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OMAN عُمان DAILY

Observer

HM receives phone call from Macron

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic, on Saturday. During the phone call, the French president expressed his thanks and appreciation to His Majesty for the efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman to reach understandings between his country and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the release of a French citizen and his repatriation to his country. The president expressed his appreciation for the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman in the region. **– ONA**

SUNRISE - **05:20 AM**

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - **03:53 AM**

DHUHR - **12:13 PM**

ASR - **03:30 PM**

MAGHRIB - **07:00 PM**

ISHA - **08:23 PM**

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OMAN OBSERVER

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GOLD RECOVERY SWEETENS COPPER MINING IN OMAN'S AL SHARQIYAH NORTH



P9
NIZWA ALL SET TO HOST SOCCA OMAN CARNIVAL



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OMANI TEXTILE ART A LEGACY WOVEN IN TRADITION



HM TO OFFER EID AL ADHA PRAYERS ON MONDAY



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will offer Eid Al Adha prayers at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Mosque in the Governorate of Muscat on Monday.

This was quoted in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court reading as follows: "His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will offer Eid Al Adha 1445 AH prayers at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Mosque in the Governorate of Muscat.

As he performs the Eid prayers, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by some Royal Family members, ministers, under-secretaries, top officials, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces and senior officers at the military and security units.

On this auspicious occasion, the Diwan of the Royal Court expresses the most sincere and heartfelt greetings to His Majesty the Sultan, along with solemn prayers to Allah the Almighty to grant him good health, well-being and a long life, wishing that His Majesty the Sultan will witness many happy comebacks of the occasion.

The Diwan of Royal Court also wishes the Omani people, Arab nation and the Islamic world prompt fulfilment of their aspirations on this blessed occasion." **— ONA**

HM exchanges Eid Al Adha greetings with leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Saturday exchanged greetings on the occasion of Eid Al Adha during phone calls with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and heartfelt sentiments with the leaders, wishing them good health, happiness and a long life. His Majesty prayed to the Almighty Allah for the return of this blessed occasion on them and peoples of their countries.

On their turn, the leaders expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty the Sultan. They prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant His Majesty the Sultan many happy comebacks of this blessed occasion and empower him to fulfil aspirations of progress and prosperity for the people of Oman.

HM RECEIVES GREETINGS FROM OMANI OFFICIALS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received Eid Al Adha greetings from some officials in the Sultanate of Oman.

They expressed their sincere greetings to His Majesty on this happy occasion. They wished His Majesty good health, happiness and a long life, praying to the Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty at a time the Omani people enjoy further progress and prosperity under His Majesty's wise leadership.

His Majesty the Sultan received the greetings from: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, and Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service. **— ONA**

Omani efforts succeed in mutual release of Iranian, Swedish citizens

MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to respond to the request of the Iranian and Swedish governments to help settle the issue of citizens detained in the two countries, the Omani efforts resulted in an agreement between the two sides on the mutual release.

Those released were transferred from Tehran and Stockholm to Muscat on Saturday, for their repatriation.

The Sultanate of Oman values the positive spirit that prevailed in the talks held in Muscat between the Iranian and Swedish sides.

Oman also appreciates their keenness to settle this humanitarian matter.

Reuters reported that Sweden freed a former Iranian official while Iran released two Swedes that were held there.

The prisoner swap was mediated by Oman, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"Omani efforts resulted in the two sides agreeing on a mutual release, as those released were transferred from Tehran and Stockholm," it said.

Sweden had freed former Iranian official Hamid Noury, Iran's top human rights official said on X. Noury would be back in Iran in a few hours, the official added.

Separately, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said in a statement that Swedish citizens Johan Floderus and Saeed Azizi who had been detained in Iran were on a plane back to Sweden.

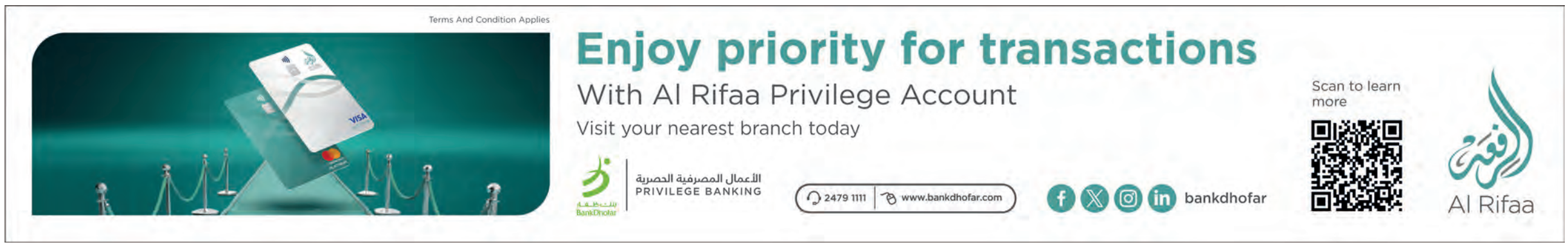
— Agencies



PILGRIMS ASCEND MOUNT ARAFAT IN HAJ CLIMAX

MOUNT ARAFAT: More than 1.5 million Muslims braved extreme heat to reach Mount Arafat on Saturday for the high point of the annual Haj pilgrimage, praying for hours. Clad in white, worshippers began arriving at dawn ascending the rocky, 70-metre hill where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have given his last sermon. **– AFP** **SEE ALSO P3**

WEATHER MUSCAT: Max **37°C** Min **32°C** SALALAH: Max **32°C** Min **29°C** NIZWA: Max **42°C** Min **30°C**



CPA intensifies inspections ahead of Eid in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 15

In preparation for the upcoming Eid al Adha holiday, Dhofar Governorate has launched extensive inspection campaigns across various wilayats. These efforts, led by the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), aim to ensure price stability and the availability of essential goods during the festive period.

Inspection teams are diligently monitoring local markets and livestock shops, which typically experience a surge in demand around Eid al Adha.

Recognising the changing consumer preferences during this season, the campaigns have been expanded to include women's beauty salons, children's clothing stores, and other high-demand items.

Notably, specialised women's teams have been established to oversee women's stores, enhancing the accuracy of monitoring and compliance with both health and economic regulations.

A senior CPA official in Dhofar emphasised that these initiatives are part of a comprehensive plan to safeguard consumer rights. The Authority remains committed to ensuring the availability of high-quality goods and services at fair prices throughout the year, with intensified efforts during peak seasons, including holidays and periods of increased tourism.

The CPA maintains open communication channels to receive complaints from citizens and residents. These complaints are addressed promptly and with due seriousness to ensure swift resolution and achieve maximum consumer satisfaction.

Beyond market inspections, the CPA in Dhofar actively engages in consumer education through media and targeted campaigns.





Consumer Protection Authority inspectors visiting outlets as part of their mandate to ensure price stability and consumer safety

Omani engineer wins best invention award in China

SHANGHAI: Engineer Ali bin Salem al Busaidy won the gold medal and the special award cup for the best invention at the 2024 Shanghai International Invention and Innovation Exhibition, China for his invention of a first aid device.

The device is designed in such a way as to significantly reduce the number of traffic accident victims and speed up the response time to traffic accidents by enabling fast communication with emergency teams.

The device also allows receiving accident information automatically and accurately as well as contributes to reducing human error in pinpointing the accident site and ensuring the best possible emergency response.



Eng Ali bin Salem al Busaidy at the Shanghai International Invention and Innovation Exhibition

In addition, the device reduces cases of severe injuries by connecting to a group of different rescue devices for all emergency cases. It also enables the concerned authorities to reach the accident site in the shortest possible time.

The device comprises a set of smart rescue devices designed for handling various types of emergency cases (automatic fire extinguishing, smart first aid box, drowning rescue device, heart rate sensor in case of sudden seizures, sound and lights connected to the device in the car in case of emergency and a system for automatically opening car doors and windows).

The device enables the driver to communicate and send text messages automatically from the vehicle alongside a link to the accident site to the relevant emergency teams and to one of the driver's relatives as well. The messages include vehicle data, the time of the accident, and other information. **— ONA**

VIBRANT SCENES AT NIZWA SOUQ



Men at Nizwa Souq inspecting and buying livestock for Eid Al Adha celebrations, a traditional practice marking the festive occasion. The citizens also engaged in purchasing fresh fruits and goods in preparation for the festival, reflecting the bustling market atmosphere.

