

Logo of Al Jabal al Akhdar Fest launched

Sheikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of al Dakhiliyah, said Al Jabal Al Akhdar Festival, will be held from August 3 to August 19. The official logo of the festival, which symbolises the essence of Al Jabal Al Akhdar and its pleasant climate, highlighting it as an exceptional tourist destination, was unveiled during the meeting.

SEE P3



Royal Decree sets up Social Protection Fund

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

Royal Decree No. 50/2023 promulgates the Social Protection Fund's Bylaw. Article (1) states that the provisions of the system/bylaw attached to this decree shall be applied to the Social Protection Fund.

Article (2) transfers the following to the Social Protection Fund: The duties, origins, specialisations, assets, rights, obligations, financial receivables and their related data of the Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence, the Pension Fund of the Royal Office, the Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police, the Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service, the Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman, the Pension Fund of the Sultan's Special Force, the Pension Fund of the Diwan of Royal Court and the Civil Service Employees' Pension Fund.

This is in exclusion of the premises of the Defence Ministry's Pension Fund and assets that will be agreed about by the Chairman of



Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund and the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses. These will be transferred to the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses. The Social Protection Fund will have the following transferred to it: Duties, specialisations, origins, rights,

obligations, receivables and data related to the Public Authority for Social Insurance — along with settlement of differences between ratios of financing of the funds mentioned in the previous clause, ratios of financing of the Public Authority for Social Insurance and the registration of the settlement sum in the financial lists of the Social Protection Fund as a deserved asset —

provided an agreement be signed to secure all details of the above mentioned settlement with the Public Authority for Social Insurance. The Social Protection Fund will have the following transferred to it: obligations calculated in accordance with the provisions of the Social Protection Law within the pension programme of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and the pension programme of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), along with related data. Also to be transferred to the Social Protection Law are assets equivalent to these obligations from the PDO and the CBO, provided two agreements to this effect be signed to cover all details of such transfer. The Social Protection Fund will also have the following transferred to it: The rights and obligations related to the project on restructuring funds and systems of retirement and social protection that are secured under the National Fiscal Balance Programme and the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development. **TURN TO P2**

His Majesty exchanges Hijri year greetings with leaders of countries

MUSCAT: On the occasion of the New Hijri Year 1445 AH and the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Hijra, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has exchanged greetings cables with leaders of Arab and Muslim countries.

In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life for them, praying to Allah the Almighty for the return of this blessed occasion on them and to make the New Year, a year of blessings for all peoples and achieve for the Islamic nation further welfare and prosperity.

In their cables to the country's monarch, the leaders of the Arab and Muslim countries expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA

Royal Decree combines retirement, social insurance systems

MUSCAT: The Royal Decree No. 50/2023, which promulgates the Bylaw of Social Protection Fund, defines the goals, areas of specialty and the administrative structure of the fund. The decree acts as the virtual legal reference for implementing the provisions of the Social Protection Law. As per the Royal Decree, all the assets and liabilities of the Public Authority for Social Insurance, the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund, the Ministry of Defence's Pension Fund, the Royal Oman Police's Pension Fund, the Royal Guard

of Oman's Pension Fund, the Pension Fund of Sultan's Special Force, the Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service, the Pension Fund of the Royal Office and the Pension Fund of the Diwan of Royal Court are transferred to the Social Protection Fund. Liabilities and assets from the Pension Programme of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and the Pension Programme of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) are also transferred to the Social Protection Fund. As such, 11 existing pension systems, along with their assets

PROTECTION UNDER ONE UMBRELLA

GOALS

1. Implement govt's vision on social protection
2. Provide fair social coverage
3. Establish an integrated system for social protection
4. Manage the Fund's resources and invest its money
5. Support programmes to enhance social protection

MANAGEMENT

The Fund will be led by a board of directors comprising representatives from govt, OCCI, trade unions and independent members

and liabilities, will be merged into one entity. The decree aims at unifying retirement and social insurance systems from all sectors. It introduces a more efficient central apparatus

capable of providing public services and developing assets. The Social Protection Fund has a number of goals: It will implement the government's vision, policy and programmes

on social protection, provide an adequate and fair social coverage for various segments of society, establish an integrated and sustainable system for social protection, manage the Fund's resources and invest its money to raise its value and align it with the current and future obligations to the interest of beneficiaries, creating savings tools and support programmes to enhance social protection, follow up and assess the performance of all monetary and non-monetary social protection programmes. **TURN TO P2**



ROYAL CAVALRY, RGO TAKE PART IN BASEL TATTOO PARADE

The Royal Court Affairs' Royal Cavalry and the Royal Guard of Oman took part in Basel Tattoo Parade on Monday. **REPORT ON P11**

Delegated by HM, Asaad to attend GCC meeting, summit in Saudi Arabia

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan will head tomorrow (Tuesday) to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to head the Sultanate of Oman's delegation during the 18th consultative meeting of leaders of GCC countries and the GCC-Central Asia Summit. The summit will be held on Wednesday.

HH Sayyid Asaad will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy; HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and the two advisers at HH Sayyid Asaad's office. — ONA



Sayyid Badr receives Secretary-General of Fatah's Central Committee

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Monday Lt Gen Jibril Rajoub, Secretary-General of Fatah's Central Committee and President of Palestine Olympic Committee.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed latest developments related to the Palestinian cause. They also discussed several

matters of mutual interest.

The two sides reaffirmed the depth of relations between Oman and Palestine. They also highlighted Oman's unwavering stance regarding the Palestinian cause and its regional and international efforts in backing the establishment of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

— ONA

OMAN AT SCULPTURE FESTIVAL



Representing the Sultanate of Oman, the sculptor Ali al Jabri, with his sculpture 'World of Thousands', is participating with support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in the inauguration of the world's first floating sculpture park at the Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival in Harbin, China.

Royal Decree sets up Social Protection Fund

FROM PAGE 1

Article (3) states that the Social Protection Fund shall be a general and integrated legal successor of the funds, the Public Authority for Social Insurance and the programmes stated in Article 2 of this decree, within the context of all contracts, agreements, investments, partnerships and alliances forged or entered into by those parties within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

This legal succession stated in Article 2 of this decree shall not entail changing the end-beneficiaries of the above mentioned origins, assets, obligations and programmes.

Article (4) stipulates that the employees stated below shall be transferred to the Social Protection Fund, along with their financial grades and allocations: employees of the Diwan of Royal Court's Pension Fund, the Civil Service Employees' Fund and the Public Authority for Social Insurance.

Following a decision by the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund, as per its needs and after coordination with heads of units, it is permissible to transfer to the Social Protection Fund any employees from the aforementioned funds or any specialised staff from the Social Development Ministry's Directorate General of Social Welfare.

Article (5) instructs the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund to issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the enforcement of provisions of the bylaw/system attached to this decree. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions shall continue to be enforced without prejudice to the attached bylaw's provisions.

Article (6) states that the phrase "Social Protection Fund" shall replace the following "phrases" wherever they might occur in the above mentioned laws and Royal decrees: "Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence", "Pension Fund of the Royal Office", "Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police",

Combines retirement, social insurance systems

FROM PAGE 1

The fund's administrative system will help devise social protection strategies, policies and programmes and enhance them in terms of incentives serving the covered groups, evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes and invest the beneficiaries' funds in a manner that achieves the expected return.

The Fund also regularises the services and policies of client care, coordinates with the authorities concerned to improve and harmonise them with the rest of the relevant initiatives.

The Fund will be managed and organised by a board of directors comprising representatives from the State's Administrative Apparatus (government departments), Oman

Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the General Federation of Oman Workers and independent members, in accordance with the best practices of governance and the requirements of the 'tripartite representation' of social insurance and protection systems.

It is worth noting that the Royal Decree (No. 50/2023) provides for the cancellation of all pension funds and the Public Authority for Social Insurance, as well as retirement/pension programmes — after transferring the ownership of their assets to the Social Protection Fund.

Meanwhile, the Royal Decree No. 51/2023 acts in a similar way in terms of Military and Security Services pension funds, thus serving retirees of military units in an adequate manner.

"Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service", "Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman", "Pension Fund of the Sultan's Special Force", "Pension Fund of the Diwan of Royal Court" and the "Civil Service Employees' Pension Fund".

Article (7) dissolves the boards of directors of pension funds, the board of directors of the Public Authority for Social Insurance and pension programmes stated in Article 2 of this decree.

Article (8) cancels all pension funds and the Public Authority for Social Insurance that emanate vide Royal decrees No. 45/80, 26/86, 72/91, 3/93, 6/93, 87/93, 7/94, 101/94 and 86/96, as well as pension programme of Petroleum Development Oman, the pension programme of the Central Bank of Oman — after the transfer of ownership of all their origins/assets to the Social Protection Fund.

This article also states that a

decision shall be issued by the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund to state the completion of transfer of such ownerships, and decision shall be published in the Official Gazette.

Article (9) cancels all that contradicts this decree or the attached bylaw/system or contravenes their provisions.

Article (10) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing.

Royal Decree No. 51/2023 promulgates the bylaw of the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses.

Article (1) states the provisions of the attached bylaw/system shall be applied to the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses.

Article (2) transfers to the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses the employees of the following

departments, along with their ranks, grades and financial allocations: the Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence, the Pension Fund of the Royal Office, the Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police, the Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service, the Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman and the Pension Fund of the Sultan's Special Force.

The enforcement of provisions of this article shall be in accordance with the mechanism and regulations that will be endorsed by the Board of Directors of the Pension Fund of Military and Security Apparatuses, after liaising with heads and commanders of units in the military and security apparatuses.

Article (3) instructs the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses to issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of provisions of the attached bylaw/system. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions shall continue to be enforced without prejudice to the bylaw's provisions.

Article (4) states that the phrases "Pension Fund of the Ministry of Defence", "Pension Fund of the Royal Office", "Pension Fund of the Royal Oman Police", "Pension Fund of the Internal Security Service", "Pension Fund of the Royal Guard of Oman" and Pension Fund of the Sultan's Special Force" shall be replaced by the phrase "Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses", wherever those phrases might occur in the enforced laws and Royal decrees, and within the purview of enforcement of the Pension Fund of the Military and Security Apparatuses' powers stated in the attached bylaw.

Article (5) cancels all that contradicts this decree or the attached bylaw/system or contravenes their provisions.

Article (6) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing.

— ONA

CAA open to ideas from weather enthusiasts

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) reinforced its commitment to collaboration and community partnership by hosting the first annual forum for weather enthusiasts in Muscat. The event, held at the CAA headquarters on Monday, aimed to enhance communication, identify meteorological talents, and engage approximately 250 weather amateurs from across the Sultanate of Oman.

The forum commenced with a dialogue session featuring Nayef bin Ali al Abri, CAA Chairman. Emphasising the significance of community partnership, Al Abri encouraged weather enthusiasts to contribute their ideas, initiatives, and inquiries. The session centred around three key topics: Governance of meteorological activities, resources and capabilities of the meteorological system, and fostering partnerships with weather amateurs.

Khalifa bin Salim al Sudairi, Head of the Numerical Forecasts

Department at the Research and Development Department of the General Directorate of Meteorology, delivered a presentation on meteorology and the National Early Warning Center. Al Sudairi emphasised the centre's pivotal role in providing early weather forecasts and supporting decisions related to community safety and the protection of property.

Furthermore, the forum featured captivating presentations by weather enthusiasts, showcasing their inspiring projects in weather map design, atmospheric analysis, climate forecasts, imaging and documentation of severe weather conditions, as well as an overview of the Rasda project and its operations.

CAA Chairman Nayef al Abri expressed the Authority's commitment to engaging with weather enthusiasts and nurturing their talents. He emphasised that the forum serves as an initial platform for interaction and knowledge sharing, enabling the transfer of valuable experiences and efforts to provide accurate



information.

Al Abri also highlighted the potential collaboration between the CAA and the earthquake centre at Sultan Qaboos University regarding tsunamis. A future merger between the earthquake centre and the Authority may be considered if the need arises.

"Subsequent editions of the forum will be organized by the weather enthusiasts themselves, with collaboration between weather amateurs and the CAA in

developing the forum's programs," added Al Abri.

Abdullah bin Rashid al Khadhouri, Director General of Meteorology, underscored the importance of establishing an effective partnership with weather enthusiasts and utilising their capabilities and skills to advance the field of meteorology. He emphasised the need for accurate and timely predictions, particularly in tropical weather conditions. Al Khadhouri highlighted that

the Civil Aviation Law does not prohibit weather enthusiasts from pursuing their hobby; rather, it aims to regulate their activities for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Al Khadhouri also revealed plans to introduce new methods and tools for early warning, including trumpets and indicative regulations. The Authority will conduct training workshops to enhance the efficiency of weather enthusiasts, covering topics such as rain chasing and meteorological

fundamentals. Additionally, an advanced smart application and website are currently in development to facilitate the meteorological system, offering user-friendly features, with an expected launch in early 2024.

The forum concluded with weather enthusiasts visiting the National Center for Early Warning of Multiple Hazards. Participants had the opportunity to explore the services, technologies, and emergency response strategies employed in monitoring, analysis, and forecasting. An exhibition showcasing the latest advancements in meteorological monitoring was also on display during the visit.

The Oman Meteorological Friends initiative, spearheaded by the CAA, encompasses the annual forum, training workshops, and awareness meetings between meteorologists and weather enthusiasts across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. These efforts aim to promote a greater understanding of weather, climate, and related aspects within this segment of society.



‘Tadoom’ granted permit to provide IoT services

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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Telecommunications Regulatory Authority issued a new permit to provide Internet of Things (IoT) services to provide smart and innovative services to beneficiaries.

The Authority issued a decision granting a permit to provide Internet of Things services to the Future Cities Company (Tadoom), which specialises in providing smart city solutions using the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence technologies.

The Authority stated that the decision aims to enable the provision of smart and innovative services to beneficiaries to raise the efficiency of services and reduce operational costs. The decision also seeks to promote the digital economy and investment opportunities in smart city applications.

Through this permit, the company will be able to provide various IoT applications such as utility management, smart meters, irrigation and agricultural applications management, and vehicle parking management.

Internet of Things services enable a large number of devices to communicate and share data, as this type of communication has the ability to provide great benefits to the economy and society in general across various sectors.

The regulation of the IoT took place for the first time in May 2022, through the issuance of a regulation regulating the provision of ‘IoT’ services issued by Resolution No. (93/2022). The regulation included four chapters, which are definitions and general provisions, the licenses chapter, the obligations and rights of authorised persons, and the penalties chapter.

IoT services may not be provided unless after obtaining a licence from the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, and the service cannot be provided for commercial purposes unless after obtaining a licence for that, and it is prohibited to assign, sell, rent or enable others to use the permit.

Official logo of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival launched

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JULY 17

Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, conducted a media briefing to elaborate on Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival, which is scheduled from August 3 to August 19. Partners and stakeholders of the festival were present during the briefing.

The official logo of the festival, which symbolises the essence of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and its pleasant climate, highlighting it as an exceptional tourist destination, was unveiled during the meeting.

The governor also disclosed the dates and details of the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival. The festival’s events will take place primarily at the main venue adjacent to Hail al Yaman Park and Seih Qatna Park from August 3 to August 19.

