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SAYYID ALI QUALIFIES FOR WORLD ENDURANCE CUP



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KEY STUDY TO ASSESS SMALL PELAGIC FISH STOCKS IN OMAN



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EXPLORING OMAN: A JOURNEY THROUGH TRANQUILLITY AND CULTURAL RICHES



**MUSCAT**

**HM GREET'S PRESIDENTS OF MADAGASCAR, CROATIA, MOZAMBIQUE, SLOVENIA**

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent greetings to President Andry Rajoelina of Madagascar, President Zoran Milanovic of Croatia, President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique and President Dr Natasa Pirc Musar of Slovenia on their countries' independence anniversary. In the cables, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Rajoelina, President Milanovic, President Nyusi and President Dr Musar and the peoples of Madagascar, Croatia, Mozambique and Solvenia.



## King Carl XVI Gustav thanks HM for release of Swedish citizens

**MUSCAT:** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from King Carl XVI Gustav of Sweden on Tuesday. During the phone call, King Carl XVI Gustav expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to reach an understanding between Sweden and the Islamic Republic of Iran to release two Swedish citizens and repatriate them to their country.

The Swedish King valued Oman's positive role through which it contributes to resolving many international issues.

The telephonic conversation touched on the advanced relations between Oman and Sweden. His Majesty the Sultan and King Carl XVI Gustav also exchanged views about the latest developments in regional events of common concern. — **ONA**

**GABORONE**

**US PIER IN GAZA MAY BE EXTENDED**



The US military's pier off Gaza may be extended well beyond its July 31 authorisation date if the United States and aid organisations can get aid flowing again to Palestinians in the coming days and weeks, a senior US official said on Tuesday.

"While the pier was authorised through July 31st, I think it is entirely possible that it will continue on for at least another month, if not longer," said Isobel Coleman, deputy administrator for policy and programming at the United States Agency for International Development.

US President Joe Biden announced in March the plan to put the pier in place for aid deliveries as famine loomed in Gaza, a Hamas-run enclave of 2.3 million people, during the war between Israel and the Palestinian militants. Aid began arriving via the US-built pier on May 17, and the UN said it transported 137 trucks of aid to warehouses, some 900 metric tonnes. **SEE P6**

**MUSCAT:** In the presence of members of the Council of Ministers, His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura, and members of the Majlis Ash'shura's Office on Tuesday.

The meeting took place within the context of coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman.

They held a meeting within the framework of the Basic Law of the State and the Law of the Council of Oman. The meeting constituted strong support for integration among all institutions of the state. It also underscored the importance of reaching common visions that lead to promoting economic and social aspects.

Out the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd commended the role undertaken by the Majlis Ash'shura and its cooperation with the government for sustaining efforts to implement the general policies of the state and upholding the country's supreme interest.

HH Sayyid Fahd spoke about various matters of relevance to consolidating cooperation between the two councils. He affirmed that the Council of Ministers accords full attention to the views of the Council of Oman that target support for efforts undertaken by government units in realising all that serves the nation and the citizens.

The meeting also laid emphasis on the role of the Majlis Ash'shura in accomplishing the missions entrusted to it. Pursuant to this approach, ministers respond to the Majlis Ash'shura's requests to present ministerial statements and visual presentations that explain the government's efforts



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said with HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said and Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy. Photo by Mohammed al Rashdi

to provide the highest rates of performance in all sectors.

The meeting also touched on the significance of the Majlis Ash'shura's hosting government officials to discuss topics being considered by its committees. It elaborated on the extent to which the two sides deal positively with those proposals and integrate their outcome in development plans and programmes.

The meeting reviewed other topics, including support for cooperation with the government, as well as means to enhance awareness in a manner that reflects the true image of joint national action. The meeting also underlined the role of the joint ministerial coordination committee (between the Council of Ministers and the Majlis Ash'shura) in achieving the desired goals. **TURN TO P2**

## UN welcomes release of WikiLeaks founder

**GENEVA:** The United Nations on Tuesday hailed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's release from detention in Britain as "significant steps towards definitively settling this case".

Assange was set to face a final court hearing after reaching a plea deal with United States authorities that brings to a close his years-long legal drama.

"We welcome the release of Julian Assange from detention in the UK," UN rights office spokeswoman Liz Throssell said, adding that the final plea deal was still awaiting approval.



WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange looks out a plane window as he approaches Bangkok airport for layover on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

"As we had noted repeatedly, this case raised a series of human rights concerns," she said.

Assange has agreed to plead guilty to a single count of conspiracy to obtain and disseminate national defence information, according to a document filed in court in the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific.

He is due in court on Wednesday.

"The increasingly protracted detention of Assange also raised separate issues of concern," Throssell said, adding: "We will continue to monitor developments over

the coming days."

Assange's wife Stella said she was "elated" that he will be a "free man" after a US judge signs off on his landmark plea deal on Wednesday.

Stella Assange said the end of the years-long legal drama that saw him board a plane from London to Bangkok on Monday had been a "whirlwind of emotions."

"I'm just elated. Frankly, it's just incredible," the South African-born rights campaigner told BBC radio. "We weren't really sure until the last 24 hours that it was actually happening." — **dpa & AFP**

## Work resumes on Al Batinah Coastal Road 1st phase

**MUSCAT:** Work on the first phase of the Al Batinah Coastal Road has resumed, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) announced on Tuesday.

The project involves completing the unfinished parts of the first phase of the project with a length of 30 km. This includes the paving of 22 km from the remaining work of the first part of the first phase (Barka-Al Suwaiq Port) and paving 8 km from the remaining parts of the second part of the first phase (Sohar Port-Khatmat Malaha), implementing 4 valley bridges and 67 box culverts to ensure uninterrupted traffic flow during rainfall in addition to service roads on both sides of the carriageway.

The project also involves the implementation of the Barka market dual link with a length of 4 km and Al Suwaiq link with a length of 6 km. This is in addition to constructing Al Suwaiq Bridge on the Al Batinah Road. The dual link will spur commercial and economic activities and connect parts of the logistics system between the ports of Barka and Al Suwaiq and Khazaen Economic City and the national roads. Al Batinah Coastal Road starts from the Wilayat of Barka stretching all the way to Khatmat Malaha in the Wilayat of Shinas with a total length of 244 kilometres. The project was divided into two phases, the first phase includes two parts the first of which extends from the Naseem intersection in the Wilayat of Barka to Al Suwaiq Port with a length of 66 kilometres. — **ONA**



# Council of Ministers, Shura members discuss steps for constructive cooperation

FROM PAGE 1

For their part, the Chairman of the Majlis Ashshura and members of the Council's Office commended the importance of the meeting with the Council of Ministers. They spoke about a number of aspects that realise more cooperation between the two sides.

They also expressed thanks to Oman's government and leadership for their valuable support towards constructive cooperation between the two councils.

The Chairman of the Majlis Ashshura and members of the Majlis Ashshura's Office stressed that discussions that took place during the meeting would consolidate efforts to preserve the gains of Oman in its quest to achieve further progress and prosperity.

— ONA



## FOREIGN MINISTER BIDS FAREWELL TO AMBASSADOR OF CYPRUS



**MUSCAT:** Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday received Andreas Nicolaides, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in enhancing bilateral relations, wishing him success in his future endeavours. The meeting was attended by several officials from both sides. — ONA

## Oman to observe World Drug Day today

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman will today join the countries of the world in celebrating World Drug Day 2024 (the International Day against Abuse of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances), which falls on June 26.

The celebration of World Drug Day 2024 seeks to enhance international cooperation in the field of combating the abuse of narcotics and psychotropic substances.

It also seeks to review world countries' policies and procedures in this respect, define the common challenges and difficulties, develop appropriate solutions and raise awareness among members of societies about the problems involved in the abuse of narcotics and psychotropic substances.

— ONA



The celebration of World Drug Day 2024 seeks to enhance international cooperation in the field of combating the abuse of narcotics. — ONA

# ‘Unified GCC visa will be a game changer for ME airlines’

VINOD NAIR  
@vinot\_nair

The introduction of a unified tourist visa for GCC countries later this year will be a game changer for regional tourism and Middle East airlines, a spokesman for Etihad Airways told the *Observer*.

“It simplifies the travel process, making it easier for tourists to explore multiple destinations within the GCC region. For airlines, this translates into

increased passenger traffic. The unified visa is expected to boost demand for regional travel, enhance connectivity and support economic growth through tourism,” he said.

“It also fosters greater collaboration among GCC countries, positioning the region as a cohesive and attractive tourism destination,” he added.

The airline, he said, is committed to Oman market, catering to both leisure and business travellers by leveraging



strong network and partnerships that offer seamless travel options. “The collaboration with the budget airline, Air Arabia Abu

Dhabi, also enables to offer competitive fares on these routes, ensuring affordability and convenience. Oman remains

a vital part of our regional strategy.”

Etihad Airways said it has partnered with Air Arabia in Abu Dhabi, a low-cost carrier that complements existing services. This partnership allows to cater to the price-sensitive segment of the market while maintaining the high standards associated with the Etihad brand.

“By leveraging Air Arabia’s expertise in the low-cost sector, we can offer competitive fares on short- and medium-haul

routes without compromising on quality.

Etihad passengers are provided with enhanced facilities from its hub in Abu Dhabi that includes check-in and baggage handling systems and biometric touchpoints throughout the airport experience, apart from flagship lounges.

Cutting-edge technology has been integrated to streamline security checks and boarding processes, reducing wait times and enhancing efficiency.



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# 221 new HIV cases in 2023, social stigma remains

OHOOD AL JILANI AND  
LAILA AL HASANI  
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

The Sultanate of Oman reported 221 new cases of HIV infections in 2023, which included 54 women, bringing the number of those infected and living with the disease to 2,339 in the Sultanate of Oman.

In an interview with the *Oman* Arabic daily, sister publication of the *Observer*, Dr Zayana bint Khalfan al Habsiyah, Head of the Department of Immunodeficiency and Transmitted Infections at the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, said that stigma and discrimination constitute a major obstacle to healthcare services, exposing those infected to the danger of making their situation

worse.

She added that relationships are the main cause in 70 per cent of total cases, followed by those related to the sharing of narcotic drugs and mother-to-child transmission. No cases due to blood transfusions have been recorded in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Zayana said that pre-marital examination is a requirement of society and has been applied in most neighbouring countries, and the issue is still under discussion in the Ministry of Health (MoH).

The ministry provides free testing for all segments of society in complete confidentiality, but it is not compulsory, and it is also provided to pregnant mothers to detect AIDS. However, there is a period during which the



According to scientific evidence, medication reduces the rate of the virus to zero

person's infection with the virus does not appear, so the mother may be a carrier of the virus and the condition does not appear initially.

As for the protocols for treating people with AIDS, Dr Zayana said, "The medications used to treat patients are among the latest

available globally and are given to the patient according to a specific protocol, and are developed and updated locally to include the best advanced treatments and the latest medications used globally. It prevents the spread of the virus to other members of society and has a positive effect on the patient, as

the patient uses antiretroviral medications to control the infection and spread of the virus."

According to scientific evidence, medication reduces the rate of the virus to zero, and this in itself makes the virus not transmitted. Dr Zayana explained that early diagnosis is important for controlling the virus early and conducting the necessary tests so that the treatment is better.

The first line of treatment protocols has a better effect on the patient, and the earlier the detection is, the more effective the therapeutic results are. Treatments have a role in the decline in the deaths of AIDS patients, which was 28 deaths last year from over hundreds in the past.

"There are cases where patients

refuse treatment, and the reason is due to a lack of acceptance of the disease or their fear of social stigma, but the specialised medical staff communicate continuously with these patients.

"Those who default on treatment are convinced on the importance of treatment. Because if it is neglected, it may pose a danger to society and be a carrier of the virus, and it may be transmitted to the other party, whether the husband or wife. Therefore, the other party must be informed from the beginning of knowledge of the infection, and the team may legally intervene in informing the partner to protect the party from the possibility of transmitting the virus and causing harm and danger to others," Dr Zayana said.

## Information ministry partakes in Arab media meet in Tunis

**TUNIS:** The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, participated in the 111th meeting of the Executive Council of the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), held in Tunis from June 25 to 26.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation is headed by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information.

The meeting discussed a number of topics related to radio, television, new media, and the Arab Radio and Television Festival slated to be held this year under the slogan 'Supporting Palestine'.

The meeting reviewed several reports, including the training report where the Sultanate of Oman came in second place in terms of attendance and participation at the Arab level



in the field of training and workshops held by the ASBU's Arab Training Centre and third place in attendance and participation in the training courses conducted by the ASBU's Media Training Academy.

The meeting touched on the

media role undertaken by the ASBU in covering events in Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in the Palestinian territories through the ASBU's special correspondents as well as their media coverage in Sudan and Libya.

— ONA

## Oman, Russia hold talks session

**MOSCOW:** The Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation on Tuesday held a session of political talks in Moscow.

The session highlighted bilateral relations, mutual visits and the participation in events held in both countries, namely the latest participation of Oman as a main guest in the St. Petersburg International Forum.

During the session, the Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of

the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Russian side was headed by Mikhail Bogdanov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Special Representative of the President of Russia for the Middle East and Africa.

Further, the two sides exchanged views on several regional and international issues, notably the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and the war in Ukraine.

On the sidelines of the session, Al Harthy met with Alexander

Yakovenko, Rector of the Diplomatic Academy of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During this meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of mutual cooperation in the field of diplomatic training and qualification.

The meeting was attended by Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Manthiri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry, Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of Oman to Russia, and several officials from both sides. — ONA



The session highlighted bilateral relations, mutual visits and the participation in events held in both countries. — ONA

# Muscat named one of the most beautiful cities on Earth

LIJU CHERIAN  
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Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman, has been honoured with the title of one of the most beautiful cities on Earth. This accolade was recently featured by msn.com, a popular web portal from Microsoft that includes news, sports, entertainment, and the Bing search engine.

The recognition comes from a survey conducted by Rebecca Hallett, a well-known travel writer and Japan specialist.

Rebecca highlights that

while cities worldwide are often associated with excitement and culture, many urban hubs rival the prettiest villages and most striking natural wonders in terms of beauty.

These beautiful cities boast breathtaking surroundings, awe-inspiring architecture and landmarks that have stood for centuries, ranging from colourful old towns to modern skylines.

Muscat is described as a dazzling city, stretching for almost 40 kilometres along the Sea of Oman. The city seamlessly blends opulent modern buildings



Muscat city seamlessly blends opulent modern buildings with fascinating historic districts

like Al Alam Palace and the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) with fascinating historic districts.

The iconic Muttrah Souq is

noted as a dizzyingly colourful bazaar, while the traditional Arabian architecture of Old Muscat gives the city a timeless

appeal. The jewel in Muscat's crown is the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, an awe-inspiring edifice of gleaming gold, vibrant turquoise, and cool, white marble.

