

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Rashad Al Alimi, Chairman of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Al Alimi, praying to Allah the Almighty to grant him success to achieve all hopes and aspirations for the Yemeni people. — **ONA**

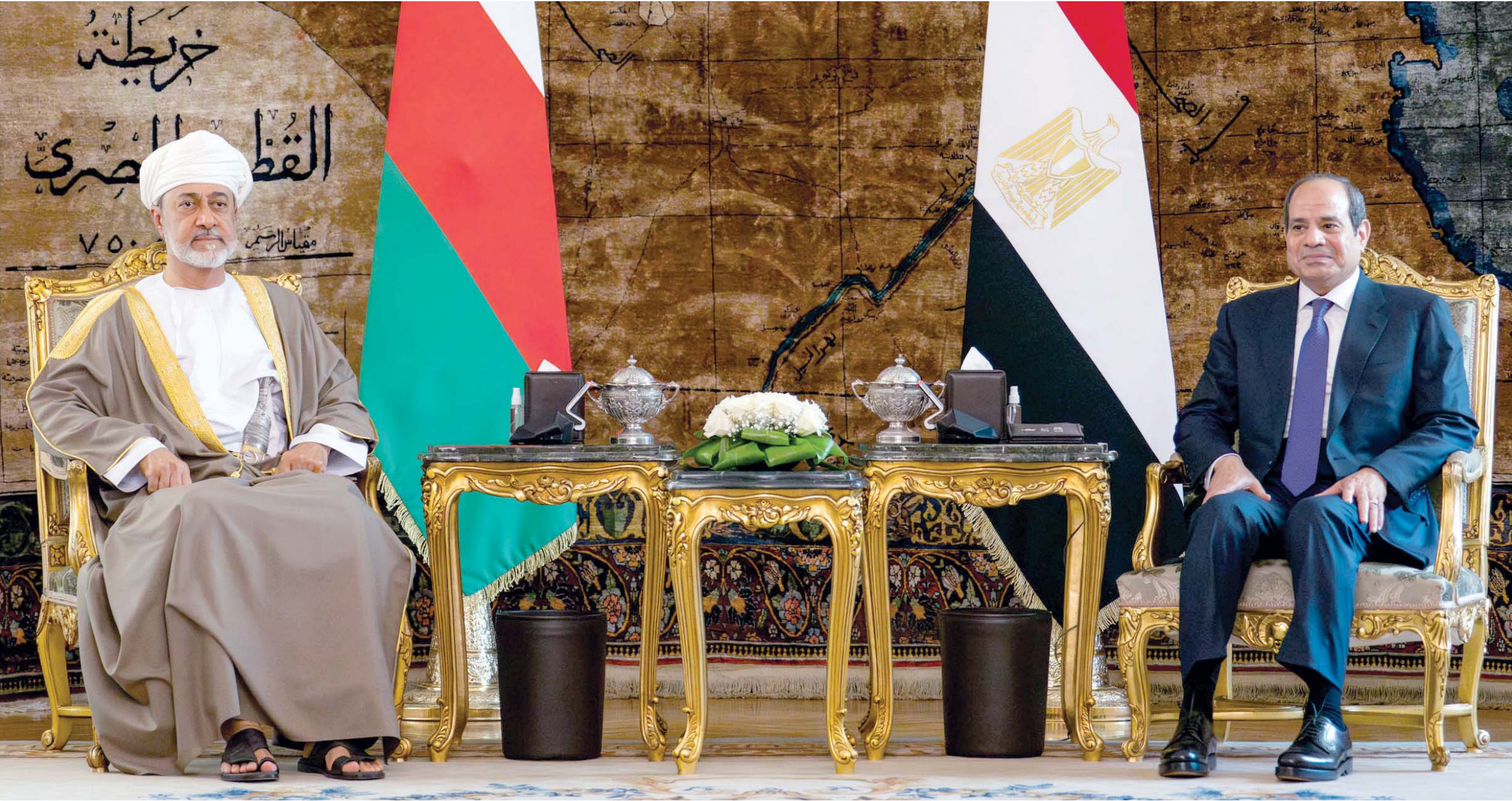


HM, Egyptian President hold official talks

HM AND EL-SISI REVIEW
DISTINGUISHED TIES AND DEEP-ROOTED
HISTORICAL BONDS

TWO LEADERS EXPLORE
VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE EXISTING
BILATERAL COOPERATION

HIS MAJESTY AND EGYPTIAN
PRESIDENT EXCHANGE VIEWS ON
VARIOUS DEVELOPMENTS



TWO LEADERS REVIEW DISTINGUISHED RELATIONS AND DEEP-ROOTED BONDS

CAIRO: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt held an official session of talks at Al Ittihadiya Palace in Cairo on Sunday evening.

At the outset of the session, the Egyptian President reiterated his heartfelt welcome for His Majesty the Sultan as a dear guest of Egypt and its people. He wished His Majesty the Sultan and his official delegation a happy stay. On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan reciprocated the kind sentiments, thanking the President for the warm welcome and sincere hospitality.

The two leaders reviewed the distinguished relations and the deep-rooted historical bonds

binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt. They also explored various aspects of the existing bilateral cooperation in all fields and contemplated ways of consolidating the joint interests in a manner that generates bounty and benefits to the two countries' peoples.

His Majesty the Sultan and the Egyptian President also exchanged views on various developments at the regional and international arenas.

The session of talks was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court,

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the Egyptian side by General Mohamed Zaki, Commander-in-

Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defence and Military Production, Sameh Shoukry, Foreign Minister, Major General Abbas Kamel, Head of the General Intelligence, Dr Hala El-Said, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Dr Mohamed Moait, Minister of Finance, Dr Assem Al Jazzar, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities (Head of the Mission of Honour), Eng Ahmed Samir, Minister of Trade and Industry, Khalid Radi, Ambassador of Egypt to Oman and Ahmed Fahmy, Spokesman of the Presidency.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan and the Egyptian President held a closed-door session. — **ONA**



HM, Sisi exchange decorations

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt have exchanged orders at Al Ittihadiya Palace in Cairo on Sunday evening, marking His Majesty's visit to Egypt.

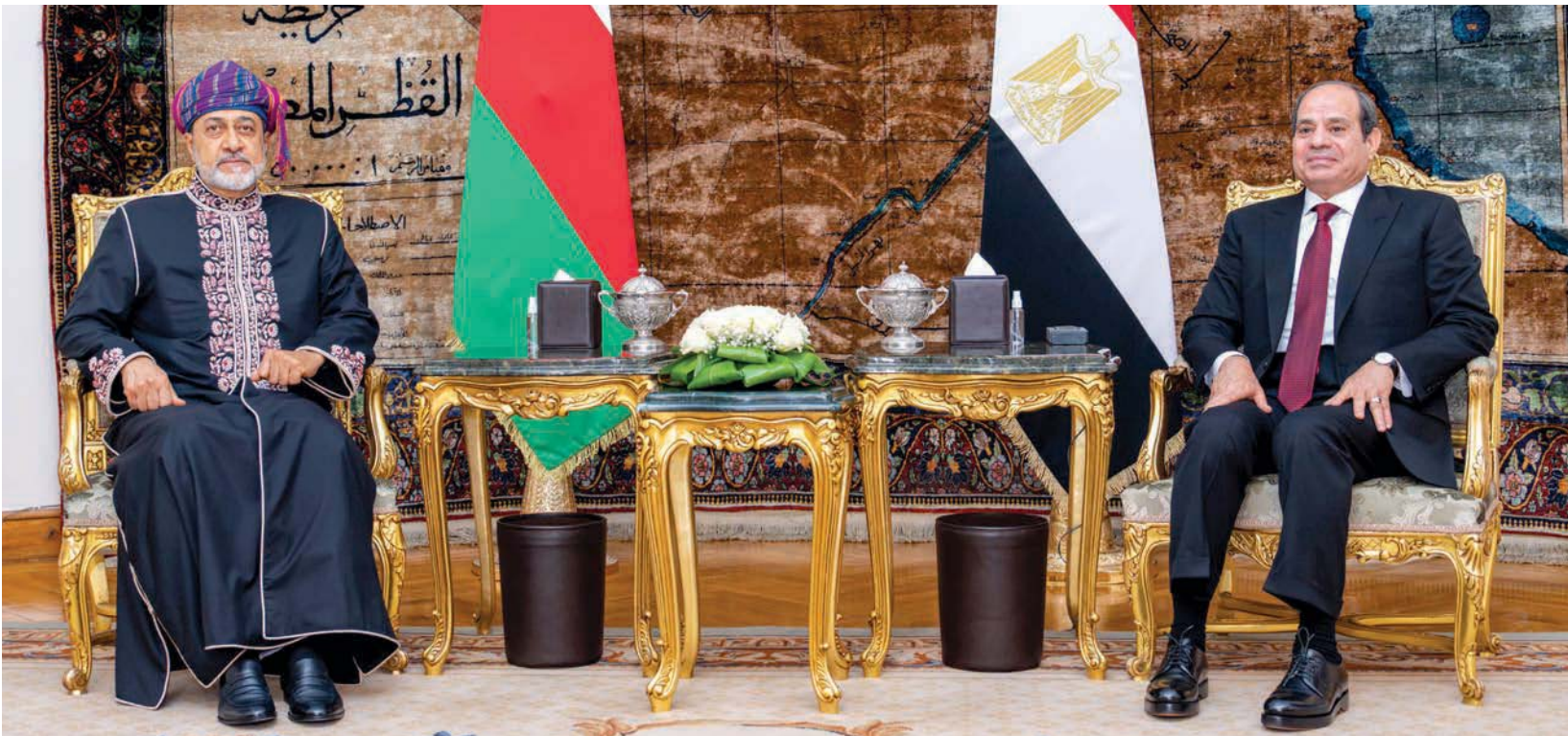
The Egyptian President conferred on His Majesty the Sultan the 'Order of the Nile', which is Egypt's most supreme accolade. The conferment of the Order demonstrates the President's deep appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan and incarnates the deep-rooted historical relations binding Oman and Egypt.

Meanwhile, His Majesty the Sultan decorated the Egyptian President with 'Oman First Order'. The conferment of the Order manifests His Majesty the Sultan's appreciation for the Egyptian President and reflects pride over the depth of fraternal relations between the two countries' peoples. The exchange of orders was attended by the official delegations of the Omani and Egyptian sides, as well as senior officials in Egypt.

EGYPT PRESIDENT HOSTS DINNER

President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt hosted an official dinner at Al Ittihadiya Palace in Cairo on Sunday evening, in honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The dinner was attended by the official delegations of the Omani and Egyptian sides. — **ONA**







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HIS MAJESTY BEGINS EGYPT VISIT



CAIRO: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Sunday arrived in the Arab Republic of Egypt on a two-day official visit.

When His Majesty the Sultan's plane touched ground at Cairo International Airport, President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt headed the welcoming party that greeted His Majesty the Sultan at the foot of the ramp.

Also present at the reception were Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt, and its

Permanent Representative to the Arab League and members of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Egypt.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and the Egyptian President headed to the Hall of Ceremonies, passing between two rows of honorary guards from the Egyptian Republican Guard.

After a short rest at the ceremonial hall, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the Egyptian President, boarded the motorcade that took them over to the Al Ittihadiya Palace, flanked by a group of motorcycles from the Egyptian

Republican Guard. There, an official reception ceremony was conducted in honour of His Majesty the Sultan.

Upon the arrival of the two leaders' motorcade at main gate of Al Ittihadiya Palace, trumpets were sounded and a group of horsemen lined up, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

Then, the Egyptian President accompanied His Majesty the Sultan to the dais of honour, where the Omani Royal Anthem and the Egyptian Republican Anthem were played. After

that, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the Egyptian President inspected the Guard of Honour, which saluted His Majesty. After that, souvenir photos were taken of His Majesty the Sultan and President El-Sisi.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with dignitaries from the Egyptian side, which comprised General Mohamed Zaki, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defence and Military Production, Sameh Shoukry, Foreign Minister, Major General Abbas Kamel, Head of the General Intelligence,

Dr Hala El Said, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Dr Mohamed Moait, Minister of Finance, Dr Assem Al Jazzar, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities (Head of the Mission of Honour), Eng Ahmed Samir, Minister of Trade and Industry, Khalid Radi, Ambassador of Egypt to Oman and Ahmed Fahmy, Spokesman of the Presidency.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA





MAINTAINING STRONG PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS

KABEER YOUSUF

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MUSCAT: The people-to-people relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt have been steadily progressing, and the mutual bond between the two nations holds great promise, according to a cross-section of individuals.

Several individuals from Egypt have shared their perspectives on why they consider the Sultanate of Oman their home, highlighting the Sultanate of Oman's hospitality.

Dr Mohammed Saad, senior journalist and Editor-in-Chief of *Al Osra Al Arabiya* newspaper and Bureau Chief of *Al Youm Al Salaa* newspaper in Egypt, explains that the historical ties between Egypt and the Sultanate of Oman have contributed to the strong relationship between the two nations. He mentions the ancient trade routes and cultural connections that have persisted throughout history, fostering close cooperation and coordination in political, economic, and cultural spheres.

Dr Saad, also the Director of the Egyptian *Al Youm Al Sabea* newspaper office in Muscat, acknowledges the significance of the Egyptian community in Oman, further demonstrating the depth of the relations between the two brotherly countries.

“The volume of trade exchange between

the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt witnessed an increase. The Sultanate of Oman is among the most secure and stable Arab and Gulf countries and attracts many communities, whether Arab, Islamic or foreign. This is what made me, like the rest of the residents of the Sultanate of Oman, choose it as my home, for more than a quarter of a century and today, I thank God, I made the right choice, and I got to know many colleagues and friends, both professionally and personally,” he says.

Dr Saad recalls, “When looking back, I can only remember goodness, respect, and moral conduct in dealing with both Omani citizens and residents. The relationship between myself and the Omani brothers has always been one of brotherhood and love.”

HISTORIC VISIT

Khaled Abdul Aziz al Shall, Vice-President of the Egyptian Community Club in Oman, highlights the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt, marking the first visit by the HM the Sultan to the country.

He emphasises the vast opportunities that exist between the two countries, given their fraternal relationship, capabilities in various fields, and influential roles in the region.

The visit reflects the mutual desire to enhance relations and cooperation across economic, cultural, and commercial domains. Al Shall expresses hope that the visit will



Dr Mohammed Saad



Khaled Abdul Aziz al Shall



Hassan Mohammed

result in increased trade, economic exchange, and mutual benefits for both peoples.

During the visit, discussions will cover regional and international issues, aiming to ease tensions in the region. The distinguished relations and shared vision between the leadership of both countries with the countries of the region further contribute to this endeavour.

Hassan Mohammed, Sales Manager at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Nizwa, acknowledged the historical depth and interconnection of Egyptian-Omani relations spanning thousands of years.

He highlighted his choice to live in Oman due to the kindness, generosity, and tolerance of its people, who embrace all nationalities and treat everyone equally.

He also praised the Sultanate of Oman's safety, security, and the calm and comfortable working environment it offers. Furthermore, he sees Oman as a promising market for investment, benefiting from the Oman Vision 2040, which aims to achieve the well-being of the Omani people. The strong people-to-people relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt continue to flourish, driven by historical ties, frequent diplomatic consultations, and signed agreements.

Both nations strive for closer cooperation and mutual benefits across various sectors, fostering a sense of brotherhood and fostering strong bonds between their peoples.

