

OMAN  DAILY

Observer



Citizens told to stay away from conflict areas in Lebanon

The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Lebanon called on all its citizens to stay away from areas of armed conflict there. In a statement published on Saturday, the embassy called on all its citizens present in Lebanon to exercise caution and adhere to all necessary security measures, to stay away from areas witnessing armed conflicts, while following the security instructions issued by the competent authorities.



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NOTES FROM TREKKING IN KASHMIR



P9

UNITED STATES MEET SWEDEN IN HEAVYWEIGHT WORLD CUP LAST-16 CLASH



P13

LAUNCH OF DUQM REFINERY TO BOOST OMAN'S REFINING CAPACITY TO 500,000 BPD



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO BOLIVIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greeting to President Luis Arce of the Plurinational State of Bolivia on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president and the friendly Bolivian people.

— ONA

HM GREETINGS TO JAMAICA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greeting to Sir Patrick Linton Allen, Governor-General of Jamaica, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the Governor-General and the friendly people of Jamaica.

— ONA

RAINS IN WILAYATS



The wilayats of Al Rustaq and Al Awabi in South Al Batinah Governorate on Saturday witnessed the fall of moderate to heavy rain. Rainfall was mainly centred on Wadi Al Sahtan, Wadi Bani Ghafir and Wadi Bani Hani in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq and Wadi Bani Kharus in the Wilayat of Al Awabi.

— ONA

23.3% GROWTH IN FDI IN FIRST QUARTER

MUSCAT: The volume of foreign direct investment (FDI) by end of first quarter increased by 23.3 per cent to reach RO 21.274 billion, with financial flows estimated at RO 4.022 billion, compared to an investment volume of RO 17.250 billion, during Q1 2022.

According to preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), oil and gas exploration activities sector accounted for the majority of FDI with a contribution of RO 15.835 billion at the end of Q1 2023, up from RO 11.697 billion a year earlier. This was followed by manufacturing industries with RO 1.571 billion, down from RO 1.671 billion in Q1 2022. Financial intermediation activities pulled in RO 1.514 billion, up from RO 1.460 billion a year earlier. FDI in real estate decreased to RO 1.044 billion at the end of Q1, down from RO 1.48 billion during the same period last year.

SEE ALSO P13

OMAN WELL POSITIONED TO BE FORERUNNER IN HYDROGEN ENERGY



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN is well positioned to be a forerunner in the race for hydrogen energy with the country's all-round efforts, The Energy Year reported.

A report featuring Abdulaziz al Shidani, Managing Director of Hydrom, says there have been efforts to develop a green hydrogen economy in Oman, followed by an ambitious hydrogen strategy since last year.

"We see this trend in Oman to become a forerunner in the hydrogen race starting from the Royal directives early last year to accelerate steps to develop green hydrogen economy in Oman," Al Shidani is quoted as saying.

According to him, this was followed by an ambitious but straightforward strategy announced late last year and the result-oriented moves demonstrated in a record time to sign five project development agreements worth more than \$30 billion with international investors, along with the launch of the second bid round. That is nothing if not a first-mover path.

"After the announcement of green hydrogen strategy in October last year, we received as many as 14 international players from around 10 countries in the box of the structure where international developers play a role till June," he was quoted by the magazine.

Among these players are large, well-known oil and gas operators, utility developers and operators, infrastructure funds, investment funds, off-takers and technology providers who have shown keen interest in Oman's hydrogen initiatives.

Oman Vision 2040 aims to achieve an average annual GDP growth of 5 per cent, supported by strong ambitions to diversify the domestic economy away from hydrocarbons, maximise In-Country Value (ICV) and create attractive jobs for an increasingly young population. This was followed by the Royal directives in March 2022 to move towards green hydrogen economy in the country, culminating in the announcement of Oman's green hydrogen strategy in October 2022, which gave clarity to the various green hydrogen moves in the country.

"However, the biggest challenge for hydrogen is the global disconnection between supply and demand, and these are the main barriers preventing a faster and more widespread deployment of hydrogen," adds Al Shidani.

ABDULAZIZ AL SHIDANI
Managing Director, Hydrom

Nasa back in touch with Voyager 2

WASHINGTON: Nasa has succeeded in re-establishing full contact with Voyager 2 thanks to an "interstellar shout" that righted the distant probe's antenna orientation, the space agency said.

Launched in 1977 to explore the outer planets and serve as a beacon of humanity to the wider universe, it is currently more than 12.3 billion miles (19.9 billion kilometres) from our planet — well beyond the solar system.

A series of planned commands sent to the spaceship on July 21 mistakenly caused the antenna to point two degrees away from Earth, compromising its ability to send and receive signals and endangering its mission.

The situation was not expected to be resolved until at least October 15 when Voyager 2 was scheduled to carry out an automated realignment manoeuvre. But on Tuesday, engineers enlisted the help of multiple Earth observatories that form the Deep Space Network (DSN) to detect a carrier or "heartbeat" wave from Voyager 2, though the signal was still too faint to read the data it carried.

— AFP

A MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTION



Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah has launched autumn campaign on Saturday. The campaign aims to place the museum as a major destination for visitors heading towards Dhofar Governorate to enjoy a unique cultural experience at the museum.

— ONA

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Civil Aviation Authority moves towards net zero

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman has developed an action plan to reduce carbon emissions from the civil aviation sector. The State Action Plan (SAP) team was established in the country by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). It also included members from the Civil Aviation Authority, national airlines and Oman Airports.

The long-term mitigation measures that can be taken to reduce carbon dioxide emissions include improvements in air traffic management, aircraft technologies (purchase of new aircraft) and, air and ground operations.

The long-term strategy on climate change for the international aviation sector aims to define a quantified CO2 emission baseline scenario, select appropriate emissions mitigation measures from ICAO's basket of measures, and calculate the expected results of implementing those measures.

The objectives are to develop a better understanding of the projections of international aviation CO2 emissions in a State, identify the most relevant mitigation measures, enhance cooperation between aviation stakeholders, support the understanding of policy decisions, and facilitate capacity building and transfer of technology. SAP includes information about national circumstances and the aviation sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

The carbon dioxide emission resulting from international civil aviation activities was calculated from local operators (Oman Air and SalamAir) based on fuel consumption and air traffic data. 2019 was adopted as the base year for building a scenario of carbon dioxide emissions from international civil aviation until 2050 in the business-as-usual scenario (without taking any mitigation measures).

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) unveiled a series of roadmaps to provide step-by-step detailing of critical actions and de-



The long-term mitigation measures that can be taken to reduce carbon dioxide emissions include improvements in air traffic management, aircraft technologies (purchase of new aircraft) and, air and ground operations.

pendencies for aviation to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

These roadmaps address aircraft technology, energy infrastructure, operations, finance and policy considerations leading to net zero. Governments and industry are aligned to reach the same net zero CO2 emissions goal by 2050.

As policy initiatives lay the foundation on which many of the needed innovations and actions will rest, these roadmaps will be a critical reference point for policymakers. "The roadmaps are the first detailed assessment of the key steps necessary to accelerate the transition to net zero by 2050.

Together, they show a clear direction and will evolve as we dig deeper to set interim milestones on the way to net zero. I must emphasise that roadmaps are not just for airlines. Governments, suppliers and financiers cannot be spectators in aviation's decarbonisation journey. They have skin in the game.

The roadmaps are a call to action for all aviation's stakeholders to deliver the tools needed to make this fundamental transformation of aviation a success with policies and products fit for a net-zero world," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director-General.

Important are the steps needed to enable aircraft powered by 100 per cent sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), hydrogen, or batteries. All development milestones are backed up by announced investment and demonstrator programmes.

Also included are new engines, aerodynamics, aircraft structures and flight systems. Energy and New Fuels Infrastructure: the focus is on the fuels and new energy carrier infrastructure upstream from airports needed to facilitate the use of aircraft powered by SAF or hydrogen. Renewable energy plays a vital role in meeting the aviation sector's energy demand, and the roadmap outlines milestones to enable the necessary infrastructure developments.

Recall

Recall Date: 6/08/2023

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Cadillac XT5	2023	3
Chevrolet Traverse		4
GMC Acadia		15

Recall consequence

These vehicles may contain a dimensionally incorrect sun gear inside the transmission. This condition can cause the driver-side half-shaft to disengage from the transmission, causing a loss of propulsion and/or a loss of mechanical park. Drivers may hear a grinding or clicking noise from the front of the vehicle. If the vehicle unexpectedly loses propulsion and/or mechanical park, there is an increased risk of a crash or roll-away.

Recall Action

General Motors is developing a remedy for this condition, and the customers affected will be notified as soon as a solution, and the necessary parts are available.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>

هيئة حماية المستهلك
Consumer Protection Authority
www.pacp.gov.om

دولة السلطنة
Consumer line
80079009
80077997

During official working hours:
OTE No. 80050002
MARH No. 80076200

موش

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Camel a symbol of tradition and environmental balance

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 5

The traditional Omani profession of camel husbandry continues to hold a significant place, particularly in Dhofar Governorate.

As one traverses the cities of Dhofar, it becomes evident that camels are not an uncommon sight, gracefully scattered across the mountains and occasionally strolling through the streets. In a display of respect, motorists pause their cars, allowing these majestic creatures to pass undisturbed.

The landscape of Dhofar's mountains and hills sets an awe-inspiring stage for camel grazing, often captured through the lens of photographers, showcasing the governorate's natural beauty and the bond between camels and their caretakers.

Environmental preservation and camel welfare go hand in hand for the camel owners in Dhofar Governorate. Each year, they undertake a crucial

practice of relocating camels away from the mountains and slopes during the autumn season when rain showers dampen the terrain. By moving the camels to flatter areas, such as the plains or the Najd region, they protect the animals from the dangers of slipping and skidding on the moist ground.

Ahmed bin Salem al Mashaikhi, a camel breeder, says that camels have a distinct gait that is not well-suited for navigating wet slopes and rainy conditions. "Thus, the responsible relocation of camels during such times is vital to ensure their physical well-being and preserve the delicate environmental balance."

The camel husbandry in Oman stands as a timeless testament to the nation's rich cultural heritage. From the captivating presence of camels amid Dhofar's natural wonders to the conscientious practices of their caretakers, this tradition embodies a harmonious coexistence between the people, the animals and the environment.



Big-ticket movies get audiences back to cinema halls

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Theatres across the world, including in the Sultanate of Oman, have been struggling to get the audience back since the start of the pandemic.

It was not only the pandemic-related measures that restricted the movie goers from going to theatres, but also the coming of age of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms that allowed movie fans to view movies at home bypassing the traditional

services.

According to theatre owners, recent big Hollywood movies helped the theatres to get back some of the audience.

In the Sultanate of Oman, Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One and Oppenheimer helped some theatres to get the ‘Housefull’ board back, while Barbie, expected to be released later this month, is also expected to get some audience.

According to Box Office Mojo, Oppenheimer has collected \$430,893,620 worldwide so far, while Mission: Impossible managed to collect \$453,852,770.

Speaking to the Observer, a theatre executive said, “Audience wants to see certain types of movies only in theatres, and it is nice to see the audience, including families, coming back to us, instead of waiting for OTT releases.” A moviegoer who went for Mission: Impossible said, “It was really a great sight to see full house theatres halls. It seems to be a much-needed boost for theatres post-pandemic and OTTs.”

Forum on tourism investment begins tomorrow

MUSCAT: The Muscat Exhibition and Forum for Tourism Investment Opportunities, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will begin at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center on Monday.

The two-day event will be launched under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in the presence of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI. Many companies from Oman, Russia and Thailand and GCC are expected to take part in the event.

The forum aims to serve as a platform that showcases a wide range of lucrative investment prospects in resorts, hotels,

integrated recreational cities, waterparks and other innovative projects.

In addition to exploring investment avenues, the forum explores potential sports projects. The Sultanate of Oman will present its vision for the establishment of sports medical cities and hosting international tournaments and sports events.

As part of the forum, the chamber will facilitate meetings between investors and companies. These sessions will shed light on Oman's foreign investment law and honour pioneers in the fields of tourism and real estate investment in the Sultanate of Oman.