– Photo by Khalfan al Ruzaiki

Homemakers balance extravagance in Eid preparations

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 15

Eid is a time of joy, celebration, and family gatherings. For homemakers, it involves significant preparations to welcome guests and create a festive atmosphere. The approach to these preparations varies, with some leaning towards extravagance and others opting for a more economical and thoughtful approach.

Some homemakers believe that Eid is an occasion for showcasing decorations, plentiful food, and extravagant hospitality. For these individuals, the focus is on creating a visually stunning environment that impresses guests and reflects their social status. This often involves purchasing expensive decorations, preparing a variety of elaborate dishes, and ensuring that every detail, from the table settings to the home decor, is breathtaking.



Some homemakers adopt a more sustainable and economical approach to Eid preparations

"I believe Eid is a special time that comes twice a year, and it's worth going the extra mile to make it memorable," says Faiza, a homemaker from Barka. "I spend about a month just planning and shopping for the best ingredients and decorations. I should be careful about where I order sweets, halwa, and flowers. It's not just about showing off; it is about showing our social status too!"

On the other hand, some homemakers adopt a more sustainable and economical approach to Eid preparations.

Eid preparations among homemakers reflect different personal approaches, from extravagance to smart economy

These individuals prioritise genuine hospitality and meaningful interactions rather than appearances. They focus on creating a warm and welcoming environment without incurring unnecessary expenses.

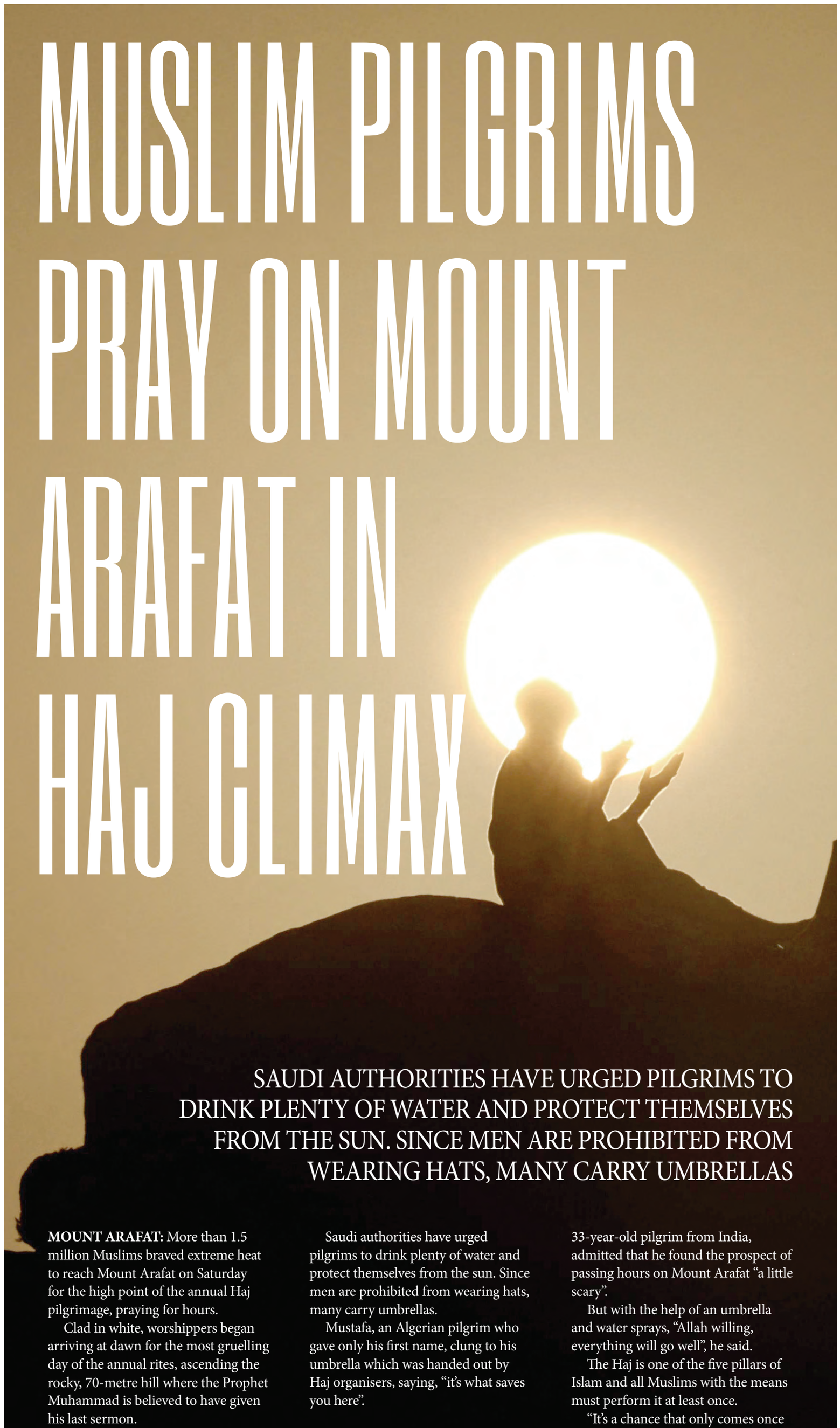
"For me, Eid is about the spirit of togetherness and hospitality, not about how much money I spend," says Maisa, a homemaker from Suhar. "I prefer to keep things simple and personal. I prepare dishes that are traditional and loved by my family, and I involve my children in decorating our home with items we already have. It's about making my guests feel at home, not about impressing them."

Many homemakers strive to find a balance between extravagance and economy, aiming to create a celebratory atmosphere without financial strain. They implement smart strategies to manage their budgets while ensuring their guests feel welcome and valued.

"I think it's possible to have a beautiful Eid celebration without spending excessively," says Noora from Al Buraimi.

"I plan my menu carefully, choosing dishes that are both delicious and cost-effective. I also get creative with decorations, using handmade items or reusing things I already have. The key is to focus on what truly matters and the joy of having loved ones around."

MUSLIM PILGRIMS PRAY ON MOUNT ARAFAT IN HAJ CLIMAX



SAUDI AUTHORITIES HAVE URGED PILGRIMS TO DRINK PLENTY OF WATER AND PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM THE SUN. SINCE MEN ARE PROHIBITED FROM WEARING HATS, MANY CARRY UMBRELLAS

MOUNT ARAFAT: More than 1.5 million Muslims braved extreme heat to reach Mount Arafat on Saturday for the high point of the annual Haj pilgrimage, praying for hours.

Clad in white, worshippers began arriving at dawn for the most gruelling day of the annual rites, ascending the rocky, 70-metre hill where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have given his last sermon.

"This is the most important day," said 46-year-old Egyptian Mohammed Asser, who came prepared with a list of prayers. "I pray also for the Palestinians. May Allah help them."

The Haj, one of the world's biggest religious gatherings, is increasingly affected by climate change, according to a Saudi study published last month that said regional temperatures were rising 0.4 degrees Celsius each decade. The rituals, which take at least five days to complete and are mostly outdoors, are "not easy because it is very hot", said Abraman Hawa, 26, from Ghana.

"We have sun... but it is not as hot. But I will pray to Allah at Arafat, because I need his support," she added.

The temperature was expected to hit 43 degrees Celsius on Saturday, creating challenges for pilgrims who arrived at Mount Arafat after spending the night in a giant tented city in Mina, a valley outside Mecca, Islam's holiest city.

Saudi authorities have urged pilgrims to drink plenty of water and protect themselves from the sun. Since men are prohibited from wearing hats, many carry umbrellas.

Mustafa, an Algerian pilgrim who gave only his first name, clung to his umbrella which was handed out by Haj organisers, saying, "it's what saves you here".

AFTER MOUNT ARAFAT, THE PILGRIMS WILL HEAD TO MUZDALIFAH, WHERE THEY WILL COLLECT PEBBLES TO CARRY OUT THE SYMBOLIC "STONING OF THE DEVIL" RITUAL IN MINA ON SUNDAY

Another man, an Egyptian who preferred to remain anonymous, said he was drinking "a lot of juice and water" and had twice stopped to rest on the roadside.