THE VOLUME OF TRADE BETWEEN OMAN AND EGYPT WITNESSED AN INCREASE

THE VISIT REFLECTS THE MUTUAL DESIRE TO ENHANCE RELATIONS AND COOPERATION ACROSS ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND COMMERCIAL DOMAINS

THE STRONG PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS CONTINUE TO FLOURISH, DRIVEN BY HISTORICAL TIES, FREQUENT DIPLOMATIC CONSULTATIONS, AND SIGNED AGREEMENTS

HM VISIT BOLSTERS OMAN, EGYPT TIES

SAMUEL KUTTY

The Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt enjoy centuries-old civilisational, cultural, and economic linkages built on people-to-people connections. These well-established historic relations are a strong model that is not affected by any regional or international political transformation.

The history of Omani-Egyptian relations, which dates back 3,500 years, started with cultural communication between Omanis and Pharaonic families. Omani frankincense played a pivotal role in that unique communication, which continues unabated till today.

Indeed, Egyptian Queen Hatshepsut visited Dhofar on a historical trip, the details of which were recorded on the walls of the Pharaonic temples.

Oman's support for Egypt during the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace process, which resulted in Egypt's recapture of the rest of its land in Sinai, is perhaps one of the most well-known political positions between Oman and Egypt. The people of Egypt still remember with appreciation and respect the remarkable historic decision of the Omani leadership.

Oman has consistently supported Egypt on several issues, including the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia, in which the Sultanate of Oman stressed the need to reach an agreement that meets the interests of all the parties.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

At the political level, Egypt and Oman have strong political relations. There is continuous consultation and coordination between the two countries on bilateral, regional, and international issues. Omani officials at all levels appreciate the role played by Egypt in resolving conflicts for the sake of the

people of the region.

The foundations of the current diplomatic relations that extend for over half a century, were laid by the late Sultan Qaboos with his trust in the leadership of Egypt and the crucial role that the country could play in the region.

And the late Sultan maintained good relations with Egypt, during the era of President Hosni Mubarak, and there were many visits to Cairo and Muscat by the two leaders. Significantly, the ramifications of the relations are not limited to one side!

Recent years have witnessed an important movement represented in high-level official visits between the two countries, and indeed many activities have begun to operate in both countries.

TOP-LEVEL VISITS

The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt following an invitation from President Abdul Fattah El Sisi assumes great importance given the current political and economic challenges in both Arab and international arenas.

The visit comes as a result of the fact that there has been real momentum in the relations between Oman and Egypt as a result of the volume of mutual visits between the two great leaders in the two countries.

During the visit, the leaders of the two countries are expected to discuss important matters including ways to boost cooperation between Egypt and Oman so that both countries can fulfil their desired joint goals. They will also debate the latest developments that occurred both internationally and regionally across the Middle East.

The first visit of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to the Sultanate of Oman in February 2018, established a new phase of solid relations between the two countries and their brotherly peoples and opened broad horizons to enhance cooperation in all fields. In June 2022,



THE VISIT OF HM TO EGYPT FOLLOWING AN INVITATION FROM PRESIDENT SISI ASSUMES GREAT IMPORTANCE GIVEN THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN BOTH ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL ARENAS

THE VISIT COMES AS A RESULT OF THE FACT THAT THERE HAS BEEN REAL MOMENTUM IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN OMAN AND EGYPT AND OF THE VOLUME OF MUTUAL VISITS BETWEEN THE TWO GREAT LEADERS IN THE TWO COUNTRIES

OMAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PIONEER IN ITS ENDEAVOURS WITH EGYPT TO BUILD BRIDGES OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION ARISING FROM THE FORESIGHT OF A VISION FOR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WORLD IN GENERAL, AND THE REGION IN PARTICULAR

the President again visited the Sultanate of Oman following which several agreements including those related to maritime navigation, investment, trade and industry, combating monopoly, providing means for free competition and development, industry and investment promotion, as well as environmental issues, vocational and technical training, raising human capabilities, and higher education were signed between the two countries.

Several Omani delegations have visited Egypt during the past two years to learn about the Egyptian experience in the field of establishing modern cities and in the tourism field.

In January 2022, Sameh Shoukry, Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs paid an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman following an invitation from Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister of Oman.

The two sides reviewed the existing bilateral cooperation relations between the two countries and expressed their deep satisfaction at the high level that these relations had reached. There were also visits by the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning and the Minister of Heritage and Tourism, about the industrial, logistical, and food industries.

Oman considers Egypt as an important channel for export to the neighbouring African countries. Omani products could also benefit from the Egyptian market to access the COMESA trade group comprising 21 countries.

Officials from both countries also meet constantly to review and activate the commercial relations between the two countries within the framework of the Great Arab trade agreement. According to the directives of the two leaderships, officials from both countries are working jointly to develop relations in various fields. This move is reflected in economic, commercial, and investment fields.

A NEW PHASE IN TIES

Oman has always been a pioneer in its endeavours with Egypt to build bridges of friendship and cooperation arising from the foresight of a vision for developments in the world in general, and the region in particular.

The depth of relations in all fields between the two countries was a motive for coordination between them in the political, strategic, and security fields, and consultation and understanding existed between the two countries on regional and international issues.

In the Arab political arena, the two countries always seek a policy of resolving all differences through dialogue and negotiation. They also call for peace and stability regionally and internationally but with an important reservation based on not giving up any of the Arab rights in general and the Palestinian ones in particular. Therefore, the two states have a vision aimed at providing the maximum possible support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate rights.

Today, Oman has distinguished itself as a player that can maintain strong working relationships with countries across the Middle East. Oman's focus on balanced foreign policy, conflict resolution, and skillful mediation makes it unique among Arab governments.

Oman's active neutrality has served the country to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between post-1979 Iran and various Arab and Western states too, such as Egypt, Iraq, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Oman has maintained this approach to foreign policy under His Majesty Sultan Haitham's leadership.

Over the past few decades, Egypt has realised major improvements in human development, including expanding access to education, reducing the burden of communicable diseases, and increasing life expectancy.



Higher education ministry, ICESCO explore areas of cooperation

MUSCAT: Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education Research and Innovation, received here on Sunday Dr Salim Mahmood Al Malik, Director-General of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO).

The meeting reviewed the ICESCO programmes which cover a range of fields, including honing the abilities of youth and supporting them in entrepreneurship, modern technologies, innovation, space sciences, scholarships, training and expanding the knowledge base of students and researchers.

During the meeting, Al Mahrouqi highlighted the strategic approaches of the Sultanate of Oman in the fields of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), exploring future potentials and entrepreneurship, among other matters. She also underscored the Ministry's keenness to boost partnership and cooperation with the ICESCO in the higher education, research and



innovation spheres.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Chairperson of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science also received in her office Dr Salim Mahmood Al Malik.

The two sides discussed means of enhancing cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman

and ISESCO in various fields of education, science, culture, communication and information. They also reviewed a number of future proposals related to preserving heritage in the Islamic world and utilising technologies of the artificial intelligence in education.

They also discussed the topic of providing the organisation with young cadres qualified to lead the various sectors and programmes supervised by the organisation, strengthening the role of national committees in member states, and supporting cooperation with external centres of the organisation such as the Center for Civilisational Dialogue, the Center for Strategic Foresight, and others.

— ONA

MoHERI invites registration for National Research Award

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Sunday invited interested researchers and specialists to submit applications for the 10th round of the National Research Award (NRA).

The competition, which encourages scholarly research in six sectors, will be open for contestants till July 20, 2023.



The NRA is granted for research in two categories: (1) The best published research for holders of the doctorate degree and its equivalent and (2) the best published research for emerging researchers (those who do not hold a doctorate).

The award covers the following six domains: “education and human resources”, “information and communication systems”, “health and community service”, “culture, social sciences and basic sciences”, “energy and industry” and “environment and vital resources”.

The ministry introduced the NRA to achieve a number of objectives: (1) to motivate high quality research focusing on national priorities, (2) hone the skills of national cadres and (3) explore national research output from academic institutions, with a view to advancing their integration with each other.

Since its inception in 2014, the NRA has seen a high rate of competition. Last year it was contested by 307 competitors, among them 209 were holders of the doctorate degree and its equivalent and 98 were junior researchers. — ONA

Al Ribat Initiative to help 306 pilgrims from Social Security Segment



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As part of the annual initiative called “Rabat” initiated by His Majesty late Sultan Qaboos, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) will provide financial support to 311 Omani citizens protected under the social insurance by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), enabling them to fulfil their dream of performing Haj this year.

“With this initiative, we make sure that any Omani national is not withdrawing from his wish to perform Haj in the year of Hijri 1444 because of shortage of funds as the initiative confirms the ability of the Awqaf to contribute to sustainable development,” said Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The aim of this initiative is to ensure that no Omani national who wishes to perform the Haj pilgrimage is unable to do so due to financial constraints. Haj holds great importance in a believer's life, and through the Rabat initiative, the Awqaf affirms its commitment to contribute to sustainable development and improve the lives of people in all countries.

A total amount of RO 120,000 has been allocated for the initiative this year, specifically for pilgrims from the Sultanate of

Oman. Additionally, an amount of RO 50,000 will be sourced from the Waqf Fund to cover the expenses, along with potential donations from charitable institutions and individuals in society.

Wail bin Saif al Harrasi, Under Secretary at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, stated that this initiative aims to enhance the living standards of the people by helping them fulfil their dreams. He emphasised that this year's Awqaf represents a new beginning for Waqf in Oman.

The beneficiaries of this initiative are selected from the social security category, registered with the Ministry of Social Development, and approved by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The first flight carrying pilgrims from Oman will depart from Muscat on June 14, corresponding to Dhul Qāda 25, 1444. This will be followed by regular flights carrying other pilgrims in the subsequent days. The initial flight will transport officials from various ministries, the Royal Oman Police, and other delegates who will be performing the holy Haj this year.

Following the closure of the registration on March 5, the Ministry received a total of 33,536 applications, including 29,930 requests from Omani citizens and 3,606 requests from residents, for this year's Haj.

Military ties discussed with UK defence college delegation

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, received here on Sunday a delegation from the Royal College of Defence Studies in the United Kingdom.

Al Harthy briefed the delegation on Oman's foreign policy and Oman's stance regarding various regional and international issues.

The meeting was attended by Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Mantheri, Head of the Europe Department, retired Air Vice Marshal Philip Thomas Giles, head



of the British delegation, and several officials from the foreign ministry.

SAF CHIEF OF STAFF RECEIVES UK DELEGATION: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief

of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received at the Maritime Security Centre (MSC) on Sunday a delegation from the Royal College of Defence Studies in the United Kingdom, headed by retired Air Vice Marshal Philip Thomas Giles.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and reviewed several military issues of common interests. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Mandhari, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning and several senior SAF officers. — ONA

Transition period brings rainfall in Oman with local cloud formations

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Oman experienced a transition period characterised by changing weather patterns, as several wilayats received rainfall on Sunday afternoon. The Oman Met Office issued an alert, cautioning heavy rains ranging between 15 to 25 mm and the possibility of flash floods.

Clouds continued to form over parts of the Dhofar Governorate, with chances of rain later in the day.

Local clouds also appeared over the Al Hajar Mountains and adjacent areas, including parts of Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah, and Al Dhahirah, with opportunities for expansion and potential rainfall.

Additionally, clouds were observed over Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Dhahirah, and Al Buraimi.

The weather forecaster at the Oman Met Office predicted that the desert region of the Dhofar Governorate, especially Al Mazyouna and Thamrait, would likely receive rain in the afternoon.

In Muscat Governorate, the south of Al Amerat and Qurayat



were identified as potential areas for rainfall.

The unique weather conditions during this period were attributed to the combination of a trough passing from west to east and the local cloud formations over the Al Hajar Mountains, which are typical during the summer. These rains were expected to be accompanied by downdraft winds, with wind speeds ranging between 30 to 50 knots, leading to reduced

Met office issues alert of heavy rains and flash floods

horizontal visibility and raising dust in the Al Hajar Mountains area.

Pictures from Suhar showcased the joy of children during the descent of the valley in Falaj Al Qabayil amidst the rainy weather.

Several wadis, including Wadi Imti in the Wilayat of Izki , Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and Wadi Al Qabil, were already flowing on Saturday.

The temperature remained high over the weekend, attributed to the ongoing transition from spring to summer. The weather expert explained that May marks this transition period, which brings about changes in weather conditions.



Battles rage hours after Sudan rivals agree to ceasefire

KHARTOUM: Residents of Sudan's capital again awoke to heavy clashes on Sunday morning just hours after rival generals agreed to an upcoming one-week ceasefire amid ongoing talks in Saudi Arabia.

The ceasefire — the latest following many successive truces that have been systematically violated — is set to go into effect at 9:45 pm on Monday, the US and Saudi Arabia said in a joint statement.

The ceasefire “shall remain in effect for seven days and may be extended with the agreement of both parties”, the statement added after talks in Jeddah.

Multiple truces have been violated since fighting broke out five weeks ago, which the Saudi foreign ministry acknowledged in a statement published by the official Saudi Press Agency early on Sunday.

“Unlike previous ceasefires, the Agreement reached in Jeddah was signed by the parties and will be supported by a US-Saudi and international-supported ceasefire monitoring mechanism,” it said.

The fighting pits the Sudanese army, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, led by Burhan's former deputy Mohammed Hamdan Daglo. Around 1,000 people have



Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud stands along with other officials as representatives of the Sudanese army and rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces sign an agreement for a seven-day ceasefire in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Saturday. – Reuters

been killed and over a million displaced throughout the weeks of intense fighting, leaving millions more with sporadic access to water, electricity or medicine.

In Khartoum, doctors

have repeatedly condemned bombardments on hospitals which have come under attack by both the air force's fighter jets and the RSF's artillery. Residents of densely-populated

neighbourhoods have accused RSF fighters of widespread break-ins and looting, with many families returning to their homes only to find them occupied by paramilitary fighters. Civilians

and aid agencies have for weeks pleaded for both sides to secure humanitarian corridors to let in urgently needed assistance.

With most banks shuttered, access to food is becoming

Around 1,000 people have been killed and over a million displaced throughout the weeks of intense fighting, leaving millions more with sporadic access to water, electricity or medicine

increasingly difficult amid crippling fuel shortages.

Warehouses and food factories have been looted, attacked and burned, raising alarm bells in what was already one of the world's poorest countries.

Currently, 25 million people — more than half of the population — need humanitarian aid, the highest number the United Nations has ever recorded in the country.

A prolonged conflict — which analysts warn is likely — will cause millions more to become food insecure and push a million people to flee into neighbouring countries, according to the UN.

The UN's special envoy to Sudan, Volker Perthes, on Saturday flew to New York, where he is due to brief the Security Council on Monday. — AFP

Israel far-right minister visits Al-Aqsa compound

TEL AVIV: Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound on Sunday, a controversial move by the extreme-right politician amid heightened tensions in annexed east Jerusalem.

The move came three days after Ben-Gvir and tens of thousands of Jewish nationalists marched through the Old City and just over a week into a fragile Gaza ceasefire. Al-Aqsa mosque is the third holiest site in Islam and is administered by Jordan. Non-Muslims are permitted to visit the site, but not pray there.

The compound is also the most sacred site for Jews, who pray below it at the Western Wall.

Hamas denounced Ben-Gvir's last visit to the site in January and again slammed his action on Sunday.