Running alongside the forum, an exhibition will provide individuals and enterprises a platform to showcase their ideas and explore potential investment opportunities in tourism.

The event presents an opportunity to foster economic growth and attract international investments, further consolidating Oman's position as a prime hub for tourism and development.

DIVERSE KHAREEF EVENTS EASE TRAFFIC, SPUR TOURISM



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 5

The Khareef Dhofar season stands tall as a beacon of Oman's tourism industry, beckoning visitors from near and far. A key draw of this season lies in the tapestry of diverse events woven across the picturesque Dhofar Governorate, proving instrumental in alleviating traffic congestion and igniting a tourism surge.

Historically, the majority of events clustered in the vibrant city of Salalah, casting a shadow of traffic woes and logistical snags. However, in recent times, visionary event organisers have charted a new course, scattering festivities across enchanting locations such as Iteen, Al Hafa, Awqad, Al Mughsail and Wadi Darbat.

The strategic dispersion of events has reaped manifold rewards, not only mitigating traffic congestion within Salalah's bustling thoroughfares but also catalysing tourism in lesser-known regions of the governorate. An illustrative testament is the resounding success of the “Return of the Past” festival in 2023, held in Al Hafa. The festival's resplendent showcase of Omani heritage proved a magnet, drawing hordes of visitors and propelling a resurgent local



economy.

The multifarious benefits of this event diversification are unmistakable - from unclogging traffic arteries to bolstering tourism prospects while proudly

unveiling Oman's rich cultural tapestry to the world.

Foreseeing a radiant future, this trend of expansive event venues is poised to persist in the years ahead, the aim being to

Visionary event organisers have charted a new course, scattering festivities across enchanting locations such as Iteen, Al Hafa, Awqad, Al Mughsail, and Wadi Darbat

amplify the allure and allure of the Dhofar Khareef season for discerning visitors.

In a testament to its growing prominence, this year's projected visitors to the Dhofar Governorate is set to swell to a staggering 1.1 million, accompanied by a projected spending spree, tipping the scales at RO 116 million.

A remarkable 37 per cent leap from the previous year, this surge is supported by reliable data furnished by aviation authorities and airlines, attesting to an exponential 99 per cent surge in scheduled flights from the Gulf countries to Salalah, further buttressed by a substantial 40 per cent hike in domestic flights.

Dhofar's Khareef sojourn unfolds its alluring tapestry, promising an enchanting rendezvous with Omani heritage and a flourishing tourism tapestry for the ages.

Students thank Oman Across Ages Museum for summer school

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, AUG 5

The Al Hosn Programme hosted by Oman Across Ages Museum concluded on Thursday. It was organised by OAA Museum in association with iDeal company from July 30 to August 3.

Al Hosn included a number of training programmes for students in various fields.

Muzna bint Sulaiman al Hosaniyah of OAA, said: “The museum hosted the Al Hosn Programme for school students aged 10 to 16 years. It aims to provide a week full of challenge, competition, learning and work through interactive games aimed at developing skills among participants such as teamwork, problem-solving, working under pressure, and time management.”

Asma bint Masoud al Hamdaniyah, Implementation and Development Officer at iDeal, said: “57 students took part in the summer programme. Through our four programmes, we focused on refining and developing soft skills and professional skills such as keeping pace with technological development and gaining



confidence in speaking fluently. Participants also learned about recycling waste around them. We focused here on the palm tree because it is considered to have thousands of uses.”

Al Hosn included the young leaders programme, the recycling programme, the engineering programme, and the sweltering season programme.

Asmaa al Hamdani added: “We introduced the participants to the historical Omani personalities so that the participants can learn skills from them and be role models for them. On the

Sweltering Season Programme, they learn about entrepreneurship, financial terminology, the way to save money, buying and selling, and how to market. The workshop started with training participants to manufacture a specific thing from raw materials, then sell it and trade in it. It is called Al Qayed because the Al Qayed season is in which trade is active.

“The workshop on engineering introduced participants to ancient and modern Islamic architecture. Students also learned about the most important engineering landmarks in Oman. Omar



al Maskari, an Omani trainer and inventor, presented the workshop. He talked about how a person can begin to invent. The recycling workshop helped them to learn about plastic and natural materials. The innovations will be inspired by the museum, whether ships, castles, or anything related to Omani industries.”

Yusra bint Saif al Harrasiyah of iDeal said: “The interaction of the participants in the programme was remarkable and distinctive. The reason for that is that the learning was in a practical and fun way rather than theoretical.

We divided the participants into groups and gave each participant a role to play. In this way, they learned about cooperation and the importance of teamwork. The team will not succeed unless each one of them plays his or her role.”

Al Baljaa bint Muhsin al Busaidiyah, a participant from Manah, said: “I learned from the workshop on how to become a team leader, the importance of focusing and not rushing to perform tasks so that the work is perfect and complete. The workshops were entertaining and enjoyable at the same time.

Today I have more confidence in speaking. I wish the programme to continue for a longer period. I advise all children to participate in such workshops because it is entertaining and useful in building character.”

Juhaina bint Jamal al Hadhramiyah, a participant from Nizwa, said: “The programme taught me the importance of cooperation and teamwork. There was new information that I learned, like Omani personalities. I learned how to design integrated circuits. I used to feel shy and now I am more social. The workshop was interesting and there were new things every day. I thank the organisers for this interesting workshop.”

Al Moather bin Thani al Tubi, another participant from Manah, said: “The work I liked the most was that I learned how to make a sword out of palm fronds. We started it by planning and working together as one team. I am sad because today is the last day of the programme. And for sure I will participate in future programmes. I thank all the organisers for the programme and the Oman Across Ages Museum.”



WANT TO SEE A RARE AND SHY ANIMAL? COME TO AL SIREEN RESERVE



“The survival of the Arabian tahr remains a challenge for years to come, despite many protection programmes. The source of the threat is not limited to poaching, but also to the destruction of natural habitats due to urban expansion

**BIODIVERSITY
EXPERT**



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

WADI SIREEN Reserve, which was set up in 1975, is home to one of the rarest and most timid mammals in the world known as the Arabian tahr or Arabian ibex.

The Arabian tahr is the smallest animal of its species (ibex) in the world. It is unique with a short body, hooked horns, reddish-brown hair, as well as a dark line that extends along the back. The male tahr has a long mane that covers its entire neck and continues to grow as the animal advances in age.

Wadi Sireen has the perfect environment for tahr to live such as mountain cliffs and rocky slopes. As with most mountain goats and sheep, they have rubber-like hooves to provide balance and traction on the steep, rocky slopes.

Wadi Sireen Reserve is located in the eastern Al Hajar Mountains about 45 kilometres southwest of Muscat Governorate.

The wadi borders three wilayats: Al Amerat, Qurayat, and Dima Wattayeen, and there are two entry points at Jabal Aswad or The Black Mountain

and Jabal Abyad or The White Mountain.

Along with tahr, there are a number of animals which share Wadi Sireen such as Arabian gazelle, Arabian wolf, red fox, hedgehog, deer, Jayakar’s Oman lizard, common Kestrel, Egyptian vulture, sand partridge, Oman saw-scaled viper.

The Arabian tahr often lives alone or in a small group, and the adult males dig holes and remove rocks with their horns. In most cases, it is difficult to see these animals because they prefer to hide among the giant rocks.

It can survive without water for a long time. Sometimes it will drink every two or three days. Tahr feeds on vegetation like grasses, fruits, seeds and leaves.

REPRODUCTION

Environmental studies indicate when there is plenty of grass, after the monsoon, the female tahr gives birth twice in a year. Therefore, the rainy seasons are important for the reproduction of this species in its natural habitat. “The survival of the Arabian tahr remains a challenge for years to come, despite many protection programmes. The source of the threat is



not limited to poaching, but also to the destruction of natural habitats due to urban expansion,” a biodiversity expert said.

The ibex is known as a dimorphic animal (formally distinct), meaning that the male ibex differs from the female in terms of shape. The male’s horns are characterised by their thickness and curve, while the female’s horns are small and less curved. The male is characterised by the density of its hair and the presence of black lines on the back and the bottom of the eyes, while the density of hair in the female is less. Old males also grow distinctive beards and a layer of hair on the upper half of the front legs, while females lack these characteristics.

Wadi Sireen contains 400 types of plant, ten of them are endemic and four are endangered species. Some of these are used in traditional medicine. It also has a dam which overflows after rains. This dam provides water for wild animals and birds. It also feeds wells, aflaj and springs in the region. There is a specialised team that protects this reserve from poachers.

People who wish to visit the reserve have to take permission from the Office for the Conservation of the Environment.



Ukraine seeks progress towards peace at Saudi talks

DUBAI: Senior officials from some 40 countries including the United States, China and India began talks in Saudi Arabia on Saturday that Kyiv and its allies hope will lead to agreement on key principles for a peaceful end to Russia's war in Ukraine.

The two-day meeting is part of a diplomatic push by Ukraine to build support beyond its core Western backers by reaching out to Global South countries that have been reluctant to take sides in a conflict that has hit the global economy.

It is not clear whether the talks are aimed at producing a joint statement however, and the Ukrainian envoy to the meeting said the conversation "will be difficult".

"But behind us is truth, behind us - goodness," said envoy Andriy Yermak, head of President Volodymyr Zelenskii's office, in a television interview published late on Friday.

Saudi state television reported on Saturday afternoon that the talks had begun.

Russia is not attending, though the Kremlin has said

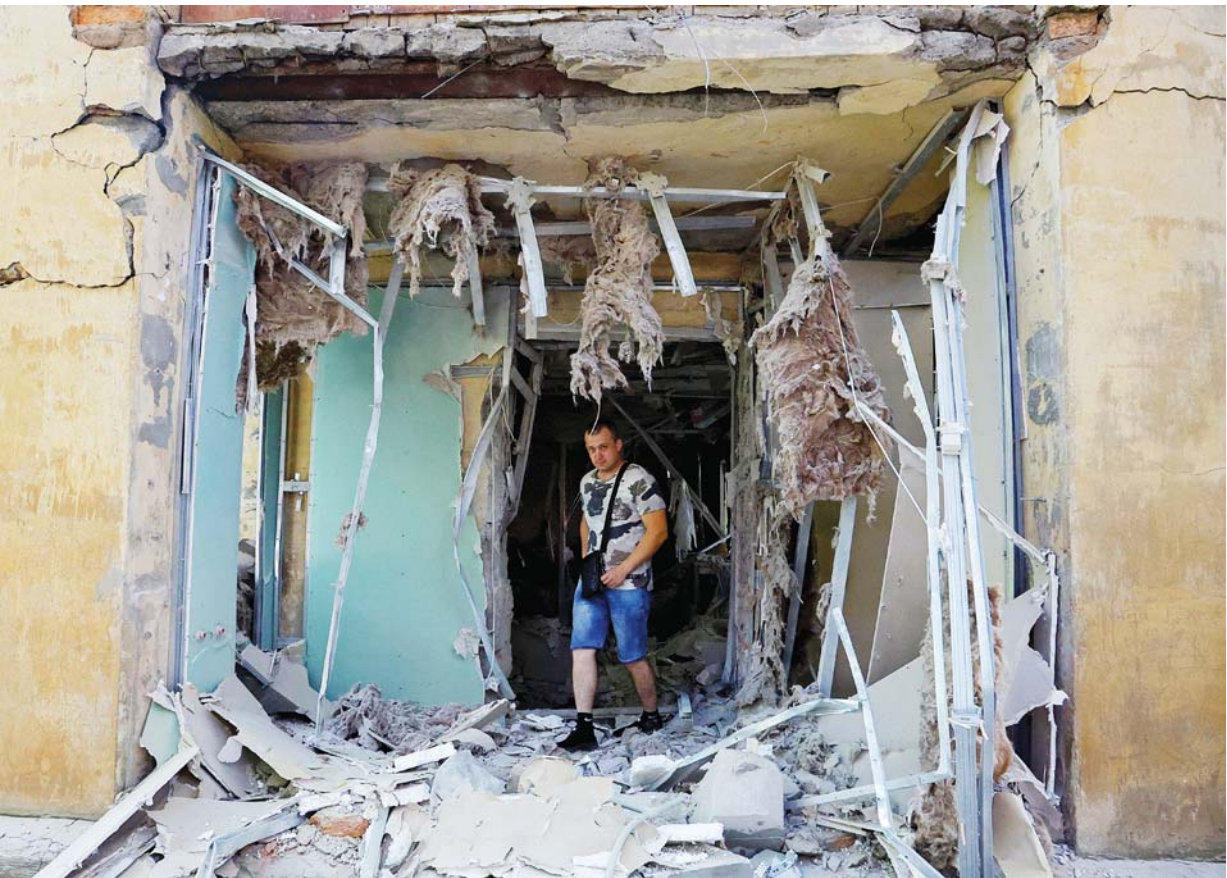
it will keep an eye on the talks. Ukrainian, Russian and international officials say there is no prospect of direct peace talks between Ukraine and Russia at present, with the war raging.