More than 10,000 heat-related illnesses were recorded last year, 10 per cent of them heat stroke, a Saudi official said.

Ahmad Karim Abdelsalam, a 33-year-old pilgrim from India, admitted that he found the prospect of passing hours on Mount Arafat "a little scary".

But with the help of an umbrella and water sprays, "Allah willing, everything will go well", he said.

The Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam and all Muslims with the means must perform it at least once.

"It's a chance that only comes once in a lifetime, I couldn't not come," said Abdulrahman Siyam, a 55-year-old Iraqi pilgrim who was performing the rituals on a prosthetic leg.

After Mount Arafat, the pilgrims will head to Muzdalifah, where they will collect pebbles to carry out the symbolic "stoning of the devil" ritual in Mina on Sunday.

The Haj is said to follow the path of the Prophet Muhammad's final pilgrimage, about 1,400 years ago.

It is an important source of legitimacy in Saudi, which monarch has the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques", in Mecca and Medina.

The kingdom received more than 1.8 million pilgrims last year for the Haj, around 90 per cent of whom came from abroad.

It also welcomed 13.5 million Muslims who came to perform Umrah, the pilgrimage which can be done year-round, and aims to reach 30 million pilgrims in total by 2030.

— AFP



Muslim pilgrims walk under mist dispensers as they walk up Mount Arafat. **– AFP**



Muslim pilgrims pray at dawn on Mount Arafat. **– AFP**



Muslim pilgrims make their way towards Mount Arafat. **– AFP**



A Muslim pilgrim splashes water on his head to cool off at the base of Mount Arafat. **– AFP**

Gaza bombed as fallout brings surging tensions

GAZA: Israel bombed and shelled Gaza on Saturday, witnesses and first responders said, with fallout from the war bringing a resurgence of tensions to the Lebanon border and Yemen.

In the ninth month of war between Palestinian groups and Israeli forces, the Civil Defence agency in Gaza City, in the territory's north, reported 10 bodies recovered from Israeli strikes on three separate homes.

In Rafah, in Gaza's far south near Egypt, witnesses reported clashes between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the city's west, and artillery fire towards a refugee camp in the city centre.

The United Nations says about one million people have been displaced from Rafah since early May, when Israel began ground operations.

Israel's military has also been operating in central Gaza, where on Friday at a hospital in Deir al-Balah city a middle-aged man wept over the body of a younger man. Blood soaked through a white cloth around his neck.

Fears of a broader Middle East conflict have surged again, with Lebanon-based fighters launching waves of rockets and drones against Israeli military targets.

Lebanese Hizbulah said intense strikes since Wednesday were retaliation for Israel's killing of one of its commanders.

Israeli forces responded with shelling, the military said, also announcing air strikes on infrastructure across the Lebanese border.


This image shows a puddle of stagnant water surrounded by destroyed buildings in Khan Younis, Gaza. – AFP

World Food Programme deputy executive director Carl Skau said that "with lawlessness inside the Strip... and active conflict", it has become "close to impossible to deliver the level of aid that meets the growing demands on the ground". "More than anything, people want this war to end," he said after a two-day visit to Gaza.

The fallout from the Gaza war also escalated this week off Yemen. On Friday the US military said it destroyed two uncrewed surface vessels in the Red Sea belonging to Yemeni groups.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said eight soldiers were killed in southern Gaza on Saturday "in operational activity" while they were in an armoured vehicle, in one of the deadliest incidents since the war broke out on October 7. Israeli media reported the troops died in the city of Rafah when their armoured vehicle exploded.

The military said in a statement that Captain Wassem Mahmud, 23, and seven other soldiers "fell during operational activity in southern Gaza". "Their families have been notified," the statement added.

The military confirmed that the incident occurred inside a Namer armoured vehicle. The latest fatalities take the military's toll to 306 in the Gaza military campaign since Israel began its ground offensive in the Palestinian territory on October 27. **—AFP**

Chinese Premier Li Qiang urges 'shelving differences' with Australia

SYDNEY: Chinese Premier Li Qiang called on Saturday for "shelving differences" with Australia as he embarked on a four-day trip dangling the promise of expanded trade.

Li — the second most powerful man in China after President Xi Jinping — touched down in Adelaide at the start of a diplomatic mission across the resource-rich continent.

China has gradually removed trade sanctions on Australian timber, barley and beef exports imposed in 2020 during a diplomatic rift with the former conservative government.

Economic relations between the two countries have eased since Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government took power in 2022 and adopted a softer diplomatic approach to Beijing.


China's Premier Li Qiang (R) greets Australia's FM Penny Wong (C), South Australia's Premier Peter Malinauskas at Adelaide Airport. – Reuters

"Mutual respect, seeking common ground while shelving differences and mutually beneficial cooperation" were key to growing China-Australia relations, Li said in a written arrival statement.

"A more mature, stable and fruitful comprehensive strategic partnership will be a treasure shared by the people of both countries."

The premier waved at the aircraft door and was greeted on the airport tarmac in Adelaide by Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, other government officials, photographers and TV journalists.

The premier will tour a South Australian wine grower and check in on two Chinese-loaned giant pandas in Adelaide Zoo, hold talks with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese before tucking into a state lunch in Canberra, and then travel to a lithium mine in Western Australia.

The Chinese premier's visit "reflects the improving tone," said Ryan Neelam, director of the foreign policy programme at Sydney-based think-tank the Lowy Institute.

"The relationship is now more focused on the economic opportunities than it has in the past, which has been overshadowed by the political and security differences," he said.

— AFP

S Africa's Ramaphosa to announce cabinet

JOHANNESBURG: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, re-elected for a second term after his weakened ANC lost its outright majority, will announce an "inclusive" cabinet, the party said on Saturday. The African National Congress (ANC) said Ramaphosa, who will lead what it calls a government of national unity (GNU), will announce an "inclusive GNU cabinet" after the May 29 general election produced no outright winner.

Congratulatory messages continued to pour in for the leader who was re-elected as president on Friday and will be inaugurated on June 19.

US President Joe Biden congratulated on Saturday his South African counterpart, Cyril Ramaphosa, on his re-election, after the African National Congress cobbled together an unprecedented coalition government.

"I look forward to the United States and South Africa continuing our work together, to expand economic opportunity, invest in clean energy solutions, and demonstrate that democracy delivers," Biden said in a statement.

South Africa's BRICS allies Russia and China on Saturday welcomed Ramaphosa's re-election with President Xi Jinping sending him a congratulatory note.


President Cyril Ramaphosa

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also congratulated Ramaphosa, hailing South Africa's "joint efforts to restore just peace in Ukraine."

"With your leadership and experience, South Africa is in good hands" the EU Commission's president Ursula von der Leyen wrote on X.

Neighbouring Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa said Ramaphosa's second mandate was "ample testimony of the great confidence and trust" South Africans had in him.

The election marked a historic turning point for South Africa, ending three decades of dominance by the ANC.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

Ship evacuated and ablaze after attack off Yemen

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said on Saturday the crew of a Palau-flagged cargo ship had been evacuated and the ship was on fire and sinking, referring to an incident that happened 98 nautical miles east of Yemen's Aden on June 13. Fired Missiles struck the Verbena in the Gulf of Aden, sparking a fire and severely injuring one of its crew.



The Yemenis have launched dozens of attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea region since November in solidarity with Palestinians in the war with Israel. The campaign in the Red Sea region has disrupted global shipping.

— Reuters

SEOUL

N Korea builds roads, walls inside Demilitarised Zone

North Korea's military has been building roads and walls inside the Demilitarised Zone that separates it from the South, the Yonhap agency reported. The construction activities are taking place north of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) that runs through the middle of the DMZ.