Israel will “bear responsibility for the barbaric incursions of its ministers and herds of settlers”,



Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visits Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem's Old City. – Reuters

the group wrote on Telegram.

The move “confirms the depths of danger looming over Al-Aqsa, under this Zionist fascist government and the arrogance of its ministers from the extreme right”, said Hamas.

Israeli police confirmed Ben-Gvir's visit in a statement, adding that it passed without incident.

Later on Sunday, Israel's top politicians held a rare cabinet

meeting in the tunnels beneath the Western Wall.

Palestinians fear their use as a vast museum threatens the foundations of Al-Aqsa mosque.

Jordan decried Ben-Gvir's actions as a “provocative step” and a “dangerous and unacceptable escalation”.

It “represents a flagrant and unacceptable violation of international law, and of the

historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its holy sites”, said foreign ministry spokesman Sinan Majali.

Tours of the site by Jewish nationalists have long been criticised by Palestinians and Arab nations, while Ben-Gvir's visits have taken on added weight since he took office in December.

The office of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas said “harming Al-Aqsa Mosque is playing with fire”.

“(It) will push the region into a religious war with unimaginable consequences that will affect everyone,” said Abbas's spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, in a statement published by the Palestinian news agency Wafa.

The timing of Sunday's visit also holds significance, coming days after nationalists marched through the Old City to celebrate east Jerusalem's capture by Israeli forces in the 1967 Six-Day War.

— AFP

Erdogan: Türkiye's irresistible force nears final election test

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has beaten back his rivals at one of his most vulnerable movements and regained his old aura of invincibility ahead of next Sunday's historic runoff election.

An unprecedented opposition coalition, galvanised by a biting economic crisis and fury over a calamitous February earthquake, represented his latest challenge in last Sunday's general election.

But while coming closer to defeat than ever, Erdogan beat the odds yet again, looking increasingly likely to extend his two-decade rule for one last time until 2028.

A transformative figure, Erdogan is revered for unshackling religious restrictions in the officially secular but mostly Muslim state, overseeing ambitious infrastructure projects and turning Türkiye into a geopolitical force. Next Sunday's runoff is turning into a referendum on his rule, with its result likely to leave the sharply polarised nation of 85 million deeply divided.

Erdogan prides himself on being able to woo doubters through tireless campaigning. This passion has helped him and his party win more



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan addresses his supporters in Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye. – Reuters

than a dozen local and national elections, allowing Erdogan to claim a people's mandate for his foreign military adventures and domestic clampdowns on dissent. Erdogan risked his political domination on a 2017 referendum over abolishing the office of prime minister and handing greater powers to the president.

Erdogan eked out a narrow win, enfeebling parliament and enabling him to effectively rule by decree. It also gave him the constitutional loophole needed to run for two more terms in office — an outcome acquiring the air of inevitability. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KABUL

2 Pilots killed in military helicopter crash

Two pilots were killed on Sunday when a US-made military helicopter crashed in the north of Afghanistan, the country's defence ministry said.

“An MD-530 helicopter of the country's air force collided with an electricity pylon,” the defence minister said.

In September, a Black Hawk helicopter commandeered by the Taliban government after the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan crashed during a training session in Kabul, killing



two pilots and a crew member.

When exiting the country in 2021, the US military left behind billions of dollars worth of aircraft, vehicles, weapons and other hardware — much of which it said had been rendered inoperable. — AFP

BEIJING

China punishes 62 officials over deadly collapse

China has issued warnings and other punishments to 62 officials after the collapse of a housing block in Changsha city in Hunan province killed 54 people last month, state news agency Xinhua said on Sunday.

Several senior city officials were given serious warnings, including Zheng Jianxin, the current mayor of Changsha who was sacked, Xinhua said.

Officials were transferred to judicial authorities for serious law violations and suspected



crimes related to their duties, Xinhua said.

Other former Changsha officials, including Hu Henghua, currently mayor of Chongqing who was former mayor of Changsha, were also given warnings. — Reuters

TEHRAN

5 Border guards killed in clashes in southeast

Five Iranian border guards were killed on Sunday during clashes with an armed group in the restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, state media reported. The guards were killed in Saravan, near Iran's border with Pakistan, the official IRNA news agency said.

Sunday's attack was carried out by “a terrorist group that was seeking to infiltrate the country” but whose members “fled the scene after suffering injuries”, IRNA said. Iran foreign ministry



spokesman Nasser Kanani condemned the attack saying: “Certainly, the aim of these terrorist groups is to disrupt the security of the common borders and the security of the people living on the borders of the two countries”. — AFP



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In brief

ROME



PM TO INSPECT EXTENSIVE DAMAGE IN FLOOD-HIT AREAS

Regions of Italy remain on the highest level of alert following severe flooding sparked by heavy rainfall, with the prime minister expected to visit the worst-hit areas in Emilia-Romagna on Sunday.

Italian media reported that Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was expected at noon in the city of Forlì, which was severely affected by the deadly flooding. The Italian premier departed earlier from the summit of seven leading industrialised countries (G7) in Hiroshima, Japan, in order to assess the developments at home. "My conscience demands that I return," she told journalists before her departure. — **dpa**

ULAANBAATAR



MACRON MAKES FIRST PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO MONGOLIA

Emmanuel Macron on Sunday made a brief but symbolic visit to Mongolia, the first by a French president to the country that is of growing strategic interest in the West.

The French head of state was greeted by a traditional Mongolian guard of honour after landing in the capital Ulaanbaatar following the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan.

Macron then attended a reception at Sukhbaatar Square, which contains a monument to Genghis Khan.

Macron will visit the museum of Genghis Khan which will lend part of its collection to the Nantes History Museum in western France. — **AFP**

CHISINAU



PRO-GOVERNMENT RALLY DRAWS TENS OF THOUSANDS

Tens of thousands of Moldovans rallied in the capital Chisinau on Sunday to support their pro-Western government's drive towards Europe.

Moldova has been badly hit by the impact of Moscow's attack of neighbouring Ukraine, which Chisinau has repeatedly condemned, and applied to join the European Union.

President Maia Sandu has accused Russia of seeking to sabotage its European integration by fuelling anti-government protests and propaganda. "Moldova does not want to be blackmailed by the Kremlin," Sandu said at the rally. — **Reuters**

Ukraine claims foothold in part of Bakhmut, aims to encircle city

KYIV: Russia and Ukraine gave conflicting accounts of the situation in Bakhmut on Sunday, with Kyiv saying it still controlled a small part of the besieged eastern city while Moscow congratulated the Wagner private army and Russian troops for "liberating" it.

Russia said on Saturday it had fully captured the destroyed city, which would mark an end to the longest and bloodiest battle of the 15-month war. Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated his troops and Wagner.

However, Ukrainian officials on Sunday disputed the claims. A top Ukrainian general said Kyiv's forces controlled what he accepted was an "insignificant" part of Bakhmut, but said the foothold would be enough to enter the devastated city when the situation changed.

General Oleksandr Syrskiy said in a Telegram post that Kyiv's forces were advancing on Russian forces in the suburbs and that they were getting closer to a "tactical encirclement" of the city, which was formerly home to 70,000 people.

"Our forces have taken the city in a semi-encirclement, which gives us the opportunity to destroy the enemy... the enemy has to defend himself in the part of the city he controls," Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said earlier on Sunday on Telegram.

Maliar added Ukrainian troops



Ukrainian servicemen fire a M777 howitzer at Russian positions near Bakhmut, eastern Ukraine. — **AFP**

were still defending industrial and infrastructure facilities as well as a private sector of the city and had claimed part of the overlooking heights.

Over the past week, Ukrainian forces have made their most rapid gains for six months on Bakhmut's northern and southern flanks, with Russia acknowledging some

setbacks for its troops. Kyiv says its aim has been to draw Russian forces from elsewhere on the front into the city, to inflict high casualties there and weaken Moscow's defensive line elsewhere ahead of a planned major Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Zelenskiy compared to the US World War Two atomic bomb

attack on Hiroshima, in Japan.

"I'll tell you openly: Photographs of ruined Hiroshima absolutely remind me of Bakhmut and other similar settlements. Nothing left alive, all the buildings ruined," he told reporters as he attended G7 summit in Japan.

Taking Bakhmut - which Russia refers to by its Soviet-era name of

Artyomovsk - would represent Moscow's first big victory in the conflict in more than 10 months.

The battle for Bakhmut has revealed a deepening split between Wagner, which has recruited thousands of convicts from Russian prisons, and the regular Russian military.

— **Reuters**

South Korea, Germany to sign information pact to boost defence cooperation

SEOUL: South Korea and Germany will soon sign an agreement aimed at protecting military secrets to boost defence cooperation, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said on Sunday as he met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Seoul.

The military information agreement will help "smoothly operate the defence industry supply chain", amid global economic and political instability, Yoon told a briefing.

South Korea, which recently pursued a similar information-sharing pact with Canada, has moved to expand its defence industry amid rising demand driven by the war in Ukraine and other global tensions, but has so far refused to provide weapons to Kyiv.

Yoon said respect for freedom as a universal value was "very vital" in the face of authoritarianism challenging democracy, unstable global

supply chains and the war.

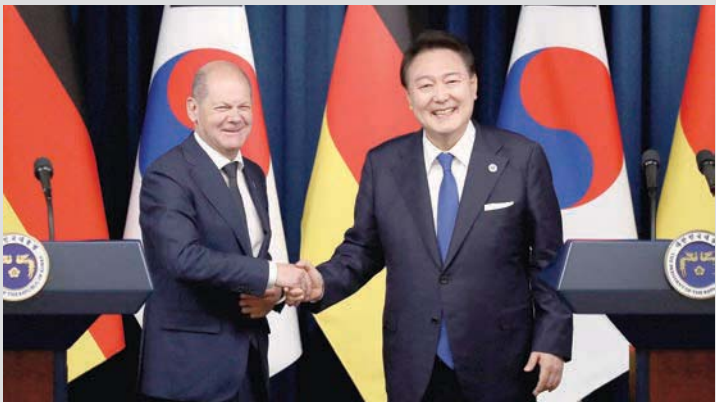
"From now, I expect South Korea and Germany will further expand reciprocal and future-oriented cooperation and strengthen the solidarity for peace and prosperity of Europe and Asia," Yoon said in opening remarks at the meeting with Scholz.

The two leaders also discussed deepening cooperation in production of semiconductors, among other areas.

Scholz, who is visiting South Korea after attending the Group of Seven (G7) summit in Hiroshima, Japan, called North Korea's missile tests a sign of a "still dangerous situation" on the Korean peninsula.

"This is a threat to peace and security in this region," he said at a military base after a visit to the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) separating the Koreans.

— **Reuters**



Olaf Scholz shakes hands with Yoon Suk Yeol after their joint press conference at the Presidential Office in Seoul, South Korea. — **Reuters**

Biden sees shift in ties with China 'shortly', says G7 wants to de-risk, not decouple

HIROSHIMA: US President Joe Biden on Sunday said the Group of Seven nations had agreed a united approach to China that called for diversifying supply chains to reduce dependence on one country, and hinted that he could speak with China's president soon.

"We're not looking to decouple from China. We're looking to de-risk and diversify our relationship with China," Biden told a press conference after a three-day summit with G7 leaders.

He said G7 nations were more unified than ever in terms of "resisting economic coercion together and countering harmful practices that hurt our workers."

G7 leaders outlined a shared approach to "de-risk, not decouple" economic engagement with China in a Saturday communique, prompting China's embassy in Japan to urged the G7 to stop creating confrontation and division.

Despite the reaction, Biden said he expected a thaw in frosty relations with China "very shortly" after strains caused by an incident earlier this year when the United States shot down a Chinese balloon that flew over sensitive military sites.

"We should have an open hotline," Biden said. He said he had agreed with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a



US President Joe Biden speaks during a news conference following the Group of Seven (G-7) leaders summit in Hiroshima, Japan. — **Reuters**

G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia last year to keep communications open, but everything changed after "this silly balloon that was carrying two freight cars worth of spying equipment"

Biden suggested a shift in US-China relations could occur soon, echoing his comment to reporters before his departure.

"In terms of talking with them, I think you're going to see that thaw very shortly," Biden said.

Biden said there was a clear understanding among most of the allies that if China were to

act unilaterally against the self-governed island Taiwan, there would be a response.

Biden reiterated that the United States and G7 allies would not trade in materials that would allow China to build weapons of mass destruction, but insisted that was "not a hostile act."

He said he would not considering easing restrictions on China on those materials, but it was under negotiation whether to ease sanctions on Chinese General Li Shangfu, who was named in March as China's new Defense Minister. — **Reuters**

Learning new languages is a rising trend



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

Many people are making mental and physical plans with the summer holidays fast approaching. These include visiting home countries, discovering new places or even indulging oneself with a staycation. Sometimes these plans also involve learning new languages. With the global world being interconnected, interest in different cultures and languages has only risen. This is even more true with languages that are popular in the entertainment industry. Korean and Turkish come to mind in the Omani context. There are many reasons for the interest in learning new languages which saw a sudden spurt during the pandemic of 2020. According to the popular networking site LinkedIn, the global pandemic, the popularity

of interactive online applications, online tutoring, and the entry of language teaching tools into new markets, have all contributed to making language learning fashionable and fun. Academic studies show that pop culture widely influences young learners to learn new languages. The huge success of Turkish televised series, for example, catapulted the Turkish language to the centre in the Arabian Gulf – facilitated by the closeness to the Arabic language and culture. The same was true of Korean a few years ago. The benefits of learning a new language are multifold: from physiological and neurological changes in the brain, being able to make new connections in grammar and vocabulary, and

LANGUAGE LEARNING IS FULL OF ADVANTAGES LIKE MORE INDIRECT SKILLS ARE DEVELOPED AS A RESULT OF LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE. FROM INCLUDE INCREASED MEMORY AND BETTER CONCENTRATION, COMMUNICATION SKILLS, AND CREATIVITY even preventing or delaying dementia, language learning is full of advantages. Other, more indirect skills are also developed as a result of learning a new language. These include increased memory and better concentration, communication skills, and creativity. All of this adds to better academic performance

in students, studies conducted by Cambridge University found. There are innumerable platforms to learn a language now. From Duolingo and Babbel, there are hundreds of language applications, most of which are free, to begin with. All of them are now interactive and have links to videos and live chat opportunities, 1-on-1 tutoring, and even games that encourage learners to proceed to new levels. There are no signs that learning new languages is going to decrease. Language learning applications are a \$3 billion industry with tremendous potential in the years to come. As the applications become more sophisticated, they will invite more participants to explore new worlds of languages. Augmented and virtual reality are the new

buzzwords in language learning – put on a headset and immerse yourself in a whole other, foreign world, complete with foreign words in their cultural setting. But will automation make learning a language unnecessarily? If machines can translate words and sentences in real-time, what is the need to learn another language? As of now, such fears are unfounded. That is because language is more than just a few words put together to make meaning. Languages are about people, cultures, and ways of life. It is what connects us to each other, helps us understand our differences, and also points to our similarities. Without languages, we would all be in our own bubbles, unable to communicate.