Zelenskii has said he hopes the talks will lead to a peace summit of global leaders to endorse principles in his plan for a settlement, which demands Russia's return of all Ukrainian territory and withdrawal of all its troops.

The world's top oil exporter Saudi Arabia, which has maintained contacts with both sides since Russia invaded Ukraine last February, has played a role in convening countries that did not join earlier meetings, Western diplomats have said.

China, which did not attend a previous round of talks in Copenhagen, is sending Special Envoy for Eurasian Affairs Li Hui, Beijing said on Saturday. China has kept close economic and diplomatic ties with Russia since the conflict began and has rejected calls to condemn Moscow.

"We have many disagreements



A man walks through an apartment damaged by recent shelling during Russia-Ukraine conflict in Donetsk on Saturday. — Reuters

and we have heard different positions, but it is important that our principles are shared," he said. Indian National Security Adviser Shri Ajit Doval has also

arrived in Jeddah for the talks, the Indian Embassy in Riyadh said on social media on Saturday. Like China, India has kept close ties with Russia and refused to

condemn it for the war. It has ramped up imports of Russian oil. Western officials and analysts said Saudi diplomacy had been

important in securing China's presence at the talks.

Under de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known as MbS, the kingdom has sought a bigger role on the world stage and has pushed to expand ties with major powers outside the old framework of its relationship with the United States.

Riyadh has worked with Moscow in recent years on oil market policy and, along with Turkiye, it helped mediate a prisoner swap between Ukraine and Russia last year. Zelenskii attended an Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia last year where MbS voiced readiness to help mediate in the war.

Saudi Arabia has also built a closer relationship with China over the past year, giving an effusive welcome to Chinese President Xi Jinping when he visited Riyadh in December, and seeking to join the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

In March, Beijing brokered a resumption of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran. — Reuters

Bahrain, Saudi call on its citizens to leave Lebanon

DUBAI: Bahrain called on its citizens to leave Lebanon because of "armed conflict," the foreign ministry said in a statement on Saturday. Saudi Arabia also called on its citizens to quickly leave Lebanese territory and to avoid approaching areas where there have been armed clashes, the Saudi Embassy in Lebanon said in a statement posted on Friday on X.

The kingdom did not specify which areas in Lebanon that it was advising its citizens to avoid.

The embassy stressed "the importance of adhering to the Saudi travel ban to Lebanon," the statement added.

Kuwait also issued an advisory early on Saturday calling on Kuwaitis in Lebanon to stay vigilant and avoid "areas of security disturbances" but stopped short of asking them to leave the country, according to a statement by the Kuwaiti Foreign ministry posted on X.

On August 1, the United Kingdom also updated its travel advice for Lebanon, advising against "all but essential travel" to parts of Lebanon's south near the Palestinian camp of Ain el-Hilweh.

At least 13 people, most of them militants, were killed in fighting that broke out in the camp on July 29 between mainstream faction Fatah and hardliners, security sources in the camp said.

Ain el-Hilweh is the largest of 12 Palestinian camps in Lebanon, hosting around 80,000 of up to 250,000 Palestinian refugees countrywide, according to the United Nations' agency for refugees from Palestine.

— Reuters

Indian lunar mission enters Moon's orbit

NEW DELHI: India's latest space mission entered the Moon's orbit on Saturday ahead of the country's second attempted lunar landing, as its cut-price space programme seeks to reach new heights.

The world's most populous nation has a comparatively low-budget aerospace programme that is rapidly closing in on the milestones set by global space powers.

Only Russia, the United States and China have previously achieved a controlled landing on the lunar surface.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) confirmed that Chandrayaan-3, which means "Mooncraft" in Sanskrit, had been "successfully inserted into the lunar orbit", more than three weeks after its launch.

If the rest of the current mission goes to plan, the mission will safely touch down near the Moon's little-explored south pole between August 23 and 24.

India's last attempt to do so ended in failure four years ago, when ground control lost contact moments before landing.

Developed by ISRO, Chandrayaan-3 includes a lander module named Vikram, which means "valour" in Sanskrit, and a rover named Pragyan, the Sanskrit word for wisdom.

The mission comes with a price tag of \$74.6 million — far smaller than those of other countries, and a testament to India's frugal space engineering.

Experts say India can keep costs low by copying and adapting existing space technology, and thanks to an abundance of highly skilled engineers who earn a fraction of their foreign counterparts' wages. The Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft has taken much longer to reach

If the rest of the current mission goes to plan, the mission will safely touch down near the Moon's little-explored south pole between August 23 and 24.

the Moon than the manned Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s, which arrived in a matter of days. The Indian rocket used is much less powerful than the United States' Saturn V and instead the probe orbited the earth five or six times elliptically to gain speed, before being sent on a month-long lunar trajectory.

If the landing is successful the rover will roll off Vikram and explore the nearby lunar area, gathering images to be sent back to Earth for analysis.

The rover has a mission life of one lunar day or 14 Earth days.

ISRO chief S. Somanath has said his engineers carefully studied data from the last failed mission and tried their best to fix the glitches.

India's space programme has grown considerably in size and momentum since it first sent a probe to orbit the Moon in 2008.

In 2014, it became the first Asian nation to put a satellite into orbit around Mars, and three years later, the ISRO launched 104 satellites in a single mission.

The ISRO's Gaganyaan ("Skycraft") programme is slated to launch a three-day manned mission into Earth's orbit by next year. India is also working to boost its two per cent share of the global commercial space market by sending private payloads into orbit for a fraction of the cost of competitors.

— AFP

نقدم بثقة

Moving Forward with Confidence

رؤية عمان 2040

Oman Vision 2040

Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
248/2023	General maintenance work for the building of the Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in the Wilayat of Khasab	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the second degree	Sunday 27-8-2023 02:00 PM	Sunday 17-9-2023 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
249/2023	General maintenance work for the investment building in the New Green Square, north of the club, Plot No. (5) of the Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Buraimi	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the second degree	Sunday 27-8-2023 02:00 PM	Sunday 17-9-2023 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
250/2023	Purchase of (100) desktop and laptop computers	Companies specialized in the field of supplying communications and information technology devices and their accessories, which are registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the degree of excellent, first or second.	Sunday 27-8-2023 02:00 PM	Sunday 17-9-2023 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
251/2023	The work of equipping a media studio equipped with all devices and equipment in the Ministry General Office	Companies specialized in the field of television, cinema and radio production services registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with the grade of excellent, first, second, third or fourth.	Sunday 27-8-2023 02:00 PM	Sunday 17-9-2023 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>**) . On **Sunday 6/8/2023**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (**reg@tenderboard.gov.om**) tel. (**24402200**).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

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A member of the ECOWAS regional force is seen at Denton check point in Banjul, Gambia. – Reuters file photo

Pressure mounts on Niger coup leaders as deadline nears

NIAMEY: Pressure on the leaders of a coup in Niger mounted on Saturday on the eve of a west African bloc’s deadline for the military to relinquish control or face possible armed intervention.

Former colonial power France, with which the junta broke military ties shortly after taking power, said it would “firmly” back whatever course of action the ECOWAS bloc took after the expiration of the Sunday deadline.

Military chiefs from the grouping said they had agreed a plan for a possible intervention to respond to the crisis, the latest of several coups to hit Africa’s Sahel region since 2020.

“All the elements that will go into any eventual intervention have been worked out,” ECOWAS commissioner Abdel-

Fatau Musah said after the talks finished. These included “the resources needed, and including the how and when we are going to deploy the force”, he added.

“We want diplomacy to work, and we want this message clearly transmitted to them (the junta) that we are giving them every opportunity to reverse what they have done,” Musah said.

Paris said “the future of Niger and the stability of the entire region are at stake” as tension ratchet up over the future of one of the world’s poorest countries.

Niger played a key part in Western strategies to combat a jihadist insurgency that has plagued the Sahel since 2012, with France and the United States stationing around 1,500 and 1,000 troops in the country, respectively.

— AFP

FORMER PAKISTAN PREMIER IMRAN KHAN ARRESTED

Court hands down 3-year sentence for illegally selling state gifts

LAHORE: Police arrested Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Imran Khan in Lahore on Saturday after a court sentenced him to three years in prison for illegally selling state gifts, potentially barring the opposition leader from contesting an upcoming election.

Legal experts say the guilty verdict reached by an Islamabad district court could eliminate Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s greatest rival in a national election expected to be held in November.

“Police have arrested Imran Khan from his residence,” Khan’s lawyer, Intezar Panjotha, said. “We are filing a petition against the decision in high court.”

The arrest is the latest in a series of blows that have weakened Khan’s political standing, after he fell out with Pakistan’s military and his party splintered.

Lahore Police Chief Bilal Siddique Kamiana confirmed the arrest and said the politician was being transferred to the capital, Islamabad. He would then be held at Central Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, near the capital, according to the arrest warrant.

Khan’s political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), said in a statement it had already filed another appeal to the Supreme Court earlier on Saturday.

Khan, 70, is a former cricket star who went on to forge a



Imran Khan's supporters shout anti-government slogans during a protest outside the press club in Quetta on Saturday. – AFP

political career and who was prime minister from 2018 to 2022. He has denied wrongdoing and in a pre-recorded video address released by his party he asked his supporters to peacefully protest.

“By the time you hear this statement, they will have arrested me. I have only one appeal: don’t sit silently at home. I am struggling for you and the country and your children’s future,” he said.

The conviction came a day after Pakistan’s high court temporarily halted the district court trial. It was not immediately clear why the trial had proceeded despite the high court decision.

Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said in a broadcast statement that Khan’s arrest followed a full investigation and proper legal proceedings in a trial court. She said his arrest was unrelated to the upcoming elections. A copy of the court verdict, shared by Khan’s legal team, said he had made false statements in relation to acquiring official state gifts.

“He has been found guilty of corrupt practices by hiding the benefits he accrued from national exchequer wilfully and intentionally,” the verdict said.

Police surrounded Khan’s residence in Lahore after the verdict was released, Pakistani media and a Reuters witness reported, but there were no immediate signs of unrest in the hours after his arrest, unlike last May. — Reuters

A migrant for whom an ‘image haunts my soul’

TRIPOLI: Pato looks at the picture on his phone. It shows him with his wife and daughter, all carefree smiles. “That’s the last time we were happy,” he says, completely traumatised.

A few months after the photograph was taken, his life was shattered. A friend showed Pato, a migrant from Cameroon, a picture from the Internet of two bodies huddled together on the desert sand. It was of Pato’s wife, 30-year-old Fati Dosso, and their six-year-old daughter Marie.

The three had become separated on a trek through the desert between Tunisia and Libya on a day in mid-July that changed Pato’s life forever. His real name is Mbengue Nyimbilo Crepin, but his nickname is Pato. After working for seven years at various jobs in Zuwara some 120 km west of Tripoli, Pato, 30, decided to go to Tunisia with his Ivorian wife and child.

But unlike the thousands of sub-Saharan migrants who enter Tunisia planning to cross the Mediterranean for a better life in Europe, Pato and Fati just wanted to find a school for Marie.

