor price changes and purchasing power, aiding in maintaining market balance and addressing supply chain issues.

The Ministry also monitors the Import Price Index and the Producer Price Index due to their impact on local prices and production costs. Imported inflation, influenced by global price rises, affects local market prices and production costs for Omani producers, manufacturers, and traders. Oman's strategic goals under the Tenth Five-Year Plan include reducing these impacts by decreasing imports and boosting local production through food security projects, localising industries, and promoting Omani products in both local and international markets. Enhancing global trade

partnerships, establishing direct import lines, and diversifying import markets are also key strategies.

Recent data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information reveal a 1.7% decrease in the producer price index during the first quarter of this year compared to the same quarter last year, and stability in the import price index during the fourth quarter of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. This stability resulted from price declines in manufactured goods, chemicals, mineral fuels, and live animals, despite increases in machinery and various manufactures.

Globally, central banks' efforts to contain inflation by raising interest rates led to a decline in inflation from its peak levels in 2021 and 2022, though it remains higher than pre-pandemic levels. The US Federal Reserve recently maintained interest rates, citing persistent inflation. — ONA

Malabar Gold & Diamonds opens new state-of-the-art supply chain office in DAFZ

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the sixth-largest jewellery retailer, has opened its new state-of-the-art supply chain office in Dubai Airport Free Zone (DAFZ).

Amna Lootah, Director General, Dubai Airport Free Zone (DAFZ) inaugurated the new office in the presence of M P Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Group; K P Abdul Salam, Vice-Chairman, Malabar Group; Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director International Operations; Asher O, Managing Director — India Operations; Mayinkutty C, Senior Director, Malabar Group; Faisal A K, Head of Manufacturing, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Aparesh Chatterjee, Head — Merchandising & SCM (Diamond & Studded); Arif Abdulhamid AlKhoori, Senior Vice-President — Customer



Care, DAFZ; other key officials from DAFZ, Malabar Gold & Diamonds' management team members and well-wishers. The new office will serve as the cornerstone of the brand's international studded supply

chain operations. 'We've successfully operated out of DAFZ since 2020, benefitting from its numerous strategic advantages, including access to world-class infrastructure, unparalleled convenience, and seamless connectivity to both GCC and global markets. Additionally, the tax incentives offered by DAFZ significantly enhance our financial and operational efficiency. Moreover, our commitment to responsibility

and sustainability aligns well with DAFZ's eco-friendly initiatives and support for sustainable business practices,' said M P Ahammed, Chairman of Malabar Group.

Spanning 6,000 square feet, the new office will bolster DAFZ's pivotal role in supporting Malabar Gold & Diamonds' current and future international operations. DAFZ's state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities enable streamlined logistics operations for the brand, improving its overall supply chain efficiency. The new office will house approximately 80 management team members and will also include a product development centre with a state-of-the-art design studio, emphasising the brand's focus on innovation in its designs.

SOHAR Port and Freezone launches emergency response organisation



SUHAR: In a significant step towards enhancing emergency preparedness and response, SOHAR Port and Freezone has announced the operational launch of the SOHAR Emergency Response Organization (SERO). This strategic initiative

represents a comprehensive and advanced approach to emergency response and safety at SOHAR Port, with the capabilities to address a wide range of incidents within the industrial area. The organisation is operated by Unity Fire and Safety, a company

that specialises in safety and emergency response. Through its mutual aid agreement, SERO extends its coverage to effectively handle additional scenarios, with support of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) and OQ. This partnership is part of a Public-Private Partnership that also includes global and local collaborations including the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) with the Port of Rotterdam Authority and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) to ensure efficient responses to emergencies at the port. Key features of the collaboration include advanced equipment and training, regulatory compliance, revision of emergency regulations and the implementation of an Emergency Response Plan aligned with international safety best practices and standards. Captain Majid bin Saif al Barahi, Director General of Maritime Affairs, Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MoTCIT), said, "With the launch, we are prioritising the safety and protection of people above all. This initiative goes beyond traditional measures, significantly boosting the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency responses. It serves as

a robust framework, seamlessly safeguarding both individuals and the continuity of essential operations during challenging times." Batti bin Mohammed al Shibli, Harbour Master of SOHAR Port commented, "By embracing innovative practices and cutting-edge technology, the organisation is setting new industry benchmarks for safety and establishing a gold standard for operational excellence. This initiative reflects our unwavering commitment to ensuring the highest level of safety, resilience, and efficiency within SOHAR. Paving a future where emergencies are met with unparalleled preparedness and adaptability."