The festival’s primary objective is to attract families and visitors to experience the distinctive culture, rich history, and natural beauty of the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar region. It will encompass a diverse array of activities, including children’s programmes and theatrical performances. Additionally, there will be numerous food stalls offering international and Omani cuisine, as well as a section dedicated to promoting local products and



supporting small and medium-sized businesses.

The festival will also allocate dedicated spaces for youth activities, catering to their interests and preferences. Furthermore, an adventure zone will be established to create a lively and creative environment for

individuals of all age groups.

Exciting activities such as paragliding, laser shows, running and mountain bike races, and performances by the Royal Guard music band will be featured.

The Governor of Al Dakhiliyah said, “The festival aims to attract both domestic and international tourists while showcasing the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and the entire Sultanate of Oman. Moreover, it serves as a platform to encourage entrepreneurs and small to medium-sized enterprises to participate in the festival, leveraging the opportunities to promote tourism and generate temporary employment opportunities.”

State Council, Majlis Ash’shura conclude discussion on Draft Tourism Law, Public Debt Law

MUSCAT: The State Council and the Majlis Ash’shura on Monday held their 2nd joint session as part of the Council of Oman’s 4th regular convening of its 7th term.

The session discussed reports of the joint committees between the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura on items of dispute regarding the draft bills of the Tourism Law and the Public Debt Law in preparation of submitting the aforementioned draft bills to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The session was attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash’shura, the Secretary-General of the State Council, the Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash’shura and members of the two councils. — ONA



‘Eidaad’ links higher education, labour market

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Monday inaugurated the fourth round of the national programme for training university students ‘Eidaad’.

The programme, based at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), seeks to enhance cooperation and integration among the sector of higher education, the industry sector and the private sector. Its objectives include linking higher education with the labour market and providing training opportunities for university students.

The programme targets students attending the second last year at government and private higher education institutions.

Besides raising the standard of education and training, the programme bridges the gap between the industrial and academic sectors by providing participants with technical experience, critical thinking,



knowledge and advanced skills to help keep pace with the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).

The inaugural ceremony included the signing of various cooperation protocols between the industrial and academic sectors. The step aims at boosting plans to link the industrial and academic sectors and training students of private higher education

institutions.

As many as 500 students compete to join the one-year programme, which sees the participation of 25 institutions and more than 40 incubators from the industrial and private sectors.

Graduates of the 3rd batch of the programme showcased their accomplished projects during the training period.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. It was attended by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and officials from universities and private colleges. — ONA

Naseem Circus is shifting from Muscat to Salalah

KABEER YOUSUF
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Khareef visitors will have an added attraction from July 24 as Al Naseem International Circus is shifting to Salalah after entertaining a large audience in Muscat’s Al Amerat Park since July 9.

Although the circus was expected to be in Muscat for ten more days, the troupe decided to make it to misty Salalah.

“We are shifting from Muscat to Salalah for a month or more because of the large number of tourists visiting the Dhofar Governorate and in the expectation that animals perform better in a cool climate,” Mohammed al Hinai, partner of the management, said.

He, however, assured to be back in Muscat soon.

This is the first time a full-fledged circus is coming to Oman, and we are glad about it,” said Mohammed bin Omaid al Hinai, project partner.

Those visiting Salalah can look forward to a range of amusing activities, including spine-chilling acrobatics, awe-inspiring puppetry, scintillating aerial displays, and taming the beasts besides internationally reputed martial arts by acclaimed artists from Colombia, Argentina, Iran and Africa.

Animals are trained under world-renowned champion trainer Mohammed Ali Kahramani who will grace the stage with brainy performances. The specially trained acrobatic teams will showcase astonishing art forms, ensuring a show brimming with surprises.

Some of the breathtaking performances by artists from 8 countries, including Africa, Argentina, Columbia, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Mexico, and Pakistan, are a sure shot to keep the audience at the edge of their seats, according to the organisers. The show is presented by Oman’s acclaimed presenter Maan al Maan.

The circus is brought to Oman by Dr Musab al Hinai, CEO of Al Naseem Group; it also has various family entertainment and amusement projects running as well in the pipeline.

Al Naseem Park Bahla, the village of Bilad Seet, which includes a zoo and a water park, besides two zoo projects, one in Salalah and one in Muscat, will be the most diverse, massive and largest in the Gulf.

The Salalah Water Park, the largest of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, is nearing completion.



Tender Announcement

شركة تنمية نخيل عمان
Nakheel Oman Development Company

A Tender [Nakheel/014] dated 16-July-2023 has been announced for lead Consultant to Design & Supervision of Integrated Center for Collection, Sorting and Marketing of Agricultural Products. Dhofar Region - (Al Najd). Last date for receiving the technical queries: 30 July 2023, Closing date of the tender: 7 Aug 2023.

All Tender communication must be addressed to: (tenders@nakheel.om) or (+968 91409620).



Pact signed for ‘Oman 2024’ yearbook publication

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion signed a partnership programme with The Business Year to be a supporting partner in the publication of the tenth edition of the foundation's yearbook titled 'Oman 2024', which focuses on Oman Vision 2040.

The report will include research on Oman's economy, an analysis of the main factors that contribute to the development of Oman's economy and the promotion of innovation and knowledge in the business community. It will also include definitions of multiple economic concepts, such as e-government services, as well as plans to attract investments to the Sultanate of Oman.

The report also highlights several topics, such as the industrial strategy, the development of Omani industry and the promotion of innovation, as well as working to find an enabling tool for institutions and

projects based on innovation and the future of the business sector.

The yearbook 'Oman 2024' is a source of information and data related to the economic and investment climate of the Sultanate of Oman. The yearbook provides its readers with a detailed analysis of economic sectors, development projects and ambitious plans.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion seeks to enhance cooperation with international media institutions in order to promote the Sultanate of Oman as an attractive destination for investment. Such reports also promote the 'Invest Oman' platform which showcases investment opportunities for investors from Oman and abroad. The platform also highlights developments from the local arena.

The report will be distributed in many events organised by the Ministry in various parts of the world. — **ONA**

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Muscat Municipality took part in the two-day U20 Mayoral Summit on July 7 and 8 in Gujarat, India, the Chair City of Urban 20 (U20) 2023. The summit discussed issues related to the global economy, climate and development.

The summit of Mayors is an initiative that deals mainly with the urban problems of cities and includes cities from the member countries of the group of twenty; other cities are also hosted outside the cluster system to expand public benefit and localise communication for the urban community.

Speaking to the Observer, Al Tayib al Harthy, Manager of Muscat Municipality in Qurayat, who represented Muscat Municipality at the summit, said Oman's participation underlines the nation's commitment to providing a better living to the citizens and residents of the country.

The event concluded with the handover of the Communiqué from the Mayors to G20 leaders.

"We at Muscat Municipality are happy to have participated in one of its kind event, the

Muscat Municipality takes part in urban planning at U20 Summit



U20 Summit. Our participation reflects a keen interest to benefit from international experiences and knowledge to enhance national efforts and endeavours aimed at achieving sustainable development according to national pillars," said Al Tayib al Harthy.

The U20 Summit brought together about 140 foreign city leaders from over 60 cities across the G20 countries, and 70 plus national and international speakers to deliberate on issues that affect urban areas and address challenges in achieving sustainable urban development.

The summit also saw the participation of over 100 Indian delegates from more than thirty cities.

Oman and the other participating members shared the key highlights of some of the policies and programmes initiated by their respective governments to promote green development, support for renewable energy, policies on e-mobility and missions and the like.

"Attending the summit is a great step forward in the urban development history of the Sultanate of Oman , and we will be putting into practice what we

have gathered from the event," he added.

The summit also highlighted the need for private investment in urban initiatives. It reiterated the urgency to work for innovative solutions to address the consequences of rapid urban growth, such as the lack of affordable housing and access to basic services.

It also focused on the importance of preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable development while reaffirming the government's commitment to inclusive governance and innovation.

OQGN successfully signs financing facilities worth USD 1.2 billion



Khalid Al Qassabi
Vice President of Finance



Mansoor Ali Al-Abdali
Managing Director of OQGN

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the exclusive operator of the natural gas transportation network in Oman, has signed three complex financing agreements with local and regional banks for a total commitment of USD 1.2Bn.

Together, this financing is considered one of the largest syndicates of Sharia-compliant financing in Oman, providing the company with access to capital in dual currencies (OMR 225 million & USD 620 million) to support its ongoing corporate activities and refinancing requirements.

Vice President of Finance, Khalid Al Qassabi commented "Today we celebrate the ceremonial signing of our latest financing agreements. We are exceptionally proud to have signed these financing agreements. My team of experienced professionals and 16 banks worked tirelessly to agree competitive terms in a timely manner. The terms were agreed to be compliant with sharia financing rules and we are now in the process of certifying them with local and regional sharia boards. We hope this financing will set a positive precedent for local, regional and international Islamic banks for similar transactions. This financing will

support OQGN's ongoing operations and next phase of growth."

About OQGN

OQGN holds a natural monopoly over critical gas transportation infrastructure in Oman as the exclusive owner and operator of the natural gas transportation network.

OQGN aims to champion the management and development of energy infrastructure through innovative and sustainable solutions. OQGN has more than 450 talents that are responsible for overseeing the smooth running of more than approximately 4,031km of pipeline network. OQGN prides itself on its operational excellence and has delivered 99.99+% gas availability over the last 10 years and recorded no gas supply interruptions in 2022. OQGN's health and safety record is also testament to its commitment to global standards. Sustainable practices are essential to our operations, and our work is proudly aligned with Oman Vision 2040 to deliver cleaner, more sustainable energy. For more information about OQGN, please visit: <https://oqgn.com/>





Al Nahdha Hospital succeeds in performing rare throat surgery

MUSCAT: Al Nahdha Hospital has succeeded in performing a surgery to treat a case of pubertal hypophonia for a 22-year-old man. The operation is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman.

A medical team specialised in the Otolaryngology Unit at Al Nahdha Hospital succeeded in performing a surgical operation, the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman. It consisted in treating a case of pubertal hypophonia for a 22-year-old boy.

Dr Shaden bint Zakaria al Riyamiyah, Consultant Ear, Nose, Throat, and Vocal Cord Surgeon, Head of the Medical Team, explained that the pubertal voice deficiency is the continuation of the teenage voice

after puberty and its instability on a certain level.

This condition is one of the cases that affects one in every 900,000 people.

Dr Shaden said that the operation aimed to restructure the larynx to reduce the pitch of the patient's voice and give him a masculine voice. The operation took about two and a half hours, and it was done under local anesthesia in order to be able to evaluate the patient's voice during the operation.

Dr Shaden received her training in the field of vocal cord surgery in the United Kingdom, to be the first surgeon specialising in this field in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



Fisheries wealth in Batinah North is economic cornerstone

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JULY 17

Beyond the coastal nature of Al Batinah North Governorate, fishing is a vital part of the local economy and environment. The Fisheries Wealth Department stands as a testament to the significance of the fisheries sector in Oman's economy and ecology.

Engineer Sultan bin Hassan bin Abdullah al Marzouki, Director General of the Fisheries Wealth Department expressed the department's concern to protect and responsibly use the governorate's rich marine resources.

Fishing is an essential industry for Oman, even without relying on oil. It provides jobs and boosts the country's economy. In Al Batinah North, over 13,000 licensed fishermen work hard, using 5,325 fishing boats and 22 artisanal vessels to catch fish and seafood.

To make sure everyone gets



fresh seafood, there are 735 licenses for transporting and selling aquatic products. These licenses help distribute fish to different parts of Oman and beyond.

Preserving the marine environment is vital, too. Al Batinah North has created 416 artificial coral reef sites to protect fish populations.

These reefs serve as safe homes for fish to grow and reproduce, ensuring there will always be plenty of fish for everyone.

When it comes to selling the catch, Al Batinah North boasts 9 bustling fish markets with 470 Omani traders. There are also 162 places to sell fish and seafood, making sure everyone can enjoy this delicious food.

Fishing is more than just about making money; it also helps Oman stay independent in providing food for its people. As Engineer Sultan says, "A nation that does not eat from its own lands and seas cannot dictate its future. That's why the fishing industry in Al Batinah North

is so crucial as it helps secure Oman's future and provides jobs for young Omanis.

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources has spearheaded a series of strategic investment projects. These initiatives aim to ensure food security and enhance the sector's contribution to the national income.

Thus the government is investing in the fishing sector to ensure food security and boost the country's income. In 2021, Al Batinah North produced over 69,000 tonnes of fish, worth more than RO48 million Omani rials. These achievements show how important fishing is for Oman's prosperity and the well-being of its people.

With strong leadership, creative thoughts and hard work, Al Batinah North is a shining example of how fishing can be a significant resource for generations to come.

Beware of scamsters: ROP

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced that a new fraud method was being circulated via social media.

It stated that the Directorate General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation had detected a new fraud method, wherein scamsters were using social media to share fake commercial advertisement of



a company offering service to bring in domestic workers at attractive prices.

"After entering the company's website and starting the reservation process through a fake electronic payment gateway, bank data is acquired for later use in seizing the victims' money," ROP stated.

ROP calls on all citizens and residents not to share any personal or banking data through unreliable websites.



Tender Number

T-02-2023

Tender Name

Call-Off agreement for the provision of Medical Examination Services for MWASALAT Drivers.

Project Summary

MWASALAT invites proposals from qualified Medical Institutions for comprehensive driver medical examinations, as per the details and terms stipulated in the tender documents.

Tender Fee

NIL

Grade & Specialty

Qualified & Specialized Medical Institutions in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution

Tuesday, 18th July 2023

Last date for tender document distribution

Wednesday, 26th July 2023

Last date for submission

Tuesday, 1st, August 2023

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.

Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head-quarter Oman National Transport Company SAOC (MWASALAT) at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"

Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 1551

P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to:

tenders@mwasalat.om

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



The Ministry of Economy
Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender Submission
2023/7	Supply, installation, testing, Support & Maintenance of CCTV cameras	25 Omani Rials	27/ 8 / 2023

- First ● All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
- The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.
- Second ● Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.
- For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

✉ etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
☎ + 9684402200

Bidding



University of Technology and Applied Sciences
Ibri College of Applied Sciences

UTAS invites Tenders Contractor firms for the:

Tender No	Tender Name	Companies that are entitled to participate	Tender's Price	Last Date for buying Tender Papers	The deadline for submission of bids
01/2023	Renting a restaurant for preparing, processing and providing meals for employees, male and female students, and Renting a corner for selling snacks and sandwiches at CAS-Ibri	Specialized in providing regained service and registered with the Tender Board	(25/000 R.O) Twenty Five Rial Omani	27/07/2023	06/08/2023

Tender Document may be collected from Administration & finance Affairs at COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES IBRI, during normal working hours starting from Tuesday 18/07/2023.

All companies must include with its bids A signed and stamped Bid Commitment Declaration from authorized personal in the company.

Submitted bids must be signed and sealed with red wax and addressed on behalf of the Chairman of the Tender Committee of Interior and written from the outside the number and the merits of the practice not to write on the envelope the name of the bidder or what it refers.

Offers must be placed in the tender box in the department referred to above, before ten o'clock in the morning scheduled above; and will not be accept bids submitted after that date regardless of the reasons for the delay, and a representative of the company may attend the bids opening.

The University is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of the sub-committee of tender
COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES IBRI



US envoy Kerry calls for ‘urgent action’ on climate at China talks

BEIJING: US climate envoy John Kerry held four hours of talks with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing on Monday, calling for “urgent action” as the two countries revived stalled diplomacy on reducing planet-warming emissions.

