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OMAN TAKES DELIVERY OF LATEST COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL



P10

OMAN BAGS 4 MEDALS IN WEST ASIAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIP



P20

INSIDE OMAN'S LARGEST INDOOR CLIMBING AND ADVENTURE FACILITY



MUSCAT

ROAD PROJECTS IN AL SHARQIYAH NORTH

Al Sharqiyah North Municipality is currently implementing a number of internal road projects in the wilayats of the governorate. The projects come within the framework of the governorate's general plan for service, development and beautification projects for 2024. The projects include construction of new roads and rehabilitating of roads damaged by flash floods, beautification projects for the entrances to a number of villages and residential neighbourhoods in the wilayats. Eng Munther bin Saleh al Yazidi, Head of Projects Section at the Projects Department at Al Sharqiyah North Municipality, said that Al Sharqiyah North Municipality is implementing a number of projects in the wilayats at a cost of RO 5 million.

DETAILS ON P2

PACT TO STUDY E-GASOLINE

Parties comprising OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE) - an OQ Group company, Dutco, Sumitomo Corporation Middle East FZE, Automobili Lamborghini SpA and Airbus have formed the OSCAR (Oman Sustainable Cars and Aviation Refuelling) consortium with the aim to study the potential of Oman for the production of e-gasoline and e-SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuels).

DETAILS ON P13

Extreme care urged as heatwave grips Oman

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

Almost all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, except for Dhofar in the south, will continue to experience extremely high temperatures in the coming days.

All citizens and residents, especially workers involved in outdoor activities, have been advised to avoid direct exposure to the sun and take precautions by staying hydrated. There has been a call for remote working options by a section of office-goers to avoid travelling in the sun.

"Temperatures will continue to rise from Sunday in most governorates, especially in parts of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Wusta governorates," Oman Meteorology said in a statement.

According to indicators, temperatures seem to be comparatively higher than at this time in 2023. On Saturday, temperatures reported at various weather monitoring stations exceeded 45°C in

Muscat, Al Suwaiq 46°C, Barka 46°C, Al Rustaq 45°C, Bidbid 45°C, Al Khabourah 45°C, Wadi Al Maawil 45°C and Bausher 45°C.

In the last 24 hours, Barka recorded 47.9°C. Al Amerat is said to be the hottest place with temperature around 47 degrees Celsius.

Due to the high temperatures, CAA has advised all to avoid exposure to direct sunlight, especially in the afternoon (from 3 to 4 pm), to prevent sunstroke and heat exhaustion.

PRECAUTIONS

To reduce and avoid sunstroke, heat exhaustion, and other symptoms associated with high temperatures, those exposed to outdoor jobs and field activities must take necessary precautions.

Vehicle owners were advised to clear cars of gaseous materials, and lighters, carbonated drinks, perfumes and batteries.

Car windows should be opened slightly (for ventilation) and do not fill the car's fuel tank full and refuel the car in the evening.

Israel pounds Gaza as US outlines truce plan

RAFAH: Israeli forces hammered Rafah in southern Gaza with tanks and artillery on Saturday, hours after US President Joe Biden said Israel was offering a new roadmap towards a full ceasefire.

Shortly after Biden's announcement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted his country would still pursue the war until it had reached all its aims.

Hamas, meanwhile, said it "views positively" the Israeli plan laid out by Biden.

In his first major address outlining a possible end to the nearly eight-month war, the US president said Israel's three-stage offer would begin with a six-week phase that would see Israeli forces withdraw from all populated areas of Gaza. It would also see the "release of a number of captives... in exchange for (the) release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners".

Israel and the Palestinians would then negotiate for a lasting ceasefire — but the truce would continue so long as talks are ongoing, Biden said. The US leader urged Hamas to accept the Israeli offer.

"It's time for this war to end, for the day after to begin," he said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called his counterparts from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye on Friday to press the deal.

UN chief Antonio Guterres "strongly hopes" the latest development "will lead to an agreement by the parties for lasting peace", his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the offer "provides a glimpse of hope and a possible path out of the war's



A woman holds a placard reading "No Olympics for genocidaires" during a demonstration to show support to Palestinians in central Paris. — AFP

deadlock", while EU chief Ursula von der Leyen welcomed a "balanced and realistic" approach to end the bloodshed.

Saudi Arabia stressed its "support for all efforts aimed at an immediate ceasefire" and the withdrawal of Israeli troops.

Indonesia, meanwhile, said it was ready to send "significant peacekeeping forces" and medical personnel to Gaza if a ceasefire is agreed.

But Netanyahu took issue with Biden's presentation of what was on the table, insisting on Friday the transition from one stage

to the next was "conditional" and crafted to allow Israel to maintain its war aims.

"The prime minister authorised the negotiating team to present an outline for achieving (the return of captives), while insisting that the war will not end until all of its goals are achieved," Netanyahu's office said.

Israel sent tanks and troops into Rafah in early May, ignoring concerns over the safety of displaced Palestinian civilians sheltering in the city on the Egyptian border. SEE ALSO P5

AUCTION OF DATES IN AL MUDHAIBI BEGINS

As the date harvest season nears amid scorching summer, the auction of date palm crops began in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. The auction attracted a large number of people, even as the first crop is ripening and promising of a good season.

DETAILS ON P3



Eid al Adha likely to fall on June 16; nine-day break expected

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY @shadadm

Astronomers from both the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia have predicted that Arafat Day is likely to fall on Saturday (June 15) making June 16 the first day of Eid al Adha this year.

This means that holidays in Oman are anticipated to begin on Sunday (June 16) and run till Thursday (June 20), giving citizens and residents a five-day break.

While a five-day break sounds good, there is hope for an even

longer holiday as Friday (June 21) and Saturday (June 22) will be weekend making it a nine-day break running from pre-Eid weekly off on Friday (June 14) to Saturday (June 22).

The latest Eid al Adha 2024 date prediction was shared by Dr Khaled Zaaq, a Saudi researcher who is also in the Saudi moon sighting committee, in a video which is taking rounds on social media.

Speaking in an entertaining way through a video tweet, Dr Khaled said, "As per astronomical calculations, Friday

(June 7) may be the first day of Dhul Hijjah and Saturday (June 15) the first day of Arafat, hence the first day of Eid is likely to fall on Sunday (June 16)."

His prediction was endorsed by Abdulwahab al Busaidy, head of the observatory at the Oman Astronomical Society, whose predictions in Oman have turned out to be correct during the past 30 years.

"Eid al Adha is always tricky because we tend to align with Haj season but as per my prediction, Arafat Day is likely to begin on Saturday (June 15) this

year. This means that this year Eid al Adha holidays may begin on Sunday (June 16). These dates are based on astronomical calculations," Al Busaidy told the Observer.

According to religious beliefs, Eid al Adha honours Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them) and their obedience to Allah, and brings with it another chance for all to spend time with loved ones while others use the holiday break for travel.

"Eid celebrations are important for us and hence

deserve adequate preparations. I have finished all my Eid shopping and I am now considering ways of enjoying the anticipated long break. I just hope the authorities announce the holidays early so that we can plan ahead," said Sabry Abdullah, an accountant based in Muscat.

Hassan al Naamani, a private sector employee, said he is currently considering flight options to Azerbaijan for short 5-day break or Kenya for safari if he gets a 9-day break. "I always wanted to go to Kenya and I hope this time I may make it."

NEW DELHI

MODI'S ALLIANCE TO WIN BIG IN POLL



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led alliance is projected to win a majority in the general election that concluded on Saturday, TV exit polls said, suggesting it would do better than expected by most analysts. Most exit polls projected the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) could win a two-thirds majority. SEE P6



Road works worth RO 5m in progress in Al Sharqiyah N

AL MUDHAIBI: Al Sharqiyah North Municipality is currently implementing a number of internal road projects in the wilayats of the governorate.

The projects come within the framework of the governorate's general plan for service, development and beautification projects for 2024. The projects include construction of new roads and rehabilitating of roads damaged by flash floods, beautification projects for the entrances to a number of villages

and residential neighbourhoods in the wilayats.

Eng Munther bin Saleh al Yazidi, Head of Projects Section at the Projects Department at Al Sharqiyah North Municipality, said that Al Sharqiyah North Municipality is implementing a number of projects in the governorate's wilayats at a cost of RO 5 million most notable of which is the paving of internal roads in the Wilayat of Bidiyah with a total length of 56 km at an estimated cost of RO 3 million,

maintenance and rehabilitation of Al Wariyah Road in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi at a cost of RO 98,000, rehabilitation and maintenance of roads in Al Mudhaibi, Sinaw and Dima W'attayeen at a total of RO 816,000, rehabilitation and repair of damaged roads in the wilayats of Ibra, Al Qabil, Bidiyah and Wadi Bani Khalid at a cost of RO 612,000, rehabilitation of internal road in Saih Al Khashita area in the Wilayat of Sinaw, implementation of the mountain walkway in the Wilayat of Wadi

Bani Khalid, and the development of the village of Al Dhaher in the Wilayat of Bidiyah.

Other projects under implementation by Al Sharqiyah North Municipality include paving of internal roads in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi with a length of 35 km at a total cost of RO 1,398,979. This is in addition to the paving of internal roads in a number of villages in the Wilayat of Al Qabil with a total length of 45 km and a cost of RO 3,442,444, the official said. — ONA

Barka Fort festival begins on June 20

MUSCAT: Al Batinah South Governorate is organising 'Barka Fort Nights' from June 20 to 24, with the participation of various government and private agencies.

An event to launch the brand identity of the festival was held under the auspices of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, in the presence of a number of officials.

Sayyid Tariq bin Mahmoud al Busaidy, Wali of Barka, reviewed the objectives of Layali Al Hosn, explaining that they reflect the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040 in fostering citizenship, identity, national heritage and culture. "Organising the Barka Fort Nights comes within the framework of strengthening the role of the governorates in

light of decentralisation, and to support the tourism sector and enhance its contribution to the national economy."

He said the objectives are to promote tourism, attract investments in archaeological and heritage areas, offer entertainment for people, support small and medium enterprises and highlight the historical role of Barka Fort.

The most prominent programmes and events of Barka Fort Nights include theatre, operetta to illustrate the history of the Wilayat of Barka, innovation hackathon and dialogue sessions. As part of the festival, Oman Sail will host events for school students and people to experience sailing on Al Muraisi Beach.



National Museum offers peek into Islamic art of India



HH Sayyidah Mayyan bint Shihab al Said, Chairperson of the Oman Design Association, at Zeina exhibition in the National Museum.



BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

A precious stone inscribed with the name of the Timurid ruler Ulugh Beg from 1449 AD, a jade pendant of Emperor Shah Jahan from 1637-1638 AD, and an archery ring from 1651-1652 AD are among the pieces of the exhibition titled 'Zeina: The splendours of the Indian Court' which was opened at the National Museum last week in collaboration with Kuwait's Dar al Athar al Islamiyyah (The House of Islamic Antiquities).

The exhibition displays an array of daggers, knives and swords adorned with precious jewels, reflecting the grandeur of Indian Islamic craftsmanship.

It will be open to visitors until September 12.

The exhibition features 130 unique and distinctive pieces of art from the collections of Shaikh Nasser Sabah Al Ahmad al Sabah and Shaikha Hessa Sabah Al Salem al Sabah.

The collection is renowned for its size and significance in the realm of ancient and Islamic art, offering a glimpse into the sophisticated and opulent lives of Indian princes and showcasing the exceptional craftsmanship of Indian jewellers from 16th to 18th centuries.

There is an archery ring inscribed with the Basmala and the names of Allah, a jewel-encrusted shield, decorated domes and armour adornments, a ceremonial sceptre, a jewel-encrusted cane handle, and a collection of finely carved household items. The women's jewellery in the collection is distinguished by unique designs studded with diamonds and colourful gemstones, alongside numerous other artefacts that reflect the harmony between the arts and court life in the Indian subcontinent.

The exhibition was unveiled by HH Sayyidah Mayyan bint Shihab al Said, Chairperson of the Oman Design Association.

In his speech, Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, expressed Oman's deep appreciation for the efforts of Dar al Athar al Islamiyyah in preserving and promoting unique Islamic heritage. He emphasised that this exhibition, which is the National Museum's first Islamic art exhibition, exemplifies the strong cultural ties between Oman and Kuwait.

Badr Ahmed al Baijan highlighted the visionary contributions of Shaikh Nasser Sabah Al Ahmad al Sabah, whose dedication to the arts and cultural heritage has resulted in one of the most important artistic collections globally.



Al Nahda Hospital organises Paediatric Conference

MUSCAT: The third National Paediatric Conference, organised by the Ministry of Health, was held at Al Nahda Hospital, on Saturday.

The conference discussed methods for enhancing scientific research and supporting research initiatives to provide excellent studies that contribute to improving the quality of paediatric healthcare.

Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, presided over the opening of the conference in the presence of a number of paediatrics experts and specialists.

Dr Hanan al Mahrouqi, Head of the Paediatrics Department at Al Nahda Hospital, delivered a speech in which she said that the National Paediatrics Conference organised by the Paediatrics Department at Al Nahda Hospital offers a unique opportunity to communicate and interact with a group of experts and specialists in the paediatrics field. By organising this conference, the hospital aims to achieve significant goals such as advancing medical knowledge through lectures and scientific discussions aimed at enriching understanding and exchanging the latest knowledge and technologies to develop children's healthcare.

A number of scientific medical topics and lectures were presented by a group of speakers and consultants on child protection including assessing low immune cells in children, assessing fever in children with hydrocephalus, skin emergencies, eating disorders and the impact of social media on children.

— ONA



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RO15 million award for best tourism project in governorate

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE1

To support tourism, economic diversification and create more jobs for Omanis, the Ministry of Economy launched a RO15 million award for governorates submitting best tourism projects to promote springs, wadis, and ancient neighbourhoods.

He added that one of the objectives of the competition is to stimulate economic potential and enhance competitiveness within the governorate.

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al



The results of the competition will be announced in 2025.

Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, said that this initiative is part of an ambitious phase of transformations of the economy of Oman to achieve

balanced growth in all the governorates.

He said the initiative will create competition among governorates for tourism projects and develop the tourism sector by wooing investors in the competitive mechanism of each governorate. It will also help in improving tourist destinations.

He added that one of the objectives of the initiative is to enhance economic diversification and local content, provide jobs for Omanis that stimulate economic potential and enhance competitiveness within the

governorate. The governorates have to submit their projects so that the best is selected through a technical committee based on specific criteria in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the award may be given to one or more governorates.

He indicated that applications for the award will begin this year and the results will be announced in 2025.

The under-secretary stressed that these projects will contribute to increasing the number of local visitors or from outside the Sultanate of Oman.