The first time they were intercepted was on July 13, in the Tunisian coastal town of Ben Guerdane. They were sent back into the searing heat of the Libyan desert and later re-entered Tunisia by night without even realising they had done so. Pato, Fati and Marie hadn’t had water for 24 hours when they came across a woman and asked for some. She directed them to a mosque, and after just five minutes the Tunisian police arrived. They took them to a police station where “there were



Pato holds a phone showing a picture of him with his family as he gives an interview at an undisclosed location near Tripoli. – AFP

a dozen or so other sub-Saharan whod’d been picked up”, Pato said. “They beat us and searched us, then left us sitting on the sand in the sun” before taking them to another police post “where they hit us and said they’d send us back to Libya”. Another group of around 30 sub-Saharan was there too. He and his small family were driven in a truck with other Africans back to the border.

“They abandoned us there beside a trench, telling us to cross it and go straight ahead into Libya,” he said.

In the desert, Pato found he had reached his limit.

“I was completely exhausted. We’d been walking for four days with no food or water. I collapsed, and we were all crying. “My wife asked me to try and get up, to keep going.”

Pato managed to convince Fati herself to continue, to “try to save the child at least”. He stayed behind. “In my head, I was sure I was dead.”

Two weeks later, the weight of his grief is unbearable.

The picture of the two bodies in the desert has been seen worldwide at a time when human rights groups and the United Nations have denounced Tunisia for “expelling migrants” to its borders, despite its strenuous denials. Media organisations including AFP have also gathered many testimonies on the Libyan side. Pato, his wife and their little girl were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

He only survived after two Sudanese gave him some water. Fati and Marie died of thirst in the vast expanse of desert. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

GENEVA

No relief from flooding in Austria

More rainfall overnight hampered efforts of Austria’s emergency services to deal with widespread flooding in the south of the country as well as neighbouring Slovenia since Friday. Although the rain was less heavy than expected, authorities evacuated campsites in Austria’s southernmost province of Carinthia and in Styria as a precaution.

More than 2,500 firefighters and dozens of supporting soldiers were deployed,



according to the ORF radio station. A campsite at Lake Gösselsdorf and one at Lake Turnersee were at risk of flooding, according to the authorities.

OTTAWA

Canada port workers accept deal

Workers at Canada’s busiest port in Vancouver and at harbours up and down the Pacific Coast have approved a tentative labour deal, their union announced late on Friday. After months of failed talks, more than 7,000 terminal cargo loaders and other employees in 30 ports had gone on strike last month and then staged another walkout days later. The labour unrest paralysed industries across Canada, disrupting an estimated \$7.5 billion in trade.



In a statement, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union of Canada said 75 per cent of its members voted to ratify the agreement “after five weeks of labour instability at British Columbia’s ports.”

FATIMA

Pope visits Fatima shrine in Portugal

Pope Francis visited the revered Catholic shrine of Fatima in Portugal on Saturday, praying the rosary with about 200,000 people at the site where the Church says the Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children in 1917.

The 86-year-old pope skipped reading a key speech that was on the programme of his two-hour visit to the world-famous shrine north of Lisbon.

The omission did not appear



to indicate that the pope was experiencing any health issues. He later greeted dozens of people individually as an aide slowly pushed his wheelchair through the crowd.

English: Forever and a day...

The English language is a simple one to learn, or maybe Omanis are just very good learners, and it is now if not the most spoken language of our world, it has surely displaced French as the international lingua franca.

With 1.3 billion native speakers, of course Chinese is the most spoken global language, followed by Spanish 485 million, English 373 million, Arabic 362 million, and Hindi at 344 million rounding out the top five. It appears that the commercial imperatives of a single global economy, and the need for absolute accuracy in finance have prompted the assumption of the number one spot by English, in global communications, despite the position of primacy held in manufacturing and industry, by the Republic of China, and is probably a matter of convenience.

All languages have their unique aspects, their lovable words, and phraseologies, many as the result of media or entertainment exposure. In this way than ‘hakuna matata,’ from the 1994 Walt Disney Studios musical animation of ‘The Lion King,’ with Elton John’s music and Time Rice’s lyrics. Rice apparently found the phrase in a Swahili phrasebook, loosely interpreted as ‘no worries’ in English, and that’s how it has entered the sphere of global colloquialisms. I love how in two vastly different languages it still conveys its message so well.

‘Karaoke’ is a Japanese word that means without orchestra and portrays very accurately the music fad of the 1970’s, originating in Japan, where orchestral accompaniments, and autocued lyrics appeared on screens, and ordinary people like you and I could sing to our heart’s content. Most of us thought it would never be a success, but there is a wannabe popstar in all of us it seems.

‘Paparazzi’ is, of course, of Italian origin and is the name given to the photographers that follow, haunt, or harass celebrities to get their photos, if possible, in compromising situations. The word itself is taken from the Frederico Fellini movie La Dolce Vita, where a photographer character was named Paparazzo, which means an



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COMMERCIAL IMPERATIVES OF A SINGLE GLOBAL ECONOMY HAS PROMPTED THE ASSUMPTION OF THE NUMBER ONE SPOT BY ENGLISH

annoying sound that you cannot get rid of.

Now that’s not to say English is perfect, however it is its idiosyncrasies that make it so much fun to speak and write, with words not meaning what they say sometimes, and are frequently referred to as ‘Janus’ words, after the ancient Roman God, and overseer of doorways and entrances. He was depicted as having two different faces as he could see entrances and exits, beginnings and endings, and is the origin of the phrase describing someone who is your friend to your face, and your enemy to others, as being ‘two-faced.’

So, English has words like ‘finished,’ which could mean completed, or could mean eliminated, or to ‘bolt’ could mean to lock yourself in (or out), or to run away. Do you see what I mean? One that I particularly like is when an activity is officially ‘sanctioned,’ which is the same as being permitted, yet when ‘sanctions’ are imposed, one is not permitted to act in defiance of those sanctions, which is weird isn’t it? One that we men seem to fall foul of occasionally is the word ‘fine,’ which has this, apparently masculine attachment of being excellent, perfect, or amazing, while the feminine perspective is more of the acceptable, or “I am just saying this so we stop arguing, but I’m not good with it,’ variety, and maybe related somewhat, to ‘fix’ something usually means to repair it, but when applied to animals, means to castrate them! You wouldn’t want to get that last one wrong, would you?

But finally, can anyone explain to me how the word ‘literally’ went from being a redundant adverb, meaning exactly, or word for word, to becoming a fashionable ‘intensifier?’ Surely, saying someone ‘ate all the pies,’ means the same when you intensify it thus: Someone literally ate all the pies. Do that to a million statements and it will always come out the same. In fact, it will come out ‘exactly’ the same... another redundant adverb!

And the final word goes to Will Shakespeare who made the words ‘forever and a day,’ which is of course an impossibility, a cliché. But that’s another story, for another day.

DOUSING THE FIRES



A firefighting helicopter makes a water drop during a wildfire near the village of Alassa, Cyprus, on Saturday. – Reuters

Achieving zero hunger is still possible

This year marks the halfway point for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the ambitious set of global targets introduced by the United Nations in 2015. These 17 goals, devised to address today’s most pressing challenges and put the world on the path to sustainability, seek to reduce poverty, improve access to healthcare and education, and mitigate the worst effects of climate change by 2030. But when it comes to meeting the critical goal of eradicating food insecurity, much of the progress made over the past decade has been undone.

When the SDGs were launched, the target of eliminating food insecurity and malnutrition worldwide within 15 years seemed ambitious but within reach. At the time, hunger levels had been trending lower for more than two decades, largely thanks to rising agricultural productivity and global economic growth.

Over the past few years, however, the world has been hit by a series of compounding crises, from the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine to extreme weather events caused by climate change. As a result, global hunger has surged, with the world’s poorest people suffering the most.

According to a new UN report,



Jordan Dey

The writer is a social-enterprise company that supports organic, chemical-free drying, storage, and transport of crops

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE WAR IN UKRAINE, AND CLIMATE CHANGE HAVE REVERSED MOST OF THE PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS ELIMINATING GLOBAL HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION OVER THE PAST DECADE

approximately 735 million people are experiencing food insecurity, an increase of 122 million people since 2019. Alarmingly, seven countries — Somalia, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen — are now on the brink of famine. Not only are we falling short of reaching zero hunger by 2030, but we are worse off than we were in 2015.

So, where do we go from here? To meet the UN’s zero-hunger target, we must first recognise who makes up the majority of the world’s poor and understand where most of their food comes from. The answer to both questions is surprisingly straightforward.

The vast majority of the world’s poorest individuals are the smallholder farmers who also produce most of the food consumed in many developing countries. These farmers have been hit hard by the shocks of the past few years, in addition to the systemic challenges that have kept them trapped in poverty and food insecurity. Yet within the current crisis lies an opportunity. By supporting smallholder farms, the international community could make significant strides towards

ending global hunger.

Governments and international institutions can aid smallholder farmers and eliminate global food insecurity in several ways. First, most smallholder farms in developing countries generate disproportionately low crop yields compared to their developed-country counterparts, largely because they lack basic inputs, such as improved seeds and organic fertilisers. This is particularly evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, where yields for staple food crops are significantly lower than global averages. Increasing access to high-quality farm inputs, especially



According to a new UN report, approximately 735 million people are experiencing food insecurity.

those that help farmers adapt to climate change, could thus greatly enhance food security.

Second, lack of access to credit prevents most smallholder farmers from purchasing improved agricultural inputs or investing in their farms. Greater global support for programmes that provide these farmers with financing would help.

Third, smallholder farmers typically harvest crops once or twice a year. This means that food must be stored for months to ensure that supplies last until the next harvest. Given the limited access to proper storage technology, staple food grains are frequently exposed to damage by

insects, mold, and other pests, contributing to post-harvest crop losses and household hunger. These smallholder farms require greater access to advanced storage options, including low-cost, hermetically sealed bags that can preserve crops for extended periods and eliminate the need to treat stored grains with potentially harmful insecticides.

Finally, smallholder farmers need better access to viable markets for their crops, enabling them to move beyond subsistence and build reliable livelihoods. The international community, alongside public- and private-sector actors, must do more to bolster local capacity and encourage investment in agricultural value chains. This would empower more smallholders to develop sustainable businesses.

Despite the massive challenges ahead, achieving zero hunger remains a feasible target. In September, global leaders attending the UN General Assembly will evaluate progress towards achieving the SDGs. If we are to create a world free from hunger, supporting agriculture and smallholder farmers must be at the top of the agenda.

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PERFECT START FOR OMAN BEACH SOCCER TEAM IN CIS GAMES

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

Oman beach soccer team registered a perfect start in their campaign at the second CIS Games which is under way in Belarus. Oman thrashed Uzbekistan 13-1 in their opening game in Group B at the beach soccer competition.

Coach Talib Hilal's men did not find any difficulty to end the game with a big winning margin. Sami al Balushi was the star of the match as he netted a superb hat-trick and the same did Abdullah al Souti. One goal each from Yahya al Murkhi, Ahmed al Owaisi, Khalid al Araimi, Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, Amjad al Hamdani and Nooh al Zadjali completed the 13-1 scoreline. The victory gave full points for the Omani men in the group.

The long-serving national coach Talib began the match with a starting list comprising Younis al Owaisi as the goalkeeper, Yahya al Murkhi and Mashal al Oraimi as defenders while captain Khalid al Araimi and Abdullah al Souti were the forwards. Many substitutions were employed during all the sets of the match.

Abdullah al Souti gave Oman

the lead in the earlier minutes of the opening set and he doubled the result as he netted the second goal in style. Yahya al Murkhi found the back of the net to score the third goal. Ahmed al Owaisi continued the goalscoring spree and made it 4-0.

Khalid al Araimi opened the account in the following set with the fifth goal while Sami al Balushi raised the score to 6-0 before Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi struck the seventh goal from a penalty.

Goalie Amjad al Hamdani etched his name on the scoresheet as he netted the eighth goal from a strong shot. Then, Abdullah al Souti scored from a penalty before Nooh al Zadjali made it 10-0. Later, Sami al Balushi entered the match strongly to score a hat-trick and end the game at 13-1.

Oman will meet Egypt in the second fixture on Sunday and the match will kick off at 3 pm (Oman time) while they will conclude the group phase with a match against Russia on Monday. The match will be scheduled at 6 pm. Group A comprised hosts Belarus, Azerbaijan, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.



