

HM greets Djibouti President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Ismail. His Majesty also wished the people of Djibouti further progress and prosperity. – ONA

SUNRISE - 05:23 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 03:55 AM

DHUHR - 12:15 PM

ASR - 03:33 PM

MAGHRIB - 07:02 PM

ISHA - 08:25 PM



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ENGLAND FANS UPSET AFTER GOALESS DRAW WITH SLOVENIA



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RO 30 MILLION AQUACULTURE VENTURE IN AL SEEB SET TO BOOST LOCAL FISH PRODUCTION



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ALGERIAN WOMEN PIONEER ECO-FRIENDLY FARMING



HIS MAJESTY ISSUES TWO ROYAL DECREES

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued two Royal decrees reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 29/2024 ratifies the agreement on regular air services between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, signed in Cairo on April 23, 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the abovementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal decree No 30/2024 ratifies the agreement on air transport between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Indonesia, signed in Muscat on June 15, 2022.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article (2) says that this Royal decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

— ONA

SAYYID ASAAD RECEIVES UZBEKISTAN'S FM



Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Wednesday Baxtiyor Saidov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral cooperation and means of enhancing them in various fields to serve joint interests. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; the Secretary-General and the adviser in the office of HH Sayyid Asaad. It was also attended by Abdusalam Khatamov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Sultanate of Oman, and the delegation accompanying the guest. – ONA

HM MEDAL FOR JORDAN OFFICIAL



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Oman Military Order (2nd Class) on Maj Gen Yousef al Huneiti, Chairman of the Jordanian Joint Chiefs of Staff, in appreciation for his efforts in consolidating military cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Jordan. The medal was handed over to Maj Gen Al Huneiti on Wednesday by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence. – ONA

7,250 JOBS FOR CITIZENS

AFRAH AL BALUSHI @afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Labour has managed to offer 7,250 jobs under the 'One Million Working Hours' initiative, the 'Sahim' initiative, and vocational training programme. This was revealed in the Majlis Ash-shura session, which discussed Omanisation and temporary jobs, on Wednesday. The session also referred to the draft public health law, financial law to the State Council.

Members said all Omani workers hired by government agencies through these schemes should be made permanent provided it is supported by financial resources.

The Omanisation rate in the government sector touched 82.2 per cent in 2022 compared to 89.4 per cent in 2021.

For every Omani, 3.6 expatriates were employed in the public sector in 2023. In the private sector, it reached 22.3 per cent in 2022 compared to 21.5 per cent in 2023. There is a 15 per cent decrease in Omanisation in the private sector in 2023 compared to 2021.

Oman has more than 100,000 active job-seekers in January 2024, of whom 42 per cent are men and 58 per cent are women.

In 2022, the number of Omanis working in the private sector reached 382,926 in 2022 compared to 397,847 in 2023, as an increase of 4 per cent. The number of expatriates in the private sector in 2022 reached about 1,353,616 compared to 1,448,342 in 2023, an increase of 7 per cent.

The projections for Oman until 2040 indicate high increase in the working age (15-59) population in 2024 making it imperative for the need to increase the size of the economy to create new jobs.

‘Recognise Palestinian state to end conflict’



A woman walks with a water container after filling up with others from a truck loaded with water cisterns in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. – AFP

30 DAYS FOR OLYMPICS



The countdown clock for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games indicates 30 days before the start of the opening ceremony, in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, on Wednesday. – AFP

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman affirmed that ending the conflict in the Middle East region can only be achieved by recognising the Palestinian state and granting it full membership of the United Nations.

Oman reiterated that this condition has become a strategic necessity for the next stage of regional relations and a global demand supported by the international community. This was unveiled in Oman's speech before the UN General Assembly, which discussed the "Security Council Report" submitted to the General Assembly on Wednesday.

Oman's speech was delivered by Mohammed bin Ali al

Shehhi, member of Oman's permanent delegation to the UN. During the conference, Oman expressed regret over the failure of the Security Council to pass a resolution granting the State of Palestine its legitimate right to membership in the UN. Oman observed that this failure undoubtedly contradicts global consensus to grant the Palestinian people their right to self-determination. It added that inaction in this respect also hinders efforts to establish justice and peace in all parts of the world.

Oman urged all members of the Security Council to accord full attention to the Palestinian cause and to apply

fair standards towards all peoples without exception. Oman called for "applying the standards of fairness and respect to international law and UN resolutions in a manner that ensures the establishment and sustainability of the rules of security, stability and peace in the region and in the entire world".

Oman joined hands with other countries calling for a review of the working mechanism of the Security Council, especially with regard to the use of the veto, so that the use of the veto is done in responsible and legal ways that do not conflict with the noble goals of the UN. **TURN TO P2**



Gen Al Numani bids farewell to Ambassadors of Jordan, Cyprus

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office on Wednesday received Amjad Kuhewi, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his thanks for the support accorded to him by officials in Oman.

On his turn, Al Numani expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in enhancing bilateral relations, wishing him success in his future endeavours.

Moreover, Gen Sultan bin



Gen Al Numani with Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus

Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office also received Andreas Nicolaides, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his appreciation for the cooperation extended to him. He also lauded the strength of relations between Oman and Cyprus.

On his turn, Al Numani expressed his thanks to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in boosting bilateral relations, wishing him success.

— ONA



Gen Al Numani with Ambassador of Jordan



ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES JORDAN'S CHAIRMAN OF JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Maj Gen Yousef al Huneiti, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and cooperation. They also discussed regional matters of common concern. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Municipal Council debates Muttrah waterfront development project



The Council approved the minutes of the previous meeting and reviewed recommendations it had received. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Municipal Council of Muscat Governorate held its sixth meeting for this year on Wednesday.

The council approved the minutes of the previous meeting and reviewed recommendations it had received regarding the statement of Omran Group which is undertaking the redevelopment of the waterfront of Port Sultan Qaboos in the Wilayat of Muttrah.

The Muscat Municipal Council meeting presided over by Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat and Chairman of the Municipal Council, reviewed recommendations provided by the Social Affairs Committee regarding the begging phenomenon which has recently taken new forms and methods most notably selling for the purpose of begging. The council suggested a set of solutions and procedures to address this negative phenomenon in cooperation with the relevant authorities.

The council reviewed the outcomes of the recommendations of the Health and Environmental Affairs Committee for the inspection and control of restaurants at private hospitals and schools to improve the nutrition system in line with the health standards. It also reviewed ways to facilitate control and inspection processes of food outlets and food suppliers to ensure their abidance by the safety and quality of food.

— ONA

Oman, Uzbekistan sign visa waiver agreement

MUSCAT: A session of political talks was held on Wednesday between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Uzbekistan. The session highlighted the historic relations and the mutual keenness to continue enhancing bilateral cooperation in diplomatic, economic, cultural and scientific fields.

During the session, the Omani side was headed by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, while the Uzbek side was headed by Baxtiyor Saidov, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The two ministers exchanged views on development in the Arab-Israeli conflict, notably in relation to the Palestinian cause and the aggressive war waged by the Israeli occupation government. They also discussed several other regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The two sides signed an agreement for the visa waiver for holders of diplomatic, private and service passports from the two countries.

The session was attended by Shaikh Humaid bin Ali al Maani, Head of the Global Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry, Abdusalam Khatamov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Sultanate of Oman and several officials from both sides.

— ONA



The two sides signed an agreement for the visa waiver for holders of diplomatic, private and service passports from the two countries. — ONA

Recognise Palestinian state to end conflict: Oman

FROM P1

Such a move, envisaged within the context of defence of international law and international humanitarian law, would help preserve the legitimacy and credibility of this important international body (the UN), Oman said.

Oman welcomed the



Mohammed bin Ali al Shehhi

resolution issued by the Security Council to support a deal to reach a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. It called on all parties to immediately take concrete steps towards the implementation of the resolution. It extended its plea to the international community, urging it to compel the occupation state

of Israel not to evade its responsibilities and to honour international demands to stop its brutal aggression against the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. Oman also called for applying the two-state solution and establishing the independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

— AFP

MoSD marks ‘special day for special children’

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

The Ministry of Social Development on Wednesday organised a recreational sports day for children with Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth under the patronage of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

The event was supported by special education schools affiliated with the Ministry of Education, the Oman Paralympic Committee, the Oman Deaf Committee, Al Wafa Centers for Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities, cultural, artistic and youth centres and associations and various associations including



The recreational day included games, sports, cultural and social activities

Special Olympics Oman and Children with Disabilities.

The recreational day, which

was held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, aimed to achieve cohesion

between children, their families and the community, strengthen social relations, spread awareness

of the importance of practicing activities in daily life and establish social values for practicing



The recreational day included games, sports, cultural and social activities such as bocce, bubble show, giant chess, giant puzzle, volleyball, basketball, football, swimming, table tennis and paddle tennis, and martial arts.

There was also an exhibition for the participating bodies, where the minister and the attendees toured this exhibition, which includes in its corners the services and programmes provided for the categories of Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder, as well as various industries such as candles, resin, soap, plaster, and water colouring.

The day concluded with poetry, musical performance and the honouring of the contestants who participated in the activities.



Book fair celebrates Golden Jubilee of Oman-Korea ties

MAI AL ABRI
SEOUL, JUNE 26

The Seoul International Book Fair 2024 commenced on Wednesday with Oman as a special guest, marking fifty years of Omani-Korean diplomatic relations. Oman's presence at the fair showcases a variety of cultural elements from several government institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

This 66th edition of the fair, organised by the Korean Publishing Culture Association, runs from June 26 to June 30 at the COEX Convention and Exhibition Centre in southern Seoul, with Saudi Arabia as this year's guest of honour. The opening ceremony featured Yoon Chol-ho, President of the Korean Publishers Association; Sayyid



The pavilion enables visitors to learn about Omani customs and traditions. – ONA

Said bin Sultan al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture; Shaikh Zakaria bin Hamad al Saadi, Oman's Ambassador to South Korea; Jo Eero, Director of the Seoul International Book Fair; Jeon Jae-soo, Chairman of the Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee at the National Assembly; Cheon Byung-keuk, First

Vice-Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism; and other dignitaries.

In his speech at the ceremony, Al Saadi praised the successful organisation of the Seoul International Book Fair 2024 and commended its efforts in promoting reading and publishing. He emphasised the fair's crucial role in fostering cultural exchange

and deeper understanding between nations, noting that this year's participation is particularly significant as it marks the 50th anniversary of Omani-Korean diplomatic relations.

To commemorate this milestone, 'Oman: A Long History of Friendship and Cooperation with Korea' by Professor Lee Hee-soo

has been published in Korean and translated into Arabic. The book explores 50 years of diplomatic relations since 1974, along with ancient trade relations between the two countries dating back to the 7th century. 'Celestial Bodies' by Jokha al Harthy, winner of the Man Booker International Prize 2019, which was translated into Korean to make Omani literature more accessible to Korean readers, was unveiled.

The Omani pavilion aims to introduce the nation's intellectual production and cultural heritage through a diverse exhibition of rare Omani manuscripts, Arabic calligraphy, and other intellectual works, while also highlighting Omani hospitality traditions of coffee, dates and Omani sweets. It also showcases cultural elements listed in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage, such as the art of Al Bar'ah, the Omani Khanjar and

Omani coffee practices, using VR technology and visual presentations of Oman's cultural and tourist sites.

The first Omani cultural programme begins on Thursday with a panel discussion titled "The Novel: The Wonder of Omani Narration," featuring writers Bushra bint Khalfan al Wahaibiyah, Mohammed bin Khalfan al Yahyai and Zahran bin Hamdan al Qasmi, moderated by Huda bint Hamad al Jahwariyah. It also includes a paper presentation on translation by Dr Hilal bin Said al Hajri on June 28. Another panel discussion on June 29 will discuss Omani-Korean Relations: Fifty Years of Proximity and Joint Work. The final panel discussion on 'Women's Literature Depicting Daily Life in Korea and Oman' will feature novelist Jokha al Harthy and Korean writer Eun Hee-kyung, moderated by literary critic Hyo Hee.

Dhofar makes strides in social solidarity

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 26

The inaugural forum on Charitable and Volunteer Teams and Committees opened on Wednesday under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. The forum brought together a spectrum of stakeholders dedicated to strengthening the social fabric of the governorate.

Organised by the Social Development Committee in the Wilayat of Salalah, the forum served as a crucial platform for fostering collaboration and charting a path for the future of charitable and volunteer work. Themed "Charitable and Volunteer Work: Sustainable Development Goals," the event underscored the vital role these efforts play in achieving the objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Discussions at the forum delved into exploring the existing policies governing charitable and volunteer work within the framework of Oman Vision 2040. This focus highlighted the government's commitment to enhancing the societal impact of these endeavours. Key areas of



Dignitaries at the opening of the forum on Charitable and Volunteer Teams and Committees. – Picture by Hamid al Kathiri

interest included strengthening the organisational structure and development of the charitable sector, showcasing successful initiatives and establishing clear guidelines for governance.

The forum served as a catalyst for forging partnerships between charitable and volunteer teams across Dhofar's social development committees. Two interactive workshops, titled "The Impact of Charitable and Volunteer Work on Students' Lives" and "Strategies for Managing Charitable and Volunteer Work," provided valuable insights for participants. Additionally, three thought-provoking working papers were presented, focusing on leadership

skills development, knowledge and expertise enhancement, and fostering positive social relationships.

The forum attracted a wide range of attendees, including representatives from social development committees and charitable teams throughout Dhofar, students from universities and institutes in Salalah, registered volunteers affiliated with the Directorate-General of Development in Dhofar, and leaders of volunteer initiatives within the governorate. The presence of such a diverse audience enriched discussions and facilitated the exchange of ideas.

The forum benefitted from the expertise of prominent figures. Dr Hussein bin Ahmed al Dhaib, Professor at the University of Dhofar, presented the first working paper, titled "Policies of Volunteer Work in the Sultanate, and Enhancing the Impact of Charitable and Volunteer Work on Society". Lawyer Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed al Rawas explored the topic of "Governing the Charitable and Volunteer Work Sector in Line with Oman Vision 2040" in his second working paper. Dr Abdul Rab bin Salem al Yafai, Chairman of Bahja Orphan Society, rounded out the presentations with his paper on "Organising and Developing the Charitable and Volunteer Work Sector". The forum concluded with a set of comprehensive recommendations outlining a roadmap for the future of charitable and volunteer work in Dhofar. These recommendations included establishing a regulatory body for charitable and volunteer teams, conducting research on the positive impact of volunteerism, organising regular meetings for collaboration, and launching a dedicated publication to showcase success stories.

SQU Council approves bachelor's degree in AI

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Council on Wednesday held its 4th meeting for the academic year 2023/2024. The meeting was chaired by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Chairperson of the Council.

The council reviewed developments related to the work process in SQU and the executive position regarding different previous decisions and recommendations.

