

HM sends message to Emir of Qatar

DOHA: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar. The message deals with the bilateral relations and means of enhancing them between the two countries. The message was handed over by Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Qatar when he was received at Amiri Diwan in Doha by Shaikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani, Deputy Emir. SEE P2

SUNRISE - 05:27 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:00 AM
DHUHR - 12:17 PM
ASR - 03:36 PM
MAGHRIB - 07:02 PM
ISHA - 08:24 PM



MUSCAT
HM RECEIVES WRITTEN MESSAGE FROM ERITREAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a written message from President Isaias Afwerki of the State of Eritrea. The message deals with relations between Oman and Eritrea. It was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister when he received in his office on Monday Osman Saleh Mohammed, Eritrean Minister of Foreign Affairs. SEE P2

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF SOUTH SUDAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Salva Kiir Mayardit of the Republic of South Sudan on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Mayardit. His Majesty also wished the people of South Sudan further progress and prosperity. — ONA

MoSD ELDERLY CARE CONDITIONS

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has issued conditions and regulations for taking care of the elders in the alternative families which fall under the ministry. Accordingly, an elderly person (everyone who has reached the age of 60).

DETAILS ON P3



HIS MAJESTY HEADS TO EUROPE FOR PRIVATE VISIT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday left heading for Europe on a private visit. May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys and grant him good health, well-being and a long life. — ONA

Royal Hospital performs complex operations with modern tech

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team from the Royal Hospital's National Centre for Cardiac Medicine and Surgery (NCCMS) performed eight complex operations using the Orbital Atherectomy technique for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Adel bin Ali al Jabri, consultant in interventional cardiology and catheterisation at the NCCMS, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that this service, first introduced in June 2022, showed encouraging results that prompted the medical team to continue using it to treat patients suffering from complex arterial blockages.

He added that another technique, the Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) technology, was also introduced for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman during the same period. This, he explained, helped in diagnosis and treatment of complex arterial cases.

Dr Adel pointed out that the



Orbital Atherectomy technique is an advanced method in treating calcified arterial blockages that cannot be treated by using traditional methods. He added that the technique allowed the removal of calcific deposits with high precision, without harming the surrounding healthy tissue.

Dr Adel reported that the OCT technology complements the Orbital Atherectomy technique, as

it provides high-resolution images of blood vessels. This, he added, helps doctors diagnose arterial blockages more accurately and decide appropriate treatment for each patient's case. The introduction of these two advanced technologies at the NCCMS represents a significant step forward in providing the best possible care for patients suffering from cardiovascular diseases. — ONA

Israel expands Gaza evacuation zone as intense battles rage

GAZA: The Israeli military on Monday expanded an evacuation order for Gaza City, with a new wave of residents fleeing the territory's main city amid intense fighting.

Civilians have now been ordered out of the majority of the Gaza Strip's largest city, where thousands of families had taken shelter from fighting in other parts of the war-stricken territory.

Backed by fighter jet and drone attacks, columns of tanks took up positions around the city, while an army spokesman warned residents of the Sabra, Rimal, Tal Al-Hawa and Al-Daraj districts to flee to so-called "humanitarian zones".

The civil defence agency in the Hamas-run territory said even before the additional warning that it had reports of "dozens" of dead and wounded from night-time fighting in different parts of the city.

The Israeli military has been fighting for nearly two weeks in the Shujaiya district of Gaza City where it issued an earlier evacuation order. It said it had "eliminated" more than 30 "terrorists" in the latest fighting there.

Loudspeakers on armoured vehicles toured the Al-Daraj and Al-Tuffah neighbourhoods



A man walks past rubble and damaged buildings along a street in the Tuffah district east of Gaza City on Monday. — AFP

telling people to leave.

Israel said the operation targets included the headquarters of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, in Gaza City.

Muhammad Bisan said he had been through "an indescribable night". "Planes and artillery are bombing and drones are firing from all directions, and we do not know where to run, right or left," he said.

Some said they had only

just left other areas after being ordered out by the army.

"Where do we go," said Abdullah Khammash, who told how he left his latest refuge at three in the morning.

"We ran away... and slept in the streets. People felt sorry for us and gave us blankets and here we are again living in the rubble." Districts near the southern cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah are also under evacuation orders. — AFP

STUDY LOOKS AT IMPACT OF FLIES ON TOURISM



The biting fly, known as Arnoot in Dhofar Governorate, is the most annoying insect for tourists especially in areas with water springs of Dhofar Governorate. This biting fly species becomes active during the autumn (Khareef) season, causing much inconvenience due to its painful bites that leave red marks on the skin and cause severe itching. Ahmed bin Khamis al Sudairy, a research assistant at the Center for Environmental Studies and Research (CESAR) at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), said that 32 species of biting fly were recorded in the Sultanate of Oman the most common of which is locally known as Arnoot spreads in the water springs of Dhofar Governorate and becomes active during the July-September period. DETAILS ON P2



HM SENDS
MESSAGE TO
QATAR EMIR

SAYYID AMMAR BIN ABDULLAH AL BUSAIDI, AMBASSADOR OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN TO THE STATE OF QATAR, WAS RECEIVED AT AMIRI DIWAN IN DOHA BY SHAIKH ABDULLAH BIN HAMAD AL THANI, DEPUTY EMIR AND HANDED OVER A MESSAGE FOR HIS MAJESTY. — ONA



HM receives written message from Eritrean President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a written message from President Isaias Afwerki of the State of Eritrea. The message deals with relations between Oman and Eritrea. It was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister when he received in his office on



Monday Osman Saleh Mohammed, Eritrean Minister of Foreign Affairs. During the meeting, the two ministers discussed the bilateral relations and exchanged views on a set of regional and international issues. The meeting was attended by some officials from both sides. — ONA

Study on biting flies looks at impact on tourism in Dhofar

YUSEF AL HABSI
SALALAH, JULY 8

The biting fly, known as Arnoot in Dhofar Governorate, is the most annoying insect for tourists especially in areas with water springs of Dhofar Governorate. This biting fly species becomes active during the autumn (khareef) season, causing much inconvenience due to its painful bites that leave red marks on the skin and cause severe itching. Ahmed bin Khamis al Sudairy, a research assistant at the Centre for Environmental Studies and Research (CESAR) at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), said that 32 species of biting fly were recorded in the Sultanate of Oman the most common of which is locally known as Arnoot spreads in the water springs of Dhofar Governorate and becomes active during the July-September period.



Arnoot bites cause a condition medically known as Popular urticaria which causes blisters and a severe rash accompanied by severe itching that causes the tourists to feel uneasy sensation thus affecting tourism turnout in Dhofar Governorate. Many studies have proven the effectiveness of some control

methods such as the use of light traps which attract biting flies with near ultraviolet rays. A study conducted at Kasetsart University in Bangkok showed the effectiveness of light traps in attracting 27 types of biting flies, Al Sudairy said. Al Sudairy stressed that the management of insect breeding

areas such as animal manure, decomposed grass, wet soil, can help maintain a clean and dry environment thereby reducing the number of biting flies. Tourists are advised to wear body-covering, light-coloured clothing to prevent the bites as well as using insect repellent that is safe for the skin. Studies

have also shown that wearing some bracelets that emit ultrasonic frequencies helps repel some types of biting flies and mosquitoes in general. It is recommended to avoid going out during peak mosquito activity times especially in the early morning and prior to sunset as well as staying away as much as possible from their breeding sites such as water springs and lush grass and trees, he said. In a bid to reduce the number of biting flies in the tourist sites of Dhofar Governorate, the Dhofar Municipality formed a steering committee headed by Dr Ahmed al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality. The committee includes a field control team and a specialised scientific research team. The field control team carried out intensive control campaigns in some water springs utilising several methods such as spraying insecticides

using drones to access rugged areas, thermal fogging to cover large areas with high efficiency, spraying moist soil on the edges of water springs to eliminate larvae and limit reproduction. The municipality also used special traps containing chemicals that attract biting flies which are placed in strategic places. These efforts have significantly reduced the number of biting flies and alleviated the inconvenience visitors are experiencing. In addition to the field efforts, the municipality formed a specialised scientific research team comprising researchers from various research, academic and governmental bodies to conduct an in-depth study on the Arnoot fly in Dhofar with the aim of developing effective and sustainable control strategies while maintaining the ecological balance.

Defence Ministry Secretary-General
visits sites of military exercises

MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence, on Monday visited the sites of two military exercises carried out by institutions of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies. The first visit was made to the site of a strategic exercise code-named 'Decision Making 11', carried out by participants in the 11th course at the National Defence College. The second visit was made to the site of an annual military exercise titled 'Al Hazm', being implemented by participants in the 37th course at the Joint Command and Staff College. At the two visits, Dr Mohammed bin Nasser Al Za'abi was accompanied by



Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, pays visit to 'Decision Making 11', 'Al Hazm'

Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, and a number of senior officers. Al Za'abi and his accompanying senior

officers listened to briefings about the objectives of the two exercises and their role in preparing the participants to deal with complex situations. — ONA



MOH, WHO ORGANISE WORKSHOP ON GLLP

MUSCAT: The World Health Organisation in cooperation with the Ministry of Health organised a regional workshop on the Global Laboratory Leadership Programme (GLLP) for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, on Monday. The 4-day workshop is attended by 60 participants from 11 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and Europe as well as several UN and international organisations.

Interactive session for urban renewal initiative held in Al Qabil

AL QABIL: The Wali of Al Qabil Office, in collaboration with the Directorate-General of Housing and Urban Planning in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, organised an interactive session for the urban renewal initiative entitled 'Al Mudayrib Deserves' in the Wilayat of Al Qabil. Shaikh Mahmoud bin Rashid al Saadi, Wali of Al Qabil, highlighted the significance of the initiative, emphasising the historical importance of the Al Mudayrib Market. The urban renewal effort is part of the regional urban strategy 2040 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, aiming to



An interactive session for urban renewal initiative called 'Al Mudayrib Deserves' was held in Al Qabil

rejuvenate and rehabilitate the market. The interactive session engaged various governmental and private



institutions and local community members to brainstorm ideas and proposals for reviving the market while preserving its archaeological

essence. Al Saadi also noted that the initiative is crucial for maintaining the market's rich history, as it has

been one of the most renowned local markets in the Sultanate of Oman since ancient times. Salem bin Ali al Balushi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Housing and Urban Planning in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, explained that the session covered several key areas. These include sustainable urban development which focused on sustainable and eco-friendly design ideas. Effective transportation system which aimed at improving traffic flow within the market. Effective infrastructure which emphasised the use of modern technology to

enhance urban planning. Environmental management which aimed at promoting tourism, preserving cultural identity, and developing tourism and culture. Growth and prosperity which concentrated on enhancing commercial development and activation and natural resource management that focused on boosting agriculture and preserving local water resources. The session also featured a visual presentation of the ancient Al Mudayrib Market, along with practical and training activities for participants.



MoSD announces conditions for providing care for the elderly

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) issued conditions and regulations for taking care of the elders in the alternative families which fall under the Ministry, through Official Gazette No (1552) on Monday.

Accordingly, an elderly person (everyone who has reached the age of 60 and fulfils the conditions stipulated in Article (3)) may be cared for through alternative families (the family that takes care of the elderly), and this care is considered work voluntary work that is done without compensation, and the Ministry may provide assistance to alternative families in this way, as per Article (2) which stipulates regulations for the care of the elderly.

The elderly person whose care is entrusted to the alternative family must be an Omani national who has a family, or his family does not provide him with care in an appropriate manner, based on the



social examination conducted by the competent department.

He must be free of infectious diseases according to a medical report issued by a health institution and this has exceptions from any of these conditions according to the circumstances of each case and the Ministry has the call on it.

On the other hand, Article 4 stipulates that the alternative family should have at least one Omani nationality within the family and it should be socially stable and capable of meeting the needs of the elderly in reality and

this shall be confirmed after social research conducted by the relevant department.

Likewise, the family members should be free from contagious diseases or behavioural disorders and should provide a stable source of income for the family that covers its needs.

Also, the Article further suggests that the family's place of residence must be appropriate and there can be an exception to care for the elderly by an individual who is capable of caring and meets the same conditions.

The person or family which meets the above requirements shall submit a request to care for an elderly person from a family member to the competent department in the stipulated format with:

1. Copy of the applicant's ID card
 2. Copies of the marriage contract for the family
 3. Non-conviction certificate for all family members
 4. Evidence that the applicant has a stable source of income
 5. Copies of the house ownership or rental contract, and
 6. A medical report issued by a health institution proving that the family members are free of infectious diseases or behavioural disorders.
- The competent department shall study the request for care for the elderly and decide on it within thirty days from the date of completion of the required documents, and if the application is rejected, the applicant may appeal the rejection decision within 60 days from the date of his notification.

Crowdfunding drives innovation in Oman



Crowdfunding has emerged as a critical financing tool, channelling approximately RO 5.8 million into over 100 diverse projects by Q1 2024.

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari, Executive Vice President of the Financial Services Authority (FSA), underscored the pivotal role of crowdfunding in Oman's burgeoning digital economy. Since its official launch in 2022, crowdfunding has emerged as a critical financing tool, channelling approximately RO 5.8 million into over 100 diverse projects by the first quarter of 2024. These projects span key sectors such as logistics, oil and gas, services and technology, demonstrating the broad applicability and growing trust in crowdfunding as a viable financial resource.

Al Maamari shared these insights during his opening speech at the "Challenges and Growth Opportunities" workshop, organised by the FSA in collaboration with 17 government and private entities. He emphasised that crowdfunding platforms are not just expanding financing options for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) but are also major drivers of innovation. These platforms leverage financial technologies to raise funds, thereby enhancing competitive capabilities and fostering market innovations.

Despite the impressive progress, Al Maamari acknowledged that the sector faces significant challenges that need to be addressed to ensure long-term success. The FSA's approach, marked by flexibility and facilitation, aims to quickly provide this financing option to support emerging companies while continuously evaluating and adapting the legislative framework to ensure a secure investment environment.

The workshop served as a platform for community

engagement, bringing together experts and stakeholders to identify the hurdles within the crowdfunding market and discuss potential growth opportunities. Participants recommended several strategic actions, such as fostering continuous communication between licenced crowdfunding platforms, initiating legislative amendments to refine crowdfunding regulations, and encouraging cooperation with the Mala'a Center (Oman Credit and Financial Information Center) for better customer risk assessment.

Additionally, there was an emphasis on digital transformation in commercial transactions and coordination between the FSA and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to support real estate projects through crowdfunding platforms.

The event featured various presentations and working papers that shed light on the crucial role of crowdfunding platforms in the economic landscape. A panel discussion further explored the challenges and obstacles these platforms face, providing a comprehensive overview of the sector's current state and future prospects.

The FSA's regulatory framework, established under Decision No. (153/2021), includes provisions designed to support SMEs by offering flexible and stimulating facilities. One notable requirement is that any company wishing to operate a crowdfunding platform must have a minimum capital of RO 25,000. This requirement aims to create opportunities for Omani youth and support the launch of national financing platforms, thus promoting investment initiatives across promising economic and productive sectors.

Ajwaa Al Ashkharah Forum begins tomorrow

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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MUSCAT: The Ajwaa Al Ashkharah Forum in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali will launch its second edition tomorrow. The forum which attracted over 220,000 visitors and participants last year will further enhance the tourism status of the governorate.

The Al Sharqiyah South Governorate will witness the Ajwaa Al Ashkharah forum from July 10 to 31, 2024 in the Niyabat of Al Ashkharah, Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

This includes a variety of activities and events that aim to highlight the tourism, entertainment and historical aspects of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali as it also enhances domestic tourism to the governorate.