US meet Sweden in heavyweight World Cup last-16



Sweden's defender, Amanda Ilestedt (C) celebrates scoring her team's first goal during the 2023 Women's World Cup. — AFP

AUCKLAND: The United States find themselves in unfamiliar territory as group runners-up at the Women's World Cup and the defending champions will now look to win a third straight title the hard way when they face high-flying Sweden in the last 16.

The Americans topped their group in 2015 and 2019 but this year they finished behind the Netherlands after two draws. They were also nearly eliminated in stoppage time of their final group game when debutants Portugal hit the post in a goalless draw.

SOCCER LANDSCAPE

The US have been far from their best but coach Vlatko Andonovski said the criticism of the team was harsh, adding that the women's soccer landscape has changed in recent years with teams closing the gap to the top.

"We want to (win) everything by five goals. Who doesn't want to do that, right? But those results are gone," he said.

For Sweden, the Americans are

FIFA Women's World Cup 2023: final stage



familiar foes but this marks the first time the two heavyweight sides, ranked number one and three in the world, face each other in the knockouts.

The Scandinavian side beat the US at the Rio and Tokyo Olympics, but coach Peter Gerhardsson said history would have no say on Sunday.

"You can talk about revenge or underdog mentality. For me, that's not going to make the difference tomorrow. It's the players who play," Gerhardsson said.

The Netherlands, 2019 runners-up, have an easier game on paper against South Africa, who reached the knockout stages for the first time.

But Dutch coach Andries Jonker is not taking the reigning African champions lightly.

"Many people in women's football will consider South Africa smaller... I think it will be another fight between two countries who have just one desire, fly to New Zealand (for the quarter-finals)," he said.

South Africa coach Desiree Ellis said they have been underestimated so many times before and backed her team to rise to the occasion once again, just as they did with a last-gasp win over Italy to advance.

"This group has shown that nothing can stand in their way, this group has shown when the chips are down that they can stand up," Ellis said.

"We know who we are playing, but they don't know who they are playing." — Reuters



Manchester United's Rasmus Hojlund during the warm-up before the match. — Reuters

Manchester United sign Danish striker Hojlund from Atalanta

MANCHESTER: Manchester United have signed Denmark striker Rasmus Hojlund from Serie A side Atalanta on a five-year contract until 2028, the Premier League club said on Saturday.

Financial details were not disclosed but British media said the 20-year-old cost £72 million (\$92 million).

"It is no secret that I have been a fan of this great club since I was a small boy, and I dreamed of walking out at Old Trafford as a Manchester United player," Hojlund said.

"Once I had spoken to the manager, I knew that this environment would be perfect for my development; I am relishing the opportunity to work with one of the best coaches in the world."

Hojlund, who previously played for FC Copenhagen and Sturm Graz, joined Atalanta at the start of the 2022-23 season and scored nine league goals in a breakout campaign.

He has also been in fine form for Denmark this year, scoring six goals in four appearances for the national team.

United needed a striker having spent the latter half of last season with Wout Weghorst

often leading the line, with the Dutchman scoring just two goals in 31 games in all competitions.

Manager Erik ten Hag will hope Hojlund brings goals to Old Trafford but another key part of the Dane's play is his ability to hold the ball up, which could create opportunities for attacking midfielders like Bruno Fernandes and Mason Mount.

"Working under Erik ten Hag and his coaches will provide Rasmus with the perfect development platform," Manchester United football director John Murtough said.

"Throughout the summer we have acted quickly and decisively to secure our primary targets early in the transfer window."

"This will ensure that Erik and his coaches have the best opportunity to prepare the squad to push for further success in the exciting campaign ahead."

Hojlund becomes United's third signing of this transfer window after the arrivals of Mount from Chelsea and goalkeeper Andre Onana from Inter Milan.

United finished third last season, securing a spot in the Champions League. They also won the League Cup in February.

— Reuters

Fritz downs Murray on way to Washington semis, Evans topples Tiafoe

WASHINGTON: Top-seeded Taylor Fritz battled past three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 6-4 then returned to breeze past Jordan Thompson and reach the semifinals of the rain-hit Washington Open on Friday.

Fritz was not the only player pulling double duty at the combined ATP and WTA hardcourt tennis tournament, after rain brought play to a premature end on Thursday.

Britain's Daniel Evans defeated Alexander Shevchenko 6-4, 6-3 then came back to upset second-seeded hometown hero Frances Tiafoe 6-4, 7-5.

Tiafoe had made short work of his third-round opponent, dispatching Chinese teenager Shang Juncheng 6-2, 6-3.

But ninth-seeded Evans gained an early break in each set and turned back the American's bid to rally in the second, breaking Tiafoe for a 6-5 lead and saving a break point as he served out the match in the next game.

Evans next faces Bulgarian fifth-seed Grigor Dimitrov, who got some unexpected rest when France's Ugo Humbert withdrew from their quarterfinal with a leg injury.

Fritz next faces Tallon Griekspoor, who finished off a rain-disrupted three-set victory over France's Gael Monfils before beating American J.J. Wolf 7-5, 6-4 in the quarterfinals.

Fritz, ranked ninth in the world, looked anything but fatigued as he raced past Thompson 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 17 minutes.

Thompson had earlier beaten Wimbledon quarterfinalist Christopher Eubanks 6-2, 6-2, while Fritz had needed three hours to subdue the 44th-ranked Murray.

Murray, showing his formidable range of skills at age 36, won his first break chance of the match with a forehand cross-court drop volley winner on the line, breaking Fritz and pulling level at 5-5 on the way to a first set tie-break.

Murray smashed a forehand winner for a 3-1 lead, took a quick break to replace a shattered shoe, then took two points off Fritz's serve as he pocketed the set.

Fritz battled back to take the second and they fought to 4-4 in the third before Murray swatted a backhand wide to surrender a break. Down 0-40 in the 10th game, Fritz saved three break



Taylor Fritz (USA) hits a forehand against Jordan Thompson (AUS) on day seven of the Mubadala Citi DC Open. — USA sports

points. Murray denied him on two match points before Fritz blasted a forehand winner on his third chance.

INSANELY HIGH LEVEL

"I think that the match with Andy earlier was insanely high level," Fritz said. "I thought he played really well. I thought he served really well."

"It was a war," he added. "With how these balls are, they're so slow, dead, it's really tough to finish points. You're going to inevitably have these really long, physical rallies."

"I did a great job to win that. And then I did a really good job to

come back and play how I played in that last match.

"I feel like my body probably couldn't have handled another battle like I had with Andy," Fritz added. In women's action, top seed Jessica Pegula rallied past Wimbledon semifinalist Elina Svitolina 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 to book a semifinal showdown with Greek fourth seed Maria Sakkari.

Sakkari had to win twice on Friday, beating Canadian Leylah Fernandez 7-5, 6-2 before dispatching seventh-seeded American Madison Keys 6-3, 6-3 in the quarterfinals.

Third-seeded American Coco Gauff cruised past sixth-seeded

Swiss Belinda Bencic 6-1, 6-2 to line up a semifinal against defending champion Liudmila Samsonova, a 6-4, 6-2 winner over Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk.

Gauff, in contrast, was never troubled by reigning Olympic champion Bencic, converting six of her nine break chances.

"I put a lot of hours in after Wimbledon and I was eager to bounce back," said Gauff, who crashed out in the first round at the All England Club.

"The serve has improved, the return has improved and I think I'm dictating a lot of points, which against Belinda is not an easy thing to do." — AFP

Chelsea sign goalkeeper Sanchez from Brighton



LONDON: Chelsea have signed Spanish goalkeeper Robert Sanchez from Brighton & Hove Albion on a seven-year contract, the Premier League club announced on Saturday. British media reported that Chelsea will pay £25 million (\$31.87 million) for the Spain international.

Chelsea have been looking to bolster their goalkeeping options since Edouard Mendy joined Saudi Arabian side Al Ahli in June.

Chelsea are looking to revive their fortunes under new manager

Chelsea are looking to revive their fortunes under new manager Mauricio Pochettino after coming 12th in the standings last season — their worst finish since 1994

Mauricio Pochettino after coming 12th in the standings last season — their worst finish since 1994.

"Robert has repeatedly proved himself in the Premier League and been capped by his country," Paul Winstanley and Laurence Stewart, Chelsea's co-sporting directors, said in a statement. "We are excited to watch him work with Mauricio

and his coaching team during the season ahead."

Sanchez joined Brighton's academy in 2013 and has made 87 Premier League appearances for the south-coast club, but fell out of favour towards the end of the previous season, with Jason Steele starting 15 of Brighton's last 16 league games.

The 25-year-old, who is adept with his feet and has a strong range of passing, has won two caps for Spain. He will compete for the goalkeeper position at Stamford Bridge with compatriot Kepa Arrizabalaga.

"Robert is a good guy and a really good player, but being a coach sometimes means making difficult and painful decisions for the team," Brighton coach Roberto De Zerbi said.

"I wish him good luck for the future." — Reuters



Notes from trekking in Kashmir

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

Thirteen Omani youth decided to hike and they chose Kashmir. They chose the toughest route to explore, which is called the Great Lakes.

They coordinated with Oman Hikes Travel Company and once in Kashmir, an Indian company coordinated the rest of the journey.

Almost 10 days of the trip saw seven days of hiking took the youngsters through some of the most beautiful spots on earth, according to Nasser al Harrasi, one of the 13 hikers.

One has to go through a medical fitness test to take this journey.

"We went up to 4,200 metres. So an individual has to be prepared because, by the time you reach 3,000 metres, you can feel the difference in the oxygen level, that is why it is important to be physically fit," Nasser said.

They landed in Srinagar and experienced the city before they started the unique experience of the grandeur of the Himalayas.

"We reached places that are accessed by hiking. The area is only open for three months as the rest of the year it is too snowy. What I liked the most of course was the different views. The lakes were amazing. Hiking every day with an average that was between 10 to 15 km and living in tents was an experience on its own. We had Kashmiri guides and their mules carried everything we needed," he pointed out.

This is how he would like to describe the journey, "An enchanting journey through the lakes of Kashmir, the captivating trail of beauty. Vivid colours blend with breathtaking landscapes as crystal-clear waters meet the glimmering sunlight.

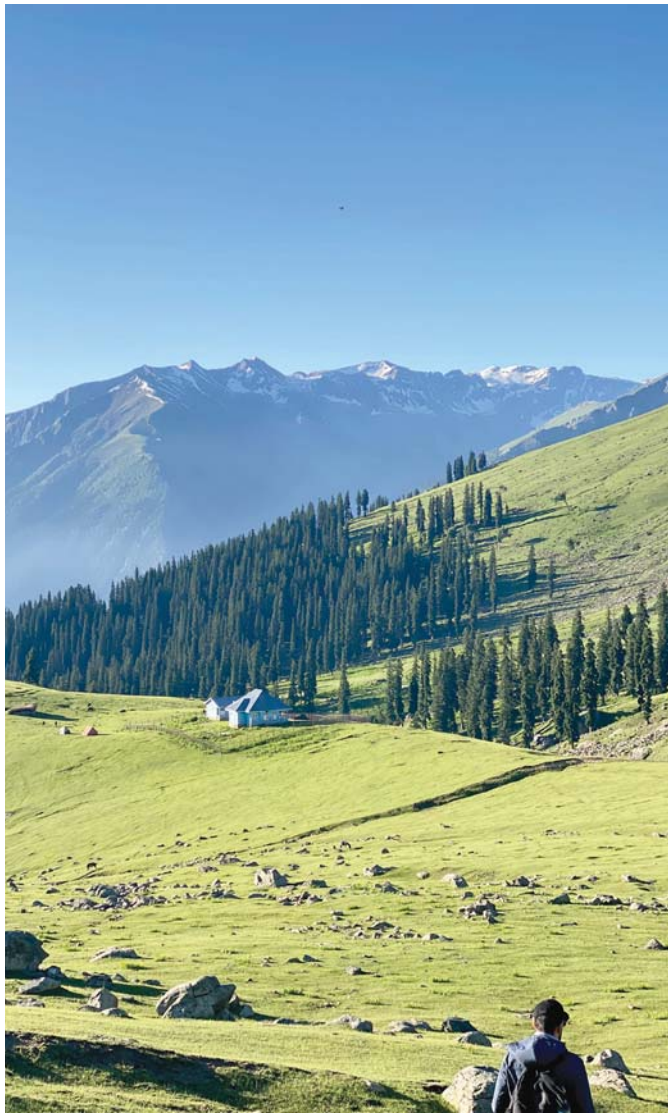
"You wander amidst misty mountains and savour the serenity of the lakes.