Some of the few other cities mentioned in the list of the world's most beautiful cities include Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Bruges (Belgium), Dubrovnik (Croatia), York (England), Khiva (Uzbekistan), Sydney (Australia), Bergen (Norway), Galway (Ireland), Prague (Czech Republic), Udaipur (India), Porto (Portugal), Reykjavik (Iceland),

Edinburgh (Scotland), Cork (Ireland), New York City (US), Cusco (Peru), Cape Town (South Africa), Vancouver (Canada), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Santa Barbara (US), Hoi An (Vietnam), New Orleans (US), Ketchikan (Alaska, US), Quebec City (Canada), Lhasa (Tibet), Tauranga (New Zealand), Kyoto (Japan), Nuuk (Greenland), Shanghai (China), Stirling, Scotland (UK), Yogyakarta (Indonesia), St Augustine (US), Cleveland (US), Lyon (France), Perth (Australia), Valletta (Malta) and Hobart (Australia).



CLEAN THE AIRWAY OF A PERSON, WHICH MEANS REMOVING ANY VISIBLE IMPURITIES ON THE NOSE OR IN THE MOUTH

PERFORMING ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION

PUT THE PERSON ON A FLAT SURFACE

PULLING THE DROWNING PERSON FROM THE WATER

FOLLOWING THESE STEPS MAY SAVE A LIFE

**AFRAH AL BALUSHI**  
@afrahalbalushia

**AS TEMPERATURES RISE** amid school holidays, many families resorts to valleys and beaches to escape the heat, which are the most places where drowning cases increase. Drowning accidents are considered painful and frequent accidents, especially in summer, which often occur around bodies of water, where people resort to escaping the heat and enjoying nature, including adults and children who cannot swim. The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has urged people to be cautious, follow safety measures and avoid hazards while swimming following an increase in the number of cases of drowning. Experts say there is high likelihood of drowning among children if left unsupervised.

CDAA stated that drowning incidents are generally attributed to lack of proficiency in swimming, in addition to swimming in places not designated for such sport including in agricultural ponds, dams, water canals and dangerous water bodies. Major Faisal bin Hamid al Bakhit, Central Civil Defense Officer in Mirbat and Taqa, and supervisor of the water rescue team in Dhofar, said: “Statistics indicated that the CDAA dealt with 324 drowning reports in 2022, while in 2023 there were about 166 cases, a decrease of 158 cases, which is a positive difference that is evidence of the Authority’s role in the awareness.” “In order to reduce drowning incidents further, we recommend following safety procedures, which include practicing swimming in designated areas. In the case of pools, they must be equipped with fixed ladders and metal handles distributed around the perimeter of the pool. Life jackets must also be provided, and the pool must not be filled completely. If it is used by children, there is a need for an elderly person to be present to monitor the children while they are swimming,” he added.

**FIRST AID**

Drowning accidents are painful, especially in the summer, and drowning may not cause death if the case is rescued with first aid. First aid includes removing the injured person quickly from the water and acting wisely by ensuring that the paramedic must be familiar with swimming skills and wear a life jacket before assisting, to ensure his safety first, and then the safety of the drowning person. As for the second step, it requires community awareness and organised initiatives to teach community members the basics of first aid and how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation, as scientific studies have confirmed that the probability of survival is much greater for patients who received cardiopulmonary resuscitation at the scene of the accident before arriving at the health institution.

**DON'T  
BE A  
DROWNING  
STATISTIC  
THIS  
SUMMER**



# Medics successfully conduct first lymph node removal in Oman

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the University Medical City, a specialised medical team at the Royal Hospital succeeded in performing the first laparoscopic operation of its kind in Oman to remove the sentinel lymph node. The 2-hour surgery was conducted for a female patient with high-risk of developing malignant tumour in the uterus.

Dr Thuraya bint Rashid al Rawahiyah, Senior Consultant, Gynaecological Oncology Surgery, at the Royal Hospital, head of the medical team, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the operation constituted a step forward in uterine tumour surgery in the Sultanate of Oman.

Such an operation, Dr Thuraya said, reduces the risks of complete removal of the lymph nodes and saves time without prejudice to the accuracy of the uterine cancer treatment plan.

Dr Thuraya pointed out that the lymph node removal



The 2-hour surgery was conducted for a female patient with high-risk of developing malignant tumour in the uterus. – ONA

technique involves the injection of a radioactive substance into the cervix prior to the operation. Once this is done, only the cancerous node is removed, instead of removing all the lymph nodes in the pelvic area, as was the case in the past.

Dr Thuraya added that this technique contributes to reducing side effects of surgery, like the swelling of legs, thereby accelerating healing and improving the patient's quality of life. — ONA

## NDC COMMANDANT RECEIVES EGYPT'S NATIONAL ACADEMY DIRECTOR



The two sides exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest, especially in academic and training fields. – ONA

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) on Tuesday received Dr Rasha Ragheb, Executive Director of the National Training Academy of the Arab Republic of Egypt and her accompanying delegation.

The meeting took place at the headquarters of the NDC in Bait Al Falaj.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest, especially in academic and training fields.

Moreover, the guests were briefed about the NDC and its various facilities. They also toured the college's different departments.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Abdullah bin Hamid al Harthy, Deputy Commandant of the NDC and Brigadier Mansoor bin Ali al Amri, Director General of Programmes and Strategic Direction at the College, as well as the Chargé d'affaires of the Egyptian embassy in Oman. — ONA

# Osool, Aviagen to set up RO 10m poultry project

MUSCAT: Osool Poultry Company on Tuesday signed an agreement with Aviagen (Ross) company to establish a major poultry project code-named "Jaddat" (mother hens), an investment worth RO 10 million. Aviagen will provide full technical support to Osool in setting up and running the project.

The establishment of the poultry project aims to enhance food security and achieve self-sufficiency by meeting the entire need for chickens in the Sultanate of Oman, and thus reduce imports.

The agreement was signed by Dr Hadi bin Mohsin al Lawati, CEO of Osool Company, and Bulent Tanyildizi, Aviagen Business Manager for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The project, which constitutes an essential component of the poultry industry chain, enables the company to produce fertilised eggs,



The agreement was signed by Dr Hadi bin Mohsin al Lawati, CEO of Osool Company, and Bulent Tanyildizi, Aviagen Business Manager for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. – ONA

quality chicks and other poultry products.

By establishing this vital project, Osool Poultry Company also seeks to reduce the risks involved in poultry imports' potential of conveying disease pathogens to the Sultanate of Oman. The project also helps overcome common logistical problems.

Osool Poultry Company is currently operating its project with a production capacity of 150 million eggs, per annum, from fertilised eggs, mainly by importing one-day-old chicks from different countries.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources undertakes a pivotal role in

By establishing this vital project, Osool Poultry Company also seeks to reduce the risks involved in poultry imports' potential of conveying disease pathogens to the Sultanate of Oman

consolidating the poultry industry in the Sultanate of Oman, notably by transferring and localising global knowledge and expertise in the field of raising and developing poultry projects.

The ministry also contributes to training Omani national cadres and empowering them to help enhance food security and self-sufficiency. — ONA

## LAUGHTER YOGA SESSIONS HELD

MUSCAT: As part of the International Day of Yoga, The Art of Living (AOL), Oman and Oasis Mall Oman held a laughter yoga session recently. The hour long sessions were held at Oasis Mall in Al Khuwair.

A team of three people from AOL Muscat conducted the sessions in which hundreds of expatriates and locals took part.

Rajiv Ahuja who led the session explained about laughter yoga and its benefits and made every one dance to set the mood of the programme. He mentioned about the benefits of global laughter exercise programme which includes three elements of laughter and playfulness, yogic breath work and mindfulness meditation.

Veteran artist, curator, poet and a certified laughter yoga teacher, Dr Shalini Gupta Kumar in her session explained the steps of laughter yoga. These included warm up exercises of clapping, chanting and moving. Breathing exercise, child-like playfulness and laughter exercises. Dr Shalini and Somu together performed about 10 laughter exercises along with the audience.



Participants at laughter yoga sessions held in Muscat recently

# Charitable, volunteer forum begins today

**QASIM ALMAASHANI**  
SALALAH, JUNE 25

Dhofar Governorate is set to host the Charitable and Volunteer Teams Forum 2024 under the theme, "Charitable and Voluntary Work: Sustainable Development Goals," which will take place at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural and Entertainment Complex today (Wednesday).

The forum aims to highlight the vital role of charitable and volunteer work in achieving

sustainable development goals and to enhance cooperation between various charitable and volunteer organisations in the governorate.

The event will include a range of activities and events designed to raise awareness about the importance of volunteer work and its role in building a more cohesive and sustainable society.

The Social Development Committee in the Wilayat of Salalah is organising this forum with the participation and support of several

sponsors, including Nama Services, OCTAL, Atyab, STRABAG, Al Rawas Holding LLC, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The forum is expected to attract numerous participants from various charitable and volunteer teams, as well as experts and specialists in the field of charitable and volunteer work, contributing to the exchange of experiences and ideas and enhancing the network of relationships between the concerned parties.



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**P.V. Gopalan**  
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Announcement of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA)  
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| Tender Number | Tender Title                                                                                                 | Bidding date previously specified | New Bid Submission Date |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1/2024        | Design, supply, implementation, management & support of OAAAQA Core Services digital transformation solution | 26/6/2024                         | 10/7/2024               |

The bidders must be submitting the bids through the ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) before 10:00 am of the day specified for the new Bid Submission Date(10 July 2024).

For inquiries about the tender, please contact the following numbers: 24121707 or e-mail: [tenders@aaaqa.gov.om](mailto:tenders@aaaqa.gov.om)



Probe highlights  
'attack on press  
freedom' in Gaza

PARIS: A collaborative investigation by international media outlets on Tuesday shed light on the circumstances behind more than 100 Palestinian journalists and media workers being killed in the Gaza war, some while wearing a press vest.

A consortium led by investigative outlet Forbidden Stories and involving around 50 journalists from 13 organisations took part in the four-month probe. It looked into strikes involving journalists and media infrastructure since Israel launched a devastating offensive in the Gaza Strip.

"More than 100 journalists and media workers have been killed," Forbidden Stories' Laurent Richard said in an editorial accompanying the Gaza Project's publication.

"Today's Gaza journalists have long-known that their 'press' vests do not protect them," he wrote. "Worse still, the protective gear might further expose them."

Carlos Martinez de la Serna, of the Committee to Protect Journalists, expressed shock at the toll. "This is one of the most flagrant attacks on press freedom that I remember," he told the investigation.

The probe found that four journalists were allegedly killed or wounded by a drone while wearing a press vest. Fourteen in total were killed, wounded or allegedly targeted while wearing their protective gear describing them as a member of the "press".

At least 40 journalists and media workers were killed while at home in Gaza, it added. "Whereas the press vest was supposed to identify and protect us according to international laws... it is now a threat to us," said Basel Khair Al Din, a Palestinian journalist in Gaza who believes he was targeted by a drone strike while wearing a press vest. — AFP



Palestinians evacuate Al Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

INDISCRIMINATE AIRSTRIKES  
KILL 24 PALESTINIANS IN GAZA



Men and children search through debris in the yard of the Asma school run by the UNRWA, in the Shati camp. — AFP

CAIRO: Israeli forces killed at least 24 Palestinians in three separate airstrikes early on Tuesday on Gaza City and the dead included a sister of Ismail Haniyeh, the chief of the Palestinian group Hamas, Gaza health officials and medics said.

Israeli tanks also pressed deeper into western areas of Rafah in the south of the enclave overnight, blowing up homes, residents said.

Two of the Israeli airstrikes hit two schools in Gaza City, killing at least 14 people, medics said. Another strike on a house in the Shati (Beach) camp, one of the Gaza Strip's eight historic refugee camps, killed 10 others.

Israel's military said its forces had targeted Palestinian groups

overnight in Gaza City who had been involved in the planning of attacks on Israel. The groups included some involved in holding captives and some who had taken part in cross-border attack on October 7.

Hamas movement denies using civilian facilities such as schools and hospitals for military purposes. The group described the attacks on the two schools and the house in Shati camp as "massacres".

Separately, the armed wings of Palestinian groups said in a joint statement their fighters had fired mortar bombs overnight against Israeli forces in the Yibna neighbourhood of eastern Rafah.

In nearby Khan Younis, medics said Israeli tank shelling

killed seven Palestinians and wounded several other people at a tent camp in the west of the city.

The United Nations Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) said chaos was taking hold in Gaza as smuggling bands form and add to the difficulties of delivering sorely needed aid.

A high risk of famine also persists across the Gaza Strip as the conflict rages on unabated and humanitarian access remains restricted, a global hunger monitor said on Tuesday.

The Israeli offensive in retaliation has so far killed 37,658 people, the Gaza health ministry said on Tuesday, and has left the tiny, densely populated Gaza Strip in ruins.

Since early May, fighting

has focused on Rafah, abutting Egypt on Gaza's southern edge, where around half of the enclave's 2.3 million people had been sheltering after fleeing other areas. Most have since had to flee again.

Gaza's health ministry said on Tuesday that hospitals and medical centres in the enclave were experiencing a severe shortage of medicines and medical supplies due to the continued Israeli offensive, Israel's control and closure of all crossings and its targeting of the health sector in Gaza.

In particularly short supply are medications needed for emergency, anaesthesia, intensive care and operations, the ministry said in a statement. — Reuters

2,000 medical  
evacuations  
prevented by  
Rafah crossing  
closure

CAIRO: The closure of the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza has prevented the medical evacuations of at least 2,000 patients, a World Health Organization official said on Tuesday, calling for Rafah and other routes to be reopened.

Before the closure, "approximately 50 critical patients a day left Gaza ... It means that since the 7th of May at least 2,000 people have been unable to leave Gaza to receive medical care," said Rik Peeperkorn, WHO representative in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Rafah crossing was the main conduit for evacuations as well as for humanitarian aid earlier in the war that began on October 7. It shut when Israel launched an operation on the southern edge of the Gaza strip in May.

The United States, Egypt and Qatar held talks late last week aimed at re-opening the crossing and increasing humanitarian aid flows, according to Egyptian security sources. But Rafah, where Egypt wants Israeli troops to pull back and a Palestinian presence to be restored, remains closed. Movement through the nearby Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing, which Peeperkorn described as unsafe, has been impeded by insecurity and logistical challenges.

At least 10,000 people are in need of evacuation from Gaza, Peeperkorn said, adding that this was an underestimate of the number needing critical care for both war traumas and chronic diseases. — Reuters



An injured man stands outside the morgue of the Aqsa Martyrs hospital. — AFP

Around half a million Gazans face 'catastrophic' hunger

ROME: Almost half a million people are still experiencing "catastrophic" hunger in Gaza, with famine still a high risk, a United Nations-backed assessment found on Tuesday.