Muscat Municipality and Bank Muscat partner to support entrepreneurs and emerging business owners

MUSCAT: The Municipality of Muscat and Bank Muscat are pleased to announce that they have recently signed a memorandum of cooperation to Launch a Food Truck initiative in Bausher to support street vendors culinary offerings. The memorandum was signed by Dr Shauqi bin Abdulrahman al Zadjali, General Director of Health Affairs and acting General Director of Planning and Investment, Muscat Municipality, and Talib bin Saif al Makhmari, Head of Community & Media Relations, Bank Muscat. It is worth noting that the implementation of the social initiative was also supported by the SMEs Development Authority. The Food Trucks Initiative reaffirms the Municipality and Bank Muscat's commitment to supporting entrepreneurs and owners of emerging businesses such as street vendors by providing them with the appropriate tools and entrepreneurial skills with the aim to develop their businesses. It also falls under Bank Muscat's full chain of social initiatives, underscoring its

commitment to supporting street vendors by offering them a number of food trucks featuring safety and modern design standards to cater to their diverse needs. The Food Trucks serve as a vibrant platform for street vendors to showcase their culinary offerings, thus, contributing to a positive experience for local residents and tourists visiting the designated area. It is noteworthy that Muscat Municipality has supplied the facilities necessary to satisfy the requirements of such businesses including vehicle-park areas. The Municipality will also actively monitor and supervise the smooth operations of these trucks in accordance with the professional and health terms and conditions. In addition, the initiative underscores Bank Muscat's dedication to supporting various business sectors through the continuous launch of sustainable programmes. It also constitutes a valuable contribution that will bring about long-term social and economic values. These food trucks will serve as



a platform for aspiring business owners, offering them a unique opportunity to showcase their culinary talents and provide a diverse range of food options to the local residents. By supporting these small businesses, the initiative will not only create new job opportunities but also foster a spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation within the community. Overall, the initiative exemplifies a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors to empower individuals, promote local businesses, and drive the economic and national growth of the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Shauqi bin Abdulrahman al Zadjali, General Director of Health Affairs and acting General Director of Planning and Investment, Muscat Municipality, reported: "We constantly seek to launch community-driven initiatives in cooperation with the private sectors. This initiative will greatly play a pivotal role in serving the community and satisfying the needs of the local residents. It also represents a platform to encourage entrepreneurs and business owners to develop and grow their businesses. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bank Muscat for its continuous

support to the community and contribution to the initiative, which reflects good partnerships between the public and private sectors." From his side, Talib bin Saif al Makhmari, Head of Community & Media Relations, Bank Muscat, said: "I am delighted about partnering with Muscat Municipality for launching this initiative. This collaboration reinforces our unwavering commitment to the community, as we embark on a journey of launching impactful initiatives which simultaneously contribute to the growth and prosperity of the nation."

NBO Muzn unveils advanced online trade portal



MUSCAT: In its continuous commitment to advance the digital capabilities of its corporate customers, National Bank of Oman Muzn Islamic Banking has launched its fully automated Online Trade Portal.

The new portal streamlines all trade finance transactions into a single, user-friendly platform, enabling customers to conduct their trade transactions digitally, making the process smoother and more efficient.

Through this launch, Muzn is significantly enhancing the digital banking experience for its corporate customers by providing easy Sharia-compliant trade finance solutions that can be accessed and managed online with ease and efficiency.

Salima al Marzooqi, Assistant General Manager & Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said, "NBO Muzn Islamic Banking is dedicated to advancing Oman's business sector and enhancing its customers' experience with innovative Sharia-compliant products and services.

The introduction of our comprehensive Online Trade Portal places the power to manage all business transactions firmly in the hands of our customers.

With 24/7 easy access to all essential functions, the dashboard provides a complete overview of the business for total control.

The Portal has been designed to meet the challenges of modern Islamic business practices and ensure companies can efficiently manage their trade working capital."

Accessible through Muzn's Corporate Internet Banking, the Portal enables customers to conduct a suite of trade finance transactions, including Letter of Credit (LC) at Sight, Usance LC, Murabaha Under Sight LCs, Murabaha under Usance LCs, Murabaha under Documentary Collections, Islamic alternate to Export and Local Bill Discounting, and Guarantees, all with Straight Through Processing.

The system also offers clients real-time updates on their transactions, such as transaction status, advice, swift messages, outstanding utilisation, and statements.

The new Online Trade Portal eliminates the need for branch visits, freeing up more time for customers to focus on running their business. Customers can view all of their reports in one place for smarter decision-making, and the service is supported by a dedicated help desk to assist corporate customers with any queries they may have.



