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OMAN SAIL TEAMS ALL SET FOR PAN ARAB GAMES 2023



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AMBITIOUS STRATEGY TO ENSURE DEVELOPMENT OF GREEN HYDROGEN ECONOMY



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MESSAGE OF PHOTOGRAPHS IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT



MUSCAT

HIS MAJESTY SENDS GREETINGS TO COMOROS, MALAWI

■ His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Azali Assoumani of the Union of Comoros on the occasion of his country’s National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Assoumani, and the brotherly people of the Comoros further progress and prosperity.

■ His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik also sent a cable of greetings to President Lazarus Chakwera of the Republic of Malawi on the occasion of his country’s Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Chakwera and the friendly people of Malawi. — ONA

ASMED LAUNCHES E-SYSTEM TO BOOST SMEs

Acting in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (AS-MED) on Wednesday launched a new electronic information system code-named ‘Information Plus.’

The system, to be available via ASMED website, constitutes a digital reference for information on companies and establishments, their locations, their activities, population information and economic activities.

The system seeks to enable SMEs to develop an entrepreneurial environment and to establish an integrated electronic information database for supporting their business activities within the framework of the national approaches of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

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‘KHUTA’ PLATFORM TO ADVANCE OMAN VISION 2040

New vocational guidance platform launched

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The National Employment Programme introduced the groundbreaking ‘Khuta’ (Steps) platform, aimed at equipping local youth with essential skills for future job market challenges and fostering a culture of work. This will be the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman.

The interactive platform, launched under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of “Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit,” serves as a comprehensive national resource for career guidance, integrating educational outputs with the needs of the labour market.

With innovative tools and resources, ‘Khuta’ empowers individuals to make informed professional decisions, explore diverse career paths, and develop skills aligned with future market demands.

It also fosters close partnerships between educational institutions and economic sectors, creating



DISCOVER ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

IDENTIFY ACCREDITED PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATES

EXPLORE DIVERSE PROFESSIONS, LOCAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES

employment opportunities and aligning study programmes with market needs.

The platform offers essential services such as programme identification, accreditation verification, awareness of future skills, and skill development support, while incorporating Artificial Intelligence for seamless operations and constant service provision. The first interactive national electronic platform for career guidance was launched in the presence of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain,

SEE ALSO PAGE 13



EMPOWERING AL FAGOUR’S QUALITY WITH ‘AL TABSEEL’

The Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah is all set to hold the ‘Al Tabseel’ season for Al Fagur production in Bidiyah on July 8 and 9. The ‘Al Tabseel’ initiative revolutionises Al Fagour production, emphasising the significance of superior product quality by leveraging cutting-edge technologies in harvesting, processing, and expanding into international markets. — ONA

Royal Decree ratifies Oman-Poland visa waiver agreement

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued Royal Decree No 49/2023 on the ratification of the agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Poland on mutual waiving of visas for holders of diplomatic, special and service

passports. The agreement was signed in Warsaw on June 13, 2023.

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

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

ICC monitoring Palestinian situation



A woman walks past the wreckage of a car in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin after the Israeli army declared the end of a military operation in the area. — AFP

THE HAGUE: The International Criminal Court’s prosecutor is “continuously monitoring” the Palestinian situation, his office said on Wednesday, after Israel carried out a large-scale operation in the West Bank city of Jenin.

The Hague-based war crimes tribunal opened a formal investigation in 2021 into the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, including alleged crimes by Israeli forces and by

Hamas and Palestinian groups.

Israel, which is not a member of the ICC, has refused to cooperate with the probe or recognise its jurisdiction.

“The Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) is continually monitoring the situation and developments in Palestine inasmuch as they are relevant to OTP’s ongoing investigations,” ICC prosecutor Karim Khan’s office said, when asked for a reaction to events in Jenin. — AFP, SEE ALSO P6

UN urges ‘massive’ clean energy investment in developing world

GENEVA: The United Nations called on Wednesday for massive investment in clean energy in developing countries, saying there was otherwise little hope of achieving any climate goals by 2030.

Developing countries need renewable energy investments of about \$1.7 trillion annually but attracted foreign direct investment in clean energy worth only \$544 billion in 2022, the UN’s trade and development agency UNCTAD said.

“We cannot fulfil the world’s



We cannot fulfil the world’s energy needs and safeguard our planet and our future without massive private sector investment in renewables in developing countries’

ANTONIO GUTERRES
UN chief

energy needs and safeguard our planet and our future without massive private sector investment in renewables in developing countries,” said UN Chief Antonio Guterres.

“We are at least a decade late in our efforts to combat global warming. Investment in renewable energy in developing countries is therefore essential and often the most economical way to bridge the energy gap.

“But while the transition to renewable energy is a global priority, investments in energy



infrastructure and efficiency still fall far short of what is needed.”

International investment in renewable energy has nearly tripled since the Paris climate accord was struck in 2015, UNCTAD noted in its annual World Investment Report.

However, it said much of the growth was in developed nations.

Since 2015, “31 developing countries, including 11 least developed countries, have not yet registered a single utility-

sized international investment project in renewables or other energy transition sectors,” the report said.

“The scale of the challenge is enormous,” said UNCTAD chief Rebeca Grynspan.

“A significant increase in investment in sustainable energy systems in developing countries is crucial for the world to reach climate goals by 2030.”

The agency called for debt relief to give developing countries fiscal space to invest in clean energy transition. — AFP



SAYYID BADR RECEIVES COPIES OF CREDENTIALS OF LIBYAN, UK AMBASSADORS



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday a copy of credentials of Hager Amru Khalifa Al Namy, Ambassador-designate of Libya to the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out her duties. He also wished the relations between Oman and Libya further development and growth. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, also received a copy of credentials of Dr Liane Saunders, Ambassador-designate of the United Kingdom (UK) to the Sultanate of Oman. The Foreign Minister wished the ambassador success in carrying out her duties and the bilateral relations further development and growth. – ONA

Defence academy chairman receives US military delegation



MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, received on Wednesday at Bait Al Falaj a delegation from the United States Military Academy at West Point. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several academic and training matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by several high ranking officers from the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies. Also, the United States Military Academy delegation visited the National Defence

College (NDC). Upon the delegation's arrival at the college, they were greeted by Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the NDC. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest, especially in academic and training fields. The visiting delegation were also briefed on the college's facilities and equipment. They also toured its various departments and halls that are designed according to the latest specifications and equipped with modern educational systems and training aids. — ONA

First Vatican ambassador lauds Oman's social fabric

KABEER YOUSUF
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Archbishop Nicholas Thevenin (Apostolic Nuncio in Oman), who has been appointed as the first Vatican Ambassador to Oman, lauded the social fabric of the Sultanate of Oman, a day after the country topped in global peace index. He praised the efforts Oman is taking in supporting people from different walks of life by offering a secular society respecting the beliefs of one and all and in providing a safe and peaceful environment to live and work in the country. Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the reception hosted by Crowe Oman, the ambassador of Vatican also hailed the farsightedness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. "It is indeed a commendable achievement that the Sultanate

of Oman has made in terms of providing the society with a fear-free life, the most peaceful and safest environment in the world," he said. A statement issued by the Foreign Ministry earlier said, "We are delighted to announce the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican. We look forward to working together for peace and many other humanitarian causes." Both sides agreed to establish, on the basis of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of April 18, 1961, full diplomatic relations at the level of an Apostolic Nunciature to Oman and of an Embassy to the Holy See. "What makes Oman different is the social fabric that is congruent to foster brotherhood, harmony and coexistence and Oman's stance in many global issues is a testimony to it," he added.



Oman's Steel Industry Booming Under the Jindal Group

An industrial powerhouse with a dominant presence in steel, Jindal Group is a prominent player in the global steel manufacturing sector. It is bolstering its commitment to the Sultanate of Oman by undertaking several strategic investments aimed at fostering socio-economic growth and supporting the nation's transition to a green, circular economy. Working in tandem with His Majesty Sultan Haitham's Vision 2040 plan to reduce the country's dependency on the oil and gas sector while diversifying into non-oil-based manufacturing, the group is flying the flag high. These investments under the Vulcan International Holding Company include Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, Sohar Steel, and Vulcan Pelletizing Plant in Sohar, and in Duqm Vulcan Green Steel. Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel (JSIS), a revered steel manufacturer in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, continues to strengthen its position as a catalyst for the Sultanate's development. The company's facility in Sohar has expanded its value chain to reach a production capacity of 2.4 million metric tons per annum (MTPA). With new projects announced at the Sohar facility, Vulcan's total investments in the area will exceed USD 1.5 billion, emphasising its commitment to in-country value creation and job opportunities. Commenting on the company's ICV strategies, Harssha Shetty, Chief Executive Officer of JSIS, said, "Since the commencement of operations in Oman in 2010, the company has kept pace with the dynamically evolving goals of the country and established itself as a reliable partner that is invested in building a resilient, self-reliant nation. As such, with the operations of the proposed new projects in full swing, the benefits to the nation will be unparalleled. We are working towards aligning a comprehensive ICV agenda with national priorities, apart from the ongoing investments in assets and technology. This



encompasses a gamut of initiatives across a wide spectrum, including generating employment and business opportunities, nurturing a skilled workforce, and supporting local industries. JSIS is driven by innovation and progressive thinking at its core, which extends to how we do our part to create a more sustainable local ecosystem." Jindal Shadeed's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs are

complementary to these initiatives. Through the 'Steel of Oman' campaign, the company has demonstrated its support for Oman's passion for football and its potential in the global football arena. Partnerships with the Oman Football Association (OFA) and Ali Al-Habsi's Academy for Football have led to the establishment of nine under-14 football training centres, fostering the development of young talent. JSIS CSR policy actively engages in community initiatives related to

the youth development, SME partnerships, and safe home construction practices. With its exceptional track record in steel manufacturing and strong community-centric values, JSIS continues to drive the Sultanate's progress and competitiveness on the global stage. The group has also committed USD 3 billion to develop a mega Green steel project in the Sultanate of Oman. The project, known as Vulcan Green Steel, will be established in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and will encompass a 5 million metric tons per annum (MTPA) green hydrogen-ready steel plant. It is a marquee initiative to combat climate change and produce green steel on a large scale. The plant will be powered entirely by renewables and green hydrogen, making it one of the largest green steel facilities globally. In addition to Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel and Vulcan Green Steel, the group is actively involved in other ventures in the Sultanate's steel industry. Notably, the company is developing the Sohar Pelletising Plant, equipped with Metso Outotec technology, with a 6 million metric tons production capacity per annum. Civil piling work is underway, and the plant is scheduled to commence production by end of 2024. Furthermore, the group is investing in a pilot Carbon Capture Plant at the Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel facility in Sohar. The plant, expected to be completed by the end of 2023, will have a maximum capacity to capture 7 tons of CO2 per day at a pilot scale. This initiative showcases the group's dedication to environmental stewardship and reducing carbon emissions. With these strategic investments, Vulcan Investments and the Jindal Steel Group is poised to strengthen Oman's steel industry, drive economic growth, and contribute to the nation's sustainability goals. The company remains committed to its partnership with the Sultanate and its vision for a prosperous and environmentally conscious future.



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RNO COMMANDER RECEIVES UK MARITIME OFFICIAL



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Commodore Philip Dennis, Commander of the United Kingdom (UK) Maritime Component and Deputy Commander of the Combined Maritime Forces. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed several matters of mutual interest. — **ONA**

Saudi Arabia begins issuing Umrah visas

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Those who wish to perform Umrah in the holy cities of Mecca and Madinah can apply now as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has begun issuing Umrah visas.

Citizens and residents can log on to Nusuk platform to make an application as was announced by the Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj and Umrah (MoHU).

Issuance of Umrah visas was stopped in view of the Haj pilgrimage and the last date for performing Umrah was June 4, 2023, according to an announcement made by the ministry. Now, Umrah pilgrims can enter the holy city from July 19 and a booking has to be made on Nusuk to visit Madinah, as part of their Umrah.

The announcement further said that those who are on family visit visa, tourist visa or transit visa



too can make use of the services through the Nusuk.

One can perform Umrah on a visit visa or Umrah visa. The tourist visa is also a multiple entry visa that anyone can apply for regardless of religion. On the

other hand, the Umrah visa is a single entry visa only issued to Muslims who will enter Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah.

It is to be noted that the Umrah visa does not allow individuals to perform Haj.

Rising tide of e-cigarettes a concern among teenagers

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, JULY 5

Many researchers say that electronic cigarettes are more addictive than real cigarettes, and their use has spread widely among teenage school students with addiction increasing in recent years.

Electronic cigarettes have invaded the markets in recent years which have gained significant popularity among young people. Marketed as nicotine-free alternatives that do not pose the same health risks as traditional cigarettes and hookahs, these products have enticed young consumers who are driven by curiosity to try such things.

The electronic cigarette first emerged in China in 2004 and has since been marketed extensively particularly through online platforms reaching numerous countries worldwide.

Resembling a regular cigarette in shape, the electronic cigarette is a metal cylinder equipped with a tank to hold liquid nicotine in varying concentrations. Despite its cigarette-like appearance, it features a rechargeable battery and does not emit smoke. The battery heats the nicotine-infused liquid often mixed with aromatic flavours.

As with any new product seeking market promotion, the electronic cigarette has been widely advertised and sold among young people based on several fallacies. These



include claims that it is a guaranteed method to quit smoking and that it is endorsed and guaranteed by the World Health Organization (WHO).

However, it should be noted that the World Health Organization itself has explicitly stated that it is not responsible for the use of its name in promoting these products.

This has reached to the point where a significant number of smokers now attempt to quit smoking by adopting what is commonly known as 'e-cigarettes' as alternatives to traditional tobacco

consumption. Proponents of these products argue that electronic hookahs do not contain the toxic and carcinogenic substances present in regular hookahs, such as tar and carbon monoxide, thus positioning them as a healthier option.

Additionally, they claim that the emitted vapour does not harm the smoker or those in close proximity, as it is vapour rather than smoke.

Omar al Amari, a concerned citizen, highlights the prevalence of smoking among school students, including both males and

females, despite international laws prohibiting smoking under the age of 18, and even under 21 in some European countries. He further notes that electronic cigarettes have gained popularity among girls and have become a fashion trend among them.

Tobacco companies actively target girls and promote electronic cigarettes using vibrant packaging and varied designs. Unfortunately, some parents find it challenging to identify electronic cigarettes due to their shape and odour.

Al Amari suggests that one of the

most effective measures to limit the spread of electronic cigarettes and other related products is to enforce stricter regulations at tobacco shops, prohibiting the sale of such items without verifying the buyer's age through proper identification.

He emphasised the importance of the family's role in monitoring their children's tools, and the school's oversight and awareness-raising role.