Moreover, the council

approved several matters, including the offering of a bachelor's degree in Artificial Intelligence (AI) at the College of Science, among other decisions.

Further, the council agreed to restructure the bachelor's degree in translation which is offered at the College of Arts and Social Sciences.

The meeting was also attended by HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU and Deputy Chairman of the Council. — ONA



The council reviewed developments related to the work in SQU. – ONA

'Our commitment to get rid of drug abuse is continuing'

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 26

Hosted by the Social Affairs Committee of the Municipal Council in collaboration with the Royal Oman Police, Al Batinah North Governorate celebrated the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, presided over the event alongside Colonel Said bin Mohammed al Jabri, Assistant Commander of Al Batinah North Police Command, and attended by various prestigious guests from different community entities.

Major Nasser bin Ali al Jadidi, Assistant Director of Drug Control and Psychotropic Substances, underscored the crucial importance of this day in reinforcing global and local anti-drug efforts. He emphasised Oman's comprehensive strategy



An exhibition which included informative corners on the societal and health impacts of drugs was held in Al Batinah North Governorate

which balances law enforcement standards with strong preventive measures.

"Our commitment to get rid of drug abuse is continuing and will never stop, including both strategic

operations against traffickers and extensive community awareness programmes," he stated.

Thuraya al Amri, Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee, highlighted the critical role of



community partnerships in tackling drug abuse and fostering sustainable health development.

Dr Ammar bin Said al Ma'nai delivered an insightful lecture too on Islam's stance against drug

abuse, emphasising moral and religious aspects and principles for achieving a drug-free society.

As part of the event, an exhibition which included informative corners on the

Our commitment to get rid of drug abuse is continuing and will never stop, including both strategic operations against traffickers and extensive community awareness programmes

MAJOR NASSER BIN ALI AL JADIDI

Assistant Director of Drug Control

societal and health impacts of drugs was held. It featured strategies, tools and ideas related to the event and the collective comprehensive efforts from different entities.



WORLD DRUG DAY

‘THE EVIDENCE IS CLEAR: INVEST IN PREVENTION’



AFRAH AL BALUSHI, @afrahbalushia

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN joined the international community in celebrating World Drug Day which falls on July 26. This year’s celebration comes under the slogan ‘The evidence is clear: Invest in prevention’, with the aim of highlighting the need for an evidence-based approach to addressing the global drug problem.

The drug problem affects millions, from individuals with substance use disorders to communities affected by drug trafficking and organised crime.

This year’s World Drug Day campaign emphasises the importance of prevention strategies based on scientific evidence that respect human rights and promote health and well-being.

Colonel Said bin Salem al Maawali, Assistant Director-General of Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, said: “This year’s celebration focuses on the prevention process to address this problem according to a methodology based on scientific and practical evidence and full respect for human rights, which gives priority for prevention, treatment and a deep understanding of the social, economic and health impacts of drug and psychotropic substance abuse.”

The Sultanate of Oman is not one of the producing or consuming countries, but it is considered a crossing point for some countries due to its geographical location, as it is considered a crossing point for some producing countries. Oman’s efforts are focused on increasing awareness within Omani society about the dangers of drugs and other psychotropic substances.

In the latest statistics by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the Sultanate of Oman recorded about 2,994 drug crimes in 2022, of which 2,115 crimes were committed by Omanis, and 879 by expatriates. Lawyers also confirm that the most common type of drug is morphine, and abuse usually begins in the early twenties.

Consecutive studies in both the United States of America and Britain indicate a high death rate among young addicts. If death does not occur, the addict is exposed to permanent brain damage.

According to the Royal Oman Police, the legally prescribed penalties for crimes of drugs and psychotropic substances differ between the smuggler, the dealer and the abuser, in which the smuggler is the one who receives the basic drugs from the countries they are smuggled from, and is punished according to the quantity. Sometimes the penalty reaches 25 years and sometimes it reaches life imprisonment.

While the dealer is the one who sells drugs to the user and punished by three to five years jail term, the abuser is the one who uses the dose of drugs in his body and punished from six months to a year.

The General Administration for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, in cooperation with various formations of the Royal Oman Police, and other concerned authorities, is making great efforts to combat anyone who dares to smuggle and traffic in narcotic substances.

2,994 THE SULTANATE OF OMAN RECORDED DRUG CRIMES



OPERATIONS AT KHAZAEN ECONOMIC CITY TO BEGIN FROM JUNE 29

Friday last day of trading at Al Mawaleh Market

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman's key landmark and largest Central Fruits and Vegetables Market in Al Mawaleh will relegate itself to history as the entire operation will be shifted to Khazaen Economic City from June 29.

In its circular issued in May this year, Muscat Municipality stated that all wholesale trading activities in the Central Fruits and Vegetables Market in Al Mawaleh will be permanently closed.

As per the timeline, between May 5 and June 9, the units for restaurants, cafes, sorting warehouses, dry stores, commercial shops, wholesale market cold stores, central cold storage, onion sheds, potato sheds and administrative offices will be handed over to the tenants.

Speaking to the Observer, an executive of Suhool al Fayha, one of the leading trading companies,



said that this Friday will be the last day for trading activity at Al Mawaleh Market, and already the authorities and businesses have started winding up activities at the current site.

Suhool al Fayha, which is one of the largest wholesale traders at Al Mawaleh, has started the process of shifting its operations fully to Khazaen by Saturday.

The circular added that the lessees of the cold stores (wholesale market building/central cold storage) will receive an additional reduction in rental value for the

first contract year, along with an extended exemption period from rent, provided the contract is signed before May 20.

While many traders and their staff of various nationalities have been operating in harmony since 1997, time has come to move to the new location to meet the growing footfall of customers and changing requirements such as more cold storage and air-conditioned halls for retailers and customers from various parts of the country.

Hamed bin Saeed al Hajri,

manager of the Central Market, earlier told the Observer, "The current market has been growing every year with more facilities, and we have products from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Egypt, and not to forget the growing presence of Omani agricultural produce. Shifting to Khazaen Economic City will help it expand with better facilities."

Abdul Vahid, managing director, Suhool al Fayha, one of the leading wholesalers at the market, said,"The market opened in 1987 but closed soon



after to reopen in 1997 and was operational full-fledged by 2000. Initially, 90 per cent of the products were imported via neighbouring countries, but 90 per cent of our products are directly imported from different countries, with around 400 export-importers operating at the market."

According to sources, the new market will have facilities such as cold and dry stores, main wholesale halls, truck sales areas, shaded areas for sorting and sale of onions and potatoes, agricultural inspection areas, office spaces

for operating companies, forklift servicing, electrical charging stations, vegetable and fruit sorting yards, several gates for customs inspection for vegetables and fruit, and a laboratory for testing agricultural samples under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Some of the regular customers in the market welcomed the move to shift to a new location with better amenities, but they were concerned about its distance from the capital city.



The agreement stems from the ministry's endeavours to consolidate partnership with the private sector. – ONA

Lease agreement signed to establish agricultural centre for robotics

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed an agreement to lease a unit for establishing a research centre to develop robotics and drones for agricultural, fishery and water uses.

The agreement stems from the ministry's endeavours to consolidate

partnership with the private sector and enable small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to carry out tasks in the agricultural sector through the use of smart technologies.

The ministry also seeks to introduce, evaluate, transfer and utilise modern technologies in the agricultural sector. — ONA

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
SUR, JUNE 26

Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Sur, presided over the opening of the project to develop shelter systems for animal populations in the Wilayat of Sur, with the support and funding from the Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Company.

The project aims to create job opportunities for young people, improve the standards of living for social security and limited income categories, and enhance the added value of animal products, in addition to its role in organising and developing shelter systems for livestock.

This is in addition to contributing to strengthen food security.

Eng Khaled bin Hamdan al Hadhrami, project manager, said, "The project is considered one of the vital and important projects in terms of contribution to enhancing food security and raising the value-added rate. It also contributes to absorbing job opportunities for members of the community."

Al Hadhrami confirmed that the project is a model for other

upcoming projects that are currently being prepared, all of which aim to develop the livestock



sector in the governorate.

"The Oman LNG Company shows interest and support for

various aspects of the country's natural resources, including livestock. It also contributes to continuous efforts in the environment, as its development programmes have touched on various development sectors to protecting the environment and sustainability of its resources and natural wealth," he said.

The cost of the project amounted to about RO 300,000 and the number of beneficiaries reached 78 livestock breeders. Among the most important services accompanying the project are providing each barn with lighting by the solar energy system.

Jordan's Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff visits MSC

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Yusef al Huneiti, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and his accompanying delegation visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

During the visit, the guests were accompanied by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).

Upon their arrival at the centre, the Jordanian guests were greeted by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and Chairman of the Maritime Security Committee. They were also greeted by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Head of the MSC. The guest and his accompanying delegation were briefed about the MSC's role in maintaining maritime security.

Moreover, Jordan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his accompanying delegation were received by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief



of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa.

Upon the guest's arrival at the COSAF, he was accorded an official welcoming ceremony.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Hamid bin Abdullah al Balushi, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, and the military attaché of Jordan's embassy in Muscat. — ONA



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health - Directorate General of Health Service AL Dhahira Governorate of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission / Closing Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
2498/2024	CONSTRUCTION OF COVERED CAR PARKINGS IN JSA AREA IN CLUSTER WITH COVERED CAR PARKINGS IN DSA AREA	Thursday 11/JUL/2024	Before 9 am on Thursday 01/AUG/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in fourth grade.	• SME:10 R.O • LO :25 R.O

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The DGHS is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.



HIGH RISK OF FAMINE PERSISTS ACROSS GAZA

CAIRO: Gaza remains at high risk of famine as war between Israel and Palestinian groups continues and access to aid is restricted, though delivery of supplies had limited the projected spread of extreme hunger in northern areas, a global monitor said.

More than 495,000 people across the Gaza Strip are facing the most severe, or “catastrophic”, level of food insecurity, according to an update from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). That is down from a forecast of 1.1 million in the previous update three months ago, but is still more than one fifth of Gaza’s population.

Under “catastrophic” food insecurity, households suffer an extreme lack of food, leading to acute malnutrition in young children, an imminent risk of starvation and death.

The IPC assessment published on Tuesday said that to buy food, more than half of Gazan households surveyed had to sell clothes and one third gathered and sold rubbish. Over 20 per cent reported going entire days and nights without eating. Overall, about 96 per cent of the population faced high levels of acute food insecurity in the period until September.

The UN-backed monitor said deliveries of food and nutrition services in March and April seemed to have reduced the severity of hunger in northern Gaza, where the IPC had previously forecast a likelihood of famine.



Palestinian children gather to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, amid food scarcity, in Khan Younis. — Reuters

However, Israel’s offensive around the southern city of Rafah from early May and other hostilities and displacement have led to a renewed deterioration in recent weeks, it added.

“The humanitarian space in the Gaza Strip continues to shrink and the ability to safely deliver assistance to populations is dwindling. The recent trajectory is negative and highly unstable,” the update said.

The Famine Review Committee, a group of experts which reviews IPC findings, said in a report also released on Tuesday that there was “extreme human suffering” in Gaza and the risk of famine had not diminished.

“Eight months of extreme pressure on the lives of the population make them much more vulnerable to collapse into famine,” it said.

The Rafah offensive led to the shutting of the crossing on Gaza’s border with Egypt, which had been a main route for the delivery of food and other supplies, as well as an evacuation point for civilians who were critically ill or injured.

Displacement to areas with less water and fewer health services “increases the risk of disease outbreaks, which would have catastrophic effects on the nutritional and health status of large segments of the population”, it said. Southern Gaza “may soon reach a tipping point that rapidly leads to a descent into famine”, the Famine Review Committee said.

— Reuters

US warns Israel over Lebanon war



A Lebanese civil defence member inspects the site of an Israeli air strike on the southern village of Khiam near the Lebanese border with Israel. — AFP

GAZA: Fighting raged on Wednesday between Israeli troops and Palestinian groups in Gaza’s southern city of Rafah, witnesses said, as fears grow of a wider regional war drawing in Lebanese.

As the war in Gaza nears its 10th month, Israel’s top ally the United States warned it of the risk of a major conflict against Hezbollah group in Lebanon following an escalation in cross-border fire.

“Another war between Israel and Hezbollah could easily become a regional war, with terrible consequences for the Middle East,” US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told his visiting Israeli counterpart Yoav Gallant. “Diplomacy is by far the best way to prevent more escalation,” Austin said.

“Another war between Israel and Hezbollah could easily become a regional war, with terrible consequences for the Middle East

LLOYD AUSTIN

US Defense Secretary

Top Israeli officials including Netanyahu have suggested they are open to a diplomatic resolution of the border tensions, though Gallant said Israel should be ready for “every possible scenario”

In Beirut on Tuesday, German

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned that any “miscalculation” could trigger all-out war and urged “extreme restraint”.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday accused Western powers of backing Israel as it sets “its sights on Lebanon”, seeking “to spread the war to the region”.

On the ground in Rafah, on Gaza’s border with Egypt, witnesses reported clashes during the night and the Israeli military said its air force struck a rocket launch site.

Mohammad al Mughayyir, an official with the civil defence agency in Gaza, said that rescuers had recovered the bodies of “15 martyrs from various areas in Rafah city in the past few hours”.

The civil defence agency and

hospital medics said at least four people, including three children, were killed in a strike early on Wednesday targeting a house in Beit Lahia, in the north.

An air raid on Tuesday killed Fadi al Wadiya, an employee of medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF). MSF said on social media platform X that it was “outraged” by Wadiya’s killing in a strike in Gaza City. “The attack killed Fadi, along with five other people including three children while he was cycling to work near the MSF clinic where he was providing care,” the charity said.

UN and humanitarian agencies have repeatedly warned that aid workers are not safe in Gaza, impeding their desperately needed efforts delivering aid to Gaza’s 2.4 million people. — AFP

Summer heat brings new misery to Palestinians

KHAN YOUNIS: Sweltering summer weather is worsening conditions in Gaza where nearly all the 2.3 million inhabitants have been driven from their homes by Israel’s military campaign and where there is almost no electricity and little clean water.

Families living in tents, in crowded shelters in UN schools or crammed into private homes, face the rising summer temperatures without air conditioning, showers or a functioning health system amid rising rates of malnutrition and disease.

In a school classroom shared as a shelter among different families in Khan Younis in southern Gaza Strip, Amal Nsair, 38, is worried that the rising heat and humidity and the increase in mosquitoes and other insects will harm their health.

Her son cannot sleep and she has nothing to cool him except a fan made from cardboard. The family’s home was in Beit Hanoun, in northern Gaza Strip, which they fled earlier in the conflict.

“My son’s body is full of heat. In the past I would wash him but I need water. I’m very worried about my husband’s health too. He has lost half his weight from carrying water,” she said.