Among the anticipated activities at the forum is Al Ashkharah Bicycle Racing Challenge for fans of bicycle



racing and adventure, as well as handicrafts exhibitions for productive families and handicrafts, popular foods, Omani folk art performances in addition to events, activities, water sports and recreational and beach competitions to enhance community and tourism interaction.

Salim bin Mohammed al

Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said that the Ministry pays special attention to tourism events, believing in their direct and indirect impact in stimulating tourism movement in targeted destinations, supporting tourism promotion efforts and encouraging investors to establish future tourism projects there.

It is expected that the forum will witness wide participation, as Al Ashkharah is famous for summer tourism due to its distinctive summer atmosphere and low temperatures. The lowest temperatures here are less than 30 degrees Celsius during the morning and decrease to a large extent at night, in addition to its consistency with summer vacation for students.

The forums held in various governorates contribute to strengthening the governorate's resources and providing people with additional sources of income by encouraging the local community to pursue the horizons of self-employment and entrepreneurship through the economic activities accompanying the forum.

The priorities of Oman's future vision will also receive attention and follow-up, including the priority of developing sustainable governorates and cities.

Bisya and Salut Visitor Centre attracts over 7,000 visitors

About 7,546 visitors of various nationalities have visited the Bisya and Salut Visitor Centre in the Wilayat of Bahla since its opening in February 2023 until May end.

These figures were revealed by The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) recently.

The Centre aims to prepare archaeological sites for tourism and to satisfy the visitors' knowledge about the historical significance of the Bisya and Salut archaeological area, as well as the history of archaeological research in the region.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Tamimi, Director, the Bisya and Salut Archaeological Site Department, at the MoHT said that the centre explores the history of human settlement in the area and the cultural exchange between Oman and ancient civilisations.

The establishment of the



Ahmed al Tamimi, Director, Bisya and Salut Archaeological Site



Archaeological excavations at Bisya and Salut Visitor Centre

centre is part of the MoHT's efforts to develop the site following archaeological excavations and the maintenance of archaeological sites in the Bisya and Salut area, as well as the initiation of pathways to the archaeological sites.

He added that the roles of the centre are part of MoHT's plans to establish centres at several archaeological sites to provide information and present it more accessible and in various display methods.

The centre features display

boards summarising the history of archaeological research in the area, different patterns of human settlement, types of tombs and trade relations that existed between neighbouring civilisations, as confirmed by archaeological excavations. The centre is equipped with modern tools to enhance information delivery, including interactive screens throughout the centre.

In the field of scientific research, the Director explained that the centre operates through



its various departments to complement the Ministry's efforts in surveying, scientific documentation and regular monitoring of archaeological sites. The centre also oversees archaeological expeditions and provides support to researchers and enthusiasts in the fields of history and archaeology.

Al Tamimi pointed out that the archaeological artefacts on display are distributed across three main sections or halls namely the Bronze Age Hall, the Iron Age



Hall, and a section for World Heritage Sites.

These sections collectively house 344 different archaeological pieces selected to support scientific texts in the exhibition halls. They represent various periods of human settlement in the region, highlighting the scale and nature of economic activities such as agriculture, trade and mining.

The exhibits vary from tools, stone and pottery utensils, seals, and bronze artefacts. Some pieces underscore external influences,

reflecting Oman's relations with neighbouring civilisations in the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia and Persia.

Al Tamimi also affirmed that a field classroom has been equipped and prepared to accommodate workshops, camps, and expeditions. These facilities are dedicated to programmes that combine classroom and field applications. In 2023, about 13 activities were implemented, and a diverse programme package has been prepared for 2024.



AFRAH AL BALUSHI, @Afrahalbalushia

BALANCING SCREEN TIME

ELECTRONIC games are considered part of modern culture, and they have become very popular in various parts of the world. Many of our children spend a lot of time in front of the computer or mobile phone, playing electronic games, and they develop such major problems that a new diagnosis called Internet Gaming Disorder has been proposed. They certainly have an impact on the behaviour of children.

Studies indicate that there is a link between frequent playing of violent and aggressive games and aggressive behaviour in children. Although sports, war and combat games may be popular among boys, it is important to ensure that violence and aggression are not promoted in these games.

Previous medical studies confirm that excessive screen use by young children can lead to them being less able to recognise emotions, but some children master values through games, and many find friendship and social cohesion.

Some studies have found that the percentage of children owning electronic devices of various types is 99 per cent, of whom more than 75 per cent own mobile phones, more than 45 per cent of children own computers, more than 35 per cent own tablets, and 5 per cent own other devices.

The study showed that more than 35 per cent own video games, which differ in terms of the way they are played and presented, as most of them are linked to violence, murder, hatred, and many ideas that are alien to our societies.

Dr Humaid bin Salem al Hinai, a trainer in human development, mentions that a balance is required when children use electronic games because of their psychological impact as the child may simulate something that is not real.

Some studies also indicate a number of positive and negative effects that may occur.

On the positive side, electronic games help children improve their creativity, critical thinking, cognitive skills, and communication with others. They may also help improve children's abilities to solve problems and make correct decisions.

On the negative side, electronic games can affect children's social behaviour, and may increase sleep disturbances and reduce physical activity and social interaction in the real world. In addition, some violent electronic games can lead to an increased tendency towards violence

and aggression in children, and this is one of the negative effects that need to be followed up and monitored by parents.

Parents are advised to oblige the child to a specific time for playing, while monitoring these games and their quality

- 99% OF CHILDREN OWN ELECTRONIC DEVICES
- 75% OWN MOBILE PHONES
- 45% OWN COMPUTERS
- 35% OWN TABLETS
- 5% OWN OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES
- 35% OF CHILDREN OWN VIDEO GAMES

- AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR
- REDUCED EMOTIONAL RECOGNITION
- SLEEP DISTURBANCES
- REDUCED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
- SOCIAL ISOLATION
- TENDENCY TOWARDS VIOLENCE
- MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS
- COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

EFFECTS OF E-GAMES

negative effects of electronic games on children's behaviour, parents should monitor when children use electronic games and provide them with effective positive alternative activities.

Spending too much time playing video games instead of indulging in physical activities may harm a child's health in many ways. A child's cognitive development may be affected if they do not go out and socialise in the real world.

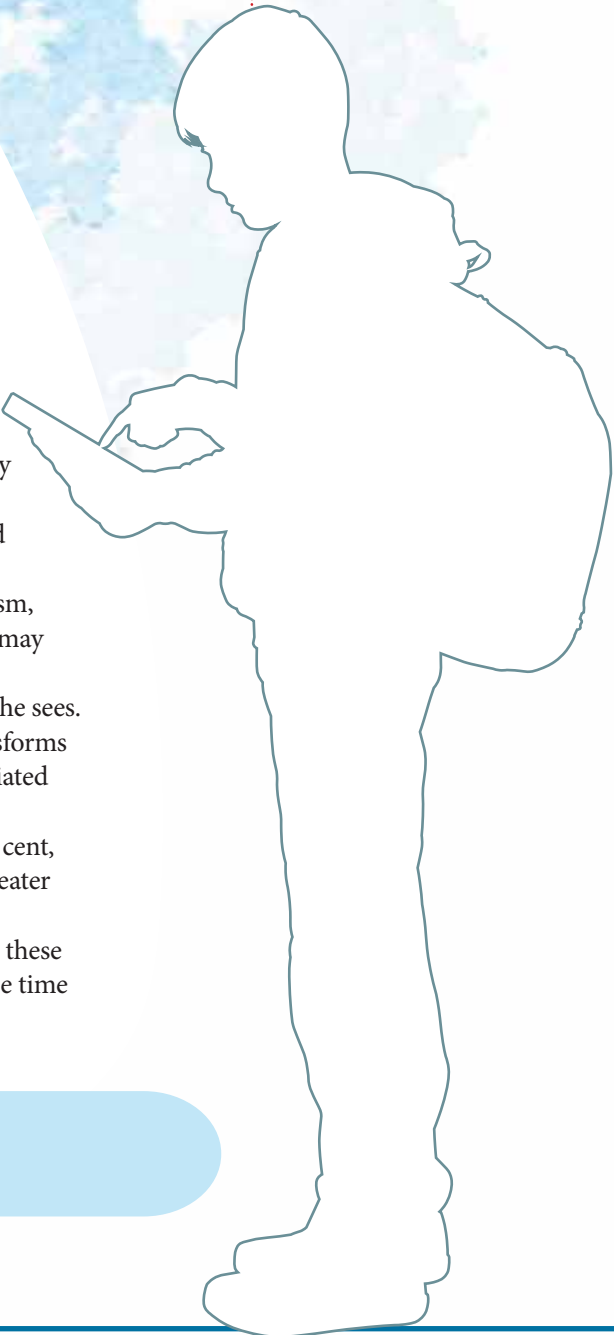
Constantly sitting in one place and playing prolonged video games can increase the chances of obesity, weaken muscles and joints, and make hands and fingers numb due to excessive stress, and multiple studies indicate that it can impair eyesight.

Children are exposed to wrong values through video games, as many video games contain excessive violence, profanity, racism, and many other things that children cannot imagine in the correct way. So, they may fail to take these images with caution and may end up trying to emulate the same behaviour as depicted in the games.

The danger of games reaches the stage of depression and isolation for the child and that child begins to imitate the characters he sees. It also afflicts him with a state of laziness, lethargy and a lack of social relationships because it takes up a lot of his time, and transforms him over time from an active child into a lazy child and full of negativity, because all his thoughts are about the game to be associated with him in a psychological state.

Mental health consultants warn that a child's time playing electronic games exposes him to depression at a rate of 70 to 80 per cent, but what is happening now is that many children spend long hours a day exceeding those percentages, which exposes them to greater depression.

To reduce the risks of electronic games, parents are advised to oblige the child to a specific time for playing, while monitoring these games and their quality, and tend to involve the child in sports clubs to practice the games and hobbies they love, and to use free time to learn useful things, and to develop a weekly plan to visit family and relatives to strengthen family and community ties.





CPA ENGAGES WITH STAKEHOLDERS OF NEW SILAL MARKET

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Oman's Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) recently convened a significant meeting with suppliers and wholesalers of vegetables and fruits in the Silal market.

The session, chaired by Waleed bin Ali al Rawahi, Director General of the Directorate General of Consumer Services and Market Control, saw participation from key stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Silal, and various CPA officials.



The primary objective of the gathering was to bolster existing cooperation among institutions.

The primary objective of the gathering was to bolster existing cooperation among institutions, achieve sustainable development, and serve the public interest by

overcoming challenges and proposing viable solutions. The CPA seized this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to both providers and consumers in the Silal marketplace.

Al Rawahi emphasised the CPA's unwavering support across all sectors. The dialogue centred on the CPA's role in the Silal market, exploring strategies to benefit both

providers and consumers. Al Rawahi pointed out that enhanced cooperation among stakeholders is crucial for economic recovery, diversification, and an active commercial environment.

A key highlight of the meeting was the CPA's collaboration with relevant authorities to ensure the steady supply and price stability of vegetables and fruits in the market.

The meeting also tackled challenges faced by government institutions, suppliers, wholesalers, and the Silal market. Proposed solutions focused on organising sales movements, ensuring the display of product price lists, and issuing invoices in Arabic during transactions. It was

stressed that the market's operational period should not be exploited.

Al Rawahi further highlighted the CPA's role in market monitoring and providing diverse shopping options to safeguard consumer rights. The CPA is dedicated to ensuring compliance with regulations and issuing violation reports against any provider exploiting market changes.

The commitment to fulfilling the CPA's objectives, supervisory functions, and raising awareness in coordination with various authorities was emphasised, aiming to foster cooperation, integration and effective partnerships within the local community and its institutions.

Energy, water production sees growth by 1.4 per cent in April



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman saw a 1.4 per cent increase in total electricity production, reaching 11,196 gigawatts per hour by the end of April 2024, compared to 11,036.5 gigawatts per hour during the same period in 2023.

Preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information highlighted that the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, and Al

Dhahirah collectively produced 6,790.2 gigawatts per hour.

In Muscat Governorate, electricity production decreased by 0.9 per cent, totalling 36.6 gigawatts per hour. Conversely, Dhofar Governorate experienced a significant increase of 19 per cent, reaching 1,618.8 gigawatts per hour.

Al Sharqiyah North, and Al Sharqiyah South governorates also saw an increase in electricity

production by 4 per cent, amounting to 2,586.9 gigawatts per hour. However, Al Wusta Governorate experienced a decrease of 41.8 per cent, producing only 44 gigawatts per hour. In Musandam Governorate, production increased by 5.2 per cent, totalling 109.9 gigawatts per hour. Overall, Oman's net electricity production until the end of April 2024 increased by 1.3 per cent, reaching

10,825.7 gigawatts per hour. Regarding water production, the Sultanate of Oman produced approximately 163.3 million cubic metres of water by the end of April 2024, a slight decrease from 164.9 million cubic metres in the same period of 2023. Muscat Governorate, and Dhofar Governorate recorded increases in water production by 5.6 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively. — ONA

Treasury bills worth RO 20m issued

MUSCAT: The total issuance of Government Treasury Bills amounted to RO 20 million.

The value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 4 million, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO 99.640 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.640 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.69286 per cent and 4.70981, per cent respectively.

The value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 16 million, for a maturity period of 91 days.

The average accepted price reached 98.730 RO for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 98.730 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.09396 per cent and 5.15948 per cent, respectively.

The Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting



and repurchase facilities (Repo).

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 6 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 6.50 per cent.

Furthermore, the Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

— ONA

93 ABM students graduate in National Education Diploma

KABEER YOUSUF
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As many as 49 boys and 44 girls of Ahmad Bin Majid International School (ABM) pursuing the National Education Diploma graduated at a glittering ceremony held under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said for girls, and Engineer Said bin Hamood al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) for boys at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Saturday.

"Today is a great day that 93 grade 12 students got their wings to fly to greater heights and conquer the world.

This school and campus are close to my heart and may all these boys and girls have their



The primary objective of the gathering was to bolster existing cooperation among institutions.

future moulded with a blend of national pride and thirst to contribute to the world," Engineer Said bin Hamood al Maawali, told the Observer.

Addressing the graduates, Waheeda bint Abdulaziz, Board

Member, ABMIPS said, "Today marks a milestone in your path to becoming future leaders. As active alumni of ABM International School, affiliated with prestigious networks like Cambridge, Edexcel, and Unesco,

you can proudly proclaim your graduation from a school known for outstanding results and award-winning programmes in leadership, sports, and international exchange". "Always remember: success

is not always linear. Embrace scenario planning, learn from failure, and prioritise an "I can" attitude. Surround yourself with mentors and positive influences, and uphold integrity, tolerance, and excellence in all you do, she



advised.

"As you receive your diplomas, know that this graduating class embodies ABM's mission — blending international education with Omani culture and values. The world awaits your positive impact," she noted in her congratulatory address.

Expressing his joy, Mohammed bin Hamood al Ghafri, a graduate, said "We recognise the visionary leadership of the late Sultan Qaboos, who recognised the crucial role of education in shaping Oman's future and for investing in its development. We also extend our appreciation and support to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for continuing to uphold and enhance the legacy of his predecessor and for his commitment to realising the ambitious goals of Oman's Vision 2040," said Al Ghafri.



Gazans found
dead after release
from custody

GAZA: The handcuffed bodies of three Palestinian men freed from Israeli custody have been found near Gaza’s border with Israel, and an uncle of one of them and a witness said they had been attacked by Israeli forces shortly after their release.

Abdel Hadi Ghabayen, an uncle of one of the detainees, Kamel Ghabayen, said he set out at 5 am on Sunday looking for his nephew following his arrest by Israeli forces on Saturday.

“I found him left on the ground along with the other two martyrs. They were without clothes, and their hands had plastic cuffs put on them by the Israeli army,” Ghabayen said.