Since these products entered Oman markets, there have been numerous efforts to raise awareness about their potential

There is prevalence of smoking among school students, including both males and females, despite international laws prohibiting smoking under the age of 18, and even under 21 in some European countries

OMAR AL AMARI

A concerned citizen

Development projects completed in Al Suwaiq

AL SUWAIQ: Al Suwaiq Municipality has completed the implementation of 10 development projects in the municipal sector.

Engineer Sulaiman bin Hamad al Sunaidy, Director-General of North Al Batinah Municipality, said that the pavement of internal roads in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq with a distance of 4.5 km has already been completed while other projects are yet to be completed.

The first phase of the pavement of internal roads with a total distance of 37.3 km is 80 per cent complete whereas the

second phase (49.7 km) is nearly complete at an implementation rate of 97 per cent. The repair and rehabilitation of the damaged roads is 5 per cent complete, the official said.

Al Sunaidy said that 95 per cent of the municipal parking project has been completed. In addition, 15 per cent has been completed of internal roads project at a length of 48 km, and 60 per cent has been completed for maintenance of roads damaged by the tropical condition Shaheen with a length of 7 km.

The maintenance of creeks affected by the tropical condition

Shaheen has been completed. The municipality is supplying and installing stalls allocated to job-seekers for the selling of various products. Besides, the project of supplying and installing decorative lighting poles has been completed.

Noteworthy, the North Al Batinah Municipality will award new projects in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq which will be announced after the completion of tender procedures. These projects aim at enhancing municipal services and upgrading various services related to the development and economic aspects. — **ONA**



كلية عُمان
OMAN COLLEGE
of Management and Technology

إعلان طرح مناقصات
TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

تعلن لجنة المناقصات الداخلية بكلية عمان للإدارة والتكنولوجيا عن طرح المناقصات التالية:
The Internal Tenders Committee of Oman College of Management and Technology announces the following tenders:

رقم المناقصة Tender Number	عنوان المناقصة Tender Title	قيمة المستند بالريال العماني (لا ترد) Value of document in Omani Rials (Non-Refundable)	تاريخ بدء استلام كتيب العطاء Starting date of Receiving Tender Booklet
OCMT-2023 /11	توريد حواسيب محمولة Supply of Laptops	١٠٠ ريال عماني OMR 100	٢٠٢٣ / ٧ / ٩ 9/7/2023
OCMT-2023 /12	توريد أجهزة حاسوب مكتبية Supply of Mini Cases	١٠٠ ريال عماني OMR 100	٢٠٢٣ / ٧ / ٩ 9/7/2023

تودع العروض في صندوق المناقصات بالكلية في موعد أقصاه ٢٣ / ٧ / ٢٠٢٣
هاتف (٩٦٨) ٢٤٠٥١٠٠٠ ، (٩٦٨) ٢٤٠٥١٠٠٠

Bids are deposited in the Tender Box at the college no later than 23/7/2023
For inquiries and communication, contact us through Tel : (968) 24051000, (968) 24051006



ACADEMIC JOURNEY OMANI STUDENTS ABROAD NEED MORE SUPPORT

FATIMA AL MARSHOUDI
MUSCAT, JULY 5

The process of transitioning from a familiar environment to an entirely different setting presents students with a multitude of intricate social challenges. Among these challenges, a prominent concern arises from the profound shift experienced when moving from a community-oriented society, characterised by shared social responsibilities, to an individualistic society.

Additionally, students must navigate the disparities in societal norms and divergent areas of personal interest, which can give rise to cultural clashes and a sense of disorientation.

While it is crucial to address these issues and offer support, it is equally important to ensure that the difficulties faced by students are not exacerbated. By identifying and rectifying manageable issues, conducive environment that eases their transition can be created.

Omani scholarship students studying abroad are encountering a range of challenges, compounded by the global economic inflation. These hurdles, including rising living expenses, limited course availability, lack of guidance and financial strain are affecting the overall well-being and academic performance of these students.

One of the primary concerns for Omani students is the escalating cost of living. With the surge in prices for rent, utilities and daily necessities, many students find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Rent in some study destinations, such as the United States, can range from \$1,200 to \$1,800 per month. Omani students often have to pay between RO 350 to RO 500, or even more, which adds a significant burden to their monthly expenses.

Transportation is another pressing issue. Owning a car becomes an expensive affair, as students must contend with insurance, parking fees, gasoline, and even monthly parking space rent. These costs make it challenging for students to maintain a reliable mode of transportation, impacting their mobility and access to essential resources.

Wala al Ajmi, a graduate Omani student from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, expressed her hopes saying, “I hope that the problems facing the scholarship students will be reconsidered and that the situation will be

TO COPE WITH THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGES, MANY OMANI STUDENTS RESORT TO TAKING MULTIPLE PART-TIME JOBS ON CAMPUS. HOWEVER, THE DEMANDING WORK SCHEDULES AND INCREASED RESPONSIBILITIES DETRACT FROM THEIR ABILITY TO CONCENTRATE ON THEIR STUDIES, RESULTING IN DECREASED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND INCREASED STRESS LEVELS

improved for the better, so that the students will not be distracted from achieving their aspirations with the highest grades.”

To cope with these financial challenges, many Omani students resort to taking multiple part-time jobs on campus. However, the demanding work schedules and increased responsibilities detract from their ability to concentrate on their studies, resulting in decreased academic performance and increased stress levels.

Moreover, Omani students face difficulties when registering for courses. Some Cultural Attachés may require students to take a heavy course load to complete their studies within the allotted time. However, limited course availability, especially for specific subjects or semesters, adds pressure to students and hinders their progress.

Additionally, the Cultural Attaché’s role is of utmost importance in providing invaluable support to Omani students studying abroad. As they always seek their primary goal to ensure the success of Omani students

throughout their academic journey, students would need more effective communication and guidance, to prevent the situation of having students encountering avoidable pitfalls.

Strengthening these aspects would greatly alleviate the challenges faced by Omani students. It is essential to provide them with ample support and clear directions to ensure they can navigate their academic journey with confidence and ease. In certain instances, the absence of sufficient guidance has unfortunately led to some students discontinuing their studies, which is a situation we hope to avoid through enhanced support mechanisms.

To address these issues, several solutions should be considered. First, it is crucial for the Omani government and relevant authorities to reassess scholarship funding to ensure it covers the rising costs of living expenses, including rent, utilities and transportation. Providing additional financial support or subsidies can help alleviate the burden on students. Additionally, a potential solution could involve optimising the allocation of scholarships by reducing their number, thereby establishing a prudent budget for students studying abroad, ultimately enhancing the efficacy of the experience.

Efforts should also be made to enhance course availability, enabling students to access the required subjects throughout their academic tenure. Regular coordination and communication between the Cultural Attaché and educational institutions can help streamline the course registration process and ensure students can study according to their planned timelines.

Furthermore, it is essential to revise the healthcare policies for Omani students abroad.

Implementing comprehensive health insurance coverage that includes emergency care without additional financial burden on students would ensure their well-being and timely access to medical services.

In conclusion, enhancing communication channels and support systems for Omani students is crucial. The Cultural Attaché should establish effective mechanisms to provide guidance, counselling and assistance to students, ensuring they feel supported throughout their educational journey.

By addressing these challenges and implementing effective solutions, Omani scholarship students studying abroad can experience a more conducive academic environment, enabling them to focus on their studies and achieve their educational goals successfully.





Integrated complexes key to development of tourism sector

MUSCAT: Integrated tourism complexes provide a qualitative addition to the tourism sector, including hotels, recreational and commercial facilities and real estate units, which contribute to diversifying tourism products and destinations. This is achieved through raising the number of hotel rooms, the quality of services and the recreational service facilities, as well as providing direct and indirect job opportunities.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has granted 19 valid licences for integrated tourism complexes, including a number of projects across the governorates of Muscat, Dhofar, South Al Sharqiyah, South Al Batinah and Musandam. These projects provide 81 hotel facilities, including 16,576 hotel rooms, 2,552 apartment hotels and villas and 42,617 housing units, in addition to golf courses and a number of harbours, restaurants, cafes and shops.

The total investment volume



in the integrated tourism complexes projects is estimated at approximately RO 4.376 billion for complexes under implementation and RO 3.120 billion in other licensed projects that are in the pre-implementation phase.

Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, said: “The integrated tourism complexes are a modern style of tourism cities that provide

all services and facilities under one roof. Residents of such complexes can live with no need to leave the boundaries of the complex, where the integration of residential, tourism, recreational, sports and commercial facilities contribute to providing the foundations of a new living experience. These integrated complexes also provide the opportunity for non-Omanis to own property, constituting a mixture of different interactive

cultures and providing an opportunity to attract capital and businesspeople to reside in the Sultanate of Oman and provide a supportive base for the national efforts aimed at attracting investments”.

He pointed out that the integrated tourism complexes have added new dimensions to the tourism sector at the levels of modern and unique architecture in parallel with the quality of the integrated infrastructure.

He added that integrated tourism also offers a wide range of options in terms of tourism facilities and services, which are among the most important pillars of tourism development. Such integrated complexes have become tourism destinations for tourists to enjoy various facilities. The hotels component provides the tourism market with hundreds of hotel rooms that provide high levels of luxury and a variety of styles. — ONA

MoH launches ‘1,000 health paramedics’ campaign

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of Health Services in the Governorate of Muscat, launched a ‘1,000 health paramedics’ campaign in Al Amerat, which was announced in May this year.

The campaign comprised several introductory and training workshops for participants from various locations as announced by the Directorate on its official websites and on social media platforms.

Faisal bin Amer al Hanashi, a senior specialist nurse in the Training Department of the Directorate-General of Health Services in the Governorate of Muscat, explained that the campaign aims to educate the community in the field of first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation in order to raise the level of health awareness.

“The campaign will be applied initially in the Wilayat of Al



Amerat until it reaches all the wilayats in the Governorate of Muscat, according to the plan prepared for it, which received a great turnout from members of society during the registration period,” he said.

The Directorate began holding activities accompanying the campaign, which included publishing video clips on the Directorate’s account for social media platforms, in addition to distributing some educational pamphlets about the campaign and holding mini-training courses in a number of schools in Muscat Governorate, targeting 700 teachers and students.

New vocational guidance platform launched

FROM PAGE 1

Minister of Labour and General Supervisor of the national programme, ministers, members of the State Council, specialists and the media.

“This programme (Khuta) is the first comprehensive interactive national electronic platform in the field of career guidance which was adopted and implemented as one of the strategic initiatives towards raising the efficiency of the career guidance service in Oman and one of the main components that promote integration and harmony between the outputs of the

educational system and the actual needs of the labour market,” said Eng Azhar bin Ahmed al Kindi, Technical Director of the National Employment Programme.

Khuta platform has been one of the focus areas ever since its launch was announced in 2021, and was developed with joint efforts by a team of experts and specialists in the field of career guidance and information technology.

The platform was also designed to be easy to use and has a variety of innovative tools and resources that help individuals in making appropriate professional decisions.

Exploring various professional

paths and working on developing their skills, especially those that are related to the future and the renewed needs of the labour market.

Dr Badr bin Hamoud al Kharousi, Head of the Research and Development, National Employment Programme, and the supervisor of the ‘Khuta’ platform for career guidance says the initiative aims at keeping pace with the international practices in the vocational guidance system besides providing comprehensive interactive services in various services related to this field, and contributing to empowering

students with future skills and readiness to join the labour market.

“As far as the employment opportunities and the nature of professions in terms of responsibilities, skills and qualifications are concerned, it will also provide specialised training courses in future and basic skills in accordance with the contents of the Omani national framework, in addition to providing lessons of future skills accompanied by detailed data on educational opportunities, the labour market and the skills necessary for success that have been worked on.

SalamAir operates first direct Bahrain-Salalah flight

SALALAH: The Sultanate of Oman’s budget carrier SalamAir began operating its first direct flights between Bahrain International Airport and Salalah Airport, at a rate of two flights per week, on Saturdays and Wednesdays.

The schedule provides travel options for those interested in visiting Dhofar Governorate during the Khareef (monsoon) season 2023.

Captain Mohammed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, expressed his delight at operating the direct flights which, he said, would boost commercial and tourism relations between Oman and Bahrain.

In a press statement, Captain Mohammed Ahmed pointed out that the direct flights will provide



a smooth travel experience for travellers from Bahrain wishing to make the best of their summer break in Dhofar, known for the diversity of its hotels and facilities.

SalamAir operates flights to as many as 39 local, regional and international destinations. — ONA

Making good use of summer

SIHAM AL SAIDI
BATINAH, JULY 5

As the summer heat settles in, North Al Batinah is preparing to offer an exciting summer experience for students. The Ministry of Education is launching the highly anticipated ‘Summer of Growth and Building’ programme, aimed at helping students discover their potential and broaden their horizons.

The programme, spanning two weeks starting this month, welcomes students in grades 5 to 11 and aims to attract 1,200 male and female students from all the wilayats of the governorate.

The programme is not a typical summer break. It is an engaging and educational initiative designed to make the most of students’ time off. Through a supportive learning environment, the programme aims to empower students, develop their skills and nurture personal growth. By participating in a range of activities, students will explore new subjects, think critically and develop a love for lifelong learning.

The programme offers captivating workshops in exciting areas like robotics, smartphone applications and various art forms such as visual arts, photography and digital design. Students will also have the chance to learn about cybersecurity, citizenship, entrepreneurship, leadership and other essential life skills through interesting lectures.

The summer programme is organised under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and with the coordination and monitoring of the Education Directorate in



North Al Batinah, in collaboration with the office of the North Al Batinah Governorate.

Issa bin Saif al Shamsi, Head of the summer programme local committee in North Al Batinah Directorate and the Director of Career Guidance and Students Affairs Programmes, stated that more than 15 government and private institutions will participate in this year’s summer programme, including the Technical University of Applied Sciences in Suhar, the municipalities of North Al Batinah, the Agricultural Research Centre in North Al Batinah, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, the General Directorate of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, as well as other vital sectors.

Additionally, there will be the participation of renowned individuals,

active members of clubs, local teams, and private sector institutions in the governorate who have eagerly joined forces to contribute their expertise and enrich the programme.

This summer programme aims to transform students into innovative thinkers, confident leaders and responsible citizens. By uncovering their talents and nurturing valuable skills, students will grow personally and make a positive impact on society.