PDO evaluating bids for two 100 MW wind projects

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JUNE 29

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the country's biggest oil and gas producer, has announced progress in the development of a string of renewable energy projects designed to support the decarbonisation of its operations in key areas of its expansive Block 6 concession.

Notable is a pair of wind power projects — the first by the majority state-owned energy company — and a new solar Independent Power Project (IPP) planned in the north of its concession.

The two wind energy IPPs, dubbed Riyah-1 and Riyah-2, are of around 100 MW capacity apiece, and are proposed to come up at Amin and Nimr West in the southeast of PDO's concession.

They will capitalise on exceptional wind resources characterised by wind speeds averaging 8 metres/second.

"A 12-month feasibility study, including a site measurement campaign, was conducted to identify the best wind farm lay-out, position and most suitable wind turbine model, and ultimately calculate the expected energy



The 100 MW-capacity wind farms will come up at Amin and Nimr West in PDO's concession.

yield," said PDO, adding that the study also "determined our concession area has excellent wind potential."

Following a Request for Proposals (RfP) floated in April 2023, PDO is currently evaluating technical and commercial bids received from a number of

developers. Work on the two wind farms is slated to be completed by Q2 2026.

Also under development is the North Solar IPP, a 100 MW utility-scale solar photovoltaic scheme to be established close to Qarn Alam Airport near Saih Nihyada in the north of Oman.

The project is targeted for completion in Q4 2025. North Solar IPP will be modelled on the lines of PDO's landmark 100-MW Amin Photovoltaic Power Plant — Oman's first utility-scale solar PV plant — which was launched in May 2020.

Located near Nimr, the Amin

project is also the world's first utility-scale solar project to have an oil and gas company as the sole buyer of electricity. Currently in the fourth year of operations, the plant enables PDO to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels as part of a broader energy transition.

"This transition to a full-fledged

energy company also means leveraging new technology, greater collaboration and improving our overall energy efficiency and water management," the company said.

"By transitioning to cleaner technologies, implementing rigorous emissions reduction strategies and investing in renewable energy sources, PDO aims to not only reduce its carbon footprint to net-zero emissions by 2050 but also set a precedent for sustainable practices within the industry. Our current power target is to source 30% of our power capacity from renewable sources by 2026 and we are aspiring to reach 50% by 2030," it stated.

Also as part of this low-carbon journey, PDO has financed the introduction of solar power at three of its airports, while also commissioning solar rooftop systems atop six buildings at its Mina Al Fahal complex.

Furthermore, buoyed by the success of its pioneering Miraah solar project for the generation of steam for its enhanced oil recovery project at Amal, PDO is also exploring opportunities for wider adoption of renewable energy, notably in electrical and molten salt heaters, it added.

PDO wins five awards at GCC International CSR Conference and Awards 2024



MUSCAT: In recognition of its outstanding contributions to corporate social responsibility, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) received five awards at the 2nd GCC International Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Conference and Awards 2024, held in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The event was organised by the Bahrain CSR Society in partnership with the Eastern Province Council for Social Responsibility from Saudi Arabia.

The company secured first place in the categories of Excellence in International CSR and Excellence in Community Social Service. Additionally, it obtained second place in the categories of Excellence in Environmental Sustainable Development and Excellence in Community Social Development.

Eng Abdulmir bin Abdul Hussein al Ajmi, External Affairs and Value Creation Director at PDO, was honoured with the Excellence in CSR-Community Builder Award for individuals.

Commenting on the accolades received, Eng Mohammed bin Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghareebi,

External Affairs, Communication and Social Investment Manager at PDO, said: "PDO's acceptance of these prestigious awards exemplifies our commitment to socially and environmentally responsible practices, which align with the comprehensive goals of sustainable development and the priorities of Oman Vision 2040. While we take pride in this recognition, which reflects the tireless efforts of our entire team, we remain dedicated to enhancing our contributions and supporting initiatives that build a better future for our coming generations."

PDO's dedication towards social responsibility extends beyond awards. In the past year, PDO committed to 95 new projects within its Social Investment Programme, with a total value of approximately \$13 million.

These projects encompassed various themes such as health, safety and environment, education, youth and women empowerment, and community welfare. Over the past decade, the total value of CSR projects implemented by PDO has amounted to approximately \$130 million.

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 29

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has been inducted into the World Economic Forum (WEF) New Champions Community. This exclusive membership underscores Omran Group's commitment to transformative growth and innovation, further cementing its status as a global leader in tourism sector.

Omran Group's membership was secured during the 15th Annual Meeting of the New Champions in Dalian, China, during June 25-27, 2024. This year's meeting, themed "Next Frontiers for Growth," convenes



over 1,500 high-level leaders from diverse fields, including business, government, civil society, and international organisations, alongside prominent entrepreneurs, innovators and academics.