Exploring the dynamic twining and adaptability between man, machine

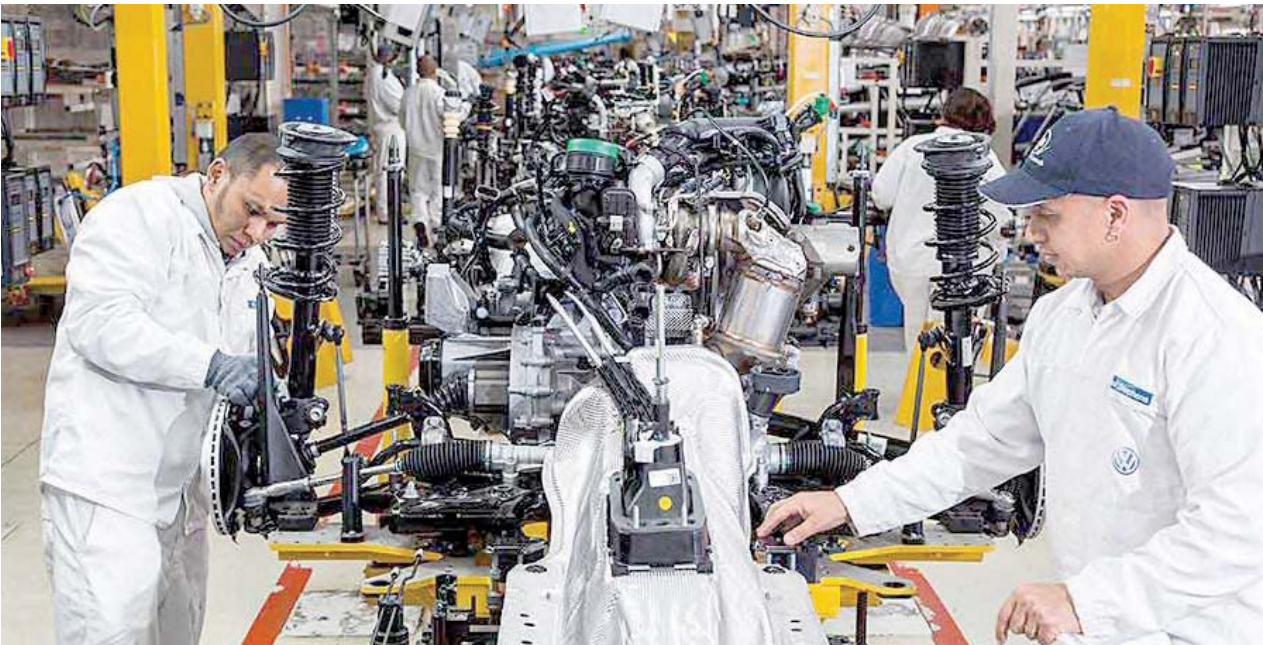


Dr Muamar bin Ali al Toobi

The writer is an Omani academic and researcher

The Digital Human, Digitisation of Humans or humanisation of machine are all projects adopted by large technology firms that seek to twin humans and machine by blending the biological and the digital systems, to be more precise, with Artificial Intelligence from one side and fitting machines with human features, on the other hand to reflect a phase that might overtake the smart machine phase which won't only operate, at that day, by its independent digital system alone but it will also operate in biodigital twinning with humans. Before we come to discuss some details of this twinning and its real-life examples, it is crucial to pay attention to the significance of this twinning and its consequences that determine our current and future digital orientations.

The term 'digital human' refers to human contact with the digital system, which contains, in some cases, the types of electronic systems and their different sizes that are related to computer systems and their smart algorithms which will be in their advanced stages represented by artificial intelligence which will reflect, at that time, what can be called the human digitalisation. This will result in the highest utilisation of technology for the service of man even in his complicated biological makeup, I will provide examples of the same in the next paragraphs. Regarding the humanisation of machine, machine here refers to the term artificial intelligence in general. Artificial intelligence means to equip the machine with human capabilities starting with the capacity to think, analyse, and move (automation) and ending with the machine possessing human feelings and this last goal actualises the required humanisation. The current scientific advancement has overridden the science fiction phase in creating a realistic industry for the digitisation of humans and humanisation of machine. There are many forms that acquired their scientific nature



which is based on the making and realisation of twinning. Many models of twinning have turned into an undeniable reality some of which are known inside the scientific milieus as Human Immortality Project that attempts to design a digital copy of man through artificial intelligence and digital embodiment such as the metaverse technology that emulate the original biological copy of human beings in terms of speech, including the tone of the voice and the countenance, behaviour, thinking and so on. This digital copy passes through a training period during which it receives the data of the biological human who is on the process of digital cloning. This data comprises thoughts, information, way of talking, tone of the voice, important life details and everything else that can be considered as data possessed by that human being. Such a project, and other similar ones, which reflects man or machine twinning emerged from laboratories and became a reality even through with a limited spread thus far. Up to present, many digital copies have emerged of international personalities proving that twinning is successful despite being incomplete in terms of the spiritual components which give the machine complete human

nature. However, this enhances our confidence in science and its abilities when oriented towards realising human interests and enriching the human experience. Hence, it's interesting to see personalities putting their scientific

THE HUMAN IMMORTALITY PROJECT, WHICH I LIKE TO CALL 'DIGITAL HUMAN', IS NOT THE ONLY PROJECT THAT COMES UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF TWINNING AND ADAPTATION BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE

and civilisational fingerprint, in case of sufficient data, even by digital being to complement the civilisational march reflecting an advantageous aspect of the digital human project and the humanisation of machine which assumes human role and personality. Another project with the same scientific nature and more complicated expectations is the

brain copying and downloading scientifically known as the Whole Brain Emulation. The project aims at completely copying the human brain and downloading it into a computer. The research is still underway due to the biological complexity of the brain and rigorous computational requirements. The Human Immortality Project, what I like to call 'digital human', is not the only project that comes under the umbrella of twinning and adaptation between man and machine. There is the digital (computational) control of the human brain which functions by connecting microelectronic chips to the brain. One of the most famous techniques is Elon Musk's microchip designed by Neuralink, one of Musk's firms. This technology uses a microchip equipped with complicated sensors that are connected to the human brain, the brain activities are then recorded and analysed by means of artificial intelligence to help humans reactivate impaired organs lost due to blindness or paralysis through digital orders received by the brain which resend them to non-functioning body organs. The scientists in charge of the project carried out tests on animals some of which were successful and others were not but the results were generally encouraging. However,

the technology was not given green light so far for official and expanded usage with humans. Such a technology which focuses on harmony between machine (digital system and artificial intelligence) and man in such a manner as to present man as linked to a digital system that reflects the targeted image of the digital human. Such examples related to projects that embrace the twining of man and machine are but a small part of bigger projects that multiplied in quality and quantity with the artificial intelligence revolution and its accelerated progress. Few years ago such projects were considered nothing but research inside narrow scientific labs and were waiting to come out into the wider real world. One of the most interesting books that dealt with these technologies was authored by the American physicist Michio Kaku titled 'Physics of the future: How science will shape human destiny and our daily lives' by the year 2100. When it was published in 2011 it was a forward-looking book that uncovers the upcoming scientific technologies and their applications that will impact our lives including those related to man-machine twinning. At that time many of those projects were dealt with by scientists within the limits of the experiments with only few projects moved on to the practical phase. However it prompts us to feel the extent of the scientific advancement that reveals the depth of the human-machine relationship and the volume of their integration that reflects a bright face that reveals the importance of such changes in our life. On the other side, it also exposes a dark side that worries the scientists and foreshadows a future that threatens the identity and stability of humans when they become a part and parcel of the digital system and when man becomes hostage to digital system and under the control and dominance of the machine which will, in turn, rise to the artificial human levels by means of the humanisation projects.

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Narrating the past in present and future

Oman today is not the old Oman of yesterday. Its inconvenient living and ill-fated face has entirely changed. Since the start of the blessed renaissance in early 70s, the country has shaken off the dust of isolation and standstill, opened its doors and windows to the light, interacted with the global changes and got affected and influenced by them. Its strong, cordial and bilateral historical relations dated thousands of years back with many countries around the world played a key role in forming Oman's history, culture and heritage. In a way or another such relations were of high significance to the nation and its people. While today, the country has adapted the modern and revolutionised life, Oman has never lost its genuine identity, rich culture and authentic heritage.

As late Sultan Qaboos once stated, "It has been very clear to us that our heritage is not only represented by forts, castles and ancient buildings, but by spiritual customs and traditions, by science, art and literature transmitted by one generation to another. The real preservation of heritage will not be accomplished unless we understand this and cherish it".

If we are to be proud of Oman's great heritage that we have received from our ancestors, who strived hard to protect it, this pride must not be our ultimate aim. Heritage and culture should be well-preserved, cherished and passed on to all the generations to come. This common responsibility shall be shared and reliably taken care of by all Omanis, individuals, government and establishments concerned. It is a national accountability that we all should be according valuable importance and priority.

That is why it is of high significance to have national museums, bringing history, heritage and culture back to life. Rather, museums are narrating the nation's historical reserves in present and future to all generations. In fact, museums are regarded essential contributors to the well-being and sustainable development of human



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

WE ARE TO BE PROUD OF OMAN'S GREAT HERITAGE THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM OUR ANCESTORS

communities. They are uniquely placed to create an ongoing impact to foster positive change. This translates the concept of a museum as it is more than just a collection of art, sculptures or heritage. Instead, it is a storehouse of the history of the extinct lives and their cultures.

As the legendary pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey, said, "A people without knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture are like a tree without roots." Likewise, it has been attributed that If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are only a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree. Accordingly, one has to learn more and more about his nation's culture, history and heritage. Paying a visit to a museum with family or friends is always worth doing every now and then to get enlightened about the past.

Perhaps it is worth visiting the recently opened Oman Across Ages Museum, which stands out as a cultural and educational landmark for locals and visitors alike. Being commissioned by late Sultan Qaboos, the museum marks a celebration of the country's economic, cultural and social renaissance since the 1970s.

The outstandingly-designed museum brings a range of unique experiences and stands as a place of memories and enlightenment. The museum acknowledges the rich foundations of the country's past while celebrating its bright and optimistic future. It bridges between the past and future of Oman with highlight to the country's achievements in an innovating, informative and interactive manner. Oman Across Ages Museum complements its structure with the stories of human and cultural achievements. The past glory of Oman is being sustained and presented there along with many other outstanding cultural, historical and heritage aspects. The museum is a real mesmerising landmark and becoming a key tourist destination for Omanis, residents and tourists. With all its various attractions and historical treasures, the museum brings Oman's rich history back to life!

CLEANING THE BEACH!



A university student cleans up plastics and other debris washed ashore at a beach in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on Sunday. — AFP

Erdogan eyes third decade of rule in historic runoff

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan cruises on Sunday into the final week before an historic runoff election as the big favourite to extend two decades of his rule until 2028.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu gave the opposition's best performance of Erdogan's dominant era in May 14 parliament and presidential polls. The retired bureaucrat of Kurdish Alevi descent broke ethnic barriers and Erdogan's stranglehold on the media and state institutions to win almost 45 per cent of the vote.

But Erdogan still came within a fraction of a point of topping the 50-per cent threshold needed to win in the first round. The 69-year-old leader did it despite Turkiye's worst economic crisis since the 1990s and opinion surveys showing him headed for his first national election defeat.

Kilicdaroglu will now need to rally his deflated troops and beat the odds yet again to wrest back power for the secular party that ruled Turkiye for most of the 20th century.

The Eurasia Group consultancy put Erdogan's chances of winning next Sunday at 80 per cent.

"It will be an uphill struggle for Kilicdaroglu in the second round," Hamish Kinnear of the Verisk



Dmitry ZAKS

Turkey News Editor at Agence France-Presse (AFP)

THE EURASIA GROUP CONSULTANCY PUT ERDOGAN'S CHANCES OF WINNING NEXT SUNDAY AT 80 PER CENT

Maplecroft consulting firm agreed. Erdogan rode a nationalist wave that saw smaller right-wing parties pick up nearly 25 per cent of the parallel parliamentary vote. Kilicdaroglu is courting these voters in the second presidential round.

The 74-year-old revamped his campaign team and tore up his old playbook for the most fateful week of his political career. He has replaced chatty clips that he used to record from his kitchen with desk-thumping speeches and pledges to immediately rid Turkiye of millions of migrants.

"As soon as I come to power, I will send all the refugees home," he said in his first post-election address. He has chased the endorsement of a little-known ultra-nationalist, whose tiny vote share pushed Turkiye into its first presidential runoff.

And he has punched back against Erdogan's claims that he was associating with "terrorists" — a code word for Kurdish groups fighting for broader autonomy in Turkiye's southeast. "We have millions of patriots to reach," Kilicdaroglu said.

But Kilicdaroglu's sharp right turn could prove costly with



People take pictures with their mobile phones at an election campaign point of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, ahead of the May 28 runoff vote, in Istanbul, Turkiye, on Sunday. — Reuters

voters from Kurdish regions that overwhelmingly backed him in the first round.

Kurds embraced Erdogan during his first decade in power because he worked to lift many of their social restrictions.

They turned against him when Erdogan formed his own alliance with Turkiye's nationalist forces and began to unleash purges after surviving a failed coup attempt in 2016. Kilicdaroglu's new and more overtly nationalist tone

echoes a secular era during which Kurds — who make up nearly a

fifth of Turkiye's population — were stripped of basic rights.

The political battles are being accompanied by market turmoil that set in once it became apparent that Erdogan was on course to keep his grip on power.

Turkiye's recent years have been roiled by economic upheaval that erased many of the gains of Erdogan's more prosperous early rule. Most of the problems stem from government's fervent fight against interest rates — an approach some analysts link to his adherence to rules against

usury. "I have a thesis that interest rates and inflation are positively correlated," he told CNN this week. "The lower the interest rates, the lower inflation will be."

The markets' trust in more conventional economics have put massive pressure on the lira.

Government data showed Turkiye's foreign currency reserves — topped up by aid from Arab allies — dropping by \$9 billion and reaching their lowest levels in 21 years in the week running up to the first-round vote.

Analysts think most of the money was spent on efforts to prop up the lira against sharp and politically sensitive falls.

"There is now a very real risk that an Erdogan victory could lead to macroeconomic instability in Turkiye, including the threat of a severe currency crisis," Capital Economic warned.

But Erdogan has exuded confidence since the first round.

He has ridiculed his rival's nationalist overtures and stuck by some of his more controversial policies — including an increasingly strong relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin. — AFP

sport

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The stakeholders and associates of AMM Sports with the chief guests and dignitaries during the opening ceremony. – PICS BY KHALFAN AL RUSAIQI

A M M S P O R T S O P E N S C E N T R E W I T H 5 B W F - A P P R O V E D C O U R T S

Muscat gets new badminton facility

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Badminton players and enthusiasts in the town have a reason to cheer themselves up as a new state-of-the-art badminton courts with a gallery facility opened in Muscat recently. Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, Hisham bin Juma al Sinani (DG of Sports, Welfare and Development, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth), inaugurated the much-awaited AMM Sports Arena on May 17. The badminton facility is set up in accordance to the Badminton World Federation's (BWF) international norms and regulations and approved by Oman Badminton Committee. The dignitaries present included Khalfan al Majrafi, General-Secretary, Oman Badminton Committee, Sajjad bin Mohammed bin Baqir al Lawati, Vice-Chairman, Oman Table Tennis Association, Dr Marwan bin Juma bin



Ali al Juma, Chairman – Oman Hockey Association and Anoop Bijily, Second Secretary to Indian Ambassador. With its sleek design and cutting-edge features including five internationally approved badminton courts and table tennis facility, the arena promises to deliver an exceptional playing experience for both amateur enthusiasts and professional athletes alike.

