

HM GREETINGS TO GEORGIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Salome Zourabichvili of Georgia on the occasion of her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and well-being to the president and further progress and prosperity for the friendly Georgian people.

CAIRO

ARAB PARLIAMENT DISCUSSES GAZA

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Council of Oman, participated in the 40th plenary session of the fourth session of the third legislative term of the Arab Parliament, which was held at the headquarters of the Secretariat-General of the League of Arab States in Cairo, on Saturday. The session discussed the report of the Palestine Committee which comes in light of the special interest attached by the Arab Parliament to the Palestinian cause in light of the ongoing genocidal war in the Gaza Strip. Also discussed at the session were the reports of the Arab Parliament's standing committees. **DETAILS ON P2**

MUSCAT

OIA TO SIGN RO 35M WORTH OF CONTRACTS



On the sidelines of COMEX 2024, several companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) will sign over 30 programmes, agreements and initiatives with a total value exceeding RO 35 million. These agreements include partnerships with leading global companies in the field. The agreements to be signed by OIA-affiliated companies such as Omantel, Oman Data Park, Ithca Group, and OQ with global leaders like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, TCS, and Virtusa, cover various initiatives. These include the establishment of data centres, adoption of cloud solutions, artificial intelligence technologies, and other innovations. **DETAILS ON P13**

ISRAEL STRIKES RAFAH AFTER TOP UN COURT ORDERS IT TO HALT OFFENSIVE

OMAN WELCOMES ICJ RULING ON RAFAH OFFENSIVE

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the decision issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding the genocide charges against Israel and the imposition of additional emergency measures to immediately halt the military operations in Rafah and allow humanitarian aid and investigative committees to enter the Gaza Strip.

In a statement issued on Saturday, the Foreign Ministry called on the international community and the UN Security Council in particular to hold Israel to its responsibilities in accordance with international law and to implement the decision of the International Court of Justice to immediately end the offensive in Palestinian territories.

Meanwhile, Israeli air strikes and artillery pounded Rafah on Saturday, despite the UN's top court ordering an immediate halt to its military offensive in the southern Gazan city.

At the same time, renewed efforts were under way in Paris aimed at securing a ceasefire in the war sparked by the October 7 attack.

In a case brought by South Africa alleging the Israeli military operation amounts to "genocide", the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt its Rafah offensive and demanded the

A man carries a child amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza on Saturday. – Reuters

Palestinians want action not words

Forced from her home by Israel's seven-month-long Gaza offensive, Salwa al Masri has little hope her plight will be alleviated by a ruling from the UN's top court ordering Israel to halt its offensive in Rafah.

"The massacres are only increasing," she said, as she cooked a meal on an open fire outside a tent in Deir al Balah.

"They shouldn't say one thing, while the action is something different," said Masri,

who fled her home in northern Gaza earlier in the war. "We want these decisions to be implemented on the ground."

Judges at the World Court, also known the International Court of Justice (ICJ), ordered Israel on Friday to halt its offensive in Rafah. It marked a landmark emergency ruling on a case brought by South Africa accusing Israel of genocide in its assault on the Gaza Strip.

immediate release of captives.

The Hague-based ICJ, whose orders are legally binding but lack direct enforcement mechanisms, also instructed Israel to keep open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which Israel closed earlier this month.

Israel gave no indication it was preparing to change course in Rafah, insisting the court had got it wrong.

"Israel has not and will not carry out military operations in the Rafah area that create living conditions that could cause

the destruction of the Palestinian civilian population, in whole or in part," National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said in a joint statement with Israel's foreign ministry spokesman.

Hamas welcomed the ICJ ruling on Rafah but criticised its decision to exclude the rest of the Palestinian territory from the order.

In spite of the ICJ ruling, Israel carried out strikes throughout the Gaza Strip on Saturday morning as fighting raged between the army and Hamas.

EU PRESSURES ISRAEL TO OBEY UN COURT ORDER

ORDER DOES NOT RULE OUT ENTIRE OFFENSIVE: ISRAEL

GERMANY CALLS ISRAELI OPERATION IN RAFAH ILLEGAL

Palestinian witnesses reported Israeli strikes or shelling in Rafah, the central city of Deir al Balah, Gaza City, Jabalia refugee camp and elsewhere.

"We hope that the court's decision will put pressure on Israel to end this war of extermination because there is nothing left here," said Umm Mohammad al Ashqa, a Palestinian woman from Gaza City displaced to Deir al Balah by the war.

Mohammed Saleh, also interviewed in the central Gazan city, said, "Israel is a state that considers itself above the law. Therefore, I do not believe that the shooting or the war will stop other than by force."

Yahya, a 34-year-old in Gaza who did not give his second name for security reasons, said: "Perhaps these decisions... that Israel has not complied with, will make the Western world move more strongly (in favour) of our cause at popular and political levels, supporting the recognition of the state of Palestine and strengthening our rights."

SEE ALSO P6

May records highest temperature at 46.3° C

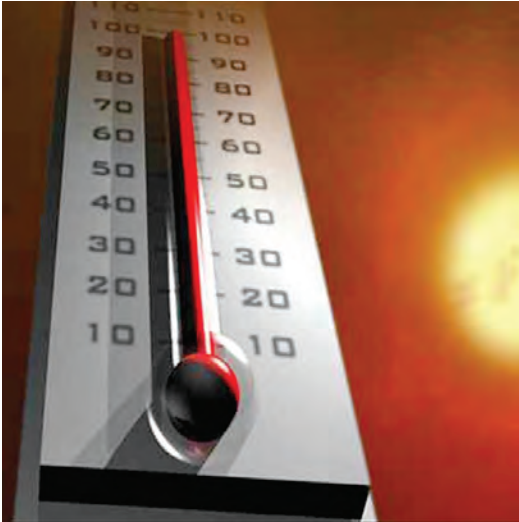
LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

Summer has not technically begun yet in the Sultanate of Oman, but the month of May always records the highest temperatures in the year and a contributing factor is wind.

According to Oman Met Office, active northwesterly winds blew over the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta, where Jaalouni station recorded 15 knots, Fahud 17 knots and Qarn Alam 17 knots. The monitoring station in Haima recorded wind speeds exceeding 25 knots, while the Duqm station recorded 20 knots with gusts reaching 30 knots, followed by the Mukhaizna and Qarn Alam stations with 19 knots.

According to the Oman Met Office's weather forecaster, May is a transition stage between winter and summer. The origin of the wind and its direction are determining factors.

Weather forecaster Jaifer al Busaidy said: "The temperature as high as 47 degrees Celsius



and even 50 degrees was recorded during one year once in Al Suwaiq. Interestingly in the coastal areas, the temperatures could range around mid 30s."

During summer the temperature is lesser than that in May, he pointed out.

Currently, Suhar and Mahout recorded a maximum temperature of 46.3 degrees

Celsius. According to Al Busaidy the reason is there is no prevalence of sea breeze.

During the month of May, the wind blows from the mountains and deserts resulting in high temperatures.

"Some days the highest temperatures are recorded during the night hours because of the breeze from the land. However, during summer strong sea breeze starts around sunset, but the humidity tends to be high resulting in feel temperature," said Al Busaidy.

The Civil Aviation Authority has advised everyone to pay attention and take precautions during the northwesterly winds, as it can cause the rise of dust and decrease visibility.

On Sunday, the weather forecast stated that mainly clear skies are expected over most of the governorates with chance of clouds advection over parts of the Arabian Sea. There are chances of low level cloud or fog patches over parts of the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Dhofar and Al Wusta and dust rising over desert and open areas.

LEARNING THROUGH SPORTS



The Oman Athletics Association organised a festival for children that uses the power of athletics to inspire children and young people, wherever they are, to be more active, develop their skills and confidence, and to connect with sport in Nizwa and Bahla. This was part of the International Children's Athletics Day which falls on May 7 with the World Mile Challenge to mark the 70th anniversary of Roger Bannister breaking the four-minute mile on May 6, 1954. **DETAILS ON P3**



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RISKS OF SUNSTROKE RISE AS TEMPERATURES INCREASE

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Risks of sunstroke or heatstroke are rising temperatures cross 45 degrees Celsius in many parts of Oman. Heatstroke is a condition in which the environmental temperature is equal to or greater than the body temperature, and as a result, the body fails to cool or use heat. When the body temperature rises above 40 degrees Celsius due to prolonged exposure to extreme heat, an individual can suffer from heatstroke. According to doctors, heatstroke can lead to confusion, altered mental status, slurred speech, loss of consciousness (coma), hot and dry skin or profuse sweating, seizures, and very high body temperature and can be fatal if treatment is delayed. Severe heatstroke has the potential to quickly damage your brain, heart, kidneys and muscles. If treatment is delayed or left untreated, heatstroke can increase the risk of serious heart, kidney and brain complications and can become fatal. It is one of the causes that lead to sunstroke exposure to a hot environment, especially if humidity levels are high. This is common in the Gulf region, and here the source



When the body temperature rises above 40 degrees Celsius due to prolonged exposure to extreme heat, an individual can suffer from heatstroke.

- of heat that leads to heatstroke is the sun or the hot surrounding atmosphere. It is called “non-exertional heatstroke,” meaning it is not caused by exertion. Engaging in vigorous physical activity occurs when a person exercises or performs physical effort in a hot environment. It is called “exercise heatstroke.” Wear a large amount of clothing, which prevents sweat from evaporating to cool the body and reduce temperature. Dehydration occurs when a
- person does not drink sufficient amounts of water to replace the fluids he loses through sweat. The risk factors for heatstroke are more for people over 65 years old. So the elderly must avoid going out if it is very hot. In addition, not drinking enough water is also common among young people and adults who may forget to drink water. People should avoid physical activities like playing and exercising in the sun. If anyone suffers heatstroke,

- towels dipped in cold water should be applied on victim’s forehead, give water to drink and take him/her to hospital.
- HERE ARE THE TIPS TO PREVENT SUNSTROKE:
 1. Wear light, light-coloured clothing that does not reflect or absorb sunlight.
 2. Drink plenty of fluids.
 3. Do not leave a child in the car, even if the windows are open.
 4. Do not exercise or walk in hot weather or under the sun.

Council of Oman takes part in Arab meet



The Sultanate of Oman was represented by Shaikh Dr Talib bin Hilal al Hosni, member of the State Council; Sariyah bint Khalfan al Hadiyah, member of the State Council; and Humaid bin Ali al Nasiri, member of Majlis Ash’shura

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Council of Oman, participated in the 40th plenary session of the fourth session of the third legislative term of the Arab Parliament, which was held at the headquarters of the Secretariat-General of the League of Arab States in Cairo, on Saturday. The session discussed the reports of the meetings of the standing and sub-committees related to following up on developments in the various political, security and social files in the Arab region. It also discussed the report of the Palestine Committee which comes in light of the special interest attached by the Arab Parliament to the Palestinian cause in light of the ongoing

genocidal war in the Gaza Strip. Also discussed at the session were the reports of the Arab Parliament’s standing committees: the Foreign, Political and National Security Affairs Committee, the Economic and Financial Affairs Committee, the Legislative, Legal and Human Rights Affairs Committee and the Social Affairs Committee and Educational Committee. The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation took part in the meetings of the preparatory committees for the plenary session, which discussed the political, security, social and legislative developments in the Arab region in a way that serves the protection of Arab interests and contributes to achieving stability, growth and

integration in the Arab world. The committees also reviewed parliamentary visions for resolving the current crises as well as the draft laws currently being prepared by the Arab Parliament. The Legislative, Legal and Human Rights Affairs Committee discussed a number of files on the agenda including the joint meeting with the Chairman of the Arab Charter Committee on Human Rights, the report of the meeting of the joint committee concerned with supervising the preparation of the anti-bullying law in the Arab world, the second draft of the report on the situation of human rights in the Arab world for the year 2023, among others. — ONA

RO10,000 stolen from woman in OTP fraud

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 25

The Royal Oman Police in Al Dhahirah Governorate arrested an Asian for defrauding a woman after convincing her that the caller works as an employee in a bank. The victim was asked to update her bank information and provide a one-time password (OTP), which enabled the caller to steal RO 10,000. In a separate incident, the Directorate of Criminal Investigation arrested a person of Asian nationality for colluding with an international gang to carry out phishing operations by calling and sending random messages via WhatsApp to a group of people, informing them of the need to update their bank information. After getting this information, money was stolen from the victims’ accounts. Cyberattackers use fraudulent methods to access OTP. As OTPs are sent to an e-mail ID or mobile number registered with the service provider, cyber attackers cannot access them without approaching the bank customer. They either steal OTP or lure them into revealing the OTP by using fraudulent tactics. OTP scammers often use phone calls, SMS, or e-mails

Avoid sharing OTP, PIN details over the phone, writing them down, or leaving them on unprotected networks

to trick victims into sharing their OTP. They pose as bank representatives, lenders and other service providers, typically creating an urgency to get the OTP. It is important to note that legitimate institutions or companies do not ask for your OTP unless you initiate a transaction that prompts two-factor authentication. Avoid sharing these details over the phone, writing them down, or leaving them on unprotected networks. Upon downloading an app, you often need to grant permission to access your device’s camera, photo gallery, etc. Sometimes, approving these permissions becomes necessary for KYC formalities and SMS alerts. But if a suspicious app asks for access to these functions, it can easily steal your OTP. Public Wi-Fi networks tend to be risky. Scammers can use these networks to spy on your online activities and steal your sensitive information, including OTPs.



Dr Khalifa al Barwani, CEO of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, with Marc Rubin and Sumaira Chowdhury, UNICEF Representative in Oman.

Oman, UNICEF discuss efforts made to promote child health, nutrition

MUSCAT: UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Marc Rubin, visited Oman last week to engage in high-level discussions with officials to promote child health and nutrition. During the visit, the Deputy Regional Director met key officials from the Ministry of Health, the Foreign Ministry, the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the Environment Authority, and the Social Protection Fund as well as with the World Health Organization and other partners.

The discussions focussed on enhancing collaborative efforts to tackle critical issues such as child health, nutrition, climate change, protection and strengthening evidence through data. These meetings aim to reinforce the partnership between UNICEF and the government. Over 70 regional health and nutrition experts visited health centres throughout Muscat to observe and experience the advancements in services and health interventions designed to accelerate health outcomes for children.

The Deputy Regional Director’s participation highlights UNICEF’s dedication to fostering regional cooperation and knowledge exchange to tackle pressing health challenges. Rubin expressed optimism about the visit, stating, “I am honoured to visit Oman and engage with our government partners and regional colleagues. Together, we can build on our achievements and address the challenges that lie ahead to ensure every child in the region has the opportunity to grow up healthy, educated and protected.”