The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) partnership said its March warning of imminent famine in the north of the Palestinian territory had not materialised.

"However, the situation in Gaza remains catastrophic and there is a high and sustained risk of famine across the whole Gaza Strip," the report said, warning against any complacency.

It said around 495,000 people — around 22 per cent of the Gaza population, according to the UN — are still facing "catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity" known as IPC Phase 5.

Another 745,000 people are classified as in a food security emergency.

The UN's World Food Programme said the new report "paints a stark picture of ongoing hunger".

"The improvement shows the difference that greater access can make. Increased food deliveries to the north and nutrition services have helped to reduce the very worst levels of hunger,



A boy walks with a jerrycan after filling up with others from a truck loaded with water cisterns in Rafah. — AFP

leaving a still desperate situation," it said. But it warned that in the south of Gaza, the situation was getting worse.

"Hostilities in Rafah in May displaced more than a million people and severely limited humanitarian access," it said.

"Meanwhile, the security vacuum has fostered lawlessness and disorder which severely hamper humanitarian operations.

"WFP now fears that southern Gaza could soon see the same catastrophic levels of hunger previously recorded in the northern areas." The IPC is an initiative involving over 20 partners, including governments, UN agencies and NGOs.

Meanwhile, ten children per day are losing one or both of their legs in the war in Gaza, the head of the UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees said on Tuesday.

"Basically we have everyday 10 children who are losing one leg or two legs on average," UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini told reporters in Geneva. Citing figures from the UN children's agency Unicef, he said that figure "does not even include the arms and the hands, and we have many more" of these. — AFP



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## In brief

■ THE HAGUE



### ICC ISSUES ARREST WARRANTS FOR TWO RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

The International Criminal Court on Tuesday said it had issued arrest warrants for Russia's top army chief and ex defence minister over strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure that constituted alleged war crimes.

The warrants, made public on Tuesday, concerned the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, and former defence minister Sergei Shoigu.

ICC judges said there were "reasonable grounds to believe that the two suspects bear responsibility for missile strikes carried out by the Russian armed forces against the Ukrainian infrastructure from at least 10 October 2022 until at least 9 March 2023." — AFP

■ BEIJING



### CHINA LUNAR PROBE RETURNS TO EARTH WITH SAMPLES

A Chinese probe carrying samples from the far side of the Moon returned to Earth on Tuesday, capping a technically complex 53-day mission heralded as a world first.

The landing module of the Change-6 spacecraft touched down at a predetermined site in Inner Mongolia at 2:07 pm, the China National Space Administration said, hailing the mission a "complete success".

It comes bearing soil and rocks from the side of the Moon facing away from Earth, a poorly understood region that scientists say holds great research promise because its rugged features are smoothed over by ancient lava flows than the near side. — AFP

■ TEHRAN



### IRAN'S KHAMENEI URGES HIGH PARTICIPATION IN PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for "high participation" in Friday's presidential election to replace Ebrahim Raisi.

"We emphasise the importance of high participation (in the election) because it is the pride of the Islamic republic," Khamenei declared in a televised speech three days ahead of the vote.

"In every election where the turnout was low, the enemies of the Islamic republic have denounced us," he added.

Khamenei criticised "certain politicians" for believing "all paths to progress pass through the United States". — AFP

# European Union starts accession talks with Ukraine and Moldova

LUXEMBOURG: The European Union launches accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova on Tuesday, setting the fragile ex-Soviet states on a long path towards membership that Russia has tried to block.

The landmark move is aimed in particular at signalling a vote of confidence in Ukraine's future as Moscow has momentum on the battlefield almost two and a half years into the Kremlin's attack.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky called it a "historic day" ahead of the start of talks between officials from Kyiv and the EU's 27 member states in Luxembourg.

"We will never be derailed from our path to a united Europe and to our common home of all European nations," the Ukrainian leader wrote on social media.

Ukraine and later its neighbour Moldova lodged their bids to join the EU in the immediate aftermath of Russia's assault in February 2022.

The start of the talks marks just the beginning of a protracted process of reforms strewn with political obstacles that will likely take many years — and may never lead to membership.

Standing in the way along that journey will be not just Russia's efforts at destabilisation but reticence from doubters inside the EU, most notably Hungary.

But European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen called the opening of talks "very good news for the people of Ukraine, Moldova, and the entire European Union."



Ukrainian President Zelensky speaks during a special meeting of the European Council at The European Council Building in Brussels. — Reuters file photo



We will never be derailed from our path to a united Europe and to our common home of all European nations

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

Ukraine's President

So far, Ukraine — represented at the talks by Deputy Prime Minister Olga Stefanishyna — has won plaudits for kick-starting a raft of reforms on curbing graft and political interference, even as war rages.

The meetings with Ukraine and Moldova on Tuesday will set off a process of screening of how far laws in the countries already comply with EU standards and how much more work lies ahead.

Once that is done the EU then has to begin laying out conditions for negotiations on 35 subjects — from taxation to environmental policy.

The talks also come at a tense time in Moldova after

the United States, Britain and Canada warned of a Russian "plot" to influence the country's presidential elections coming up in October.

Wedged between war-torn Ukraine and EU member Romania, Moldova's pro-Western authorities frequently accuse the Kremlin of interfering in its internal affairs.

President Maia Sandu has accused Moscow — which has troops stationed in a breakaway region of the country — of aiming to destabilise Moldova ahead of the vote. "Our future is within the European family," Sandu wrote on X. "We are stronger together." — AFP

## Anne doing fine after horse accident

LONDON: King Charles III's sister Princess Anne is improving in hospital, her husband said on Tuesday, after she suffered concussion in an incident at her country estate.

"She's doing fine — slow but sure," Tim Laurence told reporters outside Southmead Hospital in Bristol, western England, where she was taken on Sunday evening.

Anne, 73, suffered minor injuries to her head and concussion at Gatcombe Park on Sunday evening and was airlifted to hospital.

It is believed she was kicked by a horse as she was walking within the protected perimeter of the sprawling estate, which hosts equestrian events.

Retired naval commander Laurence, her husband since 1992, said she was "recovering well", adding that they were both "profoundly grateful" to the medical teams that treated her at the scene and in hospital.

The Princess Royal, as she is also known, is a skilled horsewoman who competed at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, and has a reputation as the hardest-working royal.

She has stepped in to represent her brother while he postponed public engagements during his cancer treatment, and rode at his official birthday parade this month. But the accident has forced her to withdraw from an appearance at a state banquet on Tuesday evening for visiting Japanese Emperor Naruhito, and cancel an upcoming trip to Canada. Buckingham Palace said she was in hospital "as a precautionary measure for observation and is expected to make a full and swift recovery". — AFP



Princess Anne

# Uzbekistan's tourism contributes to people's welfare

Uzbekistan, with its rich cultural heritage, historical sites, and stunning natural landscapes, is committed to advancing its tourism sector. The "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy aims to boost the number of tourists by creating favourable conditions for both international and domestic tourism.

Uzbekistan achieved 98 per cent of its pre-pandemic foreign tourist numbers. In 2019, the country welcomed 6.748 million foreign tourists, and by 2023, this figure was 6.626 million, illustrating a swift recovery.

To attract more foreign tourists, Uzbekistan has implemented several practical measures such as simplifying the visa regime, developing new tourism routes, investing in relevant projects, and hosting significant events.

For instance, in 2023, a total of 508 projects worth 9.5 trillion soums were executed, resulting in the creation of 9,492 new jobs. 183 new hotels and 232 hostels were launched, and the total number of accommodation facilities reached 5,526.

Additionally, 452 family guest houses were established, bringing the total number to 3,458. As a result of opening 810 new tourist organisations and travel agencies, the total number of such entities has increased to 2,649. From 2017



The current state of Uzbekistan's tourism sector and its development trends show positive results.

to 2023, the number of foreign tourists visiting Uzbekistan has significantly increased. Specifically, in 2017, the country was visited by 2.7 million people, whereas in 2023, this figure rose to 6.6 million, which is 2.5 times more than in 2017 and 1.3 times more than in 2022.

The number of tourists from Japan increased fivefold in 2023, while those from India and

Italy increased by 3.5 times, and from the USA by two times. In 2023, 80.7 per cent of foreign tourists came from neighbouring countries, 11.5 per cent from other CIS countries, and 7.8 per cent from other countries. The average length of stay for tourists increased to 4-5 days, which is 1.5 times more than in 2022 (3 days). This indicates that all necessary conditions for a

comfortable stay of tourists have been created in the country.

Domestic tourism is also developing rapidly. Within the framework of the "Travel around Uzbekistan!" programme, 15 million people travelled around the country, making 21 million visits to various regions. As part of social support, 1,100 people with disabilities and 570,000 young people were sent on trips.

In 2023, the export of tourist services amounted to \$2.1435 billion, which is 1.3 times more than in 2022.

Additionally, about 70,000 new jobs were created in the tourism and related sectors. This indicates that all necessary conditions for tourists have been created in the country, which contributes to economic growth and improved living standards.

# Why Netanyahu doesn't take Biden seriously



Nicholas D. Kristof

A few months ago, President Joe Biden seemed so fed up as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel ignored his calls for restraint in the Gaza Strip that he finally sounded tough.

In March, Biden was asked if his calls for Israel not to invade the southern Gaza city of Rafah marked a “red line,” meaning that an invasion would lead to serious consequences.

“It is a red line,” Biden said, “but I’m never gonna leave Israel.” What that added up to wasn’t clear, perhaps not even to Biden. But as someone who generally admires Biden’s foreign policy, I wanted to think that the president meant that an Israeli invasion of Rafah would lead to a suspension of transfers of offensive weapons, but no interruption of defensive weapons such as protections against incoming missiles.

Then in April, Biden called Netanyahu and seemed again to draw a line that was at least pink. He urged an immediate cease-fire and, according to the White House announcement, “made clear the need for Israel to announce and implement a series of specific, concrete, and measurable steps to address

civilian harm, humanitarian suffering, and the safety of aid workers.”

All this seemed to signal Biden’s belated willingness to stand up to Netanyahu and avert a humanitarian catastrophe in Rafah. After being widely urged to do more for Palestinians in Gaza — even by his wife — Biden seemed to condition assistance so as to push Israel to flood the territory with aid, avoid an invasion of Rafah, stop killing aid workers and move toward a cease-fire. In the period since that stern April phone call, Biden has again allowed Netanyahu to walk all over him. Israel did invade Rafah. The supply of food reaching people in southern Gaza dropped. At least an additional 15 aid workers have been killed in Gaza.

Now that Biden’s red and pink lines have been ignored, what is the president planning next? The administration is moving ahead with an \$18 billion sale of F-15 fighter jets to Israel; I’ve no objection to the sale in principle, but the timing sends an awful signal that there are no consequences for ignoring Biden. “What Biden has shown Netanyahu over and over is that he will wag his finger but he won’t enforce the finger-wagging,” said Jeremy Konyndyk,

THE WAR HAS MADE A MOCKERY OF BIDEN’S ARGUMENTS THAT THE UNITED STATES BACKS THE “RULES-BASED INTERNATIONAL ORDER” AND HAS THUS UNDERMINED OUR POSITION IN UKRAINE

the president of Refugees International.

Biden seems to have believed initially that he could best influence and restrain Netanyahu by holding him close. And in fairness, this approach worked to some degree: Israel did not invade Lebanon last fall, as it was considering, and its invasion of Rafah seemed more measured than its invasion of other Gaza cities. It has also allowed more food into northern Gaza, aid workers say.

But the bottom line is that Biden’s Gaza policy has helped Netanyahu stay in power without, in my view, advancing Israel’s long-term security interests. The war has made a mockery of Biden’s arguments that the United States backs the “rules-based international order” and has thus undermined our position in Ukraine.

The realm of diplomacy always has more problems than solutions, and American politics and Netanyahu’s slipperiness make it all the more complicated. Yet after eight months of unrelenting horror in the Middle East, Biden should recognise that his Gaza policy is a moral, practical and political failure that has not helped anyone but Netanyahu.

— *The New York Times*

## World not ready for wild fires due to climate change

LINDA GIVETASH

The world is unprepared for the increasing ferocity of wildfires turbocharged by climate change, scientists say, as blazes from North America to Europe greet the northern hemisphere summer in the hottest year on record.

Wildfires have already burned swathes through Turkiye, Canada, Greece and the United States early this season as extreme heatwaves push temperatures to scorching highs.

While extra resources have been poured into improving firefighting in recent years, experts said the same was not true for planning and preparing for such disasters.

“We are still actually catching up with the situation,” said Stefan Doerr, director of the Centre for Wildfire Research at the UK’s Swansea University.

Predicting how bad any one blaze will be — or where and when it will strike — can be challenging, with many factors including local weather conditions playing into calculations.

But overall, wildfires are getting larger and burning more severely, said Doerr, who co-authored a recent paper examining the frequency and intensity of such extreme events.

A separate study published in June found the frequency and magnitude of extreme wildfires appeared to have doubled over the past 20 years.

By the end of the century, the number of extreme wildfires around the globe is tipped to rise 50 per cent, according to a 2022 report by the UN Environment Programme.

Doerr said humanity had not yet faced up to this reality.

Fires do not respect borders so responses have evolved between governments to jointly confront these disasters, said Jesus San-Miguel, an expert for the European Commission Joint Research Centre.

The EU has a strong model of resource sharing, and even countries outside the bloc along the Mediterranean have benefited from firefighting equipment or financial help in times of need, San-Miguel said. But as wildfires become increasingly extreme, firefighting simply won’t be a fix.

Controlled burns, grazing livestock, or mechanised vegetation removal are all effective ways to limit the amount of burnable fuel covering the forest floor, said Rory Hadden from the University of Edinburgh.

Campfire bans and establishing roads as firebreaks can all be effective in reducing starts and minimising spread, said Hadden, an expert on fire safety and engineering. — **AFP**

## Eid shows the need to diversify income



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Eid Al Adha is a meaningful annual reminder of the many blessings of family, friendship, food, shelter, and safety that we enjoy. It is a time for reflection and gratitude, a moment to pause and appreciate the abundance in our lives. Most importantly, Eid encourages us to share these blessings with others, especially those in need. The act of giving during Eid, whether it be through the sacrifice of animals or charitable donations, embodies the spirit of compassion and community that is essential to our shared humanity. This tradition of generosity reinforces the values of empathy and solidarity, reminding us that we are all interconnected and responsible for one another’s well-being.

However, in the aftermath of pandemic, ongoing conflicts, and the rising cost of living, it is becoming increasingly difficult for families to extend their support to those in need. The economic disruptions caused by these global challenges have strained household budgets, making it harder to maintain the tradition of giving that is so integral to Eid. Inflation, job losses, and reduced economic activity have significantly impacted the financial stability of many families. This situation is a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities within our economic systems and underscores the importance of finding sustainable solutions to support our communities.