Temperatures in Gaza this week are forecast above 30 degrees Celsius and recent years have brought a series of lethal heatwaves across the Mediterranean as the summer advances.

Gaza’s electricity was largely provided from Israel, but this was cut off as soon as the war began along with fuel for the territory’s only power station. Diesel to supply private generators was largely exhausted soon afterwards.

Israel’s military campaign began the same day and has levelled swathes of the enclave, destroying most infrastructure, and killing more than 37,600 Palestinians according to health authorities in Gaza. “Insects and mosquitoes are biting us all night long. I don’t sleep so that I can apply cream on my child, any kind of ointment or cream so he does not get bitten by the mosquitoes. They are scratching all night,” said Nsair. — Reuters



A man pulls a cart loaded with water containers between tents sheltering displaced Palestinians in Rafah. — AFP



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In brief

■ BRUSSELS



NATO PICKS NETHERLANDS' MARK RUTTE AS NEXT BOSS

Nato on Wednesday selected Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte as Nato's next boss. Rutte's appointment became a formality after his only rival for the post, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, announced that he had quit the race, having failed to gain traction.

Rutte will take over on October 1 from Jens Stoltenberg of Norway, who is stepping down after a decade in the post. Ambassadors from the alliance's 32 members took the decision at a meeting at Nato headquarters in Brussels. After declaring his interest, Rutte gained support from members of the alliance including the US, Britain, France and Germany. — **Reuters**

■ WASHINGTON



US CALLS KENYANS TO RESPECT RIGHT TO 'PEACEFUL' PROTEST

The United States on Wednesday called on close partner Kenya to respect the right to peaceful protests after more than 20 people died during mass demonstrations against a tax proposal. "We continue to urge restraint so that no further Kenyans are put in harm's way while exercising their right to peaceful public assembly."

We believe it must be respected," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

Kirby said that while Kenya's constitution allows peaceful assembly, it also permits the use of defence forces to protect infrastructure, a step taken by the government. — **AFP**

■ SAO PAULO



BRAZIL'S LULA WANTS APOLOGY FROM ARGENTINA'S MILEI

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Wednesday he believes his Argentine counterpart Javier Milei owes him and Brazilians an apology. The Brazilian leader said that he has still not met Milei, who took office in December, because he wants an apology first.

Milei attacked Lula several times during the Argentine presidential campaign, dubbing him an "angry communist" and "corrupt." "I just want him to apologise," Lula said.

"Argentina is a country that I like very much. It is a very important country for Brazil and Brazil is very important for Argentina." — **Reuters**

Zelensky visits troops in frontline Donetsk region

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited troops in the eastern frontline Donetsk region with his top military leadership on Wednesday.

Zelensky recorded a video address against the backdrop of a city sign of Pokrovsk, along part of the front that has seen some of the most intense fighting during the 28-month-long full-scale attack.

Zelensky presented the new joint forces commander on Wednesday to troops defending the eastern frontline region of Donetsk.

He announced on Monday he was appointing Brigadier-General Andriy Hnatov to the post, which involves strategic planning of operations, replacing Lieutenant-General Yuri Sodol who had faced criticism over serious military setbacks.

Hnatov's main tasks include "preserving as many fighters' lives as possible" while repelling the Russian forces, Zelensky said in a video address posted on social media.

One of his meetings during the trip addressed security and support for the people of the Donetsk region, including water provision, social issues and evacuation, Zelensky said on the Telegram messaging app.

In the video, he expressed surprise that some relevant government officials had not visited the region in six months or more.

"There will be a separate conversation in Kyiv, particularly with officials who must be here and in other areas near the frontline - in difficult communities where people need immediate solutions," Zelensky said. "Solutions that simply cannot be seen from Kyiv."

Zelensky and his army chief Oleksandr Syrskyi also listened to reports from frontline positions. Ukraine's military has found



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky awards Ukrainian service members during his visit to a frontline, Donetsk region. — **Reuters**

There will be a separate conversation in Kyiv, particularly with officials who must be here and in other areas near the frontline - in difficult communities where people need immediate solutions

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

Ukrainian President

itself on the back foot this spring as Russian forces opened a new front in the northeastern region of Kharkiv in May and continued to press Ukrainian forces in other directions.

Russia and Ukraine each handed back 90 prisoners of war on Tuesday in the latest of several periodic swaps in their 28-month-old conflict, with the United Arab Emirates overseeing the exchange as an intermediary.

The last exchange took place on May 31, when each side handed over 75 prisoners of war, also with the UAE acting as a go-between. That was the first exchange in nearly four months.

Russia said prisoners brought home on Tuesday had faced mortal danger in captivity.

Ukraine said returnees had included soldiers who had defended the Azovstal steel mill in a three-month siege in 2022 and others taken prisoner when Russian forces briefly seized the defunct Chernobyl nuclear power station.

The UAE said its action as a go-between had been made possible by maintaining good contacts with both sides. — **Reuters**

Scholz confirms EU jobs deal with von der Leyen

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz confirmed on Wednesday that the European Parliament's three main centrist groups would back Ursula von der Leyen for a second term as Commission president, in a deal Italy's prime minister said ignored voters' wishes.

In a speech to the German parliament assessing the fallout from this month's European elections, Scholz said the groups had also agreed Portugal's ex-premier Antonio Costa should be chair of meetings of EU national leaders and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas should be the bloc's new foreign policy chief.

The three groups combined have a majority in the European Parliament (EP), Scholz noted, adding he hoped that EU leaders meeting would quickly sign off on the arrangement.

"We cannot afford to drag our feet in these difficult times," he said, adding that the EP vote had shown how multiple crises, from the coronavirus pandemic to Russia's attack of Ukraine and the war in the Middle East, had shattered trust in the European Union and national governments.

Populist parties, which performed strongly in the

elections, are exploiting citizens' concerns for their own ends, he said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni criticised the plan to share out the top EU jobs among the three main groups, saying they ignored the success of right-wing parties in the EP elections. "It does not seem to me that a willingness to take into account what the citizens have said at the ballot box has emerged so far," Meloni told lawmakers.

Earlier on Wednesday, the government agreed on a draft law to make it easier to deport people for praising or promoting "terrorist crimes".

Scholz long downplayed the strength of the AfD. But since it surged to second place in nationwide polls last year and sustained that position, he has started to address it publicly head-on. The AfD is on track to come first in three state elections in the formerly Communist-run eastern Germany in September.

At their summit on Thursday, EU leaders will discuss Europe's priorities for the coming years, Scholz said.

These included security, competitiveness and economic growth, and reforms to make the bloc more effective. — **Reuters**



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivers a government declaration in parliament in Berlin. — **Reuters**

Families flee as Sudan's RSF advances on Sennar city

CAIRO: Paramilitaries from Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have advanced on the southeastern trading hub of Sennar as they push to expand territorial gains more than 14 months into a war with the army, residents and officials said on Wednesday.

Families fled the city on the banks of the Blue Nile after hearing the sound of fighting on Tuesday evening, locals said.

"We can hear artillery and heavy gunfire. I left Sennar with my family and we're heading south because I'm scared for my children," 49-year-old Nazik Ahmed said.

UN agencies say around 10 million people have fled their homes across Sudan since the army and RSF fell out over a planned integration of their forces and started fighting in the capital Khartoum in April last year.

The RSF has since taken over most of Khartoum, the central farming state Gezira and the vast western Darfur region, as well as many parts of the Kordofan regions to the south. In Sennar, south of Gezira, many took refuge



People line up to register for a potential food aid delivery at a camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) in Agari, North Kordofan. — **AFP**

in surrounding villages, locals said. Fighting raged through the evening then appeared to die down overnight, they added.

The state's army-led security committee said the military and allied fighters had destroyed

seven RSF vehicles that had approached the city and fired rockets.

In a video posted online on Wednesday, RSF soldiers said they would take over the city soon, but called on residents to

stay.

The RSF has been making advances into the state for weeks, locals say. On Monday and Tuesday, it clashed with the army in the strategic Jebel Moya area, and said it now controlled the

UN agencies say around 10 million people have fled their homes across Sudan since the army and RSF fell out over a planned integration of their forces and started fighting

area in a video posted on X on Tuesday. It circulated another video on Tuesday showing vehicles, mostly motorcycles driving through an area on the northern edge of Sennar.

Residents say the RSF has looted homes and killed civilians arbitrarily in areas it has entered. The United States has also accused it of war crimes as well as crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The army, which has carried out a vast air strike campaign has also been accused of war crimes by the United States.

Aid agencies have warned the rain will impede crucial deliveries of food and other supplies, which have also been held up by bureaucratic blockages and risk of looting. — **Reuters**

Embracing the AI-energy-climate nexus



Sultan Al Jaber

The author is Sultan Al Jaber, the UAE’ Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology, iCOP28 President, CEO of ADNOC, and Chairman of Masdar

Six months ago, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28), the world transcended geopolitical divides – something few believed possible – and united behind a realistic plan, known as the UAE Consensus, to promote sustainable prosperity and address the threat of climate change. Nearly 200 governments and all sectors of the global economy coalesced around a practical, science-based pathway for achieving low-carbon economic growth while keeping 1.5° Celsius within reach.

The key to the agreement’s success was inclusivity: no one was excluded, no industry was sidelined, and no solution was off the table. As we move to implementation, the world must leave no stone unturned to accelerate progress. Specifically, that means embracing artificial intelligence, which promises to have a far-reaching, transformational impact on the energy transition and is projected to add \$7 trillion to global GDP over the next ten years.

It is difficult to overstate the potential of AI in the fight against climate change. This evolving technology can change the pace of progress by

redesigning industrial processes, optimising transport systems, maximising energy efficiency, and minimising emissions at scale. AI will also strengthen our adaptive resilience through innovations in agriculture, water security, and health.

But AI development will necessarily lead to a surge in energy demand. Resolving the contradiction between AI’s thirst for electricity and its potential to reduce emissions will require technology and energy firms to cooperate in new and creative ways.

The flipside to AI’s transformative potential is its insatiable energy consumption, which is putting additional stress on an already-stretched power system. Since 2019, emissions from the largest AI firms have increased by roughly 30 per cent. By 2030, demand for data-centre power worldwide is expected to grow by 160 per cent, owing to the technology’s vast processing needs, and these new operations could consume as much electricity as Canada, implying a doubling of carbon dioxide emissions. Bridging this gap will be difficult, as no single energy source is currently capable of meeting such a huge leap in demand.

BUSINESS POLICYMAKERS, INVESTORS, AND CIVIL-SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS WILL COME TOGETHER TO REIMAGINE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENERGY, AI, AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Major tech companies are starting to collaborate with energy companies to face this challenge head-on. In May, Microsoft and Brookfield closed a deal to develop 10.5 gigawatts of renewable capacity by 2030. Adopting a holistic approach is critical to addressing these problems and reaping AI’s potential benefits.

To that end, I am convening a “Change Makers Majlis” – a majlis being a traditional gathering that encourages the exchange of diverse perspectives – in Abu Dhabi in November to discuss AI and the energy transition. Business leaders from the energy and technology sectors, policymakers, investors, and civil-society organisations will come together to reimagine the relationship between energy, AI, and inclusive economic growth.

The UAE has an established track record as a responsible energy supplier. Given our commitment to sustainable development, and our emergence as an AI leader – with investment platforms like MGX, infrastructure developers like G42, and the region’s largest and fastest-growing large language model, Falcon – we are keen to bring all relevant stakeholders together on an issue of profound importance to all humanity.

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Rahul Gandhi faces new test in revived fortunes

SEAN GLEESON

Once dismissed as an “empty suit”, perennial Indian premier-in-waiting Rahul Gandhi emerged from his third consecutive election defeat with his reputation enhanced and his party back from the political wilderness.

But analysts are divided on whether the 54-year-old — a scion of a dynasty that has already given India three prime ministers — is ready for the next battle he faces.

Already the leader of the opposition to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in all but name, Gandhi now takes on the formal position in India’s parliament.

Gandhi’s ascension is significant because, for the previous decade, his once-mighty Congress party did not have enough seats in the legislature to qualify him for the post.

“It’s a huge thing what he has achieved in this election — he’s been able to get the masses to take him seriously,” Sugata Srinivasaraju, an author of a book on Gandhi, said.

“But is that sufficient to be a good leader of the opposition inside the parliament? That is a big question.”

With the BJP now reliant on coalition allies to govern, and Congress nearly doubling its seats in parliament, the dynamics of Gandhi’s role will necessarily change.

His new post entitles him to take a role in the composition of parliamentary committees and sit on selection panels for appointing some of India’s most powerful civil servants.

But Srinivasaraju said it remained to be seen if Gandhi could evolve from Modi’s chief gadfly outside parliament to an effective opponent within its walls. “He has not been a great speaker inside parliament. He has not been able to sway the crowds,” he said.

“From that perspective, we don’t know if Rahul is really ready.”

Leaked US embassy cables disparagingly referred to him as an “empty suit”, and Modi dismissed him as a dynast more interested in luxury and self-indulgence than fighting to helm the world’s biggest democracy.

For much of the past decade, many voters agreed with that sentiment.

His stewardship of Congress looked hapless against Modi’s seemingly unassailable rule.

The seeds of his turnaround were sown in 2022 when he embarked on a cross-country walking tour inspired by his unrelated namesake, independence hero Mahatma Gandhi, to hear the concerns of ordinary people. — AFP

Assange’s plea deal sets a precedent



Charlie Savage

The plea deal that Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, has reached with prosecutors is bad for American press freedoms.

But the outcome also could have been worse.

The deal, which was finalised on Wednesday in a courtroom in a remote US commonwealth in the Western Pacific, cleared the way for him to walk free after more than five years in British custody, most of which he spent fighting extradition to the US. In exchange, he pleaded guilty to one charge of violating the Espionage Act.

The result is an ambiguous end to a legal saga that has jeopardised the ability of journalists to report on military, intelligence or diplomatic information that officials deem secret. Enshrined in the First Amendment, the role of a free press in bringing to light information beyond what those in power approve for release is a foundational principle of American self-government.

The agreement means that for the first time in American history, gathering and publishing information the government considers secret has been successfully treated as a crime. This new precedent will send a threatening message to national security journalists, who may be chilled in how aggressively they do their jobs because they will see a greater risk of prosecution.

But its reach is also limited, dodging a bigger threat. Because Assange agreed to a deal, he will not challenge the legitimacy of applying the Espionage Act to his actions. The outcome, then, averts the risk that the case might lead to a definitive Supreme Court ruling blessing prosecutors’ narrow interpretation of First Amendment press freedoms.