The report follows an incident last week when South Korean forces fired warning shots after North Korean soldiers briefly crossed the MDL. "Recently, the North Korean military has been erecting walls, digging the ground and constructing roads in some areas between the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and the Northern Limit Line in the DMZ," the military source said. **— AFP**

SKARDU

A Japanese climber missing in Pakistan found dead

One of two Japanese climbers was found dead and his body recovered from a mountain in northern Pakistan on Saturday, with a search ongoing for the second man. Ryuseki Hiraoka and Atsushi Taguchi were attempting to summit the 7,027-metre Spantik mountain in the Karakoram range before they went missing this week. "The dead body of a Japanese climber was found, and a search is ongoing for the second climber," Wali Ullah Falahi said, the Shigar district deputy commissioner. The body was found 300 metres below Camp 3, he said, set at around 6,200 metres from where climbers prepare for the final summit. **— AFP**



In brief

TEGUCIGALPA



HONDURAS PLANS TO BUILD 20,000-INMATE MEGAPRISON

Honduras will build a 20,000-capacity "megaprison", President Xiomara Castro announced, among a raft of measures to combat a "security emergency" in the Central American country. Castro said in a late-night address to the nation the "plan of solutions against crime" was in response to public complaints about rising violence.

She said the armed forces and police must make "urgent interventions" in all areas where there was "a high incidence of crimes such as murder, drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, arms trafficking, illicit associations and money laundering." — **AFP**

STOCKHOLM



SWEDEN SAYS RUSSIAN BOMBER VIOLATED ITS AIRSPACE

A Russian SU-24 bomber violated Swedish airspace near the strategic Baltic Sea island of Gotland, leaving only after Sweden scrambled two JAS-39 fighter jets, Sweden's military said on Saturday.

"On Friday afternoon, a Russian SU-24 jet fighter violated Swedish airspace east of Gotland's southern tip. The Swedish air combat command warned the Russian aircraft with a verbal call," the Swedish armed forces said. "The Russian actions are not acceptable and demonstrate a lack of respect for our territorial integrity," the head of Sweden's air force, Jonas Wikman, said. — **AFP**

PORT-AU-PRINCE



HAITI TO REPLACE POLICE HEAD WITH CHIEF NORMIL

Haiti will replace the head of its national police force, Frantz Elbe, with former chief Rameau Normil, the prime minister's office said, as the country faces a gang crisis that has displaced over half a million people.

A spokesperson from the office of Prime Minister Garry Conille confirmed the change by telephone following local media reports.

The effective date was not clear, but the decision will likely go into force after a decree from Conille and the presidential transition council.

The Caribbean nation's police force has significantly suffered from lack of resources while fighting the criminal groups, armed with high-calibre weapons. — **Reuters**

Ukraine seeks path to peace at Swiss summit



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (CL) arrives flanked by with Swiss Federal President Viola Amherd (CR) to join a press conference during the Summit on peace, at the luxury Burgenstock resort, near Lucerne, Switzerland. – **AFP**

BURGENSTOCK: President Volodymyr Zelensky said he hoped to find paths to a "just peace" as soon as possible, as a first international summit on pathways to end Russia's war in Ukraine opened on Saturday.

More than 50 world leaders were joining Zelensky at the Burgenstock resort in Switzerland for a two-day peace summit — though with Moscow rejecting the event, it only has the modest ambitions of laying the groundwork for ending the conflict, now in its third year.

"I believe that we will witness history being made here at the summit. May a just peace be established as soon as possible," Zelensky said as the event began.

"Everything that will be agreed upon at the summit today will be part of the peacemaking process.

"We have succeeded in bringing back to the world the idea that joint efforts can stop war and establish a just peace."

The summit is aimed at trying to agree a basic international platform for eventual peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow.

The conference, convening 100 countries and global institutions, comes at a perilous moment for exhausted Ukrainians and outgunned soldiers, more than two years since Moscow launched its full-scale attack in February 2022.

> **I believe that we will witness history being made here at the summit...We have succeeded in bringing back to the world the idea that joint efforts can stop war**
>
> **VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY**
> *Ukrainian President*

The leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan are attending, as is the European Union chief and the leaders of Colombia, Chile, Finland, Ghana, Kenya and Poland.

US President Joe Biden sent his Vice President Kamala Harris, who announced more than $1.5 billion in new aid for Ukraine, mainly for its energy sector and in humanitarian assistance.

The summit aims to find paths towards a lasting peace for Ukraine based on international law and the United Nations Charter; a possible framework to achieve this goal; and a road-map as to how both parties could come together in a future peace process. On Sunday, three topics will be discussed in detail in working groups: nuclear safety, freedom of navigation and food security, and humanitarian aspects.

Ukraine hopes Russia will attend a second summit and receive a joint plan presented by the other attendees.

The Burgenstock gathering comes straight after the G7 summit, at which the seven wealthy democracies agreed to offer a new $50-billion loan for Ukraine, using profits from the interest on frozen Russian assets.

A landmark 10-year security deal signed by Zelensky and Biden on Thursday will see the United States provide Ukraine with military aid and training.

And on Friday, the European Union's 27 member states agreed "in principle" on beginning accession negotiations with Ukraine. — **AFP**

PRINCESS OF WALES MAKES FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE SINCE CANCER DIAGNOSIS

LONDON: Catherine, Princess of Wales, on Saturday tentatively returned to UK public life for the first time since being diagnosed with cancer, attending a military parade in London to mark King Charles III's official birthday.

Kate, as she is widely known, travelled in a state carriage alongside her three children at the outset of the annual event before watching the ceremonial proceedings from a viewing point.

The 42-year-old future queen then appeared on the Buckingham Palace balcony, to cheers from the crowds below who had braved torrential rain to turn out for the pageantry.

It comes nearly three months after the princess revealed she was receiving chemotherapy treatment. She had not been seen at a public engagement since a Christmas Day service last year.

In a Friday evening statement Kate said she was "making good progress" with her treatment, which is set to last for several more months, but was "not out of the woods yet".

"I'm looking forward to attending the King's Birthday Parade this weekend with my family and hope to join a few public engagements over the summer," the princess added.

Kate's cancer announcement came just weeks after it was disclosed that her father-in-law and British head of state Charles had also been diagnosed with the condition. Neither has revealed what type of cancer they have.

Kate, wearing a white dress and hat, was seen arriving by car at the palace with William and their children ahead of the parade.

Proceedings then culminated several hours later in a fly-past by the Royal Air Force, featuring various aircraft including its aerobatic Red Arrows display team trailing red, white and blue vapours.

Senior royals looked on from the balcony, with Kate smiling at points as she stood alongside other family members.

Royal officials are keen to manage expectations about Kate's gradual return to the public eye, and have maintained that her appearances will depend on her treatment and recovery.

The event has its origins in the preparations for war, where all regimental flags were shown to the soldiers so that they would recognise them in the confusion of battle. — **AFP**



UK's royals as they wave from Buckingham Palace after attending the King's Birthday Parade "Trooping the Colour" in London. – **AFP**

Thousands march across France against far-right

PARIS: Demonstrations took place in Paris and cities across France on Saturday to protest against the far-right National Rally (RN) ahead of upcoming elections to the French parliament.

Following RN's surge in last Sunday's European elections, police said 350,000 people were expected to march and 21,000 officers had been mobilised after labour unions, student groups and rights groups called for rallies to oppose the anti-immigration, eurosceptic party. At least 150 marches were expected in cities including Marseille, Toulouse, Lyon and Lille.

In Paris where up to 100,000 people were expected to turn out a march will set off from Place de La Republique, in the east, going through the Bastille square to Nation.

Speaking from Place de Republique, hard-left CGT union leader Sophie Binet told reporters: "We are marching because we are extremely worried that (RN's head) Jordan Bardella could become the next Prime Minister ... We want to prevent this disaster."



Protesters gather during an anti-far-right rally following their significant gains in European Parliament elections, in Paris. – **AFP**

President Emmanuel Macron called a snap legislative election, to be held in two rounds on June 30 and July 7, after his centrist alliance was trounced by the RN in last Sunday's European Parliament ballot.

A first series of opinion polls have projected that the RN could win the election and be in a position to form the next government.

A poll conducted for Le Point magazine published on Friday forecast RN would lead in the first round of the parliamentary election with 29.5 per cent of votes, narrowly ahead of a coalition of left-wing parties called the Popular Front on 28.5 per cent. Macron's centrist camp was on 18 per cent.

France forward Marcus Thuram on Saturday called on voters in the country to "fight" to stop the far-right coming to power in upcoming snap elections.

"I think the situation is sad and very serious," the 26-year-old forward with Italian champions Inter Milan told reporters in Paderborn.