The launch of the programme has generated excitement throughout North Al Batinah. Its impact is expected to extend beyond the programme, inspiring further educational initiatives and fostering progress. This groundbreaking programme brings together students, educators and institutions in pursuit of excellence and a brighter future.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2023/088	SUPPLY OF DISTRIBUTION TRANSFORMERS	20 th July 2023	3 rd August 2023	RO. 26.250
DISC/ 2023/089	SUPPLY OF WOODEN POELS	20 th July 2023	3 rd August 2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/090-2	REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING BELT CONVEYORS AT SOLID PROCESS BUILDING WITH SCREW CONVEYORS IN WRP	20 th July 2023	3 rd August 2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/111	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION (UPGRADING) SUPERVISION OF WRP-PHASE III - STAGE 1 IN SALALAH	20 th July 2023	9 th August 2023	RO. 525.000
DISC/ 2023/116	UNE-LOT 06 C-2023	20 th July 2023	30 th July 2023	RO. 52.500

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using “isupplier portal”. No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person’s name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232554
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Israeli troops withdraw in West Bank, Gaza rockets fired



Palestinians clash with Israeli forces amid an Israeli military operation, in Jenin, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — Reuters

JENIN: Militants from the Gaza Strip fired rockets on Wednesday after Israeli forces withdrew from the Palestinian city of Jenin on Tuesday, following one of their biggest military operations in the occupied West Bank for years.

Israeli jets hit an underground weapons manufacturing facility in response, the military said, but it was not immediately clear whether there would be any further escalation.

Hours earlier, two Israeli military vehicles were seen leaving Jenin after dark in what appeared to signal an end to an Israeli operation.

At least twelve Palestinians, five of them fighters, and one Israeli soldier had been killed.

The operation, which the army said was aimed at destroying infrastructure and weapons in the Jenin refugee camp, was launched with a drone strike on Monday, and over 1,000 troops were deployed.

After they left, residents who had vacated the camp during the fighting began returning to its dark streets.

The densely populated refugee camp, where some 14,000 people live in less than half a square kilometre, has been one of the focal points of a wave of violence that has swept the West Bank for more than a year, drawing growing international alarm.

A few hours after the forces began withdrawing, Palestinian

groups in the Gaza Strip fired five rockets toward Israel, the military said. The rockets were intercepted and there were no immediate reports of casualties.

There was further escalation on Tuesday with a car-ramming and stabbing attack claimed by the Palestinian Hamas group in Israel's business hub Tel Aviv, in which eight people were hurt.

As Israeli troops were leaving Jenin, explosions could still be heard in the northern West Bank city amid reports of a gun battle near a Jenin hospital.

Doctors Without Borders said Israeli forces had fired tear gas at a hospital where its teams were working.

Palestinian fighters from groups

including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah had fortified the camp with obstacles and watching posts to counter regular army raids.

Power and water supplies remained cut off in the camp and in some areas of the city after bulldozers that ploughed up roads looking for improvised bombs cut cables and a main water pipe.

Israeli forces uncovered underground explosives caches, one concealed in a tunnel under a mosque, confiscated 1,000 weapons and arrested 30 suspects, the military said.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it had evacuated 500 families from the camp, around 3,000 people.

— Reuters

Kenya says Somalia border reopening delayed after attacks

NAIROBI: Kenya said on Wednesday it was delaying the planned reopening of its long-closed border with Somalia after a number of deadly attacks on its soil attributed to the fighting group Al-Shabaab.

Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki said the phased reopening of border posts in Mandera, Lamu and Garissa along the lengthy frontier with Somalia would not go ahead as announced in May.

The decision comes after the murder of five civilians and the deaths of eight police officers in Kenya in separate incidents near the border last month blamed on Al-Shabaab.

“The government will delay the planned reopening of Kenya-Somalia border points until we conclusively deal with the recent spate of terror attacks and cross-border crime,” Kindiki said during a visit to the Dadaab refugee camp in far eastern Kenya near Somalia.

The frontier was officially closed in October 2011 because of attacks by Al-Shabaab, which has been waging an insurgency against the central government in Mogadishu for more than 15 years.

The two nations had announced plans in July last year to reopen the border at talks between then Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta and his Somali counterpart Hassan Sheikh Mohamud but they never materialised.

But on May 15 this year,



Kithure Kindiki

following a high-level ministerial meeting in Nairobi, officials from both countries agreed to the phased reopening of three border posts.

Mandera was to reopen within 30 days of the announcement, followed by Garissa in 60 days and Lamu in 90 days.

However on June 13, eight Kenyan police officers were killed in Garissa when their vehicle struck an improvised explosive device.

On June 24, five civilians had their throats cut in an attack in Lamu near the Somali border. Some were beheaded.

Kenya has suffered retaliatory attacks on its soil by Al-Shabaab since sending troops over the border into Somalia in 2011 to crush Al-Qaeda linked groups.

Among the deadliest attacks in Kenya was a massacre at Garissa University in 2015 that left 148 people dead, almost all of them students.

Kindiki said “99.99 per cent of refugees are good and law abiding and we will do our best to help them”. — AFP

S Korea says respects IAEA approval of Fukushima water release

SEOUL: South Korea said on Wednesday it respects the UN atomic agency's endorsement of Japan's plan to release treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant, despite growing domestic opposition and protests.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) this week gave the green light for a decades-long project to discharge accumulated water from the plant, which was devastated by an earthquake and a tsunami that hit the eastern coast of Japan in 2011.

After a two-year assessment, the IAEA said the release would have “negligible radiological impact” on people or the environment — but the public in neighbouring South Korea is strongly opposed to the

plan.

“The IAEA is a global authoritative body and the government's basic stance is we respect its decision,” Park Ku-yeon, the first deputy chief of the policy coordination office, said at a daily briefing.

He added that the government would deliver its analysis of the IAEA's final review once South Korea's independent assessment is complete.

Some 80 per cent of respondents in South Korea expressed concern about the release in a recent survey by Gallup Korea.

That planned release has triggered panic-buying of salt in South Korea, based on fears that the Fukushima water would



Protesters wave flags during a protest against Japan's plan to release treated Fukushima water, near the Japanese embassy in Seoul. — AFP

pollute the ocean and also the salt sourced from seawater.

A local e-commerce site reported an 800 per cent increase in salt purchases week-on-week in June around the time Japan announced its Fukushima water release plan.

South Korea's government is in the process of releasing up to 400 tons of sea salt from state reserves to stabilise the market.

There have also been regular public protests against the move, including one on Wednesday outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

Some opposition lawmakers have even gone on hunger strike to protest the release.

Several of the reactors at the

Fukushima Daiichi plant went into meltdown after cooling systems were overwhelmed by a massive 2011 tsunami.

The resulting nuclear accident was the worst since Chernobyl, and the clean-up has lasted more than a decade, with most areas declared off-limits due to radiation now reopened.

Decommissioning the plant itself will take decades more, but the facility's operator TEPCO faces the immediate problem of more than 1.33 million cubic metres of water accumulated on the site.

The water is a mixture of groundwater, rain that seeps into the area, and water used for cooling.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia to hold state polls in August

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's coalition government will face its first public vote of confidence in August, when six key states will head to the polls, the election commission said on Wednesday.

While the regional polls will not directly impact Anwar's two-thirds majority in parliament, any significant losses for his coalition could lead to questions about his leadership and destabilise his ruling bloc, which came to power after election in November.



The elections will pit Anwar's progressive, multi-ethnic coalition against a mostly conservative ethnic-Malay, Muslim alliance led by former premier Muhyiddin Yassin.

— Reuters

ULAANBAATAR

Hundreds flee homes after flooding

Hundreds of people in Mongolia's capital have fled their homes as heavy flooding inundated basement apartments, with authorities placing the city on high alert on Wednesday.

In traditionally dry Ulaanbaatar this week, heavy rains have inundated rivers, flooding basement apartments and trapping cars. Residents of Bayanzurkh District living near the river Selbe said that they had been working since the early hours to boost the height of a



local dam and stem rising waters caused by heavy rain.

“Our neighbours started to bring dirt and rocks from other places to add more layers on the dam at 3 am,” said a resident of the area. — AFP

BEIJING

15 dead as rains lash heavily

Fifteen people died and four were missing after torrential rain lashed the metropolis of Chongqing and swathes of southwestern China, local officials and state media said on Wednesday.

Residents in the capital Beijing and dozens of other areas have been warned to stay indoors as temperatures soar past 35 degrees Celsius.

In one of the deadliest natural disasters in China so far, torrential rains in Chongqing this week “killed 15 people and left



four others missing”, local authorities said.

“The heavy rains disrupting the lives of more than 130,000 people in 19 districts and counties,” state-run news agency Xinhua said. — AFP



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In brief

TEXAS



1 KILLED, 4 INJURED IN FIREWORKS ACCIDENT

Fireworks being prepared for a Fourth of July spectacular ignited in a Texas warehouse, killing one person and injuring four and destroying the building where they were stored, officials said.

The accident happened near the town of Gilmer in preparation for Independence Day fireworks in nearby Kilgore, both in rural Upshur County, about 200 km east of Dallas.

“From our initial interviews with especially one survivor there was an ignition while they were working with it, and then it all happened real fast,” said David Hazel, chief deputy of the Upshur County Sheriff’s office.

The ignition started a “significant blaze” that destroyed the building, he said.

The Kilgore fireworks show was cancelled. — Reuters

THE HAGUE



2 DEAD AS STRONGEST STORM BLASTS

A record-breaking summer storm hammered the Netherlands and Germany on Wednesday, killing two people and throwing international air and rail travel into chaos.

Storm Poly packed howling winds of up to 146 km/h, toppling trees and forcing the cancellation of 400 flights from Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport, one of Europe’s busiest hubs.

Meteorologists said the storm was the strongest on record to hit the Netherlands in the summer months and issued a rare “code red” warning for millions of people in the low-lying nation to stay indoors. — AFP

REYKJAVIK



HUNDREDS OF QUAKES SPUR VOLCANO WARNING

Some 2,200 earthquakes have been recorded in the area around Iceland’s capital Reykjavik the past 24 hours, signalling that a volcanic eruption could be imminent, the country’s weather office said on Wednesday.

The Icelandic Meteorological Office (IMO) said the tremors began around 4 pm on Tuesday beneath Mount Fagradalsfjall, which sits atop a volcanic system and where two eruptions have occurred in the past two years on the Reykjanes Peninsula, Iceland’s southwestern tip.

Seven of the quakes had a magnitude over four, which is still considered a light quake.

— AFP

UN worried as clock ticks on Ukraine grain export deal

GENEVA: The United Nations said on Wednesday that it was “worried” about the survival of a grain exports deal for Ukraine, which could collapse within a fortnight, threatening food security for the world’s most vulnerable.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative aimed at easing a global food crisis is set to expire on July 17 unless Russia, which is pressing an attack of Ukraine launched in February 2022, agrees to its renewal.

But Moscow remains unhappy about the operation of the deal’s parallel agreement on Russian food and fertiliser exports, and said on Tuesday that it saw no reason to extend the BSGI.

“No doubt we are worried because the two agreements signed in Istanbul are very important for food security and for the developing countries in the global south,” Rebeca Grynspan, head of the UN’s trade and development agency UNCTAD, told reporters in Geneva.

UNCTAD has been a major player in brokering the deals.

Russia’s attack of Ukraine saw Black Sea ports blocked by warships until the agreement,



Combines harvest wheat in a field in the Zaporizhzhia region, Russian-controlled Ukraine. — Reuters

signed in July 2022, allowed for the passage of critical grain exports.

The initial 120-day agreement struck with the UN and Türkiye

last July has been extended three times: in November, March and in May.

The parallel agreement, between

Moscow and the UN, is aimed at facilitating the export of Russian food and fertilisers, which are exempt from Western sanctions

imposed on Moscow over the Ukraine war.

But Russia claims this parallel agreement is not being upheld.

“We need both, to continue bringing prices down and have stable markets of food and fertilisers in the world,” Grynspan said.

“The United Nations remains committed to making every effort for the continuation of the agreements. They remain our main concern and we hope that we can ensure their extension for the benefit of the most vulnerable countries and the most vulnerable people in the world.

“We will continue during the days and hours still left with our efforts to make that happen.”

Ukraine was one of the world’s top grain producers, and the deal has helped soothe the global food crunch triggered by the conflict.

Some 32.8 million tonnes have been exported so far under the agreement, according to the UN. Just over half of the exports have been corn, while more than a quarter have been wheat.

Grynspan said consultations with a Russian delegation had taken place in Geneva. — AFP

German cabinet approves belt-tightening draft budget



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (C) addresses delegates during a question time at a session of the Bundestag in Berlin. — AFP

BERLIN: Germany’s coalition government approved a draft of next year’s budget on Wednesday after fractious negotiations, aiming to impose deep cuts after years of big spending while giving defence a boost.

Following months of feuding after Finance Minister Christian Lindner demanded severe cutbacks, Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s cabinet finally signed off on the proposed 2024 budget.

Lindner, from the business-friendly FDP party, sees it as a turning point after several years of massive outlays to tackle first the coronavirus pandemic and then an energy crisis triggered by Russia’s attack of Ukraine.

The budget for 2024 was the start of a “return to fiscal normality”, Lindner said at a press conference to present his plans.

“We are still faced with structural challenges but are not

in an exceptional emergency situation,” he said.

The draft did however tap funds to boost funding for Germany’s armed forces on the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

“Above all else it is about the security of our country,” Scholz said of the budget plans.

Other spending issues would have been “easier to deal with” were it not for the conflict, Scholz told parliament, which will debate the draft budget from September.

Europe’s top economy — which slipped into recession at the turn of the year, as surging inflation and interest rate hikes took their toll — forecasts spending of 445.7 billion euros (\$485 billion) next year, down from 476.3 billion planned for 2023.

Despite the drop, spending will still be 25 per cent higher than in 2019, according to the draft.

Accordingly, borrowing is also

set to fall drastically. For 2024, 16.6 billion euros in new borrowing is forecast, down from 45.6 billion in 2023.

Lindner however defended his plans against accusations that spending cuts went too far.

“The state cannot solve everything with money,” he said.

This statement was a swipe at his coalition partners, Scholz’s centre-left SPD party and the Greens, with whom negotiations have been tense.

The Greens were upset at Lindner’s refusal to sacrifice tax breaks for motorists while he has also been reluctant to give ground on a proposed new scheme to combat child poverty.

But plans meant Germany should comply with its constitutional “debt break” which limits new annual borrowing to 0.35 per cent of gross domestic product a year. — AFP

Backlash after Macron calls to ‘cut off’ social media

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron’s government faced a backlash on Wednesday after the centrist leader called for powers to “cut off” social media in case of widespread violence like riots over the past week.

“We have to think about the social networks, about the bans we’ll have to put in place. When things get out of control, we might need to be able to regulate or cut them off,” Macron told a meeting of mayors according to media reports.

Macron and his ministers have singled out platforms like Snapchat, TikTok and encrypted messenger Telegram for their role in spreading images of the nights of violence following the June 27 police shooting of a 17-year-old teenager, Nahel M.

“When (social media) becomes a tool for organising or for attempting to kill, it’s a real problem,” Macron said.

Opposition politicians from left and right had attacked the proposal.