French Legion of Honour bestowed on SAF Chief

PARIS: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis bin Abdullah al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) received the National Order of the Legion of Honour (commander rank) at the headquarters of the French Ministry of Armed Forces in Paris, on Friday.

General Thierry Burkhard, Chief of Staff of the French Defence handed over the medal on behalf of the French government.

They discussed a number of topics related to the armed forces of Oman and France and ways of enhancing them.

An official reception ceremony was organised for Vice



Admiral Al Raisi and the military delegation accompanying him upon arrival at the headquarters of the French Ministry of Armed Forces.

The meeting was attended by a number of senior officers from both sides.

— ONA

Auctioning of date palms in Al Mudhaibi begins

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

As the date harvest season nears amid scorching summer, the auction of date palm began in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

The auction attracted a large number of people, even as the first crop is ripening and promising of a good season. The campaign brings together buyers, farmers and auctioneers who organise harvest sales along the wadis and aflaj in different times to help a larger number of the public, including employees working in government and private establishments, to take part.

The crops are sold when they are still on the trees, and it is a good way to market the surplus product at reasonable prices.

Mohammed al Habsi of Al Mudhaibi, said: With the onset



Citizens check date palms before fixing the prize

of summer, the villages of Al Mudhaibi are witnessing auction of Al Naghal, the first variety of dates, which will continue for two to three weeks in the villages of Al Zahib, Al Rada, Al Sharq, Al Zaidi, Al Fath, Al Ainin, Al Khashaba, Al Sedira, Al Wafi, Al Tala'a. The auction always witnesses a great demand due to the quality and abundance of the crop varieties in these villages."

Sulaiman al Habsi, auction

supervisor, said that the prices ranged between RO 8 and RO 20.

Auction of dates in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi is divided into two stages. In the first stage, dates varieties like Al Najal, Al Madluki and Al Khunaizi are auctioned. In the second stage after Eid al Adha, the rest of the crops are auctioned. These included Khalas, Meznaj, Qashosh, and Fard" which Al Mudhaibi is famous for.



The crops are sold when they are still on the trees, and it is a good way to market the surplus product at reasonable prices.

For the first time in the Sultanate and one of the first countries in the Middle East... AWASR launches 10 Gbps



In a pioneering step towards the digital future, AWASR the leading company in providing fixed telecommunications services and winner of the Fastest Internet Award in Oman for seven years in a row 2017-2023, launched a 10 Gbps high-speed Internet service for the first time in the Sultanate, with download speeds of up to 10 Gbps and upload speeds of up to 2.5 Gbps, making it one of the first countries in the Middle East to provide these advanced speeds.

This achievement comes as part of the Sultanate's commitment to strengthening the digital infrastructure and improving the user experience, as the new service provides many technological advantages, including superior download and upload speeds that allow users to download and upload high-resolution content at an unprecedented speed, which contributes to improving the viewing and broadcasting experience over the Internet, in addition to improvements in communication between users, including high-quality video calls and instant interaction in cloud applications.

These speeds also enable the operation of modern applications such as virtual reality and augmented reality with high efficiency, which opens the door to innovation in various fields. In addition to benefiting individuals, companies and institutions will benefit from these high speeds in improving their operations and increasing their productivity through the use of advanced cloud systems and transferring data

quickly and securely. Adnan Bin Mohammed Al Alawi -CEO of AWASR - said: "We are proud to be one of the first countries in the region to provide this advanced service, and we look forward to seeing the positive impact of this technology on society and the Omani digital economy. This service was developed in cooperation with global partners in the field of Technology to ensure the provision of the latest technical solutions and provide a solid infrastructure that supports digital transformation in the Sultanate. This step comes within Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to promote innovation and sustainable economic growth through technology."

It should be noted that this service will be available to individual users and commercial institutions in some major regions initially, with plans to expand coverage to include other regions in the near future, ensuring that the largest possible segment benefits from this advanced service.



KEEP YOUR INTERNET MODEM AWAY FROM SUMMER HEAT



DURING THE SUMMER, SUBSCRIBERS ARE SUFFERING FROM INTERRUPTIONS IN THEIR HOME INTERNET, AND WHEN LOOKING INTO THE PROBLEM, WE FIND THAT THE MODEM'S TEMPERATURE HAS REACHED MORE THAN

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DEGREES CELSIUS

ALAA AL MAAWALI
Omantel

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

As temperatures rise during the summer, the risk of damage to electronic devices, including Internet modems, increases. High temperatures can slow down Internet speed, cause disconnections, and even permanently damage the modem.

At a time when users increasingly need a stable and fast connection, especially with the heavy reliance on the Internet for remote work, study and entertainment, they must adhere to steps to maintain device efficiency.

Ahmed al Ajmi, from Ooredoo, provided valuable tips to protect modems from the summer heat and maintain connection speed and stability. Al Ajmi explained that keeping the modem away from direct sunlight and other heat sources is an essential step. He pointed to the importance of placing the modem in a high place away from the ground and out of reach of children, where the air is cooler. In addition, placing the modem in a high place helps distribute the Internet better throughout the home. Al Ajmi added

that it is important to make sure that there is enough space around the modem to ensure airflow, and not to cover the ventilation holes on the modem because they are necessary for airflow.

On the other hand, Al Ajmi stressed the need to avoid turning the modem on and off repeatedly, as it is preferable to do so no more than once a day, as this can affect the device and speed.

In the same context, Alaa al Maawali of Omantel indicated that it is preferable to place the modem in a place where it reaches moderate temperatures, and avoid placing it on wood or fabric. Al Maawali explained that the company often receives calls from subscribers during the summer who are suffering from interruptions in their home Internet, and when looking into the problem, we find that the modem's temperature has reached more than 42 degrees Celsius due to exposure to direct sunlight or being placed in a place where it does not reach moderate coolness.

Al Maawali added that the company advises customers to turn off the modem for 20 minutes to lower its temperature, and then restart it to operate normally, which allows them to benefit from the required speed, as the high temperature of the modem leads to a slight decrease in Internet speed.



Displaced Palestinians transport belongings in Rafah. – AFP

Egypt to talk with Israel, US over Rafah crossing

CAIRO: Egypt will host Israeli and US officials to discuss the reopening of the Rafah crossing, a vital conduit for aid into the besieged Gaza Strip, Egyptian state-linked media said.

Al Qahera News, which has links to Egyptian intelligence, quoted on Saturday a unidentified senior official as saying Cairo was demanding “a total Israeli withdrawal” from the terminal on Gaza’s southern border with Egypt.

“An Egyptian-American-Israeli meeting is scheduled for tomorrow (Sunday) in Cairo to discuss the reopening of the Rafah crossing”, the official said.

The crossing has been closed since Israeli forces seized its Palestinian side in early May, reducing aid flows into the war-torn territory to a trickle.

Since then, Egypt and Israel have blamed each other for the blocking of aid deliveries through Rafah. The Egyptian authorities have refused to coordinate with the Israelis, preferring to work with international or

Palestinian bodies.

After talks with US President Joe Biden last month, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi agreed to temporarily divert UN aid to the Kerem Shalom crossing, near Rafah but on Gaza’s border with Israel.

Biden on Friday revealed a multi-phase plan for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip proposed by Israel, saying it was “time for this war to end”.

The official quoted by Al Qahera said that Egypt was undertaking “intensive efforts” to “resume negotiations” for a truce “in light of the recent American proposition”.

The US president has been under international pressure over his support for Israel since a deadly strike on Rafah set ablaze a crowded camp on Sunday. Gaza officials said 45 people were killed and about 250 wounded. The White House however said this week that while the Israeli strike was “devastating,” it did not breach Biden’s red lines for withholding weapons deliveries to the key US ally.

— AFP

GAZA UNDER FIRE AS BIDEN OUTLINES CEASEFIRE PLAN

RAFAH: Israeli forces hammered Rafah in southern Gaza with tanks and artillery on Saturday, hours after US President Joe Biden said Israel was offering a new road-map towards a full ceasefire.

Shortly after Biden’s announcement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted his country would still pursue the war until it had reached all its aims.

He reiterated that position on Saturday, saying that “Israel’s conditions for ending the war have not changed: the destruction of Palestinian groups military and capabilities, the freeing of all captives and ensuring that Gaza no longer poses a threat to Israel”. Palestinian movement Hamas, meanwhile, said it “views positively” the Israeli plan laid out by Biden.

In his first major address outlining a possible end to the nearly eight-month war, the US president said Israel’s three-stage offer would begin with a six-week phase that would see Israeli forces withdraw from all populated areas of Gaza.

It would also see the “release of a number of captives... in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners”. Israel and the Palestinians would then negotiate for a lasting ceasefire -- but the truce would continue so long as talks are ongoing, Biden said. “It’s time for this war to end, for the day after to begin,” he said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called his counterparts from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and



Palestinians carry some salvaged belongings as they leave the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. – AFP

The US president said Israel’s three-stage offer would begin with a six-week phase that would see Israeli forces withdraw from all populated areas of Gaza

Türkiye on Friday to press the deal.

UN chief Antonio Guterres “strongly hopes” the latest development “will lead to an agreement by the parties for lasting peace”, his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

But Netanyahu took issue with Biden’s presentation of what was on the table, insisting the transition from one stage

to the next was “conditional” and crafted to allow Israel to maintain its war aims.

Israel sent tanks and troops into Rafah in early May, ignoring concerns over the safety of displaced Palestinian civilians sheltering in the city on the Egyptian border.

On Saturday, residents reported tank fire in the Tal al-Sultan neighbourhood in west Rafah, while witnesses in the east and centre of Rafah described intense shelling.

There was also shelling and gunfire from the Israeli army in Gaza City, in the north of the territory, a reporter said.

Before the Rafah offensive began, the United Nations said up to 1.4 million people were sheltering in the city. — AFP



People carrying placards and Palestinian flags take part in a rally outside the US embassy in Jakarta. – Reuters

Indonesia offers to send peacekeeping troops to Gaza

SINGAPORE: Indonesia’s president-elect, Prabowo Subianto, said on Saturday that his country was willing to send peacekeeping troops to enforce a ceasefire in Gaza if required.

Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia’s premier security conference, Prabowo said US President Joe Biden’s three-phase proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza was a step in the right direction.

“When needed and when requested by the UN, we are prepared to contribute significant peacekeeping forces to maintain and monitor this prospective ceasefire as well as providing protection and security to all parties and to all sides,” Prabowo said.

The 72-year-old former special forces general and current Indonesian defence minister said that President Joko Widodo had instructed him to announce that Indonesia was also ready “to evacuate, to receive and to treat with medical care up to 1,000 patients” from Gaza.

The Indonesia Hospital in Gaza, which was run by an Indonesia NGO, closed in November amid the fighting.

— Reuters

Pro-Palestinian protesters take over Brooklyn Museum

NEW YORK: Pro-Palestinian protesters took over parts of the Brooklyn Museum, hanging a banner above the main entrance, witnesses said.

The art museum in the New York City borough of Brooklyn said it closed an hour early because of the disruption, including skirmishes between police and protesters that took place inside and outside the building.

Some arrests were made but a New York Police Department spokesperson said there would be no official count until after the protest concluded. A demonstration continued outside the museum hours after the initial confrontation, but the spokesperson could not say whether any protesters remained inside.

One of the arrests was of a man who defaced an outdoor sculpture with graffiti, a witness said. Several protesters scrawled messages on the OY/YO sculpture on the plaza outside the entrance.

“Out of a concern for the building, our collections, and our staff, the decision was made to close the building an hour early,”



Pro-Palestinian protestors try enter the Brooklyn Museum, in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. – Reuters

Demonstrations against Israel’s prosecution of the war in Gaza have continued in the United States, largely on university campuses

and the public was asked to vacate peacefully, the statement said.

Hundreds of demonstrators were marching through Brooklyn when some of them rushed

the entrance. Security guards prevented many from entering but some managed to get inside.

A banner was hung from atop the neoclassical facade proclaiming, “Free Palestine, Divest From Genocide.”

A pro-Palestinian organisation named Within Our Lifetime urged demonstrators to “flood Brooklyn Museum for Gaza.” It said activists occupied the museum to compel it to disclose any Israel-related investments and to divest any such funding.

— Reuters



TENDER

Manah Power Plant, operating by Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company (GPDC), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
GPDC/2024/01	Supply and upgrade Human Machine Interface (HMI) solution	06 June 2024	07 July 2024	100 /- Plus VAT Total amount: 105 OMR

- Bids must be submitted in three separate sealed red waxed envelopes (Commercial Proposal, Technical Proposal & Bid Bond), addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee”. Ensure each envelope is marked with the tender number and name. No indication or reference about the bidder is permitted on the envelope.
- The original hard copy of bid bonds should be dropped in the tender box at the Nama Holding reception before 02.00 pm, time of the Sultanate of Oman, on Sunday 07 July 2024.
- Each bid should be accompanied by bid bond, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee of GPDC. Bids that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested party must deposit the non-refundable tender fee into the following account:
Account Name: Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company
Bank: Bank Muscat
Account Number: 0423011069510017
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Hungarian PM Viktor Orban delivers a speech during a pro-government rally, in Budapest, Hungary. – Reuters

Thousands rally to back Hungary’s Orban ahead of EU vote

BUDAPEST: Tens of thousands of Hungarians marched through downtown Budapest on Saturday in support of nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who faces an unexpected challenge from a political newcomer ahead of next week’s European Parliament election.

Orban, in power since 2010, hopes his Fidesz party, which is not affiliated with any grouping in the European Parliament (EP), will benefit from a rise in far-right support across Europe as he prepares to take over the European Union’s rotating presidency in the second half of the year. Orban has long been at odds with fellow EU members over a range of issues, including refusing to send weapons to Ukraine and maintaining economic ties with Moscow.

The flag-waving crowd, chanting “Hungary-Hungary” and holding banners saying

“Give us peace, Lord”, marched from Budapest’s Chain Bridge alongside the parliament building to Margaret Island, where Orban addressed supporters.

“Never before have so many people lined up for peace. We are the biggest peace corps, the largest peacekeeping force in Europe,” Orban said.

“Europe must be prevented from rushing into war, into its own destruction. Europe today is preparing for war, with daily announcements of the handing over of a new section of the road to hell,” he added.

“We are fighting for peace,” said Zoltán, 62, who took part in the march. “We have to turn the European Union in a different direction to avoid war ... The rhetoric coming from the direction of France, the United Kingdom and Germany clearly wants war, with the help of the US.” — Reuters

US defence chief praises ‘new era of security’ in Asia-Pacific

SINGAPORE: US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday hailed a “new era of security” in the Asia-Pacific region, as Washington strengthens its network of alliances.