Regulations on parental leave come into effect from July 19

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

Law introducing 98 days of maternity leave and seven days of paternity leave will be effective from July as part of the social protection system and its executive regulations. From July 19, the Social Protection Fund (SPF) will implement maternity leave insurance for both Omani and non-Omani employees across the sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative is part of a strategic effort to enhance benefits within the SPF, aligning with Oman Vision 2040's goal of ensuring well-being and social protection to support a decent and sustainable life for all. This new legislation aims to create a more attractive and responsive labour market, characterised by flexibility, efficiency, and the capacity to manage challenges effectively. It prioritises national capabilities, enhances institutional performance, and improves administrative practices.

The law considers the social aspects of the workforce to boost productivity and performance,



Women will get 98 days leave and men seven days

particularly among women. Under the new provisions, women are entitled to 98 days of maternity leave, with the option to take up to 14 days before the expected birth date. Men are entitled to seven days of paternity leave, provided the child is born alive, and this leave must be taken within 98 days of the child's birth. These leave periods are included within the employee's actual service period.

Employers are prohibited from requiring women to return to work during their maternity

leave. If an insured woman changes her workplace, she will continue to receive the maternity leave allowance based on her last wage before the move.

Huda al Jardaniya, Director of the Maternity Leave Benefits Allowance Project at the SPF, explained that employers must contribute 1 per cent of the monthly wage to the maternity leave insurance as stipulated in Article 128 of the Social Protection Law.

This provision applies to all Omanis working in Oman,

regardless of contract type, including temporary, training, and retired workers, as well as non-Omani workers in specified categories determined by the Council.

However, these provisions do not apply to self-employed Omanis, part-time employees, Omanis working in GCC countries or those employed abroad. Maternity leave insurance aims to provide social protection by ensuring women on maternity leave receive 100 per cent of their salary during the leave period.



Bait Al Zubair adds new board members, managers

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, 26 MAY

As part of its new vision to align with future aspirations and developments in the cultural and creative sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, Bait Al Zubair Foundation has announced a series of structural and management changes aimed at enhancing the Foundation's role in Oman's ongoing cultural renaissance.

Commenting on the announcement, Mohammad Al Zubair, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Trustee, outlined the Foundation's vision: "With the 25th anniversary of the Bait Al Zubair Foundation, since its inception in 1998, and as the Sultanate of Oman strengthens its presence in the cultural and creative industries, we believe it is time to build on our vision. Bait Al Zubair will continue to work and expand on the cultural, artistic, and heritage fields covered by the Foundation, while integrating with relevant institutions in Oman and abroad."

He added, "We have strengthened the Board of Trustees with young talents by appointing Ahmed al Mukhaini and Mohra al Zubair as members. I am confident they will be valuable additions in achieving the Foundation's future goals."

The changes also include appointing Dr Muna al Alsulaimi as General Manager, Fahd al Hasani as Deputy General Manager and Head of the Art and Museum Department, Omar

al Maamari as Museum Manager of the Bait Al Zubair Museum, and Rafael Aivazin as Manager of Business Development & Support.

The organisational structure has been revised to streamline operations and enhance efficiency, enabling the Foundation to develop local and international relations and partnerships to serve its objectives.

Dr Mohammed bin Abdulkarim al Shahi, a Member of the Board of Trustees and Cultural Adviser to the Foundation, commented on these changes: "These appointments and promotions strengthen the institutional and administrative framework of Bait Al Zubair with specialised national expertise. They align with the Foundation's future directions, which will see significant transformations, necessitating new structural and management changes to meet the institution's goals in the coming years."

Expressing her vision for the Foundation's future, Dr Muna Habrass said: "The cultural sector in the Sultanate of Oman is undergoing rapid changes aimed at developing cultural and creative industries and introducing new products in line with Oman Vision 2024. As one of the most prominent private institutions in heritage, arts, and culture, the Bait Al Zubair Foundation has built a comprehensive strategy over the past years. We are now moving forward to realise this strategy and pioneer the local cultural movement."

REHABILITATION PLAN FOR KEY ROADS IN AL SHARQIYAH NORTH GOVERNORATE

MUSCAT: Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), for Transport, announced a plan to rehabilitate the road linking Sinaw to the highway, as well as the new Wadi Bani Khalid road, which starts from Aqaba in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

The tender for the alternative route after completing the



procedures with the rest of the relevant authorities will be granted in the coming days.

A new alternative road will be constructed from Aqaba to Wadi Bani Khalid, around 6 to 7 kilometres, designed to be more durable to withstand landslides. This project, which was proposed before the current road was damaged in extreme weather conditions, will invite expertise from companies experienced in constructing similar roads

in other governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

MoTCIT will also rehabilitate the road leading to the village of Saiq in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi by constructing wadi bridges to avoid even during rainfall and valley flow.

The under-secretary said the ministry is currently inventorying the rest of the roads intending to make improvements in some designs to avoid damages during extreme weather conditions.

Children in Nizwa, Bahla learn skills and gain confidence through sports

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MAY 25

The Oman Athletics Association organised a festival for children that uses the power of athletics to inspire children and young people, wherever they are, to be more active, develop their skills and confidence, and to connect with sport in Nizwa and Bahla.

This was part of the International Children's Athletics Day which falls on May 7 with the World Mile Challenge to mark the 70th anniversary of Roger Bannister breaking the four-minute mile on May 6, 1954.

About 80 children participated along with athletes, coaches, technical staff and physical education teachers in various competitions held in the souq and fort premises of Nizwa and Bahla. The festival also included some accompanying activities such as folk art (Al Razha), as well as pottery, palm fronds craft, Omani food, which the children got to know closely. The Oman



Children learn pottery



Palm frond craft



World Mile Challenge

Athletics Association aimed to introduce and highlight the tourism and heritage of Nizwa by organising the festival.

Khalfan bin Hamad al

Waeli, a member of the Board of OAA, said: "This festival is for children's athletics, and its goal is to celebrate World Children's Athletics Day this

year. It comes under the slogan World Mile Challenge. All countries in the world now celebrate this occasion, each in its own way, but within the conditions and basics set by the International Federation. We also targeted the tourism aspect, highlighting the role of tourism. Our goal was to introduce athletics to kids." The festival ended with honouring sponsors, distributing certificates and gifts to the children. Saud al Farqani, a member of the Municipal Council in Al Dakhiliyah, representing Nizwa, was the guest of honour.



جهاز الضرائب
TAX AUTHORITY

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BIRTH OF WILD REEM GAZELLE BRINGS HOPE

LAKSHMI
KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

THERE IS GOOD NEWS. A baby Arabian sand gazelle has been born in the wild.

Dr Mataab al Ghafri, a senior wildlife specialist at the Environment Authority, indicates a partial success to all the measures taken to protect the species known as Reem in Oman, also referred to as the Arabian sand gazelle (*Gazella marica*). According to IUCN, sand gazelles are classified as vulnerable.

They face many challenges for survival even though they are known to be native to the desert regions of the Arabian Peninsula — the Empty Quarter, known as the Rub al Khali.

“In Oman, the sand gazelle is found at the Arabian Oryx Reserve in Al Wusta,” said Dr Al Ghafri.

Some of the major challenges sand gazelles face that threaten their survival are habitat loss, climate change, poaching and illegal hunting as well as diseases.

“The habitat loss limits their range and access to essential resources like food and water,” explained Dr Al Ghafri. Prolonged years of drought and heat waves lead to desertification and reduced availability of vegetation and water sources.

Poaching remains a significant threat for all wild species which primarily leads to the extinction of many wild species in Oman.

“Sand gazelles are targeted for their meat and majestic horns as trophies,” he said.

Another major threat they face is disease and that is because sand gazelles are susceptible to diseases transmitted by domestic livestock. Reem gazelles are protected species in Oman. It is illegal to kill or catch an animal alive.

This is the story of Reem or sand gazelles in Oman. “They were reintroduced to Oman (specifically to the Arabian Oryx Reserve) in 2013 with an initial population of 315 individuals. This step came after the extinction of this iconic species in the wild. This project was a collaboration of Oman, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

ARE THEY NOW IN THE WILDERNESS OR RESERVES?

Dr Al Ghafri replied, “We have animals in captivity where we set two large enclosures with a total area of more than 1,000,000 square metres. These two large enclosures hold more than 1,400 animals. At the moment there are more than 50 individuals roaming freely in the reserve. Many measures have been taken to protect them such as patrols which cover the entire sanctuary 24/7.

“Their main duty is to protect the animals and prevent any illegal access to the reserve. In addition, rangers provide information about the range and distance moved by the wild animals,” he explained.

IS POACHING STILL A THREAT?

“Unfortunately, yes, it is still a threat but its intensity fluctuates between seasons. For example, hunting incidences are noticed to be reduced during summer and increase during winter. Hunting is the main reason which hinders the release of large numbers of animals to the wild,” Dr Al Ghafri said. The Environment Authority is dedicated to spreading awareness about the protection of the species through social media, radio, newspapers and TV which advise people to respect and be kind with the wild creatures and help in protecting them and to inform the officials if they sight a wild animal or encounter a hunting incidence.

The Environment Authority has set up several water stations around the reserves so animals can get access to water. “Water stations are in a varying distances from the reserve camp ranging from 15 km to 25 km, which allow the animal to roam freely in the reserve,” said Dr Al Ghafri.



Reem or sand gazelles were reintroduced to the Arabian Oryx Reserve in Al Wusta in 2013 with an initial population of

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Two large enclosures, spread over 1,000,000 square metres, hold more than

1,400
animals

At the moment there are more than 50 individuals roaming in the reserve

Many measures have been taken to protect them such as patrols which cover the entire sanctuary 24/7





Underwater installations to protect coral reefs

SAFIYA AL NASRI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

A groundbreaking initiative by the Environment Authority is expected to rehabilitate coral reefs and create new marine ecosystems.

The Environment Authority recently launched a project to submerge out-of-service military equipment in the marine environment. This project aims to rehabilitate coral reefs lost to human activities and natural events while fostering new marine ecosystems. The submerged equipment is expected to attract various marine creatures.

This unique idea not only promotes marine conservation but also enhances eco-tourism, offering a distinctive attraction for tourists and diving enthusiasts. By setting up this underwater installations, Oman aims to support tourism and alleviate the pressure on the coral reefs in Al Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve.

The Environment Authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence, submerged eight pieces of military equipment, including seven trucks and a Skyvan aircraft, near Al Daymaniyat Reserve Islands. This location was selected for its compatibility with existing coral reefs, ensuring the



By setting up underwater installations, Oman aims to support tourism and alleviate the pressure on the coral reefs in Al Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve

new site integrates well with the natural environment.

Mohammed al Ruzaiqi, speaking about marine life in Al Daymaniyat Islands, highlighted that the primary goal was to develop marine life. The site will also serve as a tourist attraction and provide an ideal environment for marine life impacted by fishing nets and human activities.

Access to the site will be regulated through a permit system, ensuring coordination with relevant authorities. Al Ruzaiqi noted that the chosen equipment underwent extensive testing to confirm its suitability for promoting natural coral and marine plant growth. This

initiative aims to reduce the impact on natural coral reefs by providing an alternative attraction for fishermen, divers and tourists.

The underwater installations are slated to open in July, with environmental changes to be monitored a year after its inauguration. This pioneering project is expected to rejuvenate the area with flourishing coral, making it a standout tourist activity in the region.

Introducing such an innovative museum underscores Oman's commitment to marine conservation and tourism, setting a precedent for future initiatives worldwide.

ORA discusses real estate appraisal regulation

MOHAMMED AL DIGHAISHI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Oman Real Estate Association (ORA) discussed the latest developments in the real estate market at a meeting in the Cultural Club in Al Qurum last week.

Younis bin Khasib al Harrasi, ORA Chairman, said: "The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is preparing to issue regulations for practicing the real estate valuation profession in the Sultanate of Oman, and this session aims to collect the views of the association's members and those interested in the real estate sector about the new regulations, which will regulate real estate appraisers and adopt professional standards".

Al Harrasi confirmed that the draft regulations for practicing the real estate



Younis bin Khasib al Harrasi, ORA Chairman.

appraisal profession contain 42 articles that include the mechanism for obtaining licences, conditions and controls for practicing the profession, in addition to aspects of oversight and control of the quality of professional performance, fees, violations and administrative penalties.

He pointed out that the regulation will contribute to addressing the gaps faced by practitioners of the real estate valuation profession, and will limit the practice of this activity to offices and companies licenced by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. It will also include setting the necessary

conditions and controls, and creating a clear database of companies licenced in various governorates, in addition to monitoring quality of professional performance. The practice of the real estate appraisal profession will be limited to individuals who hold academic qualifications and specialised training in the field of real estate appraisal.

Al Harrasi touched on the latest developments in the real estate market in the Sultanate of Oman, pointing to the unprecedented activity, size and quality of the announced projects, such as Sultan Haitham City, the Al Khuwair Downtown Project, and the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Project. He also discussed the issues of supply and demand and the potential impacts on the market, stressing the importance of forming alliances and mergers.

Meet held in Suhar to boost institutional collaborations

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, MAY 25

Sohar University recently hosted a 'Business Partners' Gathering, bringing together around 38 government and private institutions. The event, held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, aimed to boost research, training and industrial partnerships, while facilitating the exchange of institutional experiences across the country.

The highlight of the gathering was a dialogue session entitled 'From Education to Learning,' led by Mustafa al Lawati, Manager of Community Engagement and Partnership at Sohar University. Key participants included Badr al Jahwari, Superintendent of Professional and Organisational Development at Sohar Aluminium Company, Ahmed al Hajri, General Manager of the General Directorate of Labour in Al Batinah North Governorate, and Professor Hussein

Kazim, lecturer at Sohar University.

The session delved into the critical role of education in sustainable development, emphasising the collaboration between higher education, industrial and government institutions to drive national progress. Discussions also covered the skills and capabilities needed in the workforce and the potential for higher education institutions to foster entrepreneurship and innovation.

Dr Hamdan bin Sulaiman al Fazari, Vice-Chancellor of Sohar University, highlighted the institution's achievements, faculties, academic offerings and innovative teaching and learning strategies. He also discussed the accomplishments of staff and students in areas such as innovation, community service, industrial collaboration and scientific research. Dr Al Fazari emphasised the opportunities for collaboration between the university, government, business and society.

The gathering also saw the signing of cooperation agreements in training, research and innovation.

Early diagnosis, treatment help cancer recovery

MUSCAT: The Oman Cancer Association (OCA) recently organised Continuing Medical Education (CME) programme in Muscat. The event was under auspices of Dr Wahid al Kharusi, President and Chairperson of OCA. This month's session, co-ordinated by OCA and Global Treatment Services in association with MGM Hospitals Chennai, India, focused on "HSCT in Haematological Malignancies" with a special emphasis on haploidentical transplants, and included a brief talk on HIPEC.

Dr Deenadayalan M, senior consultant and clinical lead in paediatric haematology, oncology and bone marrow transplant, graced the event. Dr Salah al Jabri, head of the liver transplant committee at Royal Hospital, delivered a talk on "Hepatocellular Carcinoma: Where Are We Standing." Dr Salah summarised that liver transplantation significantly improves survival rates among HCC patients.