This prestigious gathering aims to generate collective insights and actionable solutions, offering a unique platform for collaboration among global leaders to foster and sustain positive economic

momentum.

Omran Group's membership in the WEF New Champions Community is a testament to its exceptional growth, transformative mindset, and solid reputation.

The community, limited to the top 100 mission-driven companies from 45 countries and more than 30 sectors, is designed to recognise and support mid-sized companies driving positive change and implementing innovative solutions in today's complex global landscape.

This strategic membership provides Omran Group and the country with unparalleled access to a global network of leading companies, key decision-

makers, and influential figures across various sectors, including financial institutions, technology, sustainability and investors.

It enhances Omran Group's market positioning as a key developer in tourism, showcasing its commitment to innovation and leadership. Additionally, it provides access to strategic intelligence platforms, enabling the company to obtain valuable insights and data crucial for informed corporate and strategic planning.

By joining this prestigious community, Omran Group not only reinforces its leadership in the tourism sector but also expands its influence and capabilities across a broader range of related industries.

OIA's National Development Portfolio assets reach RO 12.175 bn

FROM PAGE 13

The OQ Group spent approximately \$245.400 million on SMEs, and the Oman Minerals Development Group's payments to SMEs amounted to RO 2.900 million.

The Asyad Group awarded contracts and purchase orders to more than 496 SMEs, totalling over RO 68 million. In natural resource management, the Oman LNG Company signed contracts to export 10.4 million metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas annually post-2024, reinforcing Oman's reputation as a reliable exporter.

The Minerals Development Oman announced new discoveries, including 4.8 million tonnes of

copper ore, 163,000 tonne of chromium ore, 111 million tonnes of soft silica, 98 million tonnes of hard silica, and 401 million tonnes of dolomite. The Oman Food Investment Holding Company, Nitaj, expanded contract farming in the Al Morooj Dairy Project and began exporting camel milk to Saudi Arabia.

Additionally, the Nakheel Oman Development Company's products reached eight new markets: Russia, Peru, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Iran, Qatar and the UAE.

Investment partnerships with the private sector and international investors were also strengthened.

The Ithca Group expanded local investments,

most notably through a new semiconductor design centre in Muscat by the American company GSME.

Ithca and the venture capital funds Oryx Fund and Cyfr Fund made significant investments in technology. Omantel partnered with Zain Group to launch Zain Omantel International and the Oman-Emirates Telecommunications Gateway project, a strategic submarine cable linking Oman and the UAE.

The National Development Portfolio is a diversified entity encompassing over ten main sectors, more than 160 holding and subsidiary companies, and a variety of bonds, bills, sukuk, and deposits. — ONA

Credit granted by banks in Oman rises to RO 30.8 billion

MUSCAT: By the end of April 2024, the total amount of credit extended by the Omani banking industry has grown by 2.6 per cent to RO 30.8 billion.

According to data released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), by the end of April 2024, the amount of credit extended to the private sector had increased by 3.2 per cent to a total of RO

25.9 billion.

Information about how it was distributed across other sectors shows that, as of the end of April 2024, non-financial companies held the highest part, at 45.7 per cent, followed by the individual sector at 45.1 per cent.

The remainder was allocated, with 5.6 per cent going to the financial companies sector and



the rest percentage going to other sectors at a rate of 3.6 per cent.

By the end of April 2024, the total deposits in the banking system had grown by 10.4% to RO 30 billion. By the end of April 2024, private sector deposits in the banking system had increased by 12.4% to RO 20.1 billion.

When examining how the

private sector's total deposit base was distributed among its various sectors, the data show that the individual sector held the largest share — roughly 50.6 per cent — followed by the sectors of non-financial companies and financial companies, at 29.7 and 16.8 per cent, respectively. Regarding the proportion, other sectors received the remaining 2.8%. — ONA

The reconfiguration of the global supply chains

The global supply chain, a dynamic and remarkably adaptable system, has steadily gained prominence since the latter half of the 20th century. Its evolution has been shaped by globalisation, trade liberalisation, reduction in trade barriers, technological advancements, accelerated communication speed, cheaper transportation, offshoring, and outsourcing.

The production process becomes fragmented, and input goods travel across the global value chain before the final product is manufactured and sold to the customer.

This is the worldwide supply chain, a system that continues to evolve and grow with time and the dynamic global climate.

Over the years, China has played a significant role in the global supply chain, earning the title of the “manufacturing hub of the world” due to its cost competitiveness.