From Japan to Australia, the United States has been deepening defence ties across the region, ramping up joint military exercises and regularly deploying warships and fighter jets.

In the past three years, Austin said there had been a “new convergence around nearly all aspects of security” in the Asia-Pacific, where there was a shared understanding of “the power of partnership”.

“This new convergence is producing a stronger, more resilient and more capable network of partnerships and that is defining a new era of security in the Indo-Pacific,” Austin told the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

However, it was not “about imposing one country’s will” or “bullying or coercion”, Austin said. “This new convergence is about coming together and not splitting apart,” Austin said. “It’s about the free choices of sovereign states”

The Shangri-La Dialogue, a major security forum attended by defence officials from around the world, has become a barometer of US-China relations in recent years. Austin met with his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun on Friday for the first substantive face-to-face talks between the two countries’ defence chiefs in 18 months.



US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin speaks at the 21st Shangri-La Dialogue summit in Singapore. – AFP

US President Joe Biden’s administration and China have been stepping up communication to ease friction between the nuclear-armed rivals, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken visiting Beijing and Shanghai last month.

A key focus has been the resumption of military-to-military dialogue, which is seen as critical to preventing flashpoint disputes from spinning out of control.

Friday’s meeting offered hopes of further military dialogue that could help prevent flashpoint issues from spinning out of control.

Austin said the United States and China would



This new convergence is producing a stronger, more resilient and more capable network of partnerships and that is defining a new era of security in the Indo-Pacific

LLOYD AUSTIN
US Defence Secretary

resume military-to-military communications “in the coming months”, while Beijing hailed the “stabilising” security relations between the countries.

“I told Minister Dong that if he calls me on an urgent matter, I will answer the phone,” Austin said on Saturday. “And I certainly hope that he’ll do the same.”

The two sides agreed after a summit between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Biden last November to restart high-level military talks.

That includes a communications channel between the US Indo-Pacific Command chief and Chinese commanders responsible for military operations. — AFP

India’s six-week election ends with enduring heatwave

VARANASI: India’s marathon election drew to a close on Saturday six weeks after voting began, with voters enduring a scorching heatwave to cast their ballots in the city of Varanasi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has long been widely expected to win a third term when results are announced on Tuesday, in large part due to his cultivated image as an aggressive champion of India.

Exit polls — though historically unreliable at capturing voter shifts in an election with 968 million eligible voters — are expected to give some initial indication of whether he has succeeded later.

Many in the 73-year-old

Crowds lined up early outside polling booths to beat the heat in Varanasi, where a week of unbearable temperatures has brought daily life to a standstill

premier’s constituency of Varanasi were eager for that to be the case.

India’s gruelling heatwave is set to abate soon but that was no consolation to housewife Bindwasvini Devi, one of the millions braving Saturday’s scorching sun to vote in the final day of national elections.



Voters queue up to cast their ballots at a polling station in Varanasi, India. – AFP

Crowds lined up early outside polling booths to beat the heat in the city of Varanasi, where a week

of unbearable temperatures has brought daily life to a standstill. With temperatures peaking

at 44 degrees Celsius in the afternoon, many were keen to dispense with their democratic duty as soon as possible and return home to bunker down until the heat recedes.

“It made a lot more sense to be out before the sun gets stronger,” Devi, 42, said from outside a booth in her neighbourhood soon after polls opened, admitting even at that early hour that the heat was taking a toll. “The last few days have been very tough and we’ve tried to stay hydrated and avoided going out as much as possible.”

Even in the morning hours, polling officials and voters alike had faces coated in a sheen of sweat.

Many queueing up grumbled among themselves over long wait times outdoors and in corridors without overhead fans or air conditioning.

India has voted in seven phases over six weeks to ease the immense logistical burden of staging an election in the world’s most populous country.

Authorities in the eastern state of Bihar said on Friday that 10 poll workers had died of heatstroke the previous day while setting up for the vote.

A scorching sun bore down on Varanasi and its countless temples and riverside crematoriums during Saturday’s vote, with afternoon temperatures peaking at 45 degrees Celsius. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

MEXICO CITY

Mayor murdered in Mexico two days before vote

A mayoral candidate was murdered in central Mexico, local authorities said, less than 48 hours before general elections plagued by the killing of at least 25 political hopefuls.

A statement confirmed the death of Jorge Huerta Cabrera, in the city of Izucar de Matamoros where he was a candidate. The prosecutor’s office said it was investigating. Huerta Cabrera’s wife and one of his colleagues were wounded in the attack, authorities added.



“His life was taken from him in an unjust and violent way,” another local candidate, Eliseo “El Chino” Morales, said in a statement posted on social media. — AFP

ROME

Italy warns ‘rash’ moves over arms to Ukraine

Italy’s foreign minister repeated his opposition on Saturday to Ukraine using Italian weapons inside Russia, warning of a “delicate” situation where “rash” moves must be avoided.

“It is a very delicate moment, we must not make false steps” and must avoid “rash steps and declarations”, Antonio Tajani told a meeting in Rapallo, northwest Italy. He added that “even the US has not authorised the indiscriminate use of its weapons against Russia, but only



to strike a base from where the drones depart. They too are very cautious”, AGI reported.

Tajani added that Italy would send another package of aid to Ukraine within “weeks”. — AFP

TOKYO

Japanese billionaire cancels lunar SpaceX voyage

Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa said on Saturday he has cancelled his journey around the Moon on a SpaceX rocket, a voyage that had boasted an artist-filled crew, because of development delays.

Maezawa announced in 2018 the “dearMoon” lunar orbital mission, travelling on SpaceX’s Starship rocket.

However, the dearMoon’s website said in November the project would be postponed “due to the on-going development of



Starship”.

Maezawa bought all the seats aboard the rocket and created a competition in 2021 in which artists from around the world could apply to join him. — AFP

Permission to fire into Russia buoys Ukraine



Andrew E. Kramer

The writer is the Kyiv bureau chief for The New York Times covering the war in Ukraine

For weeks Ukrainian officials had cited the need to remove the shackles on their commanders as they appealed to allies to allow a more effective defence, using Western weaponry. That consent finally came in a significant way on Thursday when the United States amended its policy after months of resistance, saying Ukraine could use US-provided weapons to hit military targets in Russia.

The shift is narrow in scope, granting Ukraine permission to use US air defence systems, guided rockets and artillery to fire into Russia only along Ukraine's northeastern border. Fighting has been raging there near the city of Kharkiv for the past three weeks after Russian troops poured over the border to open a new front in the war.

But hitting targets with US weapons inside Russia had been a red line drawn by the Biden administration because of worries about escalation into a broader conflict. Ukrainian officials tried to assuage that fear by framing the use of Western weapons as a purely defensive tactic, pointing out how Russia has been launching missiles and gathering forces in the safety of its own territory, out of range of Ukraine's Soviet-era weaponry.

Indeed, in granting permission, US officials said the weapons should be used only in self-defence in the border region.

The peril to civilians near the border was underscored once again on Friday when a Russian missile tore into an apartment block in Kharkiv in the early morning, killing three people and wounding two dozen more, including a medic and a police officer, regional officials said.

Ukraine hopes the reversal in policy will be pivotal in helping it regain its footing in a war that Russia is now dominating. It was a historic moment for the United States as well: It appeared to be the first time an American president had allowed the limited use of US weapons to strike inside the borders of a nuclear-armed adversary.

At a news conference in Sweden, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine called the decision "a step forward" to the goal of defending "our people who live in the villages through the borderline."

Lt Denys Yaroslavsky, a Ukrainian intelligence officer, said he had met on Friday with fellow commanders who felt buoyed by the Biden administration's decision. He said his understanding was that Ukraine had permission to launch strikes stretching to about 24 miles inside Russia.

This range, he said, will allow Ukraine to hit garrisons for Russian troops, logistics hubs for weaponry and ammunition depots but not the airstrips Russia uses to send bombers headed towards Ukraine, which are farther from the border. A number of weapons systems from Nato allies, including M777 howitzers from the United States, are already positioned within range of Russian territory, he said.

Speaking on Friday afternoon, Yaroslavsky declined to clarify if Ukraine had already opened fire into Russia.

Other officers also welcomed the decision. "Do the Ukrainian defence forces know from where the occupier is attacking Kharkiv?" said Col Yuriy Ihnat, a Ukrainian air



A Ukrainian soldier with a mobile rocket launcher in eastern Ukraine.

force officer, referring to the launch sites of missiles across the border in Russia. "Obviously, we do," he said in a text message, noting that until now Ukraine had been unable to strike back.

Russian officials have been proclaiming all week that Nato countries risk escalation if they provide Ukraine greater freedom to shoot into Russia. On Friday, Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesperson, claimed Ukraine had earlier in the war fired US weapons into Russia and "it proves the extent to which the US is involved in this conflict."

With nearly every new Western weapon system delivered in a show of support for Ukraine's war effort, Russia has threatened ominous consequences for the West, though so far it has not delivered any.

Bending to Russian threats of escalation, said Col Roman Kostenko, the chair of the defence and intelligence committee in Ukraine's parliament, would only signal "weakness" by Europe and the United States. That would surely be noticed in other contexts in the world, he said, including the tensions between China and Taiwan.

He said the policy shift was needed to deter attacks

elsewhere along the Ukrainian border. Russia could swiftly mass troops at any point, he said, and "it's important to hit them before they cross."

Ukrainian officials had said allowing the use of Western weaponry could help turn the tide of the fighting along the border and defend against attacks on Kharkiv, whose city centre is just 24 miles from Russia, by hitting missile launchers and airplanes inside Russian territory.

Officials in Britain, France, Poland and Sweden had already voiced support for the use of their countries' weapons to strike inside Russia before the Biden administration shifted its stance, and Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg had spoken in favour of allowing Ukraine to use weapons from members of the alliance to strike targets within Russia.

Ukraine has been striking targets deeper in Russian territory with a homegrown fleet of long-range exploding drones. The US weapons will help Ukraine's army in the ground fighting north of Kharkiv and Ukraine's air defence forces in defending the city of Kharkiv, Ukrainian officials said before the announcement in Washington.

Ukrainian officials tried to assuage that fear by framing the use of Western weapons as a purely defensive tactic, pointing out how Russia has been launching missiles and gathering forces

Scientists find the largest known genome inside a small plant



Carl Zimmer

The author writes Origins column for The New York Times and covers news about science

Last year, Jaume Pellicer led a team of fellow scientists into a forest on Grande Terre, an island east of Australia. They were in search of a fern called *Tmesipteris oblancoolata*. Standing just a few inches tall, it was not easy to find on the forest floor.

"It doesn't catch the eye," said Pellicer, who works at the Botanical Institute of Barcelona in Spain. "You would probably step on it and not even realise it."

The scientists eventually managed to spot the nondescript fern. When Pellicer and his colleagues studied it in the lab, they discovered it held an extraordinary secret. *Tmesipteris oblancoolata* has the largest known genome on Earth. As the researchers described in a study published on Friday, the fern's cells contain more than 50 times as much DNA as ours do.

Scientists assumed that humans and other complex species must make a lot of different proteins and therefore have bigger genomes. But when they weighed the DNA in different animals, they discovered they were wildly wrong. Frogs, salamanders and lungfish had far bigger genomes than humans did.

It turns out that genomes are much weirder than scientists had expected. We carry about 20,000 protein-coding genes, for example, but they make up only 1.5 per cent of the 3 billion pairs of letters in our genome.

Another 9 per cent or so is made up of

stretches of DNA that don't encode proteins but still carry out important jobs. Some of them, for example, act like switches to turn neighbouring genes on and off.

The other 90 per cent of the human genome has no known function. Some scientists have an affectionate nickname for this vast quantity of mysterious DNA: junk.

In 2010, when Pellicer began working at Kew Gardens in London, he got the chance to study a family of plants known as bunchflowers, which were known to have big genomes. He spent months mincing leaves with a razor blade, isolating cells from dozens of species and weighing their DNA.

When he weighed the genome of a plant called *Paris japonica*, which grows in the mountains near Nagano, Japan, he was shocked at the result. The ordinary flower had a genome containing 148 billion pairs of letters — a world record.

In the years that followed, colleagues sent him fresh samples of ferns from Australia and New Zealand to chop up. He discovered that those plants, too, had massive genomes, although not quite as big as that of *Paris japonica*.

Pellicer knew that related fern species grew on a few Pacific islands. In 2016, he began making plans for an expedition to Grande Terre, part of the archipelago known as New Caledonia.

It wasn't until 2023 that he finally made



Scientists conducting field work on Grande Terre, part of the archipelago known as New Caledonia, east of Australia.

it to the island. He collected a number of species along with a team that included colleagues from Kew, his graduate student Pol Fernández and local plant experts.

Back in Barcelona, Fernández was startled to discover that *Tmesipteris oblancoolata*'s genome contained about 160 billion pairs of DNA letters. Thirteen years after Pellicer had discovered a record-breaking genome, his graduate student was also experiencing the thrill of breaking the record.

There are two chief ways in which genomes expand over evolutionary time. Many species carry virus-like stretches of DNA. As they make new copies of their genomes, they sometimes accidentally make an extra copy of that viral stretch. Over many generations, a species can accumulate thousands of new copies, causing its genome to swell.

It's also possible for a species to suddenly end up with two genomes instead of one. One way for an extra genome can arise is for two closely related species to mate. Their hybrid offspring may inherit full sets of DNA from both parents.

Pellicer and his colleagues suspect that a combination of virus-like DNA and duplicated genomes is responsible for the huge amount of genetic material in *Tmesipteris oblancoolata*. But they don't know why this humble fern ended up with a record-setting genome while other species — like us — have so much less DNA.

As the researchers described in a study published on Friday, the fern's cells contain more than 50 times as much DNA as ours do

Are we reading less?