The bodies were found near the Israeli border fence on Sunday in the vicinity of the Karam Abu Salem crossing in southern Gaza, he said.

Abdel Hadi Ghabayen said one of the men had lost a leg and his body was “in pieces” after what he said was an attack by Israeli forces carried out shortly after their release.

Abdel Hadi Ghabayen said that when he tried to recover the man’s dismembered leg the Israelis “started shooting at me, so I stopped.” He later carried the bodies of the three on his truck to Nasser Hospital in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

The three —Kamel Ghabayen, Mohammed Awad Ramadan Abu Hejazi and Ramadan Awad Ramadan Aby Hejaz —were among several Palestinians detained on Saturday and held for questioning, according to one of the men, Mahmoud Abu Taha.

“We reached Karkar Street (in Gaza). After 10 minutes of being there, we found a bomb thrown at the people with me. Thank God I was at the front. The bomb hit 6 or 7 people who were detained with us. Thank God I am alive,” he said.

— Reuters



ISRAELI TANKS STORM
GAZA WITH HEAVY FIRE



Palestinians flee and carry their belongings amid Israeli strikes, in Gaza City. – Reuters

CAIRO: Israeli forces bombarded Gaza City early on Monday and columns of tanks advanced into the heart of the city from different directions in what residents said was one of the heaviest attacks in the Palestinian territory since the start of the war.

The Gaza Civil Emergency Service said it believed dozens of people were killed but emergency teams were unable to reach them because of ongoing offensives in Daraj and Tuffah in the east and Tel Al Hawa, Sabra and Rimal further west.

Residents said neighbourhoods in Gaza City, which lies in the north of the Gaza Strip, had been bombed throughout the night into the early morning hours. Several multi-floor buildings have been destroyed, they added.

The Gaza Civil Emergency Service said it believed dozens of people were killed but emergency teams were unable to reach them because of ongoing offensives

One Israeli tank thrust pushed people towards the western road near the Mediterranean, residents said. “The enemy is behind us and the sea is in front of us, where we will we go?” said Abdel-Ghani, one Gaza City resident, who did not give his full name. “Tank shells and missiles from the planes are falling on the roads and houses like hell from a volcano. People are running in all directions and no one knows where to go,”

Abdel-Ghani added.

The Israeli military said in a statement it was mounting an operation against infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, and that it had taken out of action more than 30 fighters. More than 38,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli military offensive since then, according to Gaza health officials.

Gaza residents said tanks advanced from at least three directions on Monday and reached the heart of Gaza City, backed by heavy Israeli fire from the air and ground. That forced thousands of people out of their homes to look for safer shelter, which for many was impossible to find, and some slept on the roadside.

Medics at the Al Ahli Arab

Baptist Hospital in Gaza City had to evacuate patients to the already crowded and under-equipped Indonesian Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, Palestinian health officials said. An Israeli strike in the eastern suburb of Shejaia killed four Palestinians, medics said.

Hopes among Gaza residents of a pause in the fighting had revived after Hamas accepted a key part of a US ceasefire proposal, prompting an official in the Israeli negotiating team to say there was a real chance of a deal. Hamas has dropped a demand that Israel first commit to a permanent ceasefire before it would sign an agreement. Instead, the group said it would allow negotiations to achieve that throughout the six-week first phase. — Reuters



Israel opposition
offers PM lifeline if
he signs ceasefire

TEL AVIV: The head of Israel’s biggest opposition party said on Monday he would lend Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu his support in parliament to keep him in office if members of the ruling coalition quit over a ceasefire deal.

Netanyahu has authorised his officials to resume negotiating a possible deal with Palestinian group Hamas to end the fighting in Gaza and release Israeli captives seized on October 7.

Some far-right partners in his coalition have said they will quit if the war ends before Israel has eradicated Hamas and freed the captives, an outcome that could bring down Netanyahu’s government.

Yair Lapid, leader of the Yesh Atid party, said at a meeting of his parliamentary faction: “There’s a hostage deal on the table.

It is not true that Netanyahu has to choose between the captives deal and the continuation of his tenure as prime minister.”

“Let him do the deal,” Lapid said. “I promised him a safety net and I will keep that promise,” he said, referring to a scenario if Netanyahu’s coalition partners quit.

He said that was a difficult decision to make, given his opposition to Netanyahu, but “the most important thing is to bring the captives home.”

The two far-right parties in Netanyahu’s coalition that are most implacably opposed to a ceasefire deal have a combined 13 seats in the Israeli parliament, while Lapid’s party has 24 seats, according to the parliament’s website.

Meanwhile, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on Monday it would be a huge mistake to stop Israel’s military offensive in Gaza now.

Smotrich made the comment as Israeli officials continued talks via mediators about a possible ceasefire deal with Palestinian group Hamas.

To stop now, just before the end, and let him recover and fight us again, is a senseless folly.” — Reuters

Stranded aid trucks deepen
humanitarian catastrophe

AL-ARISH: Hundreds of trucks loaded with food and water have been stranded on a scorching Egyptian road, some for nearly two months, awaiting permission to deliver the much needed humanitarian supplies to war-torn Gaza.

About 50 kilometres from the Gaza border, trucks carrying flour, water and other aid line a dusty road in both directions. The drivers say they have been waiting for several weeks in the searing Egyptian summer heat.

The standstill is exacerbating Gaza’s dire humanitarian crisis after nine months of war between Israel and Palestinian groups. Aid groups warn there is a high risk of famine across the besieged coastal territory.

The truck drivers, parked on the outskirts of the Egyptian city

of Al Arish in the Sinai Peninsula, say they have been unable to deliver humanitarian supplies ever since Israel expanded its offensive on the Gaza-Egypt border in May. Some food has had to be discarded, they said.

“Before this load, we came here and stood for more than 50 days and eventually the load was returned because it had expired,” said truck driver Elsayed el-Nabawi.

The Israeli military started its assault on the southern Gazan city of Rafah in May. The Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, a lifeline to the outside world for Gazans, allowing the delivery of aid and the evacuation of patients, has been shut since then.

Talks involving Egypt, the United States and Israel have failed to reopen Rafah, where Egypt

The truck drivers say they have been unable to deliver humanitarian supplies ever since Israel expanded its offensive on the Gaza-Egypt border in May

wants a Palestinian presence restored on the Gazan side of the border. Israeli flags now fly over Gazan buildings destroyed along the border with Egypt.

“We’ve been stranded here for over a month waiting to deliver this load. We’ve waiting for our turn but nothing yet” said Ahmed Kamel, another of the truck drivers.

Aid and commercial supplies have still entered Gaza through other land border crossings, through air drops and by sea, but



A man gestures while leading a donkey pulling a cart transporting his family members, east of Gaza City. – AFP

aid groups and Western diplomats say the supplies are far below needs. The drivers say they are waiting for Israeli permission.

Distribution of aid in Gaza was difficult even before Israel’s assault on Rafah. Israel has enforced restrictions on goods entering the

enclave. Some aid convoys have also been hit in Israeli military strikes, resulting in deaths of aid workers. — Reuters



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In brief

■ BEIJING



HUNGARY'S ORBAN VISITS CHINA, BACKS XI'S PEACE PLAN

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban met Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday to discuss Ukraine peace deal, paying the unexpected visit to Beijing. Orban and Xi met at the Diaoyutai State Guest House in Beijing for what Orban described as the third leg of a "peace mission" that he has undertaken.

"The international community should create conditions for the resumption of direct dialogue and negotiations between the two sides and provide assistance," Xi told Orban. Orban said China was "a key power in creating the conditions for peace in the Russia-Ukraine war". — **Reuters**

■ GOMA



RWANDAN TROOPS FIGHTS ALONGSIDE REBELS IN DR CONGO

Some 3,000-4,000 Rwandan soldiers fought alongside M23 rebels in east DR Congo, said a UN expert report seen on Monday.

The North Kivu province has been in the grip of the M23 (March 23 Movement) rebellion since the end of 2021.

The report's researchers estimated that the number of Rwandan troops were "matching if not surpassing" the number of M23 soldiers, thought to be at around 3,000. The report contains authenticated photographs, drone footage, video recordings, testimony and intelligence, which it says confirm the RDF's systematic border incursions. — **AFP**

■ BELGRADE



A NEW INTENSE HEATWAVE SWEEPS THROUGH THE BALKANS

A new heatwave started to sweep over the Balkans on Monday, three weeks after the last one caused a power outage in several countries in the region.

In Albania, where temperatures exceed 40 degrees Celsius, the government announced on Monday morning that "any deliberate or accidental fire" could lead to a 15-year prison sentence.

"The temperatures in Albania increase the risk of fires that can have disastrous consequences for the environment and endanger lives due to wind spreading the fire," the Ministry of Defence said. — **AFP**

Zelenskiy vows retaliation for Russian strike

KYIV: Ukraine will retaliate after a Russian missile strike killed at least 29 people and damaged a children's hospital in Kyiv, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Monday during a visit to Warsaw during which he signed a security pact with Poland.

As world leaders prepare to head to a Nato summit which starts today in Washington, Zelenskiy called on Kyiv's allies to give a firm response to Monday's attack in a press conference that started with a minute's silence for the victims.

"I would also like to hear from our partners about a greater resilience and a strong response to the blow that Russia has once again dealt to our people, to our land, to our children," he said.

"We will retaliate against these people, we will deliver a powerful response from our side to Russia, for sure. The question to our partners is: can they respond?"

Zelenskiy said Kyiv wanted to be able to use weapons supplied by its partners to hit the sites in Russia that attacks were being launched from. "I think, we would really like to receive such decision from our partners," he said. "Or they would like to see the strikes again."

Zelenskiy said Ukraine was waiting for concrete steps from its Western partners to strengthen its air defences and protect its energy sector.

He said Kyiv was initiating an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council in connection with the Russian attack.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that Poland was discussing how it could



Rescuers work at Ohmatdyt Children's Hospital that was damaged during Russian missile strikes, in Kyiv. — **Reuters**

We will retaliate against these people, we will deliver a powerful response from our side to Russia, for sure. The question to our partners is: can they respond?

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKIY

Ukrainian President

help provide energy for Ukraine before the winter as Russia targets Ukrainian energy infrastructure.

He also said that Poland was open to the idea of shooting down Russian missiles that were heading for Nato territory while they were still over Ukrainian soil.

"We need clear cooperation

within Nato here, because such actions require such joint Nato responsibility... we are open to it, logic indicates it that this would absolutely be a more effective action," he said.

The agreement with Poland was the 21st such pact Kyiv has signed with countries including the United States, Britain, France and Germany. — **Reuters**

PM Starmer wraps up UK tour after visit to N Ireland

BELFAST: New Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday wrapped up a whistlestop tour of the UK, promising Northern Ireland's leaders "a different way of doing politics" following years of Brexit turmoil. Starmer, whose centre-left Labour party won last week's general election, ended the two-day tour in Cardiff, meeting party allies heading Wales' devolved government, after also visiting Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In Belfast, he met the leaders of the UK province's power-sharing executive and other parties at the Stormont parliament buildings.

"I've been very clear that my government has a mandate for change, for stability here in Northern Ireland and a different way of doing politics," Starmer said after the talks.

He had met First Minister Michelle O'Neill, of the pro-Irish unity Sinn Fein, as well as the party's president Mary Lou McDonald, alongside deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly, of the pro-British Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

Northern Ireland's parties appeared united in hoping Starmer can improve stability and engagement, as well as relations with Dublin, after strained ties under his Conservative predecessors.

McDonald told reporters the talks were "very constructive" and expressed "happiness" that "the party of the Good Friday Agreement, the Labour Party, is now back in government in London".



Britain's PM Keir Starmer (L) and Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Edwin Poots, outside of Parliament Buildings, the seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast. — **AFP**

The Sinn Fein leader said she reminded Starmer that "referendums, provision for referendums and charting our future together" are at the "very core" of the landmark peace accord, brokered by Tony Blair's Labour government in 1998. "We want this British government to be at the heart of honouring that agreement, fulfilling that agreement, in all of its parts," she added.

Starmer and his newly appointed Northern Ireland secretary, Hilary Benn, "won't feel forced to put a border poll on the agenda, at most some pressure to outline procedural criteria for a poll to take place".

Pro-UK unionists have historically allied with the UK Conservative party and been wary of Labour, but few are shedding any tears over the Tories' defeat after 14 turbulent years in power. — **AFP**

Philippines and Japan sign key defence pact, boost ties

MANILA: The Philippines and Japan signed a key defence pact on Monday that will allow the deployment of troops on each other's territory, as they continue boosting ties.

The Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) was finalised in Manila, where Japanese Defence Minister Minoru Kihara and Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa held talks with their Philippine counterparts Gilberto Teodoro and Enrique Manalo.

The accord, which Tokyo and Manila began negotiating in November, provides the legal framework for Japan and the Philippines to send defence personnel to each other's territory for training and other operations.

Teodoro and Kamikawa signed the agreement at the presidential palace. It will take effect once ratified by lawmakers in both countries.

The signing was "another milestone in our shared endeavour to ensure a rules-based international order, to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and particularly in our region", Teodoro said.

The Philippines and Japan are longtime allies of the United States, which has been strengthening its alliances from Canberra to Tokyo to counter influence in the region.

Japan is a key supplier of security equipment and technology to the Philippines,



Japan's Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa (front L) and Philippine Defence Minister Gilberto Teodoro shake hands after signing the Reciprocal Access Agreement at the Malacanang Palace in Manila. — **AFP**

including patrol vessels and surveillance systems.

Tokyo's Ambassador to Manila, Kazuya Endo, flagged in a speech on Thursday "significant developments" in Japan's defence equipment supplies to the Philippines.

Tokyo has signed similar reciprocal access agreements with Britain and Australia in recent years. Manila has equivalent pacts with the United States and Australia and plans to pursue one with France.

The Philippines has been a key focus of US efforts to build an arc of alliances.

Leaders from Japan, the Philippines and the United States had their first trilateral summit in April aimed at boosting defence

ties in Washington.

It was held on the heels of four-way military drills that included Australia in the South China Sea.

"Beyond our bilateral relations, Japan is also keen to deepen trilateral and quadrilateral ties, such as Japan, the Philippines, United States or Japan, the Philippines, United States and Australia," Japan's Kihara said.

"The Japanese would like to impress upon the Americans that Japan is the linchpin of US security presence, military presence here in the region, and of course, the most reliable ally of the United States," said Renato Cruz De Castro, professor for international studies at De La Salle University in Manila. — **AFP**

Call for more innovative recreational options



The Sultanate of Oman, located in the Arabian Peninsula, experiences extremely high temperatures during the summer months, with temperatures often exceeding 40 degrees Celsius. This extreme heat poses a significant challenge when it comes to providing recreational facilities for residents and tourists during the summer season.

However, Oman stands out in another aspect that sets it apart from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula: the presence of cool or moderate havens during the summer.

This is evident in Dhofar Governorate, which transforms into a green paradise during the summer, with temperatures dropping below the mid-twenties during the day and even lower during the night.

This turns the governorate into a sought-after destination for tourists from Oman, the Gulf and other Arab countries.

Its fame has even spread to parts of Asia and Europe.

While there are suitable havens for Arab tourists in many countries, the Dhofar

Governorate remains the top choice for family tourism and nature lovers seeking rare sights.

Often referred to as ‘God’s Paradise’ in the Arabian Peninsula, it has made significant strides in the tourism industry over the past years.

By learning from tourist cities worldwide, it has developed advanced infrastructure to cater to tourists’ needs and offers exceptional entertainment activities, establishing itself as one of the most important tourist destinations in the region.

As temperatures soar to record levels, the Dhofar Governorate has become the top choice for hundreds of thousands of tourists. The governorate has utilised all its resources to accommodate large numbers of visitors, showcasing its innovation, uniqueness, and ability to amaze.