"Unforgettable moments in a mesmerising world where you discover the depth of your soul and draw inspiration for new ideas."

He was impressed with the determination and dedication of trekkers from across the globe. "We saw other trekkers too and we came across a group from Korea and their youngest team member was 50 years old. It just showed how fit they were. On the other hand, some groups could not complete the journey."

They had to hike 80 km to reach their destination, which was at a height of 4,200 metres.

According to Trekup India, "You must take care of your body, be healthy and look good. You can train yourself as a trekker by exercising regularly at the gym, running on an incline, biking, cross-training and stretching every day. Mental fitness is equally important. The trek starts approximately three km from Sonamarg on Srinagar Road. There are very few Shabbas along the way. Trekkers should eat at the Naranag stop, as the last trace of a dwelling spot will be at Naranag."



Day 1: Arrive in Sonamarg
Day 2: Sonamarg (7,800ft) to Nichnai, via Shekdur
Day 3: Nichnai (1,500ft) to Vishansar Lake (12,000ft).
Day 4: Day of Acclimatization and Rest/Buffer Day at Vishansar
Day 5: Vishansar (12,000ft) to Gadsar (12,000ft), via Kishansar Lake & Gadsar Pass (13,750ft).
Day 6: Gadsar (12,000ft) to Satsar

(12,000ft).
Day 7: Satsar (12,500ft) to Gangabal Twin Lakes (11,500ft).
Day 8: Gangabal (11,500ft) to Naranag (7,450ft). Drive to Srinagar

During this trekking route, one can enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the four lakes. The months to visit are June, July and August; although it is monsoon time in India and the

mountains do get their share of rains it is also the time for some of the valleys to burst into flowers. Regular trekkers also point out that flowers change according to seasons.

"From Oman, we took our hiking equipment. I go running every day so it was fine for me. Some of our team members got tired when there was a lack of oxygen."



What was the learning experience? It was a reset of the mind — away from technology, having natural food, drinking water from the lakes. Sometimes we missed the sun as the clouds were heavy and it was cold."

Seeing the elderly people in the mountains being healthy and fit, made me realise that healthy life is the way to live, said Nasser, adding it is better than city life. Everyone can achieve this.

If we cannot do this route we must reconsider our daily routine.

There the lifestyle makes you fit. We could see the Kashmiris swimming in the lakes.

The journey also gave the youngsters to enjoy traditional Kashmiri cuisine and ingredients as the food was prepared fresh at each campsite. The beauty is that because of the altitude, there are no mosquitoes or snakes. Just fresh air, water and peace of mind.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

The Woman Behind the ‘Hot Girl Summer’ Necklace

BY DAY, TAYLOR SADE, 24, is a marketing manager. But after work hours, she hand-strings beads and stones on her bed in her Lower East Side apartment, cradled next to her two Himalayan cats. Those creations eventually add up to Vertigo, the buzzy brand behind the accessory draping the necks and waists of many young women this summer.

"I've always loved solitary activities," Sade said in an interview from her studio, pointing to a stack of puzzles and knitting equipment sandwiched between tattered books in her living room.

That do-it-yourself quality applies more broadly to the bohemian appeal of Vertigo. The brand sells a collection of chokers, pendants and belts made of oversize beads that look as if they were plucked from the sand. The accessories, which cost \$120 to \$380, are often dark-hued but also glint in brighter colours, and they've shown up on many bikini-clad beachgoers — an embodiment of

a self-assurance often associated with a "Hot Girl Summer."

Gabriella Karefa-Johnson, a contributing editor at *Vogue*, said Vertigo inspired a feeling of nostalgia and evoked a bygone era that's hard to place. A Vertigo girl is someone who "didn't shop at Hollister and might not have been popular because of it, but she knew what was cool decades before the rest of us," Karefa-Johnson said.

Sade said she had never strung a bead before starting the company in summer 2021. At the time, she was searching for a creative respite from her full-time job and recalled watching videos about how to string necklaces. "I literally just went onto YouTube one day — it sounds so silly," she said.

For the first six months, Sade sourced materials from Phoenix, where she is from and where her family lives. Her mother would video chat her daughter as she visited local jewellers in her stead. "I'd be like, 'I want this jade, not



that one!" Sade said. "Then she'd ship over a box, and I'd Venmo her."

No pieces look exactly the same, because each stone, bead and jewel varies in colour and shape. "The styles are one-of-a-kind and made in very limited quantities, adding a sense of individualism," said Brandon Tan, a

stylist and fashion editor for *GQ*. "These days in the fashion landscape, that's extremely desirable."

This quality has helped land Vertigo in *Sports Illustrated*, a *Victoria's Secret* ad and a Frankies Bikini billboard in SoHo. In a shoot in May for Mirror Palais, a womenswear company, Emily Ratajkowski wore one of the pen-



dants, featuring a large lapis doughnut-shaped stone tied as a choker. The campaign garnered millions of views on Mirror Palais' Instagram account, which helped put Vertigo on the map, Sade said. Vertigo has also caught the eye of several celebrity stylists, who have requested accessories for their clients like model Gigi Hadid and TikTok influencer Alix Earle.

Sade keeps her operations relatively modest, although she no longer relies on her mother for help. Instead she negotiates with Arizona-based lapidaries via email and over the phone, accumulating one box at a time in her studio apartment (which is all she has space for, she noted). Recently, she started sourcing more ornate options like fossilised coral, opal

eye and green jade from Indonesia.

While hesitant to expand the company, Sade said she hired an intern in April to help her string beads. "My problem is, I don't trust anybody else to execute my vision," she said.

Sade oversees the entire process of creating a Vertigo accessory and attributes the brand's success to her attention to detail, down to the very last moment the product ships from her home to the next.

"I have people directly messaging me, 'This is the most beautiful package I've ever received,'" she said. "And it literally sounds like a joke, but it's because I spent five minutes wrapping your suede cord into a bow!" — **NYT**

DISCOVERY

Heaviest animal ever? Scientists discover massive ancient whale

LOOK OUT, BLUE WHALE — there's a new contender for your heavyweight title.

A newly discovered whale that lived nearly 40 million years ago could be the heaviest animal to have ever lived, based on a partial skeleton found in Peru, scientists said on Wednesday.

The modern blue whale has long

been considered the largest and heaviest animal ever, beating out all the giant dinosaurs of the distant past.

But *Perucetus colossus* — the colossal whale from Peru — may have been even heavier, according to a study published in the journal *Nature*.

Extrapolating from some massive bones found in the Peruvian desert, an international team of researchers estimated that the animal had an average body mass of 180 tonnes.

That would not take the heavyweight title by itself. The biggest blue whale ever recorded weighed 190 tonnes, according to Guinness World Records.

But the researchers estimated the ancient whale's weight range was between 85 and 340 tonnes, meaning it could have been significantly larger.

The first fossil of the ancient whale was discovered back in 2010 by Mario Urbina, a palaeontologist who has spent decades searching the desert on the southern coast of Peru.

"There is no record of the existence of an animal as large as this, it is the first, that's why nobody believed me when we discovered it," Urbina told AFP in Lima.

According to the researcher, this discovery "is going to cause more questions than answers and give the rest of the palaeontologists a lot to talk about."

The remains were presented to the



public for the first time during a press conference at the Natural History Museum in the Peruvian capital, where they are being displayed.

The researchers estimate that the animal reached about 20 metres (65 feet) in length.

REWRITING CETACEAN HISTORY

The researchers were careful not to declare the ancient whale had broken the record.

But there was also "no reason to

think that this specimen was the largest of its kind," study co-author Eli Amson told AFP.

"I think there's a good chance that some of the individuals broke the record — but the take-home message is that we are in the ballpark of the blue whale," said Amson, a palaeontologist at the State Museum of Natural History Stuttgart in Germany.

A total of 13 gigantic vertebrae — one of which weighed nearly 200 kilograms (440 pounds) — were found at

the site, as well as four ribs and a hip bone.

It took years and multiple trips to collect and prepare the giant fossils, and even longer for the team of Peruvian and European researchers to confirm exactly what they had found.

On Wednesday, they revealed it is a new species of basilosaurid, an extinct family of cetaceans.

Today's cetaceans include dolphins, whales and porpoises, but their early ancestors lived on land, some resembling small deer.

Over time they moved into the water, and basilosaurids are believed to be the first cetaceans to have a fully aquatic lifestyle.

One of their adaptations at that time was gigantism — they became very big.

But the new discovery indicates that cetaceans reached their peak body mass roughly 30 million years earlier than previously thought, the study said.

TINY HEAD, HEAVY BONES

Like other basilosaurids, *Perucetus colossus* likely had a "ridiculously small" head compared to its body, Amson said — though there were no available bones to confirm this.

Lacking any teeth, it was impossible to say for sure what they ate. But Amson speculated that scavenging off

the seafloor was a strong possibility, partly because the animals could not swim quickly.

The researchers were confident that the animal lived in shallow waters in coastal environments, due to the strange heaviness of its bones.

Its whole skeleton was estimated to weigh between five and seven tonnes — more than twice as heavy as the skeleton of a blue whale.

"This is — for sure — the heaviest skeleton of any mammal known to date," as well as any aquatic animal, Amson said.

Perucetus colossus needed heavy bones to compensate for the huge amount of buoyant blubber — and air in its lungs — which could otherwise send it bobbing to the surface.

But just the right balance of bone density and blubber allowed the giant animal to stay in the middle of around 10 metres (33 feet) of water "without moving a muscle," Amson explained.

Felix Marx, a marine mammal expert at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa not involved in the study, told AFP that *Perucetus colossus* "is very different from anything else we've ever found".

He cautioned that extinct sea cows had heavier bones than would be expected for their total body weight, potentially suggesting *Perucetus colossus* could be on the lower end of its estimated weight range. — **AFP**



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Launch of Duqm Refinery to boost Oman’s refining capacity to 500,000 barrels per day

DUQM: The refinery project of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries (OQ8), currently nearing completion in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), is set to boost the Sultanate of Oman’s aggregate refining capacity to around 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude.

Work on the project is now 98 per cent complete, with a trial run having covered over 65 per cent of the project facilities.

The trial operation includes testing the readiness of the refinery facilities, which includes three packages, the first of which deals with the main processing units of the refinery.

The second package consists of facilities and services supporting operations, and the third package includes storage and export facilities for liquid and bulk petroleum materials in the Port of Duqm and private crude oil storage facilities.

During the past months, Ras Markaz Crude Oil Terminal



received more than 3 million barrels of Omani and Kuwaiti crude oil, which were later pumped from Ras Markaz to the refinery complex in Duqm

through an 80-kilometre crude oil pipeline. The trial operations also included the export of the first shipments of naphtha through the storage and export berth in the

Port of Duqm. Naphtha is one of the main products of the refinery for export to global markets.

Other products that will be eventually produced for export

include diesel, aviation fuel, liquefied petroleum gas and other energy products.

The project is distinguished by Duqm’s strategic location at the crossroads of global trade lines, which will contribute to promoting the export of Omani and Kuwaiti energy products to global markets.

The project is also one of the largest investment projects in the refinery and petrochemical sector between two Gulf countries. The project contributed to supporting the local added value in Oman, as 20 per cent of the project value was allocated to support local small and medium enterprises, with a total amount of \$2 billion.

The Duqm Refinery project — a joint strategic project between Oman and Kuwait — after its completion, will provide the economies of the countries with financial resources that will contribute to the consolidation of ties and the promotion of prosperity for the two countries.

— ONA

Oman posts 23.3% growth in FDI in Q1



MUSCAT: The volume of foreign direct investments (FDI) by end of Q1 increased by 23.3 per cent to reach RO 21.274 billion, with financial flows estimated at RO 4.022 billion, compared to an investment volume of RO 17.250 billion, during Q1 2022.

According to preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), oil and gas exploration activities sector accounted for the majority of FDI with a contribution of RO 15.835 billion at the end of Q1 2023, up from RO 11.697 billion a year earlier.