Some voices were even raised within Macron’s parliamentary camp, with MP Eric Bothorel writing that to cut off social

networks would mean “giving up on the idea that democracy is stronger than the tools turned against it. It would be a mistake.”

Digital Transition Minister Jean-Noel Barrot’s office on Wednesday told France Inter that cutting off social networks was “not on the table”.

Meanwhile, France’s mainstream right-wing party was accused of “crass racism” on Wednesday after claiming that immigrant-origin people who took part in riots over the past week had undergone “a regression to their ethnic roots”.

Bruno Retailleau, who heads the Republicans party in the Senate, was responding to a question about the identities of the people who have burned cars and clashed with police during the country’s worst riots since 2005.

Although many of them were black or of north African origin, sparking calls for tighter curbs on immigration, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told parliament on Tuesday that 90 per cent of the people arrested since last Tuesday were French citizens. — AFP



France’s Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin (L) looks on as he attends a hearing by a French Senate Law Commission in Paris. — AFP

The Muscat staycation without a map

During the Eid holidays, it was enjoyable to drive around Muscat and the surrounding districts to see how development is changing the areas. There are so many new residential buildings, shopping centres, hotels and roads. The current construction and commercial boom gives the impression that everyone is rushing to launch new business ventures.

For me, it was time to explore Muscat, not just as a working place but as a historical and fast-changing city. I have always been more familiar with the desert and the mountains of Oman than the capital and its surrounding areas.

With the easy traffic on the main roads, driving around the Governorate of Muscat and having the chance to look around was like visiting new places. The hills and heights are bustling with construction sites. I crossed from Ruwi to Sifa, Yiti to Ghala, Bausher to Saal, Rusayl to Haz al Ramra, Seeb to Barka and Musannah. I drove around Blue City in Sawadi, crossed the hills from the Old Al Khoud village to Fanja, and followed the desert tracks behind Ghala. An exciting adventure between here and there, and a treasured experience.

A trip back in time is made possible by Old Muscat's winding streets. The landscape is captivating, and the alleys certainly have fantastic stories to tell. One can feel a sense of collectivism and strong relationships. Perhaps this was one of the reasons that influenced people with families in Old Muscat to stay in that part of the city during the Covid lockdown.

In the middle of the capital, I have been to several parks hidden away among fishing boats and extended stretches of unspoiled beaches with lush vegetation. It appears that these tiny jewels won't last very long. Like the dunes in recent years, pristine beaches have become a commodity. I have snapped hundreds of photos to register these locations because they will probably soon be taken by concrete.



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THE WRITER EXPLORES MUSCAT AND ITS EVOLVING SURROUNDINGS, WITNESSING RAPID DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORIC CHARM. FROM OLD MUSCAT'S WINDING STREETS TO HIDDEN PARKS AND TRANSFORMING LANDSCAPES, THE STAYCATION OFFERED A DEEPER APPRECIATION FOR OMANI CULTURE AND LEFT HER INSPIRED

The growth of Barka astounded me. It was almost impossible to remember the roads leading to wedding halls from a decade ago. Old plantation farms have been transformed into resort destinations with opulent amenities. It is a thriving metropolis with bits of dunes and desert areas. The wilayat has attracted international attention as it hosts several power and water desalination plants.

The area around Al Jafnayn is growing quickly as a residential, commercial and industrial location. Halban, Mabela, Al Seeb and Al Amerat have undergone significant development with new roads, shopping centres, and industrial and business areas. The fishing village of Qantab, with the sea and intriguing mountains as its backdrop, continues to be charming, but it is also going through incredible changes. Most of the locations I travelled through were framed by a mix of smooth and rough roads, alleys and dirt roads. Getting lost was normal, even motivating.

I then spent some time going to shopping centres. Hundreds of people were strolling from one side to another, enjoying a well-deserved outing with meals and entertainment within the comfort of powerful air conditioners.

With the outside temperature in the 40s Celsius, the malls were the best choice. Customers were tempted by an array of products at reduced prices. When it came to dining, there was a wide selection of cuisine namely Iranian, Lebanese, Turkish, Asian, Zanzibari, and then intercontinental food, with varying prices from reasonable to excessive.

Over the days, I have discovered intriguing locations that serve as reminders of a rich history. Places that fill my eyes and my heart with delight. The Muscat staycation was inspiring. It became clear how the sea, mountains and desert are fundamental to the local culture. Some of the most poetic scenes have provided me with a further understanding of my surroundings in Oman.

JENIN: AFTERMATH AND GRIEF



An elderly woman reacts as she stands by the rubble of broken pavement along an alley in Jenin in the occupied West Bank after the Israeli army declared the end of a two-day military operation in the area. The Israeli military launched the raid on the Jenin refugee camp early on July 3, during which 12 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were killed. – AFP

Arrangements underway for the tenth term of Majlis Ash'shura elections

The recent announcement of the candidates for the tenth term of the Majlis Ash'shura marks the commencement of the upcoming four-year session. An impressive total of 883 candidates, including 33 women, are running for council seats, representing a substantial increase of 245 candidates compared to previous elections.

This surge in participation and engagement stands as a cornerstone of the State's decision-making process and highlights the importance of embracing this inclusive path to address various demands and bolster the consultative work within the country.

This necessitates a proactive contribution to rendering a successful experiment, which was created to be developed through enhancing sound participation and proper selection of candidates. Such civil experiences are built and advanced by society and citizens in particular when they make precise and correct choices, which requires keen attention.

Undoubtedly, the Sultanate of Oman's democratic experience is gradually advancing based on the evolution of society and national and global factors, and on many fronts represented by numerous civil society organisations.



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ENHANCING DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE AS THE TENTH TERM OF MAJLIS ASH'SHURA ELECTIONS TO FOCUS ON INCREASED PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBLE VOTING

Our experience is better than that in neighbouring countries. However, some individuals make judgments that undermine the development of their own national experiences by adopting non-scientific criteria and comparisons that are lacking crucial elements that should be taken into account.

At the Majlis Ash'shura, the municipality, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, clubs, organisations, syndicates and the public are involved in decision-making. Such participation is growing gradually, reflecting the state's climate for participation.

However, the success or failure of this engagement is determined first and foremost by the voter's selection of an acceptable candidate. As a result of this, we cannot improve any democratic experience until we improve the selection process. When individuals improve their engagement in elections, democratic experiences will naturally evolve.

Drafting legislation is one of the most significant tasks of Majlis Ash'shura. We do not request its members for anything other than the Council's aims and terms of reference, since there is a

municipal council that plays a different role in furthering developmental and municipal activities, particularly in the provinces, in accordance with the plans that have been established.

Before the elections begin, it is important to emphasise that the person who deserves to be elected to the Majlis Ash'shura is the one who possesses the power of reasoning, argument and good manners, and who can be entrusted with responsibility with all of its duties and accompanying suffering and accountability.

As a consequence, we believe that the voter will vote for whoever fits the aforementioned criteria, regardless of tribe, provincialism, or regionalism. In its widest sense, efficiency is what is required and nothing else, and it is the one criterion by which we achieve the hoped-for success.

Candidates in many provinces compete fiercely to obtain the confidence of people to get a seat on the council. However, there are individuals who are more worthy of representation and up to the responsibilities required.

This is something we must remember: we are the ones who choose the members of the council, and we must bear the consequences of our actions, as everyone aspires for a voice and utilises his abilities and potential.

We hope to witness perfect elections in every manner and to eventually welcome distinguished council members who, within the confines of this institutional framework, perform exemplary parliamentary work that genuinely improves our democratic experience.



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OMAN SAIL TEAMS ALL SET FOR PAN ARAB GAMES 2023

MUSCAT: Seven sailors from Oman Sail's youth sailing squad will join over 3,800 athletes from 18 countries at the 15th edition of the Pan Arab Games, being held in Algeria for the first time since 2004 from 5-15 July 2023. Racing begins on 7 July with Omani sailors competing in Optimist, ILCA 4 and ILCA 7 classes under the guidance of coaches Sultan al Balushi and Munthir al Kindi. Competition will be held over 12 races in all classes at the Promenade Les Sablettes in Algiers following a practice day to acclimatise to the conditions.

Oman will also be providing two senior officials to the sailing event after the Union of Arab National Olympic Committees selected Abdulaziz al Shidi to be a member of the Technical Committee team and Nawaf al Ghadani to be part of the Jury Committee Team, which will also demonstrate Oman's capabilities off the water. On the sailing side, Oman will be represented by a talented group of sailors in various categories. In the Optimist class, Hassan bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Tamim bin Sulaiman al Balushi, Firas bin Haitham al

Nabhani, and Soud bin Talib al Shaqsi. For the ILCA 4 category, Abdullatif bin Zaid al Qasmi and Hatim bin Mohsin al Araimi will be competing. Finally, Ahmed bin Hassan al Balushi will represent Oman in the ILCA 7 class. Ahmed al Qasmi, National Team Manager, said, "The team has been taking part in a training camp at Ras Al Hadd since mid-June to prepare and will now travel to Algeria to represent Oman. We are confident in our abilities and look forward to competing alongside talented sailors from across the region. Our sailors

have performed very well in recent championships and in training in all three of our classes at the Pan Arab Games and we are all very proud to represent the nation at such a high-profile event." ILCA 4 ad ILCA 7 National Team Coach, Munthir al Kindi, added, "We have selected seven of the top prospects in our youth squad for this championship and have supported them to take another step forward in their careers. This is a great opportunity to test their knowledge and technique against their peers from different nations and engage in high-level

competition. This is part of a busy season for our teams, and it will be a very valuable experience for everyone involved." This will be the first staging of the Pan Arab Games since Doha 2011. There will be 20 sports featured, including three events for people with disabilities. At the conclusion of the 2023 Pan Arab Games, the team will turn its attentions to preparing for the Oman Sailing Championship in Ras Al Hadd from 24-28 August 2023, and Al Musannah Race Week at Barceló Mussanah Resort from 18-24 October 2023.

Fatik claims high jump gold at Arabian Sports Games



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 5

The Oman athletic player Fatik Abdulghafoor claimed the first gold medal for the Sultanate of Oman in the underway Arabian Sports Games in Algeria, during July 5 to 15. Fatik managed to clinch the gold in the Men's high jump



competition, as he registered a jump with a mark of 2.16 meters. The silver medal went to Algerian Hi. Bouhanoune after he marked 2.13 meter, while his teammate Bilel Afer got the same mark and won the bronze medal. The Omani Fatik Abdulghafoor had recently claimed the gold medal in high jump competition in the Arabian Athletics

Championship in Marrakesh, as he registered a jump with a mark of 2.15 meters. Oman's star in Paralympics Qusai al Harrasi bagged the silver medal in the Men's 100 meters in the T12/13 category, when he cleared the distance in a timing of 11 minutes and 83 seconds, while the gold medal clinched by Algerian Salah Khelaifa, the

bronze medal was bagged by Algerian Djmail Nasser. Post the podium ceremony, the athlete Fatik expressed his joy and said "I am very pleased with this a new accomplishment, i managed to earn the first gold after tough competitions with top athletes from different Arabian countries. The previous attendance in the

regional and international events helped me to develop my technical experience beside the domestic and abroad camps. My achievement in the Arabian Athletics Championship encouraged me to show much better in this event and I could manage to earn another gold medal. I am looking now for more accomplishments at the

international levels in the near future," he said. The Omani sprinters Barakat al Harthy and Ali al Balushi progressed into the finals of the men's 100 meter competition. Barakat qualified from group one as runners up with a timing of 10.46 seconds while Ali moved to the finals as he registered 10.67 seconds in the second group.



Alcaraz, Rybakina in winning Wimbledon starts as rain causes havoc

LONDON: World number one Carlos Alcaraz and defending women's champion Elena Rybakina got their Wimbledon bids off to winning starts on Tuesday as torrential rain brought havoc to the All England Club schedule.

Only an hour's play was possible on the outside courts, which meant 69 of the planned 77 matches were unable to be completed.

Just eight matches took place on the covered Court One and Centre Court.

Alcaraz raced through the first set against French veteran Jeremy Chardy in just 22 minutes before breaking twice in the second set.

Chardy, who had previously announced that Wimbledon would be the final tournament of his career, drew first blood in the third set to lead 4-2, but Alcaraz hit back strongly, sealing a 6-0, 6-2, 7-5 win with an ace.

"I like to play battles and I am really happy to have played a great level, both of us, in the third set," said the Spaniard.

"I am really happy to get through this first round."

The US Open champion is seen as one of the few credible threats to Novak Djokovic, who is targeting an eighth Wimbledon crown to equal Roger Federer's men's record.

Federer tribute

Wimbledon's Centre Court paid tribute to Swiss great Federer before the start of play as he returned to the scene of some of his greatest triumphs.

The crowd gave Federer, who retired in September, a prolonged standing ovation interspersed with cheers as he entered the royal box, which threatened to upstage the first match of the championship for Rybakina.

The Kazakh third seed was caught cold in the opening set, double-faulting on her first point on the way to losing her first service game to unseeded American Shelby Rogers but she rallied strongly to win 4-6, 6-1, 6-2.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates winning his first round match against France's Jeremy Chardy. — Reuters



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina celebrates winning her first round match against Shelby Rogers of the US. — Reuters

"It was really tough for me today," said Rybakina. "I was pretty nervous, and I can't even hide it.

"The double fault said it all at the beginning of the match. I'm really pleased to get to another round."

Murray through

Two-time champion Andy Murray eased past fellow Briton Ryan Peniston in straight sets.

Former world number one Murray, who won his first Wimbledon title in 2013 before adding a second three years later, came through 6-3, 6-0, 6-1.

Now ranked at 40, and playing with a metal hip, the 36-year-old had too much power and finesse for wildcard Peniston, the world number 268.

"It's amazing to be back on Centre Court again," said Murray.

"I started off quite nervously, I was a little bit tentative but once I got a break I played some good stuff. There were good signs."

— AFP

Striker Firmino joins Al Ahli as a free agent after leaving Liverpool

RIYADH: Brazilian striker Roberto Firmino has joined Al Ahli on a free transfer following his departure from Liverpool, the Saudi Arabian side said on Tuesday.

"I always played for big teams, now I'm in Al Ahli," Firmino said in a video on Al Ahli's twitter account.

The 31-year-old signed a three-year contract and will team up with goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, who also left the Premier League after three seasons with Chelsea.

Al Ahli returned to the Saudi Pro league after spending the 2022-2023 campaign in the second division but the team is still without a coach following the departure of South African Pitso Mosimane.

Firmino joined Liverpool in 2015 and helped the team win the Champions League, FA Cup and Premier League titles.

The Brazil international bade farewell to Anfield in late May, scoring his 111th goal for the club during their last game of the season.