However, the Dhofar Governorate is not the only Omani haven for tourists during the summer. Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, an exceptional tourist destination not far from the Muscat Governorate, has also gained much popularity.

The Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has started focusing more on the tourism industry in

INVESTING
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OUTSIDE

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar by organising festivals, cultural, and entertainment events that attract tourists, providing a dual experience that enhances the enjoyment of the beautiful weather.

And to boost recreation in other parts of Oman which are not immune to summer heat, one solution to address the need for such is to focus on indoor options. Investing more in indoor recreational facilities allows residents and visitors to engage in physical activities and socialise without being exposed to the extreme heat outside.

Another approach to meeting the demand for recreational options in Oman’s hot climate is to develop water-based recreational facilities. Water parks are popular attractions worldwide and offer a refreshing escape from the heat.

By investing in water parks with slides, wave pools, lazy rivers, and other water attractions, Oman can provide an enjoyable experience for individuals and families seeking relief from the high temperatures.

Additionally, creating artificial lakes or ponds for activities like boating or fishing can also enhance the recreational opportunities available during the summer months.

Macron sees off far-right threat but dilutes his power

MICHEL ROSE

President Emmanuel Macron may have seen off the threat of France’s far right, but he now faces a frustrating final three years in office after gambling away much of his political power in an election that has left France with a chaotic hung parliament.

Rolling the dice after Marine Le Pen’s National Rally (RN) humbled his own party in June’s presidential election, Macron challenged voters to decide again where power should lie.

Le Pen and her young protege Jordan Bardella were confident victory would be theirs. They were wrong.

A surge by the left-wing New Popular Front alliance, aided by tactical anti-RN voting, thwarted Le Pen. Even Macron’s own centrist camp bettered the far-right vote.

Macron, 46, has a history of winning audacious bets, not least his first presidential run in 2017 when he had never held elected office. While he may have neutered the far right for now, Sunday’s vote will shift political power from the Elysee Palace to a potentially disorderly parliament.

His Prime Minister, Gabriel Attal, gave his own blunt assessment, seeking to distance himself from Macron’s electoral gamble on which he had not been consulted.

“From tomorrow, the centre of gravity of power will be ... more than ever in the hands of the parliament,” Attal said as he announced his plan to resign from his post on Monday morning.

Macron rejected his offer, asking him to stay on for now to help to ensure stability.

Macron said he wanted the election to provide clarity, but it has had the opposite effect, plunging France into the uncharted waters of coalition government and weakening his authority as president. Macron’s office did not return a request for comment.

The president’s snap election call stunned close allies and opponents alike. Some from Macron’s own camp have denounced it as a reckless move though others close to him argue it was not an entirely illogical decision, according to half a dozen sources in government or in his party speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The government expected to face no-confidence motions from opponents later in the year, and Macron hoped to catch them off guard with a quickfire ballot on his own terms. Macron’s move was indicative of how out of touch he had become with an electorate that was increasingly disenchanted with him, sources who know him well said. — Reuters

Sudan’s tragic conflict: A plea for peace



Zahir Al Mahrooqi

The writer is an Omani writer and the author of ‘The Road to Jerusalem’

As I followed the tragic events in Sudan between two rival factions and saw the heavy toll on the Sudanese people, I recalled a statement by the late Ugandan President Idi Amin.

The former boxing champion once suggested settling his differences with Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere in a boxing ring, sparing their people the horrors of war.

This idea seems fitting for Abdel Fattah al Burhan, Chairman of the Transitional Military Council, and Mohamed Hamdan Hemedti, commander of the Rapid Support Forces. If they fought in a ring, it would save countless innocent lives and ease the burden on the Sudanese people.

Over a year into the Sudan war, millions of Sudanese are suffering more than ever, fleeing catastrophic conditions in the worst crisis in Africa’s history.

My friend, Sudanese journalist Ahmed Qasim al Badawi, described this in a report titled ‘Displaced Sudanese: The Journey of Fleeing from Death to Death.’

News from Gaza has overshadowed Sudan’s struggles, where some Arab nations have intervened on one side.

According to new statistics, about a quarter of Sudan’s population has fled. The Associated Press reported that eight million people have left their homes, with ten million displaced internally and over two million seeking refuge in Chad, Central Africa, South Sudan, Egypt, and Kenya.

The United Nations warns of widespread famine and death in Darfur and other regions if aid is blocked, as humanitarian needs are urgent.

Al Badawi, a refugee in Egypt, reports that cities in Sudan are now ghost towns reeking of death and destruction. Sudanese prefer fleeing north to Egypt, despite the risks, including fatal accidents and thirst in the desert.

Some exploit the situation, smuggling Sudanese into Egypt illegally. Hospitals in Aswan are overwhelmed with accident victims, and the morgue is full of dead Sudanese. The Sudanese consulate warns against illegal entry due to dangers and legal consequences.

The plight of refugees heading to Libya, Chad, Central Africa, and Ethiopia is equally tragic. People flee from one death to another, clinging to hope.

Sudanese writer Azmi Abdel Razek describes Khartoum’s devastation: rare archaeological sites destroyed, and the Khartoum Natural Museum’s animals dying from thirst and hunger.

When a nation loses peace, it longs for the past, as seen in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. The war between two factions in Sudan threatens more tragedy and displacement. While many Sudanese hope for an end, the Arab world seems indifferent.

Without optimism, I see no end in sight, as personal interests prevail over national unity.

CITIES IN SUDAN ARE NOW GHOST TOWNS REEKING OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION AND THE PEOPLE FLEEING DESPITE THE RISKS, INCLUDING FATAL ACCIDENTS AND THIRST IN THE DESERT

Sultan Qaboos once said, “A strong regime is better than a weak one,” but what if a regime is weak and dependent on outside agendas? That spells destruction.

If Al Badawi discussed his experience and observations of Sudanese refugees in Egypt, what if we read about the tragedy of migrants to the interior and to Libya, Chad, Central Africa, and Ethiopia? Certainly, it is no less tragic; man always lives in hope, so we find him fleeing from death to a death that may be more painful, even though the taste of death is the same.

Aside from the human tragedies, the Sudanese writer and journalist, Azmi Abdel Razek, draws in an article published on the Al Jazeera Net website a sad pen picture of the condition of the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, which is no longer what it was.

Nothing that remains in it indicates that it is Khartoum, the bride of the Nile, with its fragrance and originality, and it is impossible to recognise it, after many of its rare archaeological monuments were destroyed or completely erased, as the Khartoum Natural Museum was destroyed, in which all the animals and birds died a slow death, due to thirst and hunger, and there are no other samples of it in Sudan.

When a nation — any nation — loses security and peace, it must yearn for the old days, in which people lived in safety.

What is interesting is that this is what happened in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, which confirms that the alternative was worse and that is why people revolted.

The inhuman conditions that millions of Sudanese are experiencing because of the war between two factions or people portend more tragedies, destruction, and the dispersal of the Sudanese people into internal and external exiles.

Many people wonder about the ending of the war, and the “many” meant here are the “Sudanese,” because the Arabs — it seems — do not care about what happens in Sudan, Gaza, or other Arab countries.

But — despite my constant optimism — I do not see a light in the tunnel, because there are those whose personal interests prevail over the interests of the nation, and the result is that one country becomes more than one country, and each region, state, or governorate has a piece of cloth fluttering in the air called a “flag.”

This is what happened in more than one Arab country, and I remember here what Sultan Qaboos — may God rest his soul — said: “The presence of a strong regime in any country is better than the presence of a weak regime.”

This is a fact, but what if the regime was originally weak but was dependent on the outside world? Just implementing his agendas? Isn’t that destruction of the homeland?

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
(The original version of this article was published in the print edition of Oman Arabic newspaper on July 8, 2024).

The recliner dilemma: Comfort and fear

Not all recliners are comfortable, there are some we fear. Most people would want a recliner seat in their living room to relax and watch television.

This is one of the best ways to wind down. Even at the office when you want to recollect your thoughts, one tends to recline his or her seat.

The reclining position is a state of mind because if you think about it you would want to recline only in places where you are at ease.

It all depends on the level of comfort. This could be because you tend to go into a calm mode when you recline. Going into a calm mode could lead you to drift into the sleep zone, especially if you are a sleep-deprived one.

But there is one recliner that almost everyone must have dreaded at some point in their life and they are the recliners at the dentist's. The phobia of visiting a dentist can be so overwhelming that we tend to avoid and postpone the visit until the situation is unbearable, just like many factors in life that would have been simpler if we had acted sooner.

And that reminds us of the proverb, 'A stitch in time saves nine.' The epigram teaches us the difference between corrective measures and measures of repairs.

'Procrastination' is a problem on its own but the fear of dentists is a problem of its own.

Dentophobia can be experienced by people who do not even have an iota of social phobia. Also known as 'Odontophobia', the fear of dentists could be for many reasons, but the reality is that oral health is extremely important, because the various features are interconnected.

Speak to doctors and they will explain how oral health is connected with body health. We connect the body and mind and have been growing in awareness about mental health.

Health experts however have been warning about oral health and heart health, including diabetes and now even the impact on memory and brain health.

It teaches us the importance of the element called balance.

Life on its own is a balancing act. Getting it right is a challenge.



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

LIFE ON ITS OWN IS A BALANCING ACT AND LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN SO PREDICTABLE IF THERE WERE NO UNCERTAINTIES IN LIFE

Getting it right is a challenge. For that matter, this is true even in nature, especially with weather.

Life would have been so predictable if there were no uncertainties in life.

For instance, when the arrival of monsoon shifts slightly, there are consequences and people are impacted starting from tourism to farmers. And this is the case with the changes one faces at a personal level.

Some overcome the changes and thrive while others breakdown. But when one faces the challenge of do or die, most will try to swim. Once we cross the current, there could be endless opportunities and we might even enjoy the process.

The same goes for dentists - we might detest thinking about having an appointment, but once we experience the benefit we might lose the fear.

However, most probably, we have not taken this fear seriously and worked at it.

A common belief is that the less we know and mess around, the better. Tell me the word dentist, and I will visualise the recliner and needles along with the tools. And the bigger challenge is that the work is to be done in the mouth, where we cannot see and a prick can seem to be very sensitive. On the other hand, the fear of the dentist also makes us bear the pain silently until - you know when.

So they say visit regularly. A couple of tricks that have been shared are deep breathing, meditation, and distraction such as listening to music.

There are more techniques, but the best one is a friendly, confident, and comforting dentist, this makes all the difference in the world.

After all, fear is a whole different game. It is not an intention, but a condition with which life is quite limiting.

Living life fearlessly ought to have its benefits such as regular checkups leading to solutions.

Living fearlessly could also open doors to unlimited opportunities. A simple reason is the level of confidence.

The doctor said to the frightened patient who was going through an eye procedure, "A little bit of fear is good because it is this fear that makes us run when we see a lion."

SNOWY CERES DELIGHT



People enjoy the snowfall during a cold front as a snowman is seen during a cold front near Ceres, South Africa. – Reuters

Minimalist and mindful travelling for maximum fun

In an era characterised by relentless schedules and consumerist tendencies, mindful and minimalist travelling offers a refreshing alternative.

It allows us to focus on the things that truly matter namely presence, humility and meaningful experiences.

This approach to travel is not just about packing light – it is a philosophy that can transform the way we engage with the world, our environment at work, at home and in turn ourselves.

Mindful travelling encourages us to immerse ourselves fully in our surroundings.

Instead of rushing from one attraction to another, it's taking the time to observe, appreciate and connect with the here and now.

This heightened state of awareness can lead to deeper cultural understanding and unforgettable experiences.

When we slow down we can fully engross ourselves in the present moment while savouring the sights, sounds and smells of a new place, leading to a richer and more fulfilling trip.

It gives time for the things around us to shine, which we often miss while rushing.

Minimalist travelling which involves packing only the essentials significantly



Hyesha Barrett @coach_hyesha

The writer is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner

MINIMALIST TRAVELLING IS MORE SUSTAINABLE AS MINDFUL TRAVELLERS ARE MORE CONSCIOUS OF THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND MAKE CHOICES THAT SUPPORT ECOLOGICAL PRACTICES

reduces stress.

With less worry about losing or misplacing belongings, the modesty of discreet packing also means less time spent organising and more time spent enjoying.

A reduction in physical clutter automatically corresponds to a reduction in mental clutter - the benefits of decluttering and living a humbler life are exponential.

Travelling light and mindfully can also lead to substantial financial savings.

Focusing on experiences rather than material possessions, minimalist travellers often find that they spend less on baggage fees, souvenirs and other items that are often a one-hit wonder, which end up gathering dust or at the bottom of a drawer.

When travellers are not preoccupied with adhering to a packed itinerary, they have more opportunities to connect with the people and places they visit.

These connections can be profoundly enriching, offering insights into different ways of life and fostering a sense of global community.

Whether it's a conversation with a local shop owner, a shared meal with strangers, or a moment

of solitude in a beautiful natural setting, these encounters can create lasting friendships and wonderful introspection.

Occurrences as such are more rewarding than typical tourist traps, as memories provide eternal value and joy over short-term delights.

Minimalist travelling is inherently more sustainable as mindful travellers are more conscious of their environmental impact and make choices that

support ecological practices.

The green approach to using public transportation, staying in eco-friendly accommodations and supporting local businesses benefits the environment through carbon footprint reduction, while promoting responsible tourism.

Mindful and minimalist travelling offers a wealth of benefits that extend beyond the immediate pleasure of a holiday. By embracing simplicity and presence, travellers

can enhance their experiences, reduce stress, save money, minimise their environmental impact, foster personal growth and forge meaningful connections.

This approach to travel is about experiencing the world in a deeper, more intentional way. Minimalist travelling will ultimately free you from the burden of wanting more "stuff", allowing you to focus on your needs and what truly makes you happy.





Ali al Balushi celebrates after winning.

Ali clinches gold at Arabian Athletics Championship in Egypt

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

After securing spot at the 2024 Paris summer Olympic Games recently, Oman's young sprinter Ali bin Anwar al Balushi achieved another milestone to his impressive track record by claiming the gold medal at the U-23 Arabian Athletics Championship which is under way

in Egypt until Tuesday. The 22 years old athlete managed to earn gold medal in the 100m event and registered a new personal record as he finished the distance within 10.00 seconds. Nasser Mohammed from Saudi Arabia took the silver medal with a time of 10.23 seconds, while Lebanese runner Tamer Mohammed secured the bronze, clocking in at 10.32 seconds.

Ali al Balushi had earlier secured his spot in the finals by topping the qualifiers with a time of 10.22 seconds. This championship marks Ali's last official participation before his debut at the prestigious Olympic Games in Paris later this month. Under the guidance of his coach, Fahad al Mashakyei, Ali will undergo an intensive training programme in preparation for the

Olympics. In other events, Asian Games bronze medalist Hussain al Farsi finished fourth in the 1,500m race, clocking 4.03.39 minutes. The gold medal was claimed by Algerian runner Hiethem Shneft, who finished in 4.01.16 minutes, followed closely by Qatari athlete Zakariya Ibrahim with a time of 4.01.45 minutes. Morocco's Osama Er-Redounani took the bronze

with a time of 4.03.16 minutes. Omani athlete Hamza al Jabri competed in the 400m event, finishing fourth with a time of 47.71 seconds. Morocco's Dair Hamza won the gold medal with a time of 46.34 seconds, followed by his team-mate El-Boussiri Walid, who clocked 46.88 seconds for the silver. Lebanese athlete Mark Ibrahim secured the bronze with a time of

47.35 seconds. High jumper Nameer al Busaidy finished fifth in the high jump competition, clearing 1.95 metres. The gold medal was awarded to Yousef Fawzy from Egypt with a jump of 2.13 metres. Iraqi athlete Abderrahmen Sabar took the silver with a jump of 2.10 metres, while Amine Ouahioune from Algeria claimed the bronze with a jump of 2.05 metres.