Dr Al Kharusi reaffirmed OCA's commitment to raising awareness and advocating for cancer patients and their families. "Our primary mission is to educate the community, support cancer patients and their families and provide essential information to healthcare



Dr Wahid al Kharusi, President and Chairperson of OCA, felicitates Dr Deenadayalan M

providers," he stated. Dr Al Kharusi emphasised the importance of education as a fundamental tool in OCA's efforts. "We aim to educate not only the public and cancer patients but also their relatives and healthcare providers. It is crucial for healthcare professionals to have a comprehensive understanding of the disease," he said.

Empowerment is another key aspect of OCA's work, particularly for women. Dr Al Kharusi explained, "Women are the cornerstone of our society and must be protected and empowered. If women are well-informed and supported, the chances of early cancer detection increase significantly. Early diagnosis, especially at stage one, allows for effective treatment and a higher likelihood of recovery."

Conference on cancer, stem cell transplant held

MUSCAT: Muscat Family Physicians' Group in association with HCG Cancer Hospital, Bengaluru & Global Treatment Services organised an International Medical Conference in Muscat on Friday.

Dr Wahid al Kharusi, senior orthopaedic surgeon, chairman of Oman Cancer Society and Dr Khalid al Hashmi, senior consultant and HOD of Haematoma-Oncology, MOD Hospital Al Khoudh, were guests of honour.

Dr Natraj K L in his presentation said, "The field of cancer is evolving rapidly, that too the field of blood and blood related cancers are evolving at a rapid pace. The newer therapies like CART (Chimeric Antigen Receptor Based T cell therapies) have become most sought of treatments for relapsed blood cancers, lymphoma and multiple myeloma. The patient who would have had no response and refractory to the available therapies are now achieving deeper responses with these therapies. We adopt technologies to make lives of patients better."

Dr Nithin Teja in his presentation said, "In Musculoskeletal oncology the right treatment the first time is a very important step. Because 97 per cent of the bone and muscle tumours can be cured if the right treatment is done at the first instance. This can be achieved by a thorough assessment by clinical, radiological, pathological modalities and by a multidisciplinary team approach in planning the treatment. With about 15 years of experience in Musculoskeletal Oncology and after managing about 8,000 cases, a team of doctors at HCG Bengaluru is now in a position to treat most of the complex Musculoskeletal tumours."

Meeting was attended by around 65 leading medical practitioners from both ministry and private health establishments of Oman.

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Israel strikes Rafah despite UN court orders

RAFAH: Israeli air strikes and artillery pounded Rafah on Saturday, despite the UN's top court ordering an immediate halt to its military offensive in the southern Gazan city.

At the same time, renewed efforts were under way in Paris aimed at securing a ceasefire in the war sparked by Palestinian groups October 7 attack on Israel.

In a case brought by South Africa alleging the Israeli military operation amounts to "genocide", the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt its Rafah offensive and demanded the immediate release of captives still held by Palestinians.

The Hague-based ICJ, whose orders are legally binding but lack direct enforcement mechanisms, also instructed Israel to keep open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza, which Israel closed earlier this month.

Israel gave no indication it was preparing to change course in Rafah, insisting the court had got



Palestinians search for survivors at the site of an Israeli strike on the Al-Daraj neighbourhood in Gaza. – AFP

wrong. "Israel has not and will not carry out military operations in the Rafah area that create living conditions that could cause the

destruction of the Palestinian civilian population, in whole or in part," National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said in a joint statement with Israel's

foreign ministry spokesman. Palestinian movement Hamas welcomed the ICJ ruling on Rafah but criticised its decision to exclude the rest of the

Palestinian witnesses and teams reported Israeli strikes or shelling in Rafah, the central city of Deir al-Balah, Gaza City, Jabalia refugee camp and elsewhere

Palestinian territory from the order.

In spite of the ICJ ruling, Israel carried out strikes throughout the Gaza Strip on Saturday morning as fighting raged between the army and Hamas's armed wing.

Palestinian witnesses and teams reported Israeli strikes or shelling in Rafah, the central city of Deir al-Balah, Gaza City, Jabalia refugee camp and elsewhere.

The ICJ ruling came days after Ireland, Spain and Norway said they would formally recognise a Palestinian state and the International Criminal Court prosecutor requested arrest

warrants for Israel PM.

The UN court ordered Israel to allow UN-mandated investigators "unimpeded access" to Gaza to look into the genocide allegations.

It also instructed Israel to open the Rafah crossing for the "unhindered provision at scale" of humanitarian aid and also called for the "immediate and unconditional release" of the captives.

On the diplomatic front, efforts have resumed to seek the first ceasefire in Gaza since a week-long truce and captives release in November.

CIA chief Bill Burns was expected to meet Israeli representatives in Paris in a bid to relaunch negotiations, a Western source close to the issue said.

Top US diplomat Antony Blinken also spoke with Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz about new efforts to achieve a ceasefire and reopen the Rafah border crossing, Washington said. — AFP



Voters stand in lines as a policeman stands guard at a polling station, in New Delhi. – Reuters

India's massive election faces heatwave in penultimate phase

NEW DELHI: Indian voters braved temperatures of nearly 45 degrees Celsius in parts of the country as they headed to polling stations in the penultimate phase of the world's largest election on Saturday.

More than 111 million people in 58 constituencies across eight states and federal territories are eligible to vote in the general election's sixth phase, which recorded turnout of 49.2% at 3 pm, with three hours of polling left. The overall turnout in the same phase of the last election in 2019 was about 63%.

Among those casting their ballots early on Saturday in the capital New Delhi were Rahul Gandhi, leader of the

opposition Congress party and the main competitor of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — whose Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to win a third consecutive term. Voting in the elections began on April 19 and will conclude on June 1, with results due on June 4.

Paramedics were on hand with oral hydration salts at polling stations in Delhi, where mist machines, shaded waiting areas and cold water dispensers have also been installed by the Election Commission due to concerns about the heat.

"We hope that people will overcome the fear of the heatwave and come and vote," Delhi Chief Electoral Officer P Krishnamurthy said. — Reuters

G7 cites 'progress' to use profits from frozen Russian assets for Ukraine

STRESA: G7 finance ministers cited "progress" on Saturday in finding ways to use profits from frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine, envisioning a concrete proposal to present to a leaders' summit next month.

A search for creative yet legally sound solutions was top of the agenda at the two-day Group of Seven meeting in Stresa, northern Italy that wrapped up on Saturday, as Kyiv continues its urgent appeals for more funds from Western allies in its third year of war with Russia.

"We are making progress in our discussions on potential avenues to bring forward the extraordinary profits stemming from immobilised Russian sovereign assets to the benefit of Ukraine, consistent with international law and our respective legal systems," the ministers said in a draft final statement.

They hope to present a proposal that is "defined in all its dimensions" to G7 leaders ahead of a summit in Puglia, southern Italy, on June 13-15, Italian Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti told a final



Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors pose for a picture at the G7 Finance Ministers meeting in Stresa, Italy. – AFP

A search for creative yet legally sound solutions was top of the agenda at the two-day Group of Seven meeting in Stresa as Kyiv continues its urgent appeals for more funds

press conference on Saturday. "Progress has been made," Giorgetti said, adding that there was a "strong political positioning by all the G7 countries" over the idea.

An agreed proposal "is clearly not yet finalised because it has significant technical and legal issues", Giorgetti cautioned. "We do not deny the difficulties but

there is a firm determination to arrive at a solution," he added.

G7 finance ministers reiterated in the draft that Russian assets frozen by the Group of Seven nations "will remain immobilised until Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine".

But they went further, saying they were "committed to

further financial and economic sanctions... including continuing to target Russia's energy revenue and future extractive capabilities".

The summit wrapped up a day after the United States announced a new \$275-million package of aid for Kyiv, part of a \$61-billion military aid deal passed by Congress last month after months of delays. Kicking off the finance summit, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had urged her counterparts to embrace "ambitious options" in considering how to use the frozen Russian assets. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Migrants arriving in UK by sea top 10,000 this year

More than 10,000 irregular migrants have crossed the Channel to Britain on small boats this year, government data released on Saturday showed.

Conservative Party leader Sunak had pledged to stop the crossings but some 288 asylum seekers made the journey in five boats on Friday, taking the provisional total for 2024 so far to 10,170. The number of undocumented migrants arriving via sea had already reached a record high for the



first five months of a calendar year. On Wednesday, Sunak called a general election for July 4, firing the starting gun on six weeks of campaigning in which immigration is already featuring heavily. — AFP

WASHINGTON

US screens record 2.95m passengers in single day

The US Transportation Security Administration (TSA) said it screened 2.95 million airline passengers on Friday, the highest number ever on a single day.

The record travel coincides with the Memorial Day weekend that marks the beginning of the US summer travel season.

The TSA said on Friday's travel broke a record set in November of nearly 2.91 million air passengers screened. Five of the 10 busiest ever travel days have been since May 16, the



agency said. Airlines for America said US carriers plan to fly more than 26,000 daily flights this summer, up nearly 1,400 over 2023, or 5.6%, when they carried 255 million passengers. — Reuters

SYDNEY

More than 300 buried in Papua New Guinea landslide

More than 300 people and over 1,100 houses were buried by a massive landslide that levelled a remote village in northern Papua New Guinea, local media reported on Saturday. The landslide in the Pacific nation north of Australia buried more than 300 people and 1,182 houses, the Papua New Guinea Post Courier said, citing comments from a member of the country's parliament, Aimos Akem. More than six villages had been impacted by the landslide in the province's Milne Bay.



region, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) said. The landslide has blocked highway access, making helicopters the only way to reach the area, the broadcaster reported. — Reuters

Russia disrupts Ukraine’s Starlink service



Paul Mozur

The writer is the global technology correspondent for The New York Times, based in Taipei.



Adam Satariano

The writer is a technology correspondent based in Europe, focuses on digital policy.

The new outages appeared to be the first time the Russians have caused widespread disruptions of Starlink. If they continue to succeed, it could mark a tactical shift in the conflict

Just before Russian troops pushed across the Ukrainian northern border this month, members of Ukraine’s 92nd Assault Brigade lost a vital resource. Starlink satellite Internet service, which soldiers use to communicate, collect intelligence and conduct drone attacks, had slowed to a crawl.

Operated by Elon Musk’s SpaceX, Starlink has been critical to the Ukrainian military since the earliest days of the war with Russia. Without the full service, Ukrainian soldiers said, they couldn’t quickly communicate and share information about the surprise onslaught and resorted to sending text messages. Their experiences were repeated across the new northern front line, according to Ukrainian soldiers, officials and electronics warfare experts.

As Russian troops made gains this month near Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, they deployed stronger electronic weapons and more sophisticated tools to degrade Starlink service, Ukrainian officials said. The advances pose a major threat to Ukraine, which has often managed to outmanoeuvre the Russian military with the help of front-line connectivity and other technology, but has been on the defensive against the renewed Russian advance.

The new outages appeared to be the first time the Russians have caused widespread disruptions of Starlink. If they continue to succeed, it could mark a tactical shift in the conflict, highlighting Ukraine’s vulnerability and dependence on the service provided by Musk’s company. As the United States and other governments work with SpaceX, the disruptions raise broader questions about Starlink’s reliability against a technically sophisticated adversary.

Starlink works by beaming an Internet connection down from satellites revolving around Earth. The signals are received on the ground by pizza-box-size terminal dishes, which then distribute the connection like a Wi-Fi router to laptops, phones and other devices nearby. Starlink has provided Ukraine with vital Internet service since 2022, with soldiers relying on it to guide Internet-connected drones that are used for surveillance and as weapons, among other tasks.

In an interview this week, Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine’s digital minister, said Russia’s recent attacks against Starlink appeared to use new and more advanced technology. The service previously held up remarkably well against interference on battlefields, where there has been widespread electronic warfare, radio jamming and other communication disruptions.

But the Russians are now “testing different mechanisms to disrupt the quality of Starlink connections because it’s so important for us,” Fedorov said, without giving details about what he called their “powerful” electronic weapons systems. Ukraine was constantly communicating with SpaceX to resolve the problems, he added.

Russia’s Ministry of Defence did not respond to a request for comment. An official who leads Russia’s electronic warfare efforts told state media last month that the military had put Starlink on a “list of targets” and developed capabilities to counter the service.



A firefighter at the scene of a deadly Russian missile strike in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv.

While Fedorov said Starlink service should improve soon, some of the outages appeared timed to Russian attacks, according to soldiers and officials. Any disruptions at crucial battlefield moments put Ukraine’s already stretched army at a further disadvantage, they said.

“We’re losing the electronic warfare fight,” said Ajax, the call sign for the deputy commander of the 92nd’s Achilles strike drone battalion, who in an interview described the challenges his troops faced after Starlink connectivity failed.

“One day before the attacks, it just shut down,” said Ajax, who would be quoted only on the condition of being named by his call sign, in keeping with Ukrainian military policy. “It became super, super slow.”

Kari A Bingen, a former US Defence Department official and an expert on electronic warfare, said Starlink and other satellite communications could be disrupted by the use of a high-power radio frequency to overwhelm the connection links. The invisible attacks are typically done from a vehicle with a large radio tower attached to the top, she said.

“It’s naturally in the cross hairs of Russian forces,” said Bingen, now the director of the aerospace security project at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank in Washington. “It degrades Ukrainian forces from being able to communicate on the battlefield.”

Throughout the conflict, Ukrainian forces have tried various techniques to shield Starlink from attacks, including placing the terminals in holes dug in the

ground and putting metal mesh over them. Infozahyst, a Ukrainian company that works with the military and specialises in building tools for electronic warfare, said it did not believe such improvised solutions were effective.

Starlink has given Musk outsize influence in the war because he controls where the satellite service is available and can choose to cut off access. In some instances, Ukrainian officials have appealed directly to Musk to turn on Starlink access during military operations so they can conduct drone strikes across enemy lines — requests that the billionaire has not always approved. The US government, which has purchased Starlink terminals for Ukraine, has sometimes gotten involved in the negotiations.

Starlink is not sold directly to Russia. But this year, Ukrainian officials publicly raised alarms that Russia was using Starlink terminals bought from third-party vendors, potentially eroding Ukraine’s connectivity advantage.

Experts have warned that Ukraine is overly dependent on a single company for such a vital resource, particularly one run by someone as unpredictable as Musk. But Ukraine’s reliance on Starlink is unlikely to shrink. Few alternatives exist for such comprehensive and reliable service.

Fedorov said the Ukrainian government was constantly testing new systems. The military has specialised systems for maritime drones that have destroyed a number of Russian ships in the Black Sea, he said. “But of course there is no mass-produced equivalent,” he said.

At a Trump rally in the Bronx, chants of ‘build the wall’



Michael Gold

The author is a political correspondent reporting on the campaigns of candidates in the 2024 presidential election.