Climate talks between the two biggest greenhouse gas emitters came to a halt last year.

Kerry, a former secretary of state, has enjoyed comparatively cordial and consistent relations with China.

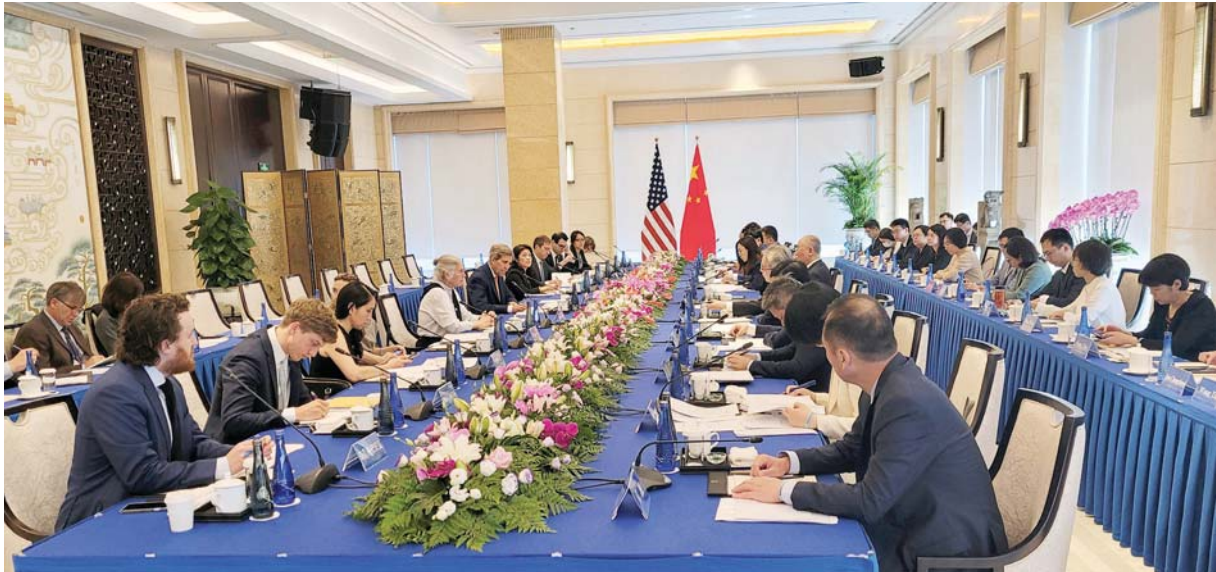
Kerry met his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua in Beijing on Monday, with the two men speaking for around four hours, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Both countries “must take urgent action on a number of fronts, especially the challenges of coal and methane pollution,” Kerry wrote in a tweet after the talks.

“The climate crisis demands that the world’s two largest economies work together to limit the Earth’s warming,” Kerry tweeted.

Beijing said after the talks that “climate change is a common challenge faced by all mankind”.

China would “exchange views with the United States on issues related to climate change, and work together to meet challenges and improve the wellbeing of current and future



US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry attends a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua in Beijing, China. — Reuters

generations”, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told CNN on Sunday Kerry would press Beijing not to “hide behind any kind of claim that they are a developing nation” in order to slow-roll efforts to cut emissions.

“Every country, including China, has a responsibility to reduce emissions,” Sullivan said.

“And the world, I do believe, should step up and encourage — indeed, pressure — China to take far more dramatic action to reduce emissions.”

China has long used its official status as a developing nation to justify its high emissions, with Sullivan saying “there is more work for them to

China would “exchange views with the United States on issues related to climate change, and work together to meet challenges

MAO NING
China foreign ministry spokesperson

do on that front”.

“Secretary Kerry will make that point when he’s in Beijing,” he said.

Kerry’s trip follows two

other high-profile visits by US officials — Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen -- that were aimed at stabilising US-China ties.

His visit to China came as the Northern Hemisphere endured record-setting summer heat waves, which scientists have said are being exacerbated by climate change.

“The Kerry visit and the resumption of climate interaction underscores the critical importance of coordinated efforts to address the climate crisis,” Chunping Xie said, Senior Policy Fellow at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment. — AFP

Türkiye’s Erdogan begins Gulf tour with trip to Saudi

RIYADH: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrives on Monday in Saudi Arabia during a three-country Gulf tour as he looks to attract foreign investment in his country’s ailing economy.

Erdogan is scheduled to land in the Red Sea city of Jeddah to meet King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman before going to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar later this week.

“During our visits, our primary agenda will be joint investment and commercial activities with these countries in the upcoming period,” Erdogan said before leaving Istanbul.

He said bilateral trade with Gulf countries has increased from \$1.6 billion to approximately \$22 billion over the past 20 years.

“With the business forums to be organised, we will look for ways to move this figure much further,” Erdogan said.

Erdogan visited Saudi Arabia in April 2022, and Prince Mohammed went to Türkiye in June last year.

Erdogan’s new Saudi trip comes as Türkiye battles a currency devaluation and soaring inflation that has battered its economy.

The two countries will sign several accords during Erdogan’s trip as Ankara looks to non-Western partners for financial support, a senior Saudi official said on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan addresses his supporters during an event, at Beylerbeyi Stadium in Istanbul, Türkiye. — Reuters

speak to the press.

“Erdogan’s visit to the Gulf after the critical elections held in Türkiye itself reflects the importance of the Gulf states in the Turkish foreign policy agenda,” Sinem Cengiz said, a researcher at Qatar University.

“Growing Gulf interest in investing in diverse sectors is a boost for Türkiye, which is trying to increase exports to help ease its economic problems,” said the expert on Gulf-Turkish relations.

Last month, Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yilmaz and Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek travelled to the UAE to discuss “economic cooperation opportunities” with counterparts, and they met President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Ankara said.

Erdogan appointed Yilmaz and Simsek after the elections in part to execute a U-turn after years of unorthodox economic policy that sent inflation soaring and net foreign reserves to a record low in May. — Agencies

Yoon vows ‘complete overhaul’ of approach to extreme weather

SEOUL: South Korea’s president vowed on Monday to “completely overhaul” the country’s approach to extreme weather from climate change, after at least 40 people were killed by recent flooding and landslides during monsoon rains.

Rescue workers waded through thick mud as they drained a flooded underpass in central Cheongju, searching for more victims after vehicles were trapped in the tunnel by flash floods, the interior ministry said, with nine people still missing nationwide.

South Korea is at the peak of its summer monsoon season, and days of torrential rain have caused widespread flooding and landslides, with rivers bursting their banks, and reservoirs and dams overflowing.

“This kind of extreme weather event will become commonplace — we must accept climate change

is happening, and deal with it,” President Yoon Suk Yeol said during an emergency response meeting on Monday.

The idea that extreme weather linked to climate change “is an anomaly and can’t be helped needs to be completely overhauled”, he said, calling for “extraordinary determination” to improve the country’s preparedness and response.

South Korea will “mobilise all available resources” including the military and police to help with rescue efforts, he said.

“The rainy season is not over yet, and the forecast is now that there will be torrential rain again tomorrow,” he added.

Following the meeting, Yoon, who returned from an overseas trip early Monday, travelled to Yecheon in North Gyeongsang province — one of the hardest



South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol (C) visits a village, where more than a third of houses were damaged in landslides and two people remain missing, in Yecheon. — AFP

hit villages, where more than a third of houses were damaged in

landslides and two people remain missing.

Dressed in a green jacket, often donned by top officials during

public emergencies, Yoon was briefed by officials as he walked past piles of fallen trees and relief workers shovelling mud.

“I’ve never seen something like this in my life, hundreds of tonnes of rocks rolling down from the mountain,” Yoon told the villagers. “How surprised you must have been.”

“I’ll do everything I can to restore the village,” he added.

The majority of the casualties — including 19 of the dead and eight of the missing — were from North Gyeongsang province, and were largely due to massive landslides in the mountainous area that engulfed houses with people inside.

Some of the people who have been reported missing were swept away when a river overflowed in the province, the interior ministry said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

HODEIDA

UN hands over ship for oil transfer

The United Nations on Monday handed over a vessel that will take on board oil from a decaying tanker in the Red Sea off war-torn Yemen, an operation aimed at averting an environmental catastrophe.

The handover ceremony took place aboard the Nautica in the presence of the country’s authorities of the capital Sanaa.

In the coming days, an operation is expected to begin pumping 1.14 million barrels of crude oil to the Nautica from the FSO



Safer, a rusting 47-year-old ship that the UN describes as a “ticking time bomb”.

Monday’s ceremony highlighted close cooperation between the UN and Yemen.

GOMA

Regional force probes M23 massacre

An East African force in eastern DR Congo on Monday announced it would send a fact-finding mission to an area where locals accused M23 rebels of killing 11 people.

The M23 has denied carrying out the massacre.

According to sources in North Kivu province’s Rutshuru territory, the bodies of 11 people who were shot or hacked to death were discovered on Sunday.



They said the bodies were found in Bukombo, around 100 kilometres north of the provincial capital Goma, after rebels withdrew from the area.

JAKARTA

Indonesia replaces minister held in probe

Indonesian President Joko Widodo named a new communications minister in a cabinet shake-up on Monday after the previous minister was detained in a corruption probe linked to a project that cost the country half a billion dollars in losses.

Budi Arie Setiadi succeeds Johnny G Plate, who was arrested in May over accusations he demanded kickbacks related to a government telecommunications project to



expand internet access.

Plate, who denies the allegations, is the fifth member of Widodo’s two administrations to be arrested in a graft scandal since 2014.



In brief

MEXICO CITY



PRESIDENT URGES VOTERS TO REJECT ABBOTT

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday urged Mexican-Americans not to vote for Texas Governor Greg Abbott in response to Texas putting a barrier of orange buoys in the Rio Grande to stop migrants crossing into the United States. Mexico's incoming Foreign Minister, Alicia Barcena, said that the barrier violates a water treaty and may intrude on Mexican territory. "We don't have to do much, just tell our compatriots not to vote for the governor of Texas," Lopez Obrador said. Barcena said Mexico had sent a diplomatic letter to the US on the issue. — Reuters

NAIROBI



DEATH TOLL IN STARVATION CULT PASSES 400

The death toll in an investigation linked to a Kenyan cult that practised starvation to "meet Jesus Christ" has exceeded 400 after 12 more bodies were found on Monday, a senior official said. "Total death Toll - 403," Coast Regional Commissioner Rhoda Onyancha said following the latest round of exhumations in the Shakahola forest, where cult leader Paul Nthenge Mackenzie allegedly urged followers to starve to death. "Exhumation continues tomorrow," Onyancha added, as investigators search for more graves in the forest. Starvation appears to have been the main cause of death were strangled, beaten or suffocated. — AFP

ATHENS



WILDFIRE FORCES EVACUATION OF RESORTS

Wildfires broke out near Athens on Monday as a heatwave grips Greece, firefighters said, with 1,200 children evacuated outside a seaside resort. The first blaze started in Kouvaras, 50 kilometres southeast of Athens. "It's a difficult fire, the winds are really strong" with gusts reaching up to 60 kilometres per hour," said Yannis Artopoulos, a firefighters' spokesman. A forest fire had also flared in strong winds near the Isthmus of Corinth close to the popular beach town of Loutraki. Thick smoke blocked traffic on the roads around Kalyvia. — AFP

Moscow halts grain deal after Crimea hit

MOSCOW: Russia halted participation on Monday in the year-old UN-brokered deal which lets Ukraine export grain through the Black Sea, just hours after a blast knocked out Russia's bridge to Crimea in what Moscow called a strike by Ukrainian sea drones. Russia said two civilians were killed and their daughter wounded in what Moscow cast as a terrorist attack on the road bridge, a major artery for Russian troops fighting in Ukraine.

The Kremlin said there was no link between the attack and its decision to suspend the grain deal, over what it called a failure to meet its demands to implement a parallel agreement easing rules for its own food and fertiliser exports.

"In fact, the Black Sea agreements ceased to be valid today," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call. "Unfortunately, the part of these Black Sea agreements concerning Russia has not been implemented so far, so its effect is terminated."

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, the grain deal's sponsor,



Bulk carrier ARGO I is docked at the grain terminal of the port of Odessa, Ukraine. — AFP file photo

said he still believed Putin wanted it to continue.

"I hope that with this discussion, we can make some progress and continue on our way without a pause," Erdogan said.

Russia's foreign ministry said it would consider rejoining the grain deal if it saw "concrete results" on its demands.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy raised the prospect of

resuming grain exports without Russia's participation, suggesting Kyiv would seek Türkiye's support to effectively negate the Russian de facto blockade imposed last year.

"Even without the Russian Federation, everything must be done so that we can use this Black Sea corridor. We are not afraid," spokesperson Serhiy Nykyforov quoted Zelenskyy as saying.

"We were approached by companies, ship-owners. They said that they are ready, if Ukraine lets them go, and Türkiye continues to let them through, then everyone is ready to continue supplying grain."

The blast on the road bridge to Crimea could have a direct impact on Moscow's ability to supply its troops in southern Ukraine, and reveals the vulnerability of Russia's own Black Sea infrastructure to devices such as seaborne drones: small, fast remote-controlled boats packed with explosives.

The grain deal was hailed as preventing a global food emergency when it was brokered by the United Nations and Türkiye last year.

Putin had threatened last week to walk out of the grain deal, while also saying Russia could return to it "immediately" if its demands were met. — Reuters

EU holds Latin America summit amid rifts over trade and Ukraine



Senior figures pose at the EU-LAC 2023 Business Round Table at the European Commission headquarters on the day of the EU-CELAC summit, in Brussels, Belgium. — Reuters

BRUSSELS: The European Union hosted Latin American and Caribbean leaders on Monday at a long-awaited summit to soothe strained ties, but found themselves divided over how to address Russia's war in Ukraine.

The summit of just over 50 senior figures is the first between Brussels and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) since 2015, with several issues undermining ties.

"We need our close friends to be at our side in these uncertain times," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said, welcoming Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva ahead of the talks.

Von der Leyen promised that Europe would invest 45 billion euros in the Latin American economy under the Global Gateway programme, Brussels' answer to China's "Belt and Road" outreach to developing economies.

But the Europeans had also hoped to convince their transatlantic opposite numbers to sign up to a stern denunciation of Russia's attack of Ukraine — only to be disappointed.

The Europeans had also hoped to convince their transatlantic opposite numbers to sign up to a stern denunciation of Russia's attack of Ukraine — only to be disappointed

Summit host Charles Michel, representing EU leaders as president of the European Council, opened the first session urging delegates to condemn Russia's "illegal war".

"Every country on this planet must be safe. And that's why Russia must not be allowed to succeed," he said, arguing that in addition to hurting Ukrainians the war has had "devastating consequences for food security, energy prices and the global economy."

CELAC's president, Prime Minister

Ralph Gonsalves of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, insisted the summit was not the place to discuss Ukraine, arguing that the war should be brought to a negotiated end even if "not entirely satisfactory to each party".

"I am aware that member states of the European Union may have an understandable preoccupation with the situation in Ukraine," he said.

"But this summit ought not to become another unhelpful battleground for discourses on this matter, which has been and continues to be addressed in other more relevant forums."

Even as EU and CELAC leaders gathered in Brussels, diplomats were struggling to agree on the wording of the final communique.