Green sports programme continues in Bausher

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to enhance its leading role in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, remains committed to support youth sports teams through its annual Green Sports programme. Recently, the bank celebrated the inauguration of the lighting system project for Athaiba Sports and Cultural team in the Bausher. The event was held in the presence of Shaikh Saif bin Ahmed al Khalili, Chairman of Bausher Club, Said bin Ahmed al Salmi, Regional Manager of Meethaq Branches and team members. During the ceremony, Said bin Ahmed al Salmi, Regional Manager of Meethaq Branches, said: "The Green Sports Programme continues to achieve success in supporting sports and youth across the Sultanate of Oman. The programme witnesses a great turn out each year as the



Athaiba Sports Team

local teams compete to benefit from the support provided that includes greening of football pitches, water desalination and lighting. I would like to congratulate the team for the successful execution of the lighting project and we wish them all the best." Speaking on the occasion, Salim bin Said al Rahbi, Head of Athaiba Sports and Cultural team,

said: "I am pleased to extend my appreciation to Bank Muscat for the continuous support given to develop local sports teams. We are happy to see the completion of the lighting system project which will help the team to further take advantage of the space and develop their sports skills. The field will also represent a suitable venue for the team to launch events in the

evening and to organise different cultural and sports activities." The Green Sports programme is one of Bank Muscat's key sustainable social responsibility initiatives. It aims to promote entrepreneurship, partnership, and community empowerment by supporting talented Omani youth in sports and culture. The programme also enhances the



Athaiba Sports Team

role of cultural sports teams in supporting national sports by improving sports stadium infrastructure across the Sultanate of Oman. To date, the programme has supported 183 teams and benefited over 50,000 team members in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. Since its inception in 2012,

the Green Sports programme reaffirms the bank's commitment to providing ample opportunities for young Omanis to develop their talents. It goes a long way in developing the sporting skills and talents of Omani youth, thereby leading to all-round development of the sport.

RYBAKINA INTO WIMBLEDON QUARTER-FINALS AS AILING KALINSKAYA RETIRES

LONDON: Former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina reached the quarter-finals after ailing Russian 17th seed Anna Kalinskaya retired from their clash with a suspected right forearm injury while trailing 6-3 3-0 on Monday.

Big-hitting Rybakina, who came into the match as the only woman remaining in the decimated draw to have lifted the Venus Rosewater Dish, found herself an early break down but the 2022 champion settled her nerves quickly to reel off the games.

The fourth seed is the also the highest-ranked player left in this year's tournament but said she faced no added pressure heading into the business end.

"Every opponent is difficult and I know that I must always bring my best. That's what I try to do form every match," said Rybakina, who will face 21st seed Elina Svitolina in the last eight.

"I'm just really enjoying every time I step out on the court and I'm happy I'm going fine in the draw.

"Hopefully I can go to the end."

The Moscow-born Kazakh broke back before drawing level at 3-3 when Kalinskaya began to struggle with a forearm problem that she had treated after losing another game.

Kalinskaya appeared to have overcome the problem, much to the relief of her boyfriend and world number one Jannik Sinner who was watching on from the Centre Court stands, but she was unable to prevent Rybakina from winning the first set.

"My serve helps me a lot and especially when the roof is closed there is no wind, no conditions and it's perfect for my game," Rybakina said.

"I'm really happy the way I played the last two matches. I really enjoyed my time here."

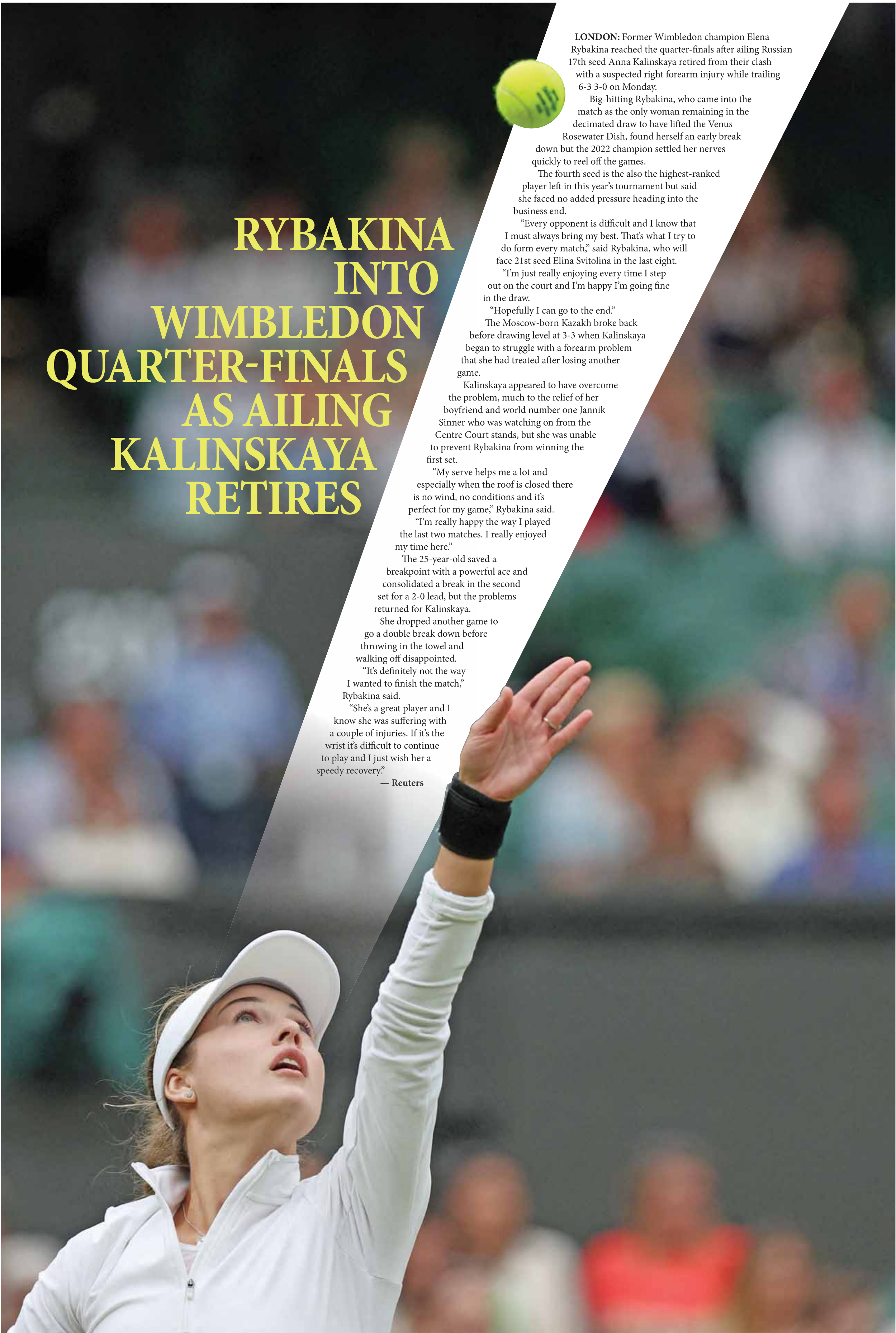
The 25-year-old saved a breakpoint with a powerful ace and consolidated a break in the second set for a 2-0 lead, but the problems returned for Kalinskaya.

She dropped another game to go a double break down before throwing in the towel and walking off disappointed.

"It's definitely not the way I wanted to finish the match," Rybakina said.

"She's a great player and I know she was suffering with a couple of injuries. If it's the wrist it's difficult to continue to play and I just wish her a speedy recovery."

— Reuters



France aim to silence critics against depleted Spain for spot in Euros final



France's Kylian Mbappe in action. – REUTERS



Spain's Daniel Olmo heads the ball. – AFP

MUNICH, GERMANY: Goal-shy France will be looking to silence the critics when they take on Spain in their Euro 2024 semi-final clash on Tuesday in Munich, while their opponents hope to keep their impressive campaign going even without key players.

With Kylian Mbappe leading their talented squad, France were well among the favourites when they arrived in Germany.

But they have come under fire from fans and pundits alike for a string of unimpressive performances and have reached the last four without scoring a single goal in open play.

Despite reaching the final of the last two World Cups, winning in Russia in 2018 and losing only on penalties to Argentina in Qatar four years later, their Euros record under coach Didier Deschamps is less impressive. In his 12 years, their best result was a runner-up spot in 2016 on home soil.

On Friday they only edged past Portugal on penalties, with Mbappe substituted after another match where he spent more time fiddling with his mask than setting up his teammates.

Deschamps' France often manage to be dour and dramatic at the same time - defensively solid, they tend to waste chances up front, and they survived against Portugal partly thanks to similarly wasteful Cristiano Ronaldo.

Mbappe's form after sustaining a broken nose in France's opener



Spain's midfielder #16 Rodri celebrates. – AFP

and that of Antoine Griezmann remain big question marks ahead of the clash with Spain, who overcame a raucous Stuttgart Arena crowd to beat the hosts with a goal in the final minutes of extra time.

"Personally I don't give a damn" about the critics, midfielder Youssef Fofana told a press conference on Sunday.

"We are semi-finalists. Questions about the level of Antoine and Kylian? We have to realise that that's enough to be in the semi-finals. So I don't see why we would nitpick."

However, it remains to be seen if it is enough to get past a highly aggressive Spain, who are in imperious form with five straight wins so far at Euro 2024 but who will be missing several key players in Munich.

Midfielder Pedri is out of the



tournament after sustaining a knee injury in a nasty clash with Germany midfielder Toni Kroos in their dramatic win on Saturday.

Substitute Mikel Merino's header in the 119th minute gave Spain a 2-1 win in a nerve-racking encounter that ended with 16 bookings including a yellow card for centre back Robin Le Normand and a red for fullback Dani Carvajal, meaning both are suspended for Tuesday's game.

Real Madrid defender Nacho will play centre back alongside Aymeric Laporte and 38 year-old full back Jesus Navas, the last player of Spain's golden generation who won the 2010 World Cup and back to back Euro titles in 2008 and 2012.

Navas will share the right-hand channel with 16-year-old winger Lamine Yamal, one of the players of the Euros so far harassing opponents' defences together with Nico Williams, 21.

All in all the team is a blend of deep experience and raw talent that has been thriving under the calm guidance of coach Luis de la Fuente.

"This is everyone's national team. Unity is strength and if we all keep pushing in the same direction, we can achieve our goals. If we are connecting with our fans then I am more than happy to play a part in generating enthusiasm," de la Fuente told reporters.

— Reuters

Quick guide to Euro 2024 semi-finals

BERLIN: The four remaining teams at the European Championship will take centre stage in the semi-finals to be played on Tuesday and Wednesday. Here is a quick guide to the fixtures (times in GMT).

SPAIN V FRANCE ON TUESDAY Spain, three-time European champions, will try to earn a shot at a record fourth title against 2022 World Cup finalists France. Spain, with 11 goals so far in the tournament, have the highest tally of all four

teams in the semi-finals with 10 of those goals coming from inside the box. They are the only team to have won all five of their games so far at Euro 2024, while they also have the highest number of goal attempts (102).

Despite featuring one of the world's top strikers in Kylian Mbappe, France, twice European champions, have only three goals in their five matches so far, via two own goals and a penalty.

They have managed to keep four clean sheets in their five matches so far but have just

under 30 per cent fewer goal attempts than their opponents going into the semi-final.

NETHERLANDS V ENGLAND ON WEDNESDAY

The two sides met five years ago at the same stage of the Nations League with the Dutch winning 3-1 in extra time.

Neither team have been convincing at the tournament to date despite the array of talent at their disposal, but they have potential match-winners who only need an instant to find a

decisive moment. England were seconds away from elimination before a 95th minute Jude Bellingham overhead kick rescued them against Slovakia in the last-16.

Despite England's below-par performances in Germany, they are unbeaten in their last 12 Euro matches (not including their shootout defeat in the 2020 final), winning eight, and last tasted defeat against Iceland in 2016.

Netherlands had their best performance of the tournament in their comprehensive 3-0 win over Romania in the round of 16, but needed to

dig deep to score twice in six minutes to come from a goal down and edge Türkiye 2-1 in the last eight.

The Dutch have reached the Euro last four for the first time since 2004 having finished third in their group behind France and Austria.

Netherlands and England are both aiming to reach their second Euro showpiece match, with the latter eyeing back-to-back finals after losing to Italy in 2021. The Dutch have not reached the final since lifting the trophy back in 1988. — Reuters



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Oman explores potential for biogenic CO2-based CCUS

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Five leading Omani public sector organisations have come together to explore opportunities for Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) with a specific focus on biogenic CO2 — a climate-friendly carbon source originating from biomass decomposition, digestion or combustion.

Taking part in this first-ever biogenic CO2 based CCUS initiative are Oman Environmental Services Holding Co (be'ah) which manages the country's municipal and solid waste sector; Nama and Nama Dhofar Services — both members of state-owned power and water services group Nama; Marafiq — the integrated utility services provider at Duqm SEZ; and OQ Alternative Energy — part of OQ Group.

Announcing the partnership, be'ah said: "A collaborative effort between be'ah, Nama, Nama Dhofar Services, Marafiq, and OQ Alternative Energy has been initiated to conduct a comprehensive joint study.

This study aims to quantify and assess the sources of biogenic CO2 and explore opportunities for its potential capture, storage, and utilisation," be'ah — part of Oman Investment Authority — stated in its 2023 Sustainability Report.

CCUS — a multibillion dollar climate tech industry — is gaining traction in Oman as part of the country's wider Net Zero strategy. A number of energy companies have already unveiled initiatives aimed at capturing climate-warming CO2, and sequestering the emissions in underground geological formations, such as depleted oil and gas reservoirs or deep saline aquifers.

The more enterprising among them plan to utilise the captured CO2 as feedstock in the production of low-carbon fuels, chemicals and other commodities.

Furthermore, its potential use in Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) and mineralisation — applications that help permanently trap or convert



Examples of biogenic CO2 include emissions from the combustion of biogas.

the CO2 into stable carbonates — are being explored as well.

In all of these instances, the sources of the CO2 are industries, power plants, oil and gas fields, and other such activities where the CO2 emissions stem from the combustion of fossil fuels.

Biogenic CO2 emissions, on the other hand, relate to the natural carbon cycle, as well as those resulting from the combustion, harvest, digestion, fermentation, decomposition, or processing of biologically based materials.

Examples of biogenic CO2 include emissions from the combustion of biogas collected from biological decomposition of waste in landfills, wastewater treatment, or compost management processes, combustion of green municipal waste, or combustion of biological material, including forest-derived and agriculture-derived feedstocks.

be'ah, along with Nama Water Services and Nama Dhofar Services, currently manage significant volumes of biowaste (solids and liquids) associated with biogenic CO2 emissions. Efforts to capturing CO2 emissions — whether linked to fossil fuel based activities of biological combustion — offer a promising pathway to climate change mitigation, say experts.

In the Sultanate of Oman, energy companies and other sector stakeholders currently exploring the adoption of CCUS as part of their energy transition strategies include Petroleum Development Oman, Oman Shell, Occidental of Oman, OQ Gas Networks, and OQ Alternative Energies, among others.

OQGN expands gas network to meet rising demand in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Oman's sole gas transmission operator and owner, OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), is gearing up to significantly expand its natural gas network in response to the rising demand across the Sultanate of Oman.