However, with paradigm economic developments, escalating geo-political tensions, the trade war between China and the USA, Covid-19, the Russian attack on Ukraine, and the escalating war between Israel and



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The author is a National-Level Award-Winning Outstanding Women Educator and Scholar in Strategic Management. She is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat and a member of Knowledge Oman.

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS BECOMES FRAGMENTED, AND INPUT GOODS TRAVEL ACROSS THE GLOBAL VALUE CHAIN BEFORE THE FINAL PRODUCT IS MANUFACTURED AND SOLD TO THE CUSTOMER.

Palestine, the global supply chain has shown changes by adapting to these structural changes.

First, to understand the rise of structural changes, let us see how China became the world’s manufacturing hub.

China’s World Trade Organization (WTO) membership in 2001, reduction of their import tariffs, FDI attraction, a vast pool of cheap labour, and plow back of massive savings into the championed sectors led to the rise of China to the centre of the global value chains.

China’s role as the “world factory” was not limited to finished products but included intermediary goods. This huge comparative advantage worked in their value until foreign investors realised they could not access China’s domestic market, resulting in asymmetries in the functioning of the global supply chains.

Contentious relations between China and the USA played a key role and inevitably led to shifts in the global supply chain. The USA restrictions and impositions of trade barriers have made it expensive for US businesses to operate in China.

Many countries like Japan, the USA, the EU, and the Republic of

Korea have introduced legislation that impacts international trade.

With the growth of the Chinese middle class, there is a demand for higher wages and better working conditions.

This eroded the once-enjoyed comparative competitive cost advantage of low labour and production costs. The impact of geopolitical tensions on the global supply chain is urgent and cannot be ignored.

The Covid-19 pandemic served as a stark reminder of the vulnerability of the global supply chain. Beyond its health implications, the pandemic proved a significant cost for companies heavily reliant on a single-location supplier.

This realisation underscored the critical importance of supply chain diversification in building a resilient supply chain capable of absorbing unexpected external shocks.

The need for diversification has become a key learning point in the evolution of the global supply chain, emphasising the urgency of this strategy.

Globalisation has driven rapid global trade flows and has now experienced a slowdown, pause, or potential reversal. This is the first time in 20 years that Mexico

has officially surpassed China as the largest importer into the USA.

The US has seen a 5% increase in imports from Mexico from 2022 to 2023 and a 20% drop in Chinese imports, reflecting a shift in the import of finished and intermediary goods.

Many companies have adopted the ‘China plus one’ strategy to enhance the resilience of their supply chains and mitigate the risks associated with economic and political factors.

In this strategy, companies maintain their presence in China while investing in other countries to reduce the risk and dependence on a single country. Companies explore strategies like reshoring, nearshoring, friend-shoring, and diversification.

Regionalisation will reduce the risk between markets, mitigate the risk of trade wars and protectionist policies, and improve political relationships between regional neighbours.

The Southeast Asia region is emerging as an ideal alternative. India, the second largest economy in the area, is an attractive alternative to China as a primary supplier.

Emerging countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia have low labour costs, low

manufacturing costs, and a young, energetic workforce, making them attractive as a manufacturing destination.

Bangladesh also offers competitive labour costs, a large workforce, and duty-free market access to many countries.

Bangladesh shows strong potential as a manufacturing alternative to China, especially in textiles and electronics; it must address challenges like lack of diversification, energy dependence, and skills gaps.

Some African countries, like Ethiopia, have made many policy changes like tax breaks, infrastructural developments, and investments in industrial parks to attract foreign investors.

In conclusion, the structural reconfiguration of the global supply chain has begun to eclipse China’s competitiveness and attractions, with the emergence of alternatives in Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and Africa.

The China market is still huge and has considerable purchasing power. China is also attractive for advanced manufacturing.

The reconfiguration of the global supply chains away from China, which remains a major manufacturing powerhouse, will take time and unfold gradually.

Dollar is the only winner from China-West trade war

The only “winner” from a possible all-out trade war between the West and China will probably be the US dollar.

Uncertainty around global trade policy is the highest since 2018-2019 when clashes between former US President Donald Trump’s administration and Beijing reached fever pitch.

It’s nowhere near those peaks yet, but will be the focus of greater attention as the US presidential election draws closer.

Whoever wins in November, further tariffs on imports from China and likely retaliation seem inevitable. China already warns that a move by Europe to join the tariff train would constitute a “trade war.”

Trump’s return to the White House would raise the stakes significantly.

Rising protectionism and shrinking cross-border trade may dampen growth everywhere but the US — the world’s economic and currency superpower — has layers of protection that other countries don’t.

These include the relatively closed nature of the economy, the global importance of US equity and bond markets, and the ubiquity of the dollar in international reserves.