AMM Sports, a leading provider of sports and recreation facilities, is the key promoter of this brand-new badminton/sports arena. The arena is located in Ghala and is easily accessible from both Sultan Qaboos Street and Muscat Expressway. **WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES** The highlight of the courts is the BWF approved APACS Red Mat, a first time

in Oman. The courts will be lit up with excellent lighting system with nine preset conditions for all operations. The specially designed spectators' gallery has a capacity of 200 persons. Certified trainers for coaching beginners, intermediate and advance players will be available at the centre, which also have a dedicated table tennis playing area. Speaking to Oman Observer, Muhammad Haroos, one of the stakeholders of the centre, said the badminton facility was result of the hardwork of a group of dedicated badminton enthusiasts. Other stakeholders include Gineeth, Rajendran, Tariq, Ashutosh, Nisaar and Rahul. **NEW PLANS** Among the upcoming plans, they said a full-fledged table tennis academy, gymnasium, gaming station, billiards and pool table provisions are on the pipeline. Most of the new facilities are to come

on the first floor of the centre, where the provisions are set to accommodate these, said Dr Simon Joseph of AMM Sports. "The centre will cater to the growing demand for quality recreational opportunities in the area. The establishment of this modern badminton court is a testament to the group's commitment to promoting active lifestyles and fostering a vibrant sports community," said Lijihass Ussain, one among the many parents who were present at the grand opening ceremony. **CENTRE READY** AMM Sports Arena look forward to welcoming sports enthusiasts, athletes and the community at large to experience the excitement and possibilities that this facility offers. (For enquiries – 92144925/97446582/info@ammports.com). AMM Group is a company based in Oman that has been in the sports equipment's supply industry for the past seven years.

Oman finish runners-up in Arab beach soccer

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Oman beach soccer team suffered a 4-2 defeat against Egypt late on Saturday in the final clash of the Arab Beach Soccer Championship 2023 to finish as runners-up. The victory gave Egypt their second title after they won the trophy in 2014. The 10 days tournament, which concluded in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, featured participation of 12 teams distributed into three groups. Hosts Saudi Arabia led Group A alongside Mauritania, Morocco and Lebanon while Oman were grouped with Palestine, Kyrgyzstan and Egypt in Group B. The Group C featured the UAE, Libya, Kuwait and Comoros. After the final match, Oman players received silver medals while the winners Egypt players collected the gold medals and lifted the title. The match started strongly from both teams as they were seeking for

the title. Yahya al Murkhi scored the opening goal for Oman after entering in the box and hitting a strong ball to the net. Egypt's Hassan Hussain equalised as he tried to send a ball from long distance to end the first half at 1-1. In the following half, the opponents were the better side as they controlled the match. Hassan Hussain returned back to take his team in lead by registering the second goal while Ismail AbdulQudoos made the score 3-1 as he netted the third goal. Before the end of second half whistle, Egypt players benefited from the mistakes in the back side as Haitham Mahsoob scored the fourth goal to take it to 4-1. In the third and last half, coach Talib Hilal's men pressed hard to register a return back to the match but the only goal from Khalid al Orami was not enough as the match ended at 4-2. Oman beach soccer team

secured slot in the quarters after qualifying from the group as second behind the toppers Egypt. Oman recorded two victories in the group stage against Palestine and Kyrgyzstan while they suffered a loss against Egypt. In the quarterfinals, Oman beat UAE 5-4 to book a berth in semis. Then, Oman team defeated Morocco 4-2 in the semifinals to confirm their attendance in the final match. Oman team, coached by long-serving national coach Talib Hilal, will begin few days later the preparation for the ANOC qualifiers and then for the world assignment. The recently concluded tournament in Saudi Arabia acted as thrilling stage for the team's preparation for the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup UAE 2023 which will take place in UAE during November 16 to 26. Hilal's men will eye on posting a top show in the world class event and register positive results.





Lucknow edge Kolkata to enter play-offs

KOLKATA: Lucknow Super Kings survived an unbeaten blitz of 67 by Rinku Singh to edge Kolkata Knight Riders by one run and qualify for the Indian Premier League play-offs on Saturday.

Nicholas Pooran's 58 guided Lucknow to 176-8, a total that was threatened by Rinku, a left-hand batsman, who smashed four sixes in his 33-ball knock but Kolkata ended on 175-7.

"First reaction is satisfaction," Lucknow skipper Krunal Pandya said after the win.

"We never gave up, we were put under a lot of pressure but credit to the boys. At one stage, they were 61-1 but I've seen it before that at this level, two-three tight overs and we're in the game."

The result ensured a top-two finish for Chennai Super Kings, who hammered hosts Delhi Capitals by 77 runs in their march to the play-offs in the first match of the day.

Four-time champions Chennai, led by MS Dhoni, will take on holders Gujarat Titans, who top the 10-team table, in the

first qualifier next week.

The winner will head straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser playing the winner of the 'eliminator' between teams three and four in the second qualifier.

"There is no recipe as such," Dhoni said on his team's success in the T20 tournament.

"You try to pick the best players and try to give them the best slot. You use them in the manner where they have most chances of succeeding and groom them in the areas where they are not as strong."

Two-time champions Kolkata bowed out of the race for the top four, leaving five-time champions Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bangalore — both the teams play their respective matches on Sunday — and Rajasthan Royals fighting for the remaining spot.

Kolkata began strongly to put Lucknow in trouble at 73-5 before the left-handed Pooran hit back in his 30-ball blitz to guide his team to 176-8 at Eden Gardens and was named man of the match. — AFP

Cameron Green ton keeps Mumbai afloat in IPL play-off race

MUMBAI: Australia's Cameron Green hit his first-ever T20 century to lead the Mumbai Indians to a crushing eight-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad and keep their IPL play-off hopes alive on Sunday.

Green made an unbeaten 100 off 47 balls and put on a key stand of 128 with skipper Rohit Sharma (56) as Mumbai achieved their victory target of 201 with two overs to spare at the Wankhede Stadium, their home ground.

Mumbai, five-time winners of the Indian Premier League, now await the result of the second match of the day between Royal Challengers Bangalore and holders Gujarat Titans to see if they can clinch the last remaining play-off spot.

The result eliminated the Rajasthan Royals from the play-off race while Bangalore, led by Faf du Plessis, remain in contention.

Bangalore need a win to make the next round, but a loss would allow Mumbai to go through.

Table-toppers Gujarat and second-placed Chennai Super Kings will clash in the first qualifier next week. Lucknow, who became the third team to book their play-off berth, await their opponent in the eliminator.

The winner of Qualifier 1 will head straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser will play the winner of the eliminator.

Green, a big buy for Mumbai for \$2.11 million in the auction, stood out on Sunday with eight fours and eight sixes.



After Rohit's departure, Green kept up the charge and put on an unbeaten partnership with Suryakumar Yadav, who hit 25, to register their eighth win in 14 group matches.

Medium-pace bowler Akash Madhwal set up victory

with figures of 4-37 to check Hyderabad to 200-5, a total that looked to go bigger but for some disciplined bowling.

Openers Mayank Agarwal (83) and Vivrant Sharma (69) put on 140 runs to lay the foundations for the total, which

proved insufficient.

The departure of Sharma and then Agarwal made Hyderabad slide with the rest of the batting falling apart.

Hyderabad took the wooden spoon in the 10-team table.

— AFP

Chennai, Mumbai and Gujarat's success story



The statistics have certified that the 2023 season of IPL has been the most competitive season of all times and it has had a lot of extra attention from the fans. Now that's bound to happen when even after over one and half months of matches if teams are reliant on what happens on the last day of the league stage. But there is one question that has been asked to me over and over again, "what's the reason for the success of Chennai Super Kings, Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Titans over the years?" and today I am going to be defining the secret for each of them in my opinion.

MUMBAI INDIANS - Mumbai Indians are one team that work in a very different way compared to other teams. Mumbai Indians have established a very strong base with infrastructure, training facilities, coaching staff, scouts, trainers, personnels and many other facilities and services. Every year, the huge scout team goes and looks for average performing but huge prospects of the future. Now Mumbai Indians provide them with a base, consistent training and development facilities and small opportunities, through which they start to perform like super starts from season 2 or 3. Obviously, they are average players when being recruited, but they are kept between superstars, which increases their self-belief. Mumbai Indians also understands that, there will be a drought for a season or two and they do not panic in that tough phase and the management absorbs that pressure.

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS - If the DRS is called Dhoni Review System, then you can imagine the amount of love and respect that this man has earned over the years. He has proved himself year-after-year to people's expectations and he has surely stood up to it consistently. Now, if we look into the details of how CSK operates, then its extremely different from how



the other teams like to do things. One can compare CSK to an autocratic government, where all the decisions are made from a single ruler. Now in reality, Dhoni has so much love and respect from the fans, management and his teammates that this works absolutely fine there. Now Dhoni is a firm believer of investing in experienced resources majorly, who already know how to absorb pressure. Another special trait of Dhoni is that, he doesn't judge players based on their past performances, that's exactly why Dhoni is able to find results from players like Ajinkya Rahane, Shivam Dube and Ambati Rayudu. His calmness on the field, allows the player to stand up in difficult times.

GUJARAT TITANS - Now this is a special one and my perception would surely differ for anything that you would have generally seen or heard about. Gujarat is a team that has been found just last season and they won the

championship last year and this year they top the points table at the end of the league.

Firstly, in my opinion, this team has been formed on the guidelines which were well explained in the 2011 movie 'Moneyball', which stars Brad Pitt. The movie is based on Oakland Athletics baseball team of 2002 season. Faced with the franchise's limited budget for players, the hero builds a team of undervalued talent by taking a sophisticated sabermetric approach to scouting and analysing players.

In my opinion, Gujarat follow a similar concept, where majority of their players aren't superstars, but they are just able to obtain the right amount of contribution required from a player to win the game. Players like Vijay Shankar, Sai Sudarshan, Rahul Tewatia, Wriddhiman Saha, Joshua Little, Noor Ahmad,

Mohit Sharma and many others have been provided with the exact expectations from the team management, which makes things simple for them. One extremely important part is the relationship between Hardik Pandya and Ashish Nehra. Pandya is the captain and future of Indian cricket, yet he gives the space to Ashish Nehra to call the shots. This space is extremely important for any team/player to be able to perform freely and I feel that even Virat Kohli is learning from this model and trying to give space to Faf Du Plessis to captain, such is the impact.

LUCK FACTOR - One of the young followers of this column, Arian Jewrikar, a third standard student of Indian School Nizwa, mentioned to me that, "Hardik Pandya brings luck with him, taking his team to play-off top spot second time in a row. His luck will make India win World Cup." Yes, I believe that luck plays a

big role, but it's way more than luck and if Team India are able to adapt to these strategies, then they could benefit in a big way and surely, he should be considered as the leader for the upcoming World Cup and so should Nehra be kept along with the team.

It goes without saying that these teams also have flaws, but their capacity to keep calm in difficult situations and patience combined with quality communication has been able to provide unexpected results for their teams. Their way of operations is completely different from one another, but that what we mean by horses for courses and I assure you that the main reason for their success, which stays common for all is their solid base structure, which is well defined with the expectations and roles of different individuals associated, that's exactly what provides clarity and avoid chaos/ confusion.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina with the trophy after the WTA Rome Open final against Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina, who forfeited due to an injury, at Foro Italico. – AFP

Rome winner Rybakina sets sights on Roland Garros

ROME: Elena Rybakina won the Italian Open on Saturday and promptly turned her attention to Roland Garros and the pursuit of a second career Grand Slam title.

Kazakhstan's Rybakina captured her second WTA 1000 title of the season at Foro Italico when Ukrainian opponent Anhelina Kalinina retired with a thigh injury which she had been carrying all week.

Rybakina hugged her friend and rival at the net as the tearful loser explained how the physical problem had finally caught up with her.

World number six Rybakina, the reigning Wimbledon champion, was leading 6-4, 1-0 when

Kalinina called it quits shortly after midnight in a final long-delayed by rain. Rybakina, 23, became the first woman to capture two WTA 1000 titles this season, having already won the prestigious Indian Wells hard court tournament in March.

She was also runner-up at the Australian Open and in Miami and now she is eyeing up the French Open.

"Hopefully I can go far at the French Open," she said.

"I have good memories playing there. Now that I've got more matches on clay, it's a bit easier and (gives) a bit more confidence definitely.

"It's always important to be healthy, be ready physically, then

hopefully I can go far there."

She offered wishes for a speedy recovery to Kalinina.

"She has done an amazing job, I hope she is fit for Roland Garros," Rybakina said.

The 68-minute match didn't get underway until 11 pm, Rybakina telling the hardy fans in the stadium who sat through more than four hours of delays that she knew it wasn't easy for them.

Rybakina, who will rise to four in the world ahead of Roland Garros, is only the third woman to have reached the finals at the Australian Open, Indian Wells, Miami and Rome in the same season.

The others were Monica Seles

in 1991 and Maria Sharapova in 2012. The Russian-born Rybakina has now won 28 matches this season — only world number two and Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka has won more, with 29.

"I'm proud that I can maintain this level, it's not easy with all the scheduling, traveling.

"I think we're doing a good job with the team," Rybakina said. "I can see improvements on the court, physically also. I think we're on a right way."

But she added: "There is still a lot of room to improve. But for now it's going well, and hopefully I can continue like this till the end of the season." —AFP

Despite defeat Spurs still bidding for Europe

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, MAY 21

On the day that saw Manchester City achieve the remarkable feat of becoming champions of the Premier League for the third consecutive year and for the fifth time in six years, Brentford beat Tottenham Hotspur 3-1 with both teams still with a chance to qualify for European competition.

Both teams will go into the last game of the season with Brentford just a point behind Tottenham and vying for at least the Europa Conference League next season depending on the results of Brighton and Aston Villa who are also in contention for Europe. That is how close the fight remains.

Brentford manager, Thomas Frank said: "We are depending on other results so don't know exactly how it will go. We know Tottenham and Villa need to drop points and on the last game of the season we're facing the best team in the world (meaning Manchester City)."

He added: "But we'll do everything to make an outstanding season even better. We showed this season we can beat everyone, we can also lose to everyone if we don't perform."

Tottenham dominated the first half of the game taking the lead in the 8th minute. Spurs were given a free kick 25 yards out when Oliver Skipp was fouled and Harry Kane hit a brilliant shot — after the ball was nudged to him — into the top corner for his 28th goal of the season and 211 in total.

Tottenham then missed two fine chances. Emerson Royal's powerful header from a cross by Heung-Min Son was cleared off the line by Rico Henry and then Arnaut Danjuma, in his first start in the team, put his header wide.

But Spurs performance dropped in the second half as the visitors improved. They equalised just five minutes after the break when Bryan Mbeumo received a pass from Yoane Wissa on the right and he went past Ben Davies



Brentford manager Thomas Frank

to smack a low shot inside the far post. Twelve minutes later Brentford were in the lead after Kane lost possession to Aaron Hickey who gave a lovely pass, which beat Davies, and Mbeumo put in a left footed drive into the far corner from a very tight angle.

Brentford were more in control as the second half progressed while Spurs' performance dropped. Finally with just two minutes of normal time remaining, it was all over for Spurs. Skipp lost the ball in his own half to Shandon Baptiste who passed to Mbeumo and, in turn, he found Wissa to score Brentford's third. As a last action of the match David Raya made an excellent save from a header by Spurs' Richardson, which he managed to push against a post.