At least two polls have put the left not far behind the RN and ahead of Macron's group.

In Tours, western France, where hundreds of protesters were taking part in a March, a banner read: "For liberties, for rights, for a social and democratic republic, against far-right ideas and against racism". Several banners read: "young people hate the FN (the RN's former name), while a pensioner carried a banner that read: "Old people also hate the RN". — **Agencies**

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To blow the whistle or not to blow

A colleague sent his son to see a dentist, Dr A who recommended non-surgical treatment. Two years later the son had to see a different doctor when Dr A was on leave.

The new doctor discovered that the actual treatment was not done properly and recommended the start from scratch. My colleague was angry and frustrated for several reasons.

First because he trusted Dr A who worked in the same hospital, second because he dismissed comments from his son who mentioned on several occasions that Dr A's treatment does not seem to be working.

The third reason was, being a medical doctor himself, my colleague felt it was his duty to expose Dr A so he would not harm other patients especially when the harm is done through negligence which is often difficult to detect.

A whistleblower is a person, who could be an employee of a company, or a government agency, disclosing information to the public or some higher authority about any wrongdoing, which could be in the form of fraud, corruption.

The most famous whistleblower in modern history is probably Julian Assange who founded Wikileaks in 2006 to publish leaked documents. Whistleblowers can be subjected to emotional and sometimes physical pain, from being called traitors to receiving death threats.

This is why some people prefer to keep quiet. So what makes whistleblowers take the risk?

From a psychological perspective, whistleblowing is a complex behaviour that is determined by several personal and organisational factors. At a personal level, whistleblowers often have specific personality traits like having a sense of responsibility, courage and a strong ethical orientation.



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WHISTLEBLOWERS CAN BE SUBJECTED TO EMOTIONAL AND SOMETIMES PHYSICAL PAIN, FROM BEING CALLED TRAITORS TO RECEIVING DEATH THREATS. WHICH IS WHY SOME PEOPLE CHOOSE TO KEEP QUIET WHEN WITNESSING A MISCONDUCT

They have stronger moral judgement and personal norms that make them report the misconduct.

Research studies show that one's age and work experience are also important as experienced employees with higher education and those working at an organisation that encourages reporting of misconduct were more likely to act as whistleblowers.

The person's perception of misconduct will determine his reaction. When the misconduct is serious and has a negative impact on the company, customers or society people are more likely to report it, this is why medical errors are more likely to be reported.

Before reporting misconduct, people perform personal cost-benefit analysis to ensure that the benefits of reporting outweigh the potential costs.

Employees who feel they will be supported by colleagues, supervisors or other whistleblowers, are more likely to report wrongdoings.

We all know that our emotions influence our behaviour and decisions. So when we experience anger, frustration or outrage toward a particular misconduct, we are more likely to act as whistleblowers.

At an organisation level, having a clear system of reporting misconduct is more likely to encourage whistleblowing as employees feel confident that they will be protected from retaliation and discrimination.

Financial incentives are a strong motivator for people to speak out but at the same time this may increase 'fake whistleblowers.'

So a clear system of investigating needs to be in place to minimise the misuse of the whistleblowing system for personal grudges or financial gain.

BALINESE CULTURAL PARADE



A Balinese woman wearing a traditional costume performs during a parade at the Bali Art Festival in Denpasar on Indonesia's resort island of Bali. – AFP

Preserving and enhancing heritage through AI technology

Artificial Intelligence (AI) opens new horizons for exploring, understanding and documenting heritage, enriching and renewing the human experience through the combination of technology and human creativity. At Qatar Foundation (QF), experts are spearheading projects that integrate technical innovation with cultural and historical heritage.

These initiatives employ advanced technologies such as machine learning and natural language processing to develop tools and software that enable effective and comprehensive heritage monitoring and documentation. This contributes to the preservation and communication of heritage for future generations.

Dr Ibrahim Muhammad Zain, Professor of Islamic Studies and Comparative Religion at QF member Hamad bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) College of Islamic Studies, emphasises AI's pivotal role in preserving heritage and presenting it systematically. He views AI as a means to make heritage an active part of daily life and enhance its educational and cultural value.

EXPERTS FROM QF'S HAMAD BIN KHALIFA UNIVERSITY ARE DEVELOPING AI TECHNIQUES TO PRESERVE ISLAMIC HERITAGE AND THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

"Through AI, we can preserve heritage and history in a way that has never happened before," he says. "Today, we have moved to a more complex level, which is AI, providing tremendous potential for preserving heritage in all its forms, whether written, material, or otherwise."

One project epitomising this vision is the Digital Sirah Project.

Commencing in 2018 through a collaboration between Qatar National Library (QNL) and Aga Khan University, this project reflects the aspiration of Shaikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, for QF to undertake initiatives serving the Sirah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Currently curated by QNL and CIS, the project aims to create the world's most comprehensive digital portal on the Prophet (PBUH), making his life accessible and engaging to the public, especially youth, through digital mediums and AI elements.

"The Digital Sirah Project aims to focus on the biography of the Prophet Muhammad as a good example for the general public, both Muslims and non-Muslims, and to help them comply with prophetic values and morals in their daily lives and practices," says Dr Zain. He underscores the necessity of a "clear and specific" vision when using AI in documenting heritage and history, explaining that effective heritage preservation requires a clear strategy to ensure its educational value and its expression of Arab and Islamic civilisation. At HBKU's Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI), experts are using AI techniques to preserve Arab linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as to teach and advance the understanding of the Arabic language and local dialects.



Dr Ahmed Ali, a researcher in the centre's Arabic Language Technologies Department, highlights the unique challenges of the Arabic language, including its diverse dialects and the lack of a standard orthography.

"Using AI, we can recognise different Arabic dialects and distinguish between them," he says. This capability allows AI to convert spoken texts into written ones and differentiate between speakers from various Arab countries.

AI's ability to understand and interact with multiple Arabic dialects — such as Egyptian, Levantine, Gulf, and Maghrebi — enhances the user experience in various applications, from cars to home appliances and mobile phones. "This ensures a smooth interactive experience in Arabic between the user and the device," Dr Ali explains.

The Fanar project, a strategic collaboration between the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and HBKU's QCRI, represents a significant advancement in Arabic language AI models.

Utilising a dataset of over 400 billion words of high-quality Arabic text, Fanar produces accurate, high-quality texts that enhance the representation of Arabic in the AI field globally.

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Oman's real estate sector remains resilient despite economic challenges: Report

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The real estate sector in the Sultanate of Oman remains resilient and even grows despite economic challenges. This is the main takeaway of the Real Estate Sector Report 2024 published recently by Tibiaan Properties, one of the leading real estate companies in the country, managing a rich portfolio of apartments, villas, condos and land, as well as commercial real estate.

The report highlights key developments and trends that are shaping the real estate industry. Despite ongoing challenges such as footfall concerns and the impact of geopolitical turbulence on supply chains, the report reveals the resilience of the real estate sector in Oman.

Many businesses have adapted by maintaining larger inventories and revising their operational strategies to mitigate supply chain disruptions.

One of the significant findings in the report is the continued economic revitalisation in Oman in 2023, driven by government initiatives and proactive measures.

Despite a slight decline in oil production, the overall economic activity has shown growth, particularly in development projects and the non-hydrocarbon sectors.

Increased expatriate employment in various industries has supported this growth, indicating a diversification of the economy.



The allocation of RO 900 million for implementing developmental projects further underscores the commitment to fostering growth and economic development.

An essential aspect highlighted in the report is the implementation of 11 sizable projects under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) programme.

These projects cover sectors such as Transport & Logistics, Health, Education, Agriculture & Fisheries, Construction and Information Technology. These initiatives are expected to bolster long-term economic growth and stability in Oman and attract investment opportunities both locally and internationally.

Younis bin Khasib al Harrasi, Chief Executive Office of Tibiaan Properties says, "However, the successful realisation of these projects hinges on a comprehensive and aggressive marketing and promotion campaign, both in the short and long-term. It is crucial to highlight these opportunities to attract investment and participation from both local and international stakeholders."

The real estate market in Oman is set to witness further growth with the announcement of key projects such as the 'Integrated Residential Neighbourhood Project' (Souroh) and the Sultan Haitham City project.