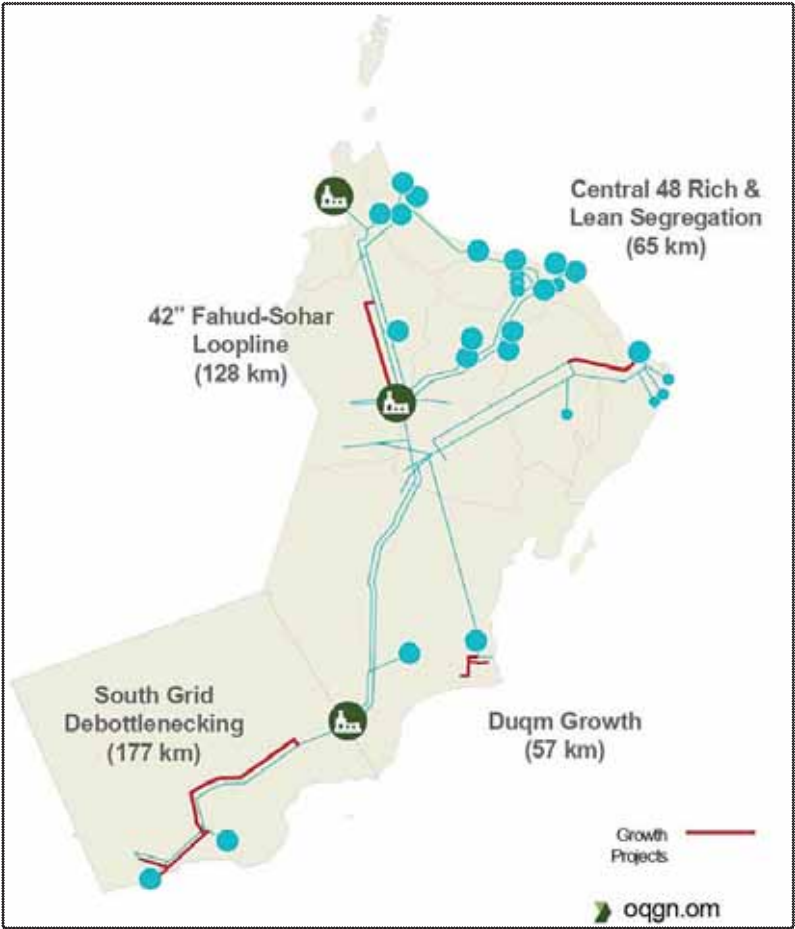
With a rich history of growth and innovation, OQGN plays a crucial role in Oman's energy sector, providing essential infrastructure to various industries.

Eng Mansoor al Abdali, CEO of OQGN, in a presentation during the inaugural 'CEO Talks @U Capital' held yesterday, stated, "Forecasting an average growth rate of 3% per year in natural gas network capacity during the Price Control-3 period, OQGN's expansion is set to strengthen Oman's energy landscape."

The company's dedication to reliability, integrity, availability, and safety is evident, as shown by the impressive milestone of delivering 40.5 billion standard cubic metres (SCM) of gas in 2023 — the highest in its history.

OQGN's robust expansion plans include developing new pipeline segments and compressor stations to enhance gas transportation efficiency.

Currently, OQGN manages 4,045 kms of gas pipelines, along with three compressor stations and 29 gas supply stations, ensuring energy delivery to 130 major consumers, including power plants, desalination facilities, and various industrial complexes.



By 2024, OQGN plans to increase the pipeline length to 4,222 kms, further extending it to 4,287 kms in 2025, 4,344 kms in 2026, and 4,472 kms by 2027.

By 2024, OQGN plans to increase the pipeline length to 4,222 kms, further extending it to 4,287 kms in 2025, 4,344 kms in 2026, and 4,472 kms by 2027.

Network capacity is expected to rise from 69.3 billion SCM in 2023 to 71.1 billion SCM in 2024, 77.1 billion SCM in 2025 and 2026, and 79.7 billion SCM by 2027.

Correspondingly, the volume of gas transported is projected to increase from 40.5 billion SCM in 2023 to 41.7 billion SCM in 2024, 43 billion SCM in 2025, 44.3 billion SCM in 2026, and 45.6

billion SCM by 2027.

In a strategic move to support Oman's energy transition, OQGN is leading the development of hydrogen pipeline infrastructure.

"As the National Infrastructure Provider for hydrogen pipelines, OQGN is partnering with various entities to streamline hydrogen transportation, paving the way for sustainable energy solutions," Al Abdali added.

The Sultanate of Oman has set out ambitious Green Hydrogen Production Targets that will be enabled by OQGN.

OQGN is actively involved

in Hydrom's feasibility study, ensuring alignment on technical, commercial, financial, and legal considerations, with the study expected to be finalised by Q4 2024. OQGN is also in talks with Fluxys (which owns 4.9% of OQGN) to jointly develop the hydrogen transportation network in Oman.

OQGN will develop an optimal hydrogen pipeline network to cater to announced and future blocks, taking advantage of economies of scale and right-of-way efficiencies to lower transportation costs. OQGN is also committed to sustainability, aiming for Net-Zero emissions by 2050.

"The company's comprehensive decarbonisation strategy targets a 43% reduction in overall scope 1 and 2 emissions between 2021 and 2023, demonstrating a tangible commitment to reducing its environmental impact", Al Abdali noted.

Additionally, OQGN's initiatives to improve energy efficiency in office buildings and reduce flared gas emissions reflect a holistic approach to sustainable energy practices.

With a legacy of reliability, a forward-looking vision for sustainability, and an experienced management team driving transformative projects, OQGN is set to shape the future of energy infrastructure in Oman.

By embracing growth opportunities, sustainable practices, and cutting-edge technologies, OQGN is leading the way towards a greener and more efficient energy ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman's water resources monitoring capabilities modernised

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 8

The hydrometric network of monitoring stations, distributed across the Sultanate of Oman, is being expanded and modernised to help strengthen national preparedness against two alternating threats: paucity of rainfall, on the one hand, and surface runoff during adverse weather events, on the other.

According to a senior official, the potential impacts of climate change have also necessitated an upgrade of Oman integrated network of monitoring stations.

In an interview with the Observer, Eng Ali Bait Said, Director of the Water Resources Department in the Governorate of Dhofar, said the Omani government places great

importance on the processes of monitoring and recording rainfall and surface runoff quantities through an updated and integrated hydrometric network of monitoring stations distributed across the country.

Monitoring and recording rainfall and surface runoff quantities was particularly imperative in light of the climatic changes facing the Sultanate of Oman and the scarcity of rainfall in certain seasons, he noted.

The hydrometric monitoring network affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources comprises a number of stations spread across all the governorates of Oman. Rainfall and wadi flow stations operate remotely, relying on modern devices to measure rainfall and wadi flow quantities



Eng Ali Bait Said, Director of the Water Resources Department.

and send the data immediately to the control centre.

In Dhofar Governorate, the ministry is implementing a project to modernise the water resources monitoring system, said Eng Ali Bait Said. It will comprise of 57 stations to measure the amount of rain and 12 stations to measure water flows in wadis.

These will be integrated with the remote monitoring system in Dhofar Governorate. Specialised teams in the Water Resources Monitoring Department operate and maintain these stations, ensuring the data is reviewed and verified for accuracy, he said.

According to the official, the

importance of rainfall and surface runoff monitoring extends beyond just knowing the quantities, encompassing numerous benefits for various sectors.

It enables, for example, the proper planning and design of development projects, such as dams, irrigation networks, and infrastructure, aligning with Oman's water needs.

Additionally, the data helps in assessing the available water quantities and distributing them equitably across different uses, including drinking, irrigation, and industry.

Furthermore, the monitoring data is used to predict floods and identify vulnerable areas, enabling the implementation of necessary measures to mitigate their impact. It is also utilised in studying weather and climate patterns,

developing weather forecasting models, and understanding climate changes.

Crucially, it also contributes to public awareness about the significance of preserving water resources and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

"Monitoring and recording rainfall and surface runoff quantities is a fundamental pillar to ensuring the security and stability of Oman's water resources and achieving sustainable development across various fields," said the official.

Moreover, the precise data provided by the hydrometric monitoring network enables various governmental and private entities to make informed decisions, contributing to building a better future for the coming generations, he added.

OETC welcomes 34 students as part of the 2024 summer training programme

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to community service and providing platforms and opportunities for knowledge and experiences exchange, and in recognition of the OETC’s pivotal role in empowering youth, building national capacities, and developing competencies through various educational practices and support initiatives, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) recently welcomed a new batch involving 34 students from higher education institutions from different governorates in the Sultanate of Oman. This comes as part of the 2024 Summer Internship Programme, which spans over two months continuing until August 15, 2024. The students will undergo



an intensive training and gain practical and applied experiences across various technical and non-technical fields. This training aims to develop the students’ skills, abilities, and knowledge, providing them with the optimal educational and developmental experience in a professional and work-oriented environment. Additionally, it seeks to enhance their awareness of professional ethics, policies and procedures, alongside how to operate in a real work environment. Regarding the importance that OETC places on supporting youth through various initiatives, programmes, and activities, Mubarak al Jahwari, General

Manager of Human Resources at OETC, emphasised the company’s efforts and commitment to providing suitable opportunities for young people and offering the necessary support to enhance their competencies, knowledge, and skills. He also highlighted the OETC’s ongoing endeavours to increase the added value for the community. Al Jahwari added: “At OETC, we place utmost importance on the younger generation as they are the builders of Oman’s future. We have high hopes for them to contribute significantly to our beloved nation. This importance is reflected through the various programs, activities, and initiatives we diligently implement on a regular basis.”

MC20 centre stage at Goodwood Festival of Speed 2024



MUSCAT: From July 11 to 14, Maserati will be there at the 2024 Goodwood Festival of Speed, with a multi-pronged tribute to the super sports car par excellence: the innovative, first-of-its-kind MC20. The Trident halo car with its unmistakable style — launched in 2020 as the first model equipped with the innovative V6 Nettuno engine — is a one-of-a-kind car that has carved out a leading role in both its eclectic versions, coupé and convertible, and is always ready to take over the stage at the biggest, most popular motorsport events in the world. One of these is the Goodwood Festival of Speed in West Sussex, southern England: every year, it brings together legendary drivers, teams and modern heroes of motorsport, alongside the most beautiful and most coveted models on two and four wheels, from both the present and the past.

KR Eshraqa Foundation signs social projects agreements

MUSCAT: In line with its transformative initiatives that have impacted communities across the Sultanate of Oman, the Eshraqa Foundation, Khimji Ramdas’ (KR) social development arm, has signed several social projects agreements to support the Musandam Governorate. The signing witnessed the presence of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, Anil Khimji and Nailesh Khimji from the KR Board of Directors, walis of the Musandam Governorate, as well as General Directors from various ministries. The agreements include a diverse range of sectors: Education, Health, Community Well-being, and Training. It is noteworthy that the Eshraqa Foundation has covered seven wilayats since its inception in 2016, including Samayil, Izki, Bidbid, Ibra,

Bidiyah, Dima W’attayeen and Bahla. Discussing the significance of the signing, Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas, stated, “The Eshraqa Foundation is dedicated to uplifting communities through sustainable development, under the statutes set by Oman’s Vision 2040. Our commitment to Musandam Governorate symbolises our mission to continue fostering growth, and enhance the quality of life of individuals and families across the Sultanate of Oman.” Mahmoud bin Khalifa al Saqri, CEO of Eshraqa Foundation stated: “The Eshraqa Foundation is committed to developing social responsibility initiatives that ensure sustainability and impact. Our efforts align with the strategic plans and objectives of Oman Vision 2040, as we provide assistance to those in need, in coordination



with charitable organisations in the Musandam Governorate. We have focused on four key sectors: health, education, community well-being and training. This includes the integration and rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the empowerment of Omani women, and support for the ‘Istiqrar’ programme, that was recently launched by the Ministry of Social Development.”

The new BMW R 1300 GS Adventure

MUSCAT: The new BMW R 1300 GS Adventure: When it comes to motorcycle adventure and long-distance touring, this is the rock in the surf. An almost completely newly designed model with enhanced adventure expertise across the board. Crossing the Sahara in searing heat, climbing the Himalayas or exploring the Amazon rainforests — for more than two decades the big BMW GS Adventure with flat twin boxer engine has been synonymous with such long-distance motorcycle journeys with a passenger and lots of luggage. To ensure that this remains the case in the future, and to provide adventurous motorcyclists with even more adventure expertise, BMW Motorrad has almost completely redesigned the engine, chassis, body-work, design and storage concept of the new R 1300 GS Adventure compared to the previous model, taking the cornerstones of the BMW GS Adventure to a new level. The legendary twin-cylinder boxer engine is once again at the heart of the new R 1300 GS Adventure. The new design, first introduced on the R 1300 GS, is much more compact than its predecessor thanks to a transmission located under the engine and a new arrangement of the camshaft drive. It generates



107 kW (145 hp) from 1,300 cc at 7,750 rpm. Maximum torque is 149 Nm at 6,500 rpm. This makes it by far the most powerful BMW boxer engine ever to be produced in series. At the centre of the new suspension is the sheet metal shell main frame made of steel, which in addition to being significantly optimised in terms of installation space also offers higher levels of stiffness than the predecessor model. In place of the previous tubular steel construction, the new R 1300 GS Adventure now has an aluminium lattice tube rear frame made of aluminium tubes and forged parts. The EVO Telelever front wheel guide with flex element and the revised EVO Paralever rear wheel guide also provide even greater steering precision and riding stability. Adaptive vehicle height control and adaptive vehicle height control comfort with vehicle lowering as optional equipment ex works. The new adaptive vehicle height control and vehicle height control comfort are available ex works as optional extras for the chassis of the new R 1300 GS Adventure. With adaptive vehicle height control, the new R 1300 GS offers

Ooredoo trains 200 Omani women in Springboard programme

MUSCAT: Ooredoo recently kicked-off the 23rd Springboard programme, for more than 200 Omani women. Providing training opportunities for those across the country, Springboard was created by women for women and promotes the inclusion of Omani women in the workplace. It continues to strengthen and empower them to leverage their talent and skills to achieve their aspirations and become future business owners. This year, Springboard welcomed participants from various government and private institutions, in a collaborative effort with Omani women’s associations in Al Batinah South Governorate, from the wilayats of Nakhal and Al Awabi. As Springboard is regarded as a benchmark for successful public-private sector collaboration, as well as putting in place an agreement to launch a programme to empower a group of female taxi leaders at Otaxi.

Plus, Ooredoo collaborated with Omran, the leading entity in the tourism and hospitality sector, to empower a group of its female employees. This partnership aims to provide these women with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles and contribute to the company’s growth. The training programme, which will continue over a period of 3 to 4 months, includes a series of workshops and practical sessions. By building skills and providing the right tools, the course helps to launch women into the world of work, including entrepreneurship. In doing so, this helps them to contribute to the development of the national economy while creating a positive and sustainable impact on future generations. Always focused on giving back to local communities, Ooredoo’s Springboard programme falls under the company’s Corporate Social Responsibility Goodwill umbrella.





New hydroponic farm to boost agritourism in Oman

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

The launch of a first-ever hydroponic farm in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is set to bolster the agritourism appeal of this popular mountaintop destination in Oman's Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Last week, the luxurious Alila Jabal Akhdar – part of Omran Group's portfolio – unveiled the hydroponic farm as part of the resort's commitment to enhancing guest experiences and promoting sustainability, additionally, offering educational tours for schools and universities, fostering a deeper understanding of sustainable practices.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Puneet Singh, General Manager, emphasised

Omran's continuous support for agritourism and sustainable tourism, which will contribute to a reduced carbon footprint.

The hydroponic farm project leverages the unique climate and terrain of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, providing fresh, farm-to-table ingredients for the resort's culinary offerings, he noted.

Singh explained that the hydroponic farm aims to ensure the highest quality and flavour in every dish served at the resort.