Spurs acting manager, Ryan Mason said: "Of course it hurts. It's understandable because of how the second two-thirds of the season have gone. But we know the fans will be there next season, this club will keep moving forward and now's the time, we need to be stronger than ever."

OMAN EYE A 'DREAM SPOT' IN ODI WORLD CUP

WE WILL MAKE AN IMPACT AT THE WORLD CUP QUALIFIER, SAYS COACH MENDIS



MUSCAT: He has been a manager of a World Cup-winning squad and has already led Oman to two T20 World Cups. A coach who certainly knows what it takes to go to a World Cup, Duleep Mendis has a challenge that he is relishing as Oman prepares for a dream mission — a spot in the ICC Men's World Cup.

The ODI World Cup is scheduled to be held in India in October-November later this year and with eight teams already confirmed, the stage is now set to decide the remaining two spots for the World Cup, which would be decided during the forthcoming ICC Men's World Cup Qualifier in

Zimbabwe from June 18-July 9.

Mendis will be leading Oman at the Qualifier and sounded confident of Team Red's chances in Zimbabwe that will feature four-Test playing nations along with six Associate nations vie for the two berths at the ICC ODI World Cup.

Two-time World Cup winners West Indies, Sri Lanka, the team which won the World Cup in 1996 with Mendis as manager, hosts Zimbabwe and Ireland are the four teams that along with Netherlands finished as bottom five of ICC Cricket Super League. The quartet will be joined by Scotland, Oman and Nepal who finished as top-three nations in the World Cricket League Division 2 and UAE and USA, who made it through Qualifier play-off.

With the format for the World Cup Qualifier and groupings yet to be announced, Mendis said: "It has been a remarkable journey over the past four years during which we played 36 ODIs and finished second in the seven-nation Division 2.



"The forthcoming World Cup Qualifier will be a great opportunity for our boys to showcase their potential and I am confident that our team can do well. The recent performance at the ACC Premier Cup, an Asia Cup qualifier, in Nepal where we finished third gave us a good insight what our players

can do. "The batting didn't click initially but did well in the later stages in Nepal. If our batters can perform as they did in the later stages, I am confident we can do well. Bowling has been our forte and if our batters play to their potential, we stand a chance."

Mendis said: "Oman are not

going to make up numbers in the Qualifier in Zimbabwe. We will make an impact and the 10-12 warm-up camp in Durban, South Africa, will do us a world of good. We will play five warm-up games against top teams there.

"Our boys have been training hard here but weather is definitely a big obstacle these days. We hope to acclimatise to conditions similar to Zimbabwe during the Durban trip."

The Sri Lankan great said: "On our day we have the ability to beat the best. I tell my boys that they should never fear their rivals, be it any side, Test-playing nation or Associate." "There is no place for negativity in my coaching style. The players will go out and fight hard, be it any opposition. Our main aim is to get into the next round of Qualifier, and we can create few upsets," he added.

JOURNEY OF PRIDE AND PASSION, SAYS JESRANI

While Mendis expressed hope and optimism, the man who has been one of the longest-serving

managers of any Associate team in the world, Madhu Jesrani, who is also the secretary of Oman Cricket, was full of emotions while recollecting the team's journey since the start of the 21st century.

Jesrani said: "We have reached World Cup Qualifiers twice in the past, first in 2005 in Ireland and then in 2009 in South Africa. We had few amazing results though the 2009 trip to South Africa was disappointing. The current team has done brilliantly to finish second in Division 2 and we are proud of their journey."

"I still remember how our team prepared for the previous World Cup Qualifier. We didn't have even turf wickets or grass grounds. Oman Cricket has come a long way, thanks to the yeoman contribution of our former Oman Cricket chairman Late Shaikh Kanak Khimji. "We all miss him, and it was under his guidance that we have come so far. This has been a journey of pride and passion for us," said Jesrani as his voice choked with emotions.



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3-day Oman Urban Hackathon kicks off in Muscat



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

A delegation from the European Union and its partners launched on Sunday, May 21, 2023, the third edition of the ‘Oman Urban Hackathon’, - the largest Omani hackathon specialised in urban planning and environmental sustainability.

Over the next two days, the hackathon’s activities and programmes will take place at the Youth Centre in Muscat, organised by the delegation in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Muscat Municipality, in addition to the embassies of Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Oman Think Urban.

The aims to bring together local practitioners and civil society institutions to find radical solutions to the most urgent issues related to sustainable development, enhance the capabilities of local talents, and support the green transformation in the city of Muscat. **TO PAGE 14**

Fisheries, aquaculture to contribute RO 1.3 billion to Oman’s GDP in 2023

Processing activities: Value added products to account for 30 per cent of total fisheries production by year-end: Ministry

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources aims to increase the contribution of value added products to 30 per cent of total fisheries production by the end of the year, according to a Ministry official. Speaking to the *Observer*, Redha Bait Faraj, Director General of Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing at the Ministry, explained the reason behind this decision.

“The current trend is concentrated mainly in dealing with the basic processing of fishery products, which does not capture the true value of our



fishery products. To capture the real value, we need to push into what we call added value in which a higher value of the product could be achieved with an even less amount of raw material,” he added.

According to Bait Faraj, value addition can result in increased income due to increased revenues within the sector.

He shared that a metric tonne

of fresh sardines has a value of RO 350, while a canned tonne amounts to 575 RO, whereas a tonne of fillets amounts to RO 850 according to data from the last two years.

Furthermore, he argued that it can result in a better utilisation of raw materials. “[Value addition] will also help achieve good sustainability in the utilisation of fishery products, and also to maximise the yield of whatever available product.”

He explained that byproducts such as scraps or cutting remains, or even products unfit for human consumption can still be used to create a wide range of products.

Such products include animal and fish feed, enzymatic processed products such as amino acids, fish oil and different bioactive ingredients and compounds.

The Ministry expects the fishery and aquaculture to contribute to RO 1.3 billion to the GDP this year.

Oman’s SEZs, free zones to go paperless from July 1

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) is proceeding with its strategic plan for the digital transformation programme, including setting June 30th, 2023 as the last day for receiving and sending paper-based transactions,

except for some special government correspondence.

This reflects OPAZ efforts and initiatives to make the most of the modern technologies, and to achieve a major objective of Oman Vision 2040 towards digital transformation in government transactions and services provided to investors and beneficiaries.

Mahmoud bin Hamoud al



Rawahi (pictured), General Manager of Planning and Information Technology at

OPAZ, stressed the Authority’s commitment towards implementing the strategic directions of the National Programme for Digital Transformation, adopting digital best practices and benefiting from modern technology in order to improve and increase the efficiency of the provided government services.

Accordingly, OPAZ has set June 30, as the last day for receiving and sending paper-based transactions, except for some special government correspondence.

“OPAZ strives to simplify the procedures for investor services and re-engineered all licenses, permits and approvals necessary to operate any investment project,” ha added. **TURN TO P14**

Housing Ministry signs RO 70 million usufruct contracts

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning yesterday signed ten usufruct contracts with an investment value exceeding RO 70 million.

The contracts cover commercial, industrial, health and agricultural sectors in the governorates of Muscat, Al Dhahirah and Al Batinah South.

The total area of the projects is 1.3 million square metres.

Most of the contracts were awarded for projects in the Governorate of Muscat.

These include a land usufruct contract for the construction of a specialised hospital on an area of 40,000 square metres in the Wilayat of Al Seeb at an investment cost of RO 65 million.

A second usufruct contract in the same Wilayat provides for the setting up of a cement factory on an area of 3,000 square metres at a cost of RO 1.2 million



In the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate, a usufruct contract was signed for an agricultural project.

In the Governorate of Al Batinah South, a usufruct contract was signed for the establishment of an industrial project at a cost of RO 1.2 million.

The contracts were signed by Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Unde-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing, and representatives of companies and establishments investing in the respective projects.

The Ministry also announced the launch of five new sites for investment via the investment platform “Tatweer” as part of the national initiative for integrated residential areas “Surooh” in the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Batinah South, Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Sharqiyah North. — ONA



Oman eager to supply green hydrogen to Switzerland

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Sultanate of Oman says it is keen to supply green energy in the form of renewable hydrogen or its derivatives to Switzerland.

This was announced by the Omani Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi during an interview broadcast yesterday by Zurich-based NZZ am Sonntag.

Oman aims to produce green hydrogen using renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power. The country has abundant sources of both solar and wind energy, which makes it an ideal location for green hydrogen production.

“That is why we are in contact with Swiss energy suppliers,” Al Aufi said.

Switzerland, on the other hand, is one of the leading countries in Europe when it comes to adopting clean energy. The country has set an ambitious target of reducing its carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050.

One of the key strategies to achieve this goal is the adoption of hydrogen as a clean energy source. Switzerland has already announced plans to invest heavily in the development of hydrogen infrastructure and technology.

The country aims to become a hub for green hydrogen



production and distribution in Europe.

The Sultanate of Oman is interested in Swiss know-how in the use and transport of hydrogen. “We are talking to research institutes. And the (Swiss) financial centre is important for us, because most of the time, it will not be Oman who will invest, but rather local and private foreign investors,” the minister added.

The announcement by Oman comes at a time when the global demand for hydrogen is rapidly increasing. Hydrogen is considered a clean and versatile energy source that can be used in various sectors such as transportation, industry, and power generation.

However, the current production of hydrogen is mostly based on fossil fuels, which results

in carbon emissions.

Green hydrogen, produced using renewable energy sources, is considered a more sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative.

Al Aufi assures that the Sultanate of Oman has great potential for the production of hydrogen from renewable energies. “In the southern part of Oman, we can use wind and solar energy at the same site. Thanks to this combination, we are one of the three regions in the world that benefit from the best conditions,” he added.

According to him, there are a few countries in the world that have similar advantage, such as Australia, Morocco, Chile and Namibia.

In March this year, as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations

of bilateral relations between Switzerland and Oman, and as Switzerland is committed to closer bilateral cooperation in the field of sustainability, the Swiss Embassy in Oman has invited the Swiss-French graffiti artist Saype to create a giant fresco in Oman.

The work of over 10,000 square metre of eco-friendly paint was created in Oman’s largest solar power plant in Ibri and symbolises cooperation on a sustainable world for future generations.

The work was presented to Eng Salim bin Nasser bin Said al Aufi, Oman’s Minister of Energy and Minerals. A partnership between Switzerland and Oman is a natural fit: while Oman has ideal conditions for wind and solar energy, Switzerland has much to offer in the field of sustainable technology.

3-day Oman Urban Hackathon kicks off in Muscat

FROM PAGE 13

During the previous period, the hackathon received proposed ideas and projects from various youth categories, including university students, entrepreneurs, professionals, and individuals interested in urban planning, architecture, civil engineering, digital arts, design, environment, science, cultural studies, and transportation. The hackathon focuses on seven main urban planning themes, as follows:

Climate change and urban sustainability: Finding solutions for challenges related to heatwaves, adaptation to rising sea levels, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, public transportation, consumption behaviour, and construction.

Waste management: Formulating ideas to reduce industrial or organic waste, promote recycling and reuse methods.

Mobility: Innovating environmentally friendly transportation methods on land, sea, or alternative aviation.

Energy: Reducing consumption and transitioning to renewable energy alternatives.

Water management: Developing alternative methods to reduce water consumption, mitigate flood risks, manage wadis, and promote water conservation.

Community participation and public spaces: Considering ways to empower local communities and provide accessible natural public spaces for public use.

Society and culture as urban dimensions: Creating urban ideas that promote cultural exchange, social cohesion, and enhance cultural and social activities within communities, or increase awareness of cultural practices.

The first day of the hackathon included training and guidance sessions for participants by top

experts in sustainable planning, including several European experts.

The hackathon witnessed the participation of 30 competitors divided into five groups, selected from over 400 applicants from all over the Sultanate of Oman.

Participants had the opportunity to present their solutions to a judging committee composed of academics, technology experts, urban development specialists, and cultural experts. Five participating teams presented their projects as follows:

Transportation Solutions Team: This team presented a project to develop the bus station in the commercial district of Ruwi, Muttrah Governorate, in Muscat, to become an integrated station for various transportation networks.

Climate Change Solutions Team: This team designed the Central Park project in the Ghala area and Bausher, Muscat Governorate, to enhance green spaces through sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions.

Sustainable Planning and Development Solutions Team: This team presented the Community Center project connecting the Al Khoudh and Al Mawaleh areas in the Governorate of Muscat. The project hosts a range of services and social interaction activities.

Construction and Smart Solutions Team: This team presented proposed solutions for the redevelopment plan of the Ghala area and Bausher, Muscat Governorate, to enhance smart solutions based on human interaction and reduce the effects of climate change.

Public Spaces and Community Participation Solutions Team: This team presented proposed solutions for the redevelopment of the Seeb Sports Stadium in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate.

Oman’s SEZs, free zones to go paperless

FROM PAGE 13

It also participated in the ‘Manjam Lab’ to simplify the procedures of government services supervised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, which had an impact on raising the level of quality of services provided to investors.”

“OPAZ is going on to develop the centralised platform for investor services in all the zones

affiliated to OPAZ. This platform will provide all services online in the economic zones, free zones and industrial cities, considering the integration between this platform and other national platforms related to the services provided by government bodies.

OPAZ held several meetings with the concerned government parties to ensure full integration with its digital platforms, reflecting the national strategic

directions to maximise the use of the infrastructure available to these entities”, he stated.

OPAZ will soon announce the launch of the first version of “Etlizam” system, which is one of the electronic applications that assists the different concerned departments to perform their regulatory role in an interactive manner with companies.

The main purpose of the supervisory work of OPAZ is to

bring an added value represented in improving the performance and efficiency of the projects that are supervised by OPAZ with regards to its compliance with the relevant legislations. Moreover, it serves verifying its understanding of the proper application of these legislations, while guiding these entities with constructive feedback and recommendations that could enhance its future commitment”.

Forum held on empowering Oman as a seafood production and export hub



MUSCAT: Under the auspices of Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries, Faculty of Business Studies & Faculty of Computer Studies, Arab Open University, Oman organised a colloquium on “Empowering Oman as a production and export hub of Seafood Value-added products” on Sunday, May 21, 2023 at the AOU New Campus in Al Maabela.

The colloquium was chaired by Prof Mohammed bin Hamdan al Badi, Rector of AMOU-Oman. The colloquium discussed the effective strategies for empowering Oman as a production and export hub of seafood value-added products from Oman.

The colloquium have two keynote addressed by Eng Redha bin Said Bait Faraj, DG of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Viju Puthusseril of Bell Foods Group.

Oman Power and Energy Forum 2023 set to commence today

MUSCAT: The second edition of the three-day Oman Power and Energy Forum is set to commence today at the Grand Millennium Hotel in Muscat. The forum will be held under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy & Minerals, will be the Chief Guest & Keynote Speaker at the forum.

In his keynote speech, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi will shed light on the important regulatory developments in the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as review the efforts made in terms of energy transition. The power and energy industry is currently experiencing a remarkable transformation, driven by the ever-changing dynamics of the global landscape.

This shift is characterised by a growing emphasis on sustainable development, climate change

mitigation, and the increasing demand for clean and renewable energy sources.

Technological advancements and innovative solutions are reshaping the way energy is generated, stored, and distributed, leading to the rapid emergence of smart grids, microgrids, and decentralised energy systems.