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

READING has been a long-time hobby for many people. We read to acquire knowledge about the world and other cultures, we also read for pleasure as a form of relaxation during our free time. In the western countries we used to see people reading in the train, the underground and while waiting for the bus. Some read in the aeroplane or at their holiday destinations. Children from a young age are introduced to reading using pictures and simple words to trigger their imagination. Unfortunately, the situation has changed over the past few years. According to data published by the Human Development Organization, issued by Unesco, the average Arab citizen reads much less than one book, with every 80 people reading a single book per year. In contrast, the average European citizen reads about 35 books per year. In another Unesco report, it was revealed that Arabs collectively, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf, read a quarter of a page per year

compared to the average American who reads 11 books and the average British person who reads 7 books. Furthermore, the Cultural Development Report issued by the Arab Thought Foundation stated that the average Arab individual reads for 6 minutes annually, whereas the average European reads for 200 hours annually. The report also indicates that the rate of reading among children in the Arab world outside of school curricula is 6 per cent per year, with every 20 Arab children reading a single book. In contrast, the average British child reads seven books per year. The question that one needs to ask, what is stealing our attention? In my opinion, the first distraction would be social medical platforms which we use daily to communicate with friends and family, read the news and also watch short videos that we can share with others with a click of a button. The second distraction is digital entertainment such as movies and TV series that we can watch anytime and anywhere using our smartphones, tabs and smart TVs. The entertainment

A RECENT REPORT REVEALED THAT THE AVERAGE ARAB PERSON READS A QUARTER OF A PAGE PER YEAR COMPARED TO THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WHO READS 11 BOOKS, AND THE AVERAGE BRITISH PERSON WHO READS 7 BOOKS

industry keeps us hooked by releasing new series almost daily, some of which are based on published books so watching the drama versions of books has become a preferable option in recent years. The third distraction is online gaming that has increased in popularity not only among children and teenagers but even older users. Some games allow multiple users from different countries and bonus offers and rewards which increase the popularity of this type of entertainment. So how can we still enjoy reading? You can still combine reading and modern technology by downloading books to your hand-held devices such as mobile phones and tablets. You can also listen to audiobooks which can be stored in your mobile for you to enjoy while walking, jogging or driving. Some YouTube channels provide summaries of popular books. This is a smart way of combining knowledge and entertainment. Finally, it's worth considering integrating technology to increase people's motivation to read more.

Ramaphosa's future hangs in the balance

HILLARY ORINDE

IT was predicted to go badly but turned out to be worse: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa led the ANC to its worst election result since the end of apartheid, one which threatens his survival. Returns from more than 99 per cent of the polling stations used in Wednesday's election showed ANC had barely scraped past 40 per cent of the vote, a spectacular drop from the 57.5 it won in 2019. The shock result will prove a litmus test for Ramaphosa, a popular party figure with a reputation as a fine negotiator beneath his affable demeanour, political commentators say. ANC, a now divided movement that led the nation out of white-minority rule and into democracy, will remain the largest party in parliament but will lose its majority, heralding choppy uncharted waters for the party once led by Nelson Mandela. It will have to forge alliances to re-elect Ramaphosa at the end of the month and stay in power, with its hand forced into possible concessions with minnows it failed to beat in the election. But Ramaphosa will first have to persuade his party's all powerful yet split National Executive Committee to keep him in the job. In 2022, his party lawmakers closed ranks around him at an impeachment vote over a scandal subbed "farmgate" that nearly cost him his job, when hundreds of thousands of dollars were reported stolen from a sofa in his country home. He was also re-elected the ANC president that same year in a race that looked closer than expected. "The party has rallied around him to a certain extent. There have been very high level comments saying 'we are not going to recall Ramaphosa,'" Christopher Vandome, senior research fellow at the London-based Chatham House think tank, said. The 71-year-old former trade unionist and mines boss came into power in 2018 as a graft-busting saviour after the corruption-tainted tenure of predecessor Jacob Zuma. A fluent speaker of all of the country's 11 official languages, he took up anti-apartheid activism while studying law in the 1970s and spent 11 months in solitary confinement in 1974. Preferred by Mandela as his heir, he stood alongside the liberation hero when he walked out of jail in 1990. But the farmgate case dealt a massive reputational blow to the wealthy businessman and for many the storied ANC has become synonymous with corruption. Ramaphosa has denied any wrongdoing. South Africans remain vexed by a prolonged water and electricity crisis that has put a drag on Africa's most industrialised economy with crime and unemployment rates running high. — AFP



Dr Gbenga Ekundayo



Bakhtawar Durrani

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Importance of developing universal environmental accounting disclosures

ENVIRONMENTAL Accounting Disclosures (EAD) in recent years is increasingly gaining prominence in different parts of the world as businesses, corporations and conglomerates now seek to optimise their value to ensure long term sustainability by prioritising the disclosure of environmental issues by an entity for the preparation of environmental financial statements. The call for establishment of reporting standards bordering on environmental accounting disclosure (EDA) has transcended boundaries and greater public interest is expanding today because of globalisation and the need to foster sustainable development that will be conducive to the human and corporate organisations to operate efficiently. This has led to enhanced accounting practices, comparability of financial reports for investors, analysts and regulators and new challenges. This approach to reporting has become fundamentally important given the fact that globalisation has become a key driver of change. The heightened focus on environmental accounting disclosure (EAD) stems from the need for businesses to acquaint stakeholders with their environmental performance to enhance values and corporate image as well as creating a base for improved earnings and operations in the future since businesses have an impact on the environment. Shareholders in developing countries are becoming increasingly interested in the environmental policies, impacts and practices of business entities given the activities of some oil and gas and telecommunication companies. However, financial statements have not traditionally provided this information. As a result, there is clear indication that some listed companies in the developing countries are beginning to publish sustainability reports complying with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), an organisation set up in 1997, to develop a sustainability reporting framework for businesses. The GRI Sustainability Reporting Guidelines give guidance to entities on how to measure and report on management approach to the economic, environmental, and social aspects that impact on their businesses.



Shareholders in developing countries are becoming increasingly interested in the environmental policies, impacts and practices of business entities

THE HEIGHTENED FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTING DISCLOSURE (EAD) STEMS FROM THE NEED FOR BUSINESSES TO ACQUAINT STAKEHOLDERS WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE TO ENHANCE VALUES AND CORPORATE IMAGE

Despite compliance by companies in the developed countries with regards to fulfilling this disclosure mandate, principal arguments, debates and controversial issues have still been witnessed by companies in the developing countries on EAD. Commentators are of the opinion that such disclosures have their adverse consequences relating to information overload which may lead to window dressing (creative accounting), legal suit as a result of disclosing wrong environmental report, lack of comparability which may mean that the cost of producing information outweighs the potential benefits to shareholders. They are of the view that such voluntary disclosure may not be audited and therefore the reliability of the information is questionable and makes it less useful to decision makers. These divergent opinions have propagated a clarion call for extensive disclosure of environmental accounting information in the Sultanate of Oman and other climes by extension.

This article presented a cursory examination of conceptualisations and theoretical underpinnings and also probed into the scientific views proffered by leading scholars in green accounting and environmental management discourses and identified some fundamental gaps in literature. Previous studies have prioritised dimensions of independence of the board, gender diversity, presence of an environmental committee, environmental performance, and degree of pollution to the company, other dimensions of EAD such as quality have not received significant empirical considerations. Noteworthy, there appears to be a dearth of studies on determinants of environmental disclosure quality in the developing countries. Majority of studies in these areas were mainly domiciled in the industrialised countries of Europe and America to the neglect of emerging countries We hereby make a proposal for standard setters and regulatory bodies to be responsive and unequivocally committed to the incessant calls advanced by leading scholars and practitioners to establish a regulatory framework from the context of industrialised nations and emerging countries for mandatory environmental and social disclosure, which should be widely implemented to reflect consistency and uniformity in corporate reporting across all nations.

Adrenaline junkie or couch potato?

ADRENALINE junkies give leisure a bad name, said a colleague last week, and I had to smile wryly, as while I have known, and seen hundreds, I've rarely felt the need to become one.

Taking part in exciting, intense, and dangerous activities is not for me, being more 'into' the sedentary activities of reading, writing, and watching sports, and rather than feeling any compunction at not being intense or dangerous, I almost proudly see myself as a fully committed couch potato, for whom a walk on the wild side is to eat my usual bog standard 'Ready-Salted' potato crisps, instead of some 'you never know what's in them' varieties like 'Jalapeno and Dill,' or 'Seafood Chilli and Lime.' I'm not ready for such absurdity!

The best things about me in this, my couch potato phase, according to my long-suffering wife, are first that I usually do the outstanding 'jobs around the house' done, so I can't be dragged away from my sports watching later in the day, and second, that she always knows where I am when the All Blacks, Black Ferns, or Highlanders, are playing rugby, the NZ7s are playing, the All Whites or Newcastle United are playing football, the Black Caps are playing cricket, sailing, like the America's Cup or Sail GP, when Horseracing, IndyCar, or Formula 1 are on, or there is a good golf tournament on. And, of course, new James Bond movies, old John Wayne movies, historical dramas like Shogun, but none of those Academy Award winning movies... they tend to be long, woke, and mind-numbingly boring!

My couch potato experience is an emotional roller-coaster, as I live vicariously through the deeds of 'my combatants.' Not for a minute do I suggest that I have any form of ownership of 'my' teams, but almost exactly the opposite... they own me! But I love it! Feet up in the lounge, on my favourite part of the sofa, with crisps and some, salami or meat cold cuts, something to drink, and even with adverts regularly punctuating the experience, I find it so incredibly easy to put in a solid shift of up to 6 hours of wall-to-wall sports. Considering I can't usually concentrate for five minutes... it's



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a miracle of fish and loaves proportions!

But anyway, the other side of the coin is the adrenaline junkie. Now whether it's bungee-jumping, parachuting, mountaineering, white-water rafting, wing-walking, storm-chasing, zip-lining, or anything in between, the adrenaline rush must be something! I mean, get it wrong and you could die! Makrowski, Makrowski, and Kaminski (2016), produced research saying that parachutists and rock climbers are not only intense, but are driven by that closeness between life and death, and their psychological sense of sensation or stimulation, is directly related to motivation, with the most highly motivated craving the 'rush' like an addict does a drug.

Apparently, the neurobiological processes are so incredibly complex, with psychological and physiological factors seriously influenced by dopamine and serotonin deficiencies. This, according to Dr Elizabeth Scott, creates a thirst for heightened impulsivity, intolerance of risk, a need for the dramatic, basically, a need to invent crises, to implement what has been called the 'warrior gene,' because it's not enough to see something dangerous, but to feel highly motivated to do something about it!

I know. Some of you are looking at this trying to figure out if you are a potential 'adrenaline junkie.' Well maybe, as I've learned that some of you just can't do without a rush, but have no wish to endanger yourselves! While 'thrill-seekers' rarely consider the consequences and can be a danger to themselves. Some are just bored, and others compulsive, doing stuff without thinking. Others seek an escape from the pressures they are under, and a game of squash or a swim just won't do it for them anymore. Occasionally it's not genuine, but the result of peer pressure, and being 'bullied' into it, while being desperate for peer approval or self-esteem can see one feeling like they have no other option. I really like Bert Kreischer, though, saying, "If there's an adrenaline rush I'll find it. If there's an anxiety attack, I'll find that too."

Anyway, I've gotta go, the Indy500 is on, and it's as much excitement as my ticker can handle...

BUT ANYWAY,
THE OTHER
SIDE OF THE
COIN IS THE
ADRENALINE
JUNKIE

DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION!



Children dressed in traditional Kosovo Albanian clothing take part in the international Children's Day in Pristina, Kosovo, on Saturday. — AFP

How to protect the world from the next pandemic

HISTORY teaches us that the next pandemic is a matter of when, not if, warned World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus earlier this year. He is right. That is why it is vital that the world's governments successfully conclude their work of negotiating an accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response. Negotiators were not able to meet the latest deadline for an agreement. They need more time, but they must also be mindful that time is running out.

We believe that an accord can be agreed that protects the world, if governments internalise the lessons of the Aids and Covid-19 pandemics. But some are proving slow to recognise this.

The draft pandemic accord opens with a bold and inspiring statement endorsing solidarity, equity, and human rights. These principles underpin effective prevention and response, and early proposed versions of the accord included binding commitments from governments to put them into practice. But the negotiations have generated pressure to water down several of these commitments, to the extent that some proposed versions would not guarantee that the response to the next pandemic would be any stronger than the response to Covid-19.



Winnie Byanyima
The writer is Executive Director of UNAIDS and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations



Joseph E Stiglitz
The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics and University Professor at Columbia University, is a former chief economist of the World Bank

So far, the negotiations have been marked by a divide between the Global North and the Global South — the same divide that impeded the Covid-19 response. Low- and middle-income countries point out the need for binding commitments to ensure that medical technologies are produced and distributed widely next time. But they have faced opposition on this point from some wealthy countries, even though it is in everyone's interest to ensure equitable and universal access to the products — from diagnostic tools to vaccines — needed to beat pandemics.

Health products need not be scarce: geographically diversified production can help ensure ample supply. But, too often, after governments have poured public funding into the pursuit of lifesaving medical breakthroughs, they have handed exclusive rights over the resulting vaccines and treatments to private pharmaceutical companies. The inevitable result is that doses are provided only to countries that can afford to pay high prices for them, leaving poorer countries struggling to secure vaccines, tests, and treatments in a timely manner.

This deadly scarcity is not a bug in the system; it is a defining feature of private monopolies.

World leaders were slow to recognise this during the Aids pandemic. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, 12 million Africans died from Aids while waiting for life-saving medicines that were widely available to people in the Global North. Then the Global South started producing more affordable generic medicines, and the cost of treatment plummeted from well over \$10,000 per patient per year to well below \$100. Now, three-quarters of people living with HIV are getting the treatment



Vaccine inequity cost the global economy \$2.3 trillion.

they need to live long and full lives. If universal access to Aids treatment is guaranteed, the world can eliminate Aids as a public-health threat by 2030. Beyond saving millions of lives, this would bolster global stability, health security, and economic growth, with high-income countries also benefiting.

One would have expected these hard-won lessons to shape the Covid-19 response. They did not. Instead, pharmaceutical companies were given vaccine monopolies, so doses were delivered to wealthy countries first, leaving poorer countries unable to secure supplies

— with tragic results. A more equitable Covid-19 vaccine rollout could have saved 1.3 million lives in the first year alone. This does not include the massive indirect losses of life and health caused by the redirection of health resources toward Covid-19 cases. Beyond the high human costs have been severe economic repercussions. According to one estimate, vaccine inequity cost the global economy \$2.3 trillion. Ultimately, countries in the Global North have been playing a negative-sum game: the increased profits for a few pharmaceutical companies — and a few billionaire pharmaceutical barons — are dwarfed by the losses for everyone else. The pillars of effective pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response are well-known: relevant knowledge and technology must be shared openly, and vaccines, tests, and treatments must be produced widely. To this end, sufficient funding needs to be provided at the national and international levels, and intellectual-property barriers that prevent safe, capable manufacturers from joining the pandemic response must be removed.

sport

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

The Sultanate of Oman bagged four medals in the West Asian Athletics Championship which concluded in Iraq's Basra on Saturday. Oman's athletes managed to win one gold, one silver and two bronze medals. Salim bin Abdullah al Rawahi claimed bronze medal in the men's long jump with a distance of 6.91 metres while Abdullah Gamer of Iraq won gold with a mark of 7.43m and his team-mate Ehab Yassine received the silver medal after registering 7.03m.