By growing produce on-site, Alila Jabal Akhdar enhances its guests' culinary experiences while demonstrating a commitment to environmental responsibility.

The initiative allows guests to enjoy the freshest produce, adding a new dimension to their stay.

The hydroponic farm is central to Alila Jabal Akhdar's



Puneet Singh (left), GM – Alila Jabal Akhdar, with Dr Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, Omran Group CEO at the hydroponic farm.

sustainability efforts. According to Singh, by the end of 2025, the farm will be powered entirely by

solar panels, making it 100 per cent sustainable.

This aligns with the resort's

goals of reducing its carbon footprint and promoting renewable energy. The farm also reduces the need to transport goods from cities and towns, supporting local sustainability efforts by growing produce that is typically imported to Oman.

Alila Jabal Akhdar offers educational tours of the hydroponic farm for schools and universities. These tours aim to foster a deeper understanding of sustainable practices and the importance of environmental stewardship.

The initiative supports Omran's continuous efforts in promoting agritourism and sustainable tourism.

According to the General Manager, the establishment of the hydroponic farm faced significant challenges, including navigating

the rocky terrain and setting up the necessary infrastructure.

Through innovative engineering solutions and a dedicated team effort, these obstacles were overcome, ensuring the farm's functionality and sustainability in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's unique environment, he said.

Alila Jabal Akhdar has plans for future sustainability projects, with hydroponics playing a central role. Singh detailed plans to expand the use of solar energy to power the main pool and spa, further reducing the resort's carbon footprint.

Additionally, over the next 18 months, Alila aims to plant 1,500 fruit and olive trees, enhancing its environmental stewardship and providing fresh, locally sourced produce for guests.

Finance ministry launches guide for Oman's 'Budget Programmes and Performance'

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance launched a guide for 'Budget of Programmes and Performance', as a step forward in the field of public finance management in the Sultanate of Oman.

The guide aims to raise the efficiency of public spending and achieve the desired outcome from allocating budgets to units of the state's administrative apparatus.

This is in accordance with the objectives, programmes and activities focusing on the implementation of the State Budget in an



'item-based manner'.

The guide includes a set of criteria on measuring performance and decision-making support systems. It deals with financial tools and advanced financial analysis of 'Budget-Performance-Related Methods and Techniques' to be applied within a medium-term financial framework.

The guide also includes a detailed section for implementing budgets, preparing reports and auditing accounts. It thereby provides a road-map for all government units.

Ubhar Capital hosts OQGN in inaugural launch of 'Talks with CEOs @ U Capital' series



MUSCAT: Ubhar Capital SAOC (U Capital), a leading financial services firm in the Sultanate of Oman has launched a new series of events titled 'Talks with CEOs @ U Capital', an initiative where CEOs and CFOs from leading companies in Oman come together for interaction with the wider investor community.

Through this online platform, attendees have the chance to partake in enlightening presentations and discussions, providing them opportunity to acquire thought-provoking viewpoints from senior executives themselves.

The first event in this series was a presentation and insights from OQ Gas Networks where Ubhar Capital hosted Masoor al Abdali, CEO of OQGN alongside Khalid al Qassabi, CFO, OQGN.

The event turned out to be highly engaging with OQGN highlighting their attractive investment case which is further enhanced by the advent of green hydrogen technologies in Oman. The OQGN management most graciously answered all questions from the audience providing investors with great insights.

Ubhar Capital is the largest and most diversified financial

services provider in the Sultanate of Oman with more than thirty partnerships in the countries of the region and twenty other business relationships across more than dozens of countries.

Currently, Ubhar Capital offers a wide suite of activities which includes investment banking activities, brokerage, asset management, liquidity providing & market making, wealth management and research.

The CEO of U Capital, Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Khalifa al Saadi, expressed his enthusiasm for the future prospects of the company, stating: "The aim behind launching this series of events is to support MSX towards greater transparency from corporates which will eventually enhance capital markets activity in Oman.

The series of events is yet another testament to our commitment to excellence and innovation in the financial sector.

U Capital's forward-looking approach is set to revolutionise the financial services industry in Oman by providing clients with access to a wider range of financial solutions, all underpinned by U Capital's commitment to integrity, innovation and a client centric approach."



OMAN REVIEWS STRATEGY IN GREEN HYDROGEN SECTOR

AMSTERDAM: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, participated in the hydrogen symposium, which was held in the Dutch city of Amsterdam.

In his speech during the symposium, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals, reviewed the strategy of the Sultanate of Oman in the green hydrogen sector and the important steps it has taken to build a competitive and sustainable hydrogen economy, stressing the importance of strengthening international cooperation to develop trade corridors for hydrogen and its derivatives.

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman participating in the symposium held multiple meetings, including the Port of Amsterdam and some companies operating in the hydrogen transportation and consumption sector, to enhance the partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the energy and logistics sectors related to the transportation of liquid hydrogen. – ONA

US-GCC trade exchange soars to \$94.7 billion in 2022

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

The trade exchange between the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the United States of America amounted to \$94.7 billion in 2022, according to recent data published by the council.

This figure represents a 34.1 per cent increase from 2021's figure, which was \$70.6 billion. Of this total, imports from the United States to the countries of the GCC amounted to \$49.7

billion in value.

Miscellaneous items worth \$20.3 billion made up 40.9 per cent of total imports, while machinery and mechanical appliances accounted for 26.8 per cent share worth \$13.3 billion.

Vehicles and vehicle parts represented 14.3 per cent of imports, valued at \$7.1 billion, while aircraft, spacecraft, and parts represented 7.2 per cent, valued at \$3.6 billion.

Other key import categories comprised electrical machinery and equipment (5.6 per cent)



Exports from the countries of the GCC to the United States amounted to \$45 billion in value in 2022.

valued at \$2.8 billion, followed by medical, optical, and photographic apparatus (5.2 per cent) valued at \$2.6 billion.

Meanwhile, exports from the countries of the GCC to the United States amounted to \$45 billion in value in 2022. Mineral fuels, oils, and waxes, totalling \$24.3 billion in value, represented a 54 per cent share.

This was followed by miscellaneous items (22.9 per cent of exports) valued at \$10.3 billion.

Aluminium and aluminium

products represented 8.7 per cent of total exports, amounting to \$3.9 billion, followed by fertilisers (5.1 per cent) worth \$2.3 billion, precious stones and metals (4.9 per cent) valued at \$2.2 billion, and printed books, newspapers, and pictures (4.4 per cent) worth \$2.0 billion.

The United States was the GCC's 5th largest trading partner in 2022, while China ranked first with two-way trade worth \$316.4 billion, followed by India (\$174.2 billion), Japan (\$140 billion, and South Korea (\$97.6 billion).

Highlights of the executive educational technology visit in China



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is founder of Knowledge Oman knowledgeoman.com

As part of a delegation from Oman, nominated by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) and represented by about 20 senior-level academic leaders (Deans, Vice-Chancellors, and Executives), I had the privilege to attend a 1-week visit (from June 29th to July 4th) to Huawei's headquarters in Shenzhen, China, to explore cutting-edge educational technologies and explore areas of collaboration and cooperation with the specific aim of

supporting Oman's digitalisation, bridging the digital gap, and creating a platform to support the Oman Vision 2040. The executive trip was not only an eye-opener for what and how educational technology has advanced but also a great opportunity to find potential areas of collaboration to enhance Oman's education sector. My article this week is the highlight of the executive educational technology visit in China.

The invitation to Shenzhen, the vibrant city blended with tradition and modernity and also known as China's Silicon Valley, was arranged by Huawei, a leading global ICT solution provider. The Omani delegation, nominated and selected by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, was headed by Dr Maryam bint Balarab al Nabhanayah, the General Directorate of Private Universities and Colleges, with the attendance of the Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of the National University

of Science and Technology, along with 20 senior-level representatives from higher education's private and public institutions. The visit explored educational and innovation technologies provided by Huawei, where traditional education is complemented by smart technologies utilising artificial intelligence via cloud solutions and the Internet of Things (IoT) — truly comprehensive! The delegation from Oman had the opportunity to visit multiple exhibitions, centres, and innovation labs that include Huawei's Shenzhen Head Quarters, Education Industry Exhibition Hall, F5G Optix Innovation Lab, Global Flagship Store, Digital Power HQ, Cyber Security Innovation Labs, Research & Development Campus, Training Center Library, Planck Cloud Exhibition, 5.5G Exhibition, Dongguan University of Technology, Polytechnic University, Shenzhen University, and later concluded with the ICT Talent Development Forum, where discussion on ICT

talent development and areas of engagement with Huawei was discussed and presented during a dedicated full-day event organised for the delegation. Best practices, experience, and knowledge sharing among the Omani and Chinese universities were shared during the panel discussion session. Huawei overall has a presence in over 170 countries, comprising 207,000 employees, of whom approximately 55 per cent work in research and development. Furthermore, Huawei has a presence in 500+ universities and 60+ science research institutes. Huawei has generated a revenue of \$100 billion (in 2023 itself) and is today considered 4th in global research and development investment. Over the past 21 years (since 2003) in Oman, Huawei has set up its first transmission backbone network and continues to progress to date by having recently signed a national cloud contract that provides the latest global technologies and expertise and enhances the security and hosting of local data for various

sectors that include government institutions and companies, including the financial sector, energy, health, and others. Huawei's contribution to the education sector includes, but is not limited to, smart classrooms, AI-powered learning platforms, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) solutions, cloud-based learning platforms, innovation and research, 5G connectivity, ICT talent development programmes, and digital transformation initiatives, to name a few. What I found most intriguing is Huawei's dedication to research and development centres. These centres are the heart of Huawei's innovation, where cutting-edge technologies are developed and refined. I see that leveraging these technologies would truly let students receive a high-quality, future-ready education. It was truly an amazing experience and an inspiring journey into the future of education. I was honoured to learn about the rapid technological advancements China has made over the past few decades.

The ability to learn, explore, and touch the latest technology in smart campus education — 5.5G, F5G, digital power, intelligent automotive, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud solutions, and the like — was also immersive. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's vision for education is comprehensive, forward-thinking, and aimed at creating a world-class education system for Oman that is inclusive, innovative, and aligned with the needs of the 21st century. The potential strategic collaboration between Oman and Huawei promises a fruitful partnership that will drive educational excellence and innovation for years to come. We look forward to further discussing, supporting, and seeing how we can integrate some of the practical learning into the education setting in Oman so as to develop Oman's Vision 2040 while enhancing cooperation and collaboration internationally as well. Until then, let's remain positive and continue serving Oman with technology!

Global economy finds new ways to keep growing

The world economy is defying the Cassandras. Despite widespread predictions of a slowdown, global GDP growth is accelerating. The United States is still the star performer but as it flags other regions are picking up the slack. Risks of damaging geopolitical confrontations abound. But for now investors can bask in an ideal economic environment.

"Steady but slow". "Weak pace". "Modest growth". The latest predictions by, respectively, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development do not make for cheery reading. Their common concern is that the global economy has been unable to regain its pre-pandemic cruising speed. As the World Bank points out, in 2024 and 2025 nearly 60 per cent of countries, comprising over 80 per cent of the global population, will grow by less than their average rate in the 2010s.

Look under the bonnet of the world's economic engines, however, and the perspective is more optimistic. For a start, global GDP is accelerating. When economists at UBS last tracked 320 monthly data series from 28 economies for April, they found that the global economy was growing at an annual rate of 3.5 per cent. If maintained throughout the year, this pace would be faster than the 3.2 per cent expansion in 2023 and not far from the 3.7 per cent yearly average in the decade before the Covid-19 pandemic struck in 2020. In practice, such a heady pace is unlikely to last. Nevertheless, it is still a sign of the positive momentum behind global output. Just as importantly, this pickup is taking place as price



FRANCESCO GUERRERA

The author is a Global Economics Editor at Reuters Breakingviews.



Ships and shipping containers are pictured at the port of Long Beach in Long Beach, California, US. — Reuters

rises are abating. Median headline inflation peaked at 9.4 per cent in 2022 as the health emergency and lockdowns sent prices spiking around the world. But after supply chains, energy markets and consumer behaviour adapted, and central banks belatedly but aggressively raised rates, global inflation is on track to fall to 2.8 per cent this year and 2.4 per cent in 2025, the IMF forecasts. The United States is the key driver of these benign conditions. While the other two big engines — Europe and China — sputtered, it was the world's largest economy that provided the thrust. Unlike most other countries, the US has already resumed its pre-pandemic growth trajectory, with GDP expected to grow by 2.7 per cent this year, compared

with just 1.7 per cent for advanced economies, IMF data shows. This economic feat owed much to the huge fiscal stimulus unleashed by the federal government in the form of corporate subsidies and direct transfers to households. These sustained consumption and corporate investment, helping to keep unemployment low. Admittedly, there are signs this star performer is flagging. US GDP grew at an annual rate of just 1.4 per cent in the first three months of the year, while the consumer sentiment index compiled by the University of Michigan is at the lowest point since November 2023. But the rest of the world seems ready to pick up the baton. Within the 28 economies tracked by UBS, the growth momentum is coming from emerging

markets such as India, Turkiye and Poland. The domestic economy in these and other countries is providing much of the impetus, as falling inflation and steady job markets are prompting more people to spend. Booming consumer confidence, for example, will power the Indian economy to a 7.2 per cent growth rate in 2024 and 6.5 per cent next year, according to Fitch economists. That's way above the annual average of 4.6 per cent between 2019 and 2023. Of course, the size of those economies means that their absolute contributions to global growth are relatively small. But there are other positive signs. After economic stagnation caused by high energy prices and a lack of investment, the euro zone is recovering. A survey of

5,000 companies in the single currency area by S&P Global found that their expectations for output growth in the second quarter of 2024 were at the highest in a year. Even China grew at an annual rate of 5.3 per cent in the first quarter, much better than the 4.6 per cent forecast in a Reuters poll. That solid start was helped by fiscal and monetary stimulus from the government. To be sure, this hopeful economic picture faces several clouds. Wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have the potential to escalate. The United States could turn more isolationist if Donald Trump regains the presidency. In the United States, a softer labour market, depleted consumer savings and a ballooning deficit suggest a further weakening in the second half of the year. China's hopes of reaching Beijing's stated target of "around 5 per cent" growth in 2024 is threatened by a prolonged property crisis, anaemic consumption and possible trade wars. Meanwhile, the eurozone only managed to grow 0.4 per cent year-on-year between January and March. Political instability, as shown by turbulent elections in France, lower fiscal firepower because of rising government indebtedness and weaker exports due to trade issues all limit the region's growth prospects. For the moment, though, investors are enjoying a near-perfect environment. That's particularly true in developed-market equities. The S&P 500 Index of leading US stocks has returned more than 26 per cent in the past year and is touching new highs. In Europe, the benchmark STOXX 600 Index is up nearly 13 per cent in the past 12 months. — Reuters