In Oman, a significant portion of the population relies on income from jobs in the public sector, including state-owned enterprises (SOEs). While these jobs have historically provided stability and security, they also represent a concentration of economic dependence on a single sector. This dependency poses a risk, particularly in times of economic downturns or shifts in government policy. The public sector cannot indefinitely absorb the growing number of job-seekers, and relying too heavily on it limits the potential for economic innovation and resilience. To ensure long-term economic stability, it is crucial to diversify income sources and reduce over-reliance on the public sector.

Diversifying income sources offers numerous benefits. It can enhance economic resilience by spreading risk



Let us commit to fostering a diverse and dynamic economic landscape that enables us to continue the tradition of generosity for generations to come

across various sectors, reducing the impact of sector-specific downturns. By fostering entrepreneurship and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), we can create a more dynamic and innovative economy. Additionally, diversification can lead to the development of new industries, generating employment opportunities and boosting overall economic growth.

BY EMBRACING EDUCATION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND SECTORAL INNOVATION, OMAN CAN BUILD A RESILIENT AND PROSPEROUS ECONOMY THAT BENEFITS ALL ITS CITIZENS

Encouraging investment in sectors such as tourism, renewable energy, and technology can unlock new avenues for wealth creation and reduce the pressure on the public sector. A diversified economy is better equipped to adapt to global changes and sustain its growth trajectory.

There are several ways in which people in Oman can diversify their income sources. One approach is to invest in education and skills development, equipping the workforce with the capabilities needed for

emerging industries. Vocational training and continuous learning programmes can help individuals transition to new fields and take advantage of opportunities in sectors like technology, healthcare, and green energy. Additionally, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship is essential. Providing access to financing, mentorship, and business development services can empower aspiring entrepreneurs to start their ventures and contribute to economic diversification.

Supporting SMEs is another critical strategy. Simplifying regulatory processes, offering tax incentives, and improving access to markets can help small businesses thrive and become significant contributors to the economy. Furthermore, promoting tourism and leveraging Oman’s natural and cultural assets can attract international visitors and generate income for local communities. Investing in sustainable tourism initiatives ensures that the benefits are long-lasting and environmentally responsible.

In conclusion, Eid Al Adha serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of sharing our blessings and supporting those in need. However, the economic challenges posed by recent global crises highlight the necessity of diversifying our income sources. By embracing education, entrepreneurship, and sectoral innovation, Oman can build a resilient and prosperous economy that benefits all its citizens. This Eid, let us commit to fostering a diverse and dynamic economic landscape that enables us to continue the tradition of generosity for generations to come.

# Oman is more than a job destination

An often-asked question to anyone who exits the Sultanate of Oman is how good the country to work and what it is like to live in. The shared answer is: “It’s amazing, and you won’t feel like you’re an expat living there.”

No doubt, Oman’s beautiful and dramatic landscape leaves everyone in awe. The easy-going lifestyle, the friendly Omani people and the pleasant weather all make it a lovely place to live. Muscat’s blend of traditional Arabian architecture and modern infrastructure instantly captivates anyone who steps into the city. The facility that one can find and enjoy in any modern and cosmopolitan city is accessible in this country as well.

Furthermore, Oman is a pretty tolerant and safe country as well. It boasts of the reputation of being one of the safest countries in the region with its low crime rates. It offers a sense of safety for residents and visitors alike.

In the recent years, Oman has emerged as a promising hub for expats seeking to enhance their careers and enrich their lives. Its stable economy, hospitable environment, and the Omani government’s commitment to cultural diversity have made it an attractive destination for foreign professionals and families.

All these are the result of the country’s visionary leadership and the tangible impact of the prevailing policies. After all, visionary leadership means more than just having a vision; it is all about articulating it in a way that inspires and mobilises others. Oman’s historical geopolitical role has been anything but straightforward or, for that matter, stable. Oman’s unique identity sets it apart from the other countries and contributes to the contemporary role it plays in the region.

In the Global Peace Index



Samuel Kutty  
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IN OMAN, WHAT WE FIND IS THE VISION OF A MODERN AND PROSPEROUS NATION GALVANISING THE PEOPLE TOWARDS A SHARED GOAL

2024, Oman has been ranked as the third-most peaceful country in the Middle East and North Africa. The ranking also placed Oman 37th in the world. This consistent improvement reflects Oman’s dedicated efforts towards enhancing internal stability and promoting a peaceful society.

Oman is among the safest countries in the world for expatriates, with the country ranked fourth for personal safety and ninth for political stability, according to the Expat Insider 2023 survey. In Oman, what we find is the vision of a modern and prosperous nation galvanising the people towards a shared goal. As a result, the expats who work in the Sultanate of Oman are also enjoying the fruits of this transformation.

Coming back to the question about life in Oman, as a person who stayed in the Sultanate of Oman for two and a half decades, my own experience testifies that the quality of life in the country is excellent. The social scene is vibrant, allows a lot of freedom to foreigners and promotes tolerance of other religions. Particularly motivating in Oman is how much the citizens love their ruler. They genuinely love him.

Omanis are known for having the most hospitable culture in the Gulf countries. They share their food, their culture, whatever — all without expecting anything back. I was overwhelmed by the kindness of people. Even after my exit, I still enjoy it. Let me say that the Sultanate of Oman’s vibrant culture, stunning landscapes and warm-hearted people still have an indelible mark on my life’s journey. Oman has been more than just a job destination; it has become a place of personal growth and self-discovery.

To conclude, living in Oman presented me with a blend of modern comforts and traditional values in a peaceful setting.

## DOUSING HEAT



A boy swims in the water of Iraq’s Euphrates River to cool off during an extreme heatwave in Nasiriyah in the southern Dhi Qar province on Tuesday. – AFP

# Putin-Kim pact an opportunity for the west

June has been a busy month for Russian President Vladimir Putin. In a speech at Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he outlined his terms for peace negotiations with Ukraine and proposed establishing an alternative international security system in collaboration with China.

A week later, during a two-day visit to Pyongyang, he signed a strategic defence pact with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Russia and North Korea pledged to provide each other with immediate military assistance in the event of war, leaving no doubt about the Kremlin’s determination to undermine the US-led international order by forming alliances with authoritarians around the world.

In his hour-long address on June 14, just before a Ukraine-led peace summit in Switzerland, Putin covered a wide range of topics. He began with the so-called “special military operation” in Ukraine, discussed the “inevitable” emergence of a new multipolar world order, and addressed Western efforts to “restrain the development of the Global South,” noting Russia’s presidency of the BRICS+ group.

In addition to his usual grievances, Putin outlined Russia’s conditions for peace in Ukraine, demanding that Ukrainian forces withdraw from the four regions annexed by Russia in 2022. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky quickly rejected these terms, which bear a striking resemblance to the ultimatum issued by Putin at the outset of the war. Zelensky’s rejection was



Ana Palacio

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THE PACT LEAVES NO DOUBT ABOUT PUTIN’S DETERMINATION TO OVERTHROW THE EXISTING INTERNATIONAL ORDER. BUT THE AGREEMENT COULD ALSO STRAIN THE KREMLIN’S RELATIONS WITH CHINA

echoed by Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who emphasised that it is Russia that must withdraw from Ukrainian territory. Even prominent Russian commentators recognised Putin’s demands as unrealistic, viewing them as an attempt to pressure the West rather than a genuine attempt to achieve peace.

Putin also confirmed once again that Russia is at war not only with Ukraine — which it considers a proxy — but with the West, especially the United States. Predicting the imminent collapse of the “entire system of Euro-Atlantic security” and denouncing Western strategies for ensuring Europe’s defence, Putin outlined a five-step plan for establishing a Eurasian system of bilateral and multilateral collective-security guarantees.

This framework, Putin argued, would complement Chinese global security initiatives, marking another stage in Russia’s “no limits” partnership with China. Stressing that the new security alliance would be open to Nato members, Putin urged European countries to reconsider the military presence of “external powers in the Eurasian region” — a clear departure from Nato principles.

While these arguments were not new, the emphasis on the Global South, particularly Africa and Latin America, stood out. Like other demagogues and authoritarians,

Putin highlighted the significance of BRICS+ as a geopolitical counterweight to Western power and expressed support for efforts to develop an independent payment system for member countries, free from Western control. This is part of Russia’s broader strategy to undermine the existing global financial architecture, thereby mitigating the impact of US-led economic sanctions.

The timing of Putin’s speech was not coincidental. It reflected the Kremlin’s ongoing effort to shape critical policy debates in the West and influence election campaigns in countries like France, where Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally could undermine European efforts to devise a coherent Russia strategy.

A significant portion of Putin’s speech was dedicated to the

European Union, which he has long considered subordinate to the US. In a clear attempt to revive old divisions, he addressed “politicians of truly European and global scale” who are “patriots of their countries and nations” and who, like the late French President Charles de Gaulle, understand that Europe’s well-being depends on maintaining friendly relations with Russia.

Putin, of course, neglected to mention his own efforts to undermine the existing global order. Together with China, Russia has long acted as a spoiler in the United Nations Security Council. But Russia’s recent actions — such as using its veto to end a humanitarian mission to rebel-controlled areas in Syria and to shut down an expert panel monitoring compliance with economic sanctions on North Korea — have

alarmed international diplomats.

The terms of the security pact with Kim mirror the 1961 treaty between the Soviet Union and North Korea and represent a significant escalation, even by Putin’s standards. In addition to North Korean support for Putin’s war of aggression in Ukraine, the agreement signals increased Russian support for Kim’s nuclear ambitions, to the detriment of North Korea’s neighbours, including China.

In response, South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador and announced that it will consider sending weapons to Ukraine. China, North Korea’s largest trading partner, has sought to distance itself from this rogue alliance. But Russia’s advances could ultimately erode China’s influence over North Korea and escalate tensions with the West, thus jeopardising Chinese President Xi Jinping’s long-term geopolitical ambitions.

Given that Putin is unlikely to abandon his efforts to erode Western unity and undermine the current international order, the West should focus on exploiting any potential rifts, even minor ones, between Russia and China. In this regard, Putin’s alliance with Kim offers an ideal opportunity to weaken the Sino-Russian partnership.



Kim Jong Un (R) and Vladimir Putin in Pyongyang. – AFP file photo

# sport



## AL ZUBAIR TEAM ALL SET FOR 24 HOURS OF SPA

**SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (BELGIUM):** The regular Al Manar Racing by Getspeed trio of Oman's Al Faisal bin Khalid al Zubair, Austrian Dominik Baumann and Canadian Mikaël Grenier will be joined by new Swiss racer Philip Ellis for this weekend's CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa, the flagship second round of the 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup.

The quartet are entered in the Gold category in their Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo and will be bidding for a podium finish and a class victory. Al Zubair, Baumann and Grenier began the season as a three-driver line-up to finish second in the Gold category at the opening round at the Paul Ricard circuit in France in early April.

Ellis, 31, will be driving alongside Al Zubair for the first time, although the Munich-born Swiss racer has considerable experience across GT World Challenge America, the IMSA SportsCar Championship, the International GT Challenge and the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup. He began this season with Winward Racing in the IMSA SportsCar Championship and has planned programmes in GT World Challenge America, the Intercontinental GT Challenge, in addition to his tie-in with Al Manar Racing by GetSpeed.

Al Faisal said: "I am really excited to get this weekend's Spa 24 started. It's definitely one of the biggest events in the endurance racing calendar. It is definitely the biggest GT race of the year.

It won't be easy. There are 67 cars, I believe, across all the classes so the field will be extremely competitive throughout.

"Nonetheless, our package is very strong with the drivers, the car and the team. It's looking good so far. The track has been resurfaced since the recent test and it definitely won't be easy. We are committed to perform our best and hopefully we can come back with a podium position or a win in class. I am really looking forward to it."

Rivals in the Gold category are the current class-leading Saintéloc Racing Audi R8, the 2 Seas Motorsport Mercedes-AMG, a Haupt Racing Team Mercedes, a Tresor Attempto Racing Audi and the CSA Racing Audi R8. Saintéloc Racing is a former winner at Spa.

A hectic weekend's action gets underway with a free practice session on Thursday (June 27) morning from 11.20hrs (CET) and this is followed by a pre-qualifying stint at 16.30hrs and three qualifying sessions, starting at

20.35hrs, 20.57hrs and 21.41hrs, respectively. Night practice will then be permitted from 22.25hrs.

Friday's (June 28) action features a Super Pole session from 15.45hrs and an evening warm-up from 20.10hrs.

The CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa fires into life at 16.30hrs on Saturday (June 29) on the famous Belgian 7.004 km circuit and finishes at the same time on Sunday (June 30). Belgian racing legend Jackie Ickx will officially flag the cars away from the start.



Try Sailing as part of Oman Sail Activities during Barka Fort Night.

## OMAN SAIL TAKE PART IN BARKA FORT NIGHTS FESTIVAL

**MUSCAT:** Oman Sail introduced over 250 school students and visitors to sailing and windsurfing during the five-day Barka Fort Nights festival. Held at Al Muraisi Beach, a total of 266 men and women took the opportunity to learn the first stages of sailing and windsurfing from qualified Oman Sail coaches and connect with Oman's maritime heritage.

Nawaf al Ghadani, Oman Sail's Deputy Head of Sailing Schools, said, "We are very proud to be part of the Barka Fort Nights festival and pass on our expertise to visitors of all ages. The festival aimed to show the historical significance of the Barka area and the potential for the growth of tourism, and through sailing Oman Sail is able to showcase our nation's rich maritime history as well as its prosperous future as a sports and adventure tourism destination."

"Oman Sail is committed to making a significant contribution to national objectives for a diverse and thriving tourism sector. By hosting international events, creating opportunities to represent the nation and teaching valuable skills through sport, Oman Sail's Sailing Schools are actively supporting the development of the next generation of Omani sailors. Being part of festivals such as Barka Fort Nights is the perfect platform for organisations to join hands and support regional communities," he added.

Organised by the Al Batinah South Governorate, the Barka Fort Nights festival also featured theatre productions, an operetta illustrating the history of the Wilayat of Barka, an innovation hackathon and forums to share more about the culture of the area as well as plans for the development of tourism.





Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko hits a return to Greet Minnen. – AFP

## Former champion Ostapenko wins Eastbourne opener

**EASTBOURNE:** Jelena Ostapenko launched her bid for a second Eastbourne title with a gritty straight sets win over Greet Minnen in the first round of the Wimbledon warm-up event on Monday, while top seed Elena Rybakina withdrew from the tournament.

Latvian fifth seed Ostapenko, the 2021 Eastbourne champion, defeated the Belgian qualifier 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 in just under 90 minutes on court.