Additionally, the increased adoption of electric vehicles and energy storage technologies is further accelerating the transition to a low-carbon economy. Governments, businesses, and

individuals are recognising the urgent need to address climate change, and as a result, are making concerted efforts to invest in and promote renewable energy projects, energy efficiency initiatives, and cutting-edge research.

This global shift towards a more sustainable and resilient energy future is not only redefining the industry but also paving the way for new economic opportunities and a better quality of life for all. Oman Power and Energy Forum will focus on the above changing



dynamics of the global power and energy sector as well as explore the Sultanate of Oman’s strategy and achievements on the path of energy transition in alignment with the goals set forth in Oman Vision 2040.

The forum is hosted in partnership with the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Oman Section, IEEE Power and Energy Society and Oman Society of Engineers with the support of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and in strategic partnership with Nama Group.

Over 60 top industry leaders from Oman, GCC and international markets will discuss on market trends and policies, sustainable energies, distribution systems, power grids, energy management and efficiency, and asset management and optimisation.



Report sales of unstamped excisable goods: Oman Tax

CONRAD PRABHU

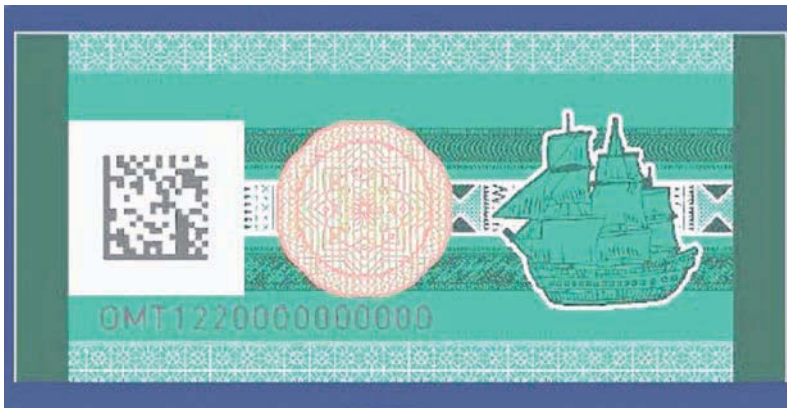
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Oman Tax Authority has advised consumers to flag traders, shops and other outlets that sell Excise Tax liable goods, such as tobacco products, beverages and so on, but without the mandatory digital tax stamps that distinguish authorised sales from illicitly sourced merchandise.

In a post, the Authority urged the general public to report such instances, if any, via its Ta'akad app – launched earlier this year to

provide consumers and retailers with the ability to quickly and easily validate the authenticity of excisable products using digital stamps or other digital markers since applied to such products.

“The Digital Tax Stamp (DTS) is applied to verify the source of the commodity and that it enters the markets officially, meaning that it is not counterfeit or smuggled. If you find any of these goods that do not bear the Digital Tax Stamp, you can report them via the Ta'akad app,” the Authority stated in its post.



Under laws that came into force in mid-2019, Oman began levying an excise tax ranging from

50 to 100 per cent on a range of merchandise, notably cigarettes and tobacco products, alcohols

and spirits, and carbonated and energy drinks, among other products.

The list of excisable goods was broadened in October 2020 to include a wide range of sugar-sweetened drinks, canned juices and other ready-to-drink beverages.

Since the rollout of the Digital Tax Stamp system last year, the affixing of digital stamps has become obligatory on an initial selection of excisable merchandise, according to Oman Tax.

“The Digital Tax Stamp system

has been applied to cigarette products, tobacco products and their derivatives, and the application will be extended to other Excise Tax goods in stages over certain periods in the Sultanate of Oman,” it stated.

Manufacturers and importers of excise products who do not comply with the Digital Tax Stamps scheme will be penalised in accordance with the penalty provisions prescribed under the Oman Excise Tax Executive Regulations (administrative penalty of RO 500 to RO 5,000).

Risks of dependence on hydrocarbons

**WAEEL AL HARRASI & LOAY AL SHIBLI**

MUSCAT, MAY 21

Like many other countries in the Middle East, Oman for the past 50 years has been heavily dependent on oil as a source of revenue. In fact, the country's economy has been heavily reliant on the oil industry since the discovery of oil in the early 1960s.

While this has brought significant economic benefits to the country, it has also created a dangerous level of dependence on a single commodity, leaving Oman vulnerable to the volatility of the global oil market.

The issue of dependence on oil is not new to Oman. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have dealt with this issue for decades and have taken clear steps to diversify their economies.

Oman dependence on oil exports will need to be addressed if it hopes to build a sustainable and diversified economy. According to economist Jeremy Jones, one of the biggest challenges facing Oman is the oil market's volatility. Prices can fluctuate wildly, which can have a significant impact on Oman's economy.

When oil prices are high, Oman's economy booms. But when prices drop, the country can experience significant economic downturns. This volatility can create uncertainty for foreign investors and make it difficult for Oman to plan for the future.

Another challenge facing Oman is the limited nature of its oil reserves. While Oman's oil reserves are significant, they are not infinite.

As the world's oil reserves begin to dwindle, it becomes increasingly important for Oman to diversify its economy to ensure long-term economic stability.

If the country fails to do so, it risks being left behind as other countries transition to alternative energy sources.

In addition to these challenges, Oman's dependence on oil has also created significant environmental challenges. The extraction and processing of oil can have a negative impact on the environment, and Oman has already started to feel

the effects of these negative effects. The oil industry has impacted the country's air quality, and there have been reports of water pollution and other environmental issues.

As the world becomes increasingly focused on sustainability and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Oman risks being left behind if it fails to address these environmental challenges. One potential area for diversification is tourism.

Oman has a rich cultural heritage and a beautiful natural environment, which makes it an attractive destination for tourists from all around the world. By investing in the tourism industry, Oman could create new jobs and revenue streams while also promoting the country's unique culture and history.

Jeffrey Lefebvre states in his article ('Oman Foreign Policy Analysis') that another area for diversification is renewable energy. Oman has significant potential for solar and wind power, and investing in these industries could profoundly help reduce the country's high dependence on oil revenues while promoting sustainability.

In fact, Oman has already begun to progress in this area, with plans and visions to build several solar power plants in the coming years.

In addition to these areas, Oman could also invest in other industries, such as manufacturing and technology. By building a diversified economy, Oman can reduce its reliance on oil and create a more stable and sustainable future for its citizens. Of course, diversification of the economy will not be easy, and it will require significant investment and political will.

However, the alternative of remaining heavily dependent on oil is simply not sustainable nor beneficial in the long term. By investing in areas such as tourism, renewable energy, privatisation, human resource investments, and other technological industries, Oman can create new jobs and revenue streams and promote sustainability.

This will reduce Oman's dependence on oil and help the country become more resilient to the volatility of the global oil market.

Why investments in Oman's entertainment sector are crucial

NOOR FAISAL ABDULLAH AL MUSHARAFI

MUSCAT, MAY 21

Every nation places a high premium on the welfare of its citizens, one of the most significant factors that plays a role in the welfare of the people is entertainment. Entertainment is crucial to the wellbeing of a person and it is also the main driver of tourism. The globe is currently observing great development and advancement in many forms of entertainment.

This sector brings commercial, economic, and tourism benefits to the state in which it takes place. Oman has made remarkable strides in this area, and as a result, there are now a great many opportunities for entertainment and enjoyment.

It is clear that Oman has been making efforts to make the most of its resources and skills. However, there is always more room and wider methods by which Oman may spend in this regard.

This is because Oman is a country rich in opportunities, and making the most of it to the absolute maximum extent in order to serve this field will be extremely useful.

When discussing entertainment, one aspect that should be taken into consideration is how it is distributed. The amount of opportunities for recreation and entertainment available in every municipality in Oman differs substantially from one another.

As can be seen, Muscat, which serves as the nation's capital and is home to a large number of entertainment options, stands in stark contrast

to the rest of the country, which is often characterised as lacking in this regard. And when seen from this angle, it makes sense for the means of entertainment to be distributed and expanded on a more extensive scale.

It is adequate that the nation's capital has the greatest amount of entertainment opportunities, but the gap shouldn't be too enormous. As Muscat is the primary destination in terms of entertainment and services in all of their many forms, this by itself has the potential to alleviate the problem of traffic congestion that occurs during the holidays.

As a result, the potential of other places has to be taken advantage of, and they ought to be made more appealing as tourist entertainment destinations. Although Oman has a great deal of opportunity in terms of entertainment options, it is not seen as diverse and is lacking in creativity and creative spirit.

Since the people of Oman have the goal of making their country the best in the world and the desire to always be one step ahead of the competition, investing in this field is very vital. It is possible to achieve this goal in several ways, one of which is to downplay the well-known traditional concept of entertainment in favour of engaging in more creative activities.

As evidence of this, we can take a look at the Expo of the United Arab Emirates and the Riyadh Season in Saudi Arabia. These are examples of global industry events in this field and how beneficial they were for the states they served.

Therefore, the development

of entertainment means for creative and innovative forms and, in some cases, scientific forms, is very important.

Moreover, high-priced entertainment is an issue that must be addressed. Because of the high prices, it is difficult for many Omani citizens to get access to various forms of entertainment.

This hinders their capacity to participate in leisure activities and contribute to the expansion of the entertainment business. The government has a number of options available to it in order to solve this problem.

One strategy for lowering the expenses of entertainment venues is to contribute financial support for such venues and events. Omanis, particularly those who hail from families with lesser incomes, may find that solution gives them a bigger space to engage in such entertainment activities and events.

Additionally, the government has the ability to encourage private investors to construct more cheap entertainment choices, such as public parks or community centres that organise events at no cost or at a very low cost. Another perspective to take into account is the scarce opportunities for women in the entertainment space.

Most entertainment means have historically been male-dominated, and despite the major improvements that have been made in recent years, there is still a substantial scarcity of chances for women in multiple entertainment opportunities.

It's undeniable that certain entertainment venues set aside specific days for women, but

further effort into this topic is needed to provide additional changes and equal opportunities for women.

An example of an cheap investment in women-only entertainment is providing private beaches only for women. It is possible that some of them require payment to access, but it is required that there be some that are free. Their presence will enhance the level of well-being, which, as indicated, will help the economy as well.

To summarise, a bigger investment in entertainment in Oman is crucial not only for tourism and the economy of the nation, but it is also an important measure of the wellbeing of the people in the country.

Oman has demonstrated a commendable interest in this sector; however, owing to the valuable potential that Oman possesses, there is always more opportunity for advancement in this field.

It is possible for Oman to make further progress in this area in a number of different ways; however, it is sufficient for the purposes of this article to mention only four of them: the equitable distribution of recreational opportunities, the investment in innovative and practical recreational means by deviating from the traditional conception of entertainment, the reduction in the prices of entertainment means, and finally, the creation of spaces for women-only entertainment on an equal basis.

Assigning a higher priority to the consideration of amendments of this kind will be advantageous for both the people and the state.



A guide to strategic planning for the modern entrepreneur



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In today's dynamic and rapidly changing business environment, it is essential for entrepreneurs and small business owners to have a strategic plan in place to position their businesses for growth. Strategic planning is the process of defining a company's vision, mission, and objectives, and then creating a road-map to achieve those goals. With the right strategic plan, businesses can stay ahead of the competition, identify new opportunities and achieve long-term success. Here are some key aspects of strategic planning that entrepreneurs and small business owners should consider when developing their own plans.

1. Define Your Vision and Mission: The first step in strategic planning is to define your

company's vision and mission. Your vision is a statement of what you want your company to achieve in the future, while your mission is a statement of why your company exists and what it does. Defining your vision and mission will help guide your business decisions and ensure that everyone in your company is working towards the same goals.

2. Conduct a SWOT Analysis: A SWOT analysis is a tool used to evaluate a company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. By conducting a SWOT analysis, entrepreneurs and small business owners can identify areas where they excel, areas where they need to improve, opportunities they can capitalize on, and potential threats to their business. This information can be used to

develop strategies that leverage strengths, minimize weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate threats.

3. Set Specific Goals and Objectives: Once you have defined your vision and mission and conducted a SWOT analysis, it's time to set specific goals and objectives. Goals are broad

statements of what you want to achieve, while objectives are specific, measurable, and time-bound targets that support your goals. By setting specific goals and objectives, entrepreneurs and small business owners can focus their efforts and measure progress towards their vision.

4. Develop a Plan of Action: A plan of action is a detailed road-map that outlines the steps needed to achieve your goals and objectives. It includes timelines, responsibilities, and budgets. A well-developed plan of action can help ensure that everyone in your company is on the same page and working towards the same goals.

5. Monitor Progress and Adjust the Plan: Finally, it's important to monitor progress

towards your goals and adjust your plan of action as needed. Regularly reviewing your progress and making adjustments to your plan can help ensure that you stay on track towards your vision and mission.

In conclusion, strategic planning is a critical aspect of business success for entrepreneurs and small business owners. By defining a vision and mission, conducting a SWOT analysis, setting specific goals and objectives, developing a plan of action, and monitoring progress, businesses can position themselves for growth and long-term success.

Question: How can a small business owner ensure that their strategic plan remains relevant and effective in a rapidly changing business environment?

Asia tech's next challenge is resetting the bar

ANSHUMAN DAGA

The instinct is to sell. Asia technology companies from Singapore to China are making the right noises on cost cutting and are mostly moving in the right direction but can't do enough to please investors. The market's high expectations are a sticky problem for a sector on the mend.

"Stocks in this part of the world fall on a miss and fall on a beat as well", Venugopal Garre, a senior analyst at Bernstein wrote to clients after shares of Singapore's Grab crashed 15% on Thursday despite the ride-hailing to deliveries company raising its guidance.

Grab is at one pointy end of the scepticism. Investors in the \$11 billion SoftBank-backed company are focusing on its tepid 3% growth in its gross merchandise value in the first quarter and looking past its narrowing of losses for the fifth straight quarter.

CEO Anthony Tan is more sanguine. The return of tourists to Southeast Asia, he says, bodes well for the group's core mobility business in the second half.

Earlier in the week, shares of compatriot Sea plunged 18% after slightly disappointing earnings, which overshadowed the games-to-shopping company recording its second consecutive quarter of profit.

Others are feeling a similar heat. Chinese video-games and social media giant Tencent on

Wednesday delivered a better-than-expected 11% year-on-year jump in quarterly revenue, thanks to double-digit percent increases in its advertising, payments and cloud computing units.

Despite the return to growth, its Hong Kong stock still slumped the following day.

Investors were also spooked when e-commerce group Alibaba, reported sales that missed analyst forecasts on Refinitiv by 1%, wiping out \$13 billion in market value overnight in New York. Even the company's plan to return shares of its cloud computing division to shareholders — part of a radical breakup aimed at unlocking value — failed to enthruse markets.

Some caution is warranted but the \$220 billion Alibaba, for example, trades on just 10 times its forecast next 12-month earnings, not that far from state-owned utilities like China Mobile and China Unicom, which fetch roughly 9 times. At 2.5 times sales, Sea trades at nearly half of Tencent's multiple.

Grab meanwhile is handicapped by the excessive \$40 billion valuation at which it went public through a merger with a blank-cheque firm in 2021. At 4 times sales, it still commands a multiple twice

Uber's, suggesting investors are at least giving it some credit for its high potential businesses including in fintech. The next challenge is resetting investor expectations so that beats can shine through. — **Reuters**



A man talks on the phone as he surfs the internet on his laptop at a local coffee shop in downtown Shanghai. — **Reuters**

To counter China, G7 countries borrow its economic playbook



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President Joe Biden, right, with Xi Jinping, Chinas leader, in Bali, Indonesia, in this file photo. — **The New York Times**

Midway through his face-to-face meeting with President Joe Biden in Indonesia last fall, the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, offered an unsolicited warning.