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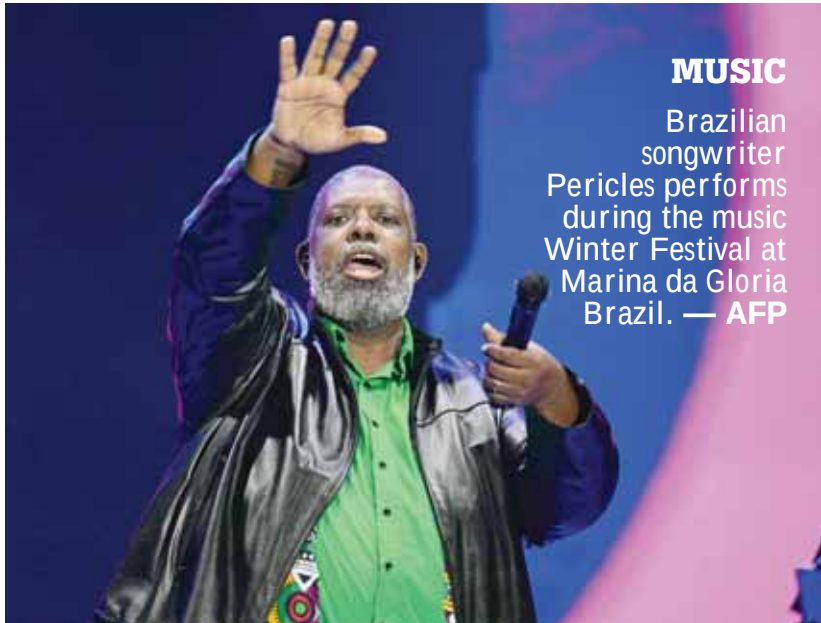
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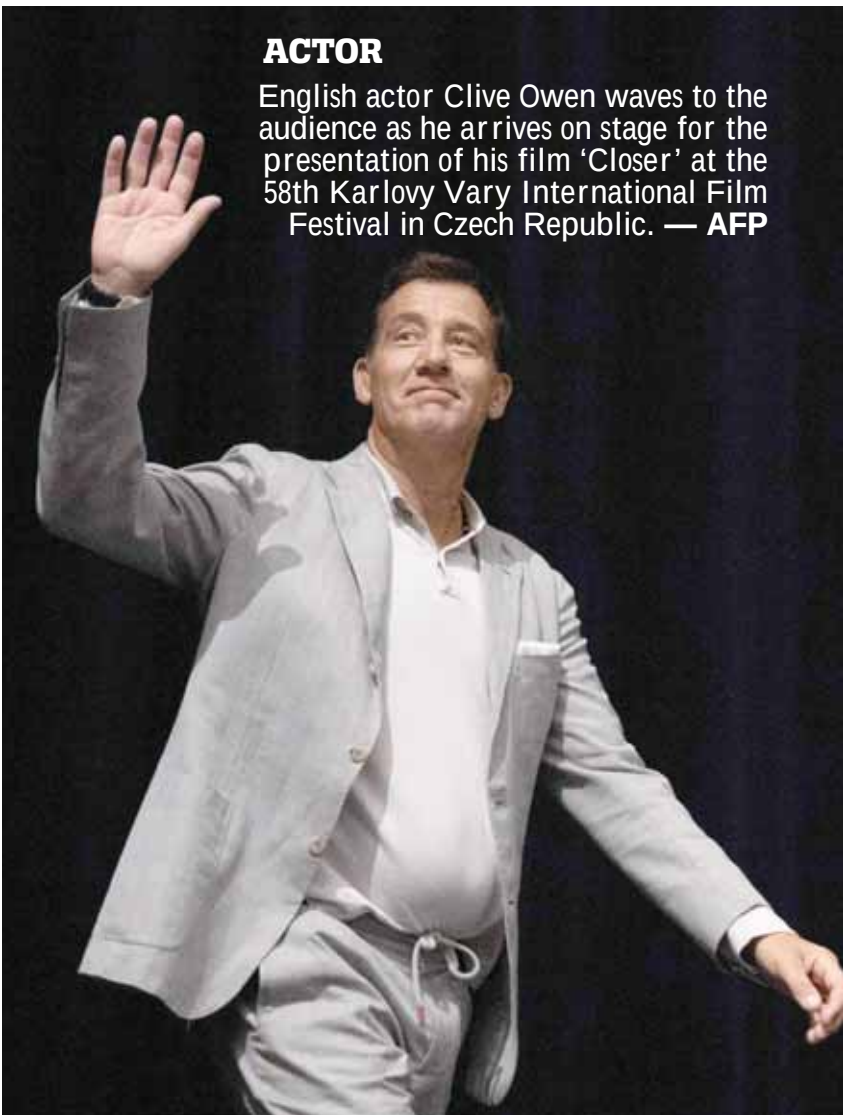
LIFESTYLE

A girl pulls a cart of water containers past a line of displacement tents in Deir El Balah in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP



MUSIC

Brazilian songwriter Pericles performs during the music Winter Festival at Marina da Gloria Brazil. — AFP



ACTOR

English actor Clive Owen waves to the audience as he arrives on stage for the presentation of his film 'Closer' at the 58th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in Czech Republic. — AFP



TRAVEL

This photo shows people riding past Tharabar Gate in Bagan in Myanmar's central Mandalay Region. — AFP



FILM

US-Canadian actor and producer Ryan Reynolds gestures during a press conference to promote his new film 'Deadpool & Wolverine' in Seoul. — AFP

art & life

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Oman's elite halls are blends of luxury, tradition and modernity

Wedding and event halls have become symbols of style and sophistication in Oman. These halls are not just places to hold events, they create memorable experiences with a perfect blend of luxury and tradition... P20

NEW EDITION OF OMANI MUSIC ISSUED

OMAN CENTRE FOR Traditional Music at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday issued an edition of electronic magazine Omani Music, a periodical publication that deals with Omani music in particular and Arab music in general. Its articles span thought, literature, heritage, musical history, personalities, musical compositions, among others.

The latest edition of the magazine contains articles penned by a number of writers specialising in traditional music including an article written by Professor Mohammed al Asaad Qaria, Professor at the University of Tunis entitled The Definition of Maqam in Some Old and Modern References.

It also features an article entitled Hajj Songs in Egyptian Culture by Professor Dr Mohammed Shabana, Professor of Popular Music at the Academy of Arts in Cairo, and an article by Dr Amal al Harmali entitled From Water to Music in addition to a number of insightful articles. — ONA



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



German conductor to perform music from legendary 'Napoleon' film

The restored film score of Abel Gance's legendary epic 1927 film "Napoleon" is being premiered on Thursday and Friday in Paris — under the baton of German conductor Frank Strobel.

Reconstruction of the film's music took 14 years, and resulted in a score that as compiled from 104 separate pieces by 48 composers and which weighs 33 kilogrammes.

The mammoth work, which is a French national treasure, will celebrate its world premiere in two parts on July 4 and 5 at the Seine Musicale in Boulogne-Billancourt, one of the largest concert halls in France.

Under the direction of Strobel, over 250 musicians will accompany the 7-hour version of the silent film, whose 4.5 million (\$4.8 million) reconstruction is itself regarded as an epic achievement.

Strobel is known for his film concerts. He has conducted performances of the restored versions of "Metropolis" and "The Tired Death" by Fritz Lang, among others. The "Napoleon" epic is nevertheless a challenge for the director of the European Film Philharmonic and former chief conductor of the WDR Funkhausorchester in Cologne.



"The score is extraordinarily stylistically diverse. It covers around 300 years of music history and ranges from Mozart and Wagner to Beethoven, Liszt, Haydn, Berlioz and Penderecki," he said in Paris. Strobel

calls the composition, compiled by Simon Cloquet-Lafolloye, a kaleidoscope that is a fully thought-out system.

The conductor is no stranger to the work of Gance, having already

provided musical accompaniment for two works by the avant-garde film pioneer.

The epic film is designed as a grand spectacle that portrays Napoleon Bonaparte as a superman.

With over 400,000 metres of film, thousands of extras and a wide array of film techniques on display, the film was widely regarded as the work of a megalomaniac at the time it was made. — dpa

Cinema

HOLLYWOOD ICON PARAMOUNT AGREES \$28 BN MERGER DEAL



ONE OF HOLLYWOOD'S oldest companies, Paramount Global, has agreed to merge with independent film studio Skydance Media.

Under the deal, Paramount's non-executive chair Shari Redstone will sell her family's controlling stake in the company in a complex transaction that will result in a new firm worth around \$28 billion (£21.9 billion), BBC news reported.

It marks the end of an era for the Redstone family, whose late patriarch, Sumner Redstone, transformed a chain of drive-in cinemas into a vast media empire.

As well as Paramount, the group includes the television networks CBS, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon and MTV.

According to the company, its TV channels have a global reach of over 4.3 billion sub-

scribers across more than 180 countries.

The merger would combine Paramount, home of classic films such as Chinatown and Breakfast at Tiffany's, with its financial partner on several recent big releases, including Top Gun: Maverick and Star Trek Into Darkness.

Under the agreement, Skydance will invest around \$8 billion in Paramount, including paying \$2.4 billion for National Amusements, which controls the group.

National Amusements owns just 10 per cent of Paramount Group's shares, but accounts for almost 80 per cent of its voting rights.

Paramount said it expected to close the deal by the summer of next year (2025).

Paramount Global traces its origins back more than a century to the founding of

Paramount Pictures Corporation in 1914.

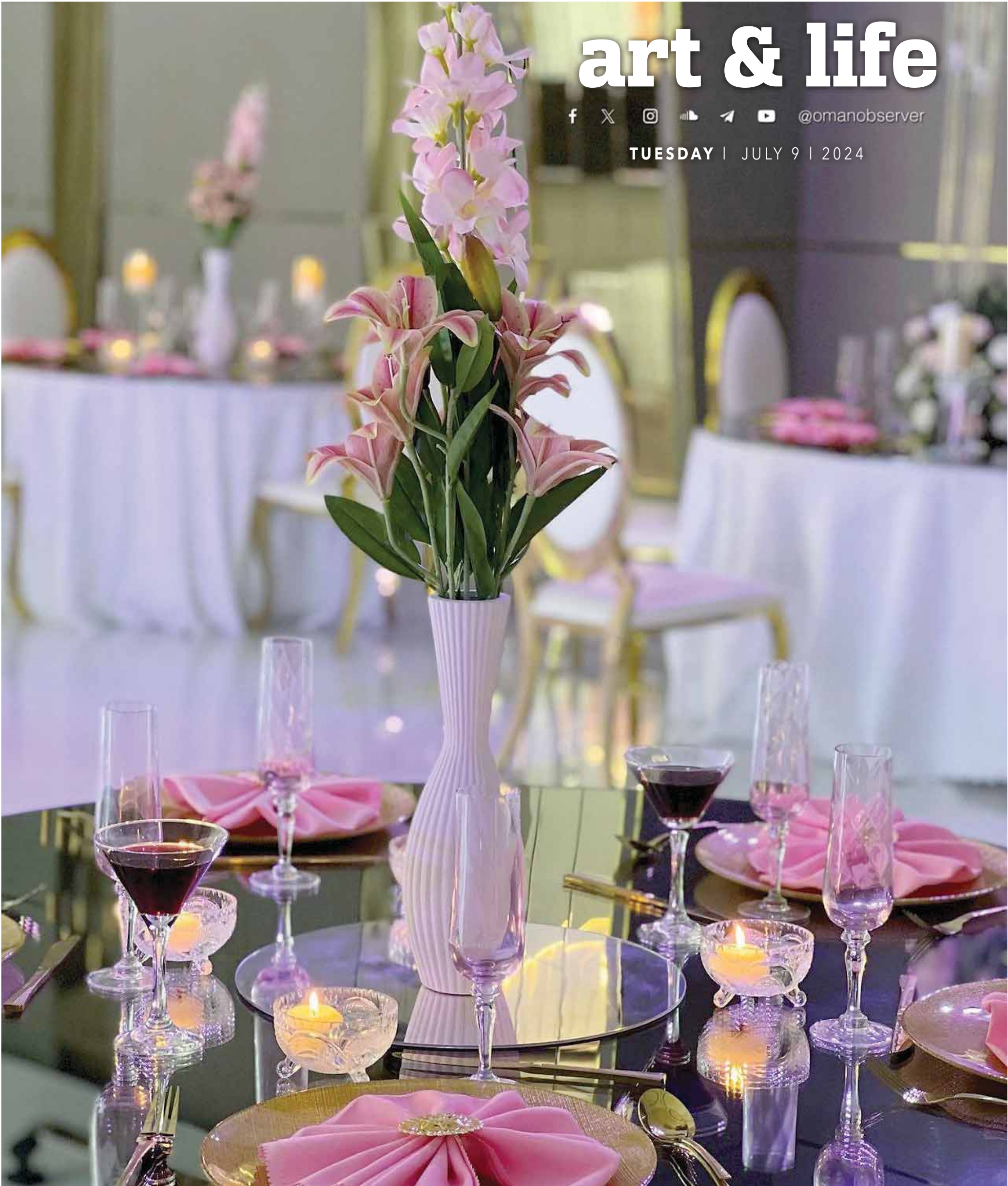
The studio has made many hit films, including the Godfather, Star Trek, and Mission Impossible series.

But the entertainment giant has struggled over the past decade. Paramount Global's shares have fallen by more than 75 per cent in the last five years.

Skydance is owned by David Ellison, the son of Larry Ellison, who founded US technology giant Oracle.

The announcement came after eight months of negotiations that saw Redstone holding talks with a number of potential partners including Sony and private equity firm Apollo.

The deal comes as the global entertainment industry is being transformed by the video-streaming revolution. — ONA



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Siham Al Saidi

Wedding and event halls have become symbols of style and sophistication in Oman. These halls are not just places to hold events, they create memorable experiences with a perfect blend of luxury and tradition.

A standout feature of Oman's best wedding and event halls is their stunning decorations. Each hall offers a wide range of styles to match different tastes. These halls showcase a variety of decorations. From the intricate designs of Islamic art and lush floral arrangements, modern looks, they cater to all preferences. This variety ensures that every event, whether a wedding, corporate meeting, or social gathering, has its own unique charm.

Elegance is key in these halls. The combination of luxurious settings and attention to detail creates a breathtaking atmosphere. Modern amenities add to the elegance. Advanced lighting and sound systems, and comfortable seating enhance the overall experience. These features are designed to impress and ensure guests' comfort. Beyond decorations and elegance, professionalism in service is vital. Skilled event planning and management teams ensure that every aspect of the event goes smoothly. Clients receive personalised and attentive service from the first consultation to the final execution.

Yaqoob bin Hamoud al Hosni, along with his brother, Eng Hamed bin Hamoud al Hosni, are the owners of a series of luxurious event halls in Oman. One of their notable venues, the Arena Hall in Muscat, has recently gained significant attention for its exceptional organisation, attention to client's tastes, and creative decorations and services.

Yaqoob al Hosni shared the challenges and successes behind their impressive event halls. "Bringing venues of such unique standards to life was not easy," he said. "We had to consider a wide range of tastes, from classical to contemporary, reflecting individual preferences. Securing the necessary materials for such distinguished outputs is also a challenge. While the local market has its limitations, we often turn to global markets to ensure our halls meet high standards."

"Elegance is about the fine details that create a beautiful experience," she says. "From the choice of linens to the stage design, every detail is carefully chosen," he added.

Al hosni emphasised their commitment to continuous innovation and high-quality organisation to maintain a competitive edge in Muscat's event hall industry.

"Despite the high competition, our hallmark remains in our continuous development and the diversity of services we offer," he explained.

"We strive to renew and enhance our organisation according to high standards and steady steps, ensuring that we always stand out."

The success of Arena Hall and other venues under their management showcases their dedication to excellence and client satisfaction, making their halls some of the most sought-after in the region. Adding "Our clients' satisfaction is our top priority. We offer complete packages, including catering and entertainment, so clients can enjoy their special day." This level of service makes each event not just an occasion but a memorable experience.

Client feedback highlights the success of these halls. Buthaina al Saidi, who had her wedding at the Shaiks' Palace Hall in Al Khabourah, shares her experience in her wedding: "The process was smooth. The team was very professional, and the hall was beautifully decorated. It was a dream come true." She added: "The service of offering coffee and soft drinks and smiling hospitality was extremely awesome too."

Wedding and event halls in Oman excel through their stunning decorations, diverse styles, elegance and professional service. These venues set high standards, making every event extraordinary and reflecting Oman's rich cultural heritage.

OMAN'S ELITE HALLS ARE BLENDS OF LUXURY, TRADITION AND MODERNITY