Miles from the rather somber Manhattan courtroom where he has spent much of the past five weeks as a criminal defendant, former president Donald Trump on Thursday stood at a park in the Bronx, surveyed the crowd and acknowledged he had been concerned over how he might be greeted at his first rally in New York state in eight years, and his first ever in the borough.

In front of him was a more diverse crowd than is typical of his rallies, with many Black and Hispanic voters sporting bright red “Make America Great Again” hats and other Trump-themed apparel ordinarily scarce in deep-blue New York City. Still more people stood outside, waiting to get past security. “I woke up, I said, ‘I wonder, will it be hostile or will it be friendly?’” Trump said. “It was beyond friendly. It was a love fest.”

As is often the case during Trump’s speeches, the truth was a bit more complex. As he spoke, more than 100 protesters demonstrated outside the fenced-off area of Crotona Park where he had staged the rally. A wave of elected officials denounced his visit to the city. And his insistence that he would carry New York in November — though perhaps not as laughable as it once might have

sounded, judging from at least one recent poll — conveniently disregarded the thumping he took in the state in the 2016 and 2020 elections.

But as heated arguments took place outside his rally, Trump, who veered occasionally into lengthy New York-focused reminiscences that were lost on his supporters, seemed to relish the chance to appear in his hometown, seize media attention and know that New Yorkers would hear what he had to say, like it or not, one way or the other.

Throughout the rally, Trump, one of New York’s most famous native sons, who formally made Florida his home in 2019, embraced the chance to demonstrate his support in the city he left behind — and which he swore he still loved, even as he decied it as descending into chaos.

His remarks largely followed familiar patterns as he railed against the Biden administration and made explicit overtures to Black and Latino voters. He lamented the surge of migrants across the southern border and criticised President Joe Biden’s economic policies as disproportionately hurting people of colour, whose support he is eager to win from Democrats. “African Americans are getting slaughtered. Hispanic Americans are getting slaughtered,” he said.

He also insisted that the migrant influx,



Former president Donald Trump speaks at a rally at Crotona Park in the Bronx.

Trump’s screeds against those crossing the border illegally and his vow to conduct the “largest deportation operation” in US history were met with cheers.

which has prompted a crisis in New York, was disproportionately hurting “our Black population and our Hispanic population, who are losing their jobs, losing their housing, losing everything they can lose.”

Trump’s screeds against those crossing the border illegally and his vow to conduct the “largest deportation operation” in US history — both staples of his campaign rallies — were met with cheers.

They did not appear to object to his broad assertion, which has no evidence, that those coming across the border were mentally ill criminals mounting an invasion of the United States.

Some in the crowd said they were immigrants but were quick to clarify that they had crossed the border legally and that they disapproved of those who did not. As the protesters were demonstrating, the atmosphere became momentarily charged, with Trump supporters and anti-Trump protesters screaming at one another from across the street. The New York Police Department began separating both sides, lining the streets with metal barricades.

The Bronx remains one of the most Democratic counties in the country. Biden won the borough by 68 per cent in 2020, though Trump improved on his performance in 2016, when he lost by 79 percentage points.

You have been scammed



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

A few weeks ago, I received a friend request on Facebook from a middle-aged man who said he was from Germany and worked as a flight attendant and bitcoin trader.

He would text me in the afternoon and ask how my day was and would tell me what he had for lunch and where he was flying to the following day. Part of me felt he could be a scammer but I thought let's see where this chatting goes. He would ask about the weather in Oman, when is the best time to visit, and what are the property prices in Muscat.

Once he tried to convince me to buy bitcoin, and when I said I was not interested he sounded angry saying “We are friends, and we should be able to talk about everything”.

Once he texted me saying he was in Canada with his friends, and could not use his credit card and asked me to send him some cash, when I replied, “sorry I can't, he responded, “Why?”

Scamming is a common phenomenon and the internet made it easier for scanners to study their prey and plan how to lure them to trap. Most victims are middle-aged or older women who are either divorced or widowed or living alone. Being lonely and in need of feeling loved makes them the perfect prey. The internet is full of real stories of women who meet men while on a holiday abroad and fall in love with them in a short period. Some end up getting married and start helping their new husband get their nationality so they can travel back with them in the hope of living happily ever after, only to discover that the man is after their money and the new nationality. The majority of scamming victims feel shy and do not report the scamming preferring to suffer the psychological impact I silence.

Psychologists tell us that scammers use sophisticated psychological techniques to get control over their targets. Some would contact several victims in the same period to see who

DON'T RUSH INTO SIGNING UP FOR SUSPICIOUS OFFERS, WATCH OUT FOR PRESSURE TACTICS, AND REMEMBER THAT SOMEONE ELSE'S PROBLEM IS NOT YOURS TO SOLVE.

is vulnerable while others focus on a specific person. The most common method of scamming is probably random phone calls from someone claiming to work in a company selling a specific product and offering you a special discount for a limited period, the offer is usually “too good to be true” yet some people fall for it.

The second method is creating a sense of urgency when scammers fabricate scenarios like claiming a bank account is at risk of closure or your order will not be delivered unless you send them money. This aims to prevent you from assessing the situation logically or seeking advice, so you rush to send them what they asked. So how can you avoid being scammed? Make sure you verify the identity of the person contacting you by asking a different way to call them back. Don't rush into signing up for suspicious offers, watch out for pressure tactics, and remember that someone else's problem is not yours to solve. When in doubt consult a colleague or family member.

Biden grumps at media as poll pressure mounts

DANNY KEMP

From testy exchanges with reporters to outright silence, the pressure of Joe Biden's US presidential election battle with Donald Trump appears to be straining his relationship with the media.

While the 81-year-old Biden has never shown his predecessor's outright hostility to journalists, the Democrat has recently appeared to lose his cool with the press.

His increasing irritability coincides with a recent rash of polls showing him trailing his scandal-tainted Republican rival with less than six months until the November 5 vote.

The most recent example was a grumpy exchange with a reporter at a White House press conference on Thursday with visiting Kenyan President William Ruto. Biden called on a reporter who said “two questions, if I may” — to which Biden sharply replied: “No. One.” There was laughter in the gilded East Room, but when the reporter tried his luck with his second question Biden made it clear he wasn't joking.

“You guys never keep the deal, but that's ok,” said Biden.

Then there have been frequent digs at the media, which Biden and his campaign feel overplay polls that show him doing badly.

Until recently he would stop to answer questions on the way to his helicopter at the White House or under the wing of Air Force One, but those exchanges have largely stopped.

That's partly because Biden has in recent months been surrounded by aides as he walks to the chopper — itself part of a White House strategy to distract from his increasingly unsteady gait amid what it believes is an unfair focus on the media on his age over that of Trump, who is just four years younger. Biden's frustration has only grown as a series of recent polls show Trump leading him in many key battleground states, despite the Republican spending much of the time in a criminal hush money trial. During that time his campaign adopted a strategy of “Let Joe Be Joe,” which instead of shielding a president who's long been famed for gaffes saw him hit the campaign trail hard and step up full-frontal attacks on “loser” Trump.

Biden's attitude is reflected by his campaign, which has stepped up criticism of the media for failing to notice the positive economic numbers on jobs and growth. Biden would also be far from the first president who ends up as no fan of the press. From Abraham Lincoln to Barack Obama, many presidents have sought ways around coverage that they think is unfair. Biden will have a major opportunity to do just that and speak directly to voters in the first of two scheduled presidential debates with Trump on June 27.

— AFP

The architect who made Singapore's public housing the envy of the world



SUI-LEE WEE

The high-rise apartments — some with panoramic views of Singapore's tropical cityscape — are airy, light-filled and spacious enough to comfortably raise a family. They are also public housing units, and for decades were emphatically affordable, giving Singapore an enviable rate of homeownership.

Now, however, at least a few of the apartments are being sold at a price that would have been unthinkable not long ago: more than \$1 million.

“I'm sad to see that — because public housing must equal affordability,” said Liu Thai Ker, the urban planner who gets much of the credit for creating the country's widely lauded approach to housing its citizens.

Now 86, Liu is considered the architect of modern Singapore because of his role overseeing the development of about half of the more than 1 million apartments that make up public housing in the small and exceptionally prosperous city-state of 5.6 million people.

But in the 1960s, the country's economic standing was starkly different. It was one of the poorest cities in Southeast Asia, where 3 out of 4 residents lived in overcrowded and filthy slums, in ramshackle houses with tin walls known as “squatters.” At that time, Liu was working in the New York office of architect I.M. Pei. He had recently graduated from Yale University with a master's degree in city planning.

“After four years, I felt that America really did not need me; they had way too many architects,” he said. “So I started thinking about coming back.” He returned in 1969, accepting a job as head of the design and research unit at Singapore's Housing and Development Board.

One of his main jobs was to create “new towns,” or planned urban centres, for Singapore, even though no one could explain how that would look. So he had to figure it out.

With some research, he decided the new Singapore would include highly self-sufficient neighbourhoods with schools, shops, outdoor food stalls and playgrounds.

Liu also wanted to avoid the kind



Liu Thai Ker, known as the architect of modern Singapore

of public housing he had seen in the United States and Europe, where apartments face one another with a central corridor with little light. People with low incomes were living cheek by jowl, creating what he called “a concentration of poverty.” He also wanted to spur a sense of community among residents. To figure out how to do that, he asked sociologists to estimate how many families should live in proximity to maximise social interactions. Six to eight was the answer, so each corridor would share six to eight units; that way, neighbours could mingle.

As the public housing following his vision began to be built — and its success to be recognised — Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first prime minister, gave Liu an ambitious goal: resettle everyone still living in the slums by 1982.

By 1985, virtually every Singaporean had a home.

Liu was 6 when he arrived in Singapore in 1944 from Malaysia. His father, Liu Kang, was an accomplished artist in Shanghai who fled to Malaysia during World War II.

After his mother asked him to study architecture to help the family earn money, Liu obtained a scholarship and enrolled in a part-time course at the University of New South Wales in Australia, where he worked and studied at the same time. He graduated with first-class honours.

Liu then headed to Yale, where after

graduation, he was offered a choice to go to Harvard University to further study urban design or to work with Pei. He chose the latter.

It was a crucial milestone in his life. From Pei, Liu learned the importance of “flow” and “harmony” in designing buildings, he said, concepts that he put into practice in Singapore.

From 1989 to 1992, Liu was CEO and chief planner of Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority. In 1991, he created the “Concept Plan,” dividing Singapore into five regions, making each one a small city unto its own so people didn't have to leave an area to go shopping or see a doctor.

After leaving the public sector, Liu did urban planning work in roughly 60 Chinese cities, including Fuzhou, where he met the highest-ranking local official, a man by the name of Xi Jinping. Xi asked him to design the Fuzhou airport, a project that Liu initially turned down because he had not done an airport before.

Several months later, Xi, China's future leader, came to Singapore and asked Liu to reconsider, according to Liu. This time, he agreed.

At 79, Liu started his own consultancy and is now advising Fiji and the governments of Sichuan and Guangdong in China on urban planning. He works five days a week, which, he said, “slows down the ageing process of my brain and my body.”

— The New York Times

Relationships: Two way streets...

Relationships: Can't live with them, can't live without them. They are so much a part of our lives aren't they? They may be a consequence of blood, love, lust, culture, necessity, economics, design, arrangement, convenience, and or fashion.

Definitions all revolve around the way in which people are connected, or even the way in which people behave towards each other, and given the excesses and challenges of our time, it is a true wonder of this world that any survive, particularly given that what should, on the face of it, sustain and add value to relationships are the very things that can tear them apart.

For example, relationship counselling, is a growth industry that although its stated purpose is to keep couples together, in practice, the very 'honesty' that counsellors demand of their clientele, is what will ultimately drive them apart. What the 'protagonists' in a relationship want is rarely going to be the same. What they prioritise is rarely going to be the same. What they will accept of each other as acceptable behaviours is rarely going to be the same.

So, how is emotional wellbeing to be satiated by this polarisation? Leading counsellors seek to re-establish the security and happiness that bought people together, however by focusing on the individual, and giving them the opportunity to describe their pain, conflict, or isolation while their partner is torn between response, and their own insecurities. It's a recipe for disaster as the blame game, the finger-pointing will never end.

Give-and take exists only in literature, is a bridge too far for most of us as full and frank discussions, as in politics, have extraordinarily long memories. The wounds opened by 'forgive and forget,' again, rarely work out well, whether in books or movies, so why should life be any different? One of you, one day, when pushed far enough, will seize upon the not-quite-forgiven-and-forgotten, and go for the jugular, casting peace aside, re-opening



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

old wounds, and renewing hostilities. It's human nature at its most primal.

The thing is, most mistakes are just that, mistakes. They rarely have a willingness to hurt as part of their DNA, yet a single poor decision, mistake, can so often take on an identity that is a stranger to its genesis, instead becoming a catalyst for calamity, and being blown out of all proportion. The fact is, we all make mistakes. Some we learn from, some we don't, but if there is one pearl of wisdom I would share with you ahead of all else, it would be that many battles need not be fought, and a wry smile, a "Yes dear," or an "I understand," as remarkably effective.

None of these demonstrate weakness, but rather the wisdom to put ego and pride on the back-burner. The ability to have respect for each other, your differences, your opinions, and each other's achievements have the potential to create an environment in which differences can be encouraged and celebrated, rather than being weaponised. I have found too, that good relationships aren't something that you walk away from when they aren't going well. Good relationships come about when you have to work hard and find ways to make them work, because all relationships go through hard times, while genuine relationships get through them.

We so often hear the subsequent plaintive cry: 'You make one little mistake...' in the wake of having made one. Often accompanied by a wry smile that probably indicates that it has neither been just one mistake, or a little one. But does it matter? Relationships work when we both work at them, when we are both resilient, and when we both want the same thing... to be together. Relationships, like life, are never easy, and as Forrest Gump observed 'are like a box of chocolates,' where there are the ones you like, and those you don't, and so won't always be smooth sailing.

They are not, in fact, 'a walk in the park,' or more rightly, 'a walk in Jurassic Park.' But all the better for the defiance and demur.

GIVE-AND TAKE EXISTS ONLY IN LITERATURE, IS A BRIDGE TOO FAR FOR MOST OF US AS FULL AND FRANK DISCUSSIONS, AS IN POLITICS, HAVE EXTRAORDINARILY LONG MEMORIES

RESTORATION IN FULL SWING



Workers react after a crane installed the restored 'Croix de chevet' cross at the top of the choir of the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral, which was ravaged by a fire in 2019, as restoration works continue in Paris, France, on Saturday. – Reuters

How Europe can get the green deal done

Since the European Green Deal was introduced in 2019, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has touted it as the European Union's new economic-growth agenda. After all, while the strategy's core objective is climate-related — to reduce the EU's greenhouse-gas emissions to net-zero by 2050 — it aims to achieve that by modernising the economy and fostering innovation. But not everyone is convinced.

In recent months, European drivers have complained about the EU's looming ban on the production and sale of cars with internal combustion engines, households have resisted plans to phase out gas boilers, and farmers have revolted against environmental regulations they view as overbearing. With the approach of next month's European Parliament elections, far-right parties are jostling to establish themselves as the official standard-bearers of this growing discontent and preparing to use any power they win to sabotage the green agenda.