These projects represent substantial investments in the real estate sector, providing housing solutions and contributing to the development of infrastructure in various governorates across Oman. Additionally, the government's allocation of approximately RO 900 million for implementing developmental projects in the Sultanate of Oman in 2024 further underscores the commitment to fostering growth and economic development.

The budget includes provisions for governorate projects and additional funding for key sectors, indicating a strategic approach to sustainable development.

The real estate sector in Oman is poised for growth and resilience against global economic pressures, as indicated by the positive trends observed, including a modest increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in 2023.

The report emphasises the importance of strategic marketing, human resource development, and comprehensive promotion campaigns to maximise the potential of ongoing initiatives and attract investment opportunities.

IT spending in Mena region to reach $193.7 billion in 2024



MUSCAT: Tech research and consulting firm, Gartner forecasted that IT spending in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region in 2024 will reach $193.7 billion, an increase of 5.2 per cent over last year.

The MENA region's spending on IT services in 2024 is expected to increase by 9.6 per cent.

Miriam Bert, Executive Vice President of Analytics at Gartner, said that IT leaders in the Mena region agreed to provide more professional and advisory services to prepare their companies to move to the cloud and use artificial intelligence (AI), generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI), and Internet of Things (IoT) applications, and benefit from data monetisation opportunities resulting from the convergence of these technologies.

Spending on devices is expected to decline by 4.5 per cent during 2024 due to uneven demand for newer devices such as mobile phones in multiple countries in the Mena region. **— ONA**

Gold recovery sweetens copper mining in Oman's Al Sharqiyah North

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

A copper mine launched recently in Oman's Al Sharqiyah North Governorate has also begun to yield modest, but heartening, quantities of associated gold – helping buoy export revenues for the Omani-Australian joint venture behind the project.

Last month, Muscat-based Al Hadeetha Resources LLC celebrated the maiden shipment of copper concentrate from its Al Wash-hi Majaza mine in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi.

Shipped to markets in China, the consignment comprised 156 metric tonnes of copper, underscoring the promising potential of the mine. Importantly, the shipment also yielded six kilos of gold, affirming the presence of commercially extractable quantities of the precious metal associated with copper ore deposits in Oman.

Galvanised by the success of its inaugural shipment, Al Hadeetha Resources is now gearing up to dispatch its second consignment via Sohar Port and Freezone.



The presence of small quantities of gold associated with copper ore adds to the commercial appeal of copper mining in Oman. Image for illustration only.

As with the first cargo, the next shipment — slated to depart Sohar Port on June 24, 2024 — will be loaded into containers for ease of handling and security during transportation.

Shipment Number 2 is estimated to weigh around 1,200 wet metric tonnes, according to the company.

Global commodities group Trafigura is the offtaker of copper concentrate from the Al Wash-hi Majaza project under an agreement signed with Al Hadeetha Resources committing all output for a period of eight years from the start of production.

Pricing is based on the official London Metal Exchange cash settlement quotation for Grade A copper at the time of delivery.

In a statement, Al Hadeetha Resources — 51% owned by Australian mining firm Alara Resources — also announced that progress is being made in repairing a malfunctioning 'Tailing Filter Press (TFP)', which is keeping the concentrator plant from operating at its optimal capacity.

SHIPPED TO MARKETS IN CHINA, THE CONSIGNMENT COMPRISED 156 METRIC TONNES OF COPPER, UNDERSCORING THE PROMISING POTENTIAL OF THE MINE. IMPORTANTLY, THE SHIPMENT ALSO YIELDED SIX KILOS OF GOLD, AFFIRMING THE PRESENCE OF COMMERCIALLY EXTRACTABLE QUANTITIES OF THE PRECIOUS METAL ASSOCIATED WITH COPPER ORE DEPOSITS IN OMAN.

A technical team representing the Italian equipment manufacturer is at site evaluating options to repair the faulty component. Furthermore, the company is weighing a proposal for procuring a new unit as a backup. Al Hadeetha's newly installed copper concentrator plant has a capacity to process 1 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of copper ore.

Oman's money supply rises to RO 24.2 billion



MUSCAT: The broad money supply in the Sultanate of Oman exhibited a significant growth of 15.2 per cent on an annual basis, reaching a total of RO 24.2 billion by the end of March 2024.

This surge can be attributed to a 9.2 per cent increase in cash and a 17.5 per cent rise in cash equivalents, which comprises the total of savings deposits, time deposits in Omani Rials, certificates of deposit issued by banks, security margin accounts, and all foreign currency deposits within the banking sector.

During the same period, cash held by the public decreased by 2.5 per cent, while demand deposits experienced a notable increase of 12.4 per cent.

In terms of the interest rate structure of traditional commercial banks, the weighted average interest rates on Omani Rials deposits rose from 2.124 per cent in March 2023 to 2.642 per cent in March 2024.

Similarly, the weighted average interest rates on Omani Rials loans increased from 5.381 per cent to 5.563 per cent during the same period.

Furthermore, the average interest rates in the overnight interbank lending market saw a slight increase to 5.086 per cent in March 2024 from 5.073 per cent in March 2023.

This was a result of the weighted average interest rates on repurchase operations, which climbed to 6 per cent from 5.323 per cent during the same period last year, aligning with the policies of the US Federal Reserve. **— ONA**

New frameworks for the financial sector worldwide



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The global race towards central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) is gaining momentum, according to a recent survey by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS).

A staggering 94 per cent of central banks surveyed are actively exploring the development of CBDCs, a significant increase from the 90 per cent reported in a 2021 survey.

While countries like China, Nigeria, and the Bahamas have already launched their own CBDCs, the majority are still in the exploratory phase.

The BIS survey highlights various design features under consideration for retail CBDCs, including transaction limits, interoperability with existing payment systems, offline functionality, and zero-remuneration (no interest payments).

Another noteworthy finding is the limited use of stablecoins, cryptocurrencies pegged to assets like the dollar or gold, for payments outside the crypto ecosystem.

This indicates that while stablecoins are gaining traction within the crypto world, they have yet to make significant inroads into mainstream payment systems.

Taiwan's cryptocurrency sector has reached an important milestone with the formal establishment of the Taiwan Virtual Asset Service Provider Association (VASPA). 24 cryptocurrency-related entities came together to form the association, marking a new era of collaboration and self-regulation within the industry.

VASPA's primary goal is to act as a bridge between the private sector and the government, fostering cooperation in supervising the rapidly evolving crypto landscape.

The association's first order of business is to develop a comprehensive self-regulation code that addresses key aspects of the industry, including classification, listing and delisting procedures, consumer protection measures, risk management protocols, transaction monitoring, and advertising guidelines.

With the approval of Taiwan's Interior Ministry in March 2024, the association was formally inaugurated with a founding meeting, appointing BitoPro founder and CEO Titan Cheng as chair and XREX Chief Revenue Officer Winston Hsiao as vice chair.

After the FTX scandal Taiwan engaged in a proactive approach to regulating the crypto sector, shifting from its previous laissez-faire to the current and more regulated mindset.

The formation of VASPA signifies a concerted effort by industry stakeholders to establish a framework for responsible growth and innovation within Taiwan's cryptocurrency ecosystem.

The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) and the Bank of Canada have joined forces to establish a new innovation hub in Toronto.

This collaborative effort aims to drive the development of cutting-edge technologies that will enhance the financial system's efficiency and inclusivity in Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Toronto hub will concentrate on three key areas: open finance, regulatory and supervisory innovation, and next-generation financial market infrastructures.

These focus areas align with the broader goals of the BIS Innovation Hub, which also prioritises central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), green finance, and cybersecurity.

The BIS has a strong track record in exploring innovative financial solutions, including CBDCs and asset tokenisation.

The organisation's work programme for 2024 includes ongoing research into CBDC privacy and the launch of a blockchain-based tokenisation project.

Additionally, the BIS is collaborating with several other central banks on Project Agora, an initiative focused on asset tokenisation in the financial system and private institutions.

But it's not all good news in the crypto regulation week.

FlowBank, an online Swiss bank known for its crypto trading services, has been shut down and declared bankrupt by the Swiss financial regulator, FINMA.

The regulator found that the bank had seriously violated capital requirements and was no longer financially viable.

FINMA's investigation revealed multiple compliance failures, including inadequate due diligence on high-risk business relationships and large transactions.