The 33 nations of Latin America and the Caribbean have no agreed position on the Ukraine war, and some want to protect ties with Russia or to seek a compromise peace deal.

Instead of dealing with Ukraine, some CELAC delegates will push for the implementation of the 2019 EU-Mercosur trade deal. — AFP

WHO concerned at rise in Poland bird flu cases in cats

GENEVA: Poland is the first country to report "high numbers" of cats infected with bird flu across a large area, the WHO said on Monday, adding that the risk of human infection remained low.

The World Health Organization said that since Polish health authorities informed it last month of unusual cat deaths across the country, 29 cats had tested positive for H5N1 bird flu.

They were among 46 cats and one captive caracal tested for the virus, it said, adding that 14 of the infected animals were reported to have been euthanised, while another 11 had died.

"The source of the exposure of cats to the virus is currently unknown and epizootic investigations are ongoing," WHO said in a statement.

Some cats developed severe symptoms including difficulty in breathing, bloody diarrhoea and neurological signs, with rapid deterioration and death in some cases.

Since late 2021, Europe has had its worst-ever outbreak of bird flu, while North and South America have also experienced severe outbreaks.



This has led to the culling of tens of millions of poultry worldwide, many with the H5N1 strain of the virus, which first emerged in 1996.

There has recently been a worrying spike in infections in mammals.

The UN health agency pointed out

that sporadic infection of cats with H5N1 had previously been reported.

"But this is the first report of a high numbers of infected cats over a wide geographical area within a country," it said.

As of July 12, no human contacts of infected cats had reported symptoms, the WHO said, adding that the surveillance period for all contacts had been completed.

It stressed that the risk of human infections following exposure to infected cats had been assessed as low for the general population in Poland.

The risk for cat owners, veterinarians and others who might be exposed more regularly to H5N1-infected cats without using personal protective equipment was meanwhile seen as low to moderate, it said.

Human H5N1 cases are usually the result of direct or indirect exposure to infected live or dead poultry or contaminated environments.

Since 2020, the WHO said it had received 12 reports of human H5N1 cases worldwide. — AFP

Ejada shifts control from others to ourselves



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
khalidalharibi@gmail.com

The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

“As soon as I became Prime Minister I realised that we have an ambitious vision and objectives to achieve; economic growth in addition to improving ease of doing business, healthcare and most significantly education. So to achieve this, I agreed with my cabinet on three team Objectives and Key Results- OKRs: first, performance rewards will depend on both each Minister’s performance in his or her portfolio and, second on the overall cross-functional team performance. Third, credit will be given where credit is due so performance excellence will be publicly recognised and highlighted as a national and career achievement and attributed to the relevant cabinet team member.” This was a part of an insightful conversation with the nation of Georgia’s former Prime Minister Nika Gilauri (2009-2012).

His cabinet’s results are inspiring, including, +8 per cent growth rate, 100 new hospitals built by private sector, and secondary and tertiary education reform. It also improved the nation’s Ease of Doing Business rank in five years from 112th to the 9th.

There are best practices to be shared from this Georgia experience as the Performance Measurement and Institutional Excellence System, known as Ejada, has become one of the most discussed relevant topics for people from every walk of life in Oman.

Individual KPIs
Key Performance Indicators are not a goal on their own right, they serve as a way to remind us of the

collective objectives. While there are many previous performance management systems, these types of systems need consistent refreshment and update, just like the apps in our phones, to improve performance. For example, where previous management systems were right, top-down job description dependent forms, Ejada system is participatory and invites team members to set their own KPIs with their line managers. The significance of this improvements is that it shifts the locus of control from “others” to “ourselves”, which is important in limiting any tendency to blame others instead of thinking and acting as critical thinkers and problem-solvers.

Team KPIs
Teamwork is easier said than done, everyone talks about it and all institutions write in their values, and a few leaders are actually able to make it happen. Challenges to teamwork include but are not limited to our tendency to envy and be self-centred since the dawn of time and the time of our ancestors Cain and Able. This self- centredness combined with connectivity through 24/7 technology and social media is negatively impacting our empathy and teamwork.

While being connected online is helping us communicate faster and get matters done more efficiently it has enabled us to stay for ours without face-to-face human connections, and has been plagued with famous influencers who succeeded in gaining hundreds of thousands of followers through unusual click-baiting for clout and money, not

I AM HOPEFUL THAT EJADA WILL ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORKFORCE MODERNISATION OBJECTIVES AND KEY RESULTS THAT WE ARE ALL LOOKING FORWARD TO IN OMAN VISION 2040

realising that these unusual behaviours, called trends, nudge significant segment of our communities, especially youth, to adopt superficiality as a habit in dealing with all serious and not-so-serious matters in life. A similar solution to this cross-functional team KPIs such as in the Georgian Cabinets is now being tested in China as a social credit system where all public behaviour is measured; the positive is rewarded and the negative chips away from your public good standing and credit score.

Public Recognition
A few years ago, newspapers reported that a late Arab leader kept a secret government agency called “Anti-Stars Unit”. This unit had only one objective- neutralise anyone with extraordinary public performance, fearing they might develop future ambitions and become competitors. What is the result? A crisis for the nation and a talent shortage that has caused failures in every sector for a generation. For this reason, appropriately giving credit where credit is due ensures social justice and motivation for excellence.

Georgia is a beautiful nation that remind me of the Sultanate of Oman, with proud people who are proud of their national heritage and spirit and stood up for them for millennias, and they also managed to modernise and attract investments with balance. I am hopeful that the brilliant Ejada system will also contribute to the workforce modernisation objectives and key results that we are all looking forward to in Oman Vision 2040.

The tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer



Kai Bird

The author is the director of the Leon Levy Center for Biography and co-author with the late Martin J. Sherwin of “American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer.”

One day in the spring of 1954, J. Robert Oppenheimer ran into Albert Einstein outside their offices at the Institute for Advanced

Study in Princeton, N.J. Oppenheimer had been the director of the Institute since 1947 and Einstein a faculty member since he fled Germany in 1933. The two men might argue about quantum physics — Einstein grumbled that he just didn’t think that God played dice with the universe — but they were good friends.

Oppenheimer took the occasion to explain to Einstein that he was going to be absent from the Institute for some weeks. He was being forced to defend himself in Washington, D.C., during a secret hearing against charges that he was a security risk, and perhaps even disloyal. Einstein argued that Oppenheimer “had no obligation to subject himself to the witch-hunt, that he had served his country well, and that if this was the reward she [America] offered he should turn his back on her.” Oppenheimer demurred, saying he could not turn his back on America. “He loved America,” said Verna Hobson, his secretary who was a witness to the conversation, “and this love was as deep as his love of science.”

“Einstein doesn’t understand,” Oppenheimer told Ms. Hobson. But as Einstein walked back into his office he told his assistant, nodding in the direction of Oppenheimer, “There goes a narr [fool].”

Einstein was right. Oppenheimer was foolishly subjecting himself to a kangaroo court in which he was soon stripped of his security clearance and publicly humiliated. The charges were flimsy, but by a vote of 2 to 1 the security panel of the Atomic Energy Commission deemed Oppenheimer a loyal citizen who was nevertheless a security risk: “We find that Dr. Oppenheimer’s continuing conduct and association have reflected a serious disregard for the requirements of the security system.” The scientist would no longer be trusted with the nation’s secrets. Celebrated in 1945 as the “father of the atomic bomb,” nine years later he would become the chief celebrity victim of the McCarthyite maelstrom. Oppenheimer may have been naïve, but he was right to fight the



J Robert Oppenheimer

charges — and right to use his influence as one of the country’s pre-eminent scientists to speak out against a nuclear arms race. In the months and years leading up to the security hearing, Oppenheimer had

OPPENHEIMER WAS TRYING TO WARN OUR GENERALS THAT THESE ARE NOT BATTLEFIELD WEAPONS, BUT WEAPONS OF PURE TERROR. BUT OUR POLITICIANS CHOSE TO SILENCE HIM; THE RESULT WAS THAT WE SPENT THE COLD WAR ENGAGED IN A COSTLY AND DANGEROUS ARMS RACE.

criticised the decision to build a “super” hydrogen bomb. Astonishingly, he had gone so far as to say that the Hiroshima bomb was used “against an essentially defeated enemy.” The atomic bomb, he warned, “is a weapon for aggressors, and the elements of surprise and terror are as intrinsic to it as are the fissionable nuclei.” These forthright dissents against the prevailing view of Washington’s national security establishment earned him powerful political enemies. That was precisely why he was being charged with

disloyalty. It is my hope that Christopher Nolan’s stunning new film on Oppenheimer’s complicated legacy will initiate a national conversation not only about our existential relationship to weapons of mass destruction, but also the need in our society for scientists as public intellectuals. Nolan’s three-hour film is a riveting thriller and mystery story that delves deeply into what this country did to its most famous scientist.

Sadly, Oppenheimer’s life story is relevant to our current political predicaments. Oppenheimer was destroyed by a political movement characterised by rank know-nothing, anti-intellectual, xenophobic demagogues. The witch-hunters of that season are the direct ancestors of our current political actors of a certain paranoid style. I’m thinking of Roy Cohn, Senator Joseph McCarthy’s chief counsel, who tried to subpoena Oppenheimer in 1954, only to be warned that this could interfere with the impending security hearing against Oppenheimer. Yes, that Roy Cohn, who taught former President Donald Trump his brash, wholly deranged style of politics. Just recall the former president’s fact-challenged comments on the pandemic or climate change. This is a worldview proudly scornful of science.

After America’s most celebrated scientist was falsely accused and publicly humiliated, the Oppenheimer case sent a warning to

all scientists not to stand up in the political arena as public intellectuals. This was the real tragedy of Oppenheimer. What happened to him also damaged our ability as a society to debate honestly about scientific theory — the very foundation of our modern world.

Quantum physics has utterly transformed our understanding of the universe. And this science has also given us a revolution in computing power and incredible biomedical innovations to prolong human life. Yet, too many of our citizens still distrust scientists and fail to understand the scientific quest, the trial and error inherent in testing any theory against facts by experimenting. Just look at what happened to our public health civil servants during the recent pandemic.

We stand on the cusp of yet another technological revolution in which artificial intelligence will transform how we live and work, and yet we are not yet having the kind of informed civil discourse with its innovators that could help us to make wise policy decisions on its regulation. Our politicians need to listen more to technology innovators like Sam Altman and quantum physicists like Kip Thorne and Michio Kaku.

Oppenheimer was trying desperately to have that kind of conversation about nuclear weapons. He was trying to warn our generals that these are not battlefield weapons, but weapons of pure terror. But our politicians chose to silence him; the result was that we spent the Cold War engaged in a costly and dangerous arms race.

Today, Vladimir Putin’s not-so-veiled threats to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in the war in Ukraine are a stark reminder that we can never be complacent about living with nuclear weapons. Oppenheimer did not regret what he did at Los Alamos; he understood that you cannot stop curious human beings from discovering the physical world around them. One cannot halt the scientific quest, nor can one un-invent the atomic bomb. But Oppenheimer always believed that human beings could learn to regulate these technologies and integrate them into a sustainable and humane civilisation. We can only hope he was right.

— The New York Times

The Communist rallying Spain’s left

VALENTIN BONTEMPS

“Less noise and more talking” is the rallying cry of Spain’s popular Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz, who’s hoping her straight-talking message of unity will reinvigorate Spain’s radical left in Sunday’s election.

Gone -- at least in theory -- are the divisions that plagued Spain’s left-wing coalition government in recent months, with Podemos throwing its support behind Diaz’s Sumar (“Unite”) platform after suffering a major defeat in the May 28 local and regional elections.

“The most important thing is that we join hands, we talk and we build bridges to show Spain what politics is all about,” said the 52-year-old lawyer, who is a member of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), as she laid out her strategy earlier this year.

“It’s not about making noise or making a scene but about improving people’s lives,” said Diaz, who is credited with raising Spain’s minimum wage.

Number three in Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s government, Diaz created Sumar a year ago and has managed to attract the support of 15 parties to stand as the sole candidate for the radical left in Sunday’s vote.

It was a key victory for the Galician-born politician who in three years has gone from being a virtual unknown to Spain’s most trusted party leader in the polls -- a feat she accepted with a cool head, insisting she’s not looking to win any “medals”.

The party is tied for third place in the polls with far-right party Vox.

Born in May 1971 in Fene near Ferrol, a working-class town in northwest Spain which was the birthplace of former dictator Francisco Franco, the labour law specialist made a name for herself over a decade ago for taking part in political meetings with her baby in

DIAZ HAS ESTABLISHED HERSELF FIRMLY WITHIN SPAIN’S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE THANKS TO HER AFFABLE NATURE AND HER ABILITY TO COMPROMISE, WHICH HAS BEEN HAILED BY BOTH UNIONS AND EMPLOYERS GROUPS.

her arms.

But it was her nomination as labour minister in 2020 which brought her into the spotlight.

And 18 months later, Podemos’ then leader Pablo Iglesias handed her the reins of the radical left after he stepped down from politics following an electoral setback.

“Yolanda Diaz could be the next prime minister of Spain,” Iglesias said at the time when the pair were very close.

The daughter of a leading trade union leader, she has established herself firmly within Spain’s political landscape thanks to her affable nature and her ability to compromise, which has been hailed by both unions and employers groups.

Diaz negotiated a crucial furlough agreement during the Covid crisis, secured a significant increase to the minimum wage and pushed through a key labour reform.

She is hoping to be able to capitalise on such achievements by highlighting her image as a pragmatist.

Diaz, who frequently dresses in red, likes to recall the time Spain’s veteran Communist leader, Santiago Carrillo, kissed her hand when she was four years old.

“She’s like (France’s hard-left leader Jean-Luc) Melenchon, only dressed in Christian Dior!” grumbled Socialist veteran Alfonso Guerra, who has been critical of Sanchez’s alliances with the radical left.

It is a reproach that has been echoed in business circles where Sumar’s “universal inheritance” plan, which involves giving young people 20,000 euros (\$22,500) to spend on study or training, has provoked a backlash because of its estimated 10-billion-euro price tag.

But Diaz has fought back, insisting it was a crucial way to ensure “equal opportunities” for all.

She is also facing opposition from parts of Podemos after Sumar said it would not accept the presence of Equality Minister Irene Montero on its list. — AFP

COOL STEP



▪ A girl cools off at a fountain in Pristina on Monday as Kosovo is hit by a heatwave. – AFP

Financing childhood growth

In 2020, chronic undernutrition stunted the growth of nearly a quarter of the world’s children under five years old. Being too short for one’s age, as a result of chronic undernutrition, can cause irreversible physical and cognitive damage and increases the risk of dying from common infections.

Improving the lives of these children is not a question of food supply. Current cereal grain production, about 2.8 billion tons, provides enough calories to feed 11-14 billion people – more than meeting humanity’s current needs. But less than half of the world’s grain is eaten by humans, with the remainder fed to animals or burned as fuel. Almost every gallon of gasoline in the United States, for example, contains 10 per cent corn ethanol.

Too poor to affect grain prices in global markets, the chronically hungry are economically invisible. To avert the devastating and long-lasting effects of poor nutrition and health, we propose an innovative financing mechanism that will attract impact investors and ensure adequate food for these malnourished children.