The protesters make some legitimate points. The radical transformation that the European Green Deal entails raises difficult questions about who should bear the costs of climate action, both within and among countries. If those costs end up falling disproportionately on ordinary workers — let alone the poorest and most vulnerable



Simone Tagliapietra

The writer is a senior fellow at the Brussels-based think-tank Bruegel, is an adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Bologna

IF THE EU IS TO ACHIEVE ITS 2030 CLIMATE GOALS AND ACHIEVE NET-ZERO EMISSIONS BY 2050, IT MUST ACT NOW TO ENSURE THAT IT CAN WEATHER THE INEVITABLE POLITICAL HEADWINDS

communities — the transformation will exacerbate inequality, with potentially serious social and political knock-on effects. Fortunately, properly designed climate policies can avert that outcome and actually lead to greater social equality.

The European Green Deal has accounted for climate-justice considerations since the beginning. Advocates always knew that they would need to secure the political support of coal-intensive Poland, and they had not forgotten the "yellow vest" revolt that erupted in France in 2018, after President Emmanuel Macron attempted to introduce a carbon tax in road transport.

It is no coincidence that the first flagship initiative under the European Green Deal was the Just Transition Fund, which will dedicate €20 billion (\$21.6 billion) in 2021-27 to support the "economic diversification and reconversion" of the territories expected to be the most negatively affected by the green transition. Nor is it a coincidence that, while creating the first-ever carbon market for buildings and road transport, the European Commission established the Social Climate Fund, which is expected to mobilise at least €86.7 billion between 2026 and 2032 to compensate the most vulnerable

groups for higher energy prices.

These policy initiatives reflect the advice one would find in the economic literature on carbon dividends. But they will prove insufficient to offset the profound distributional effects of climate policy, particularly as decarbonisation accelerates and includes sectors that directly affect ordinary people's daily lives, such as buildings and transport. That is why Europe also needs a new green social contract, which focuses primarily on these sectors.

To this end, the EU should streamline and simplify existing

funding instruments to deliver even more decisive support for the transformation of coal and carbon-intensive regions. It should also take steps to ensure that EU countries make better, more targeted use of carbon-market revenues to support the uptake of green alternatives, from electric vehicles to home heating systems. And it should push for a "Rural Green Deal" that supports small farmers while requiring the agri-food industry to transform its systems. While such EU-level action would not eliminate the distributional consequences of climate policy, it

would help significantly. The EU must also turn decarbonisation into a real economic opportunity by developing a solid green industrial policy. This will require, first and foremost, revitalising the "boring" EU single-market agenda, in order to leverage the bloc's greatest asset — a huge shared market for goods, financial services, energy, workers, and ideas — to incentivise new investments in clean tech.

Interventions in specific technology areas will also be needed. Rather than mimic the broad-based US Inflation Reduction Act, the EU should make the most of its limited resources by delivering targeted support in areas where it already has a solid comparative advantage on which to build. While some incumbent industries might need support as they decarbonise, supporting breakthrough innovations should be the primary goal.

The European Green Deal has come a long way since it was conceived five years ago. But if the EU is to achieve its 2030 climate goals and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, it must act now to ensure that it can weather the inevitable political headwinds. A new green social contract and industrial policy can make all the difference.

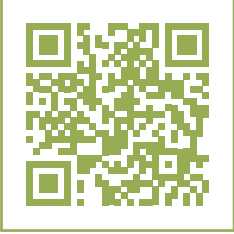
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The European Green Deal has accounted for climate-justice considerations since the beginning.

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OMANTEL LEAGUE 2023-24 CONCLUDES
WITH SEEB'S VICTORY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Seeb Club crowned the title of Omantel League at the conclusion of Oman football season 2023-24. Seeb defeated Al Shabab Club 2-0 in the final match at Seeb Sports Stadium.

Seeb dominated the game from the beginning and showed that by two early goals in the first half, both scored by Abdulaziz al Maqbali with assistance from Ali al Busaidi in the 20th and 38th minutes. Al Shabab finished the season with 24 points, placing in ninth place.

Al Nahdha the Runner-Up

Al Nahdha defeated Dhofar 1-0 at Al Saada Sports Complex, with striker Issam al Subhi scoring in the 96th minute, securing the runner-up spot for Al Nahdha despite strong competition from



Oman. Dhofar finished with 20 points.

Oman Maintains Third Place

Oman Club defeated Sur 3-2 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Sur opened the scoring in the 30th minute through Moath al Araiimi, but Oman Club equalised with a goal from Mohammed al Ghafri.

Oman dominated the second half, scoring decisive goals in the 58th and 70th minutes by Abdulwahid al Hinai and Majid al Balushi. Sur reduced the deficit in the 80th minute through Yousef al Mukhaini, but it wasn't enough to avoid defeat. Oman Club maintained third place with 42



points, while Sur finished seventh with 24 points.

Sohar in Fourth Place

Sohar and Al Nasr drew 1-1 at the Sohar Sports Complex. Sohar took the lead in the 17th minute with a powerful shot from David Ndama Molinga. In the second half, Al Nasr pressed

for an equaliser and succeeded in the 56th minute with a header from Ziad al Rasbi. Sohar finished fourth with 37 points, while Al Nasr was sixth with 32 points.

Bahla and Al Wahda relegated

Al Rustaq concluded their matches with a deserved 3-0 victory over Al Wahda at Al Rustaq Sports

Complex. Al Rustaq dominated the game, scoring the opening goal in the 59th minute through Ahmed al Adawi, followed by a second goal two minutes later from Mohammed al Ghafri. Al Wahda couldn't mount a comeback, and Al Rustaq sealed the win with a third goal in the 92nd minute by Ahed al Mashaykhi.

Al Wahda finished the season in last place with 15 points and was relegated to the first division, while Al Rustaq secured fifth place with 32 points.

Bahla defeated Ibri 2-0 at the Nizwa Sports Complex. Bahla took the lead in the 8th minute through Mostafa al Raqishi, then added a second goal in the 90+2 minute by George De Soares. Bahla was relegated to the first division, while Ibri finished eighth with 24 points.

Silhavy picks 25 players ahead of Chinese Taipei, Kyrgyzstan

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

The head coach of the Oman national football team, Jaroslav Silhavy, called up 25 players for the forthcoming domestic camp in Muscat, as it is part of the team's preparation for the fifth and sixth rounds of the second stage of the joint Asian qualifiers for the 2026 Fifa World Cup and the 2027 Asian Cup.

The camp will begin on Tuesday and the team will head off to Chinese Taipei on June 3 as they will take on them on June 6 in away game. Later, the Red Warriors will return to Muscat

for their concluding match in the qualifiers against Kyrgyzstan on June 11. Oman had managed to win Chinese Taipei in Muscat by 3-0 on November 16, 2023.

The majority of players among the 25 who were opted up by Czech coach are representing Seeb Club (7 players) and Al Nahdha (5 players). Seeb managed to end their current season on a promising note as they are title holders of Super Cup, OFA Cup and recently lifted the league shield. Al Nahdha ended as runners-up of the top tier league and runners-up as well in the HM Cup beside finishing as second placed team in the West



Zone of AFC Cup. Three weeks ago, an admin staff of the national team comprised from Hussain al Zadjali and Kavankara Babil

went to Chinese Taipei to ensure all the logistics and technical arrangement of the team's ahead of reaching the delegation there.

Kyrgyzstan are currently leading group D by nine points with goal difference than the national team who are positioned in the second

place. Then, the Malaysian team are third with six points and then Chinese Taipei with no points.

Oman Squad: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Faizal Rushaidi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Khalid al Buraiki, Mohammed al Musallami, Ghanim al Habsi, Abdulaziz al Shammosi, Amjad al Harthi, Ali al Busaidi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Arshad al Alawi, Abdullah Fawaz, Harib al Saadi, Hatim al Rushdi, Omar al Malki, Salah al Yahyaei, Zahir al Aghbari, Issam al Subhi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Abdulrahman al Mushifri, Musab al Maamari, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Ghafri and Waleed al Musallami.

Celtic leave it late to beat Rangers, win Scottish Cup

GLASGOW: Celtic beat Rangers 1-0 in a cagey Scottish Cup final at Hampden Park on Saturday with a 90th-minute winner from Adam Idah as Brendan Rodgers's side completed the league and cup double.

The match was by no means a classic and seemed destined for extra time when Idah, who joined the club on loan from Norwich City earlier this year, was in the right place at the right time to score and give Celtic a record-extending 42nd Scottish Cup triumph.

Celtic scored when Paulo Bernardo dribbled into the final third and took a shot from the edge of the box that was palmed away by goalkeeper Jack Butland, but Idah had peeled away from his marker to fire home the rebound.

"I said I'd come here to try and score as many goals as I could, I didn't think I'd score a goal like this in front of all these fans. It's an amazing feeling," Idah told BBC Scotland.

"It's hard to put into words. Anyone here can see what it means to the fans, to the players. I've always supported Celtic, it's amazing."

Rangers, meanwhile, have finished runners-up in both the Premiership and the Scottish Cup this season but did not finish the campaign empty-handed having won the League Cup.

Rangers thought they had scored from a corner on the hour mark when Abdallah Sima netted at the far post but it was chalked off following a VAR review which showed Nicolas Raskin had fouled Celtic keeper Joe Hart.

When Idah was asked about his future, the 23-year-old said: "Football is tricky. I love it here, I've said it previously, it's a great club but I'm still contracted to Norwich. I'll go back in the summer and who knows?"

— Reuters



Oman finish 6th in Asian indoor hockey

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Oman national hockey team completed their participation in the Men's Indoor Asia Cup hockey championship held at Kazakhstan city of Taldykorgan from May 21 to 26. Eight teams including Oman Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Malaysia, Iran, Singapore, Tajikistan and Thailand took part

National team ranked sixth in the overall standings of the tournament and won a number of international and Asian ranking points, which will serve the team in the upcoming participations, after starting this edition without any points.

The Oman team concluded with good performance matches, were able to win over Singapore 3-2, and then over Tajikistan with a score of 13-1 in the competitions for ranking



Rashid al Fazari



Talal Mohammed Beit Hazim

places from fifth to eighth. The team's level gradually appeared well in the championship competitions.

In the last match against the Indonesia team, Oman team sought to win and presented a better level despite losing the match with a score of 3-5.

Oman achieved a victory over Singapore in the opening of the competitions to determine the places from fifth

to eighth, with a score of 3-2, national players performed well despite many opportunities that missed.

The national team beat Tajikistan 13-1 as the players presented a good performance in the match and imposed their control over all four rounds.

Omani player, Rashid al Fazari, won the best player award in the match against Singapore. Talal Mohammed

Beit Hazim, won the best player award in the second match, after showing great performance and scoring a hat-trick. The Asian Hockey Federation has assigned Omani referee, Ahmed bin Ali al Hassani, in managing Asian Cup indoor competitions. Al Hassani officiated 7 matches in the tournament, including the most prominent semi-finals between Iran and Malaysia.

ISD Barzman basketball champion



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 25

The Indian School Darsait (ISD) emerged victorious in the Barzman Basketball Championship which was dedicated for Indian Schools after defeating the Indian School Muscat branch by 14-12 in the final clash. The event was held under the auspices of Ali bin Khalfan al Hassani, Member of the the Majlis Ash'shura for the Wilayat of Bausher.

The championship, organised by the Oman School Sports Association in collaboration with International Food & Beverages LLC (Barzman) featured participation of six Indian schools. The competition highlighted numerous emerging talents in basketball.

At the conclusion of the match, the guest of honour presented awards to the top three teams: Indian School Darsait, the champions; Indian School Muscat, the runners-up; and Indian School Al Ghubra, which secured third place. Also, the chief guest delivered awards to the partners, organisers and referees of the tournament.



Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes celebrates with the trophy. – Reuters

MANCHESTER UNITED saved their best performance of a mediocre season to the very end as they upset Manchester City 2-1 in the FA Cup final on Saturday to deprive their rivals of the double.

With speculation swirling about the future of manager Erik Ten Hag, United ripped up the form book as first-half goals from teenagers Alejandro Garnacho and Kobbie Mainoo proved enough for them to lift the trophy for a 13th time.

They had to endure a second-half siege, however, as City swarmed forward and a late goal by Jeremy Doku set up a nerve-shredding finale before United could celebrate at Wembley.

Premier League champions City, bidding to become the first club to win the double in successive seasons, had been on a 35-match unbeaten run in all competitions in open play.

But they were well below their best in the first half, gifting Garnacho a 30th-minute opener before Mainoo made it 2-0.

City woke up in the second half and Erling Haaland hit the crossbar, but they had to wait until the 87th minute for substitute Doku to halve the deficit.

United hung on, however, to seal the best result of Ten Hag's two-season reign and qualification for next season's Europa League.

"Incredible. Nobody believed in us. But we're a team, all together. We fought, the game of our lives," Garnacho, who became the first Argentine to score in the Cup final since Ricky Villa for Tottenham Hotspur in 1981, said.

The build-up had been dominated by talk of the chasm between the two Manchester clubs with City having won an unprecedented fourth successive English title and United suffering their worst Premier League campaign.

FUTURE DOUBT

Ten Hag's future was also clouded in uncertainty with reports that the showpiece would be his last game in charge, whatever the outcome.

Even the most optimistic United fans would have walked down Wembley Way in the sunshine fearing a drubbing, but their team turned logic on its head.

Garnacho, one of the few positives in United's season, had the game's first shot on target and his movement was a constant threat to a City defence featuring two changes with John Stones and Nathan Ake handed starts.

City looked ruffled by United's energy and offered a rare gift after 30 minutes.

A long ball forward should have been easily dealt with by Josko Gvardiol but his headed back pass went over advancing keeper Stefan Ortega and Garnacho ran through to tap the ball into an empty net.

Marcus Rashford had a goal ruled out minutes later with Garnacho adjudged offside in the build-up but it was not long before United were in dreamland.

This time there was no help required as a brilliant move saw Garnacho play the ball in to Bruno Fernandes whose no-look pass released Mainoo to slot his shot past Ortega.

City moved up several gears in the second half with substitute Doku causing problems and it was from his pass that Haaland smashed a shot against the crossbar.

United keeper Andre Onana had to make a superb save to keep out a Kyle Walker effort and Julian Alvarez, who came on for Kevin De Bruyne, fired a shot over as City began to exert real pressure.

Alvarez side-footed wide from in front of goal but United's rearguard began to wobble and City finally broke United's resistance when Doku cutting in to drive a shot past Onana but they had left it too late. — Reuters

Manchester United's Lisandro Martinez celebrates with the trophy. – REUTERS





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Oman–China bilateral trade surpasses \$30 billion in 2023

New platform: Oman seeks deeper ties with China at inaugural Gulf-China Industrial and Investment Forum

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 25

The Sultanate of Oman participated in the inaugural Gulf-China Industrial and Investment Cooperation Forum, which was held in Xiamen, China, during May 23 - 24, 2024.