Firmino joins a long list of high-profile players who have moved to the Saudi Pro league in recent weeks, with the likes of Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema, N'Golo Kante and Ruben Neves following in the footsteps of Cristiano Ronaldo, who moved to Al Nassr in January.

Last month, the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) announced a Sports Clubs Investment and Privatisation Project involving league champions Al Ittihad, Al Ahli, Al Nassr and Al Hilal.

PIF owns 75 per cent of each of the four clubs, while their respective non-profit foundations own 25 per cent of each. — Reuters



Liverpool's Roberto Firmino applauds fans as he walks to be substituted after playing his last game for the club. — Reuters

Mount bids farewell to Chelsea fans ahead of Man United move

MANCHESTER: England midfielder Mason Mount has said farewell to Chelsea fans in a video posted on social media on Tuesday as he confirmed he is leaving the club, ahead of a reported move to Premier League rivals Manchester United.

United have reached an agreement to sign Mount on a five-year deal, The Athletic reported on Thursday, in a move worth 55 million pounds (\$69.93 million) plus 5 million pounds in add-ons, the report said.

"Given the speculation over the last six months, this may not come as a surprise to you but it doesn't make it any easier to tell you that I've made the decision to leave Chelsea," the player said in a video posted to Instagram.

"I feel you deserve more than just a written statement. So I wanted to



Chelsea's Mason Mount looks dejected after the match. — Reuters

tell you directly how grateful I've been for all of your support over the last 18 years.

"I know some of you won't be happy with my decision, but it's

what is right for me at this moment in my career."

The 24-year-old made his Chelsea debut in 2017 and has since scored 33 goals and provided 37 assists in

195 appearances in all competitions for the club.

"I joined Chelsea when I was six years old and we've been through a lot together," Mount said.

"Winning the Youth Cup, my player of the year awards, the Super Cup, the Club World Cup, and, of course, the unforgettable night where we won the Champions League. "I want to say thank you to the academy for being so influential to me from a young age. The managers I've worked under, the backroom staff, all of my team mates over the years who have become my brothers, and most importantly you guys."

Last season the England international played 24 league games, scoring three goals and making two assists, but was hampered by a pelvic injury. (\$1 = 0.7865 pounds) — AFP

King leads Windies to victory over Oman in ICC qualifier

ZIMBABWE: A fine century from Brandon King fired the West Indies to a seven-wicket victory over Oman in their penultimate match of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2023.

Defeat to Scotland in their last match ended the Windies' hopes of reaching the World Cup in India, but they responded in style in Harare.

Romario Shepherd took three wickets as Oman were restricted to 221 for nine from their 50 overs, and King led from the front in reply as the Windies got home with 10.2 overs to spare.

Brandon King hit exactly 100 from 104 deliveries to set the West Indies on their way to a comfortable seven-wicket win over Oman.

Set a target of 222, the Windies eased to victory in 39.4 overs, as

they ended a run of three straight defeats, skipper Shai Hope sealing the win with an unbeaten half-century.

West Indies will now look to finish their campaign with another win against Sri Lanka, even though their qualification hopes were ended by Scotland.

After winning the toss, the Windies elected to field and made early inroads as Romario Shepherd (3/44) removed Jatinder Singh (8) with a short ball before Kyle Mayers bowled skipper Aqib Ilyas for one.

Some fine work in the field from Roston Chase saw Kashyap Prajapati run out for 31 before another run out accounted for Mohammad Nadeem (20).

When Shepherd then dismissed Ayaan Khan (30), with Sandeep Goud (5) following soon after,



Oman found themselves in real strife at 116 for six.

Shoaib Khan (50) and Suraj Kumar (53 not out) started to rebuild, adding 85 for the seventh wicket only for another miscommunication to lead to a third run out of the innings.

Suraj kept going, taking Oman to 221 for nine from their 50 overs, but it soon became clear that it

would not be enough.

Even though Johnson Charles was bowled by Kaleemullah in the second over for four, the Windies were always in control of the chase thanks to King.

He and Keacy Carty (29) added 80 before catching Oman's running bug, Carty paying the price for trying to run on a misfield.

That brought skipper Hope to

the wicket, and he and King settled any nerves with a 96-run stand, the opener bringing up his century with the target in sight.

While he was caught behind immediately after reaching three figures, it came with just 39 still needed from 15 overs.

Hope and Nicholas Pooran quickly saw their side home, needing just five overs to complete the victory, with the captain fittingly finishing the job on his way to an unbeaten 63.

Scotland and Netherlands chase final qualification berth

The identity of the team joining Sri Lanka in qualifying for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 will be revealed on Thursday when Scotland take on the Netherlands in Bulawayo.

Scotland's victory over Zimbabwe eliminated the hosts

from contention, leaving it as a straight shootout with the Dutch for the final spot.

Should Scotland avoid defeat, they are guaranteed a top two spot and a place in India, while the Netherlands need to win, while overhauling Scotland's superior net run-rate, to qualify at the expense of their opponents.

The other game of the day takes place in Harare as the USA and UAE face off with both teams still seeking a first win of the competition in the ninth-place play-off.

Scores in brief

Oman v West Indies at Harare Sports Club, Harare by seven wickets
Oman 221/9 in 50 overs (Suraj Kumar 53*, Shoaib Khan 50; Romario Shepherd 3/44, Kyle Mayers 2/31)
West Indies 222/3 in 39.4 overs (Brandon King 100, Shai Hope 63*, Kaleemullah 1/49, Bilal Khan 1/54)



HINDLEY

TAKES TOUR DE FRANCE LEAD AS
POGACAR SUFFERS IN PYRENEES



LARUNS, France: Australian Jai Hindley crossed the line alone to win stage five of the Tour de France on Wednesday to take the overall leader's yellow jersey as defending champion Jonas Vingegaard won a tactical battle with key rival Tadej Pogacar.

Hindley leads Vingegaard with the Dane pulling off a major coup on the final mountain and now has a 53-second advantage on Pogacar in the overall standings, which took a major shake up.

Bora-Hansgrohe rider Hindley, the 2022 Giro d'Italia winner, shook off his rivals on the Col de Marie-Blanc to break clear in the yellow jersey standings.

The 27-year-old finished 32 seconds ahead of Italy's Giulio Ciccone and Austrian Felix Gall with Vingegaard fifth at 34sec.

Ciccione climbed to third in the overall with his second place.

"I'm here for the overall win and the aim was to put as much time as possible into the others," said Hindley.

"It has been a dream since I was six years old but I never thought I'd find myself in the yellow jersey," he said.

"It was chaotic behind with different teams riding with various aims. I got the in and the lead so I'm delighted, it's going to be a crazy bike race."

Vingegaard's Jumbo-Visma stunned the UAE Team when Wout Van Aert dropped back from an early break and led Vingegaard uphill with an impressive 500m pull.

Jumbo climber Sepp Kuss then took the relay until he too peeled away before Vingegaard broke free and put the hammer down over the remaining 15km to the finish line.

"It was a really hard day," admitted Van Aert, one of the stars of the peloton with three stage wins on the 2022 Tour.

"This puts pressure on them (Team UAE)," he said. "Hindley and Ciccone got away from us, but I was holding back to help Jonas," he explained.

Meanwhile UAE Team rider Pogacar, the 2020 and 2021 champion, was left isolated as overnight leader Adam Yates appeared unable to help in the chase.

"It's not lost yet," said Pogacar, who broke a wrist in April and missed some key training time in the saddle.

"He (Vingegaard) was much faster on that climb. He was really strong and there was just nothing you can do," he said.

"It's a blow but its only the first mountain stage, we shall keep fighting and try to win back time.

The AG2R rider Felix Gall took the king of the mountains polka dot jersey after coming third behind Hindley.

On Thursday, trademark Tour climbs Col d'Aspin and Col du Tourmalet will mark out stage six as the toughest test so far with further tremors expected on the second mountain day over 145km from Tarbes to Cauterets-Cambasque.

But those two ascents make only 30km and are only part of the story with a 16km slog to a summit finish coming after an epic decent from the 2150 metres altitude Tourmalet. — **AFP**

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New national career guidance platform to address job market gaps



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 5

The newly launched national career guidance platform will serve as the missing link that connects job-seekers with Oman's labour market, according to a key official of the National Employment Programme (NEP).

Speaking to the *Observer*, Eng Azhar al Kindi, Technical Director, explained how the platform has the potential to solve gaps in the labour market. "[The platform] is the missing piece between job seekers, particularly skilled graduates, and the job market."

According to Al Kindi, the platform will serve as a resource that will educate job seekers and students about different careers and their requirements, something he considers as essential amidst the recent economic growth in the country.

"There has been a significant economic growth in past two years in the country, one would hope that it will reflect into jobs for Omanis. If we don't allow Omanis and equip them with the right tools and skills, they may not be able to meet the requirements of these jobs."

According to officials, the platform "Khuta", will serve multiple demographics including: school students, university students, graduates, or employees looking for a career change.

The platform will provide a comprehensive guide about different vocations and their academic and professional requirements, in addition to an extensive guide about academic programmes in Oman. Additionally, it will offer users access to over 100 courses in addition to virtual job training opportunities

The platform is part of the National Employment Programme (Tashgeel), a nationwide programme launched in accordance with Oman Vision 2040 to address employment concerns in the country.

Oman draws ambitious strategy to ensure development of green hydrogen economy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 5

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals, said the Ministry worked on drawing an ambitious strategy to ensure the development of the green hydrogen economy, in order to pave the way for companies to invest in that field, whereas the Sultanate of Oman strives to become one of the world pioneers in the production of green hydrogen.

In the Ministry's Annual Report 2022 which was published yesterday, oil production in the Sultanate of Oman rose in 2022, with a daily average of 1.064 million barrels per day, compared to 971,000 barrels in 2021, with an increase of 9.6 per cent.

Furthermore, the Sultanate of Oman has maintained the same level of oil production in line with the production reduction agreement concluded with member states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and other countries outside the organisation, which aim to achieving a balance between global supply and demand for oil.

The total production of electricity has reached in 2022 41.8 TWh with a net production of 40.4 TWh, with an increase of 2 per cent compared to last year.

Moreover, the production of electricity further surged by 138 per cent in comparison to 2021 due to continuing to operate Ibri 2 station owned by Shams Al Dhahira Generating Company.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, along with its partners, have made strenuous efforts in regulating the hydrogen sector in order to reach the highest levels of its aspired outcomes,



THE MINISTRY OF ENERGY AND MINERALS, ALONG WITH ITS PARTNERS, HAVE MADE STRENUOUS EFFORTS IN REGULATING THE HYDROGEN SECTOR IN ORDER TO REACH THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF ITS ASPIRED OUTCOMES, WHEREAS MAJOR STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY THE MINISTRY TO ACCELERATE THE PROCEDURES FOR REGULATING THAT SECTOR, FORMULATE THE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND POLICIES NEEDED FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS STUDY ITS PRODUCTION AND STORAGE SITES, TO ATTRACT AND LOCALISE INVESTMENTS.

whereas major steps have been taken by the Ministry to accelerate the procedures for regulating that sector, formulate the legal frameworks and policies needed for its development as well as study its production and storage sites, to attract and localise investments.

Also, the Ministry announced the opportunities and incentives aimed at investing in green Hydrogen sector.

In keeping with this momentum in the renewable energy and hydrogen sector, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals organised the Green Hydrogen Summit in 2022 and participated in COP 27 in the

Arab Republic of Egypt in order to strengthen the role of the Sultanate of Oman among the countries of the world in energy transformation plans towards reducing carbon emissions and to strike a balance between sustainable development and reducing the implications of climate change, which came out of the Carbon Management Laboratory supervised by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in line with the steps taken by virtue of the high directives to promote Carbon Neutrality in 2050.

In the minerals sector, the total production of mineral ores in 2022 was about 63.6 million tonnes,

recording a decrease of 8 per cent compared to 2021, as the quantity of gypsum and building materials production fell by 6 million, which accounted for 79 per cent of total production.

This is due to the reduced demand on those materials. Additionally, the total sales of minerals have reached 57.3 million tonnes, with a value of RO 98.974.

Moreover, with regard to the In-Country Value (ICV), the Ministry of Energy and Minerals continues its efforts by enhancing the participation of local companies in contracts and procurement, as "eTendering"

system has been activated by companies operating the supplier registration system (JSRS), to support small and medium- sized companies obtaining business in contracts with service companies and contractors.

The number of contracts awarded using e-tendering reached 242 contracts, not to mention the achievements pertaining to workforce localisation and the supplier development programmes in the petroleum and gas sector.

Furthermore, in order to create the plans and initiatives that assistive to supporting the domestic companies and employ Omani cadres, a supervisory committee has been formed with the goal of governing the ICV for minerals sector, in addition to a work team dedicated to contracts, procurement and human resources.

Of the many projects of importance launched in 2022 is the OQ Liquefied Petroleum Gas (OQ LPG) project in Salalah, which is considered to be the first gas processing facility of its kind in Oman, with an approximate total value of RO 318 million.

This project came as one of the most important energy projects, as it contributes, by extracting liquid natural gas using gas lines and networks, in enhancing value chain of gas in the Sultanate of Oman.

Additionally, Ibri 2 Solar Power Project has been launched, with a value of RO 155 and a 500 MW capacity. The project, at the peak of its productive capacity, will be able to generate sufficient power for around 50,000 households to provide them with electricity, and will further contribute in reducing 340,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions yearly.

OPAZ Board briefed on plans for new SEZs, airport FZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 5

The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) held on July 5, 2023 its second meeting for the year 2023, chaired by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Board. At the meeting, the Board commended Royal Decree No. (44/2023) establishing Khazaen Economic City, which will be overseen by OPAZ.

The Board stressed that the City will serve enhancing the business environment and creating new investment opportunities in Al Batinah South Governorate, along



with other economic zones, free zones, and the existing and under construction industrial cities in the various governorates.

During the meeting, the Board touched on the current progress of the masterplans of the Economic Zone in Al Rowdah in the Wilayat of Mahdha in Al Buraimi

Governorate.

In this regard, the Board discussed the protection alternatives from potential flood risks, in addition to highlighting the opportunities for direct connection between the Zone and the roads leading to the ports of Sohar and Shinas.

The Board was briefed on the existing coordination, through the Omani-Saudi joint Executive Committee, on the project for the Integrated Economic Zone in Al Dhahirah Governorate. In addition, the meeting included discussing the linking locations with the road leading to the Empty Quarter boarders. Furthermore, the Board approved the incentives for the usufruct agreement and stressed continuing the cooperation with the governors' offices in the two zones.

With regards to the free zone project at Muscat International Airport, OPAZ Board of Directors approved extending the concession agreement for the

operating company (ASYAD) for a period of 50 years renewable, in addition to the other advantages of the agreement.