Sprinter Mazoon al Alawi got the bronze medal in the women's 100 metres hurdles after clocking the race in 15.61 seconds. The gold medal went to Iraq athlete Kurdistan Jamal (14.73 seconds) while Al Yasar Yousfi Al Mohammed from Syria finished second in14.87 seconds.

Hibaa al Asmi won silver for Oman in the javelin competitions after she registered a mark of 40.67 metres. Earlier, on the opening day of the competitions, young sprinter Al Mulham bin Darwish al Balushi won the first gold medal for Oman in the men's 100 metres sprint in 10.25 seconds. Azza al Yaarubi won the silver medal in the women's 100 metres after she clocked 12.01 seconds.

Sayyar al Anzi, Chairman of West Asian Athletics Association, said that the event was organised successfully in Iraq. "We are happy that the tournament is back in Iraq after a long gap. Thanks to the local organising committee for their hard work in wrapping up the tournament on a successful note. I am happy with the results, especially those who qualified for the Paris Olympic Games in Paris."

14 countries took part in the championship including Iran, which is participating for the first time in the history of the championship. Oman's delegation comprised 15 athletes including Barakat al Harthy, Ali al Balushi, Mubeen al Kindi, Mohammed al Saadi, Khalid al Ghailani, Hamza al Jabri, Al Mulham al Balushi, Salim al Rawahi, Hana al Qasmi, Azza al Yaarubi, Mazoon al Alawi, Alaa al Zadjali, Duha al Sinwai, Azza al Hinaï and Hibaa al Asmi.



HIBAA AL ASMI

OMAN
BAGS

ATHLETES
MANAGED
TO WIN
ONE GOLD,
ONE SILVER
AND TWO
BRONZE
MEDALS

MEDALS IN WEST
ASIAN ATHLETICS
CHAMPIONSHIP



MAZOOON AND AZZA



SALIM AL RAWAHI



OMAN'S SALIM AL RAWAHI

Bagnaia wins Italian GP sprint, Marquez second after Martin crashes

TOSCANA: Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia won the Italian motorcycle Grand Prix sprint on Saturday and closed in on championship leader Jorge Martin in the standings after the Pramac Racing rider crashed at the Mugello circuit.

Gresini Racing's Marc Marquez finished second for the fifth time in a sprint this season while Tech3 rookie Pedro Acosta came third after Martin lost control and slid into the gravel with four laps to go.

Bagnaia's first sprint victory of the season helped the Italian to close the gap to Martin to 27 points heading into Sunday's race, where the Ducati rider will start on the second row after receiving a three-place penalty on Friday.

"I enjoyed every single lap. The last part of the race was tough but the bike is working perfectly. I'm very happy, winning here again is incredible," said Bagnaia, who also won the sprint and race at Mugello



Francesco Bagnaia rides during the second practice session. – AFP

last year. The factory Ducatis had a dream start when Bagnaia and Enea Bastianini moved up to first and second but Martin quickly took back second place.

Bastianini, who is in danger of losing his seat on the factory team, attempted to overtake Martin once again but this time they collided on turn one when the Pramac rider tried

to take the place back, leading to the red Ducati crashing out.

But before Martin could focus on reeling in Bagnaia, he had Marquez breathing down his neck and although the Gresini rider failed to make his first attempt stick, he took second place with six laps to go when he dived inside the San Donato bend.

Martin struggled to match Marquez's pace and as he tried to give chase, he lost control on turn one and slid into the gravel — a gift for Acosta who moved up to the third and final podium spot. With three laps to go, the top three riders were too far apart to battle for position as Bagnaia took the chequered flag — a week after he crashed while leading the Catalan Grand Prix sprint on the final lap.

"The pace is super good. Looks like Pecco (Bagnaia) is a bit faster than us," said Marquez, who is chasing his first victory on a Ducati machine and sits third in the championship — five points behind Bagnaia. — Reuters



SABALENKA BATTLES BACK

AS DJOKOVIC EYES FEDERER RECORD AT FRENCH OPEN

PARIS: World number two Aryna Sabalenka stormed back to defeat close friend Paula Badosa and reach the French Open last 16 on Saturday as Novak Djokovic took aim at equalling Roger Federer's record for Grand Slam match wins. Two-time Australian Open champion Sabalenka downed Badosa 7-5, 6-1 by reeling off 10 of the last 11 games.

Badosa had served for the first set at 5-3 but was eventually overpowered by Sabalenka who is into the second week in Paris for the second year in a row. Sabalenka, a semi-finalist in 2023, has made at least the last four at her past six Grand Slams and is expected to be Iga Swiatek's chief rival in the Pole's bid for a fourth French Open title.

"I just tried to play my best, play for every point. I knew I could come back," said Sabalenka after her win under the roof of Court Philippe Chatrier as rain again brought disruption to the outside arenas.

Next up for the Belarusian is a clash against either Madison Keys or Emma Navarro for a spot in the quarter-finals. With Sabalenka joining Swiatek, Coco Gauff and Elena Rybakina in the next round it is the first time in 11 years that all top four seeds have made the second week.

Defending champion Djokovic, chasing a fourth title at Roland Garros and 25th career major, will go level with Federer on 369 Grand Slam match wins if he sees off Italian 30th

seed Lorenzo Musetti. Djokovic has defeated Musetti four times in five meetings. However the Italian gave the Serb a major scare at the French Open in 2021 when he won the first two sets of their fourth round clash before retiring injured in the decider.

"There is always that kind of conviction and belief inside of me I can win a Slam. That's the reason why I'm still competing at this level," said the 37-year-old Djokovic.

Djokovic arrived in Paris under a cloud having not won a title or even reached a final in the season for the first time since 2018.

Adding injury to insult, he was accidentally hit on the head by a metal water bottle in Rome before suffering stomach problems in Geneva.

However, he hasn't dropped a set in two matches and cracked an impressive 43 winners past Spain's 63rd-ranked Roberto Carballes Baena on Thursday, dropping just seven games.

German fourth seed Alexander Zverev, who has made the semi-finals in each of the last three years, started this French Open by likely ending the Roland Garros career of 14-time champion Rafael Nadal.

Zverev shrugs off trial

On Saturday, he tackles Dutch 26th seed Tallon Griekspoor and has shown no indication of being distracted by the start in Berlin of a trial against him over allegations of assaulting an ex-girlfriend.

Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Nadal and then Djokovic in the last two seasons, needed five sets to see off Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the second round.

The seventh-seeded Norwegian faces Argentina's Tomas Martin Etcheverry who made the third round when his French opponent Arthur Rinderknech retired with a foot injury caused by kicking out in frustration at an advertising hoarding.

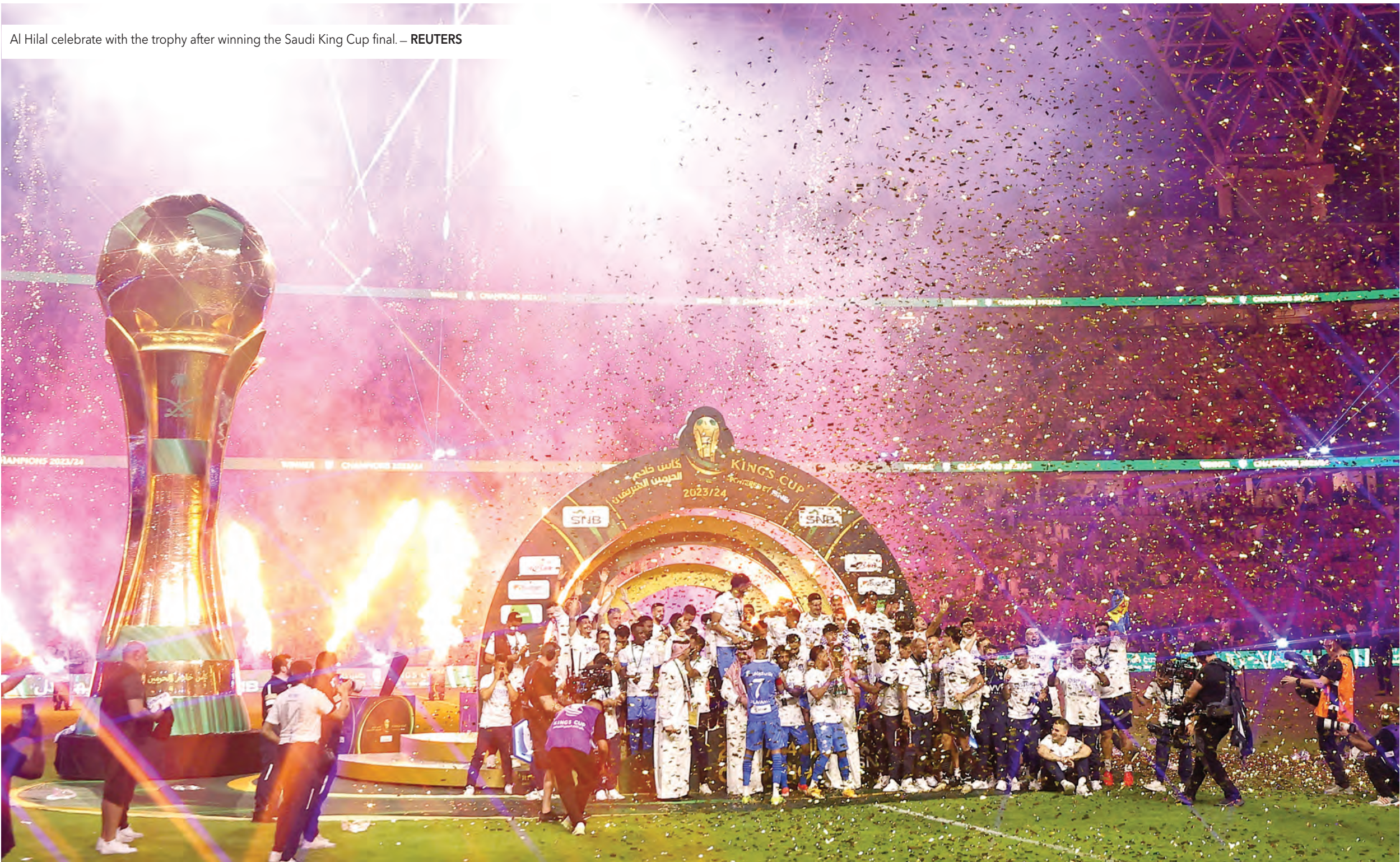
Canada's 21st seed Felix Auger-Aliassime booked a last 16 clash against Carlos Alcaraz after sweeping past 15th-ranked Ben Shelton of the United States 6-4, 6-2, 6-1.

Auger-Aliassime reached the fourth round in Paris in 2022 when he lost in five sets to Rafael Nadal.

The 23-year-old holds a 3-2 career lead over world number three Alcaraz although the two have never met on clay. World number four and former Wimbledon champion Rybakina, a quarter-finalist in Paris in 2021, eased past Elise Mertens 6-4, 6-2. — AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning against France's Pierre-Hugues Herbert at the end of their men's singles match on Court Philippe-Chatrier on day three of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros Complex in Paris. — AFP



Al Hilal celebrate with the trophy after winning the Saudi King Cup final. – REUTERS

AL HILAL BEAT RONALDO’S AL NASSR TO WIN SAUDI CUP AND LAND DOUBLE



Al Hilal's Mohammed al Qahtani celebrates with the trophy. – REUTERS

RIYADH: Saudi Pro League champions Al Hilal battled past Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr 5-4 in a penalty shootout on Friday to win the Saudi Cup and claim the domestic double, leaving the Portuguese forward in tears at the end of the drama.

Al Hilal's Aleksandar Mitrovic scored in the shootout, as did Ronaldo, but goalkeeper Yassine Bounou was the hero as he saved Al Nassr's final two penalties to secure the trophy after three players were sent off before the game went to extra time.

The two teams, who dominated the Saudi league campaign before Jorge Jesus's side won the title for the 19th time, were locked at 1-1 after 90 minutes when a last-gasp equaliser from Ayman Yahya forced the extra period but there were no goals.

Mitrovic had put Al Hilal ahead after seven minutes when he headed home Malcom's cross in the presence of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at King Abdullah Sports City.

Ronaldo fired a spectacular bicycle kick against the post after the break but he was in any case offside.

Al Nassr were then reduced to 10 men when goalkeeper David Ospina used his hand to prevent Malcom getting past him outside the box in the 56th minute.

Coach Luis Castro replaced forward Sadio Mane with substitute keeper Walid Abdullah and, despite being a man down, Al Nassr still pushed for an equaliser, with Ronaldo's long-range free kick saved by Bounou.

With the clock running down Al Hilal's Ali al Bulayhi received two yellow cards within 10 seconds for violent conduct in the 87th minute and after he was dismissed Ayman Yahya equalised for Al Nassr.

—Reuters



Aleksandar Mitrovic celebrates scoring his team's first goal. – AFP





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Oman’s first satellite to be used for gas networks monitoring

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Data from Oman's first satellite Aman-1, which was launched by Omani ETCO Space, will be used to monitor and track the country's gas networks per an agreement signed during COMEX 2024, which concluded here on Thursday. The agreement was signed by Omantel and OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), which owns and operates Oman's natural gas transportation system.

Speaking to the media soon after the signing, Khalid al Wahaibi, Vice President of Quality, Health, Safety, Security & Environment at OQGN, said: "Today, we signed an agreement between OQGN and Omantel to use satellites for monitoring, tracking, and managing gas networks. This agreement is very important for raising the safety standards in the oil and gas sector, and it translates Oman's Vision 2040 into action through the use of technology and artificial intelligence."

According to the official, OQGN will be the first company to utilise this technology in the country. Additionally, he shared that by the end of year, the company will invite other firms to implement similar digital solutions that have a valuable impact on the oil and gas sector.

Aman-1, which launched in November 2023, is the result of a collaborative effort involving Omani space company ETCO Space, Polish data analysis and solutions provider TUATARA, and Polish nanosatellite manufacturer SatRevolution.

Earlier in January, ETCO Space announced the launch of new company "Spazers", also in collaboration with TUATARA and SatRevolution, to manufacture satellites and offer space launch services in Oman.

Following the release of the Executive Space Programme in 2023 which aims to boost the space sector in Oman and its contribution to the economy, government officials revealed that RO 20 million worth of investments were raised in the space sector within the span of two years.

OSCAR global consortium to explore alternative fuels production in Oman

GREEN FUELS: PACTS SIGNED TO STUDY POTENTIAL FOR E-GASOLINE, SUSTAINABLE AVIATION FUELS AND E-NG



Omani government dignitaries and officials at the signing of the forming of the OSCAR consortium.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Parties comprising OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE) - an OQ Group company, Dutco, Sumitomo Corporation Middle East FZE, Automobili Lamborghini SpA and Airbus have formed the OSCAR (Oman Sustainable Cars and Aviation Refuelling) consortium with the aim to study the potential of Oman for the production of e-gasoline and e-SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuels).