The First Amendment implications of the case have often been clouded by fierce debate over whether Assange counts as a journalist — and by residual anger from Democrats over his publication of emails stolen from their party during the 2016 presidential election. Assange timed the release of those messages, obtained by Russian hackers, to hurt Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee, disrupting the party’s national convention and then steadily sharing batches in the final



Julian Assange waves after arriving at Canberra Airport in Canberra on Wednesday. — AFP

stretch of the campaign. But for the purposes of press freedom, what matters is not who counts as a journalist but whether journalistic-style activities — whether performed by a journalist or anyone else — can be treated as crimes.

THE AGREEMENT MEANS THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AMERICAN HISTORY, GATHERING AND PUBLISHING INFORMATION THE GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS SECRET HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY TREATED AS A CRIME.

Rather, the charges centred on the earlier publications that vaulted him to global notoriety and made him a hero to the anti-war left: a video of a US helicopter gunning down people in Baghdad, including a Reuters photographer; troves of military incident logs documenting the Afghanistan and Iraq wars; a quarter-million diplomatic cables from US embassies around the world; and dossiers about Guantánamo detainees.

The narrow criminal information to

which Assange pleaded guilty centres on one count of conspiring to violate the Espionage Act. The court document says that Chelsea Manning, an Army intelligence analyst, and Assange agreed that she would send him national security files, even though he had no security clearance, and that he would then “communicate them” to others who were also “not entitled to receive them” — that is, publish them.

Charging a government official who had a security clearance with leaking national security information for news publication was once exceedingly rare, but such prosecutions have become routine in the 21st century. The Justice Department began regularly charging leak cases midway through the Bush administration and continued that pattern under successive administrations.

While the case is not likely to give the Supreme Court an opportunity to curtail First Amendment press freedoms, the government has still made an example of Assange in a way that may well lead some national security journalists to leave some important stories unreported out of fear of facing similar prosecution.

— The New York Times

Information management

Sir Francis Bacon's *Meditationes Sacrae*, published in 1597, explains that acquiring and sharing knowledge is power. Considering that we live in a time of both peace and peril with no historical precedent, his work offers something to think about.

From his line of thought, it has been argued that secrecy provides people in government exclusive control over certain areas of information, increasing their dominance and making it harder for a free press to check that control.

Forwarding the clock centuries later, a day to observe the freedom of the press was declared to be observed annually on May 3. In 2024, the date has passed with a lower level of discussion defending the ideals of freedom of opinion, press freedom, and the right to know. A free press, if that is ever possible, can expose government and lobbying groups *faux pas*. Transparency and openness may be considered virtues, but they do not work in favour of those in power or lobbying groups.

The objective of journalism is not to entertain or amuse. It is to inform, reflect, state the risks and opportunities, and occasionally enrage public opinion.

No government should fear public scrutiny since from that scrutiny comes thoughtful consideration, and from that comes support or opposition. Both are necessary. Withholding information can backfire and miss the opportunity for debate and better understanding.

However, when journalists' licences are revoked, media offices are closed, arrests are carried out, and journalists are killed for their work, it feels like a thorn. The dangers of concealing information may outweigh the risks of justifying it. In a speech in April 1961, John F. Kennedy discussed Francis Bacon's remarks within the context of the seventeenth-century inventions of that time, the compass, gunpowder, and the printing press. Kennedy stated that "the compass has made us all citizens of the world, the hopes and threats of one becoming



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NO GOVERNMENT SHOULD FEAR PUBLIC SCRUTINY SINCE FROM THAT SCRUTINY COMES THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION, AND FROM THAT COMES SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION. BOTH ARE NECESSARY.

the hopes and threats of us all. The evolution of gunpowder has warned mankind of terrible consequences, so it is up to the printing press to be the keeper and courier of mankind's conscience."

On Liberty, the Right to Know, and Public Discourse: The Role of Transparency in Public Life Joseph E. Stiglitz wrote: "The (American) government spent significantly more on the Vietnam War than it admitted. One of the problems was that not only did we not know how much it was spending, but we did not even know who knew, and we did not know the extent of the culpability of President Johnson's economic advisers."

Information secrecy persisted during the 2003 Iraq invasion and is now being used in the Palestinian killing fields and elsewhere.

The same approach can be applied to oil price fluctuations. Without understanding the reasons for price oscillations or interest-driven crises and conflicts, people are treated like marionettes.

Students' rallies on campuses around the world in support of Palestine and against arms exports to Israel are theoretically an expression of their feelings and a manifestation of their incapacity to stop the carnage of innocent people.

While politicians and government officials travel up and down the globe with public money, taxpayers see their salaries shrink due to inflation.

The press is not allowed to address the issue, nor are citizens permitted to question it. Political and financial decisions are wrapped in secrecy.

There are segments on the global stage that benefit from political and social instability in the Middle East, if not in this region, then in other parts of the world. Journalists bear heavy responsibilities. There is a need for thoughtful consideration of shared responsibility. We should not equate the right to public information with an increased level of official secrecy. The press is not accountable for any country's administration, and there is only so much the press can do to keep the conscience of mankind awake.

CREATIVITY KNOWS NO HEIGHTS



A person looks at the biggest mural in Vienna on the wall of the Vienna International Centre (VIC) created by street artist Fintan Magee from Australia, in cooperation with the Calle Libre Street Art Festival and the UN family in Vienna, Austria, on Wednesday. – Reuters

How capitalism went off the rails

The Group of 7 countries might have set a record when they met in Italy last week. Has there ever been a less popular assemblage of leaders of the free world? Approval ratings ranged from Giorgia Meloni of Italy's about 40 per cent to Emmanuel Macron of France's 21 per cent to Fumio Kishida of Japan's 13 per cent.

Last year, the Edelman Trust Barometer found that only 20 per cent of people in the G7 countries thought that they and their families would be better off in five years. Another Edelman survey, from 2020, uncovered a broad distrust of capitalism in countries across the world, "driven by a growing sense of inequity and unfairness in the system." Why the broad dissatisfaction with an economic system that is supposed to offer unsurpassed prosperity? Ruchir Sharma, chair of Rockefeller International and a Financial Times columnist, has an answer that boils down to two words: easy money. In an eye-opening new book, "What Went Wrong With Capitalism," he makes a convincing case.

"When the price of borrowing money is zero," Sharma told me this week, "the price of everything else goes bonkers." To take just one example: In 2010, as the era of ultralow and even negative interest rates was getting started, the median sale price for a house in the United States hovered around \$220,000. By the



Bret Stephens

EASY MONEY SHOULD HAVE BROAD BENEFITS FOR REGULAR PEOPLE. IN PRACTICE, IT HAS DESTROYED MUCH OF WHAT USED TO MAKE CAPITALISM AN ENGINE OF MIDDLE-CLASS PROSPERITY IN FAVOUR OF THE OLD AND VERY RICH

start of this year, it was more than \$420,000.

Nowhere has inflation (in the broad sense of the term) been more evident than in global financial markets. In 1980, they were worth a total of \$12 trillion — equal to the size of the global economy at the time. After the pandemic, Sharma noted, those markets were worth \$390 trillion, or around four times the world's total gross domestic product.

In theory, easy money should have broad benefits for regular people, from employees with 401(k)s to consumers taking out cheap mortgages. In practice, it has destroyed much of what used to make capitalism an engine of middle-class prosperity in favour of the old and very rich.

First, there was inflation in real and financial assets, followed by inflation in consumer prices, followed by higher financing costs as interest rates have risen to fight inflation — which inevitably begets political pressure to return to easy-money policies.

For wealthier Americans who own assets or had locked in low-interest mortgages, this hasn't been a bad thing. But for Americans who rely heavily on credit, it's been devastating. "For families already strained by high prices, dwindling

savings and slowing wage growth, increased borrowing costs are pushing them closer to the financial edge," *The New York Times'* Ben Casselman and Jeanna Smialek reported in May.

Sharma noted more subtle damages. Since investors "can't make anything on government bonds when those yields are near zero," he said, "they take bigger risks, buying assets that promise higher returns, from fine art to high-yield debt of zombie firms, which earn too little to make even interest payments and survive by taking on new debt." A recent Associated Press analysis found 2,000 of those zombies (once thought to be mainly a Japanese

phenomenon) in the United States. Collectively, those companies have a total of \$1.1 trillion in loans to pay between now and September.

The hit to the overall economy comes in other forms, too: inefficient markets that no longer deploy money carefully to their most productive uses, large corporations swallowing smaller competitors and deploying lobbyists to bend government rules in their favour, and the collapse of prudential economic practices. "The most successful investment strategy of the 2010s," Sharma writes, citing podcaster Joshua Brown, "would have been to buy the most expensive tech stocks and then buy more as they rose in price

and valuation." But the worst hit is to capitalism itself: a pervasive and well-founded sense that the system is broken and rigged, particularly against the poor and the young. "A generation ago, it took the typical young family three years to save up to the down payment on a home," Sharma observes in the book. "By 2019, thanks to no return on savings, it was taking 19 years." The social consequence of this is rage; the political consequence is populism.

Sharma is no fan of Bidenomics, which, he told me, took "the 100-year expansion of government and put it in overdrive" with unprecedented stimulus packages and politically directed investments. But unlike other prominent Wall Street investors, he isn't signing up for the Donald Trump bandwagon, either. The former president loves easy money, tax cuts without spending cuts and record deficits.

"He promised to deconstruct the administrative state but ended up adding new rules at the same pace as his predecessor — 3,000 a year," Sharma said of Trump. "His exercise of presidential authority to personal ends shattered historic precedents and did more to expand than restrict the scope of government."

— The New York Times



A Wall Street sign is pictured outside the New York Stock Exchange, in New York City.

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OMAN NAME NEW FACES FOR SPAIN CAMP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Oman football coach Jaroslav Silhavy, announced the list of the 29 players for the camp in Spain from July 3 to 24. The list features new faces like Al Wahda's goalie Ibrahim al Rajhi, Sultan al Marzooq (Dhofar), Khalid al Ghatreefi (Ibri), Jawad al Azi (Al Seeb). Mohammed al Ghafri (Al Rustaq) and Nasser al Rawahi (Oman club) came back to the team. Al Rawahi replaced Hatim al Roushdi in the last gathering of the national team.

The camp is classified as an essential stage for the team's preparation for the upcoming Gulf Cup, which will be held in December in Kuwait, and the Asian qualifiers to the Fifa World Cup 2026. The draw of the third and last round matches of the qualifiers will take place on Thursday.

Oman came in fourth level for the draw alongside Bahrain and the UAE. While Asian heavyweights Japan, Iran and South Korea were grouped as the continent's highest-ranked side. Asian Champions Qatar, Australia and Iraq placed in level two. Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and Jordan in level three. China, Palestine and Kyrgyzstan in level five. While Kuwait clubbed with Indonesia and North Korea in group six level.

The exciting matches of the deciding qualifiers will start on September 5 with the second round on 10th from the same month. The third and fourth rounds will be held on October 10 and 15 respectively. There will be two matches on November 14 and 19 while the seventh and eighth

rounds of matches will be held on March 20 and 25, 2025. The ninth and tenth rounds will be played on June 5 and 10, 2025.

The qualified 18 teams will be divided into three groups with six teams each. The top two teams from each group will secure a direct spot at the 2026 Fifa World Cup while the teams that finish in third and fourth places will advance to the fourth round, which begins in October 2025 to complete a quota of eight and a half slots.

Oman ended the second round of the joint qualifiers in the top of group D by 13 points from four victories, one draw and loss against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek by 1-0. Coach Silhavy registered two crucial victories for Red Warriors since he took charge in February against Malaysia in Muscat and Kuala Lumpur beside a draw against Kyrgyzstan in Muscat at the joint preliminary qualification of the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 and Fifa World Cup 2026 during the last two months.

OMAN SQUAD: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Faye al Rushedi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Mohammed al Musallami, Khalid al Buraiki, Ghanim al Habshi, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmed al Kaabi, Amjad al Harthy, Abdulaziz al Shmoosi, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaie, Omar al Malki, Zaher al Aghbari, Arshad al Alawi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Abdulrahman al Mushefri, Musaab al Maamari, Mohsin al Ghassani, Essam al Subhi, Nasser al Rawahi, Mohammed al Ghafri, Sultan al Marzooq, Khalid al Ghatreefi, Jawad al Azi and Mohammed Humaid al Ghafri.



Oman eye second straight win against Yemen



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Oman will gun for its second straight win at 2024 West Asian Championship when it will face Yemen at King Fahd Sports City in Riyadh on Thursday. The match will start at 6:00 pm (Oman time).

The national team players commenced their journey in the championship with a crucial 2-1 win over Kuwait on Tuesday to claim their first points. In the same group Saudi Arabia and Yemen clash ended at 2-2 draw.

Oman's triumph in today's game will inch closer the team to the semis round and it is expected that coach Ahmed al Alawi's boys will put their all efforts in order to capture the victory and to put one leg in the next stage

of the tournament. Oman boys performed well especially in the second half after a tough opening half.

Muntaser Suleiman put Kuwait ahead as he scored the opening goal in the 33rd minute from penalty shootout. Ahead of the first half end, Muhannad al Saadi equalised for Oman in the 44th minute after he received a perfect pass inside the box to convert the ball into a goal to make it 1-1.

In the beginning of the second half at 47th minute, Ghassan al Masroui scored the second goal after a nice assist from Fahad al Mukhaini who sent the ball to Ghassan who found the target. Fahad al Mukhaini was named as the best player in the match after he showed top game including his assistance in the second goal.



MESSI MAY SKIP ARGENTINA'S COPA AMERICA GAME V PERU

UNITED STATES: Lionel Messi may sit out Argentina's next Copa America game against Peru to rest a sore thigh with his team already qualified for the next round after two wins.

Messi, who turned 37 this week and has been suffering muscle niggles, required brief medical treatment on his thigh during Argentina's 1-0 victory over Chile at the US-hosted tournament.

But he completed the 90 minutes, shaving the post with one long range shot and was at the heart of Argentina's attacks.

"It bothers me a bit, but I was able to stay on until the end. I hope it's nothing serious ... I wasn't able to move properly because of the bother," he said, acknowledging it might be wiser to sit out the Peru game on Saturday.

"Let's see how the next few days go, how I recover. We've taken an important step to qualify and be relaxed. It's a lot of games, a lot of travelling," added Messi, saying he had also suffered from a sore throat and fever before the Chile game.

With a 2-0 win over Canada also under their belt, world champions and tournament favourites Argentina are looking comfortable in the early stages of the Copa America even if not at their scintillating best.

They top Group A with six points, ahead of Canada on three after their victory over Peru.

Argentina are happy to have started the Copa with routine wins after the unwanted drama of their last major tournament when they opened the World Cup in Qatar with a 2-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia in one of the all-time shocks.



Argentina forward Lionel Messi. – USA TODAY Sports

STAGE SET?

Victory at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on Tuesday, thanks to a late Lautaro Martinez goal, helped Messi bury one of the worst moments of his career at the same stadium eight years ago.