On the other hand, the Board commended the progressive results achieved by the various departments of OPAZ in the field of automating procedures and digital transformation in line with the government evaluation system for digital transformation, and highly-prised the steps taken to combat the use of paper transactions within and outside OPAZ by none sending and receiving paper documents except of correspondences of a special nature, starting from July 1.

Ominvest supports SMEs in attending Leadership and Management Forum 2023

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing commitment to support local businesses, Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) – the leading investment company in the Sultanate of Oman – supported several SMEs to facilitate their participation in the 2nd edition of the Leadership and Management Forum 2023.

Themed “Financial Management and Investment,” the forum took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) and was organised by the Oman Academy for SMEs. Ominvest, staying true to its purpose of “Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies,” actively seeks to empower entrepreneurs and provide them with the necessary tools to excel, achieve sustainable growth, and expand both locally and regionally.

By supporting this initiative, Ominvest underscores its belief in the importance of the SME sector and its vital role in developing Oman’s economy. The Leadership and Management Forum 2023 serves as an effective platform for entrepreneurs and SME owners



to benefit from the experiences of globally notable speakers and exchange knowledge with them.

It also enables participants to interact with businessmen, investors, and decision-makers from the public and private sectors, strengthening their network of professional relationships.

The forum offers valuable opportunities for sharing experiences, making connections, and learning about business growth. It provides the latest insights for SMEs in leadership, financial management, strategic planning, and investment, ultimately aiding businesses in achieving sustainable development and drawing inspiration from success stories.

The forum participants were all successful entrepreneurs, carefully selected to attend this prestigious event.

OETC inaugurates RO 14m Saih Al Khairat Grid Station in Dhofar

MUSCAT: The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) celebrated yesterday, Wednesday, the inauguration of the Saih Al Khairat Station in Dhofar Governorate.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Ahmed bin Hamed al Subhi, Nama Holding’s Chairman and attended by Eng Saleh al Rumhi, the CEO of the company, along with several members of the company’s executive management team, Nama Group, as well as a group of employees, contractors, and consultants.

This grid station is considered one of the promising strategic investments for the OETC. It will ensure a stable and reliable energy supply to various sectors, including factories, the agricultural sector, and livestock development farms. Furthermore, it will work towards meeting the future growing demand for electrical energy in Dhofar Governorate.

The grid station has been equipped with communication infrastructure and security systems. Additionally, an overhead transmission line has been constructed, connecting the Thamrait Grid Station to the Saih



Al Khairat Grid Station at a voltage of 33/132 kilovolts, spanning a length of 91 kilometres.

The grid station is located 80 kilometres away from the Wilayat of Thamrait. It comprises six gas-insulated cells at 132 kilovolts, four cells at 33 kilovolts, and two transformers with a capacity of 125 mega-volt-ampere. The total cost of the project amounted to RO 14 million.

Eng Saleh al Rumhi, OETC’s CEO, emphasised that this project represents a strategic investment that will contribute to connecting

rural areas to the electricity network in Dhofar Governorate, thereby reducing operational costs. “The implementation of this project aligns with the vision of the Sultanate of Oman to achieve carbon neutrality by the year 2050. It is expected to help reduce reliance on diesel fuel for station operations and significantly decrease carbon emissions by approximately 114,000 tonnes annually,” he added.

OETC, a member of the Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission

and control of electricity across the Sultanate of Oman’s network.

The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centres in the governorates.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or the south. Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

Bank Muscat’s digital transformation aligns with Oman Vision 2040

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, has achieved significant milestones in its digital transformation journey in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

One of its key accomplishments is the constant enhancement of electronic services to facilitate digital banking and support the goals of individuals, government institutions, and corporations, enabling them to succeed.

The bank has embraced digital transformation, offering customers a wide range of options to streamline their banking transactions and meet their needs.

Bank Muscat has witnessed a shift in customer attitudes towards digital services, with individuals, government institutions, and corporations increasingly relying on these services over time. To meet customer expectations, the bank has prioritised providing a unique banking experience that focuses on convenience, speed, security, and customer confidence in digital services.

Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili (pictured), Assistant General Manager — Digital Banking, shared insights into Bank Muscat’s digital transformation strategy:

Strategy for Digital Transformation: Bank Muscat continues to launch innovative digital banking solutions for its retail, institutional, and corporate banking customers, aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

This digital shift plays a crucial role in enabling secure and convenient transactions anytime, anywhere. The bank focuses on



delivering cutting-edge financial services and solutions for retail banking, utilising multiple channels and introducing new products tailored to different customer segments.

By emphasising electronic payments and digital services, Bank Muscat maintains its leadership in providing high-tech products and services.

The bank has observed a significant increase in e-channel usage, including the rapid adoption of contactless payments through various cards and wearables. Mobile banking, Internet banking, a contact centre, and an extensive network of ATMs and devices ensure round-the-clock accessibility and a customer-centric approach.

Corporate Internet Banking customers benefit from a suite of digital solutions that optimise

cash flow, enhance control, and improve working capital management.

Prominent E-Services: Bank Muscat leads the financial services sector in Oman with 176 branches and over 821 touchpoints, including ATMs, CDMs, and FFM machines across the country.

The bank continually upgrades its omnichannel Internet and mobile banking, providing customers with a fast and secure banking experience.

Over 1.6 million retail banking customers utilise features such as real-time bill payments, fund transfers within the bank and internationally through the SWIFT network, and other services.

The bank has also introduced Multi-Function Kiosks, allowing customers to instantly issue and activate new or replacement debit cards. Financial Inclusion through

Digital Transformation: Bank Muscat is committed to enhancing financial inclusion by facilitating banking services throughout Oman. The bank continually introduces new features and services on its digital

channels, including mBanking, Internet Banking, and its e-payment gateway.

Contactless cards and QR code scanning have been particularly beneficial for the bank’s merchant partners, enabling quick and secure e-payments. These services offer easy and fast accessibility to diverse banking services, contributing to financial inclusion.

Bank Muscat has introduced specialised banking products and services for individuals with disabilities, such as the first ATM in Oman designed for visually-impaired individuals. The bank has also launched specialised banking packages for retirees and youth, promoting personal finance awareness.

Initiatives like the free Maliyat financial literacy programme, online training sessions, and financial literacy training for school students further improve financial literacy and cater to the strategic needs of Oman’s economy.

Cybersecurity Measures: Bank Muscat prioritises the implementation of the latest technology and security best practices to protect customer transactions and data.

The bank collaborates with authorities such as the Royal Oman Police, leading cybersecurity organisations, and IT experts to ensure top-notch security across its solutions and services. As one of the first banks to implement two-factor authentication for online transactions, Bank Muscat also leverages biometric authentication at branches to ensure secure transactions.

Alizz Islamic Bank SSB presents Shariah compliance report



MUSCAT: The Shariah Supervisory Board (SSB) of Alizz Islamic Bank held its third meeting for the current year with a full quorum under the chairmanship of Shaikh Dr Essam al Enezi, Chairman of the Shariah Supervisory Board, and in the presence of the members of the Board, Shaikh Dr Ahmed Subhi Ayadi and Shaikh Dr Ibrahim bin Nasser al Sawafi, and the shaikhs from the Tamkeen Programme for empowering the second level of Shariah Supervisory Boards members attended the meeting, where they participated alongside the members of the Shariah Supervisory Board as part of their practical training.

The meeting was attended by Alizz Islamic Bank’s GM Ali bin Saif al Mani & senior executive management. The GM gave a visual presentation on the Bank’s Q2 performance this year and the expectations for the bank moving forward.

The Shariah Compliance and Audit Department also presented a report on Shariah compliance and the risks of Shariah non-compliance, in which the indicators of periodic review and assessment of potential risks were mentioned.

The Shariah audit report

for the second quarter of the current year was presented, which reflected the Shariah review of executed transactions.

The Shariah Board provided appropriate solutions for procedural processes.

It also discussed a number of issues raised and new products, and the Shariah Board issued its decisions regarding them, in addition to considering a number of restructuring requests for corporate financing and issuing the appropriate decisions for them.

Issa bin Salim al Riyami, Head of the Shariah Audit and Compliance Department, said: “The Shariah Supervisory Board plays an indispensable role in terms of providing Shariah-compliant solutions to the bank’s customers, especially in terms of meeting the needs of corporate customers, where there is a requirement for more advanced products.

The department actively participated in the development of various products that were launched during the past year, as well as the products that are scheduled to be launched in 2023.

All of this was done under the supervision and guidance of the Shariah Supervisory Board.



Fed minutes meeting to offer clues on future rate hike appetite



WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve meeting minutes from the June policy gathering to be released on Wednesday are likely to show an active debate among policymakers who still on balance appear inclined to support more action to tame inflation.

The meeting minutes, will arrive after US central bank officials have spent the last three weeks following the June Federal Open Market Committee meeting sketching out their policy outlooks.

Key officials like Fed Chair Jerome Powell have pointed to forecasts released at that gathering indicating that a half percentage point's more tightening this year was very much still in play.

"The committee clearly believes that there's more work to do, that there are more rate hikes that are likely to be appropriate" at some point over the course of the year, Powell said last Wednesday in an appearance with other central bank chiefs in Portugal.

"Although policy is restrictive, it's not, it may not be restrictive enough and it has not been restrictive for long enough," which keeps alive prospects for more increases, Powell said. — **Reuters**

Oman's energy sector thrives with robust production and exports

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 5

The Sultanate of Oman's energy industry continues to flourish, evidenced by the substantial number of productive fields and impressive figures in production and exports. Per a recently published Annual Report 2022, Oman boasts a total of 380 productive fields, comprising 325 oil fields and 55 gas fields.

These fields serve as the backbone of the nation's energy sector, contributing to its economic growth and development. On a daily basis, Oman achieved an average production of 1.064 million barrels of crude oil and condensates, consolidating its position as a key global oil producer. The oil and gas sector in Oman achieved 89% Omanisation, the report added.

The average price of Omani crude oil for 2022 stood at an impressive \$95.26 per barrel, underlining the quality and value of the country's petroleum resources. This favourable pricing enabled Oman to generate substantial revenue from its oil exports, contributing significantly to its economy.

Moreover, Oman's refining capabilities are noteworthy. The Mina Al Fahal and Sohar refineries collectively produced a total of 220.5 million barrels of petroleum products last year. These refineries play a vital role in transforming crude oil into various refined products such as gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel.

The consistent output from these refineries caters to both domestic consumption and international demand.



In terms of exports, Oman has established itself as a major player in the global energy market.

In 2022, Oman exported a total of 317.98 million barrels of crude oil and condensates, showcasing its ability to fulfil international demand.

Additionally, Oman has also made significant strides in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector. The country exported 22.5 million metric tonnes of LNG last year, further diversifying its energy portfolio.

Expanding LNG exports contribute to Oman's economic diversification goals, tapping into the growing demand for cleaner and more sustainable energy sources.

China, one of the largest energy consumers globally, has emerged as the top importer of Oman crude oil. The nation accounted

for a staggering 81.7% of Oman's total energy exports, highlighting the strong trade relationship between the two countries. Oman's energy sector extends beyond oil and gas production.

The average production of natural gas stands at an impressive 137.3 million cubic meters, further solidifying Oman's position as a major natural gas producer. In addition, the country produces 874,000 metric tonnes of LPG, catering to both domestic and international markets.

With natural gas reserves totalling 24 trillion cubic feet, Oman's energy potential remains significant. These reserves provide a substantial resource base for future exploration and production activities. In terms of reserves, Oman as of 2022 possesses a total of 4,905 million barrels of

crude oil and oil condensates. As of last year, there were a total of 68 exploratory and evaluation wells, 56 of which are oil wells and 23 are gas wells.

Also in 2022, the country witnessed the signing of one new agreement for the exploration for oil and gas. The success of Oman's energy sector can be attributed to its commitment to innovation, technological advancements, and strategic partnerships.

The country has made significant investments in infrastructure, exploration, and production to ensure the sustained growth of its energy industry. The government's efforts to attract foreign investments and promote collaboration with international energy companies have also played a crucial role in achieving these remarkable milestones.

OPAZ Board briefed on plans for new SEZs, airport FZ

FROM PAGE 13

OPAZ Board of Directors was familiarised with the initial results of using artificial intelligence technologies and introducing employees' qualification programmes.

Hence, the Board directed to increase adopting new technologies and providing more spatial information to investors, artificial intelligence techniques and business intelligence in line with converting electronic basic environment systems to locally approved cloud platforms, and continue enhancing and updating information security software and systems.

Moreover, the Board was also briefed on the future programmes aimed at improving and speeding up the transactions between the economic zones, free zones and industrial cities, including the central services portal and the system for managing shipments and goods between the zones affiliated with OPAZ, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the Royal Oman Police.

OPAZ was established by Royal Decree No. (105/2020) on August 18, 2020. It oversees 14 economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities. It also supervises the establishment of a group of new economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities.

China's chipmaking export curbs 'just a start'

BEIJING/SHANGHAI: China's export controls on metals used in semiconductors are "just a start", an influential Chinese trade policy adviser said on Wednesday, as Beijing ramps up a tech fight with Washington days before a visit from US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

Shares in some Chinese metals companies rallied for a second session as investors bet that higher prices for gallium and germanium, which Beijing's export restrictions target, could boost revenues.

Germanium is used in high-speed computer chips, plastics, and in military applications such as night-vision devices as well as satellite imagery sensors. Gallium is used in building radars and radio communication devices, satellites and LEDs.

China's abrupt announcement of controls from August 1 on exports of some gallium and germanium products, also used in electric vehicles (EVs) and fibre optic cables, has sent companies scrambling to secure supplies and bumped up prices.

On Wednesday, former Vice Commerce Minister Wei Jianguo told the *China Daily* newspaper that countries should brace for more should they continue to pressure China, describing the



Flags of China and US are displayed on a printed circuit board with semiconductor chips, in this illustration picture. — **Reuters**

controls as a "well-thought-out heavy punch" and "just a start".

"If restrictions targeting China's high-technology sector continue then countermeasures will escalate," added Wei, vice commerce minister 2003-2008 and now vice chairman of China Center for International Economic Exchanges, a state-backed think tank.

Announced on the eve of US Independence Day and just before Yellen visits Beijing from Thursday, analysts said the controls were clearly timed to send a message to the Biden administration, which has been targeting China's chip sector and pushing allies such as Japan and the Netherlands to follow suit.

China is the world's biggest producer of rare earths, a group of metals used in EVs and military equipment. — **Reuters**

Saudi Arabia says new oil cuts show teamwork with Russia is strong

VIENNA: Russia-Saudi oil cooperation is still going strong as part of the Opec+ alliance, which will do "whatever necessary" to support the market, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told a conference on Wednesday.

Opec+, a group comprising the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia which pumps around 40% of the world's crude, has been cutting oil output since November in the face of flagging prices.