The concept study will explore the production of e-fuels (E-SAF and E-Gasoline) in Oman on a pilot scale with the possibility to scale it up to a commercial size project at a later stage by identifying the most appropriate pathway for production from qualifying hydrogen and CO2 sources.

The joint study agreement was

THE CONCEPT STUDY WILL EXPLORE THE PRODUCTION OF E-FUELS (E-SAF AND E-GASOLINE) IN OMAN ON A PILOT SCALE WITH THE POSSIBILITY TO SCALE IT UP TO A COMMERCIAL SIZE PROJECT AT A LATER STAGE BY IDENTIFYING THE MOST APPROPRIATE PATHWAY FOR PRODUCTION FROM QUALIFYING HYDROGEN AND CO2 SOURCES.

signed, in the presence of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Eng Naif Ali al Abri, Chairman of Oman's Civil Aviation Authority, and Ashraf bin Hamed al Mamari, Acting Group CEO of OQ. It was signed by Najla al Jamali, Chief Executive of OQ Alternative Energy; Ahmad

Sharaf, CEO of Dutco's Energy Division and attended by Sami Kamel, CEO of Dutco's Cleantech Division; Rutigliano Stefano, Strategy Director at Automobili Lamborghini; Hideki Suruga Deputy CEO and CFO of Sumitomo Corporation Middle East FZE; and Mikail Houari, President Airbus Africa and Middle East.

Additionally, OQ Alternative Energy and Tree Energy Solutions (TES) have entered into a Joint Study Agreement to assess the development of an electric natural gas (e-NG) facility in Oman.

The agreement was signed by Najla al Jamali, Chief Executive of OQ Alternative Energy, and Marco Alverà, CEO and Co-Founder of TES.

Oman has been at the forefront in the development of a green hydrogen economy, aiming to produce in excess of 1 million

tonnes per annum of green hydrogen by 2030. The country's abundant renewable resources, in particular wind and solar, combined with a one stop-shop implementation framework under Hydrom's directive, has been promoting Oman to be amongst the most promising green hydrogen production hubs in the region.

e-NG, a green hydrogen-based molecule, is chemically identical to natural gas.

It is produced by combining green H2 with CO2 through a methanation process known as Sabatier, resulting in the production of green CH4.

This process leverages existing infrastructure for liquefaction, regasification, transportation and storage. Importantly, it offers a seamless transition for industrial usage, gradually replacing natural gas.

Oman takes delivery of latest commercial fishing vessel

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) - the fisheries sector investment arm of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) - took delivery on Friday, May 31, 2024, of a new commercial fishing vessel - the latest addition to a modern fleet that will impart strong new impetus to the growth of Oman's fisheries sector.

ADAMAS, a state-of-the-art tuna purse seining vessel, was launched at the shipyard of Zamakona Yards in the Spanish city of Viejo, at a ceremony attended by top officials of FDO.

Notable attendees were Muneer bin Ali al Muneeri, Chairman of FDO's Board of Directors, and



The 85m-long ADAMAS.

Eng Nabil bin Salim al Bimani, Group CEO.

Announcing the formal delivery of the vessel, FDO said in a post: "Under the auspices of the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Spain, and the participation of many officials in the Spanish city of Viejo and our shipbuilding partners, we launch ADAMAS today as an affirmation of our commitment to expanding



Top officials of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) with representatives of Spain's Zamakona Yards touring the ADAMAS during the launch ceremony. (© FDO)

responsible fishing by adopting the latest technologies and ensuring sustainability in the field of commercial fishing."

The 84.7-metre-long ADAMAS is the second of two fishing vessels

ordered by FDO from the same Zamakona shipyard to support its commercial fishing operations. The first - ACILA - was launched just under a year ago in August 2023.

The two vessels will be operated by FDO subsidiary Al Wusta Fisheries Industries on behalf of Oman Pelagic, another wholly-owned affiliate of the group.

According to details shared by Zamakona Yards, ADAMAS, like the sister ship ACILA, has been designed and outfitted to operate in the challenging conditions of the Indian Ocean, where it will target mainly tuna for processing at the Group's expanding fish processing facilities in Oman.

Equipped with 1,800 m3 of storage capacity, the vessel can

hold up to 10,000 tonnes of tuna at temperatures of around -20 degrees Centigrade.

With the eventual deployment of ADAMAS, FDO will have a total of five commercial fishing vessels in a wholly Omani-flagged fishing fleet.

It includes the Jawharat Al Wusta, a 99.5m vessel with around 1600 tonnes of storage capacity; the FV Al Nima, another 94m long vessel equipped with 1500 tonnes of storage; and the FV Al Masara, a 95m long vessel with 1,150 tonnes of storage.

All three vessels operate in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Oman, while the newer acquisitions, ACILA and ADAMAS, will operate in the Indian Ocean.

Vodafone spearheads tech-telco experience at COMEX 2024

MUSCAT: With more than 24,000 visitors, over 15 educational workshops, and 7 partnership agreements signed, Vodafone's showcase at COMEX 2024 demonstrated the company's leading role in the tech-telco industry and underscored its commitment to digitalisation and collaboration for a better-connected tomorrow.

Following the successful launch of the company's enterprise solutions, Vodafone aimed to demonstrate the practical benefits it can offer Omani businesses by leveraging Vodafone's global expertise.

Eng Bader al Zidi, Vodafone CEO said, "Our dynamic display of technological expertise and strategic foresight at COMEX 2024 underscored our role as a leader in driving innovation and connectivity.

Through various aspects of our participation, we were able to connect with visitors and businesses, showcasing our transformative solutions and their boundless potential. The positive feedback we received reinforced our commitment to leading the way for a future where digital transformation in Oman knows no bounds."

The 4-day conference saw Vodafone Oman sign several



strategic agreements to amplify its social impact and drive further innovation and convenience for customers.

Among these was an MoU with Ericsson to boost ICT educational initiatives through the "Connect To Learn" programme, fostering digital skills and attracting Omani youth to the ICT sector.

Vodafone also partnered with Huawei to expand its In-Country Value initiatives, exploring training and development opportunities for Omani talents in the sector.

An agreement with Qpay will allow Vodafone customers to benefit from the platform's Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) service, offering short-term, interest-free financing for a wide range

of telecom and non-telecom products.

Additionally, Vodafone entered into a partnership with Global City Net Technology (GCNT) to launch a unique centralised bulk SMS service for corporate customers.

Further collaborations include teaming up with SoftwareWorld Oman to deliver the Odoo.city platform for business operations, and integrating BIMA into the My Vodafone App to offer a range of insurance solutions.

Moreover, a partnership with Byanat will create an intelligent value management platform, leveraging big data and analytics to drive digital transformation and enhance operational efficiency across sectors.

Beyond exhibitions and signings, Vodafone Oman's engagement at COMEX 2024 included insightful educational workshops and industry discussions. Aneth Guerra, Chief Operating Officer, shared the stage with key industry players to discuss digital transformation, emphasising Vodafone's digital-native foundation and NEXT-LEVEL solutions.

Guerra outlined Vodafone's plans for comprehensive business connectivity in Oman, reinforcing its commitment to empowering businesses in a digitalised landscape. Vodafone's educational workshops at COMEX 2024 received an overwhelming response and left a lasting impact on attendees.

Focused on critical themes such as AI, Digital Transformation, and Future-proofing Businesses, these workshops transcended traditional boundaries, offering participants actionable insights and tangible strategies for success.

Ending its participation on a high note, Vodafone Oman received the prestigious Cyber Security Award. This recognition underscores the company's commitment to pioneering cybersecurity solutions and protecting the digital infrastructure of Oman.



MHD Automobiles opens new Jetour showroom, launches all-new Jetour T2 in Oman

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles LLC is proud to announce the grand opening of its new state-of-the-art Jetour showroom in Azaiba, Oman.

This milestone event will also mark the highly anticipated launch of the all-new Jetour T2, a rugged and stylish SUV designed to redefine adventure and performance on the road. Built for the bold and those who seek adventure at every turn, the Jetour T2 is set to elevate your driving experience.

This rugged SUV is equipped with a host of advanced features and cutting-edge technology, making it the perfect companion for any journey.

The 2.0T-4WD Jetour T2 boasts an impressive array of features designed to enhance safety, comfort, luxury and performance.

Safety and convenience are prioritised with ABS (Anti-lock Brake System), airbags, an anti-theft alarm, auto handbrake release function, blind spot warning, collision detection, EBD (Electronic Brakeforce Distribution), a fire extinguisher,

hill assist, immobiliser, ISO Fix child seat anchors, and lane departure warning.

For comfort and luxury, the T2 offers leather seats, a front seat armrest, foldable rear seats, cupholders, adaptive headlights, auto headlamps, electric door mirrors, air conditioning, and chrome exhaust pipes.

The technology and performance suite include a 360-degree camera, active steering, and various apps, ensuring a seamless and enjoyable driving experience.

Under the hood, the Jetour T2 is powered by a 2.0-litre 4-cylinder petrol engine that generates an impressive 254 horsepower and 390 Nm of torque.

This powerhouse ensures a thrilling and dynamic driving experience, whether navigating city streets or conquering off-road trails.

MHD Automobiles LLC, the exclusive distributor of Jetour in Oman, is excited to bring this exceptional vehicle to the Omani market.

BankDhofar and SalamAir launch exclusive summer travel promotion

MUSCAT: BankDhofar in partnership with SalamAir are thrilled to announce a special summer travel promotion for their customers. From 27 May to 6 June 2024, all SalamAir customers who book flights using BankDhofar credits cards will receive a 20 per cent cashback on their purchases. This exclusive offer is available to BankDhofar and Dhofar Islamic credit card holders, providing a fantastic opportunity to save on summer travel.

"We are excited to partner with SalamAir to offer this exclusive deal to our valued cardholders," said Bilal bin Faiz bin Muhammad al Raiisi, AGM- Cards & Bancassurance of BankDhofar. "This promotion aims to delivery exceptional value and benefits to our valued cardholders, enhancing their travel experience with significant savings."

SalamAir, Oman's fastest-growing airline, is equally enthusiastic about this collaboration. "We are delighted to join hands with BankDhofar to bring this special offer to our passengers," said Sherif Hosney,



Director of Marketing and Digital Sales of SalamAir. "Our goal is to make travel more accessible and affordable, and this partnership helps us achieve that by providing our customers with an attractive incentive to explore new destinations this summer."

With SalamAir's extensive network of destinations and BankDhofar's commitment to customer satisfaction, this offer is set to encourage and enhance travel for many.

Customers are encouraged to take advantage of this limited-time offer by booking their flights through SalamAir's website or app and using their BankDhofar or Dhofar Islamic credit cards to receive the 20 per cent cashback. The Terms and Conditions for this offer can be found on BankDhofar website and branches.

Sohar International wins best bank award at NABS

MUSCAT: Sohar International clinches the coveted 'Best Bank Award in Large Banks Category' at the prestigious Oman Banking and Finance Awards 2024, held on the sidelines of the New Age Banking Summit (NABS).

The award underscores Sohar International's exceptional performance in the banking sector and highlights its commitment to excellence and innovation in financial services. The awards ceremony held under the auspices of Tahir bin Salim Al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, took place on May 28 at the Sheraton Oman Hotel. Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, received the award on behalf of the bank.

In response to this outstanding accomplishment, Ahmed al Musalmi commented, "We are profoundly honoured to receive the esteemed 'Best Bank Award in



Large Banks Category'.

This recognition underscores our strategic focus on financial excellence and operational efficiency. Winning this award, which involved evaluating our financial performance across almost 16 metrics, highlights our strong resilience, innovative approach and superior market performance.

At Sohar International, we are committed to delivering exceptional value to our stakeholders through cutting-edge financial solutions and personalised services that meet the evolving needs of our clients.

Today, Sohar International stands as a frontrunner in the banking industry, consistently driving growth and setting

new standards in financial performance. We will continue to push the boundaries of banking, ensuring unparalleled value for our customers while significantly contributing to the broader community and national economy."

Sohar International has emerged as a leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, driven by strategic growth, innovation and a customer-centric approach.

The year 2023 was particularly significant for the bank as it realised various aspects of a strategic vision initiated in 2019.

A transformative five-year plan resulted in notable achievements, including the merger of HSBC Oman into Sohar International and its first steps beyond borders to the Saudi market. This initiative catapulted Sohar International to become Oman's fastest-growing and second-largest bank.

Geely unveils the new Preface and showroom in Oman

MUSCAT: Towell Auto Centre LLC (TAC), the official distributor of Geely vehicles in Oman, has proudly launched its latest masterpiece, the new Preface, along with the inauguration of its newest showroom in Oman.

This is a landmark event for Geely, redefining the automotive landscape in the Sultanate of Oman while staying true to its commitment to excellence.

Leading the sedan segment, the new Preface represents a fusion of intelligence, driving control, technology, design and safety - heralding a new era of 'perfected presence' on the roads of Oman.



Built on the cutting-edge Compact Modular Architecture

(CMA) platform, the new Preface raises the bar for automotive



excellence by prioritising safety, performance, quality and intelligence.

The event commenced with a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of the new state-of-the-art showroom. The new showroom promises an

immersive journey for customers.

Boasting a modern and spacious facility, it offers a plethora of benefits. With an expanded product range, dedicated service areas, interactive displays and expert staff at hand, the new facility offers more opportunities to customers to explore the diverse lineup of vehicles with ease.

The grand unveiling ceremony of two variants of the new Preface began with a warm welcome speech and a brief introduction by a Geely representative, followed by the reveal of the new Preface.

Guests were captivated by the modern aesthetic, innovative

features and superior performance competencies of the Preface.

Amidst the cheer during the event, the excitement reached its peak as a lucky winner of the Geely Preface contest 'Guess the Car' hosted by Al Wisal FM, was announced and awarded a special prize.

The first buyers of the new Preface car were also felicitated, marking the beginning of their journey with this remarkable vehicle. The celebration continued with lively interactions and eagerness for the new era of automotive excellence that the new Preface promises to bring.

New data dashboard on urban projects launched at COMEX



Visual of the new data dashboard on urban projects unveiled by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning during COMEX 2024.

BUSINESS REPORTER MUSCAT, JUNE 1

At the 33rd edition of the COMEX, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning unveiled a comprehensive data dashboard designed to monitor the implementation of its urban strategy.

This innovative tool, showcased in the ministry's pavilion, aims to enhance the tracking and management of urban development projects across various levels.

The dashboard serves as a central platform that integrates and analyses data from multiple sources, providing a detailed overview of projects at the national, regional, structural, and detailed levels.