Led by Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, the Omani delegation actively participated in discussions aimed at strengthening industrial and investment ties between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and China.

This forum follows the Xiamen Ministerial Initiative, launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the first China-Gulf Summit in December 2022. The initiative proposes a dedicated China-GCC forum to bolster industrial and investment cooperation.

Discussions at the forum centred on establishing this new platform and exploring joint ventures and projects that could solidify the economic partnership between the two regions.

Dr Masan emphasised the importance of the forum in fostering stronger economic ties, particularly in trade, investment, knowledge

Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, addressing the Gulf-China Cooperation Forum.

sharing and technical cooperation.

He highlighted the potential for collaboration in green industries and renewable energy, areas where China boasts significant expertise. Oman and China already enjoy a robust trade relationship, with bilateral trade exceeding \$30 billion in 2023.

Omani exports, primarily oil, gas and petrochemicals, accounted for over \$24 billion, while imports from China, including cars, electronics and machinery, reached \$2.82 billion. Furthermore, Chinese direct investments in Oman surged by 27.8 per cent in 2023, reaching \$3.45 billion, with projects concentrated in energy, infrastructure and commercial development.

Beyond the forum, Dr Masan met with representatives of clean energy companies. He expressed interest in their expertise and extended an invitation to explore investment and partnership opportunities in Oman.

Empowering Oman’s governorates through strategic development

REGIONAL STRENGTHS: CAPITALISING ON COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Decentralisation as a strategy to enable each governorate to realise its own potential is an increasingly important economic paradigm to promote dynamism at the regional level, according to a leading Omani entrepreneur and business leader.

Abdullah bin Nasser al Saidi, CEO of Nafath Renewable Energy Company, stressed the necessity for every governorate to pinpoint its “comparative advantage,” or the particular industry in which it excels.

“Some governorates are naturally suited for tourism, while others have a strong industrial base or excel in logistics. By focusing on these distinct advantages, we can avoid redundancy in entrepreneurial ventures and ensure each region flourishes in its own right,” he stated.

Speaking the Observer on the sidelines of the landmark Governorates Economic Forum 2024, which was held in Muscat last week, Al Saidi underlined for each governorate to prioritise its development around its comparative strengths in order to sustain their long-term growth.

“We need to assess each project’s viability in a scenario where oil prices plummet to \$50 or even lower,” he warns.

Significantly, the active participation of entrepreneurs is a key component of this decentralised model, according to Al Saidi.

“Entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of innovation and job creation. By nurturing a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, we can empower local talent

Abdullah bin Nasser al Saidi, CEO of Nafath Renewable Energy (centre), speaking at the Governorates Economic Forum.

and unlock new economic possibilities,” he stressed.

The businessman also advocates for giving local companies priority when development projects are being commissioned.

“We should empower local companies to take the lead instead of relying solely on external contractors,” he noted, pointing out that this strategy gives local inhabitants a feeling of pride in their community.

Furthermore, to help create a vibrant business climate, Al Saidi emphasises the necessity of all-encompassing support networks.

“Entrepreneurs need access to training, mentorship and financial resources. By providing these essential elements, we can equip them with the tools they need to succeed,” he said.

Another key factor that can drive economic growth at the regional level is cooperation amongst governorates.

“Imagine Al Batinah North and Dhofar governorates working together: The industrial backbone of Al Batinah North Governorate is robust, whilst Dhofar Governorate has a booming tourism industry. Working together may result in

cooperative businesses that serve travellers looking for distinctive experiences or create supply chains that are advantageous to both areas.”

However, this cooperative vision is contingent upon the creation of a strong legal framework, stresses Al Saidi.

Flexible legislation is necessary to enable governorates to decide strategically based on their unique circumstances. “Certain regulations might need to be tweaked on a governorate-by-governorate basis.

A flexible legal framework is essential to unlock the full potential of devolution.” Another important pillar of this economic approach is investing in essential services. Infrastructure related to water and energy should be prioritised, according to Al Saidi.

“A strong foundation of essential services is the bedrock upon which a vibrant economy can be built,” he states.

“By ensuring reliable access to these services, we create an environment conducive to business growth and job creation.”

Al Saidi praises the Future Fund, an Omani government effort that promotes

entrepreneurship and helps governorates gain more authority. “The Future Fund shares our vision of fostering a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem,” he adds.

“Governors across Oman should actively engage with the Fund to leverage its programmes and initiatives for the benefit of their respective regions.”

The path to a decentralised and vibrant economic landscape for Oman’s governorates is not without difficulties.

Fluctuating oil prices and the need for a supportive legal environment are just two obstacles that must be overcome. However, as Al Saidi points out, the potential rewards are substantial.

“By focusing on comparative advantages, engaging entrepreneurs, empowering local businesses, fostering collaboration and investing in essential services, we can unlock a new era of economic prosperity for Oman’s governorates,” he states. “This shift towards devolution is not simply about economic diversification; it’s about empowering each region to chart its own course towards a brighter future.”

OIA to sign over RO 35m worth of contracts at COMEX

MUSCAT: On the sidelines of COMEX 2024, several companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) will sign over 30 programmes, agreements and initiatives with a total value exceeding RO 35 million.

These agreements include partnerships with leading global companies in the field. The agreements to be signed by OIA-affiliated companies such as Omantel, Oman Data Park, Ithca Group, and OQ with global leaders like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, TCS and Virtusa, cover various initiatives.

These include the establishment of data centres, adoption of cloud solutions, artificial intelligence technologies and other innovations.

This effort embodies the integrated ecosystem of the telecommunications and information technology sector, supports emerging tech companies, enhances the localisation of new industries crucial to the digital economy, and bolsters the investment environment in Oman’s technology sector.

Atif bin Said al Siyabi, Chief Information Officer at OIA,

emphasised that the Authority and its companies prioritise the technology sector, reflecting the noble vision and government direction towards building and developing a prosperous and

sustainable digital economy.

This is achieved by bringing in and localising technology within targeted local sectors through various programmes, initiatives, and executive plans

Atif bin Said al Siyabi, Chief Information Officer at OIA.

that contribute to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

In a statement, he explained that the Authority and its companies are committed to supporting startups and small and medium-

sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tech sector through significant initiatives and agreements.

These efforts reflect the Authority’s collaborative approach to fostering innovation and growth in Oman’s technology sector.

It is also noted that on the sidelines of the exhibition, the OIA-affiliated companies will sign strategic partnerships and cooperative agreements with several government and private institutions, as well as banks, aimed at providing digital services and innovative technological solutions. — ONA

Sohar International named Oman’s best bank at Euromoney Awards

MUSCAT: Sohar International proudly announces its triumph at the prestigious Euromoney Awards, being recognised with the title of “Oman’s Best Bank.” This esteemed award underscores the bank’s exceptional performance in the banking sector.

The awards ceremony, held at the Waldorf Astoria in Dubai, brought together industry luminaries and top-tier financial institutions. Mazin bin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, received the award on behalf of the bank.

The rigorous evaluation process undertaken by Euromoney’s esteemed panel of judges assessed Sohar International across various parameters, including its leading market position, product diversity, financial performance, asset quality, customer satisfaction, CSR initiatives, and environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices.

Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, expressed his pride, stating, “We are deeply honored to be recognised with the prestigious title of ‘Oman’s Best Bank’ by Euromoney.

This accolade reflects our



unwavering commitment to excellence, innovation and sustainability in the banking sector.

At Sohar International, we strive to not only lead in market performance but also to play a pivotal role in fostering a sustainable economy. This recognition is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our entire team. We will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible in banking, ensuring we provide unparalleled value to our customers and contribute positively to the broader community and the nation at

large.”

The year 2023 was particularly significant for Sohar International as the bank realised various aspects of a strategic vision initiated in 2019. A transformative five-year plan resulted in notable achievements, including a merger and the first step beyond borders.

This strategic initiative catapulted Sohar International to become Oman’s fastest-growing and second-largest bank, with a surge in assets to RO 6.7 billion, a 50 per cent increase in market share, and a market capitalisation of \$1.5 billion.

The bank also recorded a profit

for the year 2023 of RO 70.3 million, marking a 101% increase compared to the previous year.

These accomplishments further solidify its position as a leading financial institution, poised for continued growth and innovation.

At the same awards ceremony, Sohar International was also awarded the “Oman’s Best Bank for ESG” title, recognising the bank’s responsible and sustainable practices and commitment to social and environmental issues to achieve long-term economic growth.

The bank’s robust ESG framework prioritises sustainability initiatives, including a \$200 million climate financing agreement with IFC and a partnership with Fortescue Futures Industries on green hydrogen projects.

Additionally, Sohar International is financing various sustainability projects, with a pipeline valued at approximately RO 450 million. These awards collectively reinforce Sohar International’s steadfast commitment to excellence and its impactful contributions to the banking sector.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds announces HomeGoing offers for summer holidays



MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer in the world with an extensive retail network of over 350 stores across 13 countries, has announced their HomeGoing offers for the summer holidays. Customers can now get free cash vouchers on the purchase of Diamonds & Precious gem jewellery.

HomeGoing offers will be available across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms in Oman till June 22. As part of the offers, customers purchasing diamond or precious gem jewellery worth RO 500 will get a cash voucher worth RO 20 and for purchase of diamond or precious gem jewellery worth RO 300 will get a voucher worth RO 10.

The brand has reiterated that the voucher is equivalent to cash and can be used to purchase gold jewellery, diamond jewellery, gold coins and gold bars. Additional offers provided by Malabar Gold & Diamonds include no making charges on 8g Gold coins and 24K Gold bars.

“As school vacations are just around the corner, many of our customers are gearing up to travel to their home country.

The vast collection of

lightweight jewellery across our showrooms are perfectly suited for the gifting requirements of those wanting to buy jewellery for their loved ones back home.

With the opportunity to get free cash vouchers along with Diamond & Precious gem jewellery, we are adding extra value to their purchase, making jewellery from Malabar Gold & Diamonds the perfect gift for yourself or your loved ones”, commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD- International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds is renowned globally for offering an unparalleled jewellery buying experience with convenience and customer-friendly policies along with the ‘Malabar Promise’ of incomparable quality and service assurance.

Apart from this, the Malabar Promise also includes transparent pricing, assured lifetime maintenance from any of the showrooms across 13 countries, guaranteed buyback, tested and certified diamonds, 100 per cent value on diamond and gold jewellery exchange, 916 hallmarking jewellery, responsible sourcing, fair price policy, and fair labour practices.

OQ to showcase advanced innovations in energy sector at COMEX 2024

MUSCAT: OQ, the integrated global energy group, will showcase its digital transformation journey at the 33rd COMEX Global Technology Show, taking place from the May 27-30, 2024.

As a key player in digital transformation, OQ will highlight its 2023 achievements, showcasing innovations that enhance competitiveness and sustainability through the utilisation of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies.

Key presentations will include advanced digital solutions across the entire energy value chain and plans for integrating cutting-edge technologies into its facilities.

These efforts align with OQ’s commitment to driving digital transformation in the energy sector and supporting the acceleration of e-government initiatives as part of Oman Vision 2040.

OQ is committed to adopting advanced technologies, forming partnerships with leading global institutions, localising these technologies in Oman and fostering the growth of SMEs and national technical capabilities.

Maryam bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah (pictured), Vice-President of Integrated



Digital Solutions at OQ, outlined OQ’s digital transformation strategy, which aims to drive growth through digital innovation and enhanced competitiveness, while achieving sustainability through advanced technologies.

She highlighted significant achievements in 2023, including the establishment of the ‘Digital Factory’, an initiative that aims to store data within Oman, create a cloud-based infrastructure and develop a digital road-map for each subsidiary to integrate modern technologies into their operations, keeping pace with rapid technological advancements.

She also noted the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI), robotic process automation (RPA), and AI-based health, safety, security and environment (HSSE) monitoring.

Looking ahead to 2024, OQ plans to expand its AI video analytics projects, enhance predictive maintenance solutions and implement more generative AI applications in legal and operational areas. OQ has launched the SAP Concur platform, becoming the first entity in Oman to enable employees to complete logistical procedures via electronic platforms and mobile phones for travel and expense management.

Infoline unveils new brand identity, celebrates 20 years of excellence in Oman

MUSCAT: Under the esteemed auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, Infoline LLC proudly unveils its refreshed brand identity at a grand event hosted at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat.

This pivotal rebranding marks two decades of sustained innovation and dedication to excellence in the digital business process outsourcing (BPO) industry.

“Infoline has always been at the forefront of technological innovation and exceptional customer service. Today, as we step into the next chapter with a vibrant new brand identity, our commitment remains unwavering—to empower businesses with cutting-edge solutions and to drive their growth through strategic partnerships,” stated Mohamed al Maskari, CEO of Infoline.

The new brand identity reflects Infoline’s ethos of innovation and its ambition



to be the premier catalyst empowering regional businesses.

This rebranding initiative aligns with Infoline’s strategic vision to enhance service offerings and expand its market reach, promising a more integrated and efficient partner ecosystem.

Over the past 20 years, Infoline has been instrumental

in setting industry benchmarks in the BPO sector.

Starting as a contact center solution for various airlines, Infoline has grown into a leader in providing omnichannel customer experiences and advanced analytical solutions across various sectors including telecommunications, healthcare, and utilities.

“Infoline is not just

transforming business processes; we are enhancing them with the power of digital technology, making every interaction smarter and more effective,” said Muadh al Omairi, Commercial Vice-President of Infoline.

He highlighted the company’s role in pioneering next-generation AI-led communication platforms that redefine how businesses engage with their customers.

The celebration also included a look back at Infoline’s journey, from its modest beginnings to becoming a key player in Oman’s economic growth, contributing significantly to the In-Country Value and the development of Omani talent.

Approximately 4000 Omanis have been part of Infoline’s growth story, with the company being recognised for its efforts in fostering national employment and training.

NBO to showcase new digital innovations at COMEX

MUSCAT: In its ongoing dedication to advancing digital solutions within the banking arena, National Bank of Oman (NBO) and Muzn Islamic Banking are gearing up to participate in COMEX 2024, Oman’s premier technology exhibition, which will be held at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) from May 27 to 30.

The event will serve as a platform for NBO to showcase its digital capabilities and build partnerships within the growing FinTech community.

Dr Ali al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager - Head of Digital & e-Channels at NBO, expressed his enthusiasm for

the upcoming event, stating: “COMEX 2024 presents an exceptional opportunity for NBO to demonstrate our leadership in digital banking and engage with stakeholders to drive innovation and progress in Oman’s financial landscape. NBO will have the opportunity to interact with visitors, showcasing our latest digital innovations and hosting a variety of activities at COMEX.

Through workshops, demonstrations, and collaborative initiatives, we aim to empower the public with insights into how our digital advancements make banking more accessible, convenient and efficient for all.”