There was a worrying moment for Ostapenko, the 2017 French Open champion, when she fell on the grass midway through the second set but the world number 13 recovered to close out the win.

Ostapenko once won nine straight matches at Eastbourne, taking the 2021 title on England's south coast and reaching the 2022 final before her successful run was ended by Petra Kvitova.

"I think the surface suits me really well," Ostapenko said after Monday's match.

"The first time I played on grass, I was like, 'how can we play tennis on this surface? I don't understand what's happening here'. But then every year was better and better."

Asked about her fall, Ostapenko, 27, added: "Grass is a great surface, but sometimes it can be really slippery and really tricky. So I took the medical time-out just to make sure I'm fine."

The leading four players at Eastbourne were all given byes into the second round but top-seed Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, withdrew from the event on Monday following what the WTA said was a "change of schedule".

Her decision to pull out meant 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin advanced into the second round as a "lucky loser".

The 25-year-old American will now play Britain's Harriet Dart. A wildcard entry, Dart delighted the home crowd on Monday by outlasting former Wimbledon quarterfinalist Marie Bouzkova 7-5, 6-7 (7/9), 6-4 in a marathon encounter of nearly three-and-a-half hours.

In the parallel Eastbourne men's ATP Tour event, Chinese teenager Shang Juncheng won his first senior level grass-court match by defeating seventh-seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4). — AFP

# SAYYID ALI QUALIFIES FOR WORLD ENDURANCE CUP



SPORTS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

The Omani rider HH Sayyid Ali bin Ghalib al Said succeeded in obtaining the qualification card for the finals of World Endurance Cup, which is scheduled to be held in the French city of Monpazier, for a distance of 160 km during this year.

HH Sayyid Ali was able to pass all stages and stations of the races qualifying for the finals in his first participation.

The last qualifying station was Samorin race in Slovakia for a distance of 160 km. He was able to successfully pass the five stages, 35 km was the first stage, the same in the second stage, 40 km in the third stage, 25 km in the fourth stage, and 25 km in the fifth and final stage. The races were characterised by difficulty and fluctuating weather conditions.

Recently five of the Royal Cavalry riders succeeded in obtaining qualification cards for the upcoming World Endurance Cup finals. HH Sayyid Ali bin Ghalib al Said is the only rider from private stables to obtain the award qualification card.

He passed all races with all success despite his new entry into the endurance racing with his brother, HH Sayyid Louay bin Ghalib al Said, who has one race left in order to reach the World Cup finals.

The jockey began his journey in 2022 to prepare for his presence in the World Endurance Cup finals. He went through a number of training programmes, and participated in a number of stations. He started in the Buch race in Germany, for a distance of 140 km. Then he moved to the second race, for a distance of 140 km, over two days, 70 km for each day, in the German city of Buch. And then he ran the third race in Slovakia, for a distance of 120 km, during which he rode the horses 'Evala' and 'Attila'.

The International Equestrian Federation has set a number of requirements to qualify for the World Cup finals, which are the rider have to pass a number of specific races with a star classification and at different distances with one or several horses. The International Federation seeks to find an easy path in order to obtain qualifying cards.

## Afghanistan braced for 'massive' T20 World Cup semifinal

**TAROUBA, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO:** Afghanistan's remarkable journey at the T20 World Cup will take another "massive" step forward on Wednesday when they face South Africa in the first semifinal at the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba.

It is an intriguing encounter which will produce a first-time finalist to take on either 2007 winners India or defending champions England who meet in the second semifinal at Guyana's Providence Stadium on Thursday.

Celebrations in Afghanistan after Monday's Super Eight win over Bangladesh had ensured their passage at the expense of Australia were quickly closed down by the Taliban authorities.

But there may well be many more people on the streets if Rashid Khan can lead his team to the final with a win over the Proteas.

"I think the semifinal is going to be a massive, massive inspiration for the youngsters back home in Afghanistan," said skipper Rashid. "It's an unbelievable feeling."

It is appropriate the Afghans will play in a stadium bearing Lara's name because, as Rashid



Afghanistan's players celebrate the winning. – AFP

said, the former West Indies great was "the only person who mentioned Afghanistan will be in semis".

"I think when you get the kind of great, great statements from a legend, as a team, I think it gives you lots of energy as well," said Rashid.

"We are capable -- but as long we keep the things very simple and I think in the whole competition so far, we kept the thing simple."

South Africa won the 1998 Champions Trophy but have a history of stumbling in the semifinals of previous white ball

World Cups.

They made it to the final four this time with seven wins in seven matches but they have been pushed to the limit, beating England, Bangladesh and Nepal by seven runs, four runs and one run respectively.

"Obviously most of the games

have been a lot closer than we would have personally liked but the amazing thing is that this new Proteas team always seems to get over the line," said left-arm spinner Tabraiz Shamsi.

"We've been put under huge pressure in every single game that we've played and the boys have managed to find a way to win no matter what the situation is, no matter how close the game is."

"That's really pleasing for us as a unit."

**HEAVYWEIGHT CONTEST**  
India have not won a major ICC competition since lifting the 2013 Champions Trophy, increasing the pressure on skipper Rohit Sharma to deliver for the pre-tournament favourites.

The 37-year-old opener slammed 92 off 41 balls on Monday to lead the charge against the Australians, resulting in a 24-run win and a modicum of revenge for their defeat to the same opponents in last year's 50-over World Cup on home soil.

Rohit said afterwards that India "don't want to do anything different" in the semifinal against England.

"We want to play the same way,

understand what the individuals need to do in a given situation, and play freely. "So far we've been doing that consistently, and (in the) semifinals, we have to try and do the same thing. Nothing changes for us, we want to focus on what we can do as a team, and take the game on."

The English, champions in 2010 and 2022, made a sluggish start to the tournament with a loss to the Australians in the group stage followed by another defeat by the Proteas in the Super Eight.

But they have shown the ability to move up a gear when the situation demands.

"We have to do our homework and make sure we plan well and try to execute, and then make sure we get to the final," said Chris Jordan who took a hat-trick in their last game, a crushing win over USA.

The Surrey all-rounder remained laid-back about the prospect of facing the strength of the Indians. "You have to beat the best at some point to win the tournament," he said.

The only dampener to the semifinal action is the prospect of rain.

— AFP

# Sabitzer snatches Austria Euros group win against Netherlands



Austria players celebrate after the match. – Reuters

**BERLIN:** Marcel Sabitzer lashed home to earn Austria a thrilling 3-2 win against the Netherlands on Tuesday and send his team through top of Euro 2024 Group D, ahead of tournament favourites France and the third-place Dutch.

All three nations are through to the last 16 but Ralf Rangnick's intense Austria side showed why some consider them dark horses to win the tournament for the first time on a rollicking afternoon in Berlin.

Donyell Malen's own goal sent Austria ahead but Cody Gakpo pulled the Dutch level early in the second half.

Romano Schmid headed home for Austria with Memphis Depay pegging them back once more, before Sabitzer settled the frantic, end-to-end tussle.

Rangnick made four changes for Austria from the side that effectively knocked out Poland, with defender Gernot Trauner, who scored in that victory, injured, while Christoph Baumgartner also netted and was left on the bench.

Meanwhile Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman selected Malen in attack as one of three changes from the goalless draw against France last week.

The Borussia Dortmund forward

got off to an unfortunate start though when he slid in to deflect Alexander Prass' cross into his own net, as he tried to stop it reaching the lurking Marko Arnautovic.

Dutch midfielder Tijjani Reijnders had a fine chance to swiftly equalise, scuffing his shot badly wide after a neat exchange with Gakpo.

Netherlands supporters have lit up the tournament with their vibrant orange glow but Austria fans outnumbered and outsung them in Berlin. As Rangnick's men fizzed the ball around their struggling Dutch counterparts, supporters gleefully cheered each successful pass.

Koeman seethed on the touchline and flung his arms down in frustration as Malen sent a bobbling shot beyond the far post when well placed. The former Barcelona coach brought on Xavi Simons after only 34 minutes for midfielder Joey Veerman to add more spark and creativity to his team's disjointed display.

However it was Austria who carved out the next big chance, with Bart Verbruggen saving Sabitzer's drive and Arnautovic unable to get his footwork right to turn home from close range moments later as his team kept the move alive.

— AFP



Marcel Sabitzer celebrates scoring his team's third goal. – AFP

# Mbappe, Lewandowski score penalties at Euro 2024

**DORTMUND, Germany:** Kylian Mbappe scored a penalty on his return after breaking his nose but Robert Lewandowski's reply meant France and Poland drew 1-1 in their final group game at Euro 2024 on Tuesday.

The result, combined with Austria's 3-2 victory over the Netherlands at the same time, means France finish second in Group D with one win and two draws.

Wearing a mask to protect his injured nose, Mbappe rolled in a spot-kick to put France ahead early in the second half in Dortmund after Ousmane Dembele was brought down in the Poland area.

It was Mbappe's first ever goal at a European Championship, and the first scored by a France player at this year's tournament — their only prior counter was an own goal by Austria's Maximilian Woeber.

Yet Lewandowski, Poland's

all-time top scorer who was himself starting for the first time at Euro 2024 after a thigh injury, equalised from a penalty at the other end 11 minutes from time.

His first kick was saved by Mike Maignan, but Lewandowski was allowed a retake as the France goalkeeper came off his line before the ball had been struck.

France will now head to Duesseldorf for a last-16 tie next Monday against the runners-up in Group E, which will be Belgium, Romania, Slovakia or Ukraine.

More significantly, they are now on the same side of the draw as Portugal, Spain and Germany, which they would have avoided by topping the group.

Often imprecise and lacking in intensity here, the 2022 World Cup runners-up will certainly need to improve on this performance, and their previous group outings, if they are to win



Poland's Lukasz Skorupski shakes hands with France's Kylian Mbappe after the match. – Reuters

the competition.

Poland had already been eliminated before this game, becoming the first team to go out after losing their opening two matches.

This result at least allowed Michal Probierz's side to rescue

some pride and gave some cheer to their large support.

## GRIEZMANN DROPPED

It was not just the return of the masked Mbappe — who missed France's 0-0 draw with the Netherlands — that was

notable when the line-ups were announced, with Antoine Griezmann unusually left out of the starting XI.

Instead Bradley Barcola got his first start for his country as coach Didier Deschamps went with the front three that played together for Paris Saint-Germain over the past season.

Lewandowski, returning to the stadium where he made his name with Borussia Dortmund a decade ago, had one big chance in the first half, heading wide while unmarked from Piotr Zielinski's cross.

Mbappe spent much of the opening period struggling to get into the game, occasionally stopping to adjust his mask, and removing it entirely during a drinks break in sweltering conditions.

Theo Hernandez was the first France player to test Lukasz Skorupski, starting in goal instead of Wojciech Szczesny

who is set to retire from the Poland team soon after the Euros.

Meanwhile Mbappe started to come to life towards the end of the opening half.

On two separate occasions he quickly exchanged passes with Barcola on the left side of the box before having a shot saved by Skorupski.

The Bologna goalkeeper then dived to his left to keep out a trademark Mbappe curler just after the restart, but there was nothing he could do about the penalty which broke the deadlock on 56 minutes.

Dembele's end product had been almost non-existent until he produced a burst of pace on the right as he broke into the box, and all Jakub Kiwior could do was chop him down.

Italian referee Marco Guida immediately pointed to the spot, and Mbappe rolled in his kick before removing his mask as he ran off to celebrate. — AFP



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# 9 bidders prequalified for RO 155m Ibri III Solar IPP

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP), the sole buyer of power and water output in the Sultanate of Oman, has prequalified nine international companies to participate in the competitive tender for the development of Ibri III Solar IPP – a 500 MW project estimated to cost RO 155 million.

The prequalified parties are: Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar), ACWA Power, Al Riyadh National Trading and Korea Midland Power (“KOMIPO”), Jinko Power, Sembcorp Utilities, TotalEnergies Renewables, EDF Renouvelables and Korean Western Power (“KOWEPO”), International Power SA (Engie) and Sumitomo Corporation.

The procurement of this solar



The Ibri III Solar PV project is the fourth large-scale solar scheme to be developed in Oman.

project is part of the Omani government’s policy to diversify energy resources to meet the

growing demand for electricity. The implementation of this project will follow the successful

precedent IPP model established in the Sultanate of Oman and involves a fair and transparent

competition process with the objective of awarding the contract to a highly qualified private sector developer with a view to deliver world class technology solutions to advance Oman’s renewable energy and energy resource diversification goals.

In response to its request for qualification floated in January this year, Nama Power and Water Procurement Company received twelve submissions for qualification submitted by local and international developers.

Nine applicants have been either conditionally, or unconditionally qualified. The developers are from Sultanate of Oman, United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, China, South Korea, Singapore, France, and Japan.

“After a rigorous evaluation process, Nama Power and Water Procurement is pleased to announce the unconditionally

prequalified and conditionally prequalified applicants,” said PWP in a press statement.

“Nama Power and Water Procurement Company is currently working to finalise the Request for Proposals which will soon be issued to the above-listed prequalified applicants upon receipt of the relevant approvals,” it added.

Ibri III Solar IPP is the fourth solar IPP that has been tendered by Nama Power and Water Procurement Company following Ibri II Solar IPP (operational since summer 2021) and Manah I Solar IPP and Manah II Solar IPP (under construction).

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company is working along with Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Authority for Public Services Regulation to achieve the energy renewable targets set in Oman Vision 2040.

## Key study to assess small pelagic fish stocks in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI  
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has announced the launch of a study to assess the status of pelagic fish stocks along the coasts of Oman.

According to officials, the study, which will be conducted by the Marine Science and Fisheries Centre of the Directorate General of Fisheries Research, is significant due to the vital economic role of these fish and their importance to food security.

The results of the study will be used to develop and improve the condition of small pelagic fish stocks, ensure their sustainability and increase fish production.

The study will cover four types of fish sardines, Indian mackerel, anchovies, and deep water anchovies. According to the Ministry, samples will be collected from along the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

The study will focus on the biological characteristics and measurements of the samples, including age, size, length and reproductive methods.

The study will aim to identify the status of the stock in each coastal governorate. The fisheries and aquaculture



The study will cover four types of fish sardines, Indian mackerel, anchovies, and deep water anchovies.

sector is expected to contribute \$5.2 billion in value to the local GDP by 2040 according to Invest Oman.

Officials have also stressed that value-added products have a bigger economic potential than raw fish.

Highlighting the significant difference in this value, in remarks to the *Observer* last year, Redha Bait Faraj, the previous Director General of Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing at the Ministry, pointed out that a metric tonne of fresh sardines has a value of RO 350, while a canned tonne has a value of RO 575.

Earlier this year, Simak, the largest fish canning factory in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, began operations in Al Wusta Governorate, with a daily output capacity of 192,000 cans of sardines and 180,000 cans of tuna.