Saudi Arabia and Russia, the world's biggest oil exporters, deepened oil supply cuts on Monday in an effort to send prices higher. Yet the move only briefly lifted the market.

On Wednesday, benchmark Brent futures were down more than 1% at \$75.30 per barrel, lower than the \$80-\$100 per barrel than most Opec nations need to balance their budgets. Opec says it does not have a price target and is seeking to have a balanced oil market to meet the interests of both consumers and producers.

The United States has



Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman al Saud arrives for an Opec meeting in Vienna, Austria. — **Reuters**

repeatedly called on the group to boost production to help the global economy and has criticised Saudi cooperation with Russia after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

But Riyadh has repeatedly rebuffed US calls and Prince Abdulaziz said on Wednesday that new joint oil output cuts agreed by Russia and Saudi Arabia this week have again proven sceptics wrong.

"Part of what we have done (on Monday) with the help of our colleagues from Russia was also to mitigate the cynical side of the spectators on what is going on

between Saudi and Russia on that specific matter," Prince Abdulaziz said.

"It is quite telling seeing us on Monday coming out with not only our (oil cut) extension... but also with validation from the Russian side," he told a meeting of oil industry CEOs with ministers from Opec and allies, known as the Opec International Seminar.

After the end of the broadcast, Prince Abdulaziz told the seminar that Opec+ would do "whatever necessary" to support the market, according to a source who attended the meeting.

The International Energy

Agency has said it expects the oil market to tighten in the second half of 2023, partly because of Opec+ cuts.

Analysts at Morgan Stanley on Wednesday cut their oil price forecast, saying that while they anticipated a decrease in stocks in 2023 they forecast a surplus in the first half of 2024, with non-Opec supply growing faster than demand.

Additional oil cuts should be enough to help balance the oil market, United Arab Emirates' energy minister Suhail Al Mazrouei told reporters on Wednesday.

"This (output cuts) is enough to assess the market and look at the market balance," Mazrouei told reporters.

He said the UAE would not be contributing to fresh cuts as it was already producing well below its capacity. "There's a bigger thing. I'm seeing a lack of investments in many countries. We will have to invite maybe newcomers to come and join the group. The more countries we have, the easier the job, to ensure that the world has enough oil in the future," Mazrouei said.

— **Reuters**

Oman’s homegrown brands through acquisition of IPs



MUHANNA BIN HAMED
AL ZUHEIMI

The author is specialised in Intellectual Property Laws (LL.M. in IP) & Board Member in the Omani Association for Intellectual Property

As the world becomes more connected, people all over choose familiar international brands. Oman is no different.

Oman is desirous to create local companies with international brands; through licensing of IPs (Intellectual Properties) from established global brands owners. Even acquiring of low-ranking global brands can be profitable, but not without risks.

This essay shall examine these risks and rewards in relation to

Oman’s preparedness for such endeavours and consider how the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) could support Oman in these ventures.

When considering the establishing of Oman’s ‘internationally brands.’ These companies could boost Oman’s economy by attracting foreign investments, thereby creating job opportunities. In addition, they shall create accesses to high quality goods and services in the local market.

However, risks such as improper IPs transactions shall lead to legal battles that could

harm Oman’s international reputations and subsequently its economy.

Furthermore, the risk that homegrown companies may not be able to match the quality and reputation of their foreign counterparts, may ultimately lead to business failures.

In recent years, Oman has made significant progresses in becoming a preferred destination for international brands. One notable improvement is in the development of a robust legal frameworks that protects the interests of everyone involved in IPs transactions.

The Government has put in place measures to encourage foreign investments, making it easier and more profitable for international brands to establish themselves in Oman.

However, there are cultural and logistical barriers that Oman must overcome to create a welcoming environment for global brands.

For example, the country’s culture is focused on traditional markets, which may challenge international brands that offer more modern shopping experiences.

Oman can benefit significantly from the expertise of the World

Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in its pursuit of somewhat risky ventures.

As the foremost authority on global IPs legal platforms, WIPO may assist Oman in the establishment of proper procedures and legal structures needed to deal with IPs licensing and acquisition.

WIPO may assist Oman in training and technical supports to the Intellectual Property Office of Oman; to enhance its capabilities and enabling them to implement best practices and safeguarding intellectual property rights effectively.

Success of Haj and Umrah pilgrimages bodes well for Saudi economic growth



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

visitors tend to linger beyond the time limits.

These instructions also related to the need to submit the necessary vaccination papers and other requirements. They all contributed to the safety of the pilgrims and the success of their ceremonies without any significant problems.

We extend our salutations to everyone who stands behind these instructions from the officials of the Saudi leadership, the security and safety personnel working in all Saudi ports and crossings, and everyone who contributed to the success of these ceremonies.

As for the economic results of Haj for this last season, the preliminary data reveal an increase in the revenues of Haj and Umrah services to reach 35 billion Saudi riyals, accounting for about 4% of the GDP. Experts expect revenues to reach 150 billion Saudi riyals in 2030, representing 11% of the GDP, while pilgrim numbers are anticipated to reach 30 million

Today, religious tourism is receiving more attention from the concerned authorities in Saudi Arabia, at a time when domestic tourism is generally receiving a response from citizens and expatriates, helping retain hard currency in-country.

The diversification of these services enhances the production base in Saudi Arabia alongside other important economic sectors such as energy, mining, trade and industry. All these developments will bring more benefits and great economic results to this country, while providing more jobs for Saudis and expatriates.

Improving the services of pilgrims and providing infrastructure for them and for all those coming to perform Umrah will undoubtedly work to strengthen the economic business structure in Saudi in the future, which will inevitably lead to an increase in the gross domestic product of Saudi Arabia according to their vision for the year 2030.

Lithium scarcity pushes carmakers into the mining business



CLIFFORD KRAUSS

The author is a national energy business correspondent based in Houston.



JACK EWING

The author writes about business from New York, focusing on the auto industry and the transition to electric cars.



A SQM lithium plant in Salar de Atacama, Chile. Ford, General Motors and others are striking deals with mining companies to avoid raw material shortages that could thwart their electric vehicle ambitions. – The New York Times

Eager to avoid falling further behind Tesla and Chinese car companies, many Western auto executives are bypassing traditional suppliers and committing billions of dollars on deals with lithium mining companies.

They are showing up in hard hats and steel-toed boots to scope out mines in places like Chile, Argentina, Quebec and Nevada to secure supplies of a metal that could make or break their companies as they move from gasoline to battery power.

Without lithium, US and European carmakers won’t be able to build batteries for the electric pickup trucks, SUVs and sedans they need to remain competitive. And assembly lines they are ramping up in places like Michigan, Tennessee and Saxony, Germany, will grind to a halt.

Established mining companies don’t have enough lithium to supply the industry as electric vehicle sales soar. General Motors plans for all its car sales to be electric by 2035. In the first quarter of 2023, sales of battery-powered cars, pickups and SUVs in the United States rose 45% from a year earlier.

So car companies are scrambling to lock up exclusive access to smaller mines before others swoop in. But the strategy exposes them to the risky, boom-and-bust business of mining, sometimes in politically unstable countries with weak

environmental protections. If they bet incorrectly, automakers could end up paying far more for lithium than it might sell for in a few years.

Auto executives said they had no choice because there weren’t sufficient reliable supplies of lithium and other battery materials, like nickel and cobalt, for the millions of electric vehicles the world needs.

In the past, automakers let battery suppliers buy lithium and other raw material on their own. But lithium shortages have forced carmakers, which have deeper pockets, to directly acquire the essential metal and have it sent to battery factories, some owned by suppliers and others owned partly or fully by the automakers. Batteries rely on lightweight lithium ions to conduct energy.

“We quickly realised there wasn’t an established value chain that would support our ambitions for the next 10 years,” said Sham Kunjur, who oversees General Motors’ programme to secure battery materials.

The automaker last year struck a supply deal with Livent, a lithium company in Philadelphia, for material from South American mines. And in January, GM agreed to invest \$650 million in Lithium Americas, a company based in Vancouver, British Columbia, to develop the Thacker Pass mine in Nevada.

The company beat out 50 bidders, including battery and component makers, for that stake, said Kunjur and Lithium Americas executives.

Ford Motor has made lithium deals with SQM, a Chilean supplier; Albemarle, based in Charlotte, North Carolina; and Nemaska Lithium of Quebec.

“These are some of the largest lithium producers in the world with the best quality,” Lisa Drake, vice president for electric vehicle industrialisation at Ford, told investors in May.

Dozens of companies are developing mines, and there may eventually be more than enough lithium to meet everybody’s needs. Global production could surge sooner than expected, leading to a collapse in the price of lithium, something that has happened in the recent past. That would leave automakers paying a lot more for the metal than it was worth.

Auto executives are taking no chances, fearing that if they go even a few years without sufficient lithium their companies will never catch up.

Their fears have merit. In places where electric vehicle sales have grown the fastest, established automakers have lost a lot of ground.

In China, where almost one-third of new cars are electric, Volkswagen, GM and Ford have lost market share to domestic producers like BYD, which manufacturers its own batteries.

And Tesla, which has built a supply chain for lithium and other raw materials over years, has steadily gained market share in China, Europe and the United States. It is now the second-largest

seller of all new cars in California after Toyota.

Lithium is abundant but not always easy to extract. Many countries with big reserves, like Bolivia, Chile and Argentina, have nationalised natural resources or have stringent currency exchange controls that can limit the ability of foreign investors to withdraw money from the country.

Even in Canada and the United States, it can take years to establish mines.

“Lithium is going to be tough to get and to fully electrify here in the US,” said Eric Norris, president of the Lithium global business unit at Albemarle, the leading American lithium miner.

As a result, auto executives and consultants are fanning out to mines around the world, most of which have not begun producing.

“There’s a bit of desperation,” said Amanda Hall, CEO of Summit Nanotech, a Canadian startup working on technology to hasten extraction of lithium from saline groundwater. Auto executives, she said, are “trying to get ahead of the problem.”

Yet, in their hurry, car companies are making deals with small mines that may not live up to expectations. “There are a lot of examples of problems that come up,” said Shay Natarajan, a partner at Mobility Impact Partners, a private equity fund focused on investing in sustainable transportation. Lithium prices could eventually collapse from overproduction, she said.

— The New York Times

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Be Careful, Be Responsible! #LivingWithCOVID

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalfalla al Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Sheikh Al Mubtar bin Ahmad bin Alzaid al Haili took the oath of office at Al Nakhla Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world." He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability. — ONA

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL MUTTA
MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are falling on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown area reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamed al Wubshi, who accepted his car to scare away a group of people at a highway in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his ire, Hamed said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH
MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS



MUSIC
US singer Tyler Childers performs on stage during Willie Nelson's 4th of July picnic and fireworks show at Q2 Stadium in Austin, Texas. The annual Independence Day event, created by US country musician Willie Nelson, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. — AFP

LIFESTYLE
A combine harvests wheat on a field near Novosofiivka village, Mykolaiv region on July 4, 2023. Ukraine was one of the world's top grain producers, and the deal has helped soothe the global food crunch triggered by the conflict. — AFP

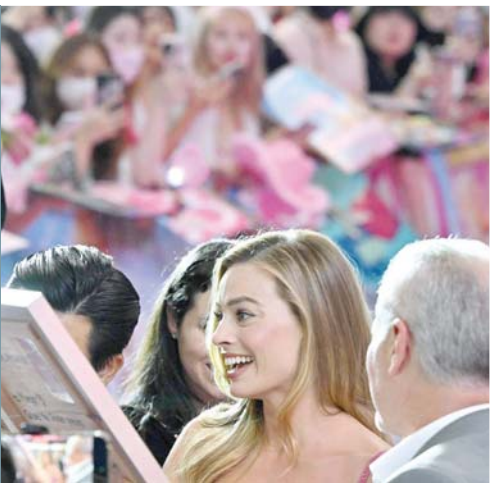


ENTERTAINMENT
The Konyak tribesmen with guns and sickle dance at their community gathering in Longwa village in the Mon district of India's Nagaland state. — AFP



FASHION
A model presents a creation by Yuima Nakazato during the Women's Haute-Couture Fall/Winter 2023/2024 Fashion Week in Paris. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT
Australian actress Margot Robbie (2nd R) meets fans during a pink carpet event to promote her new film "Barbie" in Seoul. — AFP



art & life

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Award-winning photographer says the message of photographs is always important

Nouf al Siyabi achieved gold at the individual level in the under-21 category at the FIAP (Federation Internationale de l'Art Photographique) International Youth Photography Biennial recently. She shares some secrets of her success



CHANGING WORLD

India's warriors sever past, fret over future

ONCE, THE WAY to get ahead among India's Konyak warriors was by chopping off an enemy's skull. Today, the last survivors of a past age mourn the changing times — and a new generation they see as soft.

At 90, Nokkho Konyak can barely see beyond a few feet, his facial tattoos marking him as a warrior are fading and his frail body needs support.

But his eyes light up and his hands become animated when he talks about "those simpler times".

"We witnessed our brave elders cutting off enemies' heads and participated in many battles," he said.

Nokkho is a Konyak, a small but fierce and respected warrior community in northeastern India's Nagaland state.

The Konyaks were the last to give up the age-old practice of severing enemies' heads in this remote, hilly and densely forested region close to the Myanmar border.

"I am lucky to still be alive, to be around my extended family, and I feel that today's generation is too privileged," he said at Chi village, about 360 kilometres (225 miles) from the regional capital Dimapur.

HEADS WERE TROPHIES

Nokkho is an old man from a dying breed that practised or witnessed headhunting before it stopped half a century ago.

"Human heads were trophies that earned you respect," he said, sitting in



front of a wall decorated with the skulls of animals sacrificed by his family.

Warriors were inked with different tattoos signifying anything from participation in a battle to killing someone and actually taking a head.

As a young boy, he practised lopping off heads on large puppets, though he never severed a human one in battle himself.

The last two headhunters in the village, his two elderly friends, died about 20 years ago.

Most tribal fights happened over land and limited resources, with warriors carrying spears, axes and machetes ambushing their enemies.

Wherever possible, enemies' headless bodies were tied to a bamboo pole and taken back to the victor's village.

The head itself was taken and paraded about for the village to see, hailed as a sign of bravery to be celebrated.

"My youth was a time of great transition," Nokkho said, referring to the end of British colonial rule, the arrival of missionaries, who denounced headhunting and gradually converted most people from their traditional animist beliefs to Christianity.

Nokkho remembers World War II, the formation of the Indian state in 1947, the first roads and power lines, and now, finally, the arrival of mobile phones.

HARD FOR WOMEN

Like Nokkho, 90-year-old Bo Wang, king of nearby Hongphoi village, took up hunting wild boars and other animals after "headhunting became taboo".

Wang's family, like other royals in nearby Konyak villages, has been the final local authority for generations.