As part of its involvement, NBO has organised several significant activities. NBO is set to sign memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with FinTech small

and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), solidifying the bank’s commitment to promoting innovation and collaboration in the financial industry.

Additionally, NBO will allocate a dedicated space within its COMEX booth to support and promote SMEs, emphasising its dedication to empowering local businesses.

Visitors can attend daily workshops at the booth to learn about the bank’s digital capabilities, fraud prevention measures, and customer experience enhancements through digital channels, as well as explore NBO’s comprehensive range of products and services.

Attendees are also invited to experience seamless digital payments using QR codes at a dedicated café in the bank’s corner.

The proceeds will be donated to charities, reflecting NBO’s commitment to providing convenient and secure banking solutions and supporting the community. Furthermore, NBO has partnered with Qafeer Podcast to launch a series showcasing the bank’s digital capabilities, offering insights into the future of banking and financial technology. NBO invites all to join them at COMEX 2024 to explore the future of banking and experience firsthand the transformative power of digital technologies.

Oman's total credit balance reaches RO 30.8 billion



MUSCAT: The total credit balance granted by Omani banking sector companies increased by 2.9 per cent, reaching RO 30.8 billion by the end of March 2024.

The analysis issued by the Central Bank of Oman indicated that credit granted to the private sector recorded a growth of 3.6 per cent, reaching RO 25.9 billion by the end of March 2024.

The data related to its distribution across various sectors shows that non-financial companies accounted for the largest share, which amounted to 45.4 per cent by the end of March 2024.

This was followed by the individual sector with 45.0 per cent. The remaining percentage was distributed among the financial companies sector with 5.8 per cent and other sectors with 3.8 per cent.

The total deposits in the banking sector recorded a growth of 11.7 per cent, reaching RO 30.3 billion by the end of March 2024. Within this total, the deposits of the private sector in the banking system witnessed an increase of 13.7 per cent, reaching RO 20.2 billion by the end of March 2024.

The figures indicate that individuals accounted for the largest share, amounting to approximately 49.8 per cent, followed by the non-financial companies sector and the financial companies sector with shares of 30.9 per cent and 16.5 per cent, respectively.

— ONA

New Omani – S African JV to explore rail contracts in GCC

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 25

Prominent South African rail technology firm D2 Track Solutions has announced the establishment of a joint venture that seeks to position the Sultanate of Oman as a regional base for its rail-based operations covering the wider GCC and MENA markets.

Pretoria-headquartered D2 Track Solutions, the owner and developer of South Africa's tubular-track (T-Track) based rail networks, has entered into a partnership with Oman-based First Pole of Technology and Services LLC.

The new 50/50 JV, named T-Track MENA LLC, has begun exploring opportunities spawned by the rollout of new rail networks and metro projects in Oman and the wider MENA region.

"T-Track MENA has ambitions to jump start the growth of a rail services and construction industry in Oman with an eye on opportunities across the MENA region," said Jan van Wyk, Managing Partner - T Track MENA LLC.

"Besides promoting South Africa's durable and cost-competitive T-Track rail technologies, the JV will also drive localisation, skills development and in-country value creation to underpin the growth of a green-field rail services sector in Oman."

First pioneered by South Africa in the 1980s, T-Track (tubular track) rail technology has since been embraced by many countries and regions globally.

Essentially a precast modular track system with longitudinal continuous support, the track sits on a bed of concrete that runs along the length of the network. As they do not involve the use

KEY SPINOFFS: ACCENT ON COST-EFFICIENT AND TIME-SAVING BALLAST-LESS TRACK TECHNOLOGY



T-Track rail networks in operation in key markets.

of aggregates as ballast, T-Track based rail systems are not subject to a phenomenon known as ballast-fouling sand mitigation.

Consequently, such ballast-less track systems are increasingly used for higher speed rail, particularly in desert regions of the world, sparing developers the need to invest in 3,000 tonnes of ballast per kilometre.

In the Gulf region, T-Track systems have been deployed on a rail track linking Riyadh and Dammam in Saudi Arabia in 2008.

The technology provider is now in discussion with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), which is developing the ambitious Saudi Landbridge project — a 2,600km rail link connecting Jeddah with Riyadh. As Ballast has to be transported more than 800km to the rail construction site.

Seeking to offer an integrated package of services across all aspects of the rail services supply chain, Muscat-based T-Track MENA has been forging partnerships with Omani and other international players to position itself strongly in the local

market. For example it has joined hands with Advance Business Solutions to provide GPS monitoring and rail movement of rolling stock.

The Omani JV is also keenly exploring consultancy and contracting opportunities linked to the Hafeet Rail project, work on which formally commenced recently.

In partnership with TYPESA Consulting of India, the company has submitted a bid for a contract, dubbed the 'I2 Tender', for the construction of rail yards in Al Buraimi and Suhar, which includes the construction of 56km rail tracks.

In keeping with its ICV strategy, T-Track MENA is also forging alliances with Omani product and service providers that can support the JV in meeting its project commitments in the event of a contract award coming its way.

Examples include Rusayl-based Oman Metal Industries, which has been tapped to provide gauge bars and strips for track modules, while Oriental Cement has committed to supplying

concrete. Rebar for the project will come from local company Dawood Rebar.

More than 90% of T-Track materials and consumables can be sourced locally from within Oman, underscoring the comprehensive ICV targets of the Omani JV, said Jan van Wyk.

Further, in a bid to support the creation of Omani cadres for jobs in the emerging rail sector, T-Track has been engaging with local universities and colleges to assess the training needs of graduates across a wide array of skills and disciplines.

"T-Track envisions the potential for jobs in Telecoms, Rail Signaling, Civil & Mechanical Construction, Electrical Engineering, and Rail Regulations, among others.

Indeed, T Track rail solutions will also create many sustainable long term opportunities for SMEs and the local community," Jan van Wyk said.

"T Track MENA, the owner of the technology, is also open to investment and partnership in the global roll-out of T Track technology," he added.

Oman Post, Asyad Express showcase innovative postal and last-mile delivery solutions

MUSCAT: Oman Post and Asyad Express, part of Asyad Group, presented its technological prowess in postal and logistics services at the recently held Seamless Middle East 2024 Exhibition in Dubai, UAE.

The exhibition served as a hub for industry leaders and innovators to explore the latest trends, and cutting-edge technologies shaping the e-commerce landscape.

During the two-day exhibition, Oman Post and Asyad Express' booth witnessed a large turnout, where visitors explored the company's innovative postal and e-commerce express solutions.

These offerings form the cornerstone of the strategic commitment to provide solutions that seamlessly integrate state-of-the-art e-Fulfilment centres for faster deliveries.

The company leverages cutting-edge AI-based systems to enhance performance and optimise warehousing storage and handling solutions while boasting efficient in-house customs clearance capabilities to offer unparalleled service offerings and customer experiences.

Seamless Middle East 2024 was an opportunity for Oman Post and Asyad Express to engage with key industry leaders and stakeholders, while forging strategic partnerships.

Oman Post and Asyad Express leveraged its participation in the exhibition to exchange experiences in the field of digital transformation with the global leaders of e-commerce, smart markets, customer experiences, artificial intelligence and an opportunity to establish global partnerships in the field of e-commerce, as Oman Post and Asyad Express continue to expand their digital transformation strategy to meet the evolving needs of customers.



Governorates Competitiveness Index to drive development and investment

MUSCAT: The Governorates Competitiveness Index, launched by His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, during the Governorates Economies Forum, serves as a strategic tool to guide investments and set development priorities.

This initiative aims to ensure the success and achievement of Oman Vision 2040 objectives, which focus on enhancing the national economy and maximising the economic and social impact of development projects.

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, stated that the index is a tool for measuring and evaluating the developmental performance of the governorates, their enablers, and the competitiveness of each governorate through a set of criteria and indicators covering economic, social, infrastructure, education, health, and other



The index is a tool for measuring and evaluating the developmental performance of the governorates, their enablers, and the competitiveness of each governorate.

aspects.

Al Maawali added that the index will provide a comprehensive picture of developmental performance and identify developmental gaps in each governorate.

This will enhance development decision-making based on accurate evaluation data and help direct policies and investments to reduce developmental disparities among governorates, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and ensuring sustainable development.

He explained that the index is built on the four main pillars of Oman Vision 2040: economy and development, people and society, governance and environment, and performance evaluation for the development of governorates and the achievement of Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

He noted that the Ministry of Economy is responsible for the index and will follow up and define its purpose by consolidating scattered statistics from various entities into a single index.



Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali
Under-Secretary
Ministry of Economy

This will provide governors and the government with comprehensive data and insights on the developmental performance of each governorate. The index will be implemented this year, with relevant entities participating at a later stage following the completion of the pilot phase.

He highlighted the collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia by establishing a direct link between the data available at ESCWA and the National Center for Statistics and Information. — ONA

Inflation rate in Oman rises by 0.4% in April

MUSCAT: The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 0.4% in April 2024 compared to the same month in 2023, according to data from the consumer price index released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicated a rise in the prices of various personal goods and services by 4.2%, food and non-alcoholic beverages by 2.8%, tobacco by 2.4%, culture and entertainment by 0.4%, restaurants and hotels by 0.3%, and clothing and footwear by 0.2%.

Conversely, the prices of transportation decreased by 3%, education by 0.4%, furniture, household equipment, and routine household maintenance by 0.2%, and communications by 0.2%, while prices for other groups remained stable.

Within the food and non-alcoholic beverages group, the prices of vegetables increased by 12.1%, fruits by 4.2%, milk, cheese, and eggs by 3.7%, oils and fats by 2.7%, meat by 1.9%, sugar, jam, honey, and sweets by



Al Sharqiyah North Governorate recorded the highest inflation rate by the end of April 2024.

1.4%, and bread and cereals by 1%, while fish prices decreased by 2.4%.

Al Sharqiyah North Governorate recorded the highest inflation rate by the end of April 2024 compared to the same period of the previous year, with the index rising by 1.4%, followed by Al Wusta Governorate at 1.3%, and Dhofar Governorate at 1.1%.

The rate increased by 1% in Musandam Governorate, 0.9% in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, 0.7% in Al Buraimi and Al Batinah North governorates, 0.6% in Al Dhahirah Governorate, and 0.2% in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, while the rate remained stable in Muscat Governorate. — ONA

Ethereum follows Bitcoin’s footsteps, stumbles after ETF approval



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

The author is a member of the International Press Association

ALTHOUGH STANDARD CHARTERED HAD PREDICTED SOARING PRICES FOR BOTH ETH AND BTC POST-ETF APPROVAL, THE CURRENT MARKET VOLATILITY SUGGESTS A BUMPY ROAD AHEAD, ESPECIALLY FOR ALTCOINS SEEKING ETF APPROVAL IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

experienced a 3.5% decline over 24 hours, reflecting the broader market’s uncertainty and take profits.

Although Standard Chartered had predicted soaring prices for both ETH and BTC post-ETF approval, the current market volatility suggests a bumpy road ahead, especially for altcoins seeking ETF approval in the near future.

Is Solana Next?The SEC’s green light for spot Ethereum ETFs has fuelled speculation about which cryptocurrency will be next in line. Solana has emerged as a potential candidate, merely for its market dominance in terms of market-cap, but regulatory hurdles could significantly delay its ETF approval, along with that of other altcoins.

One major obstacle is the SEC’s classification of several major cryptocurrencies, including Solana, as “unregistered securities.”

This stance stems from lawsuits against exchanges like Coinbase and Kraken. Unlike Bitcoin and Ethereum, which are often viewed as commodities, this classification creates a major roadblock for Solana and other altcoins seeking ETF approval.

Another challenge is the lack of futures markets regulated by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) for Solana and other altcoins.

Historically, both Bitcoin and Ethereum ETFs were preceded by the availability of such futures products, allowing for correlation analysis between futures and spot prices. Without this precedent, the SEC is unlikely to approve spot ETFs for these altcoins.

A bit of hope for the crypto community lies in the Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century Act (FIT21), recently passed by the House of Representatives. This bill could potentially grant the CFTC more authority over crypto spot markets, potentially easing the path for spot crypto ETFs.

However, FIT21 faces an uncertain future in the Senate, and even if passed, its impact on the SEC’s stance remains unclear. Considering these factors,

the market remains sceptical, with Polymarket predicting only an 11% chance of a Solana ETF in 2024. Even if Solana can overcome the “unregistered security” hurdle, the absence of a futures market and the complex legislative landscape could significantly delay its ETF approval, along with that of other altcoins.

The recent passage of the Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century Act (FIT21) by the US House of Representatives has ignited a heated debate within the crypto community.

While some see it as a step towards much-needed regulatory clarity, others fear it could grant excessive power to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), potentially stifling innovation.

On the positive side, FIT21 introduces a decentralisation test to classify certain assets as commodities, potentially shielding them from the SEC’s enforcement actions.

This could weed out projects that are “decentralised in name only,” promoting genuine decentralisation within the industry.

Some believe the bill could also attract legitimate blockchain projects to the US, fostering a healthier crypto ecosystem.

However, critics argue that FIT21 expands the CFTC’s regulatory authority, raising concerns about potential overreach. The CFTC has a history of questionable enforcement actions in the crypto space, and some worry about the creation of a “dual regulatory regime” where both the SEC and CFTC wield significant control over the industry.

The future of FIT21 hangs in the balance, as it still needs Senate approval to become law.

****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 threat of Trumpflation and a Fed war



J BRADFORD DELONG

The author, a former deputy assistant US Treasury secretary, is Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of *Slouching Towards Utopia: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century* (Basic Books, 2022).

IF INFLATION HAWKS ARE SERIOUS ABOUT PRICE STABILITY AND THE LONG-TERM ECONOMIC OUTLOOK, THEY SHOULD CONSIDER WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF DONALD TRUMP RETURNED TO THE WHITE HOUSE. THE PRESUMPTIVE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE HAS MADE HIS INFLATIONARY, FINANCIALLY DESTABILISING INTENTIONS ALL TOO CLEAR.



Former US president Donald Trump points at a camera at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, in this file photo. – Reuters

things, Trump has promised to impose significantly higher tariffs than Biden has.

And while Biden at least has national-security and industrial-policy rationales for his trade policies, Trump would pursue random, chaotic, corruption-ridden interventions that are almost certain to be substantially inflationary.

Moreover, Trump is keen to remove Fed Chair Jerome Powell through untested legal means, so that he can either install a loyal crony or at least set off a fight with Congress in which he can appear to be challenging the “establishment.”

He is also itching to mobilise social-media mobs, if not real-world insurrectionist terrorists, against Fed governors and bank presidents who refuse to lower interest rates at his command.

Far from hyperbole, this threat of political violence is a familiar issue in Washington today.

As journalist McKay Coppins writes in his recent book on Mitt Romney: “One Republican congressman confided to Romney that he wanted to vote for impeachment, but declined out of fear for his family’s safety.

The congressman reasoned that Trump would be impeached by House Democrats with or without him — why put his wife and children at risk if it wouldn’t change the outcome?”