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
SALALAH, JUNE 25

The Sultanate of Oman has embarked on a resolute mission to achieve food security, characterized by the rollout of strategic programmes and investments encompassing all facets of the food economy — agriculture, farming, fisheries, aquaculture, food processing, cold chain management, animal feed, and even vaccine production.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Dr Ahmed al Hadhari, head of the Agricultural Society in Dhofar Governorate, elucidated the significance of self-sufficiency in the context of the Sultanate of Oman’s agricultural landscape.

“Food security entails guaranteeing our nation’s nutritional independence,” asserted Dr Al Hadhari.

“It is the cornerstone of a robust Oman — one that cultivates an abundance of agricultural produce while ensuring its consistent market availability.”

The lynchpins of this strategy, according to Dr Al Hadhari, are twofold: bolstering agricultural production and safeguarding the integrity of Oman’s arable land.

“Preserving our agricultural heritage — from fertile fields to verdant pastures — is paramount,” he underscores. “Modern agricultural practices, encompassing cutting-edge technologies and sustainable methods, are vital to achieving this objective.”

He highlighted in this regard the importance of fostering a spirit of agricultural entrepreneurship among Oman’s youth, incentivising their participation in this vital sector.

Playing an instrumental role in bolstering food security are a number of state-led projects. “The establishment of Mazoon Dairy has significantly bolstered Oman’s dairy industry,” said Dr Al Hadhari.

Likewise, initiatives such as Dhofar Feed, Oman Flour Mills, and the shrimp farming project in Al Sharqiyah as testaments to the government’s unwavering commitment to agricultural progress.

“Nakeel Oman Development plays a pivotal role in optimising date palm cultivation, a cornerstone of our agricultural heritage,” he added.

Dr Al Hadhari outlined the Agricultural Society’s mission as a multifaceted endeavour.

“We collaborate with government entities to address the challenges faced by our farmers,” he explained.

“Our focus is on knowledge dissemination, guiding farmers in adopting modern technologies and sustainable practices. The Society champions the transfer of technical expertise and the judicious use of environmentally friendly agricultural methods.”

The Agricultural Society’s vision for the future is as ambitious as it is commendable. “We envision a future where



Our focus is on knowledge dissemination, guiding farmers in adopting modern technologies and sustainable practices. The Society champions the transfer of technical expertise and the judicious use of environmentally friendly agricultural methods

DR AHMED AL HADHARI  
Head, Agricultural Society  
Dhofar Governorate

member farms flourish,” Dr Al Hadhari stated.

This vision, he elaborated, hinges on forging sustainable partnerships and achieving shared objectives with the government.

“Our unwavering pursuit is to transform Oman’s agricultural sector from tradition-bound practices to a bastion of economic viability,” he asserted, adding that

localizing agricultural products, establishing effective marketing channels, and optimising water usage are all integral to this transformation.

The cornerstone of achieving these objectives, Dr Al Hadhari emphasises, lies in collaboration.

“Robust partnerships with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning are imperative,” he states. Cooperation with financial institutions and logistics companies is equally crucial, he underscores.

But the road to food security is not without its hurdles. He highlights the challenges of overlapping ministerial oversight, the dearth of dedicated headquarters for agricultural associations, and the burgeoning costs of agricultural land and inputs

“The absence of post-harvest services and a streamlined agricultural marketing system also present significant obstacles,” he noted.

In conclusion, Dr Al Hadhari said the sector continues to be imbued with a sense of shared responsibility.

“The Agricultural Society is merely one thread in the intricate tapestry of food security. With unwavering support and collaborative efforts, we are confident that Oman can cultivate a future of agricultural abundance and sustainable economic prosperity.”

# Meethaq wins Oman’s best domestic bank award from Euromoney

MUSCAT: In recognition of its leading role in providing banking services that comply with Islamic Shari’a principles, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat received the Best Domestic Islamic Bank Award in the Sultanate of Oman 2024 at the Euromoney Awards for Excellence.

The award was received on behalf of the Bank by Mohammed bin Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative of the UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, at a recent ceremony held in Dubai in the presence of prominent industry figures from the Middle East and across the world.

“This achievement represents outstanding recognition by a reputed global organisation and serves as a distinctive accolade to Meethaq’s record of success,” stated Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq



Personal Banking. He added “This award reaffirms Meethaq’s leadership in providing various facilities and services compliant with the Shari’a, catering to

the needs of different society segments.

It gives us a greater responsibility to continue developing products, services and banking facilities for

our valued customers.”

Every Meethaq product undergoes Shari’a compliance certification by the Shari’a Supervisory Board and adheres

to the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman. The adoption of the standards of the Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) standards distinguishes Meethaq Islamic banking practices in terms of products and services standardisation.

Meethaq Islamic Banking boasts the largest Islamic branch network in Oman, with 29 branches, a dedicated network of over 50 ATMs/CDMs, and free access to more than 870 ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country.

Meethaq’s customers can also benefit from the online services available through the Internet and mobile banking.

To ensure convenient access to banking services around the clock and to promptly address inquiries, Meethaq Islamic banking customers can call the 24/7 contact centre at 24656666.

Ooredoo  
Oman  
named most  
outstanding  
telco of the  
year



MUSCAT: In recognition of its dedication and hard work to upgrade the worlds of customers and communities across Oman, Ooredoo has been named Most Outstanding Telecommunications Company of the Year – Oman, at the M&A Today Global Awards 2024. The purpose of the M&A Today Global Awards is to provide the readership with a comprehensive understanding of those firms that are truly leaders within their chosen areas of specialisation.

Ooredoo’s commitment to its customers and communities is at the heart of everything the telco does and the driving force behind its continual improvement and innovation.

The award recognises Ooredoo’s seamless client-focussed digital customer experience, strong connectivity countrywide, unique social responsibility initiatives and leading tech, to provide consumers and businesses with all-round excellence.

# MG Oman celebrates 100 years with unbeatable price offers



MUSCAT: MG Motor, a symbol of British automotive heritage and innovation, proudly marks its 100th

anniversary with an incredible celebration in Oman. To honour this milestone, MG Motor Oman is

thrilled to announce unbeatable offers on their SUV range, promising exceptional value for all customers.

This summer, customers can drive home in select brand-new MG SUVs, with prices starting from an incredible RO 7,349. Customers can enjoy the following special offers on select models: the MG RX8 starts from RO 8,999, the MG HS from RO 9,999, the MG RX5 from RO 7,999, the MG ZS from RO 7,349, and the MG T60 from RO 9,799.

These offers come with added benefits, including free insurance and registration, 10,000 km free service, and comprehensive roadside assistance, ensuring a hassle-free ownership experience for all cars mentioned, except the T60, which

includes free registration only.

These exclusive benefits are designed to provide customers with a hassle-free and enjoyable driving experience, further highlighting MG’s commitment to customer satisfaction. Founded in 1924, MG has a rich heritage of producing stylish, reliable, and performance-driven vehicles. Over the past 100 years, MG has continually evolved, embracing cutting-edge technology and design to meet the needs of modern drivers. This limited-time offer is a testament to MG’s enduring legacy and a celebration of its journey from a historic British marque to a globally recognised brand. MG Oman invites all car enthusiasts and prospective buyers

to visit their showrooms and take advantage of this exceptional offer. Our knowledgeable and friendly sales team is ready to assist you in choosing the perfect MG model to suit your lifestyle and preferences.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked “As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of MG (Morris Garages), we are excited to launch a special price campaign to mark this historic milestone. This limited-time offer is our way of saying thank you to our loyal customers and inviting new ones to experience the legacy and excellence of MG. We are proud to honour a century of automotive heritage and look forward to driving into the future with you.”

# Oman Air gets Skytrax awards for best airline staff

MUSCAT: Oman Air has won the Skytrax 2024 World Airline Awards for Best Airline Staff in the Middle East. The award was accepted by Con Korfiatis, the Chief Executive Officer, at the awards’ 25th anniversary in Windsor, UK. It’s the seventh time Oman Air has earned the title. “Oman Air’s consistent success in this category underscores our unwavering dedication to fostering a service-oriented culture that is deeply rooted in the rich traditions of Omani hospitality. I am extremely proud of the Oman

Air family, both on board and on the ground, for proving time and again their relentless dedication to service excellence and their commitment to deliver an unmatched guest experience at every touchpoint,” said Con Korfiatis, Chief Executive Officer.

The Skytrax World Airline Awards are considered one of the most prestigious in the industry, with travellers across the globe taking part each year in the world’s largest airline passenger satisfaction survey to decide the winners.



# National Finance wins award for outstanding brand evolution

MUSCAT: Recognising the success of its exceptional brand transformation and strategic redesign, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, was recently honoured with the award for ‘Best Brand Evolution’ at the prestigious Transform Awards Middle East and Africa 2024.

Held at the Mandarin Oriental Jumeirah Beach, Dubai, the ceremony witnessed the attendance of industry luminaries from the region, C-suite executives and distinguished ministerial dignitaries.

Receiving the award on behalf of the company were HH Sayyidah Wisam bint Jaifar al Said, AGM — Marketing, Corporate Communication, Events and ESG, and Marwa al Siyabi, Marketing Supervisor at National Finance.

The Transform Awards MEA 2024 is the region’s premier event dedicated to celebrating the transformative power of brand strategy and design.

The ceremony marks the success of rebranding, repositioning and brand development endeavours across the region, highlighting their continuous strive for improvement and operational



enhancement.

First unveiled in early 2023, National Finance’s brand transformation exemplifies the company’s commitment to excellence and growth, blending the company’s 36-year history, expertise and trusted reputation

with a fresh identity.

Alongside, the new strategic business direction showcased the company’s renewed dedication to customer-centricity and organisational transformation to ensure employee satisfaction.

Commenting on this

accomplishment, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer, National Finance, said, “At National Finance, we are truly humbled by this honour.

Receiving recognition on the distinguished regional platform that is the Transform Awards MEA, is a testament to the company’s vision to revamp all facets of its approach, from a refreshed identity to service portfolio, to enhancements in the work culture, and employee engagement and growth opportunities. This achievement is a collective win for the National Finance team, as it is through the hard work and dedication of our talented staff that we have been able to scale new heights.”

National Finance’s receipt of this prestigious award is another milestone in its illustrious journey, underscoring the company’s forward-thinking approach, and dedication to being a trusted Partner for Growth for all.

With its refreshed brand identity, the company has set a benchmark for excellence in brand strategy and design, while reinvigorating its aim to provide exceptional services and experiences, characterised by its fast, easy, and flexible promise, to its valued customers.



Representatives from ABL Space Systems and Etlag Spaceport signing the MoU in the presence of CAA Chairman Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, and Ana Escrogima, US Ambassador to Oman.

## Etlag Spaceport signs MoU with ABL Space Systems

**BUSINESS REPORTER**

MUSCAT, JUNE 25

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) hosted the signing of an important Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the US based satellite launch company ABL Space Systems, and Etlag spaceport. The ceremony was attended by CAA Chairman Eng Naif bin Ali al Abri along with Ana Escrogima, the United States Ambassador to Oman.

Under the MOU, ABL and Etlag will explore launching ABL's RS1 launch vehicle from the Etlag Spaceport, bringing orbital satellite launch capability to the Gulf region.

The initial project focus is on evaluating local logistics and site construction, as well as developing regulatory and export control frameworks with both the US and Oman governments. The Etlag Spaceport located at 18-degree latitude, is expected to be operational in 2027 and will provide wide orbital access from sun synchronous to low inclination orbits. The nearby commercial airport and deepwater port in Duqm provide critical logistical capabilities to serve these satellite

missions. The spaceport will strengthen the Sultanate of Oman's space sector and position Oman as a regional and global leader in the space industry.

Harry O'Hanley, CEO of ABL, expressed his pleasure at signing the MoU, saying, "The Gulf region space ecosystem is growing immensely, with new investment and large ambition in exploration, science missions and constellation deployment. These efforts all benefit from local access to space and we're excited by the opportunity to partner with Etlag and the Sultanate of Oman to help provide this capability."

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, CEO of Etlag, highlighted the importance of this partnership stating, "We are proud of getting to this milestone with ABL Space Systems, and it reflects our commitment to developing the space sector in Oman. We believe that this MoU is a step in the right direction for us to position our spaceport as a global choice for established rocket companies."

This signing marks a significant step towards achieving Oman's goals in developing the local space sector, as well as enhancing international cooperation in space.

# Light and medium industries cluster takes shape in Duqm SEZ

**CONRAD PRABHU**

MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Phase 1 of a Light and Medium Industries Cluster is being readied at the Special Economic Zone in Duqm (SEZAD), paving the way for investment inflows into small and mid-scale manufacturing that seek to leverage Duqm's proximity to major markets in the Middle East, East Africa and Indian subcontinent.

Covering an area of 2.4 sq kilometres, Phase 1 already encompasses a number of small factories that have been in operation or development. This area is roughly divided equally between the Light Industries Area and the Medium Industries Area, collectively made up of around 700 plots.

According to details shared recently by SEZAD authorities, around 26 kilometres of arterial and secondary roads — both dual and single carriageways — have been constructed at a total cost of RO 19 million to enable streamlined access to the Light and Medium Industries Cluster.

They include roundabouts that facilitate traffic flows to and from National Road 32. Several key projects currently under development have been connected to the network as well.

The Small and Medium Industries Cluster is set to open



Masterplan for the Light and Medium Industries Cluster.



up a new stream of investments into the SEZ, which had pulled in an estimated RO 2.313 billion worth of committed investments in 2023 alone.

Distributed across 46 project agreements, the lion's share — amounting to RO 2.313 billion — came in the form of industrial investments. Investments in commercial and residential developments, tourism, logistics and government services made up the remainder.

Importantly, the Public Authority for Special Economic

Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed a large array of agreements in 2023 spanning the renewable energy, green hydrogen, green ammonia and green steel production sectors.

Notable is a land use agreement with Hyport Duqm for the production of green molecule based derivatives by harnessing solar and wind resources.

Similar MoUs for the development of green energy projects were also signed by SEZAD with a consortium headed by POSCO Energy,

another with BP Oman, and a third with Oman Shell.

Furthermore, SEZAD and the Port of Duqm also signed an agreement with Vulcan Green Steel for the construction of a steel mill in Duqm and the operation of an associated commercial berth.

In the realm of fisheries, a land use agreement was signed for the development of a major aquafeed farm on a 20,000 sqm site with a production capacity of 60,000 metric tonnes per year in the first phase.

# Muscat rises among top MENA ecosystems for startups

**JOMAR MENDOZA**

MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Muscat is becoming as a major hub for Middle East and North African (MENA) region businesses, according to a new Startup Genome analysis.

With an ecosystem worth estimated at around \$343 million, the Omani capital has managed to achieve a seat among the top 10 ecosystems for affordable talent, top 15 for optimising investment returns, and top 15 for knowledge.