By offering accurate and up-to-date information, it assists decision-makers in making informed choices about urban development initiatives.

A key feature of the dashboard is its capacity to ensure the

accuracy, completeness, and reliability of data, which is crucial for effective decision-making and project management. It includes data on 3,000 projects undertaken by 85 entities from both the government and private sectors.

These projects encompass national and regional initiatives, structural projects like the Greater Muscat project, and future city developments such as Sultan Haitham City.

Moreover, the dashboard enables relevant parties to input and update project data continuously.

It also features an interactive geographic map that links project data to specific locations, further enhancing the tool's utility for urban planning and management.

With this dashboard, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning aims to provide a comprehensive, reliable, and interactive resource that supports effective oversight and strategic planning for urban development projects.

OFM purchases 10,000 metric tonnes of Omani wheat crop

BUSINESS REPORTER MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Oman Flour Mills Company (OFM) received a batch of Omani wheat crops, which cultivated in the year 2024. The total quantity of Omani wheat crops, that will be purchased by OFM during this year, will reach to 10,000 metric tonnes, increasing by 100, compared to 2023.

This deal comes within the framework of OFM's plans to strengthen the food security system and encourage farmers to grow wheat.

The company annually purchases Omani wheat from farmers as part of its plans to develop the cultivation of local wheat crops, such as the Omani bur, and promote it in domestic and regional markets.

OFM supports local farmers by purchasing varieties of Omani wheat through the wheat purchase subsidy programme, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, which aims to expand the cultivation of the local wheat crop and develop Omani wheat



This year, Oman Flour Mills will buy wheat from 95 farmers.



Haitham bin Mohammed al Fannah
CEO of OFM

products (the Omani bur), and various other products.

On this occasion, Haitham bin Mohammed al Fannah, CEO of OFM, said: "OFM annually purchases wheat crops from farmers, seeking to develop its production and providing it as an

Omani local product in the local and regional markets".

He added: "This year's purchased quantity is considered the highest, reaching 10,000 metric tonnes, recording an increase by 100%, compared to last year.

The number of farmers from whom the crop will be purchased in this year, will exceed 95 farmers, compared to 65 in 2023, up by 45%".

He pointed out that this effort reflects the company's contributions to promote wheat cultivation in the Sultanate of

Oman as part of its strategy to strengthen the food security system. The increase in quantity of wheat this year also affirms that Omani wheat is accepted by consumers in the local and regional markets because of its high quality.

OFM's initiative aims to be part of a system to support the purchase of wheat crops in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in order to expand the cultivation of wheat as it is one of the most important strategic crops.

Bank Muscat organises annual leadership forum

MUSCAT: In commitment to enhance communication and cooperation with employees, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, organised the Leadership Forum 2024 which was attended by members of the executive management, including officials and branch managers from both Bank Muscat as well as Meethaq Islamic Banking.

The annual meet serves as a common platform where the management and the employees discuss the most prominent trends in the sector and also exchange ideas and expertise. It also looks into the implementation of future plans and the best way to fulfil them in order to maintain the bank's leadership position.

The forum hosted the honouring ceremony of the branches, head office and regional teams who won the CEO's Excellence Awards 2023, which aims to celebrate the best performing teams in various



business and operational activities. On the occasion, the executive management of Bank Muscat extended appreciation to all employees, emphasising that their contributions have strengthened the bank's leadership position and facilitated positive financial results in 2023.

The management also thanked the employees for their efforts in providing better services to customers, emphasising the importance of enhancing the customer experience and implementing projects and programmes that advance the

bank's digital transformation across various services.

During the annual Forum 2024, the bank celebrated winning the Best Workplace Award from the "Best Places to Work" Institution, which evaluates workplaces based on several key factors, including employee contribution, leadership effectiveness and corporate culture.

This prestigious award reflects the great role played by Bank Muscat to improve the employee experience and provide a model work environment. It also comes as a testament of the successful

plans and strategies implemented by Bank Muscat in the field of human resources development.

Towards the closure of the event, the attendees expressed appreciation to Bank Muscat's customers for their continued confidence in the banking facilities, services and products. Moreover, the bank's customers are the main driving force of the bank's business and are partners in the success that the bank continues to achieve in various aspects.

The forum is one of the annual initiatives the bank organises for its employees and management members to discuss issues and future plans. Over the years, the bank has expanded its branch network to reach more than 180 branches, spread throughout the Sultanate of Oman.

It has also strengthened these branches with a wide network of multi-use self-service devices, which have reached to more than 870 devices.

New fintech accelerator launched to nurture startups

MUSCAT: In a significant move to bolster Oman's entrepreneurial landscape, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) and Al Jabr have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) marking the launch of the 'NBO Fintech Accelerator', the first of its kind in the banking sector.

The initiative aims at nurturing startups and fostering sustainable business growth within Oman. The strategic partnership underscores NBO's commitment to innovation and their dedication to the economic development of Oman.

The signing ceremony, led by Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO, and Mohammed al Wahaibi, Chief Executive Officer of Al Jabr, took place at the bank's booth during COMEX 2024 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Mustahil bin Ahmed al Maamari, Assistant General



Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, CEO of NBO and Mohammed al Wahaibi, CEO of Al Jabr sign the MoU.

Manager — Head of Strategy and Transformation at NBO, said, "Our partnership with Al Jabr in the NBO Fintech Accelerator stands as a key element of our strategy to nurture and sustain Oman's dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem, particularly focusing on the fintech sector.

This initiative is designed to spark innovation and equip young entrepreneurs with the necessary tools and support to launch, develop, and expand their fintech ventures successfully."

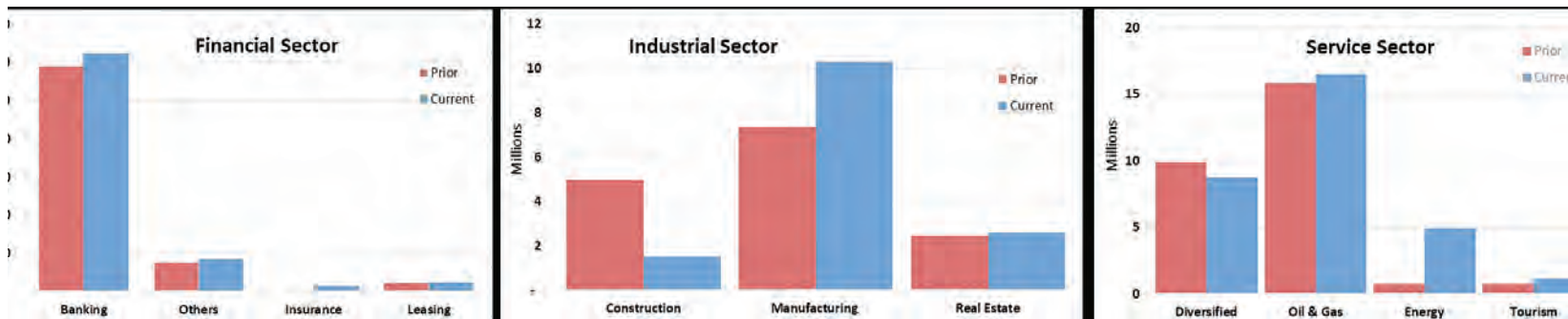
Q1 performance of SAOG companies: Positive start to 2024



KARL JACKSON

MUSCAT: With the first quarter unaudited results being published, overall, the majority of the sectors are showing a healthy upward trend in profitability.

With gains in the financial, manufacturing and energy sectors being offset slightly by losses in the construction and diversified sectors. However, looking deeper into individual companies, we still



see 24 companies reporting losses.

Stability seems to have returned to the financial sector, as banks continue to benefit from the continuously favourable interest rate environment and insurance companies were boosted by much better results at Liva, who reduced losses from RO 2.7 million to just

RO 0.7 million.

How much of this was due simply to the introduction of the new IFRS 17 accounting standard is not clear.

Within the Industrial sector, encompassing construction, manufacturing, and real estate, Oman's industrial landscape

exhibits contrasting trends.

Continuing woes at Raysut Cement, with losses surging from RO 0.8 million to RO 2.7 million have dragged down a relatively lackluster construction sector.

In the manufacturing sector, solid improvements at Oman Cables (up RO 1.0 million) and

Oman Flour Mills (up RO 1.6 million) were enough to offset the turn from profits of RO 1.2 million to losses of RO 1.6 million at Oman Refreshments, as the GCC backlash against American soft drinks in support of the Palestine cause is having a marked impact.

Lastly, in the service sector,

whilst many of the power companies typically post losses in the 1st quarter, on the back of low seasonal demand for electricity, the leader of the pack was Abraj in the energy sector with profits up from of RO 2.6 million to RO 5.9 million.

The fortunes of the oil and gas sector is now clearly dictated by OQ Gas Networks, which showed an improvement in profits from RO 11.5 million to RO 13.6 million.

[The author is an audit, assurance and ESG Partner with Crowe Oman karl.jackson@crowe.om. The article is based on financial data published by the Muscat Stock Exchange.]

When monetary policy and traditional finance meet decentralised innovation



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

Recent events in both traditional and cryptocurrency financial markets point towards a period of change and adaptation.

In the monetary policy, the European Central Bank (ECB) seems ready to lower interest rates before the Federal Reserve, reversing the usual trend of the US central bank leading monetary policy decisions.

ECB officials have strongly hinted that a rate cut is imminent at their upcoming meeting, citing progress towards their 2 per cent inflation target.

This contrasts with the more cautious stance of Fed officials, who lack confidence in easing policy anytime soon.

Market expectations are aligned with the ECB's signalling, anticipating a 25-basis point cut next week, followed by a pause in July and another potential cut in September.

Analysts suggest this gradual approach is warranted due to ongoing wage growth and a strengthening economic recovery.

A key factor driving the ECB's decision is the faster decline

in core inflation compared to similar measures in the US and UK. However, the ECB may reconsider further cuts if the euro weakens significantly against the dollar.

Overall, the ECB is expected to pursue a more aggressive easing policy than its global counterparts.

While central banks grapple with monetary policy, the cryptocurrency market is experiencing its own developments.

The stablecoin sector, in particular, is seeing a resurgence in interest, with its market capitalisation hitting a two-year high, with its total market capitalisation reaching \$161 billion in May, according to a report by CCData. This marks eight consecutive months of growth.

Tether (USDT), the largest stablecoin, reached an all-time high market cap of \$111 billion in May, solidifying its dominance at 69.3 per cent.

Meanwhile, USDC saw increased demand, with its trading pairs hitting record volumes in March.

The rise of USDC is partly attributed to increased on-chain activity on networks like Base and Solana.

Despite the overall growth in market cap, stablecoin trading volumes on centralised exchanges dipped to a monthly low in May.

This decline is historically consistent with the two months following Bitcoin halving events.

Overall, the stablecoin market has officially and successfully rebounded from losses incurred following the collapse of the Terra Luna ecosystem and the depegging of TerraClassicUSD (USTC) almost exactly two years ago.

Meanwhile, PayPal has deployed its PYUSD stablecoin on Solana, adding to its previous availability on Ethereum.

This move introduces "confidential transfers" as a key feature, allowing merchants to conceal transaction amounts from consumers while maintaining transparency for regulatory purposes.

The integration with Solana also unlocks additional programmability features for PYUSD, including "transfer

hooks" that enable custom programmes to be executed with each token transfer. This provides wallets with more control over the asset.

Launched in August 2023 and primarily backed by US Treasury Reverse Repurchase Agreements, PYUSD has seen a 50% increase in circulating supply since the start of the year. Its total circulation is around \$400 million, with \$5 million currently on Solana.

Finally, the traditional finance world is increasingly embracing digital assets.

The growing popularity of spot bitcoin ETFs, particularly BlackRock's IBIT, signals a continued convergence between traditional and cryptocurrency markets.

Spot bitcoin exchange-traded funds (ETFs) in the US have experienced a surge in popularity, with a total daily net inflow of \$28.32 million on Wednesday.

This marks the 12th consecutive day of inflows, the longest streak since February.

BlackRock's IBIT ETF is leading the charge, attracting \$24.5 million in funds and

surpassing Grayscale's GBTC as the largest spot bitcoin ETF by net assets under management. Fidelity's FBTC and Bitwise's ETF also saw significant inflows, with \$18 million and \$11 million respectively.

Overall, the 11 spot bitcoin ETFs have amassed over \$2 billion in net inflows over the past 12 days, bringing the cumulative total since January to a substantial \$13.76 billion.

This surge in interest comes as US ETF issuers prepare for the launch of spot Ethereum ETFs, following the SEC's recent approval of 19b-4 forms for such funds.

While regulatory approval for the S-1 forms is still pending, the market anticipates a continued expansion of cryptocurrency-related investment products.

Disclaimer: The information provided in this article should not be considered financial advice. The cryptocurrency market remains dynamic and carries risks. It's essential to conduct your own thorough research and consult with qualified professionals before making any investment decisions.

The rise of automotive electrification

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

When Edwin Drake drilled the first crude oil well in Pennsylvania, 1859, little did he know just how significant it would become.

It was only after the first gas powered automobile, patented by Carl Benz in 1886, only after Henry Ford's first car in 1896, only after Ford's 'Model T,' in 1908 making it affordable to the masses, did we begin to realise just how valuable this fuel was.

Fast forward a half-century later and there were 500 million vehicles on the road. By the year 2000, automotive numbers were in the billions, and growing fast.

But behind the scenes of these growing numbers, people were beginning to realise something else: The world was getting warmer, and this wasn't part of the plan.

The negative impact of carbon emissions and its implications were increasingly being realised, along with the urgency of changing it to reduce our carbon footprint.

From the first World Climate Conference in 1979 to the impactful UN Climate Change Conference COP21 in 2016 establishing the Paris Agreement, countries were now encouraged to set carbon neutrality goals and embrace the daunting net-zero targets that are so familiar to us today.

Across the world targets were set to support this shift to a less pollutive option than fossil fuels for transportation.

From the UK's ban on new gasoline and diesel vehicles from 2030, India's ban on the sale of new fossil fuel vehicles by 2030, Canada's plan to phase out the sale of gas powered cars by 2035,

and Oman's plan to reach 79% electrification of vehicles on the road by 2035, it is now evident that our values are changing.

While fuel allowed us to travel far with its energy-dense, ease of storage and transportation characteristics, what we want now are cleaner, greener, more eco-friendly options.

The spotlight was initially on the rechargeable lithium-battery, first demonstrated in 1976 by Stanley Whittingham and his colleagues at Exxon.

The advent of lithium-ion batteries allows us to store energy like never before.

Gaining momentum in the 90s with mobile phones and laptops, to become an increasingly interesting alternative to fossil fuel burning automobiles.