That’s not to say the US won’t suffer — growth would slow and inflation might rise. But higher inflation delays or possibly eliminates Fed interest rate cuts, and growth in Europe and Asia would be more vulnerable than in the US. In short, the pain is likely to be felt more acutely in other currencies, none of which have the dollar’s safe-haven status either. And in the world of exchange rates, everything is relative.

THREE TIMES THE HIT Goldman Sachs economists attempted to quantify the risks



JAMIE MCGEEVER

The author has been a financial journalist since 1998, reporting from Brazil, Spain, New York, London, and now back in the US again.

CHINA’S DOMESTIC ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND GEOPOLITICAL STANCE ARE ENOUGH TO MAKE FOREIGNERS WARY OF INVESTING IN THE COUNTRY. BUT IT’S NO COINCIDENCE THAT FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT FLOWS INTO CHINA ARE PLUNGING AT THEIR FASTEST PACE IN 15 YEARS RIGHT AS TRADE TENSIONS PERCOLATE AGAIN.



The 100 Chinese yuan and 100 US dollar bill are seen in this illustration photo. – AFP

to US and eurozone growth by analysing the 2018-2019 trade war and beyond through three lenses — US and European company commentary on trade uncertainty, stock returns around tariff announcements and cross-country investment patterns.

They found that a rise in trade policy uncertainty to 2018-2019 levels would likely lower US GDP growth by three-tenths of a percentage point. The estimated hit to eurozone growth would be three times greater.

For a region already expected to grow significantly slower than the US, at only 0.8% this year and 1.5% next year, according to the International Monetary Fund, that would be a major blow. Aggressive monetary easing from the European Central Bank could follow, undermining the euro.

“Further increases in trade policy uncertainty pose meaningful downside risk to our global growth outlook in 2024 H2 (second half of 2024) and 2025 with larger effects in economies where exports

account for a larger share of GDP,” Goldman’s economists wrote on Tuesday.

CLOSED OFF The US economy is far less open than its European or Chinese counterparts, meaning disruption to trade should have a relatively limited impact.

US exports of goods and services accounted for 11.8% of GDP in 2022, according to the World Bank, compared with 20.7% in China. Eurostat data shows that eurozone goods exports last year were worth 20% of GDP.

A persistent and deteriorating trade deficit for years was seen as a major drag on the dollar as the US had to suck in huge amounts of foreign capital to plug the gap and prevent the dollar from falling.

But the US trade deficit last year was 2.8% of GDP, much smaller than the year before and half of what it was in the mid-2000s. Onshoring, energy self-sufficiency, and a push to revive

domestic manufacturing all indicate the deficit will not be the drag on the dollar it once was. And that’s before any tit-for-tat tariff escalation potentially shrinks US imports further.

EURO PARITY? China’s domestic economic problems and geopolitical stance are enough to make foreigners wary of investing in the country. But it’s no coincidence that foreign direct investment flows into China are plunging at their fastest pace in 15 years right as trade tensions percolate again.

Chinese stocks are underperforming, barely in positive territory for this year and after a dire 2023. Beijing is struggling to hold up the yuan, which is at a seven-month low against the dollar.

European stocks and the euro have not reacted favourably to recent headlines about the tariffs Brussels is slapping on certain imports from China. Given how close trade ties are now between the eurozone and China, this

should be no surprise.

The eurozone imports more goods from China than anywhere else in the world, and the yuan’s weighting in the trade-weighted euro rivals that of the dollar. Trade tensions between China and Europe will hit the euro hard. And with the euro having a near-60% weighting in the broader dollar index, there is a naturally strong inverse correlation between the euro’s fate and the dollar.

Analysts at Deutsche Bank predict that the dollar will stay “stronger for longer” this year and into next year, although momentum may fade as the cycle gets longer in the tooth.

A more belligerent stance on trade from whoever wins the White House in November, however, would be a major dollar-positive development and probably push the euro back down towards parity.

“The dollar is under-pricing risks from US protectionism,” they wrote on Wednesday.

— Reuters

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MUSIC

US pianist and director Michael Riesman plays with the Philip Glass Ensemble during the Noches del Botanico festival in Madrid. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A man rides his cart along a street during rainfall in New Delhi. — AFP



FASHION

Fashion designer Mohammed Ashi acknowledges the audience after Ashi Studio show as part of the Paris Fashion Week in Paris. — AFP



SCIENCES

This underwater photo shows Gavin Miller, the scientific programme director from marine research centre Global Reef, cleaning an artificial structure for coral planting around Koh Tao island in the southern Thai province of Surat Thani. — AFP



FILM

US actor Toby Huss attends the world premiere of A24's 'MaXXXine' at the TCL Chinese theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | JUNE 30, 2024 | DHUL HIJJA 23, 1445 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



Lauren and Jackson England at their safari wedding in Ranthambore, India.