Startup Genome said that a combination of regional and global venture capital firms, angel investors, and government programmes are creating a vibrant startup climate in Muscat.

An abundance of talented, entrepreneurially-minded engineering and business graduates contributes to the city's

favourable business environment.

Muscat has a wide range of expertise, including marketers, designers, software developers, and business strategists.

Oman's Vision 2040 is a blueprint designed to lessen the country's reliance on oil while promoting a diversified, sustainable economy. \$39 billion in investments, including 6,500 industrial projects expected to generate 270,000 new jobs, support this objective, Startup Genome added.

The Oman Vision 2040 initiatives aim to identify important industries for development, boost competitiveness, and encourage innovation. To act as centres for trade and investment, Special Economic Zones as well as Industrial and Logistics Zones are being created. As a premier logistics project, Duqm Free Zone



Muscat has a wide range of expertise, including marketers, designers, software developers, and business strategists.

is distinguished by its deep-sea port, airport, and vast industrial and commercial facilities.

Last month, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology signed an agreement to operate the Oman Startup Platform (OSH Platform) with Al Jaber Mena at the COMEX

2024 exhibition, marking a significant development.

Through the creation of a venue where companies can interact with funders, advisors, and fellow entrepreneurs, this programme seeks to boost the tech startup ecosystem.

The platform provides

WITH AN ECOSYSTEM WORTH ESTIMATED AT AROUND **\$343 MILLION**, THE OMANI CAPITAL HAS MANAGED TO ACHIEVE A SEAT AMONG THE **TOP 10 ECOSYSTEMS FOR AFFORDABLE TALENT**, TOP 15 FOR OPTIMISING INVESTMENT RETURNS, AND TOP 15 FOR KNOWLEDGE

a thorough synopsis of the ecosystem, outlining the requirements of startups and enumerating associated activities and events.

With over \$330 million in funding, the OSH Platform is home to 167 businesses and 47 incubators, accelerators, and growth sponsors.

The Promising Omani Startups Program Supervisory Committee announced in April 2024 the establishment of the Oman Future Fund, a new venture capital fund

that will inject \$5.2 billion over the course of five years into the ecosystem to boost local SMEs and draw in foreign investment.

In addition, the \$180 million Jasoor Fund was launched by the Oman Investment Authority and Abu Dhabi's ADQ with the goal of advancing the digital economy by funding \$8 billion worth of technology-related possibilities in Oman.

Asyad Group, a logistics provider, and Omantel, a major national telecom company, collaborated to develop an accelerator program that aims to support local tech companies in the logistics industry. With 1,500 attendees, the Promising Omani businesses Forum in December 2023 in Muscat demonstrated the dynamic and encouraging atmosphere for businesses in Oman.

## SHORT TAKES

### BENGALURU

#### India kicks off \$11.5 billion spectrum auction

India has offered telecom spectrum worth around \$11.53 billion for auction on Tuesday, it said in a release, even as analysts expect lacklustre participation from players as they shore up their existing spectrum.

A total of 10 GHz of radio waves is up for sale in this auction, ranging between 800 MHz to 26 GHz. The Indian government derives a big chunk of its revenue from spectrum auctions, which award telecom companies rights



over airwaves for a particular period. During the previous auction, telecom players together picked up 5G spectrum worth \$19 billion to boost capacities in the world's second-largest smartphone market. — **Reuters**

### WASHINGTON

#### Oil prices ease on stronger dollar

Crude oil prices edged lower on Tuesday, pressured by a stronger dollar, while investors shifted focus to US inflation data due this week.

Losses were limited, however, by escalating geopolitical tensions and hopes of improved demand this summer. Brent futures for August settlement were down 50 cents, or 0.6%, at \$84.75 a barrel by 12:22 GMT. US crude futures also dipped by 54 cents, or 0.7%, to \$81.22. Both benchmarks gained



about 3% last week, marking two straight weeks of gains.

The dollar was up 0.13%, highlighting currency strength that makes dollar-priced oil more expensive for buyers holding other currencies. — **Reuters**

### TOKYO

#### BoJ opens door for a hawkish double surprise

The Bank of Japan (BoJ) is dropping signals its quantitative tightening (QT) plan in July could be bigger than markets think, and may even be accompanied by an interest rate hike, as it steps up a steady retreat from its still-huge monetary stimulus.

Hawkish hints delivered over the past week highlight the pressure the central bank faces in the wake of renewed yen falls, which could push inflation well above its 2% target by raising import costs.



Notwithstanding a market shock or severe economic downturn, a rate hike would be on the table at each policy meeting, including July's, said three sources familiar with its thinking. — **Reuters**

# Finance bosses choose Labour as election draws closer



ANDY JALIL  
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Several top financial services figures have strongly backed the Labour Party while campaigning for the UK general election gathered force. Electoral commission records and conversations with donors show that efforts by the traditionally left-wing party to rebrand itself as

the party of business are bearing fruit. Founder of legal search firm SSQ, Gareth Quarry, said that he and his wife have made “four or five donations to Labour since the election was called, with the total now at about £350,000.

He previously supported the Conservatives. But after former prime minister Boris Johnson had spoken about his total disregard toward business, the historic party of business “then couldn’t give a monkey’s”, Quarry said.

“The Tories have at every step of the way gone about creating havoc, creating uncertainty and putting me as a business owner on the back foot.

I got to know a number of Labour Party shadow front bench and realised how impressive and sensible and prudent they were and with a real will and ambition for change.”

Matthew Oakeshott, whose career in the financial district of London – known as ‘the City’ – has spanned Warburg and his own real estate investor Olim Property, said he was helping to fund Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Party candidates. “I’ve never been a Conservative, but I feel more comfortable now with Labour,” he said.

“Rachel Reeves (shadow chancellor) I have a high opinion of and have known for many years.”

As Labour has fostered closer ties with the City, other financiers have given money in the first quarter of 2024, including retired hedge fund boss Martin Taylor and Gibson Dunn partner Charlie Falconer.

Environmental entrepreneur Dale Vince told the *Financial Times* earlier this month that he

had topped up his donations to Labour by £1m the day after the election was called, taking his total to £5m.

Some City figures have stayed with the Tories. Michael Spencer, the founder of electronic markets and post-trade business NEX Group, which he sold in 2018, said: “You may well have read in the press that very recently I gave £250,000 to the Conservative Party towards the election campaign. Furthermore, I have made very many smaller donations to individual MPs.”

Healthcare software tycoon Frank Hester gave £150,000 to the Conservatives on 8 March, adding to the £5m he donated in January. Lord Michael Hintze, founder of asset manager CQS, donated £50,000 to the Conservatives. According to TheCityUK, the financial services

sector’s trade body, the next government should scrap the bank levy and surcharge tax to address “uncompetitive” rates on UK lenders.

The taxes, introduced after the 2008 financial crisis, “are key elements of the UK’s internationally uncompetitive total tax rate for banks” and should be phased out. TheCityUK wrote in its election manifesto, published on 7 June.

The levy targets balance sheet liability and equity. Short-term liability are taxed at 0.1 per cent and long-term liabilities at 0.05 per cent.

The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that the bank levy will raise £1.4 billion for the 2024 fiscal year.

The surcharge, a tax on bank profits, was cut from 8 per cent to 3 per cent in April 2023.

The surcharge reduction is set to cost the exchequer £1bn a year by the 2026 fiscal year.

The financial services sector pays more corporation tax than any other sector and is the largest net exporting industry, TheCityUK wrote in its manifesto.

Chief executive of TheCityUK, Miles Celic, said: “Financial and related professional services are the pulse of the UK economy.

The industry is a major national employer, supports people at every stage of their life, and is an enabler of cross-economy growth.

“We want to see a new era of policy certainty and collaboration between government and industry to ensure it can make an even greater contribution to driving investment, innovation, and growth across the country,” he added.

## Fostering a sustainable food industry is essential for Oman



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The author is a Media and Communication Master’s graduate skilled in diverse writing formats, specialising in storytelling, branding, and in-depth journalism

Our world is precious. Protecting it lies at the heart of our responsibility. And that is why sustainability is increasingly important in all aspects of what we do.

With a world population of over 8 billion and growing, the food sector plays a significant role in our planet’s health and wellbeing, as well as our own.

Environmental concerns have brought an increasing set of challenges towards the food industry, and the way we address the needs of this sector has never been more important. It is up to us to create a system that is carbon mindful, sustainable and food secure.

Advancements in technologies have allowed this, from sustainable farming practices to reduce environmental impact, maintaining soil health and conserving water, to optimising energy use, minimising waste and adopting renewable energy sources alongside the right policies and investments that support a sustainable food industry.

When it comes to food, Oman, as the eighth largest producer of dates in the world and the leading producer of fish in the region, has a lot to offer.

Its date industry boasts an average annual production of more than 260,000 metric tonnes per annum alongside an agricultural industry cultivating a wide range of crops and a thriving dairy industry.

Choosing local has played a significant role in the sustainability of our food system.

Besides local produce often being the fresher, tastier, and more nutritious option, it allows us to support the local economy, contributing to the success of nearby farmers and businesses, reducing the environmental impact associated with long-distance transportation.

Local establishments such as Mazoon Dairy have helped increase the food security of our country, enhancing the vitality of regional agriculture and dairy production.

Oman is also one of the largest fish producers in the region with its aquaculture sector expected to contribute \$5.2 billion to GDP and an estimated market value of \$900 million by 2049 (Invest Oman).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, aligned with Vision 2040, has developed a national strategy for agriculture and rural development strategy to unlock the potential of the agriculture sector by enhancing its economic efficiency, profitability and competitiveness; improving environmental sustainability and resilience to natural disasters and crises and fostering integrated territorial development to unlock the potential of the rural areas.

Similarly, Fisheries Development Oman successful efforts in facilitating favourable investment opportunities have helped nurture local expertise through Small and Medium Enterprises and In-Country Value initiatives.

Today, our global interconnectivity has made the responsibility of supporting local produce increasingly relevant.

Embracing local products and strengthening the bond between consumers and the producers.

Fostering a sustainable food industry is essential for the health of our planet and our communities.

Oman’s robust agricultural and aquaculture sectors demonstrate how local initiatives can enhance food security and economic vitality — not only benefiting the environment but also creating a resilient and self-sufficient food system.

Our choices matter. So let us opt for locally sourced products, and contribute to a sustainable future for Oman and beyond.



FRANCESCO GUERRERA

The author is global economics editor for Breakingviews, based in London

Britain is in a deep investment hole. Public expenditure is due to fall regardless of who wins next month’s election, while business spending is also at a low ebb. To dig the country out of its investment crisis, the party that wins national elections on July 4 has a range of options that could fudge counterproductive fiscal rules.

The policy blueprints published by the ruling Conservatives and opposition Labour Party ahead of the election are long on buzzwords. The former’s manifesto pledges “bold action”; the latter’s advocates something called “securonomics”. But they’re short on detail, for a good reason: the numbers don’t add up.

Between 2010 and 2023, UK output expanded by an average of 1.6% a year, well below the 2.2% pace between 1979 and 2010. UK GDP will grow by just 0.5% this year, compared to 2.7% in the United States and 0.8% in the eurozone, the International Monetary Fund forecasts.

GDP per capita is now lower than before the 2019 election.

The key reason for this stagnation is a collapse in productivity — the output created for each hour worked.

The London School of Economics’ Centre for Economic Performance found that productivity now is 26% lower than if it had followed its trend between 1979 and 2007. It’s also below the US, Germany and France. The LSE research shows that Britain’s

## Britain investment crisis calls for taxes and U-turns



A Union Flag flies in front of the Big Ben clock face above the Houses of Parliament in central London. – Reuters

BUSINESS INVESTMENT, WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR MORE THAN HALF OF UK SPENDING THAT DOESN’T GO ON CURRENT NEEDS, IS AROUND 10.5% OF GDP

workers didn’t receive enough capital – technology, training and machinery. In other words, underinvestment is holding back the UK economy.

Business investment, which accounts for more than half of UK spending that doesn’t go on current needs, is around 10.5% of GDP. That ranks an abysmal 28th among the 31 countries in the OECD, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research.

And government investment spending has been around 2.5% of GDP on average since 1995, below the 3.4% averaged by G7 advanced economies, the LSE found.

Worse, fiscal forecasts set by the current government — and largely embraced by Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition Labour Party — imply public sector investment will actually decline from 2.4% of GDP this fiscal year to around 1.8% in 2028-2029, according to the

Institute for Fiscal Studies.

That fall – equivalent to a cut of around 26 billion pounds — is the opposite of what Britain needs. Its schools, are falling apart and the UK transport network requires a 22 billion pound upgrade, according to the National Infrastructure Commission.

The new government will also have to find ways of encouraging private investment. Fighting climate change alone will cost up to 35 billion pounds a year in private sources of capital until 2050, the NIC said.

The new government, most likely led by Starmer, will have two natural options to deal with these issues: higher taxes or more borrowing. The manifesto says that by 2028-2029 Labour would raise 8.6 billion pounds from the likes of windfall taxes on oil and gas companies and VAT on private schools.

But around 5.2 billion pounds would come from reducing tax avoidance – a measure often invoked but rarely achieved by would-be prime ministers. Those revenues aren’t even enough to cover Labour’s spending plans of around 9.5 billion pounds a year to pay for measures such as carrying out 40,000 more weekly

operations, scans and medical appointments and to create a “Great British Energy” company to fund renewables.

And they are certainly not enough to make up for the Conservatives’ decision to leave a future shortfall of up to 20 billion pounds a year in public spending across most government departments, according to the IFS.

“Protected” areas, including health, defence and education, will receive cash injections, but such an outbreak of austerity would still hit Britain’s public services hard.

Starmer and the likely finance minister, Rachel Reeves, have promised not to hunt the big beasts in the fiscal jungle: income tax, corporation tax, VAT and national insurance.

They could increase other levies, such as the ones on capital gains or inheritances, but their room for manoeuvre is limited.