This was followed by manufacturing industries with RO 1.571 billion, down from RO 1.671 billion in Q1 2022. Financial intermediation activities pulled in RO 1.514 billion, up from RO 1.460 billion a year earlier. FDI in real estate decreased to RO 1.044 billion at the end of Q1, down from RO 1.48 billion during the same period last year.

There was also a decrease in FDI in other activities to RO 1.308 billion in Q1 2023 compared to RO 1.373 during the same period last year.

The United Kingdom topped foreign direct investments with a value of RO 10.352 billion followed by the United States with RO 3.508 billion, and China with RO 1.231 billion.

Investments from the UAE amounted to RO 934.9 million, Kuwait RO 778.3 million, Qatar RO 431.2 million, Bahrain RO 375.1 million, India RO 296.4 million, the Netherlands RO 291.5 million and Switzerland RO 181.9 million.

FDIs from other countries amounted to RO 2.893 billion.

— ONA

Oman ranks 27th worldwide in salary rankings

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 5

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved an impressive milestone in global salary rankings. According to the renowned database Numbeo, Oman has secured the 27th position worldwide, signifying the nation’s strong economic growth and commitment to maintaining competitive remuneration packages for its workforce.

Numbeo, a widely recognised online platform providing extensive data on global living conditions, recently published its annual salary rankings report.

The report compares the average monthly wages across various countries, offering valuable insights into the global employment landscape and cost of



living.

The average monthly net salary in Oman (after tax), according to Numbeo is \$ 2,205.82, making the country 27th worldwide and 5th in the Arab region. Topping the list is Switzerland with a monthly net salary of \$ 6,340.21. Qatar came 4th with \$4,135.60, UAE is 5th

with \$3,617.57, Kuwait is ranked 21st with \$ 2,648/49 net monthly salary. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia came 29th with \$2,036.49 net monthly salary.

Oman’s remarkable rise in the rankings is a testament to its sustained efforts in fostering economic development and

THE REPORT COMPARES THE AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGES ACROSS VARIOUS COUNTRIES, OFFERING VALUABLE INSIGHTS INTO THE GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE AND COST OF LIVING.

ensuring favourable working conditions for its citizens and expatriate workforce alike.

The country’s strategic investments in key sectors such as oil and gas, tourism, logistics and manufacturing have contributed significantly to its economic prosperity.

Oman’s competitive salary rankings indicate the sound financial rewards available to professionals working in the country. The Sultanate of Oman’s

stable economy and focus on diversification have bolstered its attractiveness as a destination for skilled workers seeking lucrative employment opportunities.

Moreover, Oman’s commitment to nurturing a favourable business environment, coupled with its progressive labour laws, has played a pivotal role in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and fostering sustainable economic growth.

Multinational companies operating in Oman often provide attractive salaries and benefits to their employees, further bolstering the nation’s overall salary rankings.

The government has consistently emphasised the importance of human capital development and improving the quality of life for its citizens.

TURN TO P16

OIA posts higher returns from strategic joint ventures

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 5

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman — says its sizable portfolio of strategic joint ventures established in partnership with financial institutions of a number of friendly countries continues to deliver healthy returns.

Investments across its portfolio of 8 joint ventures were rejigged during 2022 with OIA channelling funds into promising established companies and start-ups, while exiting others, as part of an ongoing strategy to achieve a consistently healthy Internal Rate of Return (IRR) and profitability.

During the year, the Spain-Oman Private Equity Fund established in partnership with Madrid-based financial institution COFIDES reported investments of RO 12.63 million approx, in three Spanish

start-ups: Seabery — a leading company providing assistive technology solutions for vocational education; Agrovini — a company specialised in providing natural ingredients and technology for the beverage industry; and All for padel: An Adidas-licensed firm specialising in the design, manufacture and marketing of padel courts, rackets and accessories.

The private equity fund currently has 10 investments in its portfolio. Al Hosn Investment Company, an Omani-Qatari company, with an investment size of RO 250 million, one of the largest in the portfolio, has seen its investments grow a total of 16 during the year.

The fund, set up to invest in key economic sectors in Oman and the GCC, has invested in the recently listed Pearl REIF of the Sultanate of Oman, as well as in the bonds of Oman Arab Bank, Bank Dhofar and Ahli Bank.

Uzbek-Oman Investment Company, a JV with the Uzbekistan Fund for



Reconstruction and Development (UFRD), is currently restructuring its portfolio of 10 investments. As part of the exercise, the JV will exit some investments

and focus on high-return assets with the goal of maintaining the portfolio’s value, said OIA in its report.

Oman Brunei Investment Company, established in partnership with the Brunei Investment Agency, also reported significant activity during the year.

It secured a cash injection of RO 4.6 million from shareholders to be invested in a private school project in Oman in partnership with the Royal Oman Police Pension Fund and Amity Education Group.

Construction work on the school project is set to commence in Q3 this year. The JV also exited from Golden Corporation, with an IRR of 15 per cent, and realising 1.52 times the value of the investment.

Divestments were also reported by the Vietnam Oman Investment, set up in partnership with the State Capital Investment Corporation of Vietnam. In addition to divesting 70 per cent of its stake in local investment company CII, the

fund also plans to exit the remaining stake during the year.

Also envisaged is a complete exit from well-known business group Kim Tin.

Pak-Oman Investment Company, a partnership of the governments of Oman and Pakistan, posted an 8.8-per cent growth in assets. Current investments are in bonds and treasury bills, said OIA in its report. Oman India Joint Investment Fund (Fund I), established in partnership with the State Bank of India, has three investments in its portfolio, down from 7 earlier, following a decision to divest from four investments.

The exit yielded 1.4 times the value of the investments.

Similarly, Oman India Joint Investment Fund (Fund II), also a JV with State Bank of India, currently has portfolio of 12 investments across various sectors. One divestment during the year achieved an IRR of 92 per cent and 3.1 times the value of the investment, OIA added.

What is a cryptoasset?



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

Digital assets, particularly cryptoassets, have gained significant traction in the financial industry and have become increasingly popular among retail investors.

These assets, such as Bitcoin and Ethereum, have experienced a surge in adoption over the past few years.

Major developments include public companies adding cryptoassets to their balance sheets, traditional financial institutions offering crypto-related products to their customers, and retail investors actively participating in crypto trading on various exchanges.

The inception of Bitcoin in 2009 was a response to the global financial crisis of 2008. Its primary aim was to address the issue of monetary debasement faced by fiat currencies controlled by central banks.

As a groundbreaking solution, Bitcoin introduced a fixed supply of 21 million coins, making it immune to manipulation by any entity or individual.

Additionally, it successfully solved the double-spending problem through the implementation of blockchain technology, eliminating the need for intermediaries like banks to prevent fraudulent transactions.

Despite the rise of thousands of other cryptoassets since Bitcoin's creation, blockchain technology's primary application remains focused on the use of cryptoassets.

Companies have invested substantial amounts in exploring new ways to leverage blockchain technology, but cryptoassets continue to dominate the scene.

Institutional interest in crypto markets has skyrocketed over the past two years, with notable billionaires like Paul Tudor Jones, Bill Miller, and Stanley Druckenmiller publicly expressing their positive outlook on Bitcoin.

Established companies such as Tesla, Microstrategy, Block (formerly Square), and SpaceX have also added Bitcoin to their reserve assets.

Notably, Microstrategy holds approximately 114,042 Bitcoin (equivalent to \$2.406 billion), while

DESPIKE THE RISE OF THOUSANDS OF OTHER CRYPTOASSETS SINCE BITCOIN'S CREATION, BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY'S PRIMARY APPLICATION REMAINS FOCUSED ON THE USE OF CRYPTOASSETS

Tesla holds about \$1.83 billion in Bitcoin, as per their 2021 Q3 filings.

Moreover, legacy financial institutions have met the growing demand from their wealth management clients by introducing various crypto-related products, such as shares of the Grayscale Bitcoin Trust, crypto-related funds, and recently approved Bitcoin futures ETF.

Long story short, today when we talk about the available digital assets on the market, we could broadly categorise them into the following groups:

Cryptoassets: These are assets native to Layer 1 public blockchain protocols that drive network incentives, process transactions, and maintain security.

Examples include Bitcoin (BTC), Ethereum (ETH), EOS and Algorand (ALGO).

Security Tokens: These tokens represent ownership interests in underlying security instruments.

This category alone would deserve an entire article as recently the SEC in the US labeled as Security Tokens a number of tokens that were previously understood to be Utility Tokens instead.

Utility Tokens: Tokens issued on top of public blockchains for governance and to access features within middleware and decentralised applications.

Stablecoins: These are asset-backed tokens issued on public and private blockchains, representing ownership interests in underlying stable assets like fiat currency and precious metals. Examples include USDT and USDC.

CBDCs: Central Bank Digital Currencies issued by central banks in wholesale or retail models, often utilising permissioned blockchain or distributed ledger technology (DLT). Examples include Digital Yuan (China) and Digital SandDollar (Bahamas).

Meme Coins: are Community-Driven Tokens that have gained popularity and attention primarily due to their association with internet memes, influential social media communities, and viral trends. Some examples are \$FLOKI and \$LADYS.

The emergence of various types of digital assets, coupled with increasing institutional interest and investments, has propelled the industry into the mainstream, making it a key area of focus for investors, businesses, and financial institutions alike.

Oman establishes own brands by emulating countries in exploitation of matured and expired IPs



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

Intellectual Properties (IPs) exploitation is the key in the catalysing innovations that spur economic growth worldwide. However, as IPs matured and expired, countries face numerous challenges in managing and exploiting these valuable assets.

With its strategic location and favourable business environment, Oman aspires to attract and establish various product streams for local consumption and exports.

This article explores initiatives that Oman aims to establish industries under existing international brands or national brands, namely the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Renewable Energy, Agro-based Products Manufacturing, Logistics and Transport, and Tourism and Hospitality Services.

The article is examining the approaches taken by Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States; in dealing with matured and expired IPs in developing and emerging economies.

ICT is the priority sector for Oman's economic diversification goals. Oman invests heavily in upgrading its ICT infrastructures for digital transformation, and innovation ecosystems.

By attracting multinational technology companies to establish their operations in Oman, the country aims to position itself as a regional hub for technological innovations, softwares development, and IPs repositories.

Focusing on creating employment opportunities for Omani nationals and contribute significantly to the country's export potentials. Whereas recognising the global shift towards sustainability and

the need for clean energy sources, Oman is actively establishing itself as a leader in renewable energy.

The country has ample solar and wind resources, making it an ideal destination for solar and wind power production. By attracting investments in renewable energy infrastructure and manufacturing facilities, Oman aims to meet its domestic energy needs while exporting excess energy to neighbouring regions.

Investing in renewable energy shall reduce the country's reliance on fossil fuels and contribute positively to environmental conservation.

Also, Oman has been making significant efforts to enhance its agricultural sector, mainly through modern farming techniques, technology adoption, and promotion of agro-based industries.

By attracting investment in agropducts manufacturing, Oman aims to add value to its agricultural produce and reduce import dependencies. Establishing food processing establishments for dairy, fruits, vegetables, grains, and fisheries would suffice local consumption needs and position Oman as a reliable exporter of high-quality processed food products.

This shall also support sustainable agriculture practices and empower local farmers and communities. With its strategic location in the MENA region, Oman has the potential to become a logistic hub connecting multiple continents.

Establishing logistics parks, free trade zones, and industrial clusters shall attract international companies to develop Oman's warehousing, distribution centres, and manufacturing facilities.

These investments shall facilitate trade, enhance supply chain efficiency, and promote local consumption and exports under existing as well as new global brands.

Oman's focus on building world-class logistics infrastructure ensures seamless connectivity for its manufacturing industries.

Likewise, Oman's rich heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and diverse cultures make it an attractive tourist destination. Investing in the tourism and hospitality industry shall promote local consumption and

significantly contribute to the country's export revenue.

Developing high-end hotels, resorts, and tourist attractions shall attract international travellers, further boosting Oman's reputation as a prime tourist destination.

By emphasising on sustainable tourism practices, Oman shall ensure long-term growth for revenues generation while preserving its natural and cultural assets. Japan is well known for its strong focus on technological innovations.