His penalty shootout miss helped condemn Argentina to an agonising loss to Chile in the 2016 Copa America final, leaving an inconsolable Messi vowing to quit international football after yet another failure with his national side.

Coach Lionel Scaloni would not say whether he would rest Messi against Peru, to keep him fit for the quarter-finals, but Argentine football commentators assumed he would do just that.

Having won myriad accolades at club level with Barcelona from an early age, it has only been in the twilight of his career that Messi was finally able to triumph with Argentina at a major international tournament and match the godlike status of Diego Maradona in his football-crazy home country.

He captained Argentina to triumph at the last Copa America in 2021 and at the Qatar World Cup in 2022.

With fans wondering if this is his final international tournament, Scaloni has urged them to enjoy watching Messi rather than speculate about his future.

The stage does appear set for another potential Messi fairy-tale.

Rivals Brazil are on a poor run of form and only managed an opening 0-0 draw with Costa Rica, and the July 14 Copa final takes place in Florida where Messi plays for Inter Miami. — Reuters

OGA to launch school golf programme

During a recent visit to Oman hosted by HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Chairman of the Oman Golf Association (OGA), Mr Neal Graham, The R&A Development Manager for the Middle East and India, was thanked for the support given by The R&A to the OGA to grow the game of golf in the Sultanate of Oman.

Through this support the OGA is pleased to announce that from the start of the next academic year it will be introducing golf into local schools through The R&A Unleash Your Drive in Schools Programme. The programme which has been created by The R&A in collaboration with the golf foundation is a six part beginner programme delivered to primary schools using specially designed equipment provided to the OGA by The R&A.

The classes will feature fun games and challenges as well as nine mental resilience tools which will not only help to master the game of golf but also to develop key life skills that are essential for long-term mental well-being.

Neal Graham said, "Unleash Your Drive has proven to be a real hit with young people in Great Britain and Ireland thanks to the great work of the Golf Foundation and so we aim to replicate this success in expanding the programme internationally and introducing the sport into schools throughout the Middle East."

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said added, "The Oman Golf Association would like to thank The R&A for providing us with the equipment and knowledge to introduce the great game of golf to a younger audience in Oman. Golf can have a significant impact on physical health and with the work done by The R&A and the Golf Foundation we are confident that Unleash Your Drive will positively impact the minds and bodies of Oman's youth. We are excited to start this programme and uncover the next generation of golfers."



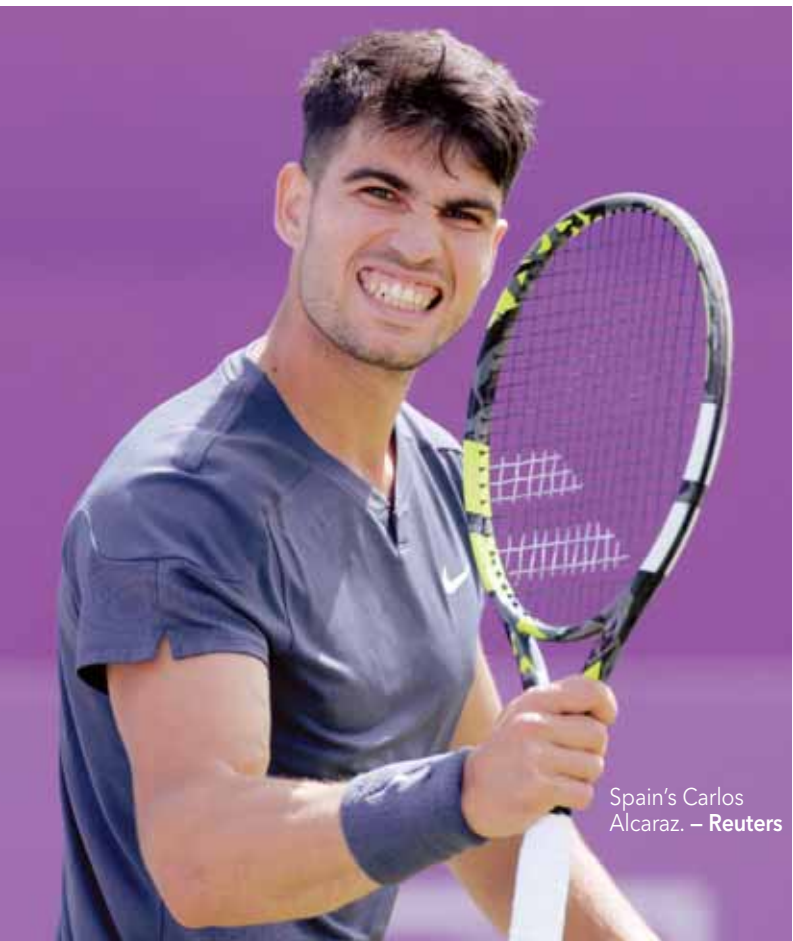
Alcaraz ready for Grand Slam defence after surging into elite group

FRENCH: Carlos Alcaraz propelled himself into the Grand Slam all-surface elite following his triumph at Roland Garros and will arrive at Wimbledon hoping to further cement his place in the big league by successfully defending a major title for the first time.

The 21-year-old overcame a forearm issue to bag his first French Open title, emulating greats including Rafa Nadal, Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Andre Agassi with major wins on clay, hard and grass courts.

Alcaraz's triumph on the Parisian red dirt was the third Grand Slam trophy of his young career and followed the Spanish world number three's breakthrough title at the 2022 US Open and epic Wimbledon victory 12 months ago.

The latter success stood out for the way Alcaraz quickly adapted to his least familiar surface by winning back-to-back titles after arriving for the 2023 British grasscourt season with only a



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz. – Reuters

handful of tour-level match wins on grass.

"I have more matches in my

bank on grass and with the great run I had last year at Queen's Club and Wimbledon, I know a bit on

how to play and understand the game on grass," said Alcaraz, who beat Djokovic in five sets in last year's Wimbledon final.

"I'm more mature playing on this surface. The first practice I've done here, my movement wasn't as good as last year but it's a slow process. I have to be really focused in every practice and every match."

Blessed with a forehand cannon and an all-action style that can often overwhelm the best in the game, the flamboyant Alcaraz will be one of the favourites at the All England Club despite his Queen's Club title defence ending prematurely last week.

Competing without coach Juan Carlos Ferrero in his corner, Alcaraz was beaten in straight sets by inspired home favourite Jack Draper in the round of 16 but he vowed to return stronger at the manicured lawns of Wimbledon on July 1.

"It's tough to deal with losses, but I think it's part of our lives," said Alcaraz, who has a 17-3 record on grass. — Reuters

Al Harthy reconvenes for biggest race of GTWCE

BELGIUM: Fresh from the biggest race in world motorsport, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Oman's number one racing driver Ahmad al Harthy is preparing for his second twice-round-the-clock contest in as many weeks just a few days from now, the CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa.

Round two of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup season, taking place this coming weekend, 29th/30th June, is arguably the greatest race in the world solely for GT3 cars and Al Harthy is relishing the prospect of being back at Belgium's Spa-Francorchamps.

The opening three-hour Bronze test has already taken place at Spa on Wednesday, Ahmad and OQ by Oman Racing will be part of the annual parade to Spa city centre. Track action resumes on Thursday, with a free practice session at 11.20 local time, followed by pre-qualifying at 16.30. Qualifying will then begin at 20.35 local time.



For the entries which progress to Superpole, that session will take place on Friday, at 15.45 local time and there will be a half-hour 'warm-up' that evening at 20.10. The big race itself, the CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa, will commence at 16.30 local time on Saturday.

2024 GTWCE Endurance Cup Bronze Class Standings (after Rd1)
1st David Fumanelli / Niccolo Schiro / Nicolo Rosi, 25pts
2nd Jef Machiels / Andrea Bertolini / Louis Machiels, 18pts
3rd Kobe Pauwels / John De Wilde / Job Van Uiter, 15pts
4th Jonathan Hui / Chris Froggatt / Eddie Cheever, 12pts
5th Ben Tuck / Matt Bell / John Hartshorne, 10pts
6th Ahmad al Harthy / Jens Klingmann / Sam De Haan, 8pts



UEFA
EURO2024
GERMANY

England fans upset after goalesss draw with Slovenia

COLOGNE: While England won their group at Euro 2024 their humdrum scoreless draw against Slovenia on Tuesday, the third dull performance in as many games, had frustrated supporters poking fun at coach Gareth Southgate and his team. England drew 0-0 with Slovenia in their Euro 2024 Group C match on Tuesday.

Even Irish-owned airline Ryanair got in on the heckling, writing in a post to the team on X: “That’s enough, let’s get you home.”

The tepid draw launched numerous amusing memes, including a photo of a man sitting facing a brick wall under the words “Watching England play football.”

Another showed Southgate planting an England flag at the top of a manure pile, with the words “Group C.”

England, who could muster only two goals in three games, enjoyed 70 per cent possession on Tuesday but despite boasting four of the best attackers in European soccer this past season, had just four shots on target.

Denmark reach knockouts, Serbia exit after 0-0 draw

MUNICH: Denmark secured a place in the knockout phase of Euro 2024 with a nervy 0-0 draw in Munich on Tuesday against Serbia - who head home after coming bottom of Group C - and will next face three-time European champion Germany.

The Danes - knowing they only needed a draw to move into the next phase - had more chances with Christian Eriksen pulling the strings from midfield, but were unable to turn that into a goal in their third draw of the tournament.

Denmark finished second in the group with Slovenia third, but both sides go through. The two teams finished level on points, goal difference, goals scored and disciplinary record but Denmark finished higher due to the next tiebreaker of who had the best qualifying ranking.

— Reuters

England manager Gareth Southgate said: “I thought we were much improved with the ball. We have created some good openings and at the moment it is hard work for us. We are not quite getting that break in front of goal. I think the players who came on did well. I understand the reactions but it is a tough environment. We tried to win the game by the changes we made. We put attacking players on the pitch.

“He (Cole Palmer) did very well. He finds space well and he makes chances and we were backing him to score at the end. They are young players and we are bleeding them in a difficult environment. They had a good impact on us and did good things for us. Anthony Gordon, Cole Palmer, Kobbie Mainoo, it was a really good move. We have to build on that. There were a lot of things to build on from tonight.

On cups being thrown towards him by England fans, he said: “I understand the sort of narrative toward me and if that’s better for the team than it is towards them, but it is creating an unusual environment to operate in. I’ve not seen any other team qualify

and receive similar... I’m not going to back away from it but I’m very, very proud of the players for how they’re operating within it.”

England captain Harry Kane said: “That was the aim before the start of the tournament, come top of the group and control our destiny. I thought we played a lot better than the other games. We couldn’t just find that finish but we look forward to the next one.

Former England and Manchester United defender Gary Neville said Southgate’s men “looked so basic in the first half.”

“It was a struggle to watch but it moved forward a lot in the second half even though we didn’t get the result but there was glimpses of what we can be,” he said during the broadcast.

“England have Cole Palmer, Bukayo Saka, Jude Bellingham, Kobbie Mainoo, Phil Foden -- massive, massive talents and we cannot afford to mismanage them.” Southgate, who guided England to a place in the 2020 Euro final where they lost to Italy in a shootout, said he understands supporters’ frustration and will bear the brunt of the criticism, but made a plea to fans to at least support the players. “I understand it. I’m not going to back away from it. The most important thing is the supporters stay with the team,” Southgate said. England’s last-16 opponent is yet to be determined.

— Agencies





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RO 30 million aquaculture venture in Al Seeb set to boost local fish production

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has announced the successful start of an aquaculture project in Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate, backed by a significant investment of RO 30 million.

Commencing operations on March 2024, this initiative marks a crucial step towards enhancing local fish production and sustainability, aligned with Oman Vision 2040's objectives.

Led by United Fish LLC, the project utilises a modern floating cage system across 152.15 hectares in Muscat, projecting an annual production capacity of 10,000 tonnes.

"This initiative represents a significant step forward in our strategy to enhance Oman's economic and environmental landscape," the ministry shared on its X account. "By integrating modern aquaculture practices,

including a state-of-the-art floating cage system, we aim to boost local fish production and ensure sustainable utilisation of our natural resources."

In July 2022, the ministry announced the signing of a contract for a substantial finfish farming project in Wilayat of Al Seeb. Focusing on the cultivation of premium fish species, the first phase targets an annual production of 3,000 tonnes, with fingerlings bred within the floating cage system.

An onshore facility spanning 7,500 square metres hosts a fish packaging and canning plant, feed storage, equipment warehouse, and other critical support infrastructure.

The investment underscores stakeholder confidence in the project's long-term viability and profitability, poised not only to contribute significantly to Oman's GDP but also to create employment opportunities and support local communities.

Oman records significant surge in energy, minerals sectors in 2023

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals aims to boost the contribution of the energy and minerals sectors to Oman's GDP and national income. The ministry's strategy includes leveraging technology to enhance production at minimal costs.

The ministry's 2023 annual report revealed that 63 exploratory and appraisal wells for oil and 15 for gas were drilled and evaluated. Positive indicators from petrophysical analyses and well productivity tests led to the addition of new oil and gas reserves.

By the end of 2023, Oman's crude oil and oil condensates reserves stood at approximately 4,971 million barrels, a 1 per cent increase from 2022. Natural gas reserves decreased by 5 per cent to about 23 trillion cubic feet.

Eighteen companies operated in 36 concession areas for oil and gas exploration and production by the end of 2023.

Oman's oil exports, including crude oil and oil condensates, amounted to about 310 million barrels, with China importing 92 per cent of this total.

Daily production of crude oil and condensates averaged 1.05 million barrels in 2023, slightly down by 1.5 per cent from 2022.

Natural gas production averaged about 142.5 million cubic metres per day, a 4 per cent increase from 2022, with 30.1 million cubic metres per day from associated gas and 112.4 million cubic metres per day from non-



Oman's crude oil and oil condensates reserves stood at approximately 4,971 million barrels. – ONA

associated gas.

The average price of Omani crude oil in 2023 was approximately \$82.3 per barrel, a 14 per cent decrease from the previous year. The price ranged from a low of \$74.8 per barrel in August to a high of \$92.8 per barrel in November.

Renewable energy initiatives saw seven main regions highlighted: Dhofar, Duqm, Al-Jazar, Manah, Ibri, Sur, and Musandam.

Six agreements were signed to produce green hydrogen in Duqm, Dhofar, and Al-Jazar. Electricity production in 2023 reached about 44.4 terawatt-hours, a 6.4 per cent increase from

the previous year. Renewable energy sources contributed nearly 2 terawatt-hours, a 5 per cent rise from 2022.

Engineer Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, emphasised the ministry's commitment to utilising advanced technology to support crude oil and condensates production and reserves. Efforts in local value addition included the establishment of a chemicals manufacturing factory in Oman and the completion of the first locally manufactured well-drilling platform.