That’s because the current government has already decreed tax rises of 23 billion pounds a year by 2028-2029, according to the Resolution Foundation. Those will further increase Britain’s tax-to-GDP ratio from the current 36.5% – the highest since 1949. — Reuters

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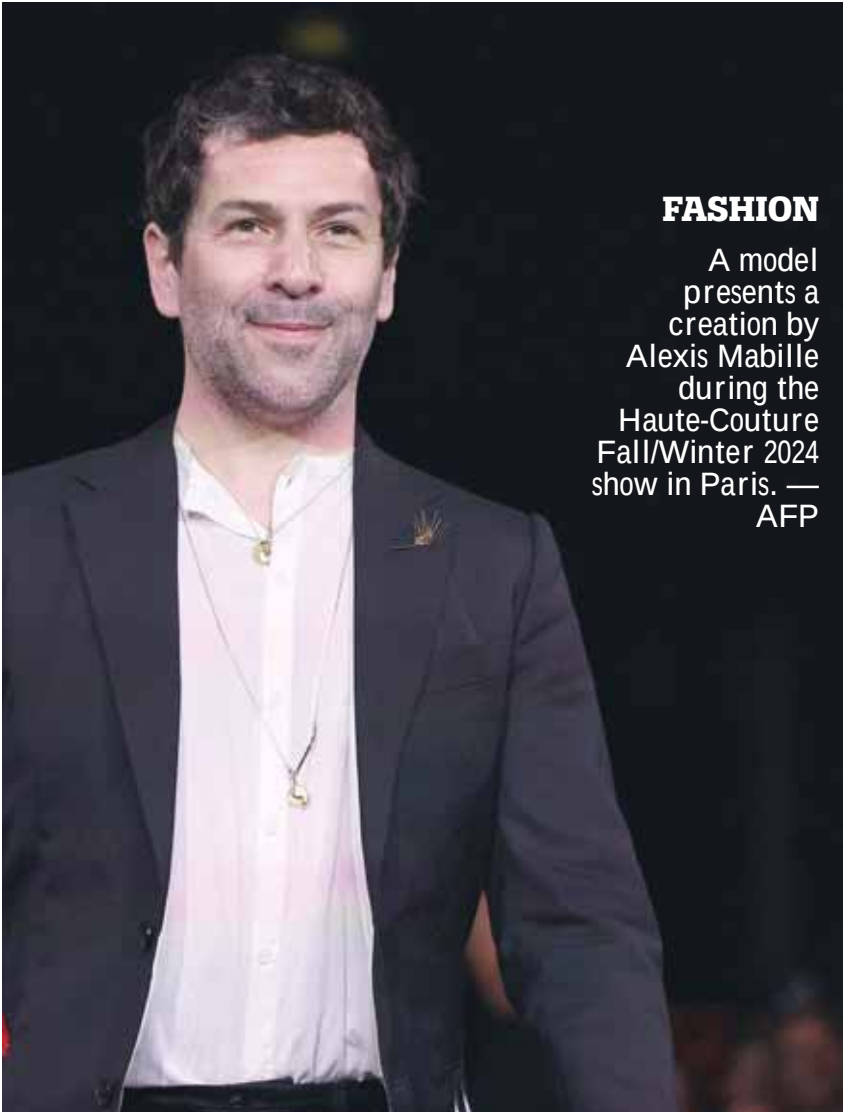
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**BOLLYWOOD**  
Amitabh Bachchan attends a promotional event of his upcoming film 'Kalki 2898 AD' in Mumbai. — AFP



**TRAVEL**  
Tourists take a photo in front of the Novodevichy convent in western Moscow. — AFP



**FASHION**  
A model presents a creation by Alexis Mabille during the Haute-Couture Fall/Winter 2024 show in Paris. — AFP



**LIVELIHOOD**  
A farmer picks tomatoes from a field in Sbikha town, which has been having drinking water problems for years, near Tunisia's central city of Kairouan. — AFP



**FILM**  
French author, theatre and film director Mohamed El Khatib poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

# art & life

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## Exploring Oman: A journey through tranquillity and cultural riches

A group of Italian travellers embarked on an unforgettable journey through Oman, experiencing its majestic mountains, serene deserts, and vibrant souqs. Discover their captivating stories and the warm Omani hospitality that makes this destination a timeless treasure... P20



## EXPO ON ALMODOVAR'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH MADRID

**OSCAR-WINNING** director Pedro Almodovar's decades-long love affair with Madrid is the focus of a new exhibition in the Spanish capital which has appeared in all of his feature films to varying degrees. "Madrid, Almodovar Girl!", which runs until October 20 at the Conde Duque cultural centre, features 200 photos from his 23 movies, as well as notebooks, movie props and the first camera Almodovar bought, a hand-held Super-8. This year marks the 50th anniversary since Almodovar began his film career in Madrid in 1974 with the release of his first short film. "The story of Pedro Almodovar and Madrid is a story of requited love, Pedro



Almodovar is Pedro Almodovar thanks to Madrid," Pedro Sanchez, the commissioner of the exhibition and author of a book on the director's links to the city, said. "Almodovar has paid back to Madrid in spades what the city has given him by being his muse," he said, adding that many foreigners' first contact with Spanish culture and Madrid is through Almodovar's works. A huge chart at the exhibition shows what percentage of the action in each of Almodovar's films takes place

in Madrid. It ranges from just six per cent in 2011 drama "The Skin I Live In" to 100 per cent in seven films. These include his international breakthrough, the 1988 romantic black comedy "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown". Almodovar moved to Madrid from a small village in Castilla-La Mancha, an arid and rural region in central Spain, in 1967 during the final years of the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco when he was just 17.



"I have never felt like a stranger here," he has said. After Franco's death in 1975, Almodovar became a key part of the cultural movement in Madrid dubbed "la movida" which saw artists break the Roman Catholic dictatorship's many taboos. Sanchez said that like Madrid, Almodovar has a "multifaceted, critical, open, fun, cosmopolitan and friendly personality". The exhibition features a map of Madrid marked with the 272 locations that have appeared in his films.

Spain's most famous director tends to avoid famous landmarks, preferring working-class areas like Vallecas and places such as hospitals, taxis, bars and cemeteries where people go about their daily lives. One of his most iconic scenes was shot outside the facade of the building housing the exhibition — the moment in the 1987 film "Law of Desire" where a city street cleaner hoses down Carmen Maura's character on a hot Madrid summer night at her request. Almodovar is known for

using vivid colours, which he has said is "a way of taking revenge" on the grey years of the Franco dictatorship, Sanchez said. He reproduced his Madrid flat for the 2019 film "Pain and Glory" about an ageing film director, even using some of his armchairs. When he visited the exhibition before it opened to the public on June 12, Almodovar reportedly said "this is my life". The 74-year-old won the Oscar for screenwriting for his 2002 movie "Talk to Her". He also picked up the best foreign language Oscar for the 1999 movie "All About My Mother" about a woman struggling with the sudden death of her teenage son. The exhibition ends with a video of part of the speech he gave when Madrid city hall in 2018 declared him to be an "adoptive son" of the city. "I came mainly to get away from the village, to urbanise a bit and then to go and live in Paris or London, but without realising it, I stayed," he said. "Now I can say that both me and my characters will continue to live here." — AFP



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## INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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# DOMINANCE, DATA, DISINFORMATION: EUROPE'S FIGHT WITH BIG TECH



**THE EUROPEAN** Union warned Apple on Monday that its App Store is breaching its digital competition rules, placing the iPhone maker at risk of billions of dollars in fines.

It is the latest in a years-long battle between Brussels and giant tech firms, covering subjects from data privacy to disinformation.

### - STIFLING COMPETITION -

Brussels has doled out over 10 billion euros in fines to tech firms for abusing their dominant market positions.

The latest threat for Apple comes three months after the bloc hit the California firm with a 1.8-billion-euro (\$1.9 billion) penalty for preventing European users from accessing information about cheaper music streaming services.

Among big tech firms, only Google has faced a bigger single antitrust fine — more than four billion euros in 2018 for using its Android mobile operating system to promote its search engine.

Google has also incurred billion-plus fines for abusing its power in the online shopping and advertising sectors.

The European Commission, the EU's executive, recommended last year that Google should sell parts of its business and could face a fine of up to 10 per cent of its global revenue if it fails to comply.

### - PRIVACY -

Ireland issues the stiffest fines on data privacy as the laws are enforced by local regulators and Dublin hosts the European offices of several big tech firms.

The Irish regulator handed TikTok a 345-million-euro penalty for mishandling children's data last September just months after it hit Meta with a record fine of 1.2 billion euros for illegally transferring personal data between Europe and the United States.

Luxembourg had previously held the record for data fines after it slapped Amazon with a 746-million-euro penalty in 2021.

### - TAXATION -

The EU has had little success in getting tech companies to pay

more taxes in Europe, where they are accused of funneling profits into low-tax economies like Ireland and Luxembourg.

In one of the most notorious cases, the European Commission in 2016 ordered Apple to pay Ireland more than a decade in back taxes — 13 billion euros — after ruling a sweetheart deal with the government was illegal.

But EU judges overturned the decision saying there was no evidence the company had broken the rules, a decision the commission has been trying to reverse ever since.

The commission is also fighting to reverse another court loss, after judges overruled its order for Amazon to repay 250 million euros in back taxes to Luxembourg.

### DISINFORMATION, HATE SPEECH

Web platforms have long faced accusations of failing to combat hate speech, disinformation and piracy.

The EU passed the Digital Services Act last year, which is designed to force companies to tackle these issues or face fines of up to six per cent of their global turnover.

Already the bloc has begun to show how the DSA might be applied, opening probes on Facebook and Instagram for failing to tackle election-related disinformation.

The bloc has also warned Microsoft that the falsehoods generated by its AI search could fall foul of the DSA.

### - PAYING FOR NEWS -

Google and other online platforms have also been accused of making billions from news without sharing the revenue with those who gather it.

To tackle this, the EU created a form of copyright called "neighbouring rights" that allows print media to demand compensation for using their content.

France has been a test case for the rules and after initial resistance Google and Facebook both agreed to pay some French media for articles shown in web searches. — AFP



## TRAVEL

# Exploring Oman: A journey through tranquillity and cultural riches

**LIJU CHERIAN**  
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In May/June 2024, seven Italian travellers embarked on a transformative journey through Oman, uncovering its rich tapestry of natural wonders and cultural treasures. Hosted by Khimji's House of Travel, in association with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and in partnership with Oman Air, these travel agents explored Oman's diverse landscapes, from rugged mountains and serene deserts to bustling souqs and pristine coastlines.

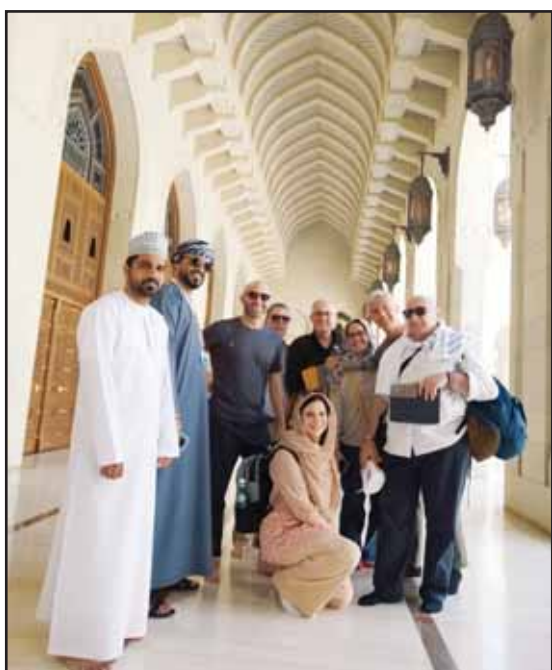
Cashio Vettom, General Manager of Khimji's House of Travel, emphasised the invaluable role of firsthand experiences for travel agents. "Experiencing Oman firsthand allows us to authentically convey its charm and allure to our clients," he affirmed. Describing the recent trip as a resounding success, Vettom added, "We've also pioneered an online marketplace for Oman through our B2B portal, tripsnstay.com. This platform offers global travel agents access to over 50 thoughtfully curated packages."

Malvika Khimji, Director of the Khimji Ramdas Group, underscored their mission to foster connections and position Oman as a premier travel destination. "Our strategic vision focuses on driving sustainable tourism growth and fostering meaningful engagements that benefit both our partners and Oman's tourism sector," she stated.

Silvia Testoni, representing Khimji's House of Travel DMC in Italy, encapsulated Oman's allure with heartfelt admiration: "Oman is more than just a destination; it's a sanctuary of peace and hospitality. The warmth of Omani smiles and the genuine welcome extended by its people resonate deeply. It's a place where modernity harmoniously coexists with tradition, offering travellers an authentic Arabic experience untainted by excessive opulence."

Roberto Carelli, a representative of Oman Air, reflected on Oman's multifaceted appeal: "Muscat's charm, reflected in its serene landscapes and architectural splendour, left an indelible mark on me. The journey through Rimal Al Sharqiya was awe-inspiring, offering breathtaking vistas and a profound sense of freedom. Oman's natural palette, especially at sunset, evokes a blend of emotions and reinforces the hospitality that defines this remarkable country."

Valentina Molteni of Schooner Viaggi echoed this sentiment, enchanted by Oman's magical landscapes: "From majestic mountains to



mesmerising deserts and azure seas, Oman captivates with its natural beauty. Every sunset, every moment in the desert exudes a profound sense of peace. However, what truly moved me was witnessing a sea turtle laying eggs under a starry sky at Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve – a reminder of nature's delicate beauty."

Claude Cascino from Vago Tour recounted a transformative experience at Desert Nights Camp: "Arriving amidst the golden dunes of Rimal Al Sharqiya felt like stepping into another realm. The desert's sheer beauty was awe-inspiring, but it was the quietude of the night and the simplicity of life that resonated deeply.



Witnessing sea turtles nestling under the moonlight was a poignant reminder of Oman's pristine natural wonders."

Matteo Santini of Santini Viaggi highlighted Oman as an adventure playground with a vibrant cultural heartbeat: "Oman's diverse landscapes – from mountains and wadis

to beaches and deserts – offer endless exploration. The country's seamless infrastructure and warm hospitality make every journey effortless. Oman's culinary delights, a fusion of global influences, add a unique flavour to the travel experience."

These testimonials paint a vivid picture of Oman as a destination where every corner tells a story of serenity, adventure and cultural richness. Oman's commitment to preserving its heritage while embracing modernity ensures that every traveller finds a sanctuary of peace and authenticity.

Beyond its scenic splendour, Oman's greatest treasure lies in its people – generous hosts whose smiles and hospitality resonate long after the journey ends. Whether navigating through the ancient alleyways of Nizwa Souq or marvelling at the grandeur of Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, visitors are greeted with warmth and sincerity at every turn.

Paola Cerri, Account Director at AIGO MBR Italy, representing the Oman Tourism Board in Italy, expressed her delight and commitment to creating opportunities for Italian operators and travel agents to explore the Sultanate. "Oman's charm and beauty are truly unforgettable – a gift for life," she remarked,



highlighting the Tourism Board's ongoing efforts to expand the network of Oman's ambassadors, ensuring more people discover and appreciate its wonders.

As travellers like Silvia, Valentina, Roberto, Claude and Matteo attest, Oman leaves an indelible mark on the soul, inviting all who wander to experience its magic firsthand. They feel that the allure of Oman transcends mere tourism; it embodies a journey of discovery and connection.

In conclusion, Oman stands as a beacon of tranquillity and cultural authenticity – a jewel waiting to be discovered, where every traveller finds a piece of their heart amidst its timeless landscapes and warm-hearted people.