When Lauren and Jackson England tied the knot with a safari wedding in Ranthambore, India, in January, they wanted the dress code to reflect the surroundings. The mood they communicated to their guests was "classic heritage Ralph Lauren." "I am an aesthetic person, and we had a clear vision for the hero image we wanted to create on the safari Jeep," Jackson England, 37, said, referring to their primary wedding portrait. (He and Lauren England are founders of a content and production company in Sydney, Australia.) "It was important to me that guests followed our colour palette." In the end, "our creative friends had fun with it, but our mothers were a bit overwhelmed." Lauren England, 40, said that they didn't want anyone to feel pressure, so they "informed everyone three months in advance, and had

tion, a multiday cruise in Europe from May 29 to June 1, included "classic cruise," "tourist chic" and "Italian summer." "Weddings today are designed within an inch of their life," said Sarah Haywood, a wedding planner in London. "These mood boards help communicate the destination, venue and event design so that guests can be dressed appropriately." Anny Choi, a stylist in New York, has seen a rise in requests to create mood boards for wedding guests. While the couples "want guests to wear what they are comfortable in, they also want everyone to look cohesive," she said. Some weddings are drawing inspiration from highly glamorous and sometimes themed events like red carpets, fashion shows and the Met Gala, which has become known for its own unconventional dress codes like "Camp: Notes on Fashion" and this year's "The Garden of Time." "Wedding events have become more extreme. It's not just a welcome party but an all-

SOME WEDDINGS ARE DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM HIGHLY GLAMOROUS AND SOMETIMES THEMED EVENTS LIKE RED CARPETS, FASHION SHOWS AND THE MET GALA, WHICH HAS BECOME KNOWN FOR ITS OWN UNCONVENTIONAL DRESS CODES LIKE 'CAMP: NOTES ON FASHION' AND THIS YEAR'S 'THE GARDEN OF TIME'

What should you wear to our wedding? Here's a mood board



discussions with them on what could work," adding that they also chose the dress code of "colours of India" for a pre-wedding event in Jaipur that doubled as her 40th birthday party. They used campaign imagery from designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee to illustrate this theme. The Englands aren't the only ones directing the aesthetic of their wedding. Earlier this year, nine pages of wardrobe guidance were given to guests for a multiday pre-wedding celebration in Jamnagar, India, for Radhika Merchant and Anant Ambani, the youngest son of one of the world's richest men. "Jungle fever," "dazzling Desi romance" and "heritage Indian" were among the themes, and the document, which included runway photos and designer campaign images for inspiration, listed the expected weather conditions for the event. Dress codes for their more recent pre-wedding celebra-

white party. It's not just a pool-side brunch but a "tropical extravaganza," Choi said. "If your vision is so specific, the more information and guidelines you can give your guests, the better." Swathi Narra, an entrepreneur and real estate developer from New Orleans, has been a guest at multiple weddings with dress codes, ranging in theme from "denim and diamonds" and "vintage Bollywood" to "Texas hoedown." Narra, 43, said she finds dress codes to be one way to get excited about the wedding, but cautioned against couples making it obligatory or overly prescriptive. "I wouldn't want them to dictate a very specific silhouette to wear," she said. Ayushi Dalmia, an art director in Toronto, decided to do away with any dress codes for her two-day wedding in Lonavala, India, in February 2023, which surprised her friends. — NYT



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HEALTH

Walking can be a powerful remedy for back pain

Doctors and physical therapists have long incorporated aerobic exercise into treatment programmes for lower back pain. Movement can simultaneously ease lower back pain and also strengthen the muscles that support your back. Still, many people with back pain can be hesitant to exercise.

A new study, published on Wednesday in The Lancet, offers more evidence on the power of movement. The study found that a regular walking routine can be very effective in preventing the recurrence of back pain. The study focused on adults with a history of low-back pain; those who walked regularly went nearly twice as long without their back pain coming back compared with the control group.

The findings are in line with a large body of existing research that has established an association between physical activity and better outcomes for back pain. A 2019 systematic review found that physical activity lowered the prevalence of back pain. In addition, a 2017 study found that yoga worked as well as physical therapy for relieving back pain.