As a result, it implements comprehensive policies to handle matured and expired IPs. Japan encourages the transfer of IPs rights through licensing and technology transfer agreements to promote utilisation.

Moreover, it actively engages in collaborative research and development efforts with developing and emerging economies to help them benefit from mature IPs assets.

In comparison, Germany is known for its robust patent systems and strong protection of IPs rights. Germany emphasises commercialising these assets to generate economic value from matured and expired IPs.

It supports various initiatives, such as IPs auctions and technology marketplaces, to connect IPs holders with potential users, fostering innovation and enabling the transfer of its technological IPs to developing economies.

However, France recognises the potential of matured and expired IPs as valuable resources for economic growth. The country emphasises the importance of IPs valuation and assists IPs owners in evaluating and commercialising their assets.

Furthermore, France invests significantly in research and development, fostering collaboration between companies and research institutes to exploit mature IP assets effectively in contributing to the local and global economies.

Likewise, the United Kingdom has a robust IP protection and enforcement of legal frameworks. It encourages IPs holders to actively utilise their matured and expired IPs by providing support and advice through various programmes and organisations.

The UK also focuses on international partnerships to

encourage knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and collaboration with developing and emerging economies.

Moreover, the government actively promotes the reuse of public sector-owned IPs to facilitate innovation in various sectors. The United States has long-standing traditions of fostering innovation through solid IPs protection. In managing matured and expired IPs, the US emphasises the significance of technology transfer to developing and emerging economies.

The government encourages licensing agreements, joint ventures, and strategic partnerships to facilitate the transfer of matured IPs assets.

Furthermore, the US actively supports research collaborations and funding technology transfer programmes to bridge gaps between mature IPs assets and emerging markets.

Oman aspire to establish manufacturing of innovative products covering renewable energy generation, agriculture and marine based processed foods, minerals mining and geological products refinements, oil and gas downstream products value addition, and some niche products development leading to IPs generation.

By strategically investing in these growing sectors, Oman aims to promote local consumption, reduce import dependencies, create employment opportunities, and enhance export potentials.

This proactive approach towards industry diversification shall uplift the economy and contribute significantly towards realising Oman's long term sustainable development goals.

Managing matured and expired IPs in developing and emerging economies requires strategic approaches that balance IPs protection and commercialisation. Japan, Germany, France, UK, and US each employ combination of policies and strategies suited to their unique ecosystem and economic strategies.

By focusing on collaboration, technology transfer, and commercialisation, these countries demonstrate their commitment to promoting innovation, supporting economic growth, and maximising the exploitation of matured and expired IPs for the global markets.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Muscat Silver Centre LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1724185, hereby announces that is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 100,000.000 to 20,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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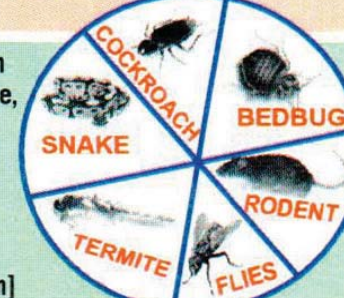


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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER



MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalfallah bin Al-Haili, Chairman of the Supreme Court Deyyd Khalifa bin bin Abdulhish bin bin al-Haili, took the oath of office at Al-Buraidi Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

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

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL BUSTE

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are failing on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Ruwi and its surrounding areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, and more than enough times that social distancing in the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his attitude of some people is not acceptable that they give the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can warn them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

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

OOMCO, Youth Centre sign pact to empower young Omani entrepreneurs



MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) and the Youth Centre recently signed a cooperation agreement to support self-employed Omani youth.

By investing in a training programme that will support young freelancers in creating their own start-ups, OOMCO is committed to contributing to the main objective of the Youth Centre to have this young talent generate more income and contribute to the national economy.

The agreement was signed by Tariq bin Mohammed al Junaidi, Chief Executive Officer of OOMCO and Eng Zaid bin Abdullah al Salmani, Managing Director of the Youth Centre.

The Youth Centre aims to support and hone the skillsets of young people in Oman through a variety of programmes and in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Tariq bin Mohammed al Junaidi, Chief Executive Officer of OOMCO said, “Our young entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized businesses and start-ups are crucial to propelling, growing, and diversifying Oman’s economy.

We aim to support our youth in turning their interests into real and sustainable jobs that will provide them with a stable income and opportunities to scale-up their ideas.”

He added, “Through this cooperation with the Youth

Center, the training programme will focus on empowering aspiring Omani talent by equipping them with innovative thinking and other essential skills. They will be able to face and overcome challenges and develop skills in marketing, selling, and financial management that will transform their ideas into sustainable businesses.”

Eng Zaid bin Abdullah al Salmani, Managing Director of the Youth Centre said, “This agreement is a continuation of the approach undertaken by the Youth Center in partnership with various institutions in the government and private sectors, to empower the youth and support multiple programmes that develop their talents and skillsets.

The goal is to help them be independent freelancers and to have them contribute onto the economy as small and medium enterprises.”

OOMCO aims to add value to local communities. The company supports many charitable, educational, environmental, and youth events and initiatives, to name a few. The development of SMEs is an essential part of OOMCO’s Corporate Social Responsibility strategy. As part of its commitment to support SMEs, OOMCO operates the Tasweik programme, in cooperation with the Al Raffid Fund, to financially support business ideas through a competition.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds launches ‘Everyday Diamond Fest’

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an impressive retail purpose of over 320 outlets across 11 countries, has launched ‘Everyday Diamond Fest’, an affordable and unique range of diamond Jewellery suitable for customers of all ages and gender, including first-time diamond buyers.

With prices starting from just RO 95, the collections in ‘Everyday Diamond Fest’ will be available across all 16 outlets of the brand in Oman.

Comprising of jewellery from Malabar Gold & Diamond’s signature diamond jewellery collections such as Mine, Era & Precia, Everyday Diamond Fest offers diamond lovers a large variety of lightweight designs across pendent sets, earring and rings suitable for office wear, daily wear and as an elegant party wear, making it a perfect gifting choice, for self or for loved ones.

Studded with natural diamonds and certified by international labs, all diamond jewellery at



Malabar Gold & Diamonds, including the collections from Everyday Diamond Fest comes

with the assurance of the Malabar Promise of 100% exchange value, guaranteed buyback, assured

lifetime maintenance and more.

“The aspiration to own a great pair of diamond jewellery is one that is widespread among jewellery lovers. Malabar Gold & Diamonds is striving to make diamond jewellery more affordable with Everyday Diamond Fest, offering a great selection that is suitable and more importantly, accessible for everyone.

We hope that our loyal customers in Oman will take advantage of this remarkable opportunity to build up their diamond jewellery collection or even begin one”, commented Najeeb K, Regional Head — Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Recipient of Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Award and Bank Muscat Award for 6 times in a row, Malabar Gold & Diamonds currently operates 16 showrooms across Oman at Ruwi, Bausher, Al Seeb, Barka, Salalah, Suhar, Muttrah Souq, Nizwa, Ibbi, and Al Khoudh, catering to the discerning tastes and preferences of its immense customer base in the region.

58 long-service employees celebrated by OAB

MUSCAT: Long-serving employees were the centre of attention at a special event organised by Oman Arab Bank (OAB) to celebrate their ongoing contributions to the bank’s success. Attended by the bank’s chairman and senior management team, 58 staff members were awarded with a token of appreciation for their years of service.

The event commemorated 50 years of the bank’s journey so far, serving as a platform to express heartfelt gratitude to the long-term employees and appreciating their dedicated service, as well as recognising their positive impact on the organisation’s corporate culture.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said: “Our loyal staff are the bedrock on which OAB has built its strong foundations over the past 50 years, playing a pivotal role



in our continued success. It is truly an honour to gather with them at this special event to recognise their valuable contributions.

These long-serving employees have fostered a deep sense of belonging and pride within the bank, leaving behind a remarkable legacy that propels us towards a bright future. None

of this would have been possible without their unwavering support and dedication.”

He added, “As we move forward, I am confident that the spirit of unity, determination, and excellence will propel us to embrace the next 50 years of success together.”

OAB continues to mark its 50th anniversary this year with a series of initiatives, events and a programme of branch upgrades across its network in Oman. One of the flagship projects coinciding with the anniversary celebrations is national internship programme Ruwad Al Arabi, currently in the process of selecting promising young Omanis from more than 2,000 applicants to fulfil one-year internships with the bank — with the ultimate goal of improving the employability of young Omani nationals while growing the Omani workforce.

Hafawa from Meethaq provides a unique banking experience for customers

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat continues to provide countless services and facilities to customers to meet their needs and provide them with a distinctive banking experience. Meethaq attaches special importance and priority to customers by providing various banking services and facilities that comply with the principles and provisions of Islamic Sharia.

Through Hafawa packages from Meethaq, customers enjoy a wide range of solutions tailored to suit their financial needs. Hafawa presents valuable rewards and features aiming at providing an exclusive banking experience for customers.

Hafawa presents multiple options and a wide range of services that ensure speed, comfort and efficiency for Hafawa cardholders, which are up to date with the recent developments in the Islamic banking sector.

Hafawa Private Banking places great emphasis on developing a long-term relationship with



customers and helping them achieve their financial goals through a number of features, like providing dedicated Private Banking relationship managers, personalised wealth management solutions, complimentary access to more than 1,000 airport lounges, and complimentary life takaful on Savings Account equal to the customer’s savings deposit.

Besides, Hafawa Private Banking Customers enjoy a daily ATM withdrawal limit up to RO 1,500, complimentary chauffeur service to and from Muscat

international airport, six times a year, global concierge service, investment option in global sukuk and fund through Meethaq, and exclusive 2-for-1 offers at your favourite dining and fitness outlets with the new app experience with the Entertainer.

While Hafawa Priority Banking customers enjoy an exclusive world of banking services where everything is personalised to suit their specific needs, they are provided with dedicated Hafawa relationship managers, dedicated Priority Hafawa centres

across the Sultanate of Oman, complimentary access to more than 1,000 airport lounges, complimentary access to Prime Class Lounge in Muscat and Duqm Airports for the cardholder along with one guest on Hafawa Signature Credit and Debit Card.

Besides, Priority banking customers are eligible for complimentary life takaful on Savings Accounts equal to their savings deposit, and a daily ATM withdrawal limit up to RO 1,000, complimentary chauffeur service to and from Muscat International Airport, thrice a year, and a global concierge service as well as exclusive 2-for-1 offers at your favourite dining and fitness outlets with the new app ‘xperience with the Entertainer’.

Adding more thrill to the services, Hafawa Privilege Banking is designed for the elite, where the highest level of service and privileges are accorded to meet customers’ expectations. This package offers specially designed Debit Card with an enhanced

ATM withdrawal limit of RO 800, complimentary access to Prime Class Lounge in Muscat, Plaza Premium Lounge in Salalah and global airport lounges for Meethaq VISA Platinum Credit Card Holders.

It also gives 50% discount on annual fees on Meethaq VISA Platinum Credit Card for Privilege Banking Debit Card holders, worldwide acceptance of Hafawa Privilege debit card and investment option in global sukuk fund through Meethaq.

Meethaq Islamic banking is keen to offer products and services that comply with the provisions of Islamic Sharia, as each of Meethaq’s products goes through a set of procedures to review compliance by the Sharia Supervisory Board and are drafted in accordance with the legislation of the Central Bank of Oman.

The Hafawa Entertainer app, which contains more than 1,800 “buy 1 and get 1 for free” offers, can be downloaded through Google Play or the Apple App Store.

Oman ranks 27th worldwide in salary rankings

FROM PAGE 13

Through various initiatives, such as vocational training programmes and educational reforms, the country has sought to enhance the skills and employability of its workforce, aligning with global market demands.

The favourable salary rankings achieved by Oman are expected to have a positive impact on the country’s overall economic growth and drive further foreign investments.

As the nation continues to diversify its economy and attract global talent, it is likely to witness increased productivity, innovation, and competitiveness across various sectors.

Furthermore, the higher salaries and benefits offered in Oman will not only attract skilled professionals from around the world but also retain local talent, reducing the brain drain and ensuring the availability of a skilled workforce to support sustainable development.