While the extraction of lithium-ion still contributes to carbon emissions, it is good enough for now, helping slow down our carbon footprint as we continue to build and improve upon a more solid infrastructure for the carbon neutral future we really want.

Today, the rise of electrification is evident in the many EV's we see on the roads and the increasing ease of finding public charging stations.

With advancing technology and infrastructure, decreasing production costs alongside governments' net-zero targets and its supportive subsidies, it is no wonder that we see this sharp and continuing rise in their numbers as EVs become more accessible and convenient to the public.

From 26 million EVs estimated to be on the roads globally in 2022, rising to over 40 million in 2023, we are excited to witness this shift in the landscape of the automotive industry firsthand. The impact is, after all, truly electrifying.

COMEX 2024: Oman's digital springboard to Vision 2040



AHMED AL RAIISI

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



The recently concluded COMEX 2024 underscored Oman's commitment to digital transformation, a vision deeply embedded in Oman Vision 2040's strategic objectives to foster a diversified and sustainable knowledge-based economy.

This aligns with a global trend where economies increasingly leverage technology to drive growth and enhance productivity.

Oman's journey towards a digital economy, as envisaged in Vision 2040, promises incremental improvements and a fundamental shift in the Production Possibilities Frontier (PPF), where more output can be achieved with the same or even fewer inputs.

This shift is underpinned by the power of digital technologies to streamline processes, reduce costs, and enhance efficiency across various sectors.

Building on COMEX 2024's momentum and the aspirations of Vision 2040, here are three key recommendations to fully harness the power of the digital economy and propel Oman's growth:

1. Revolutionise healthcare with unified medical records: Oman Vision 2040 emphasises a healthcare system that is both efficient and accessible. Unified Medical Records (UMRs), an interconnected ecosystem integrating healthcare providers, insurance companies, and beneficiaries, align with this vision.

UMRs streamline administrative processes, minimise errors, reduce duplicate testing, and improve care coordination, ensuring that healthcare resources are utilised optimally. Furthermore, by providing valuable insights into the medicine supply chain, UMRs can optimise inventory management, ensuring timely medication availability and

enhancing the healthcare sector's overall efficiency.

2. Embrace a cashless economy for increased efficiency and transparency: A cashless economy characterised by digital transactions aligns with Oman Vision 2040's goal of creating a diversified and competitive economy.

By minimising the reliance on physical cash, transaction costs are reduced, economic activity is accelerated, and financial inclusion is enhanced, particularly in remote areas.

The transparency and traceability of digital transactions aid in crime prevention and tax collection and provide valuable data for informed policymaking, contributing to a more resilient and competitive economy.

3. Establish a one-stop government hub: Oman Vision 2040 envisions a government that is efficient, transparent, and responsive to the needs of its citizens and businesses.

A one-stop digital platform

for all government services is a significant step towards realising this vision. By streamlining processes, reducing bureaucracy, and offering 24/7 access, this hub enhances convenience and minimises opportunities for corruption.

The platform also attracts investment, supports the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and appeals to digital nomads, aligning with Vision 2040's goals of economic diversification and talent attraction.

In conclusion, COMEX 2024 catalysed Oman's digital ambitions, resonating with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. By implementing these three recommendations, the Sultanate of Oman can leverage the power of the digital economy to enhance productivity, improve healthcare, streamline governance, and attract global talent, ultimately contributing to a more prosperous, diversified, and sustainable future.

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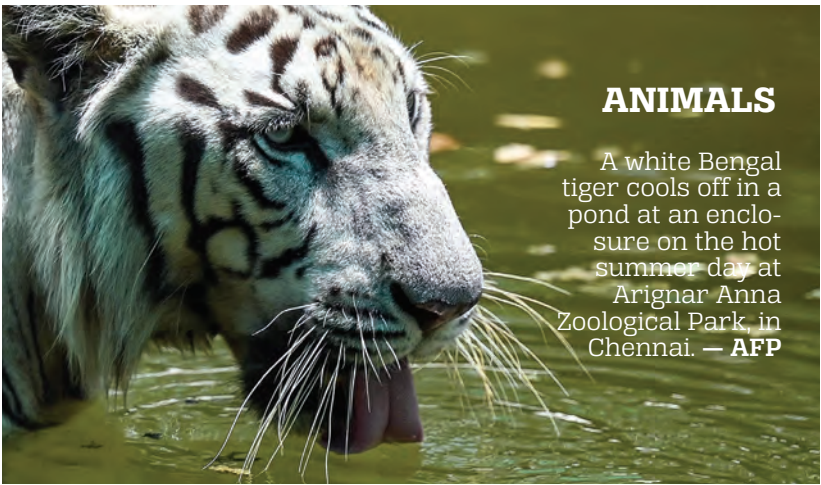
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ANIMALS

A white Bengal tiger cools off in a pond at an enclosure on the hot summer day at Arignar Anna Zoological Park, in Chennai. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

French surfer Vahine Fierro loses her balance during the women's final round of the Shiseido Tahiti Pro surfing competition against Costa Rica's Brisa Hennessy (off frame), in Teahupo'o, on the French Polynesian Island of Tahiti. — AFP



MUSIC

Swedish pop artist Loreen, the only person in history to score two wins at Eurovision, performs at the Jelling Music Festival, Denmark. — Reuters



MUSEUM

A painting by Italian master Caravaggio entitled 'Ecce Homo' is pictured at the Prado museum in Madrid. — AFP



CULTURE

A labourer works at a brick kiln on a hot summer day in Jaffarabad, in Pakistan's Balochistan province amid the ongoing heatwave. — AFP

art & life

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DISCOVERY

In Pompeii, archaeologists find children's sketches of gladiators

ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN THE ancient Roman city of Pompeii near the city of Naples have uncovered charcoal sketches drawn by children as young as six years old, depicting possibly violent fights they may have witnessed.

The sketches of gladiator stick figures were discovered during excavations in

recent months in Pompeii, a once-thriving city that was destroyed when Mount Vesuvius erupted nearly 2,000 years ago. Archaeologists also found the outlines of three small hands, two figures playing with a ball, a hunting scene possibly featuring a boar, and two fighters, one of whom is lying flat on the ground.



The director of the site, Gabriel Zuchtriegel, said the naive line drawings, found on the wall of a house known as the "Colonnaded Cenacle", were probably done by children aged six or seven. Psychologists from the Federico II University in Naples believed the sketches depicted events the children had witnessed, rather than imagined, he said. "In Pompeii, even young children were exposed to extreme violence between humans and between humans and animals in the sands of the ancient city's amphitheatre," Zuchtriegel said. Other discoveries this week included a unique portrait of a hooded child with a small dog at his feet, found in the so-called "House of the Painters at Work". At the entrance of that house, the skeletons of a man and a woman were discovered, an elderly couple that had probably sought refuge in vain from the pumice and ash that rapidly overwhelmed the city during the volcanic eruption. Last month, authorities in Pompeii revealed a black-walled dining hall with paintings inspired by the Trojan War, while in March, a building site was unearthed that shed light on ancient construction techniques. — Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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IS IT COVID,
SPRING
ALLERGIES
OR A COLD?

AS SUMMER APPROACHES, many people with spring allergies are still suffering. And as new Covid variants circulate, experts say we may also soon see an uptick in cases. (Though wastewater data suggests that Covid cases are currently fairly low.)

It can be tricky to distinguish between seasonal allergy symptoms, early signs of the coronavirus or just a run-of-the-mill cold.

The clearest way to get an answer is to take a Covid test. But at-home rapid tests have become more difficult to find since the public health emergency expired. Here are other tips to help you identify the source of your suffering.

Watch out for specific symptoms.

Some people with Covid can experience the worst symptoms during, say, their third infection compared to their first two. But in most cases, the more immunity someone has built up — through repeat infections, vaccinations or a combination of the two — the milder Covid symptoms tend to be.

"In most people, it's the sneezy, stuffy nose — it's like my allergies, for sure," said Dr Davey Smith, an infectious disease specialist at the University of California, San Diego.

People with allergies rarely develop high fevers; if you are running a temperature above 100.4 degrees, it's more likely to be Covid or another viral infection, said Dr Purvi Parikh, an allergist and immunologist at New York University Langone Health.

Covid can also cause an upset stomach, leaving people with a u s e a ,

vomiting and diarrhoea, all of which are usually not present with allergies. And unlike people with seasonal allergies, those with Covid often experience body aches as well, said Dr Lily Pien, an allergist at the Cleveland Clinic.

Allergies tend to make people itchy, so if you're scratching at your eyes, ears and throat, it's much less likely to be Covid. Another key difference is that allergies cause "dry" symptoms, Parikh said, meaning that allergy-related coughs typically won't produce mucus.

Both allergies and viral infections can wipe you out, but with Covid, fatigue comes on more suddenly, Parikh said. "It's not like 'I'm a little tired; I need a nap'" she said. "It's usually very debilitating."

Time and context matter.

Obviously, if you have spent time with someone who later tested positive and now you can't stop sneezing, there's a good chance you, too, have Covid. On the other hand, if you develop allergy symptoms every spring and started sniffing like clockwork when the trees began to bloom, you can be fairly confident that allergies are the cause of your discomfort.

However, it's possible for allergy symptoms to suddenly "turn on" in people who didn't have them before, Pien said. Moving to a new place can expose you to new pollens and longer growing seasons, which could trigger allergic reactions.

Doctors advised paying attention to how long you feel sick: If your sniffles stick around for weeks on end, it's likely allergies, said Paul Sax, clinical director of the division of infectious diseases at Brigham and Women's Hospital. (That said, Covid can also make you feel sick for weeks on end, even outside of "long Covid.")

And see whether allergy medications, like antihistamines and nasal steroid sprays, alleviate your symptoms. If so, allergies were probably the culprit.

Still, doctors stressed, the only sure-fire way to figure out the source of symptoms is with a test.

"Even I've been fooled," Parikh said. "On some of my patients, it's identical, until we get through the Covid test."

— NYT

#ALLEYESONRAFAH

Singer
Dua Lipa
condemns
'Israeli
genocide'
in Gaza

BRITISH-ALBANIAN POP singer Dua Lipa has denounced Israel's offensive in Gaza as a "genocide", after a new pro-Palestinian protest took place in London that saw dozens of people arrested. "Burning children alive can never be

justified. The whole world is mobilising to stop the Israeli genocide", the singer wrote on an Instagram story late on Tuesday with the hashtag "#AllEyesOnRafah", which has been trending on social media. Israel's military operations in Gaza, concentrated now on Rafah, provoked a renewed backlash after Gaza officials said an Israeli strike this weekend set ablaze a crowded refugee camp, killing 45. American actor Pedro Pascal and model Bella Hadid also posted graphics with "All eyes on Rafah" on Instagram. Hadid has been vocal about her support for Palestinian rights, and has also called Israel's offensive as a "genocide". In 2021, before the escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict last October, Dua Lipa, Bella Hadid and her sister Gigi Hadid were described as anti-Semitic in an advertisement published in The New York Times by a Jewish group called the World Values Network. Dua Lipa had hit back at the advert, rejecting the "false and appalling allegations".

While the pop sensation of Kosovan heritage has criticised the war in Gaza and been a vocal supporter of Palestinian rights, this is her strongest criticism yet

of Israel's actions. In January, Lipa called for a "humanitarian ceasefire" during an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine. She had previously signed an open letter to US President Joe Biden calling for "an end to the bombing of Gaza and the safe release of hostages". Forty people were arrested on Tuesday night in London following a pro-Palestinian demonstration of up to 10,000 people, UK police said. Rock star Paul Weller, the rapper Stormzy and actor Tilda Swinton are among British celebrities who have previously called for a ceasefire in Gaza. Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on October 7 that resulted in the deaths of 1,189 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures. Militants also took 252 hostages, 121 of whom remain in Gaza, including 37 the army says are dead. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 36,171 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the territory's health ministry. — AFP

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INSIDE OMAN'S LARGEST INDOOR CLIMBING AND ADVENTURE FACILITY



BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

As summer approaches and temperatures rise, adventurers look for better options to enjoy mountain sports such as climbing and jumping.

Adventure World caters to this need perfectly. It is a vast indoor facility dedicated to providing an exciting climbing and adventure experience.

As the largest indoor climbing hall in Oman and the first of its kind, it offers an excellent opportunity for both youth and families to engage in thrilling activities within a safe, controlled environment.

Adventure World is a fully Omani-owned company dedicated to delivering unique and exhilarat-

ducted with the utmost care.

The company offers a range of services, including customised adventure tours, adventure events management, outdoor equipment retail, and training programmes. The newly opened Adventure World Hall at Muscat Mall provides an exciting opportunity for people of all ages to enjoy wall climbing and hanging games in a secure environment. Children and adults alike can immerse themselves in the experience with the guidance of skilled instructors who ensure a wonderful time for all visitors.

Adventure World offers a variety of unique packages catering to all age groups, each designed to meet different goals. For instance, the Kids' Class package allows children to learn climbing safely while building confidence and strengthen-



ing adventure experiences for individuals of all ages. Their diverse offerings include white water rafting, mountain climbing, bungee jumping, and skydiving, ensuring there's an activity for everyone. Committed to safety and excitement, the company's team of skilled professionals guarantees that every trip is a memorable success. Whether you're an experienced adventurer seeking your next big challenge or a first-time thrill-seeker looking to try something new, Adventure World has something for you.

The company envisions a world where adven-

ing their muscles. They can also enjoy additional activities like the hanging garden. Another package, called Team Building, is designed for friends and corporate employees. It involves a team of six people divided into two groups, who compete in climbing while facing mental challenges that improve their cognitive abilities in decision-making and problem-solving. These are just a few examples of the many exciting packages available.

Majid al Marshudi, CEO of Adventure World, expressed his joy and pride, saying, "After extensive effort, numerous attempts, and hard work,



turers with a shared passion come together to enjoy extraordinary experiences. It aims to inspire the global community of adventurers to break out of the ordinary and create their own unique experiences, where curiosity knows no bounds. Adventure World seeks to add a wonderful element of joy to people's lives by offering new experiences and fostering a strong connection with Oman's breathtaking landscapes and rich culture.

What sets Adventure World apart is its unwavering commitment to upholding the highest safety standards in all its activities, ensuring that every adventure is not only exciting but also con-

this dream has finally come true. My adventure began in 2017, and my passion for providing the best, safest, and most enjoyable experience for people has never waned. Our foremost priority was adhering to international safety standards, known as ISO certification, which we successfully achieved thanks to coach Marchin, our health and safety officer."

Adventure World is a new gateway to Oman's adventure tourism, offering individuals the chance to explore the country's stunning landscapes and rich culture deeply.