In support of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), 16 per cent of the total value of

purchases and tenders in the oil and gas sectors were allocated to SMEs.

Significant projects inaugurated in 2023 included the Al-Ghaisin copper mine in Al Khabourah, expected to boost economic diversification with over 6 million tonnes of copper reserves at an average concentration of 2.04 per cent.

Additionally, a solar energy station was launched in Sur to power the local water desalination plant.

The ministry also committed to social responsibility, supporting three national projects with different partners, amounting to RO 2.500 million. — ONA

Dar Global launches \$500m Trump International Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

In a grand event on Tuesday, Dar Global — a luxury international real estate developer — led by CEO Ziad El Chaar, unveiled the much-anticipated \$500 million Trump International Oman in Aida, Oman.

Launched under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the project is one of the most integrated and complete in Oman and marks a significant milestone in the region's luxury real estate and tourism sectors.

Presenting the project, Ziad El Chaar emphasised its unique blend of design and functionality. "With all respect to other projects in Oman, this stands out in terms of integration and completeness. The Trump International Golf



Ziad El Chaar, CEO of Dar Global, unveils the much-anticipated \$500 million Trump International Oman in Aida.

Club, one of the largest in the region, alongside an expansive members-only club, sets a new

standard," he remarked in an interview with *Oman Daily Observer*.

“So far, investors from 60 different nationalities have committed to the project, drawn by its unique blend of natural beauty and strategic location

ZIAD EL CHAAR
CEO, Dar Global

Understanding that only a small percentage of people play golf or can afford a golf membership, Dar Global has introduced a novel concept called social membership. This allows every property owner in Aida access to the club,

broadening the appeal of the development.

"Luxury means low density," El Chaar added, underscoring the project's commitment to providing an exclusive environment with international brands that attract a global clientele.

So far, investors from 60 different nationalities have committed to the project, drawn by its unique blend of natural beauty and strategic location.

Eric Trump, Executive Vice President of The Trump Organisation, highlighted the collaborative effort behind this ambitious project.

"In collaboration with Dar Global, we are proud to launch The Trump International Oman in Aida, Oman as we introduce a new era of style, service, and exclusivity infused with the renowned Trump standard of excellence to the region. This

partnership reflects our shared commitment to crafting iconic luxury experiences for discerning travellers and investors, while also enhancing Oman's profile as a premier destination on the global stage," he said.

Launched 13 months ago, the project is progressing swiftly.

Phase one, primarily residential units, is nearly sold out and scheduled for delivery within 30 months. Phase two, which includes the hotel and additional villas, is set to be completed within 36 months. The golf course design will soon be finalised and awarded separately, ensuring it meets the highest standards. The overall development is planned to unfold over ten years, divided into ten phases.

"The focus is to succeed with this site first before considering expansion," El Chaar explained.

TURN TO PAGE 15

BANKDHOFAR LAUNCHES ITS PRIVATE BANKING SEGMENT

MUSCAT: BankDhofar launched its private banking segment to serve high-net-worth individuals, entrepreneurs and their families.

The launch further demonstrates the bank's commitment to lead wealth management in Oman, by offering world class wealth solutions, private banking expertise, an extensive network in the country and access to the full range of banking capabilities.

The launch event, held at St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat, marks a significant milestone in BankDhofar's ongoing commitment to offer a holistic banking experience with the aim of delivering sustainable long-term value to its clients.

The segment is dedicated to offering specialised core and non-core banking services, as well as a personalised wealth and lifestyle management proposition for Ultra High Net Worth Individuals, families and corporate clients.

It promises tailored solutions to nurture and grow wealth in a secure and prudent manner with complete privacy and confidentiality.

Bank Dhofar Private Banking will offer a broad range of tailored and bespoke services in Oman.

Need-based solutions Solutions that meet the needs of clients, including bespoke



lending, and investment products and propositions like mutual funds, bonds, portfolio management services, insurance and access to structured products, alternative investments and a direct equity execution platform.

Bank will provide exclusive insights to support its client's decision-making through exclusive access to private banking investment insights.

DEDICATED RELATIONSHIP MANAGER
A team of dedicated relationship managers, investment advisors

and product specialists supporting wealth planning for individuals and family offices.

With a commitment to go beyond expectations, the approach begins with a detailed review of clients' circumstances and financial goals, including short and long-term financial objectives.

These are meticulously carried out by the bank's experienced private bankers.

COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL CONCIERGE
The segment will aim to be a

complete financial concierge service, managing banking needs on a 360-degree level by addressing both onshore domestic and offshore international needs.

These include the offering of services including core banking, wealth management, investment advisory and offshore banking.

Wealth and business succession planning, key-person insurance, trust solutions, and the establishment of foundations and family offices, will also play a significant role in the new business.

NBO launches new e-KYC service on the mobile banking app

MUSCAT: In its ongoing efforts to improve customer convenience, streamline banking processes and offer seamless digital banking products and services the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has introduced a new feature on its mobile application that allows customers to update their Know Your Customer (KYC) details seamlessly.

This integral service, which was launched in June 2024, enables existing NBO customers to update their personal information directly through the mobile app; eliminating the need to visit branches due to the newly enabled digital signature feature, enhancing efficiency and user experience

NBO is committed to enhancing digital customer touchpoints through the new e-KYC feature.

By leveraging its membership agreement with Mala'a, Oman's Credit and Financial Information Centre, NBO can now automatically fetch and verify customers' identities.

This integration ensures that the bank's information databases are accurate and comply with legal and



regulatory requirements, minimising the need for customers to visit branches

Dr Ali bin Salim bin Said al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager – Head of Digital Banking & E-Channels at NBO, commented on the launch: "We're excited to have this new feature on our mobile banking app that ensures personal information is updated to better serve our customers.

In addition to enhancing customer convenience, this feature streamlines our verification process for faster processing.

At NBO, our customer-centric approach ensures that we simplify banking and directly address the needs and preferences of our customers, making their banking experience more seamless and efficient."

Bank Nizwa supports Entrepreneurship & Innovation Award

MUSCAT: Continuing its support for Omani youth and fostering an environment that promotes innovation, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most-trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, formalised a partnership and support agreement with the Office of the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah to support the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The award aims to align entrepreneurship strategies with Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on a diversified and sustainable economy.

Furthermore, the award seeks to provide a suitable environment for building networks and



knowledge exchange among entrepreneurs; thus enhancing the country's position on the regional and international entrepreneurship map.

The agreement was signed

by Shaikh Hilal bin Saeed bin Hamdan al Hajri, the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah and Salim bin Rashid bin Ali al Maharbi, Chief Financial Officer of Bank Nizwa.

Bank Nizwa's support for the

Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate aligns with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, to focus on the small and medium enterprises sector and the entrepreneurship sector.

This support embodies the active role and significant contributions of the bank in supporting the progress of this sector through providing innovative banking services and products that are grounded in the principles of Islamic Sharia.

Salim bin Rashid bin Ali al Maharbi said, "The signing of the agreement is part of Bank Nizwa's ongoing efforts to support and

empower the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman, believing in the pivotal role entrepreneurs play in supporting the country's sustainable development efforts to achieve the national aspirations outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Award in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate will act as an incentive for innovation and excellence and will encourage young people to be proactive and productive. Additionally, it will highlight and promote inspiring entrepreneurial projects and showcase their successful experiences for others to learn from and build upon."



Double the internet speed limit with Ooredoo's Fibre Home Internet

MUSCAT: Busy households in Oman, where family members are simultaneously streaming series, playing games online, working remotely and video calling friends, need ultrafast and uninterrupted Internet connections. Luckily, Ooredoo's Fibre Home Internet plans, have now doubled the top speeds of two plans at no extra charge.

So, if you want a fast connection, a ticket to anywhere safe in the digital world, then you need to sign up for Fibre Home Internet or in the case of existing customers, opt in to a 2 year contract plan.

Ooredoo's limited-time offer applies to its monthly RO 28 and RO 35 plans, which are both valid for two years. Enjoy internet speeds of 300 Mbps instead of 150 Mbps on the monthly RO 28 plan, while Ooredoo increased the speeds from 350 Mbps to 700 Mbps on the monthly RO 35 plan.

The other Fibre Home Internet plans remain as they were, with speeds of up to 1 Gbps! So, go ahead and sustainably use all your smart screens, home devices, streaming services and game consoles and enjoy zero slowdowns at home. Ooredoo's fibre can power them all at the same time. Supported by Ooredoo's awesome network, fibre plans upgrade the worlds of customers with boosted speeds and non-stop data.

OAB hosts dialogue session with Maqbool bin Ali Sultan

MUSCAT: As part of its efforts to empower national leaders and develop the skills of its employees, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) hosted Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, the former Minister of Commerce and Industry, in a dialogue session on strategic planning and its role in effective leadership and decision-making.

The session witnessed great interaction and inspirational discussions by the attendees, led by senior management of OAB. Members of "Ruwad Al Arabi" and "Ruwad Alizz" programmes were also in attendance, adding to the conversation that focused on modern leadership methodologies and their impact on leadership within the banking industry.

Maqbool bin Ali Sultan's speech highlighted modern



leadership trends, emphasising the importance of innovation, continuous improvement, and developing leadership skills to keep pace with the evolving

banking sector.

He also emphasised the role of technology in boosting productivity and business performance.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, stated: "Oman Arab Bank was honoured to host Maqbool bin Ali Sultan in this dialogue session, where he shared

his unique and diverse leadership experiences throughout his long career.

This session is part of our ongoing dialogue series, featuring some of the most prominent Omani leaders within the National Leadership Development Program "Ruwad Al Arabi".

We are proud of being one of the leading programmes in the Sultanate of Oman, significantly contributing to the support of national talents, the preparation of future leaders, and the development of human resources".

He added: "The new generations of banking leaders have great ambitions and broad potential to contribute to Oman's continuous development in the financial sector and its increasing role in sustainable development."



Aida aims to be a premier destination for tourism.

Trump International Resort in Yiti to attract global investors

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, JUNE 26

The launch of the Trump International Resort at the Aida project in Yiti aims to attract global investors. Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr from the Trump Organization were in attendance, alongside a special video message from former US President Donald Trump.

Eric Trump emphasised during his speech at the ceremony, "Each of these properties, we know every single villa, we know the layouts of their bathrooms. Real estate is in our DNA."

Donald Trump Jr expressed his enthusiasm for the project, describing it as something very special and visually important to him.

He emphasised its unique beauty, stating that there is nothing quite like it. Trump congratulated everyone involved in bringing the project to fruition, foreseeing it as a wonderful endeavour and anticipating its success. He mentioned his hope to visit in the near future and wished the project well, believing it would capture global attention.

Trump acknowledged the collaboration with remarkable individuals, expressing gratitude for their friendship and concluding with best wishes for all involved.

Dar Global, in partnership with Omran Group, Oman's leading tourism development organisation, has awarded Oman Shapoorji a RO 9.3 million contract for Phase 1 infrastructure development at

Aida.

Scheduled for completion by 2027, Aida is strategically located by the sea, offering stunning views from its 130-metre elevation and harmonising with the coastal environment.

The infrastructure contract, valued at RO 9,345,653, includes designing and constructing essential elements such as roads, water and electricity networks, utilities, drainage and sewage systems, and enhancing the surrounding road network within Aida.

These efforts uphold rigorous technical standards, complementing Aida's luxurious offerings and supporting its residential and commercial phases.

Spanning 5 million square meters and just a short drive from Downtown Muscat, Aida aims to redefine architectural excellence, environmental sustainability and bespoke living standards.

Featuring luxurious mansions, exclusive villas, and sophisticated apartments, the project aims to position Oman as a premier destination for tourism, residential living and investment.

Residents and guests of Aida will enjoy exclusive amenities, immersive experiences, top-tier hospitality, recreational facilities, picturesque landscapes and fine dining options. In partnership with the Trump Organization, Aida will also include a prestigious Trump Golf Course, further enhancing its appeal as a world-class destination.

Heavy oil production from Oman Mukhaizna field tops 600m barrels

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Crude production from the Mukhaizna heavy oil field in Block 53 has grossed 600 million barrels as of end-2023-end, according to Oxy Oman, the operator of this pivotal field in central Oman.

The milestone is one of several exploration and production achievements reported by Oxy Oman, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Occidental of the United States, during 2023.

Gross production from the Mukhaizna field, home to one of the world's largest steam-flood projects, has maintained at a steady daily production rate of around 80,000 barrels of oil per day (MBOPD) since May 2023, the operator said.

"The field's success includes a 17% reduction in Progressive Cavity Pump (PCP) failure rates and a 24% reduction in Standard Electrical Submersible Pump (SESP) failure rates.

Additionally, the commissioning of the Thuleilat Temporary High-Pressure Water Injection facility showcased Oxy Oman's commitment to innovation," Oxy Oman stated in the newly published 2023 Annual Report of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

First discovered by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) in 1975, the Mukhaizna field



Facilities at Oxy Oman's Mukhaizna field in Block 53.

was brought on stream using conventional technology in June 2000. Later acquired by Oxy Oman in 2005, the heavy oil field now features a major pattern steam flood project for Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) that utilises some of the largest mechanical vapour compressors ever built.

Oxy has since drilled close to 3,580 new wells, as of end-2022. Significantly, gross production from Oxy's other assets in northern Oman, notably Blocks 9, 27 and 65, climbed to a record 119,000 barrels of oil per day (BOPD).

"Moreover, a newly drilled Initial Production (IP) well has set a record with a daily output

of 6,000 BOPD, representing the highest production of an IP well in the Oman North blocks over the last 25 years," said Oxy.

In another significant highlight of the year, the company's 2023 exploration programme resulted in nine discoveries, with a 60% success rate. Oxy Oman also acquired and processed seismic data for 500 km² in Blocks 62 and 30, in addition to more than 2,000 km² of 3D seismic data in Block 51, which is currently being processed.

Billed as the largest independent oil producer operating in the Sultanate of Oman, Oxy Oman's major operations are located in northern

Oman, primarily in Safah and Wadi Latham Fields in Block 9, Khamilah Field in Block 27, and in Block 62, where it operates the Muradi Huraymah gas plant, and in south-central Oman in Block 53 at Mukhaizna Field.

Seeking to leverage its expertise in carbon management to advance low-carbon initiatives, the company signed an MoU with OQ Gas Networks to jointly study potential Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) projects in Oman. It has also signed the CCUS and Blue Hydrogen Policy & Regulatory Framework Terms of Reference (CCUS TOR) with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Dar Global launches \$500m Trump International Oman

FROM PAGE 13

Building on a site characterised by mountains, valleys, limestone and marble presented significant challenges.

"We wanted to preserve the natural topography without cutting into the valleys," El Chaar noted. The design was meticulously planned to respect the natural landscape, a task accomplished by a skilled team that has successfully finalised the master plan and golf course design.