Biden had in the preceding months signed a series of laws aimed at supercharging US industrial capacity and imposed new limits on the export of technology to China, in hopes of dominating the race for advanced energy technologies that could help fight climate change.

For months, he and his aides had worked to recruit allied countries to impose their own restrictions on sending technology to China.

The effort echoed the sort of industrial policy that China had employed to become the world's manufacturing leader. In Bali, Xi urged Biden to abandon it.

The president was not persuaded. Xi's protests only further convinced Biden that America's new industrial approach was the right one, according to a person familiar with the exchange.

As Biden and fellow leaders of the Group of 7 nations meet

this weekend in Hiroshima, a centrepiece of their discussions will be how to rapidly accelerate what has become an internationally coordinated round of vast public investment.

For these wealthy democracies, the goal is both to reduce their reliance on Chinese manufacturing and to help their own companies compete in a new energy economy.

Biden's legislative agenda, including bills focused on semiconductors, infrastructure and low-emission energy sources, has begun to spur what could be trillions of dollars in government and private investment in American industrial capacity.

That includes subsidies for electric vehicles, batteries, wind farms, solar plants and much more.

The spending — the United States' most significant intervention in industrial policy in decades — has galvanised many of America's top allies in Europe and Asia, including key leaders of the G-7. European nations, South Korea, Japan, Canada and others are pushing for increased access to America's clean-energy subsidies, while launching companion efforts of their own.

"This clean-tech race is an opportunity to go faster and further, together," Ursula von

der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, said after an economy-themed meeting at the G-7 summit on Friday.

"Now that the G-7 are in this race together, our competition should create additional manufacturing capacity and not come at each other's expense," she said.

Biden and his G-7 counterparts have embarked on a project with two ambitious goals: to accelerate demand, even by decades, for the technologies needed to reduce emissions and fight climate change; and to give workers in the United States and in allied countries an advantage over Chinese workers in meeting that demand.

Much of that project has roared to life since the G-7 leaders met last year in the German Alps. The wave of recent G-7 actions on supply chains, semiconductors and other measures to counter China is based on "economic security, national security and energy security," Rahm Emanuel, the US ambassador to Japan, told reporters this week in Tokyo. He added: "This is an inflection point for a new and more relevant G-7."

Emanuel said the effort reflected a growing impatience among G-7 leaders with what they call Beijing's use of economic measures to punish and deter behaviour by foreign

governments and companies that China's officials do not like.

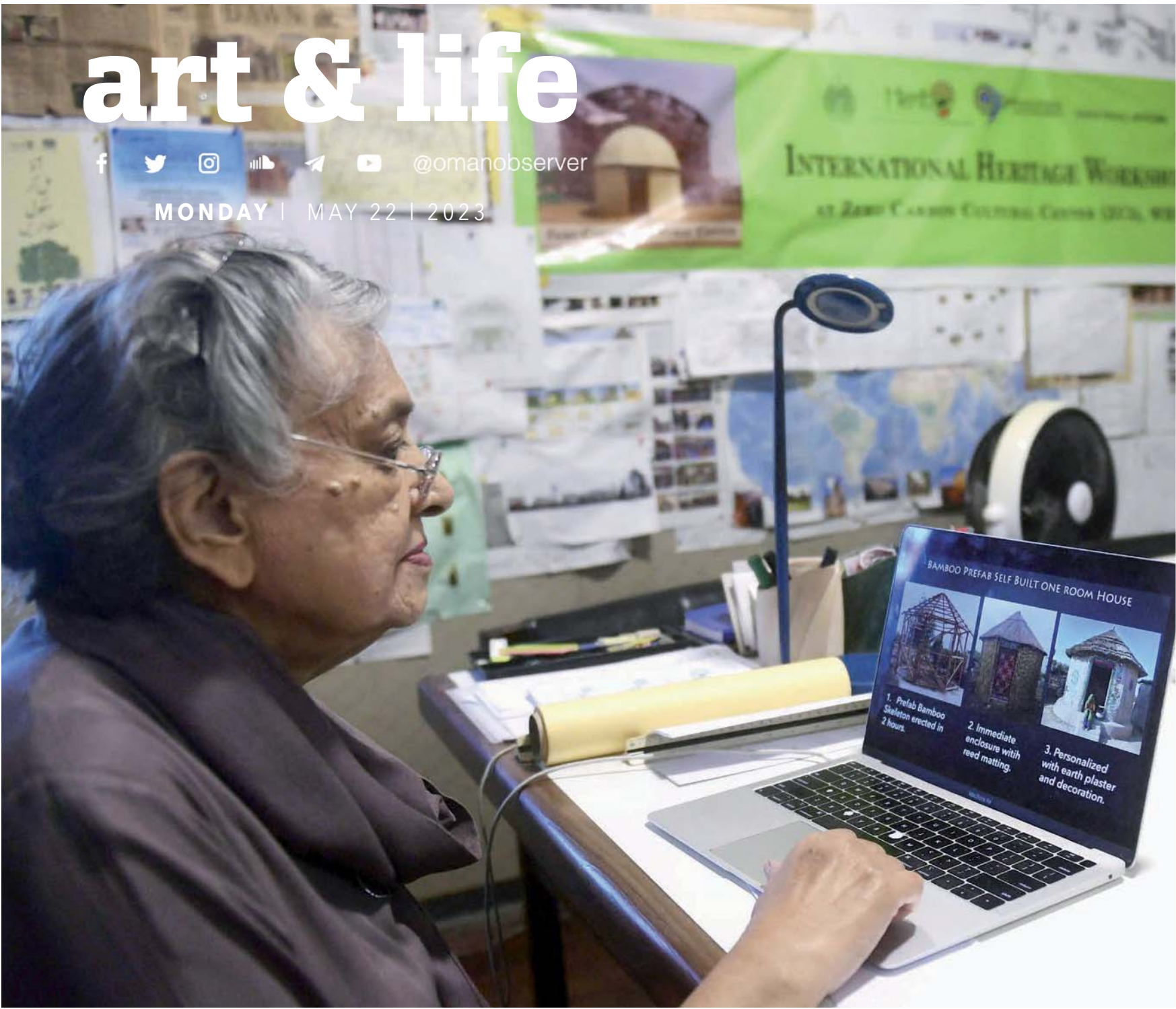
But more than anything, the shift has been fuelled by urgency over climate action and by two laws Biden signed last summer: a bipartisan bill to shower the semiconductor industry with tens of billions of dollars in government subsidies, and the climate provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act, which companies have jumped to cash in on.

Those bills have spurred a wave of newly announced battery plants, solar panel factories and other projects. They have also set off an international subsidy race, which has evolved after being deeply contentious in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the climate law.

The lucrative US supports for clean energy and semiconductors — along with stricter requirements for companies and government agencies to buy US-made steel, vehicles and equipment — have put unwelcome pressure on competing industries in allied countries.

Some of those concerns have been quelled in recent months. The United States signed a deal with Japan in March that will allow battery materials made in Japan to qualify for the benefits of the Inflation Reduction Act.

— **The New York Times**



CULTURE

The octogenarian architect working to flood-proof Pakistan

AT 82 YEARS OLD, architect Yasmeen Lari is forging the way in fortifying Pakistan's rural communities living on the frontline of climate change.

Lari, Pakistan's first woman architect, has ditched a lifetime of multi-million dollar projects in the megacity of Karachi to develop pioneering flood-proof bamboo houses.

The few pilot settlements already constructed are credited with saving families from the worst of the catastrophic monsoon flooding that put a third of the country underwater last year.

"We continued to live in them," said Khomo Kohli, a 45-year-old resident of Pono Colony village, which is a few hundred kilometres outside of Karachi.

"The rest of the residents had to move onto the road where they lived for two months until the water receded."

Now, Lari is campaigning to scale up the project to one million houses made from affordable local materials, bringing new jobs to the most vulnerable areas.

"I call it a kind of co-building and co-creation, because the people have an equal part in embellishing it and making it comfortable for themselves," she said.

The architect, who trained in the United Kingdom, is behind some of Karachi's most notable buildings, including brutalist constructions such as the Pakistan State Oil headquarters, as well as a string of luxury homes.

As she was considering retirement, a series of natural disasters — including a massive 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods — stiffened her resolve to continue working with her Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, which manages her rural projects.

"I had to find the solution, or find a way by which I could build up the capacities of people so that they could fend for themselves, rather than waiting for outside help," she said.

"My motto is zero carbon, zero waste, zero donor, which I think leads to zero poverty," she said.

TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES

Climate change is making monsoon rains heavier and more unpre-



dictable, scientists say, raising the urgency to flood-proof the country — particularly as the poorest live in the most vulnerable areas.

Pakistan, with the world's fifth-largest population, is responsible for less than one per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions but is one of the nations most vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather.

Pono Colony, with around 100 houses, was developed just months before catastrophic monsoon rains arrived last summer and displaced eight million people.

The village's elevated homes are protected from rushing water, while their bamboo skeletons — pierced deep into the ground — can withstand pressure without being uprooted.

Known locally as "chanwara", the mud huts are an improved take on the traditional single-room houses dotted along the landscape of southern Sindh province and Rajasthan state in India.

They require only locally available materials: lime, clay, bamboo and

thatching. With straightforward training to locals, they can be assembled at a cost of around \$170 — around an eighth of the cost of a cement and brick house.

In rural Sindh, tens of thousands of people are still displaced and stagnant water stands in large parts of farmland almost a year after the country's worst-ever floods.

The World Bank and Asian Development Bank in a joint study estimated Pakistan sustained \$32 billion in damage and economic losses and would require \$16 billion for reconstruction and rehabilitation.

ROYAL RECOGNITION

Lari recalls working on social housing in Lahore in the 1970s, when local women pored over her plans and probed her on where their chickens would live. "Those chickens have really remained with me, the women's needs are really the uppermost when I'm designing," she said.

This time around, the redesign of traditional stoves has become a significant feature — now lifted off the



floor.

"Earlier, the stove would have been on the ground level and so it was immensely unhygienic. The small children would burn themselves on the flames, stray dogs would lick pots and germs would spread," said Champa Kanji, who has been trained by Lari's team to build stoves for homes across Sindh.

"Seeing women becoming independent and empowered gives me immense pleasure," Lari said.

Lari's work has been recognised by the Royal Institute of British Architects, which awarded her the 2023 Royal Gold Medal for her dedication to using architecture to change people's lives.

"An inspirational figure, she moved from a large practice centred on the needs of international clients to focussing solely on humanitarian causes," RIBA president Simon Allford said.

"This is wonderful feeling," Lari said. "But of course it also makes my tasks harder. I have got to make sure that I now deliver." — AFP

LIFESTYLE



British musician finds his forte: saving unwanted pianos

IN A DESERTED FORMER department store near the port of Leith in Edinburgh, Tim Vincent-Smith reaches inside a grand piano's open top, his fingertips lightly plucking at the taut strings.

The piano is one of hundreds rescued by the musician and his team of volunteers, as homes around Britain discard the instruments in favour of more space.

Vincent-Smith's aim is to refurbish as many pianos as possible before putting them up for "adoption". Those beyond repair are turned into art or furniture.

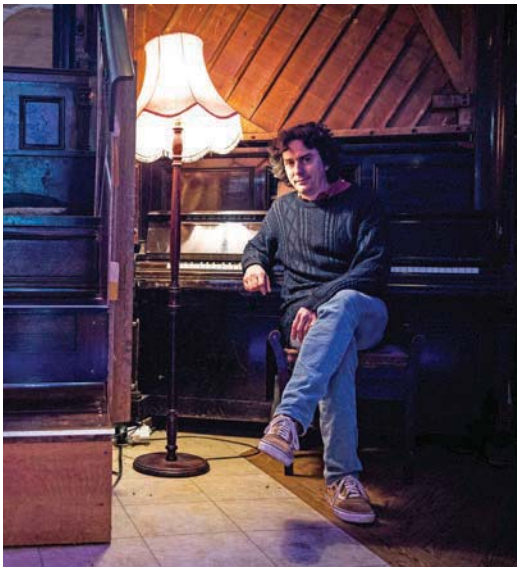
"I discovered that there were loads of pianos going to the dump and so I started making furniture — a window seat and a kind of high bed with a staircase — and then the pianos just kept on coming," he said.

As the instruments flooded in, Vincent-Smith realised that many were still "pretty good", and so he and his bandmate Matthew Wright decided to found Pianodrome, to rescue as many as possible.

"If you are lucky, you may find a beautiful antique piano which has a good action and tone, holds its tuning and is a pleasure to play," he said.

"The best thing for an old piano is to find a new home."

PIANO SMASHING



Britain has a piano-making tradition dating back more than 200 years, boasting some 360 manufacturers at its peak in the beginning of the last century.

The country was a supplier to the world, including great Western classical composers such as Frederic Chopin, Franz Liszt and Johann Christian Bach — the youngest son of Johann Sebastian Bach.

The instruments were once central to British social life and identity, taking pride of place in homes and also local pubs, where they were used for rousing beer-fuelled singalongs.

But as homes shrank in size and stairways grew narrower, it became increasingly difficult to shift pianos in narrower spaces.

Television and then later electronic pianos began providing an alternative source of nightly entertainment, leaving traditional pianos to gather dust in the corner of living rooms.

Homeowners even started finding innovative — if destructive — ways to get rid of the instruments: in the 1950s and 1960s, competitions were held to smash pianos to pieces with sledgehammers.

Vincent-Smith first came across dumped pianos when he started building furniture 20 years ago. At the time he was living and working at the Shakespeare and Co. bookshop on the banks of the River Seine in Paris.

The owner would send him to local skips to collect wood planks to be used to make shelves, benches and beds for the itinerant staff who worked in the shop beloved of writers such as Ernest Hemingway.

Vincent-Smith said he was often stunned at the quality of the pianos that were being dumped around the French capital.

A BEAUTIFUL THING

After he started Pianodrome, a piano was brought all the way to Edinburgh from the city of Plymouth in southwest England and appeared unusable.

"All the keys were stuck together because it got a bit damp," he said.

"I just filed the edges off the lead weights with a mask on so I didn't poison myself. And then when the keys could move, we discovered that it sounded really nice."

"I started to be a bit more careful about it and got all the notes working — it ended up being our sort of concert piano."

Pianos that cannot be restored are pulled apart and turned into sculptures, furniture or art.

One of Vincent-Smith's artworks, a six-metre (nearly 20-foot) elephant tusk structure outside Pianodrome's base, aims to highlight what society considers to be waste.

Pianodrome now holds regular events where the derelict shop is transformed into a concert hall in an amphitheatre built entirely from upcycled pianos.

There are also open sessions where enthusiasts can try out the pianos. When they find one they like, they can "adopt" it and take it home in return for an optional small donation.

As the sound of the strings of the concert piano reverberate through the old shop, Vincent-Smith raises his head and nods once — the piano is repairable.

"A piano is just an example of something that our society considers to be waste but can be used to great purpose," he said.

"So I guess what I'd like to say is to folk — if you're thinking of getting rid of your piano, think about keeping it, it's a beautiful thing, a piano." — AFP