In 2019, two World Bank economists, Emanuela Galasso and the late Adam Wagstaff, found that childhood stunting reduces adult economic productivity, estimating a per capita income loss of between 5 and 7 per cent in developing countries. And that figure does not account for the millions of stunted children who die young.



Joel E Cohen

Cohen is Professor of Populations at The Rockefeller University and Columbia University



John E Rogers

Rogers is Senior Counsel at Clark Hill PLC, specialising in international transactions

Galasso and Wagstaff also conducted a cost-benefit analysis of applying 10 tested nutrition interventions over 10 years in 34 countries that together account for 90 per cent of the world’s stunted children. According to their estimates, the benefits would outweigh the costs by a ratio of at least five to one, and the annual rate of return would be 12 per cent.

Such high payoffs could induce investors to buy development impact bonds focused on ending childhood stunting in low-income countries. The idea behind this type of financial instrument, in which investors provide financing for development programmes and receive returns only if agreed-upon outcomes are achieved, is “to generate a positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return.”

The World Bank’s Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF) tried a similar mechanism, albeit to provide emergency funding to the poorest countries in the event of a pandemic. Investors purchased insured bonds in 2017, and the proceeds were to be paid to developing countries to contain infectious-disease outbreaks. The Bank closed the PEF in April 2021, amid criticism that it was too generous to investors while being too strict and too slow in payouts to governments.

While the large benefit-cost ratio of tested nutrition interventions provides a compelling rationale for development impact bonds, a model of private financing or a public-private partnership

THE SIMPLEST MODEL WOULD OFFER FIXED PRINCIPAL AND INTEREST PAYMENTS, BACKED BY FIXED CONTRACTUAL PAYMENTS.

could avoid the PEF’s mistakes and overcome governmental and individual corruption, cumbersome bureaucracies, and political instability.

Returns on investments in nutrition-intervention bonds would be tied to programmes’ projected economic benefits. After all, effective nutrition interventions should boost productivity and increase the tax base in the participating country. For example, governments could contract with bond issuers to establish and operate anti-stunting programmes and then gradually increase payments to these issuers for their nutrition interventions as the expected economic benefits

materialise . Of the many possible models for “childhood growth” bonds, the majority of these bonds would be jointly issued by a parent entity in the developed world and its subsidiary in the local country. Together, they would design the programme in consultation with the participating government and recognised experts in child nutrition, field interventions, and data evaluation.

After receiving the invested funds, the parent entity would channel them tax-free to the subsidiary to implement the nutrition interventions alongside the government. That could mean buying food from local producers or markets and delivering it to poor pregnant women and undernourished children. Supplying food, at least in part, through monitored childcare programmes outside the home could reduce misappropriation.

Under the contract with the parent and the subsidiary (whose terms would be public), government payments would be in a hard currency. A “sinking fund” would cover interest payments until the government begins to see results. The government would also have the right to assume control of the programme at any time in exchange for pre-paying the bonds.

The simplest model would offer fixed principal and interest

payments, backed by fixed contractual payments. But investors with a greater appetite for risk may prefer governments to reward better-than-expected improvements in child nutrition and related tax revenues with larger contractual payments, triggering larger payments to the bondholders. Of course, poorer-than-expected improvements would result in smaller payments.

It will be important to design payment rights early and well. Given that emerging markets have a long history of debt crises, and that governments tend to repay development-finance institutions (DFIs) first, investors will want these bonds to rank equally in payment rights with the government’s debts to DFIs. They may also insist on the contract being tied to a governmental obligation to a DFI, a DFI guarantee of the bonds, or an agreement by a DFI to purchase the bonds from the bondholders upon any payment default.

Nutrition-intervention bonds are an innovative financing vehicle that promises to put food on the table, prevent childhood stunting, and yield high returns for investors. If well-structured, they can be powerful catalysts for economic growth and improving the welfare of the world’s most vulnerable people. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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OMAN TO TAKE PART IN FRIENDLY BEACH SOCCER MEET IN BELARUS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The head coach of Oman national beach soccer team, Talib Hilal, has shortlisted 12 probables for a training camp ahead of the friendly beach soccer matches, which will be held in Belarus from August 4 to 14. The camp will take place at the sands court in the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex from Friday until August 1. Most of the probables are players who represented the team in the last Arab Beach Soccer Championship and ANOC Asian qualifiers. Oman will aim for maximum technical output from this friendly tournament to gear up for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup UAE 2023 which will be held in Dubai from February 15 to 25, 2024.

Oman beach soccer team was runners-up at the Arab Beach Soccer Championship 2023 on a successful note. The team lost to Egypt 4-2 in the final game of the championship. Oman team's

campaign in the Arabian event began with a strong start when they thrashed Palestine 7-1. They received a shock 5-3 loss against Egypt before registering an astounding 14-0 victory over Kyrgyzstan in the last group match to secure a spot in the quarterfinals. They were second behind toppers Egypt. In the quarterfinals, Oman beat UAE 5-4 to book a berth in the semifinals. Oman defeated Morocco 4-2 in the semifinals to confirm their attendance in the final match.

Later in May, Oman beach soccer team missed their attendance in ANOC World Beach Games after they lost to UAE 3-2 in a tight clash in the Asian qualifiers.

OMAN SQUAD: Khaid al Araimi, Munthir al Araimi, Yahya al Murikhi, Amjad al Hamdani, Abdullah al Souti, Sami al Balushi, Nouh al Zadjali, Younis al Owaisi, Mishaal al Araimi, Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, Ahmed al Owaisi and Nouh al Battashi.



Mexico down Panama 1-0 to lift 9th Gold Cup

LOS ANGELES: Santiago Gimenez scored the game-winner minutes after entering the match on Sunday as Mexico beat Panama 1-0 to win a record-extending ninth CONCACAF Gold Cup crown.

The final of the regional championship for North and Central America and the Caribbean was a fast-paced physical affair between a Mexico team eager to move on from recent disappointments and a Panama side seeking a first Gold Cup crown in their third appearance in the finals.

Gimenez started on the bench in favour of Henry Martin and, with the match deadlocked, was brought on in the 85th minute.

Three minutes later the 22-year-old Feyenoord striker became an instant hero.

After Ivan Anderson's cross into the Mexico penalty area was blocked, Mexico's Orbelin Pineda came away with the ball and passed to Gimenez at midfield.

Gimenez raced into the penalty area, spinning away from one defender and beating another before slotting a left-footed shot past Panama goalkeeper Orlando Mosquera.

"It is indescribable," Gimenez said. "It is impressive how the group came together to move forward. I'm not saying it with words, it was seen with the title."

His fourth goal in 18 international appearances sparked frenzied celebrations among the largely pro-Mexico crowd of nearly 73,000 at SoFi Stadium, home of the NFL's Los Angeles Rams and one of



Mexico celebrate the victory against Panama following the Gold Cup final at SoFi Stadium. – USA TODAY Sports

the venues tabbed for the 2026 World Cup to be hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. Mexico added a ninth Gold Cup title to those it won in 1993, 1996, 1998, 2003, 2009, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

The United States own seven titles, but were stunningly eliminated by Panama in a penalty shootout during the semi-finals.

"We knew that we were

playing to go down in the history of national soccer and opportunities must be seized," said Mexico's interim coach Jaime Lozano, who had coached Mexico to Olympic Bronze at the Tokyo Games in 2021 and was brought in for the Gold Cup tournament after Diego Cocca was sacked last month.

Cocca was fired after a disappointing Nations League campaign, which followed

Mexico's failure to advance from the group stage at the World Cup in Qatar.

"We have said it from day one. Jaime understands very well what it means to represent Mexico, he understands the player very well, he gets the best out of each player and that is reflected on the field," goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa, who won a fifth Gold Cup title, said of Lozano.

Lozano himself refused to be

drawn on whether he thought he'd earned the permanent job with a North American World.

"This decision is not up to me," he said. "I signed a contract for the Gold Cup. Mexicans sometimes do not believe much in the process, but even if we had lost the final today, I think we should evaluate many other things, not only the final result.

"If we trust in the process, the results will be immensely better."

Mexico thought they'd seized the lead in the 33rd minute when an attack launched by a long clearance from goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa ended with Martin skipping onto a cross from Luis Romo and firing a left-footed shot from the centre of the box into Mosquera's net.

It took several minutes before a VAR review deemed Martin was offside.

Ten minutes later Mosquera kept the score level as he came up with two saves in rapid succession, one from Pineda and one from Martin.

Last drop of blood

Panama threatened in first-half injury time, but Anibal Godoy's shot went just wide of the left post.

Panama avoided a damaging reduction to 10 men in the 63rd minute when Harold Cummings was shown a second yellow card for tripping Pineda only for referee Said Martinez to quickly rescind it.

After Antuna tested Mosquera with a header in the 66th minute, Panama responded with a header from Jose Fajardo that Ochoa controlled.

Panama's Edgar Barcenas came close with a long-range shot in the 87th but Thomas Christiansen's Canamlen had no answer to Gimenez's strike.

"We gave everything we had in today's game, to the last drop of blood," Christiansen said. "The team died on its feet.

"Playing in front of 70,000 Mexicans in Los Angeles was not easy and the team gave their all at all times." — AFP

Bangladesh win T20 series against Afghanistan for first time

SYLHET, Bangladesh: Opener Liton Das top-scored with 35 as Bangladesh defeated Afghanistan by six wickets in the second Twenty20 international to take the two-match series 2-0 on Sunday.

Liton laid the foundation for the win with a 67-run opening stand with Afif Hossain (24) as Bangladesh raced to 119-4 in 16.1 overs after Taskin Ahmed's 3-33 helped the side restrict Afghanistan to 116-7 in a rain-reduced 17 overs.

Bangladesh won the opening match of the series by two wickets on Friday, and Sunday's follow-up -- both of them in the northeastern city of Sylhet -- earned them their third consecutive T20 series win, and their first against Afghanistan in three attempts.

They defeated world champions England 3-0 and Scotland 2-1 earlier this year.

Off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman gave Afghanistan a lifeline to save the series by

removing Liton and Afif in the space of three balls after their solid stand before Azmatullah Omarzai bowled Najmul Hossain for four.

But skipper Shakib Al Hasan and young Towhid Hridoy forged a 31-run stand for the fourth wicket to prevent further collapse.

"We lost couple of wickets, but given the start we had, we were always ahead," Shakib said at the post-match presentation ceremony.

"Given the ground conditions, I knew their spinners would have it tough."

Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan refused to make any excuses. "Weather is not an excuse for a team. T20 should be decided on skills and we were not good enough there, especially in batting," he said.

Omarzai dismissed Towhid for 19 before finishing with 2-17 but Shakib, with his unbeaten 18, took Bangladesh home.

— AFP

Royal Cavalry, RGO participate in Basel Tattoo Parade



Bangladesh's Shamim Hossain reacts after winning the second Twenty20 international cricket match between Bangladesh and Afghanistan at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet on Sunday. — AFP



BASEL: The Royal Court Affairs' Royal Cavalry and the Royal Guard of Oman took part in Basel Tattoo Parade, which kicked off at the city's centre and passed by the Rhine, as part of Basel 2023 show of military music bands.

Oman's mounted male and female musicians who participated in the parade rode thoroughbred Arabian horses and played Arab and international tunes that appealed to the audience of the event, which saw a large turnout of global bands from different cultural backgrounds.

Basel 2023 Tattoo lasts from July 14 to 22. — ONA

Shakeel, Salman help Pakistan counter Sri Lanka's spin

GALLE, Sri Lanka: An unbeaten century stand between Saud Shakeel and Agha Salman rescued Pakistan from a precarious 101-5 on the second day of the rain-hit opening Test on Monday.

In response to Sri Lanka's 312, Pakistan reached 221-5 when rain stopped play with the tourists still 91 runs behind.

Sri Lanka's left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took three wickets, including skipper Babar Azam.

Sri Lanka batsman Dhananjaya de Silva had earlier made 122 to hand the hosts a respectable total.

Pakistan faltered in their reply before Shakeel, on 69, and Salman, on 61, put on 120 runs to steady the innings and thwart the Sri Lankan spinners.

The left- and right-hand



Pakistan's Agha Salman (L) plays a shot as Sri Lanka's Sadeera Samarawickrama (C) watches during the second day of the first cricket Test match between Sri Lanka and Pakistan at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on July 17, 2023. — AFP

batting combination of Shakeel and Salman mixed the right dose of caution and aggression, with 12 boundaries and a six between them.

The pair showed maturity in tackling the spinners by using their feet to get to the pitch of the ball, with Pakistan scoring at nearly five runs an over.

Sri Lanka had come out roaring when pace bowler Kasun Rajitha got Imam-ul-Haq out for one and Jayasuriya sent back Abdullah Shafique for 19. The left-handed Shan Masood hit back as he smashed 39 off 30 balls but fell lbw to Ramesh Mendis, who was denied the wicket by the on-field umpire before Sri Lanka successfully reviewed.

Azam fell when he got an inside edge onto his pads and the ball looped to short leg,

taken by wicketkeeper Sadeera Samarawickrama.

De Silva earlier moved from his overnight 94 to register his 10th Test ton in his 50th match to bolster Sri Lanka's position from a shaky 54-4 on Sunday.

Pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi, fellow quick Naseem Shah and leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed ended on three wickets each to bowl out Sri Lanka and lunch was called.

The second day's play began early with revised timings for each of the three sessions and de Silva soon got to his hundred off Shaheen.

De Silva, who smashed 12 fours and three sixes, got useful runs with the lower order before he finally fell to Naseem, who struck twice after Pakistan took the second new ball.

— AFP

MESSI

AMERICA'S 10

FORT LAUDERDALE, United States: It rained on his parade, but Lionel Messi greeted his new Inter Miami fans and was hailed by the club's owner as "America's number 10" at a damp but celebratory unveiling event on Sunday.

Miami's 20,000 capacity stadium was close to full despite a huge thunder storm just before the event to celebrate the arrival of the Argentine World Cup winner was due to begin.

A massive tropical downpour forced organisers to delay the start of "The Unveil" as fans took cover or waited out the rain in their cars.

The event started around two hours later than originally scheduled with delirious fans chanting Messi's name as the lights dimmed on the venue.

The club's co-owner David Beckham opened the ceremony saying Messi's arrival was a "dream come true" before majority owner Jorge Mas whipped the crowd up.

"Tonight is a gift and celebration to the city that opened its arms to my family," said the Cuban-American businessman.

"Tonight we are doing this in the rain. "This is holy water!" he added.

"This is our moment! Our moment to change the football landscape in this country," he added, before introducing Messi as "Your new number 10, America's number 10".

Messi, who arrived in Miami on Tuesday with his family and caused a viral sensation after being photographed shopping with them in a local supermarket, thanked the supporters.

"Thank you very much to all the people for supporting me and giving me this love. I am very happy to be here in Miami," he said.

"I really want to start training, to compete, I have the same desire that I always had to compete, to want to win, to help the club continue to grow.

"I am very happy to have



Argentine soccer star Lionel Messi waves as he is presented as the newest player for Major League Soccer's Inter Miami CF, at DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on Monday. — AFP

chosen to come to play in this city with my family, to choose this project and I have no doubt that we are going to enjoy it a lot, we are going to have a good time and very good things are going to happen," he said.

Inter Miami, the bottom club in Major League Soccer, confirmed on Saturday that the seven-times Ballon d'Or winner had signed a deal that will keep him with the club until 2025.