The decision to develop in Oman was influenced by the broader economic landscape of the GCC.

El Chaar views the region as a unified economic entity, similar to Italy with its multiple thriving cities. "The economy of the GCC is \$2 trillion, comparable to Italy. We can have Muscat, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Jeddah and Riyadh all thriving within this single economy," he stated.

Environmental sustainability is a core principle for Dar Global. "We follow 100% the environmental impact rules of every country we operate in," El Chaar affirmed. While the project may not necessarily pursue LEED certification, it adheres strictly to local codes.

The project has attracted a

diverse range of buyers from around the world, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Croatia, the UK, the US and Saudi Arabia.

This diversity reflects the international allure of the development.

Looking ahead, El Chaar highlighted the need for improved air connectivity to support tourism growth in Oman. "International investors prefer direct flights. We need more flights from key destinations like China, the US and the UK," he suggested.

With the launch of Phase Two,

Dar Global is well on its way to transforming Aida into a premier luxury destination.

The project's comprehensive, phased approach ensures that each element is meticulously planned and executed, promising a transformative impact on Oman's real estate and tourism landscape.

Developed in partnership with the Trump Organisation and as a joint venture with Omran Group, the executive arm of the Sultanate of Oman for tourism development, Aida is built on a more than 130-metre-high hilltop, surrounded by rocky canyons, endless beaches, and breathtaking panoramas.

Omani mineral exports soar to 40 million tonnes in 2023

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Exports of minerals from the Sultanate of Oman climbed 9% to reach 40 million tonnes in 2023 versus corresponding figures for 2022, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals stated in its 2023 Annual Report.

The export of construction material exports climbed 4% from 19.868 million tonnes in 2022 to 20.673 million tonnes in 2023. Gypsum ore exports increased 11% from 10.575 million tonnes in 2022 to 11.713 million tonnes in 2023. While construction materials made up 52% of total exports, gypsum accounted for a 29% share.

These data demonstrate



Production of industrial minerals improved in 2023.

the strategic relevance of these commodities in Oman's export portfolio. Exports of laterite surged to 789,000 tonnes in 2023, up from 169,000 tonnes in 2022.

Limestone exports climbed to 4.957 million tonnes from 4.139 million tonnes in 2022. Exports of marble were boosted to 407,000 tonnes in 2023, up from 375,000 tonnes a year earlier.

Chrome exports spiked to 377,000 tonnes, from 213,000 tonnes in 2022. Exports of dolomite, however, dipped to 1.036 million tonnes in 2023, down from 1.171 million tonnes a year earlier.

However, the total production of mineral ores during 2023 amounted to about 70.4 million

tonnes, a decrease of 7% compared to 2022.

The production of building materials decreased by about 9 million, 58% of the total production. "These declines are due to the delay of mining companies' submission of their monthly production reports," the Ministry noted in its report.

Revenues from mineral sales amounted to RO 113 million in 2023, represented a 2% dip from the previous year's tally.

"This is attributable to a decrease in the volume of sales of building materials by RO 9.1 million (24% compared to last year). On the other hand, the value of the sales of limestone, gypsum and chrome increased by RO 6.8 million," the Ministry said.

Influence and impact of technology on leadership methods



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is founder of Knowledge Oman knowledgeoman.com

WITH THE DIGITAL TOOLS, PLATFORMS AND SERVICES THAT CONTINUE TO EVOLVE AND REVOLVE, LEADERSHIP METHODS AND STYLES ARE CHANGING (OR GETTING ENHANCED) TO INCLUDE EVERYONE WITHIN THE ORGANISATION BY BEING COLLABORATIVE INSTEAD.

I received an interesting question from the host of Gulf Tech Talk podcast during a recent interview I had that revolved around the impact and influence of technology on leadership. I decided to leverage the interview discussion by sharing the insights of the talk in my article this week. Hence, how has technology influenced and impacted our leadership methods today?

In my humble opinion and professional experience, I would say in a profound way. How exactly? In a few simple words, leadership methods are impacted from the traditional way of leading to being inclusive (getting everyone involved based on digital tools and data), more dynamic (responsive to change based on the digital tools and data), and agile (react quickly and easily to market dynamics, based again on the digital tools and data available).

Let's get into the specifics.

Gone (or will soon) were the days when decisions were only made and influenced at the top of the organisation.

With the digital tools, platforms and services that continue to evolve and revolve, leadership methods and styles are changing (or getting enhanced) to include everyone within the organisation by being collaborative instead. In what way? Decisions will be influenced by being distributed across organisations layers.

Today we have emails, instant messaging, video conferencing, unified communications and many more that continue to be introduced to enable real-time communication and collaboration, not only just across different levels of an organisation per se, but also across borders globally as well (especially organisations that operate globally).

Team members within the organisations are empowered, and as a result, decisions to become also collective (as opposed to being only done at the top). I am not saying this is completely the norm now yet it will change and is influenced by the technology evolution and its impact on people, organisations and nations as a whole.

Mark my words, change is happening fast and will transform gradually, as I see this already within some of the organisations here in Oman that I am associated with.

With the vast amount of data generated and available for leaders to analyse (thanks to big data and the data analytics tools), the flexibility, responsiveness and adaptability of leadership in organisations today are enhanced.

Access to insights on the market trends and dynamics, customer details and behaviour, operational performance and the like, via an easy-to-see dashboard, presented at a click of a mouse, surely enables leaders and

organisation to be more dynamic, in a sense make informed decisions quickly.

Decisions that are made by facts and not just by intuition or guesses per se. These data are available instantly and 24/7, be it at work, at home, or even outside the country, at a click of a mouse button (or a swipe from an app).

Today, you are connected with work or business even when you're on leave or holiday. Yup, that's not good and may not be healthy (to be honest), but that's the reality (and to some, a blessing in disguise too).

I see people taking work home instead of spending quality time with their families, while others even work while working out at a gym. Yes, technology influence is a two-edged sword – some organisations are leveraging and capitalising, while some individuals are suffering and/or benefiting as a result.

How has technology influenced and impacted leaders to be agile? Simply, again with the vast amount of data available, and with the digital tools/platforms that continue to be introduced and utilised, has made leaders act and decide quickly based on facts and evidence.

This goes all the way from better communication and collaboration with all stakeholders, faster and automated processes within and across the organisations, enhanced and personalised customer engagements using various touch points, and many more that is probably beyond my article today.

These platforms, tools and systems are evolving and indeed make leaders responsive, adaptive and innovative – from decisions, solutions to how they work too (i.e. remotely, hybrid, flexible, etc) – another interesting element to ponder in my future articles.

Until we catch up again next week, stay connected but be wary of the side effects.

OCCI keen to support adoption of fintech solutions



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) is showing great interest in addressing the challenges hindering the development of fintech solutions necessary to support the growth of the digital economy. Fintech has the potential to fuel the growth of finance, trade, industry, banking, insurance and other sectors, thereby improving the business environment.

To this end, there is continuous coordination between the specialised committees in the OCCI to identify existing challenges in fintech adoption, assess the general public's awareness of the services provided by this technology and determine the need for updated regulations and legislation to support the sector's growth.

The Chamber is also focused on studying current practices in the insurance, investment, finance and risk assessment sectors to ensure they keep pace with technological advancements.

Recently, the Chamber has worked to foster cooperation with other relevant parties to benefit from international experiences and activate the "offset" system. This aims to deepen mutual benefits from major international companies in the context of significant global growth in the financial technology sector. The goal

is to open development and improvement opportunities for operating Omani companies in these areas, provide more financial products through fintech and enhance financial inclusion in the knowledge economy.

The Chamber has presented these ideas and initiatives on several occasions to encourage more entrepreneurs and merchants to establish projects based on these technologies, thereby achieving growth and enhancing their added value in the national economy. It has also studied the legislative structure related to the digital economy, promoted investment in it, and focused on capacity building and skills development.

OCCI participates in many events, including international exhibitions and directs trade delegations to institutions with a long history in these fields. Recently, a delegation from the OCCI visited Singapore to meet with institutions that could collaborate on commercial projects in areas of interest related to technology and artificial intelligence.

The Chamber also had a significant presence at the Financial Technology Conference at the COMEX International Technology Exhibition 2024. This event aimed to enhance ideas, enable and strengthen areas of financial technology (FinTech), establish a digital financial environment in the country, and apply innovative solutions in these businesses and areas, including artificial intelligence.

These events are crucial drivers of economic growth in the country by providing innovative and effective financial services, delivering them to a large segment of consumers and companies, and accelerating the provision of new financial products and services.

This will lead to change and strengthen interests in the financial sector among Omani entrepreneurs and other commercial entities.

Mena region set to be global leader in green hydrogen production



JOHN ROPER

The author is CEO Middle East, Uniper Global Commodities SE

The Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region, including the UAE, KSA, and Oman, is positioning itself to become a hub for green hydrogen production, leveraging its abundant solar and wind resources. This strategic resource is expected to significantly reduce the cost of green hydrogen production, making it more competitive with traditional fossil fuels like natural gas.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency the cost of producing hydrogen in Saudi Arabia could drop to between \$0.7 and \$1.3 per kilogramme by 2050.

This forecast is based on the region's potential for low-cost renewable energy generation, which is essential for economically viable green hydrogen production – numerous factors contribute to the potential cost reduction, including abundant Renewable Energy resources.

The Mena region's high solar and wind energy potential enables cheap electricity for hydrogen production via electrolysis. Scaling up infrastructure, technological advancements in electrolyzers, and supportive policies will lower costs, making green hydrogen competitive with natural gas over time.

This aligns with global decarbonisation efforts and rising



The Mena region's high solar and wind energy potential enables cheap electricity for hydrogen production via electrolysis.

carbon emission costs.

The established oil and gas industry in the Mena region provides a strong infrastructure foundation and logistical expertise crucial for developing and exporting hydrogen and its derivatives.

The existing gas industry supports potentially cost-effective blue hydrogen production, serving as a transitional solution while green hydrogen capacity is increased. The region's strategic location facilitates access to key markets in Europe and Asia, enhancing export opportunities.

Although the regulatory frameworks for green hydrogen in Mena are still developing, there is high potential for government support like the US Inflation Reduction Act and EU green proposals. This support could significantly boost the energy transformation ecosystem.

Overall, the combination of natural resources, existing infrastructure, strategic location, and potential regulatory support positions the Mena region as a leading hub for green hydrogen development.

Still, the demand for hydrogen is expected to rise faster in regions with advanced regulatory frameworks such as Europe. This increase in demand is anticipated to align with various policy targets and market dynamics.

The European Union's regulatory environment, including the Renewable Energy Directive III (REDIII), aims to achieve a 42 per cent target for the use of renewable energy in industry by 2030.

This is likely to drive significant demand for hydrogen, especially in industries such as refineries, ammonia production and steel manufacturing.

In Germany, the phase-out of coal by 2040 will necessitate the adoption of alternative energy sources, including hydrogen, to fill the energy gap and support carbon neutrality efforts.

Hydrogen demand will be driven by sectors that are hard-to-abate i.e. difficult to decarbonise, such as steel manufacturing and shipping, which require high-temperature processes and energy-dense fuels, which hydrogen can provide.

It is hoped use in industrial processes as in refineries and ammonia production, will see an earlier rise in hydrogen demand, driven by regulatory targets and the need for cleaner production processes.

From 2035 onwards, hydrogen demand is expected to grow significantly in the transport sector, including maritime and aviation, and likewise in certain power generation. This aligns with broader decarbonisation goals and the transition to sustainable energy sources in the likes of Japan and South Korea.

In these countries, the initial demand for hydrogen will be driven by power generation.

Subsequently, other industries such as steel manufacturing will also start adopting hydrogen as a key energy source.

Several major countries, from the US to India are announcing multiple green hydrogen projects.

However, project developers typically require offtake agreements (demand commitments) before reaching the Final Investment Decision (FID), suggesting that oversupply will not be a bottleneck for green or low-carbon hydrogen production.

While competition among powerful nations will help lower costs, balancing supply and demand will also depend on infrastructure, certifications, and regulations.

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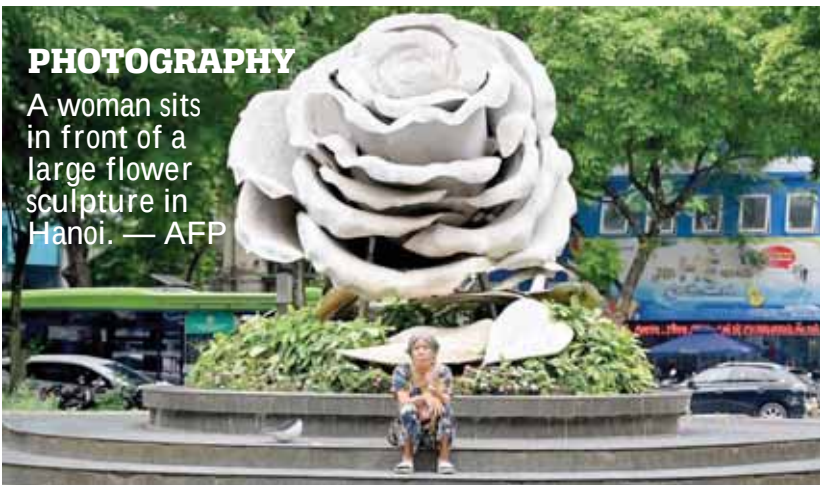