Despite being placed on a watchlist and subjected to increased scrutiny, FlowBank was unable to rectify these issues, ultimately leading to the revocation of its banking license.

The closure of FlowBank highlights the challenges faced by crypto-friendly banks in navigating the regulatory landscape.

The bank, launched in 2020, had established partnerships with notable players in the crypto industry, including TrueUSD stablecoin issuer Techteryx and crypto asset manager CoinShares. It reportedly also provided banking services to Binance, the world's largest crypto exchange.

While customers with deposits up to 100,000 Swiss francs will be prioritised for reimbursement, the bankruptcy proceedings will likely be complex due to the bank's substantial assets and numerous client accounts.

This incident serves as a cautionary tale for the crypto banking sector, emphasising the importance of robust risk management and regulatory compliance to ensure long-term sustainability.

ADVERTORIALS

Alliance formed to revolutionise civil blasting services in Oman

MUSCAT: Al Fajar Al Alamia Co SAOG (Al Fajar), a leader in explosives manufacturing and blasting services for civil uses in Oman and UAE, and MaxamCorp International, SL (Maxam), a global pioneer in explosives and initiation systems, are excited to announce a strategic alliance aimed at transforming blasting services and enhancing the technology of explosives in the region.

The strategic alliance between Al Fajar and Maxam will focus on the following key areas: Advanced blasting services and technologies; Supply chain optimisation; Operational excellence; and Market expansion.

The initial duration of this strategic alliance is set for three years, during which both companies will work towards achieving the outlined objectives. A steering committee will be established to review progress and results annually, ensuring continuous improvement and alignment with mutual goals.

"We are thrilled to partner with Maxam in this strategic alliance," said Mohammed Talal Omar, CEO of Al Fajar Al Alamia Co SAOG "This collaboration will significantly enhance our capabilities and support our growth ambitions in Oman and UAE, and will also allow us to deliver world-class blasting services and products for our customers and interduce a lot of efficiencies and enhancements to the mining and infrastructure development project."

Haythem M Macki, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al Fajar Al Alamia Co SAOG added that this strategic alliance comes within the directions of the Board of Directors of Al Fajar to focus on the clients' needs and assure stability and confidence. It will also allow us to reassure our stratigic position in this sector which we have been leading for long decades.

"Al Fajar is an ideal partner for us as we expand our presence in the Middle East," stated Javier Carrillo de Albornoz Portes, BD Manager of Maxam, Egypt & Middle East. "Our combined expertise will drive innovation and operational excellence, providing substantial benefits to the mining and civil works sectors in the region."



Omasco unveils all-new Volvo showroom, launches the fully electric EX30

MUSCAT: Volvo Cars made its much-anticipated return to Oman with the inauguration of the all-new Omasco Volvo Car showroom located at the Omasco HQ in Wattayah, Muscat.

Held under the esteemed auspices of Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed al Busaidy, Chairman of Sabco Group, the event marks a significant moment for Volvo enthusiasts and automotive aficionados in the Sultanate of Oman, who can once again experience the renowned luxury, innovation, and Scandinavian design that define Volvo vehicles, right here in the heart of Oman.

It also represents a pivotal moment in Omasco's ongoing expansion efforts; by adding Volvo Cars — a leader in climate action — to its portfolio of globally renowned brands, the Al Futtaim Automotive joint venture company is further solidifying its position as a key player in the region's automotive industry as well as paving the path towards Oman's 2050 Net-Zero mission.

Committed to driving mass electric vehicle adoption across the Sultanate of Oman, Omasco has introduced the groundbreaking all-electric Volvo EX30 – the brand's compact premium SUV – as the centrepiece of its distinctive Volvo car line-up.

"The new Volvo car showroom marks a significant milestone in Omasco's remarkable 50-year journey," commented Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed al Busaidy, Chairman, Sabco Group.

"Committed to helping propel Oman towards a more sustainable future, our strategic decision to partner with Volvo Cars aligns perfectly with our nation's decarbonisation goals. Volvo Cars' dedication to environmentally friendly practices in its factory operations, logistics, and product offerings mirror Oman's Vision 2040 for a cleaner, greener future. We eagerly anticipate continued



collaborations that will propel us forward on our path towards a more sustainable tomorrow."

David Swain, Managing Director at Omasco, added: "The opening of the new dealership exemplifies our mission to provide innovative, premium automotive solutions in Oman.

It's also an important milestone in our ongoing expansion, as we continue to strengthen the company's dynamic leadership across core economic sectors, including automotive, and our long-standing commitment to sustainability."

"By launching the Volvo EX30, we are actively contributing to Oman's sustainable future and aligning with the country's ambitious 2050 Net-Zero goal," commented Marco Melani, Regional Managing Director – Al Futtaim Automotive.

"This compact SUV not only embodies our dedication to electric mobility but also offers customers a premium Volvo experience with the lowest CO2 emissions in the brand's lineup.

Coupled with Omasco's renowned customer service, the Volvo EX30 promises a unique and exceptional driving journey for all."

With complimentary test drives available for all customers, the Volvo EX30 comes with exclusive benefits including a 3-year service package, 5-year extended warranty, 8-year battery warranty, one year of registration, 3M sun film (crystalline range) and nano ceramic paint protection – all bundled up to make life easier and worry-free.

Unlock unmatched offers on premium and sporty Alfa Romeo models

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles, distributors of the iconic Italian marque Alfa Romeo, is excited to announce exclusive offers across the Alfa Romeo lineup, which includes an array of distinguished models.

These include the dynamic sedan, Giulia; the smart and spirited compact SUV, Tonale; and the versatile and spacious full SUV, Stelvio.

Each model seamlessly blends heritage with innovation, embodying Italian flair, performance, and style. For enthusiasts seeking exhilarating performance, the lineup also features the high-performance Quadrifoglio variants of the Giulia and Stelvio, delivering the ultimate expression of Alfa Romeo's engineering prowess.

For a limited time only, customers can enjoy unparalleled benefits on the entire Alfa Romeo range, presenting a golden opportunity to own a premium Italian masterpiece.

Experience Italian excellence



with:

Flexible payment options

Pay 50% now and 50% in 12 months with 0% interest Owning a new Alfa Romeo is now more accessible with our flexible payment plan. Customers can pay 50% upfront and the remaining 50% after 12 months with 0% interest, subject to credit approval from selected banks and finance companies.

Manufacturer's warranty up to 7 years or 200,000 km (whichever comes first)

The Alfa Romeo models are backed by an industry-leading manufacturer's warranty of up to 7 years or 200,000 kilometres, ensuring long-term assurance for vehicle owners.

Complimentary service up to 5 years or 120,000 km (whichever comes first)

All Alfa Romeo models come with a service package covering up to 5 years or 120,000 kilometres, providing added peace of mind to buyers.

5 years roadside assistance

With 5 years of roadside assistance, customers can drive worry-free, knowing help is just a call away.

Complimentary first year insurance and registration

Customers will also receive complimentary first-year insurance covering Oman and the UAE, along with first-year registration.

"We are thrilled to offer these exclusive benefits to our esteemed Alfa Romeo customers," said Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles. "This campaign underscores our commitment to delivering exceptional value and superior customer satisfaction."

The offer is valid until July 7, 2024. Visit the showroom at Al Hail to seize this limited-time opportunity and drive home in your dream Alfa Romeo. For more information, call 80022008.

sport



NIZWA ALL SET TO HOST SOCCA OMAN CARNIVAL

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Nizwa City is all set to host the Socca Oman Carnival on June 25, Tuesday, the second day of Eid Al Adha, as part of the promotion for Oman hosting the Socca World Cup 2024 in November for the first time in the Middle East and Asia. The Socca Carnival in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate will be the first destination to promote hosting the World class event in Oman while the same event will take place in different governorates in the upcoming days including Sur, Salalah, and Suhar.

The organisers, Sports Makers, completed all their technical and logistics arrangements for the Carnival."The Socca Carnival in Nizwa will feature Oman's Socca Cup. As many as seven teams from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate will attend the tournament. The top two teams in the event will advance to the finals which will be held in Muscat in August. Later, the head coach of the national Socca team will select the squad after completion of the finals in Muscat," Ishaq al Handhali told the *Observer*.