The former Barcelona great opted to join Miami after his contract with French club Paris Saint-Germain expired last month.

Best in the world

He was scheduled to hold a press conference on Monday but the club said on Sunday that had been postponed. No explanation for the decision was given.

Messi could make his debut for the club on Friday against Mexico team Cruz Azul in the new Leagues Cup, which features teams from both MLS and Mexico's Liga MX.

However on Saturday, the team's new Argentine coach Gerardo Martino urged "patience" after watching his side's winless streak extend to 11 games.

"We look to the future with hope (given) that the best player in the world will play for our team, but also with the patience that we have to have so that he can get in good physical shape and can play at the right moment," he said.

Latin music stars Camilo and Ozuna were set to entertain the crowd their temporary, DRV PNK Stadium, about an hour's drive north of downtown Miami.

The stadium, on the site of the old home of the now defunct Fort Lauderdale Strikers, was not completely full as the event got under way with fireworks.

Inter are planning their own purpose-built stadium, Freedom Park, in Miami but it is not expected to open until 2025.

— AFP

Busquets inks deal to join Messi in Miami

MIAMI: Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets has signed a contract with Inter Miami that will see him reunited with Argentine superstar Lionel Messi through the 2025 season, the Major League Soccer club said on Sunday.

Completion of the deal comes a day after Messi, who sparked Argentina to a World Cup title last year in Qatar, signed his own contract with the club.

Inter had announced last month that they were acquiring Busquets, who will be reunited with his former Barcelona teammate Messi.

The one-time World Cup champion, nine-time La Liga winner and former Barca captain will occupy a Designated Player slot and is expected to join the team "in the coming days," Inter said.

"I am excited to welcome Sergio Busquets to Inter Miami," managing owner Jorge Mas said in a statement.

"Since day one we have set out to bring the world's best players to Inter Miami. Sergio's repertoire speaks for itself."

Busquets, 34, said in May that he would leave Barcelona this year at the end of his contract.



Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets (C) is presented with a jersey after signing with Major League Soccer's Inter Miami CF, at DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on Monday. — AFP

He made 134 appearances for Spain before announcing his retirement from the team in December.

Busquets has been a central part of Barcelona's successes in the past 15 years, including three Champions League triumphs.

Busquets played as pivot behind Andres Iniesta and Xavi Hernandez in an iconic midfield trio, and the three of them also won the World Cup with Spain in 2010. "He is one of the smartest players to ever play the sport," Inter's sporting director Chris Henderson said. "He reads the game at an unprecedented level

and impacts every facet of play."

Busquets said the move offered a "special and exciting opportunity."

"I was impressed by the club when I came with Barcelona last year and now I'm happy and ready to represent the club myself. I can't wait to help bring the success that this ambitious club strives for."

The signing comes a day after Messi inked the contract that has energised football fans in Miami and beyond, and on the same day that Inter planned to officially present him at an "unveiling" at the club's ground.



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GCC Council
inks pact
with Gulf
Federation of
Chambers



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) signed a joint executive programme with the Federation of GCC Chambers of Commerce and Industry on Monday with the aim of supporting joint trade and commerce.

The programme was signed by Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jassim Mohammed al Budaiwi, and the President of the Federation of Chambers of the GCC, Hassan bin Mujib al Huwaizi, in Riyadh.

Al Huwaizi of the Federation of Chambers stated that the signing represented an extension of the cooperation between the Federation and the Council which aims to enhance joint efforts in the Gulf and dates back to 1992.

The agreement aims to enhance the integration of economies of GCC member states in general, with a particular emphasis on the private sector. That includes strengthening the role of the private sector in the region, and promoting joint projects between establishments in the Gulf.

In addition, the programme will monitor and implement the provisions of the Unified Economic Agreement — a framework that aims to achieve economic integration among member states — and implement the economic decisions of the Supreme Council.

The programme will also extend to include the organisation of seminars and scientific conferences, joint training opportunities, and the distribution of studies and research issued by the Federation.

In order to unify economic efforts in the region, the Secretariat General of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council recently announced that it will soon launch a centralised recruitment portal for GCC citizens.

Oman witnesses significant growth in
LNG exports, expands trade partnerships

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Sultanate of Oman has emerged as a prominent player in the global liquefied natural gas (LNG) market, with a remarkable surge in exports and the expansion of trade partnerships. According to the recently published International Gas Union's World LNG Report, Oman experienced an impressive 11.3 per cent incremental increase in LNG exports by market in 2022, compared to the previous year.

Despite facing outages and upstream supply disruptions, Oman achieved higher-than-average utilisation rates in 2022, with a total LNG export volume of 10.4 million tonnes (MT).

This resilience and ability to maintain high utilisation rates amidst challenges demonstrate the country's commitment to meeting global LNG demand and its robust infrastructure capabilities.

Oman's operational liquefaction capacity, as of the end of April 2023, stands at 10.4 million tonnes per annum (MTPA). This signifies the country's continued efforts



to expand its LNG production capabilities, ensuring a reliable supply of LNG to meet growing market demands.

The report highlights Oman's

growing influence in the LNG sector, as it solidifies its position as a key supplier in the global energy market. This substantial growth in exports underscores

the country's commitment to harnessing its abundant natural gas reserves and capitalising on the increasing demand for cleaner energy sources.

Oman's LNG trade volumes in 2022 were distributed across various markets, with China and India leading the way as the primary trading partners for carbon-offset cargoes from 2019 to 2022. Last year, Oman exported 1.72 million tonnes (MT) of LNG to China and India.

Additionally, the country supplied 8.25 MT to other countries in the Asia Pacific region most notably Japan (2.69 MT), South Korea (4.57 MT), Chinese Taipei (0.34 MT) and Thailand (0.65 MT), demonstrating its expanding presence in this dynamic market.

Furthermore, Oman's LNG exports reached 0.70 MT to Europe, further diversifying its customer base and penetrating new markets including France, Spain, Turkey, Italy and Greece.

The country also exported 0.08 MT to Brazil and 0.12 MT to Puerto Rico, indicating its growing reach in these regions. In 2022, it also exported 0.14 MT to Kuwait.

The surge in Oman's LNG exports can be attributed to several factors.

TURN TO P14

Manufacturing units worth RO 150m
in operation in Samayil Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Apex Business Trading, represented by the Corrugated Boxes Factory, has opened its new branch at the Facility Building in Samayil Industrial City and launched four brand new and innovative products during the inaugural ceremony held on Monday under the patronage of Halima bint Rashid al Zareeya, Chairperson of the SMEs Development Authority.

Also present was Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). Ibrahim bin Murad al Balushi, General Manager at Apex Business Trading, highlighted the significance of the Corrugated Boxes Factory in Samayil Industrial City as one of the key manufacturing projects.

"Established in 2021 with support and funding from the SMEs Development Authority, this factory plays a key role in meeting the market's demand for packaging materials, cardboard cartons and innovative products," Al Balushi said, adding: "The factory has gained



increasing popularity in both local and international markets due to its ability to produce a wide range of sizes based on demand, making it a pivotal player in manufacturing high-value and competitive products."

He added, "Apex Business Trading is privileged to be the first Omani company to manufacture and innovate competitive new products using the highest quality of corrugated cardboards.

These products include exhibition booths and kiosks in various shapes and sizes, various types of furnishings, materials for professional product display

and promotion, and billboards.

The products stand out for their cost-effectiveness and eco-friendliness, with their full recyclability reflecting the company's strong commitment to the environment."

According to Ahmed bin Suleiman al Hashmi, Investor Services Head at Samayil Industrial City, Madayn has divided Samayil Industrial City into several sectors, among which is a 39,000 sqm area designated for the SMEs, with the current occupancy rate of this sector touching 34 per cent.

He added that the total number of the localised projects

in Samayil Industrial City has reached 156, covering an area of 2.2 million square metres.

Of these projects, 94 are in the production phase, 43 are under construction, and 19 are in the mapping preparation phase.

The total investment volume of these projects amounts to RO 150 million, and the projects have provided employment for approximately 2,600 workers.

Al Hashmi also pointed out several key investment opportunities in Samayil Industrial City, which have undergone preliminary feasibility studies.

These opportunities include diverse sectors such as dairy and juice production, date products manufacturing and packaging, breakfast cereal production, dolomite processing, water leakage prevention solutions, copper bars and sheets manufacturing, gypsum production, electrical conductors manufacturing, glossy ceramics production, HVAC equipment manufacturing, electrical switch manufacturing, marble product manufacturing, and prefabricated building production.

Oman REIT
secures \$30m
loan to expand
portfolio

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Oman REIT, a real estate investment trust (REIT) based in Muscat, has secured a \$30 million loan from Al Muzn Islamic, the Islamic arm of the National Bank of Oman (NBO).

The loan, which has a tenure of 14 years, will be used to acquire the Nesto Wadi Kabir building, a retail property in Muscat.

The Nesto Wadi Kabir Building has an unexpired lease term of approximately 15 years with Nesto Hypermarket LLC.

This long-term lease agreement provides Oman REIT with a stable stream of rental income, which will help to mitigate the risks associated with tenant turnover, the publicly-listed real estate investment fund said in a filing to Muscat Stock Exchange on Monday.

The acquisition of the Nesto Wadi Kabir Building is a significant milestone for Oman REIT. It expands the REIT's portfolio and increases the weighted average unexpired lease term (WAULT) of its assets.

This will help to improve the stability and predictability of Oman REIT's cash flows, it noted.

The loan from Al Muzn Islamic is a testament to Oman REIT's strong financial position and its ability to secure favorable financing.

OAB appointed as lead arranger in \$1.2 bn syndicated loan for OQGN

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has been appointed as one of the lead arrangers for a \$1.2 billion syndicated loan for OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), exclusive operator of Oman's gas transportation system.

As the only Omani bank among the lead arrangers, along with a few select international and regional banks, Oman Arab Bank demonstrated its expertise, strong relationships, and unwavering commitment to its clients and proved its ability to undertake such complex and large corporate deals.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank said, "We are honoured to have been appointed as a strategic financial partner for OQGN, as they pursue their ambitions and robust growth strategy. Combining their vision with our financial expertise, we aim



to facilitate their journey towards becoming a crucial infrastructure player in the country. We will continue to leverage our extensive resources, industry knowledge, and financial solutions to provide the necessary support to OQGN."

Headed, "The oversubscription of the syndicated loan facility underscores our strong reputation

and expertise in structuring such financing arrangements. The syndicated loan not only reflects the confidence of the financial community in OQGN's potential but also serves as a testament to OAB's capabilities in providing tailored financing solutions and leading large-scale transactions."

Sulaiman al Hinai, Head of

Wholesale Banking at Oman Arab Bank added: "Oman Arab Bank continues to be the partner of choice for numerous key socio-economic projects, enabling the growth and progress of the nation in developmental, economic and urban fields, all the while contributing to the evolving financial system."

To date, Oman Arab Bank, as a Group, along with its strategic partner Arab Bank PLC and its sharia compliant 100 per cent subsidiary Alizz Islamic Bank, has spearheaded the financing of several notable mega-scale projects, helping Oman attract more FDI into the country.

Through meticulous planning, strategic partnerships, and a dedicated team who have the expertise, knowledge and skill sets, the bank has consistently set new benchmarks in the industry.

BMW Group and AJIA celebrate 20 years of success in Oman



MUSCAT: Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group vehicles for Oman, is celebrating its 20-year partnership with the Group, and on this occasion, Jean-Philippe Parain, Senior Vice-President Sales for Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa at BMW Group, visited the Sultanate of Oman for the first time.

The celebration of the significant milestone comes in line with the relentless efforts of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles and BMW Group to bring game-changing automotive experiences for motorists across Oman, as reflected in AJIA's successful legacy as the official importer of BMW Group vehicles for the past two decades.

During his visit, Jean-Philippe Parain was accompanied by Shaikh Othman Bahwan, and Rachid Zamani, Managing Director, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, and Dr Hamid Haqparwar, Managing Director, BMW Group Middle East.

During the visit, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles also announced that the dealership will be establishing a new state-of-the-art BMW service facility at Mawaleh in Muscat, that will offer the same legendary service for all BMW customers in a futuristic service environment.

"At BMW Group, we are delighted to celebrate our 20-year partnership with Al Jenaibi International Automobiles – a relationship that has blossomed over the past two decades to put Oman at the forefront of the latest innovation in mobility," Jean-Philippe Parain, Senior Vice President Sales for Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Middle East and

Africa at BMW Group said.

"I would like to congratulate Al Jenaibi International Automobiles for their remarkable focus on the customer with a comprehensive strategy that not only brings great products, a great brand and great after sales to Oman, but also raises the BMW customer experience to a whole new level.

As the announcement about the Mawaleh service facility demonstrates, we are firmly committed to investing in and developing this dynamic market and eagerly look forward to the next 20 years of our partnership and progress in Oman," he added.

As one of the most enduring BMW partnerships in the GCC, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles has been a driving force for the brand's success in the region.

Last year, AJIA won 5 awards at the BMW Middle East Aftersales Conference in Malaysia, and more awards at the BMW Group Middle East & Sales Conference.

Commenting on the occasion, Rachid Zamani, Managing Director, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles said: "On behalf of the entire Al Jenaibi International Automobiles family, I am incredibly proud to celebrate this special milestone with Jean-Philippe Parain, as we mark 20 years of success in bringing the BMW to customers across Oman.

Built on the outstanding commitment to innovation, business strategies and service excellence, and exemplified by extraordinary talent from Oman and beyond, this partnership is a true testament to the future of the automotive sector as we work together to further develop the market and introduce the BMW electric model range to Oman."

OQ to hold emergency offshore drill at Block 8 in Musandam



MUSCAT: OQ, the global integrated energy group, will carry out an emergency offshore drill on July 19, 2023 in Musandam at Block 8 approximately between 7:00 am – 2:00 pm.

The exercise is planned and conducted by OQ Exploration and Production (E&P) in participation with OQ Crisis Management Team and Musandam government authorities.

The exercise comes as part of the efforts exerted by OQ to maintain a high level of readiness for emergencies, is

an integral part of the group's commitment to ensure the safety and security of the employees, the surrounding communities, and the group assets.

During the exercise, a scenario will be simulated to test the group's response and procedures, as well as the communication protocols. It is worth noting that the exercise is not an actual emergency but rather conducted for the purpose of training only. Therefore, it should not cause any caution or general concerns.

Oman witnesses significant growth in LNG exports, expands trade partnerships

FROM PAGE 13

Firstly, the country's strategic geographic location provides it with a competitive advantage, facilitating efficient transportation and delivery of LNG to various destinations. Additionally, Oman has made significant investments in its LNG infrastructure, including liquefaction facilities and export terminals, enabling it to meet the growing demand for LNG worldwide.

Moreover, Oman's commitment to environmental sustainability and carbon offset initiatives has resonated with global buyers. Carbon-offset cargoes have played a pivotal role in expanding Oman's LNG trade partnerships, particularly with China and India.

These countries, along with other emerging economies, have been actively seeking cleaner energy options to reduce their carbon footprints and meet their sustainability goals.

Oman's success in the LNG

market has not only benefited its economy but has also contributed to the global energy transition.

LNG, being a cleaner alternative to coal and oil, helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promotes a more sustainable energy mix. By increasing its LNG exports, Oman is playing a vital role in supporting the global energy transition and meeting the rising demand for cleaner energy sources.