This would be a MAGA rerun of Andrew Jackson’s Bank War in the 1830s, when the president ultimately succeeded in killing off the Second Bank of the United States, arguing that it benefited a wealthy elite at the expense of the American people.

In fact, the Bank War ultimately brought financial disruption, commercial bankruptcies, and deflation, thus destroying some share of national wealth and shifting the rest from entrepreneurial debtors to already-rich creditors.

True, later historians argued that Jackson’s battle against the oligarchy of Philadelphia bankers led by the Second Bank’s president, Nicholas Biddle, prefigured Franklin D Roosevelt’s battle against “economic royalists” a century later during the New Deal.

And yet, nothing is better for already-rich heirs and heiresses than general deflation.

Should Trump return to the White House and launch a Fed War, the effect would be as economically damaging as Jackson’s Bank War. But, like the Bank War, the effort would probably be popular with his base.

Is this all overblown? Bill Dudley, the former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, recently downplayed the

risk that Trump would pose to Fed operations, arguing that the next president will appoint only two of the Federal Open Market Committee’s 12 voting members. I am less sanguine.

Fed governors and bank presidents who do not feel like spending \$5,000 a day on security might be induced to resign.

And while the Fed chair can be dismissed only “for cause” (inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance), the conservative majority on the Supreme Court has demonstrated that its commitment to precedent, original intent, or the black-letter meaning of statutes cannot be taken seriously.

Moreover, Dudley himself recognises that another Trump presidency would be damaging enough, regardless of what he manages to get away with:

“The dollar has become the world’s reserve currency and a stable store of value thanks to prudent economic management, a strong rule of law, deep and liquid capital markets, and free movement of capital.

If efforts to control the Fed threatened these key attributes, the dollar would likely weaken, stock markets would decline and risk premia on US fixed income assets would increase, impairing the country’s economic health.”

For now, Powell and the FOMC are doing their best to make marginal adjustments to interest rates and financial conditions to keep the economy in its soft-landing, slowing-on-the-runway groove.

The biggest threats to monetary and economic stability right now have nothing to do with what they decide at their next meeting. If inflation hawks are serious about price stability and the long-term economic outlook, they should be much more worried about the return of Trumpism.

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TECHNOLOGY

A man tries the Meta Quest 3 mixed reality VR headset during the Vivatech technology startups and innovation fair, at the Porte de Versailles exhibition centre in Paris. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

US musician Nile Rodgers reacts on stage during the Polar Music Prize awards at the Grand hotel in Stockholm, Sweden. — AFP



CELEBRATION

An Afro-Brazilian religious believer attends the last day of the Bembe do Mercado festival on Itapema beach, Santo Amaro, Bahia, Brazil. — AFP



MUSIC

K-pop girl group New Jeans perform during "2024 Korea On Stage — New Generation," held at the Gyeongbok Palace in Seoul. — AFP



FOOD

A Sudanese assistant chief grills meat at a restaurant run by a businesswoman who relocated to the Egyptian capital Cairo after fleeing the ongoing war in Sudan. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | MAY 26, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 18 , 1445 AH  OMAN OBSERVER       www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

'DREAM TEAM EXPLORERS' REVIVES OMANI-TANZANIAN HERITAGE THROUGH ADVENTURE

The 'Dream Team Explorers' embarked on an 18-day expedition in southern Tanzania, celebrating Omani-Tanzanian heritage. Through breathtaking landscapes, cultural exchanges, and deep community engagements, they revive ancestral adventurous spirit, promoting tolerance and understanding... **P20**



MUSIC

Frida Kahlo museum denies lending painter's clothes to Madonna

A MEXICO CITY MUSEUM dedicated to the painter Frida Kahlo has denied lending her clothing and jewellery to pop superstar Madonna during a visit by the American singer to the Mexican capital.

The controversy erupted after the 65-year-old, who gave several concerts in Mexico in late April, posted a picture of herself wearing a shawl and embroidered dress during a visit to what she said was Kahlo's "family home."

"A beautiful souvenir — visiting the family home of my eternal muse," she said in a post on Instagram.

"For me it was magical to try on her clothes and jewellery, to read her journals and letters and to look at photos I'd never seen before," Madonna added.

The image provoked a mixture of reactions, with some defending the singer.

"They say that we Mexicans are born wherever we want. Madonna was born in Michigan but she is very Mexican," said one comment.

Others said ordinary people would never be given the opportunity she was.



"I'm Mexican, and I can almost assure you they would NEVER let a Mexican do that," another said.

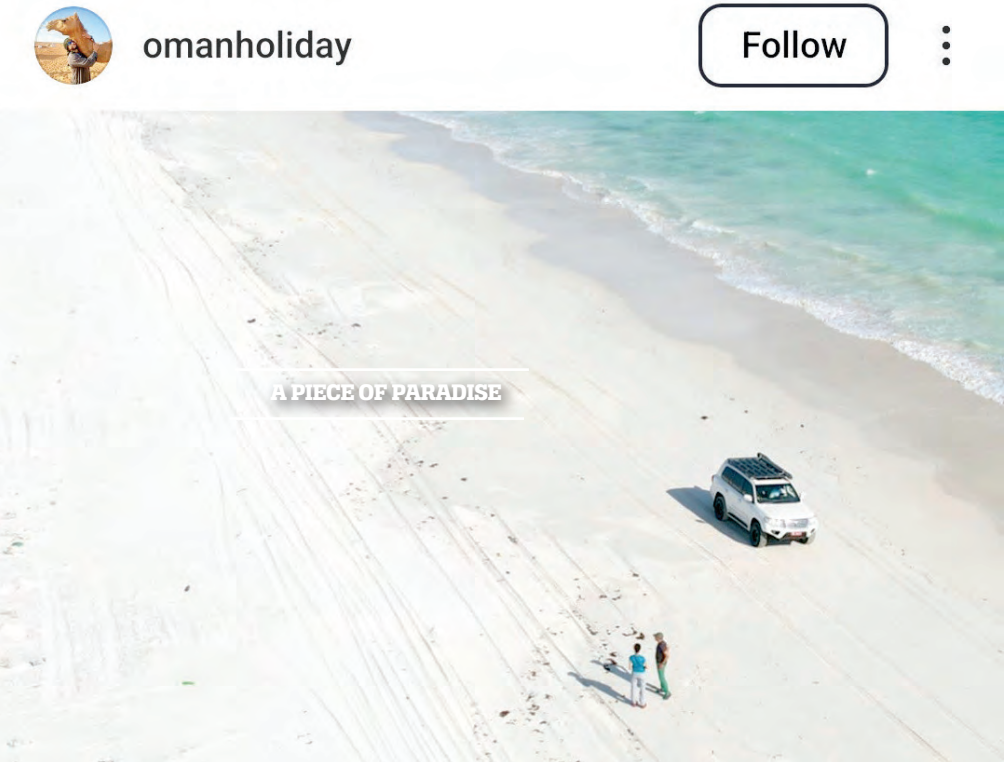
But the Frida Kahlo Museum, also known as the Casa Azul, said that the singer was unable to personally visit its collection in the house where the surrealist painter — who died in 1954 at the age of 47 — lived for 36 years.

"We want to clarify that the clothes, photos and objects that Madonna published on her different social media sites do not belong to the Casa Azul collection," it said.

The clothing and jewellery in its collection were "subject to strict conservation measures" and "not loaned for personal use," added the museum.

According to the newspaper *Reforma*, the photo posted by Madonna was taken during a private visit to a home of Kahlo's relatives, including the painter's great-grandniece. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

CUBANS PUT ASIAN SILKWORMS TO WORK FOR ARTISANS IN EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT

CUBAN BIOCHEMIST Dayron Martin, dressed in a white lab coat and jeans, looks over a table swarming with silkworms with the admiration of a proud father. Hundreds of the cream-coloured caterpillars squiggle across a bed of dark green mulberry leaves – the worm's preferred food – freshly plucked from bushes just outside his laboratory. This is the payoff, he says: The worms -native to Asia but happily transplanted to Cuba – are spinning a fine, lustrous white fibre that he hopes will be used by Cuban artisans to create products ranging from dresses, blouses, shirts and even cosmetics. Martin, who heads the ArteSeda project at the "Indio Hatuey Experimental Station" in western Cuba, oversees the process start to finish, from rearing the caterpillars to producing their preferred food and then harvesting their silk. "It's an ancestral process more than 5,000 years old," Martin says of the traditional Chinese practice, though he notes that it has only recently been adopted in Cuba. "The worms need very specific conditions," he said. Cuba fits the bill. Balmy temperatures, airy trade winds and a year-round growing season assure a happy home and plenty of

feed for the worms, which have made the transition to their new home. Silkworms are the larva of a moth (*Bombyx mori*) native to Asia. They spin a cocoon of silk fibre that has long been used as the source of commercial silk. The Cuban project, which began with funding from the European Union, the Cuban government and more recently from the French government, aims to teach artisans the process and allow them to raise their own worms from scratch. Artisans then use their silk to create home-grown products to sell to tourists and locals alike, said Dalgi Chaviano, who owns a small shop in Havana that produces cosmetics, crafts, soaps, fabrics and prints. Chaviano said she recently received authorisation from the local government to raise mulberry plants and silk worms in Havana, allowing her to produce her own raw material. "Every day I discover something new to do with the silk," Chaviano said as she put the finishing touches on a pair of red silk earrings. — Reuters



TRAVEL

Sick of tourists, Japan town blocks view of Mt Fuji

A JAPANESE TOWN MOUNTED a large mesh barrier at a popular viewing spot for Mount Fuji on Tuesday, in an attempt to deter photo-taking by an ever-growing number of tourists. Japan's most famous sight can be seen for miles around, but Fujikawaguchiko locals are fed up with streams of mostly foreign visitors littering, trespassing and

breaking traffic rules in their hunt for a photo to share on social media. Parking illegally and ignoring a smoking ban, they would cram a pavement to shoot the snow-capped mountain, which soars photogenically into the sky from behind a convenience store, residents said. Workers began putting the black netting measuring 2.5 by 20 metres (eight by 65 feet) in place on Tuesday, and by late morning they were already done, an AFP reporter at the scene said. "I hope that the net will prevent dangerous activities," resident Michie Motomochi, 41, who runs a traditional Japanese sweet shop, said. "I think it's disappointing that they are putting it up. It's obviously an iconic shot," said Christina Roys, 36, a tourist from New Zealand. "But it's completely understandable. We were here last night, managing to get the last shot before they were putting up the wall, and there were so many people," she said. "It's quite dangerous because of the traffic coming through. There are other spots where you can get the shot of the mountain."

ONLINE BOOKINGS



Record numbers of overseas tourists are coming to Japan, where monthly visitors exceeded three million for the first time in March and then again in April. But as in other tourist hotspots, such as Venice – which recently launched a trial of entry fees for day visitors – the influx has

not been universally welcomed. In Japan's ancient capital of Kyoto, locals have complained of tourists harassing the city's famed geisha. And hikers using the most popular route to climb Mount Fuji this summer will be charged 2,000 yen (\$13) each, with

entries capped at 4,000 to ease congestion. A new online booking system for the mountain's Yoshida trail opened on Monday to guarantee hikers entry through a new gate, although 1,000 places a day will be kept for day-of entries. Mount Fuji is covered in snow most of the year, but during the July-September hiking season, more than 220,000 visitors trudge up its steep, rocky slopes. Many climb through the night to see the sunrise, and some attempt to reach the 3,776-metre (12,388-foot) summit without breaks, becoming sick or injured as a result. Regional officials have raised safety and environmental concerns linked to overcrowding on the active volcano, a symbol of Japan and a once-peaceful pilgrimage site. Residents near other popular photo spots in the region, including the so-called Fuji Dream Bridge, have also reportedly complained about overtourism in recent weeks. One tour operator that offers day trips from Tokyo to the Mount Fuji area said they are taking visitors to another Lawson store nearby where a similar view can be seen, but there are fewer nearby residents. — AFP



‘DREAM TEAM EXPLORERS’ REVIVES OMANI- TANZANIAN HERITAGE THROUGH ADVENTURE

BY MAI AL ABRI

The Dream Team Explorers concluded an exhilarating 18-day expedition through southern Tanzania, marking the second phase of their remarkable journey that highlights the touristic beauty of Tanzania. This group of young Omani adventurers set out on a mission to strengthen human bonds and revive the adventurous spirit that distinguished their ancestors. Their travels embodied Oman's deep commitment to tolerance, peace, and coexist-

ing cultural exchange and understanding. Our primary objectives were to explore Tanzania's breathtaking natural landscapes, engage deeply with local communities to promote cross-cultural bonds and revive the adventurous spirit of our Omani ancestors, all while experiencing the thrill of a game drive in Ruaha National Park. "This trip taught participants the true meaning of simplicity. Through challenging experiences and meaningful interactions, we gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity and environmental conservation.

riences in building bridges of understanding between diverse cultures. The genuine friendships forged during this unforgettable journey have connected Oman and East Africa in profound ways. "This expedition through Tanzania has ignited my interest in exploring other areas rich in natural and cultural diversity. It has profoundly influenced my future travel plans, motivating me to seek unique and enriching destinations. I aim to enjoy nature's beauty, connect with people globally, share experiences, and build strong relationships. By embracing inspiring challenges and prioritising



ence among nations, while simultaneously showcasing the splendour of both Tanzania and Oman. Throughout their journey, the team revelled in Tanzania's stunning natural beauty. They immersed themselves in lush highlands, navigated winding rivers, threaded serene lake shores, witnessed cascading waterfalls, and interacted with unique wildlife in both national parks and private reserves. However, their expedition extended beyond appreciating nature to include meaningful engagements with local communities and vibrant cultural exchanges. The team confirmed that "the second phase of the Dream Team Explorers' adventure in southern Tanzania was a vibrant journey designed to showcase the region's touristic splendour while foster-

Personal growth was evident as participants embraced their roles as ambassadors of tolerance and understanding. The aim was for each participant to carry forward lessons of empathy, respect, and a renewed sense of global citizenship, inspired by their journey with the Dream Team Explorers, they added. The explorers formed lasting friendships with the warm and welcoming Tanzanian people, as well as their Omani and Yemeni counterparts settled in the region. These encounters were enriched by the sharing of stories and the enjoyment of traditional Arab and African cuisines. Every interaction, natural scene, and moment of cultural and historical significance reinforced the importance of human communication and shared exper-

activities that promote individual and collective well-being, each journey will enhance my happiness and positively impact those I meet", says Abdullah al Rubaei, a participant in the journey. He added that "this adventure revived the stories we've heard from our relatives about our ancestors' voyages to Africa, where they established strong relationships with the local Tanzanian communities. This historical connection was palpable throughout our journey, reinforcing the brotherly bond between our peoples". This extraordinary expedition stands as a testament to the power of adventure in fostering international understanding and peace, showcasing how shared experiences can transcend boundaries and create lasting bonds.