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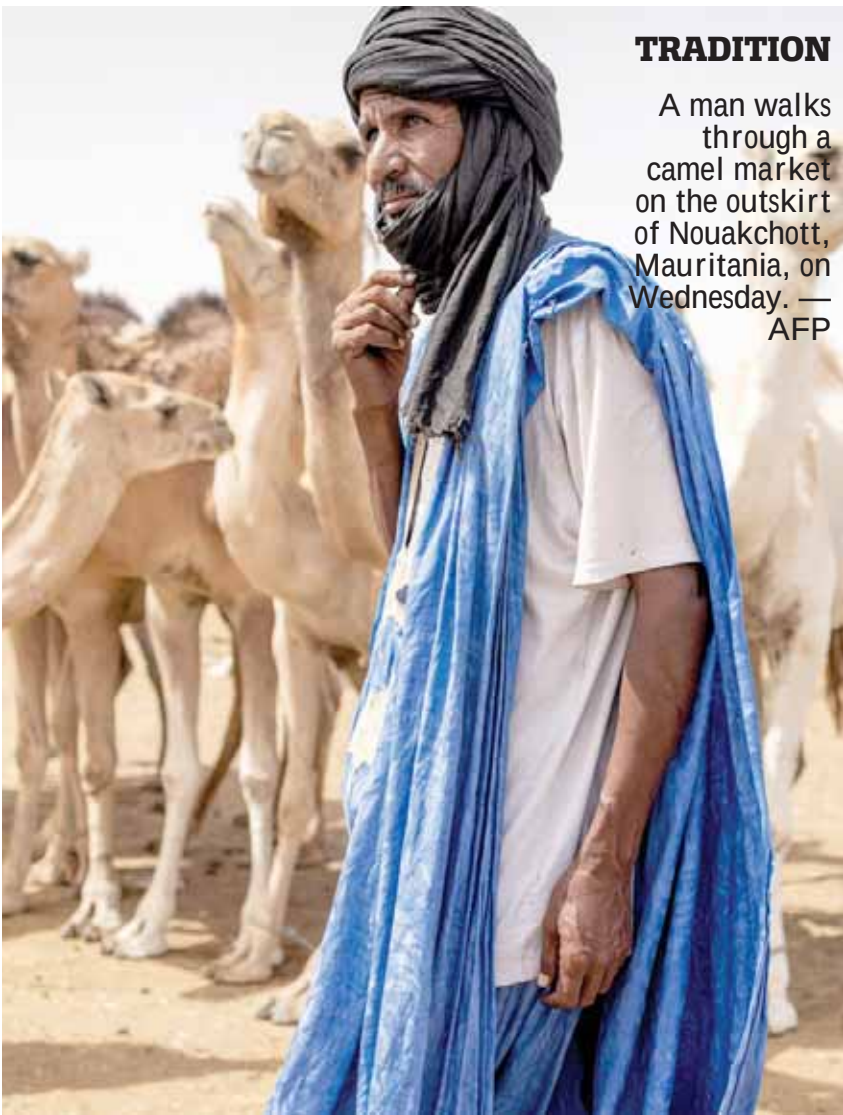
PHOTOGRAPHY

A woman sits in front of a large flower sculpture in Hanoi. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by Elie Saab as part of the Paris Fashion Week, at le Musee des Arts Decoratifs (Museum of Decorative Arts), in Paris. — AFP



TRADITION

A man walks through a camel market on the outskirts of Nouakchott, Mauritania, on Wednesday. — AFP



VIDEO

A woman live streams along a moat outside the Forbidden City in Beijing. — AFP



MUSIC

French-Italian pianist Lorenzo Naccarato poses for a photo session during a rehearsal on stage before the show "Vertumne", southwestern France. — AFP

art & life

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Abu Thamanian Souq blends flavours of past and present

The recent facelift of Abu Thamanian Souq in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, one of the ancient and popular spots for shopping, has attracted more shoppers and tourists... P20



MAJOR MUSIC LABELS SUE AI START-UPS OVER COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

SOME OF THE WORLD'S major music labels are suing music generation services Suno and Udio, accusing the start-ups of violating the copyrights of top artists to train their generative AI engines without permission. Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Records, Capitol Records and others — who filed the

copyright infringement suits on Monday in federal courts in Boston and New York — are seeking damages of up to \$150,000 per song or shares of the companies' profits. "Unlicensed services like Suno and Udio that claim it's 'fair' to copy an artist's life's work and exploit it for their own profit without consent

or pay set back the promise of genuinely innovative AI for us all," Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) Chief Executive Mitch Glazier said in a statement. Examples cited in the lawsuits included prompts using Suno's service to churn out songs mimicking copyrighted works of Chuck Berry, James Brown, Michael Buble, ABBA, and others. Suno and Udio did not respond to requests for comment. Breaching ownership rights of people's artistic creations to train generative AI models has been a flash-point as the technology races to become more capable and, ultimately, more profitable. The two lawsuits, one against each company, centre on generative AI services that allow people to make songs using basic prompts. Suno and Udio have been evasive about how they train their AI models, saying that is a guarded secret, according to the complaints.



Music publishers are collaborating with "responsible developers" to build AI tools that respect the works of artists, according to the head of the RIAA, which announced the lawsuits. "Real music comes from real life and real people," Black Music Action Coalition Chief Executive Willie "Prophet" Stiggers said in

the release. "It is vital that artists and songwriters are in charge of their own work, story and message." In April, hundreds of artists and songwriters including Billie Eilish, Smokey Robinson and the estate of Frank Sinatra signed an open letter urging protections against what they

called an "assault on human creativity" posed by artificial intelligence. "We must protect against the predatory use of AI to steal professional artists' voices and likenesses, violate creators' rights, and destroy the music ecosystem," read the letter, submitted by the non-profit Artist Rights Alliance. — AFP



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ALGERIAN WOMEN PIONEER ECO- FRIENDLY FARMING

IBTISSEM MAHTOUT and Amira Messous pick fresh strawberries and tomatoes on the eco-friendly smallholding the two women are working near Algiers, a pioneering initiative in Algeria's male-dominated agricultural sector.

After graduating from university four years ago, they left the capital and started working on the small patch of land in Douaouda, some 30 km to the west.

"As soon as I'm in the field I'm happy," said Messous, 28, holding a bundle of fresh beetroot.

"From morning to night, we're here. To me, it's the most beautiful job in the world."

The plant ecology and biodiversity graduates now run one of the country's rare ecological plots of land, where the produce is grown in harmony with the broader ecosystem and without using pesticides.

Messous said it was chal-

lenging at first to "have to integrate" into a sector in which most people who work the land are men.

According to local media, as of last October just four per cent of workers registered with the Chamber of Agriculture in Tipaza province where their land is were women.

But some "male farmers are happy to see educated women working the land", said Messous.

"They take the time to explain things to us, and it brings more value to their own work."

Her 29-year-old partner, Mahtout, recalls that they launched the project with just 60,000 Algerian dinars (around \$445) — "enough to buy basic tools" — after renting the patch of land.

With the help of Torba, an association that promotes ecological farming in Algeria, they "learned to plant, to sow, to work the soil".

Today, their 1,300-square-



metre farm even employs one male worker full-time — and up to eight part-timers at harvest time.

When they are not in the fields themselves, the two women make full use of social media to sell their produce.

On Instagram, they advertise their baskets of seasonal fruits and vegetables each week, and take orders for the produce on WhatsApp.

Come Friday, the first day of the Algerian weekend, cli-

ents pick up their orders at a larger farm in nearby Zeralda, where other smallholders also sell produce including flowers.

"We want to eat something healthy from time to time," said Fatma Zohra, a 72-year-old loyal customer and subscriber to the small farm's social media account.

"I found these girls very nice, and when I discovered they sell to subscribers, I wanted to encourage them."

Each week, the pair sell between 10 and 30 baskets of fruit and vegetables that are in season.

The farm in Zeralda where they market their produce is also educational, and runs themed programmes for children.

In addition to the Friday farmers' market, it is also a meeting space for local families and offers cooking classes, entertainment and cultural events. — **AFP**

AI

Google to Develop Artificial Intelligence Chatbot

GOOGLE IS WORKING on developing chatbots that operate with artificial intelligence (AI), and are distinguished by their ability to simulate the personalities of celebrities and influencers.

These robots will be supported by Gemini models, and users will also be able to determine the robot's personality and appearance. This product is expected to be launched during the current year as an independent project.

Google is discussing the possibility of integrating these robots into YouTube in the future, in order to provide an experience similar to what Meta already provides to users on its various platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Messenger.

Users can benefit from ready-made custom Gems templates, such as a yoga instructor, math



teacher, recipe expert, and other ready-made custom templates that Google will provide to all users.

The company will also give Gemini Advanced subscription

holders the ability to create custom Gems bots according to their specific needs, similar to the benefits OpenAI is giving to ChatGPT Plus subscribers. — **ONA**

ACTOR

Serbia deports Bosnian actor over 'security threat'

SERBIAN AUTHORITIES on Monday deported a Bosnian actor they accused of posing a security threat, his lawyer said.

Fedja Stukan — an actor, activist and war veteran — had been detained upon arrival at the capital Belgrade's airport over the weekend.

Stukan, who had been set to attend a literary festival, is known for having courted controversy in both his native Bosnia and neighbouring Serbia.

The actor's attorney, Sead Spahovic, told AFP that Stukan was placed on a flight to Sarajevo and deported on Monday afternoon.

Stukan had earlier posted documents concerning his deportation on social media.

Spahovic told local media outlets that authorities had accused Stukan of posing "a threat to the security of Serbia".



Serbian officials did not publicly comment on the case.

Stukan is well known across the Balkans for his role in Angelina Jolie's 2011 film, "In the Land of Blood and Honey", about the 1990s war in Bosnia.

He is also the author of a popular autobiography called "Blank" — where he wrote about his time in the Bosnian army in 1992.

"The reason for my harassment there (in Serbia) is my book, and my appearance at last year's demonstrations against violence in Belgrade is actually the last straw" that prompted the deportation, Stukan told reporters upon arriving at the Sarajevo airport.

The book has been "hurting nationalists" across the region for a

long time, he added.

Stukan said he did not see any other reason to be proclaimed a threat to national security.

Bosnia was torn apart by a bloody inter-ethnic war in the 1990s that killed 100,000 people.

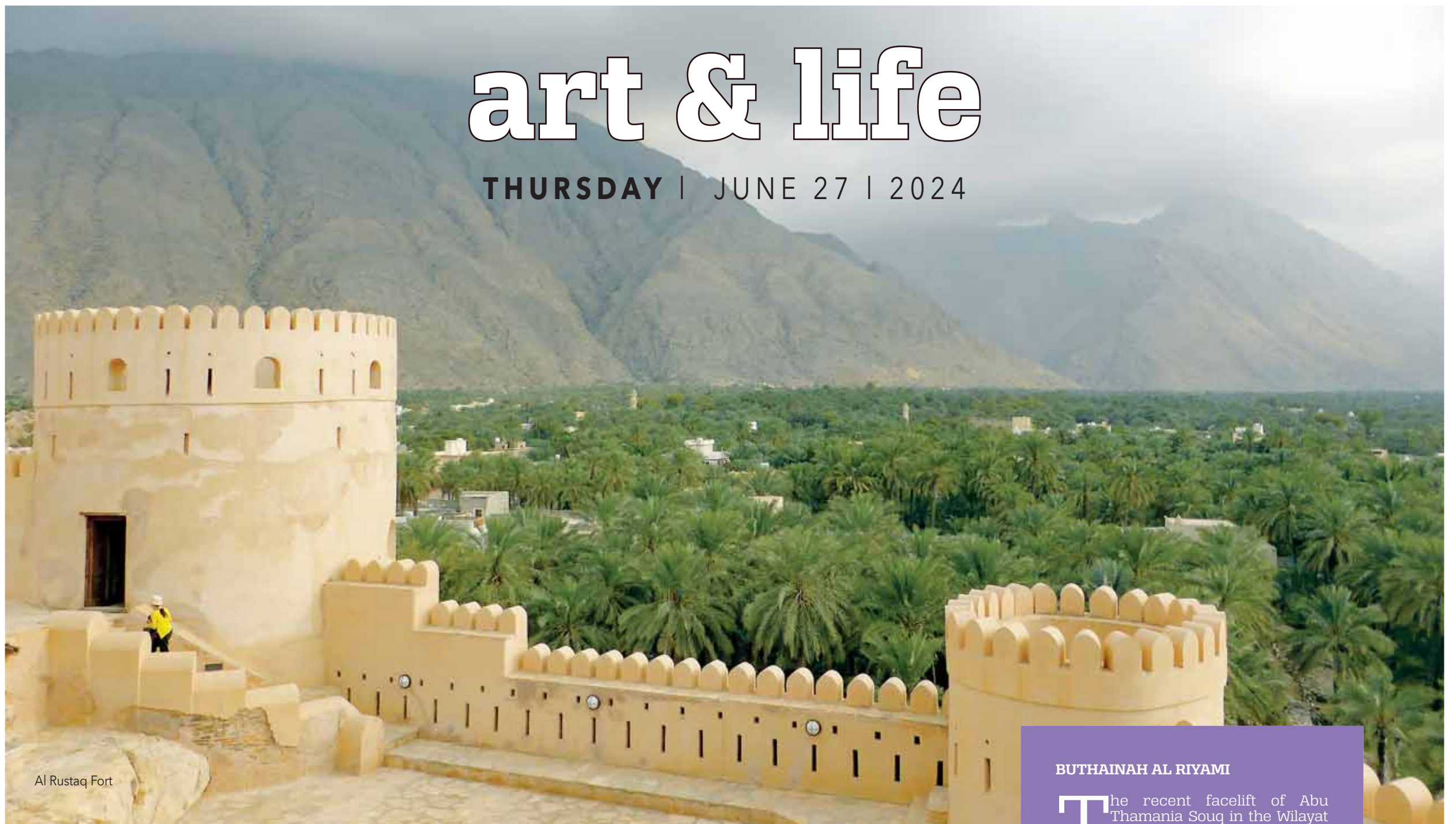
The war remains a sensitive subject in both Serbia and Bosnia, with Serb forces accused of having committed war crimes and overseeing gruesome atrocities during the conflict.

In recent years, Stukan has gained notoriety for his activism and organising protests in Bosnia.

Last year, Stukan also participated in demonstrations in Serbia, following back-to-back mass shootings in the country.

art & life

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Al Rustaq Fort

ABU THAMANIA SOUQ BLENDS FLAVOURS OF PAST AND PRESENT

BUTHAINAH AL RIYAMI

The recent facelift of Abu Thamania Souq in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, one of the ancient and popular spots for shopping, has attracted more shoppers and tourists. Souqs offer glimpses into Oman's deep heritage and rich culture. These souqs are filled with visitors during the traditional tourist season, which vary across the country.

Maryam al Chafri, a souq shopper, said, 'Abu Thamania Souq reflects my belief that no tree can grow to Heaven unless its roots reach down deep. Similarly, we can have a bright future when our traditions and culture have the foundation to grow.'

Abu Thamania Souq and Al Rustaq Fort stand on opposite sides sharing chronicles of culture and history. The souq retains its traditional architecture with modern amenities, maintaining a link between the present and the past. It offers a comfortable space for shopping. The highlight of the renovated souq is the café which offers a spending view of the surrounding mountains and Al Rustaq Fort. The panoramic view is enhanced by the green cover of the landscape. These vibes add a nostalgic flavour to the coffee, connecting different generations to their past.

The traditional souqs throughout Oman continue to keep their place as one of the top tourist spots. They continue to attract a growing numbers of Omanis, expats and tourists to experience Oman's rich, diverse and ancient heritage and to have their senses stimulated by the aromatic smells of frankincense, Arabic perfumes, and rich array of Oman's handicrafts.

The renovation of Abu Thamania Souq is part of the wider plan of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to develop and revitalise historic sites across Oman.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism puts in efforts to promote these distinctive tourist destinations, under careful direction and with the right attention to represent Oman's real and authentic culture and civilisation.

Each traditional Omani souq is distinct in terms of products and commodities such as traditional gold, silver, textiles, leather, perfumes, ceramic, herbs, palm leaves, wool, natural medicines, honey, Omani sweets, traditional handicrafts and antique weapons.

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