Looking ahead, Oman is well-positioned to continue its growth trajectory in the LNG market.

The country's ongoing investments in LNG infrastructure and exploration of new gas fields will further enhance its production capabilities.

Furthermore, by strengthening its trade relationships with existing partners and forging new partnerships, Oman can ensure a stable and prosperous future in the LNG industry.

Bank Nizwa Shariah Supervisory Board holds meeting

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading Islamic bank, held a pivotal meeting of its esteemed Shariah Board. Headed by Shaikh Majid al Kindi, Chairman of the Shariah Supervisory Board (SSB), the gathering aimed to discuss and evaluate diverse aspects of Shariah compliance within the banking industry.

The meeting saw the participation of the board members, who engaged in thought-provoking discussions to ensure the bank's adherence to Islamic principles. The Shariah Board, composed of distinguished personnel with extensive expertise in finance and Shariah law, plays a crucial role in

guiding Bank Nizwa's operations and ensuring the bank's adherence to Islamic banking principles.

The board conducts regular meetings to deliberate on matters related to Islamic finance, investments and Shariah-compliant products and services.

During the meeting, Shaikh Majid highlighted the significance of Bank Nizwa's role in providing innovative financing solutions that adhere to Islamic principles.

He stated, "Bank Nizwa's SSB meeting reinforces our collective dedication to delivering Shariah-compliant banking services to our valued customers.

We strive to ensure complete transparency, fairness and ethical



practices as well as embracing innovation which is driving us forward in perfect harmony with the rich tapestry of Islamic values

the bar of excellence in Islamic banking, fostering financial prosperity and promoting social progress in complete harmony with the wisdom enshrined in Shariah principles."

The discussions held during the meeting covered a wide range of topics, including Islamic financing, risk management, corporate governance and social responsibility. The board members provided valuable insights and guidance on these matters, enhancing Bank Nizwa's capabilities to serve its customers whilst ensuring compliance with Islamic principles.

Bank Nizwa has always been at the forefront of pioneering

Shariah-compliant banking in Oman, consistently introducing innovative products and services that cater to the financial needs of individuals and businesses seeking Islamic banking solutions. The bank's commitment to providing ethical and sustainable financial solutions has earned it recognition and trust among its customers.

Dedicated to its mission of being the preferred choice for individuals and businesses seeking Shariah-compliant banking solutions, the bank continues to embrace technological advancements in the finance field and innovative practices, whilst preserving the ethical and transparent nature of Islamic finance.



Sprawling solar modules to reduce carbon footprint of Duqm Refinery



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 17

In the lead-up to its commercial launch, tentatively scheduled around the turn of the year, new details have emerged that underscore the world-class stature of Oman's Duqm Refinery — one of the largest greenfield oil refineries in the Middle East.

Notable among the standout features of the multi-billion dollar project of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company (OQ8) — a 50:50 partnership of OQ Group and Kuwait Petroleum International — is a vast array of solar modules designed to reduce the overall carbon footprint of the massive undertaking.

According to Petrofac, a leading international integrated service provider for the oilfield and hydrocarbon processing industry, solar panel modules currently occupy a total of 47,000 square metres of surface area at the complex, with a capacity to produce nearly 8 million Kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually.

“To reduce the site's carbon footprint, solar panels have been placed on various buildings, including the warehouse, main administration building and mosque, powering utilities such as building and street lights, automatic gates and cameras,” the contractor noted in its newsletter ‘Petrofacts’.

A joint venture of Petrofac and South Korea's Samsung Engineering has been executing the EPC – 2 package of the Duqm refinery project,

covering the construction of the utilities and offsite facilities.

Petrofac has been providing engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) support for this package.

Another distinctive feature is a 180-metre flare that soars above the surrounding landscape.

The tallest flare structure in Oman, the Duqm flare stack will enable the safe venting of any gases into the atmosphere at a height that minimises any effect on the surrounding environment.

“The flare at the Duqm Refinery is a staggering 180m tall; twice the height of the Statue of Liberty in New York City,” Petrofac noted in the newsletter.

Equally notable is massive cluster of tanks installed at various locations across the complex.

As part of its project scope, Petrofac constructed over 70 steel tanks for the storage of crude, water, hydrocarbons and benzene, among other commodities.

The Tank Farm alone hosts around 50 tanks, the largest boasting a diameter of 60 metres and height of 30 metres. Covering a total area of 30,000 sq metres, the tank farm alone consumed around 33,000 tonnes of steel for the construction of a diverse array of tanks.

“Scheduled to be completed in September 2023, the refinery will process a range of crude oils at a daily rate of 230,000 barrels a day, nearly a quarter of Oman's entire current daily rate,” Petrofac added in its newsletter.

Electronic window to promote transparency in SEZs, free zones

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has launched an electronic window that allows individuals to report incidents that constitute a violation of laws and regulations in the areas that OPAZ supervises.

The initiative aims to promote the principles of transparency, integrity, impartiality, and fairness, and encourage OPAZ employees and contractors to report any irregularities or illegal practices.

The electronic window provides the necessary guarantees to whistleblowers, ensuring confidentiality and protection from any negative reactions that may harm their personal and job interests.

Issa bin Fadel al Bartamani (pictured), Director of the Internal Audit Department at OPAZ, said to *Oman Daily Observer*: “The launch of the electronic window aims to encourage OPAZ employees as well as contractors' employees to report illegal practices that take place OPAZ.

The necessary guarantees are also provided to the whistleblower because the reporting process



ensures confidentiality and the protection of whistleblowers against any reactions that may harm their personal and job interests.”

The whistle-blower can report various violations that are seen in OPAZ, including criminal acts such as bribery, theft, extortion, money laundering, fraud, and forgery of documents. Non-compliance with laws related to job affairs, waste or misuse of

public money, favouritism, and discrimination in the provision of services, and obtaining private benefits or gains from one party external are also violations that must be reported.

Other violations that can be reported include non-disclosure of conflicts of interest, threatening the health and safety of employees, harming the environment, violating rules of professional and ethical conduct, misusing powers, using the job to obtain personal benefit, or harming the interests of others, illegally disclosing confidential information or documents, and concealment in bad faith or negligence.

Non-compliance with the internal control policies, systems,

and rules, or applying them incorrectly, causing harm or threatening to do so against the person who reports the violation and covering up any of the violations mentioned above are also violations that can be reported through the electronic window initiative.

In terms of the size of the investments, the cumulative investment volume in OPAZ has exceeded RO 15 billion.

There are 8 different new economic, industrial, and free zones under construction or under study in Oman. These are expected to contribute significantly to a new shift in the industrial sector and to the decentralised development of the Sultanate of Oman.

Moreover, they are distributed in a number of governorates, the most important of which is the integrated economic zone in Al Dhahirah Governorate, which enhances partnership and economic cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

As the Zone is known for its strategic location that supports trade exchange and contributes to linking ports through the land route between the two countries.

Jindal Group acquires Sohar Steel, ensuring job security for 150 Omani staff

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Jindal Group and Vulcan Investments have announced the successful acquisition of Sohar Steel, one of Oman's earliest steel ventures that had remained shuttered for the past three years.

Boasting state-of-the-art facilities, including the Bendotti Walking Beam Reheating Furnace and Automatic Tension Control, Sohar Steel has a production capacity of 700,000 tonnes per annum and specialises in high-quality steel products ranging from 8 millimetres (mm) to 32 mm rebars and billets.

Proposed new products will include wire rods ranging between 5.5 mm to 16 mm.

“The successful acquisition of Sohar Steel represents an extraordinary stride forward for Jindal Group, cementing our position as a prominent leader in the steel industry.

This strategic move aligns



harmoniously with our steadfast dedication towards Oman's socio-economic growth, reflecting our firm resolve to progress Oman's industrial landscape.

By amalgamating cutting-edge innovations and leveraging our extensive expertise, we stand poised to drive ground-breaking initiatives, create promising employment prospects and contribute to the realisation of the country's vision for a thriving and sustainable future,” expressed Harsha Shetty, Executive Director — Jindal Group Oman.

“We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef and the esteemed members of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre for their invaluable support and cooperation in approving the acquisition of Sohar Steel.

Their dedication and commitment to ensuring fair practices have played a pivotal role in making this landmark deal a reality,” he added further.

This strategic acquisition also enables the re-employment of more than 150 local talents.

Hamed al Farsi, Head of Sohar Steel said, “We deeply empathise with the challenges faced by the individuals affected by their dismissal and their subsequent joy upon learning about Vulcan International's acquisition of Sohar Steel.

In response, we have taken the necessary steps to nurture and develop these individuals by providing them with on-the-job training and assigning them to various departments within the company.

To further enhance their capabilities, we have implemented a series of training courses and workshops, aiming to continuously empower and refine their skills.

Moving forward, we remain dedicated to evolving our company's strategy and focused on bolstering our production capabilities.”

Fisheries sector boosted by growth in qualitative landings

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources of the Sultanate of Oman has unveiled new data pointing to significant shifts in the quantity and value of fish landings from January to May 2023.

These figures, released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in its latest report, shed light on the dynamic nature of Oman's fishery industry and highlights the evolving trends

across various fish species.

Demersal Fish: With a total of 51,804 tonnes, the landing of demersal fish experienced a noticeable 14.1 per cent decrease.

The value of these landings amounted to RO 9.4 million.

Large Pelagic Fish: Landings of large pelagic fish witnessed an 8.5 per cent decline, totalling 74,203 tonnes. The overall value of these sizable pelagic fish reached RO 16.2 million.

Small Pelagic Fish: In a contrasting surge, the landing of small pelagic fish climbed 16.4



per cent, to 203,467 tonnes, with a total value of RO 31.3 million.

Sharks & Rays: Landings of these species increased 7.6 per cent to reach 2,075 tonnes of a total value of RO 400K.

Crustaceans & Molluscs: Total landings rose 5.5 per cent to reach 3,548 tonnes with a combined value of RO 300K.

Assorted Fish: There was a significant 30.9 per cent decrease in the landing of unidentified fish, totalling 1,714 tonnes of a total value of RO 300K.

Significantly, during the period

from January to May 2023, Oman's traditional fishery sector recorded an impressive total fish landing quantity of 336,810 tonnes (versus 334,004 tonnes for the corresponding period of 2022).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources has been closely monitoring and supporting the sustainable development of this vital sector, ensuring the preservation of the Sultanate of Oman's abundant marine resources for future generations.

Opportunity Oman: Food industries – a path to sustainable and diverse growth



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED
AL BALUSHI

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Oman's food industries sector offers abundant investment opportunities thanks to its extensive fisheries, diverse climates, and the government's commitment to environmentally sustainable food security.

The country's strategic location, favourable policies, and expanding population make it an appealing destination for both domestic and foreign investors.

This article aims to examine the factors that contribute to Oman's appeal as an investment hub, including its thriving fisheries, varied agriculture, and the government's initiatives to ensure sustainable food security.

The fisheries industry in Oman presents a promising investment opportunity due to the country's favourable geographical location along the Arabian Sea and Sea of Oman.

With a vast exclusive economic one spanning over 300,000 square kilometres, abundant with diverse fish species and marine resources, Oman offers immense potential in this sector.

The fisheries industry has experienced steady growth in Oman, with fish production reaching approximately 342,860 tonnes in 2020.

This growth can be attributed to the Omani government's commitment to sustainable fishing practices, the development of aquaculture, and initiatives



aimed at value-added processing.

Investors looking to capitalise on Oman's abundant marine resources can explore promising prospects by investing in fishing vessels, fish processing plants, and seafood exports.

Oman's agricultural sector benefits greatly from its diverse climates, which encompass coastal plains and mountainous regions, creating a favourable environment for cultivating a wide range of crops. The presence of fertile soils, underground water reserves, and advanced irrigation systems further contribute to the sector's success.

Date production is a source of pride for Oman, as the country has gained recognition as one of the leading global producers of dates.

Additionally, Oman's robust agricultural industry relies on the cultivation of diverse fruits, vegetables, and essential crops such as wheat, barley, and rice.

Investing in Oman's food industries sector unlocks a

BY LEVERAGING THE COUNTRY'S NATURAL RESOURCES, SUPPORTIVE POLICIES, AND COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION, BUSINESSES CAN POSITION THEMSELVES FOR SUCCESS IN THIS DYNAMIC AND EXPANDING MARKET. INVESTING IN OMAN'S FOOD INDUSTRY NOT ONLY OFFERS THE POTENTIAL FOR FINANCIAL RETURNS BUT ALSO CONTRIBUTES TO THE COUNTRY'S VISION OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION, FOOD SECURITY, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

gateway to various opportunities, including greenhouse farming, modern irrigation technologies, and agro-processing facilities.

Such investments leverage Oman's diverse climates, leading to enhanced agricultural productivity and expanded export capabilities for the country. The Omani government acknowledges the significance of sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in the food industry domain. To ensure food security and reduce environmental impact it has introduced numerous initiatives.

A significant effort being made is the National Food Security Strategy. This strategy aims to improve food production within

the country decrease dependency on imported goods and encourage sustainable farming practices.

The strategy consists of actions like conserving water, reclaiming land, and adopting advanced technologies to boost productivity while minimising resource consumption.

In addition, the government has made a concerted effort to allocate funds towards renewable energy sources, namely solar power to decrease the carbon emissions produced by the food industries sector.

These environmentally friendly practices have contributed to the establishment of a favourable investment environment. They

are appealing to investors who prioritise long term sustainability.

In conclusion, the Omani food industries sector presents numerous investment opportunities, driven by the abundance of fisheries and diverse agriculture, as well as the government's commitment to ensuring sustainable food security. Investing in the fishing industry offers potential in areas such as fishing vessels, processing plants, and seafood exports.

Furthermore, the agricultural diversity in Oman encompasses date production and various crop cultivation, providing avenues for investments in greenhouse farming, advanced irrigation technologies, and agro-processing, vertical farming, sustainable food packaging and value-added products.

Moreover, the Omani government's wholehearted embrace of environmentally friendly and sustainable practices enhances the attractiveness of investing in this sector.

Initiatives such as the implementation of the National Food Security Strategy and the transition to renewable energy sources exemplify the forward-thinking approach towards achieving sustained growth.

The Omani food industry sector presents an appealing opportunity for foreign, local, and regional investors seeking profitable and sustainable ventures. With its diverse resources and government support, this sector holds great potential for capitalising on these opportunities.

By leveraging the country's natural resources, supportive policies, and commitment to sustainability and innovation, businesses can position themselves for success in this dynamic and expanding market.

Investing in Oman's food industry not only offers the potential for financial returns but also contributes to the country's vision of economic diversification, food security, and sustainable development.

Southern Europe's heatwave fires up solar output

GAVIN MAGUIRE

Europe's enduring heat wave is pushing solar electricity output to new highs across the continent, with the combination of newly installed solar capacity along with bright, sunny skies helping break generation records across several countries.

Electricity generation from solar sources in Europe had already climbed by nearly 11% over the first half of the year from the same period in 2022 to a record 129.2 terawatt hours, according to Ember.

So far in July, output has likely climbed higher still, with country-level solar production forecasts by Refinitiv calling for output to have climbed well above long-term averages in Spain, Germany, France and Italy - all key solar producers that have seen sustained hot weather in

recent weeks.

Long-range forecasts by Refinitiv suggest solar output may climb by even more in August, with combined output in those key countries set to climb by 5% above the long-term average as a protracted heat wave steers solar production totals to new heights across the continent.