The new study builds on this research by following patients outside a tightly controlled clinical setting. Mark Hancock, a professor of physiotherapy at Macquarie University in Australia and a senior author of the study, sought

A NEW STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE LANCET FOUND THAT A REGULAR WALKING ROUTINE CAN BE VERY EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING THE RECURRENCE OF BACK PAIN.



to evaluate the effectiveness of a less-expensive intervention that could be easier for many people to access than in-clinic treatment.

Hancock and a team of researchers targeted a relatively sedentary sample group. The researchers collected data on 701 adults who had recently recovered from an episode of low-back pain. They were randomly split in two groups: one group received an individualised walking and education programme, facilitated by a physiotherapist over six sessions in a six-month period. The other group did not receive any intervention. The researchers followed both groups for the next one to three years.

The goal for each person in the walking group was to walk five times per week for at least 30 minutes daily — but the programme was highly personalised based on age, body mass index, current activity level, time constraints and personal goals. Participants in the

walking group also received an education programme to help them better understand and respond to their pain. When patients had an uptick of lower back pain, they were encouraged to continue walking, but adjust their speed and distance as needed. Hancock said that when many people experience increased pain, they often feel especially protective of their back and avoid movement.

“The education changed the way that they thought about that and got them being more active — and remaining active when they had some back pain,” Hancock said.

The new findings also echo the conclusions of a 2020 meta-analysis of 25 studies on low-back-pain prevention, of which Hancock was co-author. In the meta-analysis, researchers found that regular exercise, combined with physical education, was the most effective way to prevent lower back pain from recurring. — NYT

FASHION

Vogue World brings together fashion and sport in Paris



Vogue World brings together fashion and sport in Paris

Paris played host on Sunday to an ultra-glitzzy collision between fashion and sport as Vogue put on its latest branding event in the heart of the city ahead of the Olympic Games.

With magazine sales falling precipitously, the fashion bible has turned to star-studded events in a bid to keep its name relevant.

“Vogue World: Paris” follows similar events in New York and London, and was neatly timed in the midst of fashion week and on International Olympic Day.

Taking over Place Vendôme in the heart of the city, the idea was to match each decade of fashion from the past century — since Paris last hosted the Games in 1924 — with a different sport, from gymnastics to breakdancing to fencing.

The show began with Jean Paul Gaultier putting the finishing touches to the dress of singer Aya

Nakamura, while an orchestra delivered a classical take on Daft Punk’s “Around the World” for the 800 guests that included Pharrell Williams, Venus Williams, Katy Perry and Bad Bunny.

The first part of the show paired cycling with 1920s fashion, including vintage Chanel dresses from the period, while Nakamura sang.

At one point, supermodels Gigi Hadid and Kendall Jenner rode horses around the square — all four wearing Hermes.

Other brands providing the clothes included Balenciaga, Balmain, Dior, Louis Vuitton and Saint Laurent.

“We’re here to celebrate the wonder of French fashion. So I’m just grateful for all the support from the French community and the world of fashion here in Paris,” Vogue supremo Anna Wintour said before the event kicked off.

— AFP

KITESURFERS FLOCK TO MASIRAH TO RIDE THE WIND

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

Muscat is reeling under scorching summer, but Masirah is a very different story. Six-hour drive or less than an hour's flight away, the island is another world with cooler weather and consistent wind. Every year at this time, tourists from around the world flock to this special place.

OPEN SPACE

These are the windseekers, the wind surfers and kiteboarders from around the globe. They have chosen this path of adrenaline to immerse in the deep blue, the tranquil green, from serene lagoon to choppy waves - all they need is the open space to play their sport and, of course, the wind.

In Masirah, no space is too crowded, and there are plenty of beaches to choose from, each with their unique features from the level of wind, waves (or no waves), rocks (or no rocks).

For those who understand this thrill, Masirah is the perfect haven for windsurfers from the UAE, Europe, Canada, Asia, Australia.

From beginners looking to get started without needing to 'wait' for the wind indefinitely, to the Big Air athletes coming to try new tricks or beat their own records, the windseekers just looking for a place to enjoy the sport.

Luke, a kiter from Dubai who visited Masirah for the first time this season, said "I'm definitely coming back for sure, I started kiting in Dubai and the conditions were challenging with low wind, here the conditions are amazing". Johannas, an experienced kiter, said "I learnt kiting in Kite Camp at Masirah many years ago, and I've come here every year for the season for at least the last 5 years"

And for a sport that requires the right wind, the right place, without the overcrowded traffic of other kites, Masirah is worth it.

Whether you're a novice eager to learn or an expert looking to push your limits, Masirah promises an unforgettable adventure. As the winds continue, so too will the passion of those who flock to this idyllic spot, solidifying its reputation as a top-tier kitesurfing paradise.



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JOHANNAS, AN EXPERIENCED KITER