"Everyone lived in fear of an ambush, and we were taught to be wary of everyone," Wang said, describ-

ing the stress of growing up with the threat of headhunters.

The area is peaceful now, he said, but he laments what he sees as a lost era.

"Everything changed with modernity, our culture is dying," he said.

"People respected hierarchy, elders and their king — which isn't the case anymore," he added.

Dressed in a traditional red conical cap adorned with fluttering feathers and boar tusks, he sat around a fire with his peers reminiscing, saying they hoped their stories, lives and culture would not be forgotten.

But Wang's second wife, Kamya, 80, said she was glad her granddaughters were growing up today and not in the conditions she experienced.

"There was just stress, not enough food or resources," she said. "It was particularly hard for women, who thanklessly worked at home, in the fields — all the time".

Kaipa Konyak, 34, from a local tribal organisation working to support the Konyak culture, said that the history would not be lost.

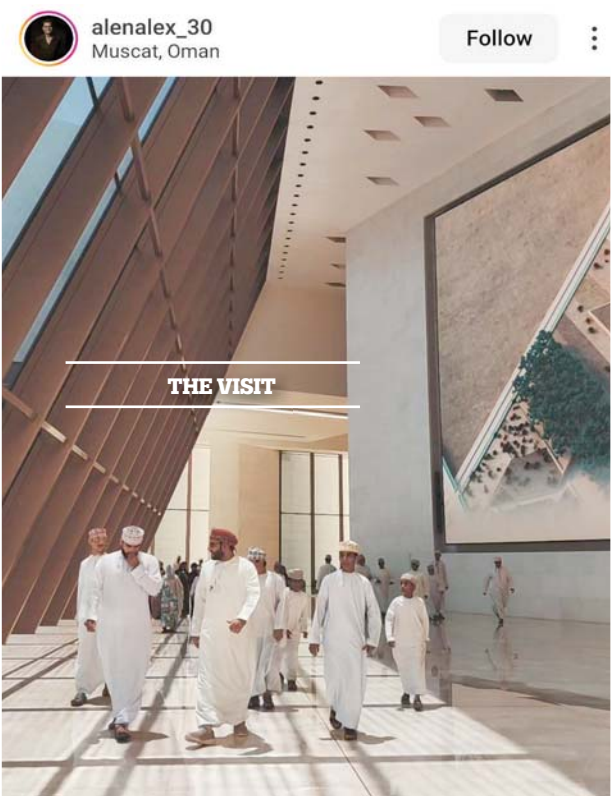
"Young people are proud of their warrior traditions and culture," he said.

"We remember our roots and will strive to protect them while also securing our future with the best modern education and infrastructure." — AFP



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As photographer, communicate your ideas visually clear

By Balqees Al Oraiimi

In a remarkable triumph for Omani photography, Nouf al Siyabiyah, a talented young female photographer, has captured the world's attention by winning the prestigious gold medal at the renowned FIAP International Award recently.

This remarkable achievement not only celebrates Nouf's extraordinary talent and creative vision, but also brings well-deserved recognition to the thriving art scene in Oman.

Nouf achieved gold at the individual level in the under-21 category at the FIAP (Federation Internationale de l'Art Photographique) International Youth Photography Biennial recently.

In an interview with the Oman Observer, Nouf shared, "I started my career in the field of photography in 2020. The corona epidemic and the series of lockdowns inspired me to discover my talents and hone them. I started in the field of drawing and worked in several other fields until I found comfort in the field of photography. I was creative in it because it brought out my ideas and allowed me to communicate my thoughts to people."

She said that her first year was spent developing her skills and it was only in 2022 when she started participating in local and international competitions.

Nouf considers her style of photography to be a description of an event or specific expressions, as she focuses on the details and shows them by increasing the contrast of the image.

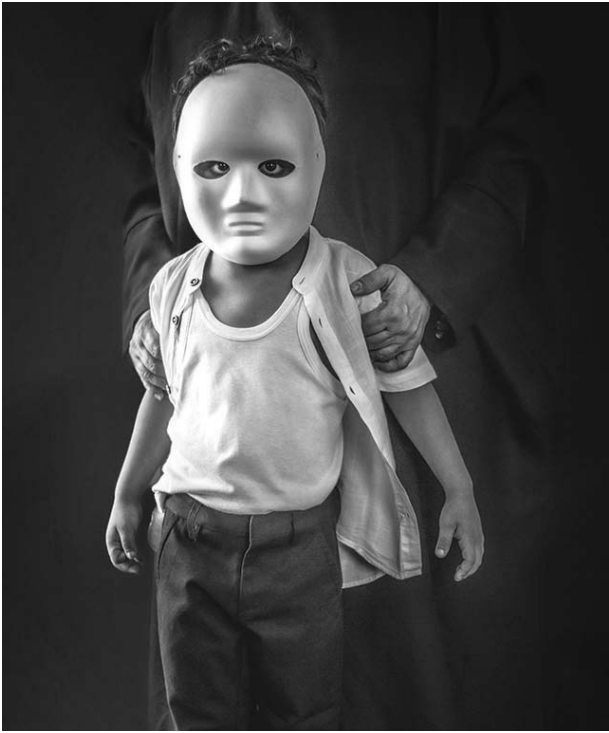
"This artform is very visual. You are only able to communicate your thoughts and ideas through what's on the picture," she said.

Of the many different genre and subjects, Nouf love working with childrend as their spontaneity, innocence and their inability to pretend conveys the message to the viewers right away.

"I am also drawn to photographing landscapes that carry a different story and feeling," she said.

Nouf has received great support from a lot of people but primarily her family who has the greatest role in encouraging her in pursuing her dreams.

"As for government agencies, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth provides us with competitions and support so that we can be more creative in this field. In addition, I do not forget my university. The University of



Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat also had a role in my progress," she said.

Nouf said any photographer will have their series of challenges as they venture into this artform. She shared that she used to be bugged by not having the required cameras and lenses but later realised that art has nothing to do with tools, but rather the ability of the artist to deal with these tools and to be creative.

"Some of the best pictures I have taken are the ones that carry deep messages. I am fond of this one series I created which dealt with kidnapping – comprised of three photos that showcased the heartbreak of when children are kidnapped. The topic touched my heart

and it allowed me to explore the different feelings and emotions of this gruesome act," she shared.

Talking a bit about her winning entry, she said that the shot was actually very spontaneous and even she was dazzled by the details. The look of the little girl, which was mysterious and her expression, communicated a lot of things which she said might have been the reason why it resonated with the judges.

Nouf shared that she plans to conduct courses in photography and to produce works that carry messages for various issues. She looks forward to continuing to participate in

local and international competitions and to represent her country Oman well.

To other female photographers, Nouf said the key is persistence especially for those who are looking at it as a hobby. She said the processes will make one realise that there are everyday learnings to can get while doing the process. She also encourages others to explore different style and methodologies and find something that works with their fashion.

Nouf shared it is also important not to compare oneself with others but rather focus on self growth and develop one's skills.

In her recent triumph, she shared that ultimately, it was all thanks to Allah who has gifted her with the skills that allowed her to win the competition.

"Winning the competition motivated me to continue my passion for photography. It's great to see that the fruits of my labour are being realised," she shared.

"I would like to thank everyone who contributed in my progress. I am truly honoured to have gotten support from a lot of people including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. I hope to be able to do more work that the country can be proud of," she said.

ART

New Madrid gallery brings royal treasures under one roof

MADRID OPENED A long-awaited multi-million-dollar gallery on Thursday, bringing hundreds of masterpieces from the royal collection, including works by Caravaggio, Velazquez and Goya, under one roof.

The new Royal Collections Gallery, next to the palace and close to Almudena Cathedral, sits across town from the established institutions of the capital's "Triangle of Art" - the Prado, the Reina Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza museums.

The 170 million euro (\$186 million) building shows artworks collected by the Spanish Habsburg and Bourbon dynasties over five centuries, including the model Bernini used for his "Fontana dei quattro fiumi" in Rome's



Piazza Navona.

Until now, the more than 650 pieces – including tapestries, sculptures, armour and jewels – were kept in palaces and monasteries across the country.

A third of the exhibits – themselves just a fraction of the total collection – will continue to move between those institutions, officials said.

The eight-floor building made of white concrete, granite, oak wood and cast aluminium also features a chunk

of Madrid's ninth-century wall built under the city's then Muslim rulers.

"The museum is born with the vocation of being a cultural and tourist key point in Madrid, Spain and Europe," Ana de la Cueva, head of National Heritage, the state-owned organisation that manages the royal collection, told reporters.

She said officials hoped the museum would persuade tourists to extend their stay in the city by at least one day, boosting revenues. — Reuters

LIFESTYLE

Sustainability in focus at Copenhagen World Congress of Architects

MAKING THE BUILDINGS and cities of the future more sustainable while using fewer resources was at the focus at the start on Monday of the World Congress of Architects being held in Copenhagen.

The congress organised by the International Union of Architects sees itself as "a chance to make architecture a central tool in achieving the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals."

None of the major challenges of our time, of our century could be surmounted without architecture, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said at the opening of the congress in Copenhagen's Bella Centre conference centre.



She pointed to how the world's resources were used along with health aspects and inclusivity. Architects' expertise and creativity were essential for all of this, Azoulay told the audience of experts in the field.

UNESCO would soon set up a special label to highlight architectural solutions, Azoulay said. She added that work was underway to have more modern African architecture on UNESCO's world heritage list.

Danish Culture Minister Jakob Engel-Schmidt emphasised the role of architecture in securing a sus-

tainable future.

Architecture was part of the answer to challenges such as climate change, urbanisation and social inequality, he said.

Architecture had the ability to change societies and make a lasting impact, he said.

Inviting participants to gain an impression of Danish architecture during the congress and urban planning in Copenhagen, designated World Capital of Architecture 2023, he issued a word of caution: "Watch out for the bicycles. There are rather a lot of them here." — dpa



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THURSDAY | JULY 6 | 2023

CULTURE

Fashion and film merge as Paris shows its opulent side



FROM AN ABSURDLY opulent film shoot at the Opera Garnier to a Chanel catwalk along the Seine, fashion week offered a very different view of Paris on Tuesday from the riots of recent days.

The country is still licking its wounds and facing up to the deep societal divisions exposed by days of violence sparked a week ago by the police killing of a teenager.

The riots have died down since the weekend, and it was the other France — of unbridled luxury, craftsmanship and conspicuous excess — that took centre-stage on the second day of haute couture week.

Chanel's models paraded alongside the River Seine with the Eiffel Tower in the background, some with little dogs or baskets of flowers, in a show of "sophistication and simplicity," said designer Virginie Viard.

She mixed tweeds, silk muslins, organzas and encrusted lace with floral and graphic motifs. A few bright colours, including Barbie pink, stood out against a largely grey palette.

Over at the Opera Garnier, the 19th-century monument to late-imperial excess, couturier Stephane Rolland put on a fabulously opulent show that was also being filmed by veteran film-maker Claude Lelouch for his next movie, "Finalement".

There was a strapless velvet dress with a glittering diamond hood, an elaborate headpiece that looked like a mass of gold flames, and a long red satin dress with a bejewelled collar.

The show was an homage to Greek singer Maria Callas, whose voice was heard through the show, aimed at reliving one of her most legendary performances at the Opera Garnier in December 1958.

Rolland is known for bright colours, such as the bright-yellow dress in which he put singer Pretty Yende for the coronation of King Charles III recently.

But he said "in the heart of the Palais Garnier, I didn't want to disturb the scenery with pinks, yellows and greens" and stuck mostly to black, white and a few flashes of deep red.

Actors mingled with the guests for the upcoming movie from Lelouch, best-known for his Oscar-winning 1966 film "A Man and a Woman".

The director's request to film during the show was "like a gift from heaven," Rolland said, adding that it was vital to merge fashion and other art forms.

"It's very important in our profession. I find that from time to time it lacks a bit of refinement. Money is not everything," he said.

Also showing on Tuesday was French designer Alexis Mabille, who created a female take on the tuxedo.

And there was another luxurious display from Giorgio Armani, all sumptuous ballgowns adorned with many variations on poppies and roses.

Red was a dominant colour for the Italian — even for the wedding dress at the end. — AFP



THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



SHADDAD AL MUSALMI

Men Can Also Cook

FOR MANY WOMEN, Eid is the season to try new recipes. However, these days, things have turned around as we men have begun showing our skills in the kitchen.

Last week, I asked the lady of the house not to cook anything for Eid al Adha; to leave the kitchen in my control.

I told her this is the time for me to show off my culinary abilities by cooking a tasty meal.

As a custom, men in Oman do not usually cook. But I have always wanted to pitch in and share kitchen duties.

By doing so, I could learn the basics and this past Eid was the perfect time to showcase my skills.

After quietly watching the lady of the house prepare some dishes, I thought time was ripe to try my own. I said to myself, 'It's my time to show that men can also cook.' Here I stress that I did not only want to cook, but cook delicious food.

As I usually spend most of my Eid holidays visiting relatives, that day I opted to cook something quick but delicious that would be ready just in time before I went out.

I opted to make baked bechamel pasta. Here is the recipe for the dish that I used. 100gm of unsalted butter, 2tbsp of white flour, 500ml of milk, shredded mozzarella cheese, cheddar cheese, one medium onion, 500gm of minced meat, one chopped carrot, half a capsicum, handful of parsley, tomato paste and pasta.

I arranged all these in a pan and baked for 30 minutes.

I am happy to say that the food was ready in time before the time we had planned to go out.

To my surprise and my family, it turned out to be one of the best meals we have had this past Eid.

They say 'something good comes out of something bad' and this is evident looking at the tasty meal that came out of the bad chef.

Life teaches us to enjoy things that we love and during this time, I was able to hone my creativity.

ANYHOW, TO MEN OUT THERE... PLEASE TRY AND TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR KITCHEN. I AM SURE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY WILL ENJOY.

My wife was shocked. I never cook at home as I am always out but I realised that cooking doesn't necessarily take much time.

I have to confess that I have always wanted to cook but I did not know where to start. But from now on, I will cook more often. The positive feedback from my wife is a testimony to my culinary skills.

However, I hope she doesn't take advantage of my talent. "Since my husband has started showing interest in cooking, I am happy that my kitchen time will be reduced," I overheard her telling the children.

This scenario happened to my brother-in-law. He also once wanted to show his skills in the kitchen but since that day, it has become his duty to cook for his family every weekend.

"It is almost three years now since I started cooking. I do so every weekend. It all started during Covid-19 lockdown period when I showed showcased my skills to my wife and since then, she gave up the kitchen on weekends," he told me.

Anyhow, to men out there... please try and take control of your kitchen. I am sure you and your family will enjoy. Till next, bon appetit!

Shaddad al Musalmi is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT SHADADM75@GMAIL.COM