A major driver behind Europe's broad gains in solar generation has been the steep increases seen in capacity additions throughout the continent.

Overall embedded solar capacity in Europe increased by close to 20% in 2022 from the year before, with double-digit increases registered in all major solar producers in the region, Ember data shows.

Capacity in Germany, Europe's top overall solar generator, rose by 12.1% to 66.55 terawatt hours (TWh), while number two generator Italy boosted capacity by 11% last year.



A tower and solar panels belonging to the Abengoa are seen at the Solucar solar park in Sanlucar la Mayor, near the Andalusian capital of Seville, Spain. – Reuters

The Netherlands lifted installed solar capacity by a record 51.5% in 2022, and overtook Spain as the region's third-largest solar capacity nation, while number four nation Spain increased solar capacity by just over 28%.

While installed solar capacity is a critical first step in ensuring

increased solar power generation in any country, a nation's theoretical solar generation potential is another vital factor that determines overall solar output.

The theoretical potential metric was devised by The World Bank to create a harmonised view

of the development potential for utility-scale solar projects across different countries, and uses the amount of solar radiation available as well as the levelised cost of electricity to rank nations by their overall solar production potential.

In Europe, the highest scoring nations in terms of solar potential were those located in the southern half of the continent, where sunlight is more abundant than further north.

Spain was the highest ranking European nation in the latest Global Solar Atlas, with an average theoretical solar potential value of 4.41 kilowatt hours per installed kilowatt-peak of the system capacity (kWh/kWp).

Turkey (4.32 kWh/kWp), Greece (4.14) and Italy (3.99) all also ranked relatively high on the solar potential table.

In contrast, northern European nations that tend to be cloudier and have fewer daylight

hours posted much lower solar potential scores, with Germany and the Netherlands both scoring less than 3.0 kWh/kWp on the solar rankings.

Such significantly lower solar potential scores indicate far lower efficiency levels at solar production sites compared with those located further south in locations such as Spain and Greece.

In turn, those lower scores mean that utilities in northern Europe will likely need to rely more on other sources of clean energy generation, especially wind power, when looking to build out renewable power capacity.

But for power producers across southern Europe, solar assets are likely delivering strong output rates this year, especially amid the current heatwave generating hours of uninterrupted strong sunshine for several hours a day.

— Reuters

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Highly regarded artist dedicated to preserving ancient heritage

BY MIAAD ALI AL DARBI

Traditional singing and folk music are integral parts of Oman's cultural heritage, showcasing a wide range of genres, performance styles, and regional variations. Jumaa bin Faiel bin Rabi al Araimi, also known as Albrazili, is a highly regarded artist who has dedicated himself to preserving this ancient heritage. His unique style encompasses various aspects of Omani vocal arts, including playing the oud instrument and mastering different rhythms. Jumaa bin Faiel, born in 1970 in Sur (Alsahel), hails from a family deeply rooted in traditional Omani arts such as Midan art, singing, and playing. Growing up, he was exposed to a rich tapestry of folk arts and rhythms, notably Midan art, Alsharh, and other local practices. At the age of 15, he delved into mastering the rhythms associated with Midan art and Madima art. He started by playing the Msendo, a large drum supported by three legs made of tree trunks and covered with cow or camel skin. As he honed his skills, he progressed to playing the Al kasir, a drum shaped like an hourglass or barrel, covered with sheep or goat skin. Finally, he took on the challenging task of playing the Al Rahmani drum, an ornamental drum requiring extensive knowledge of rhythms. These drums, the Al Rahmani and Al kasir, are fundamental to Omani musical traditions. Jumaa's upbringing was steeped in Midan art, a popular form of Omani vocal music. This art form has a structured framework, specific principles,



and rules of composition that are meticulously followed. Passed down through generations, Midan art has a strong foundation rooted in tribal traditions. Jumaa drew inspiration from renowned artists and poets who were considered pillars of Midan art, such as a member of the Al Wazir family and the artist Yusef bin Obaid bin Yusef. He learned from them the art of composing Midan poetry. Jumaa continued to practice Midan art and participated in Midan

sessions held during special occasions. Jumaa's first official appearance in Oman was during the Year of Heritage, where he contributed to a distinguished performance as part of the Youth Institute of Music. In 1993, he participated in the Oman Youth Ship event, which honoured young talents and welcomed delegations from the GCC countries. He also performed in various international events in Kuwait and Qatar. Continuing his artistic journey,

Jumaa became a prominent member of the Oman Center for Traditional Music Ensemble, affiliated with the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, an institution of the Royal Court. The establishment of this centre was a testament to late Sultan Qaboos bin Said's desire to preserve Oman's traditional music. The centre's mission focuses on safeguarding and promoting traditional Omani music, preserving its

cultural identity, artistic qualities, and aesthetics, while nurturing the skills of young musicians. Jumaa actively contributed to reviving official and private celebrations alongside other talented members of the Centre Band. Notably, they participated in joyous festivities commemorating the Blessed Renaissance Day. Additionally, he conducted several training workshops on the art of sound, including one on Awadi singing.



MUSIC

British-born singer and actress Jane Birkin dies age 76

BRITISH-BORN SINGER and actress Jane Birkin has died at the age of 76, according to French media. Birkin was an influential figure across music, film and fashion, most notably for her collaboration with the late Serge Gainsbourg and lending her name to the Hermès Birkin designer hand bag. French media have reported that she was found dead at her home in Paris. Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris, tweeted: "Jane Birkin, the most Parisian of the English has left us. "We will never forget her songs, her laughter or her incomparable



accent that have always accompanied us." Birkin rose to international stardom with her risqué projects with Gainsbourg before forging a long and varied career on her own. The couple's breathless song

"Je T'Aime.Moi Non Plus" was widely kept from the airwaves because of its adult content but reached number one in Britain despite being sung in a foreign language. Birkin pursued a solo career releasing several albums, often singing in both French and English, and her notable acting credits include Agatha Christie's "Death On The Nile" and "Evil Under The Sun". She is also the inspiration for the Hermès Birkin hand bag, after fashion businessman Jean-Louis Dumas spoke to the actress and singer about her frustration at not being able to find a bag big enough for her daughter's bottles during a flight from Paris to London in 1984. Birkin bags have a host of celebrity admirers, with famous owners of the accessory including former US first lady Melania Trump, rapper Cardi B, pop star turned fashion designer Victoria Beckham and reality star Kim Kardashian. Throughout her career, Birkin has also been involved in various humanitarian causes, including working with Amnesty International and Unicef. — dpa

ENVIRONMENT

Brazilian school awarded Unesco stamp for efforts to protect the ocean

A GROUP OF BRAZILIAN SCHOOL children gleefully remove pieces of plastic and trash on the sand of a Rio de Janeiro beach during an outing to teach them about the importance of protecting the environment. Their school, called Notre Dame, is located on the city's tourist hot spot of Ipanema beach and has just received a Blue School stamp from the United Nations cultural agency Unesco as part of an initiative to protect the Atlantic Ocean. The stamp recognises school programmes around the world in



aim of protecting oceans. The initiative comes at a time scientists fear that over 90 per cent of the world's marine food supplies are at risk from environmental changes such as rising temperatures and pollution. "It's to educate, it's to develop awareness, it's the formation of a generation that understands that we need the ocean to continue to exist as a species on this planet," says head of NGO Instituto Mar Urbano Ricardo Gomes. The stamp takes into account 16 countries located near the Atlantic Ocean and follows the UN's decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development initiative, which started in 2021 and will end in 2030. Alongside NGO Instituto Mar Urbano, Notre Dame school currently offers activities that aim to create awareness among children of different ages to preserve urban beaches. Unesco welcomed the initiative as it instils curiosity in children about the ocean and its role in generating oxygen, regulating the climate, and generating life for the planet, Unesco's coordinator for social and natural sciences in Brazil Fabio Eon said. On Ipanema, the school kids play on the famous beach's shore while cleaning up. "I loved it," said 8-year-old Notre Dame student Maria Carolina Sampaio, "because we cleaned up the trash on the beach and if it went in the ocean." — Reuters



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CULTURE

A Walk in Marrakesh: A Spiderweb of Passageways

THE WAIL OF SNAKE charmers' horns will lead you to your departure point: Jemaa El Fna. This carnivalesque, open-air market in the medina — the ancient neighbourhood where Marrakech was born — brims with juice stands, restaurants and souvenir shops, to say nothing of musicians and performers.

Before you embark on this meandering 2.2-mile walk, you should have water and sunscreen (summer temperatures can pass 100 degrees Fahrenheit in this Moroccan city); outfits that cover most of your skin (doubly useful in Islamic societies, which discourage revealing clothes); and a willingness to lose your bearings. Nearly twice the size of Central Park, the medina enfolds a vast spiderweb of passageways that seem designed to disorient outsiders.

A good strategy is to follow well-known thoroughfares while allowing ample time to duck through beckoning doorways or slip into side alleys. Succumbing to detours is essential. Making strict timetables is folly. If you lack a golden thread, a decent map will return you to the beaten path.

A compelling route from Jemaa El Fna that reveals multiple Marrakech personalities starts at the white horseshoe archway leading to Rue Riad Zeitoun el-Kadim. Walking southward on the uneven cobbled street, you'll encounter sensory stimulation at every step. Sounds of clip-clopping mule carts and portable radios blaring Arabic pop music mingle with smells — fresh-baked bread, foul drains, rosewater perfumes and spices.

Small shops and lone peddlers display their wares: palm-woven baskets, bottles of golden argan oil, silvery jewellery inlaid with coloured stones. Many people wear floor-length caftans or hooded djellaba robes. You'll see just as many sport jeans, sneakers and T-shirts.

The street opens onto the palm-lined Place des Ferblantiers, humming with cafes and crowds. Cross to the southern gate and behold the soaring battlements of El Badi Palace (70 dirhams admission, or about \$6.85), a glorious 16th-century ruin that is now a peaceful place to wander. Stone paths, wooden catwalks and mosaic-tiled floors carry you over sunken gardens and through unburied, ruined chambers while storks look down from their nests atop the ramparts.

As you walk eastward along Rue Bahia Bab Mellah, you'll pass

residential lanes on your right. The one called Derb Talmud Tora leads to the former Jewish quarter, the Mellah, which was built in the 1500s to house the many Jewish refugees fleeing Spain after the defeat of the Moors in 1492. (Only around 100 Jews

and raise families in the medina. The noises of electric saws, rumbling wheelbarrows and schoolkids shouting in darija — the Moroccan dialect of Arabic — echo off the high other walls.

Zigzagging east down Rue Sidi Boulabada and then north again



remain in Marrakech.) Halfway down the street is Slat Lazama, a synagogue and museum (10 dirhams admission) with a vaulted prayer hall and lovely interior courtyard. A few blocks farther east lies the Jewish Cemetery, a haunting sea of white horizontal gravestones.

Hair salons, pharmacies and machine shops materialise as you turn northward from the Mellah and head up Rue Djane Ben Chegra and then Rue Laarassi. This residential area is a reminder that more than 100,000 people sleep, work, study

along Rue Bab Ahmad turns up crowds of customers at ramshackle pushcarts and tiny storefronts selling shrieking chickens, skinned lambs, crates of tomatoes, boxes of cucumbers, sticky pastries glazed with honey. Scooters buzz through the crowd like bees. Be ready to leap aside.

At the fountain, take the rightward fork into Rue Tachenbacht and push upward to its own covered food market. Just beyond it, a perpendicular street on the left is your doorway into another dimension of the medina. Strolling westward along Rue Bin Lafnadek, you hear people speaking Spanish, Italian, English and especially French as djellabas and caftans give way to designer



sunglasses and New Balance sneakers. Art galleries, design shops and fashion boutiques glow with chic creations. This is the edge of the medina's international design scene and the souks, where traditional artisans ply trades ranging from wood-carving to metalwork to glassware design.

The Maison de la Photographie de Marrakech (50 dirhams) is an ideal rest stop. The restored old mansion exhibits historical photos of Morocco, and its shady roof terrace provides quiet and refreshment. A lemonade with mint leaves (16 dirhams) and a tagine bubbling with meatballs in tomato sauce (80 dirhams) will fortify you for the next leg of your journey. — **NYT**

LIFE AT THE ACADEME



Dr Zainab Al Ajmi

Self-Paced Learning

WHEN MOST PEOPLE THINK of learning, images of a scheduled online training or classroom full of learners may come to mind. Yet, learning that involves classes as a group, or cohort-based learning, is only one learning prototype – not the only one. By giving learners the facility to choose when, where, and sometimes even what they want to learn. This independent learning style is known as self-paced learning and has become a featured model in the education system ("What Is Self-Paced Learning? Definition, Benefits and Tips." Digital Learning Institute, 18 June 2023, <https://www.digitallearninginstitute.com/>).

It's worth pointing out that self-paced learning benefits a wide range of individuals within different age groups and learning styles, among them: 1. Students with Diverse Learning Styles where visual learners can focus on visual materials, auditory learners can listen to lectures or audio recordings, and kinesthetic learners through physical activity. 2. Adult Learners: Self-paced learning is particularly valuable for adult learners who may have work or family commitments, they can study at their convenience according to their schedules. 3. Gifted and High-Achieving Students: Self-paced learning allows gifted and high-achieving students to progress at an accelerated pace. These students often require more challenging materials and a faster learning pace than traditional classroom settings can provide. 4. Students with Special Needs: Self-paced learning can be adapted to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities or learning difficulties. It allows for individualised instruction, providing additional time and resources. 5. Working Professionals: Self-paced learning is highly beneficial for working professionals who want to enhance their skills or pursue professional development.

According to Suvin (2022), self-paced learning has distinctive advantages as follows: 1. Students learn at their own pace. 2. Freedom to use various models of learning according to students' learning modes and schedules, it could be from YouTube tutorials, books, podcasts, webinars, or discussions, as they wish. 3. Willingness to try out new experiences and learn new skills. 4. Students become experts. 5. Prompts more effective learning in students. 6. Boosts self-esteem and self-reflection of students. Despite the advantages of self-paced learning above, it has disadvantages as follows: 1. Lack of structure: One disadvantage of self-paced learning is that it can lack the structure and guidance provided by more traditional approaches to education. This can make it harder for learners to stay focused and motivated and to know what to learn and when to learn it. 2. Lack of support: This can make it harder for learners to get help when they need it, and to access materials and resources for learning. 3. Time and effort: Self-paced learning can require significant time and effort investment on the part of the learner. This can be especially challenging for learners with other commitments, such as work or family responsibilities. 4. Difficulty assessing: Learners have difficulty assessing their progress and determining whether they are meeting their learning goals. This can be especially true if they do not have access to external feedback or assessment. 5. Limited social interaction: Learners may also have limited opportunities for social interaction with other learners, which can be an important part of the learning experience. This can make it harder for learners to collaborate and learn from each other and may lead to feelings of isolation or disconnection (Sharma, 2023).

To summarise, self-paced learning proposes to provide learners with the experience learn of flexibility, customisation, and individualisation, making it highly beneficial across diverse educational settings for a wide range of individuals. Moreover, engaging in self-paced learning means lifelong learning, raises motivations, and allows new experiences.

Dr Zainab al Ajmi is very passionate about the growth of the education system in Oman and wants the country to produce globally competitive workforce. Her column tackles movements and developments within the education sector.

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