> A special stadium arranged in collaboration with the Oman Automobile Association can accommodate about 1,200 fans. There are several activities during the four-day events to be held in Nizwa

"A special stadium arranged in collaboration with the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) can accommodate about 1,200 fans. There are several activities in the four-day events in Nizwa which include Oman's Socca Cup, 3x3 basketball festival, theatre activities, fireworks, laser shows, restaurants corner, fun zone games for the kids and adults, E-Games, daily raffle draw and awards for the participants," he added

"Special thanks to the Al Dakhiliyah Governor's office for their support and assistance in having this event in Oman. A dedicated recognition to all the sponsors and partners to make the success of this event," he ended

The purpose of the event is to boost further the Socca game which is similar to football and the Socca is a six-a-side football tournament that started in 2018 in Portugal.

Oman will host the Socca World Cup 2024 from November 28 to December 8 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center. The international tournament will be hosted under the umbrella of the International Socca Federation. It is expected that 44 teams from across the world will attend this major event.

Oman's youth hockey stun Kazakhstan in AHF Championship opener

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15





Oman's youth hockey team commenced their campaign in the 2024 Men's and Women's Junior Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) Cup 2024 with a resounding 5-1 victory over Kazakhstan. The match was played as part of the 2024 Men's and Women's junior AHF Cup, which is being under way in Singapore till June 23.

Oman drawn in Group B alongside with China, Hong Kong, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Chinese Taipei. Group A comprised from Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Singapore, and Cambodia teams. The women's group featured Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The top five teams from each group will advance to the Asian Youth Men's and Women's Hockey Championships, targeting players born in 2003.

Back to Oman and Kazakhstan match, the first quarter saw clear dominance from Oman, and attacks on Kazakhstan's goal quickly followed. Khader al Nofli opened the scoring in the eighth minute, followed by a second goal from Talal Bait Hazim in the 15th minute, ending the first quarter with Oman leading 2-0.

The second quarter witnessed a relative difference in performance between the two teams, as Kazakhstan scored their first goal from a penalty corner through Aigymty Dozakhenszy in the 16th minute. However, Oman regained control of the match and scored the third goal through Ayman Faraj in the 28th minute, ending the second quarter with a 3-1 score in Oman's favour.

At the start of the third quarter, Kazakhstan tried to reduce the loss, but Oman's defence was up to the task. Ayman Faraj scored the fourth goal in the 37th minute, ending the third quarter with a 4-1 score.

In the fourth quarter, Ayman Faraj added the fifth goal in the 53rd minute, while Kazakhstan looked exhausted and retreated into their defensive areas. Oman continued to press for more goals, but the match ended with Oman winning 5-1.

Player Khader al Nofli expressed his happiness with the team's victory in the opening of the Asian Hockey Federation Cup. Al Nofli pointed to the players' outstanding performance and commitment to the coach's instructions as the reason for this victory, emphasising the importance of the training camps that preceded the tournament in raising the players' technical and physical readiness.

Al Nofli also noted that this tournament is a great opportunity to get to know the participating Asian teams and build good relations with them in the field of the game.

Pakistan ex-stars, media slam T20 World Cup exit

KARACHI: Pakistan's ex-stars and media blamed team discord and biased selection for the Asian cricket powerhouse's humiliating first-round exit from the Twenty20 World Cup.

The 2009 champions were knocked out after the USA-Ireland match was abandoned because of rain — the earliest-ever elimination from a T20 World Cup for Pakistan.

They suffered a shock defeat to first-timers USA before losing to arch-rivals India. Pakistan's only win was against Canada.

"Pakistani players think that if they don't perform well, the coaches will be sacked, and nothing will happen to them," former captain Wasim Akram said during a broadcast after the defeat to India.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi said changes were imminent. "Pakistan team needs a major surgery," he told local media after the India defeat

"It is time to keep the coaches and change the entire team."

Throughout the tournament, the team was dogged by allegations of internal discord and that some players were in the squad because of favouritism and not merit.

Fans and analysts also criticised the team's management for not picking the right players for the World Cup.

Former player Kamran Akmal said Shadab Khan was chosen to play because he is close to captain Babar Azam, and that meant leaving out leg-spinner Usama Mir, the top wicket-taker in this year's Pakistan Super League.

"When you select players based on friendship, you'll get these results," Akmal said. "Mir should have been in the squad... That was a big injustice."

Reports of discord over the swap also marred Pakistan's warm-up for the World Cup. They lost to Ireland, lost 2-0 to England and drew 2-2 against a depleted New Zealand.

"Some poor administrative and selection decisions in the run-up to World Cup resulted in the team's inability to progress," said the English-language newspaper *The News*.

'I AM DISGUSTED'

The 2024 edition marked a dramatic fall for Pakistan from the last World Cup two years ago, when they reached the final.

"I am disgusted and will not watch the World Cup any more," said Mohammad Asim, a Pakistani fan.

"The team selection was biased and based on friendship," said the 19-year-old university student.

And Salim, a taxi driver, said the team was "finished" after losing to a new side like the USA.

Pakistan are due to host next year's Champions Trophy, and there are calls for a major shake-up in the team and the management.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi — who is also the country's interior minister — said changes were imminent.

"Pakistan team needs a major surgery," he told local media after the India defeat.

"We must endeavour to make the Pakistani cricket team one of the best in the world. The nation does not expect such a disappointing performance."

But one former captain said the board is part of the problem.

"Before we shift the blame to the players, first the PCB and its governing body needs to be sacked," Rashid Latif wrote on the social media platform X.

"These are the people responsible for selecting the players. Heads must roll, but would they?" — **AFP**





Scotland's Angus Gunn in action with Germany's Florian Wirtz. – **Reuters**

Germany hammer 10-man Scotland to launch Euro 2024

MUNICH: Germany thrashed 10-man Scotland 5-1 as the Euro 2024 hosts kicked off the tournament in style in Munich on Friday, the start of a journey they hope culminates in a record fourth continental title.

Florian Wirtz struck the opening goal 10 minutes in and Jamal Musiala soon doubled Germany's lead with an emphatic finish.

"We couldn't have had a better start. We've seen the atmosphere in the country, and we need that," Musiala said of Germany's lightning start.

A long-awaited night for Scotland went from bad to worse before half-time when Ryan Porteous was sent off for a two-footed challenge on Ilkay Gundogan, with Kai Havertz tucking away the resulting penalty.

Niclas Fuellkrug powered in a fourth midway through the second half after coming on as a substitute and not even a late own goal from Antonio Ruediger could spoil an otherwise perfect start to the campaign for Germany.

There was even time for Emre Can to add a fifth goal with the final kick of the game.



General view during the pre-match show inside the stadium before the match. – **Reuters**

DISASTROUS SCOTTISH START

Scotland could surely not have envisioned such a disastrous beginning, but they must regroup quickly with games to come in Group A against Switzerland and Hungary.

"Today was hugely disappointing but you're playing against the host nation and it's the first game... things don't get much tougher than that," said Scotland captain Andy Robertson.

After three successive failures at major tournaments, including back-to-back group stage exits at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, this was a statement of intent from an experienced Germany side.

It is Germany's first men's major tournament as hosts since the 2006 World Cup, and they are looking to recreate the magic that helped rekindle the passion for the national team then.

Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann had spoken of his players' hunger to atone for the shortcomings of recent times, with the outlook improving and optimism gradually increasing since his appointment in September.

His counterpart Steve Clarke on the other hand urged Scotland to "fear no one" going into the country's second straight Euros after more than two decades in the international wilderness.

Almost right away Germany took the game to a Scotland side who arrived in Munich with only one win from their past nine matches — an unimpressive 2-0 victory over lowly Gibraltar last week.

GERMANY HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

Scotland goalkeeper Angus Gunn alertly blocked from an offside Wirtz, but Germany soon grasped the match by the scruff of the neck.

Toni Kroos, coaxed out of his Germany retirement earlier this year, pinged a ball out to Joshua Kimmich, who teed up Wirtz to sweep in from the edge of the area as Gunn could only help the shot in via the post.

Kroos will hang up his boots for good after the tournament, but with him and Gundogan running the Germany midfield they bring a level of knowledge and maturity few can match.

Gundogan threaded a pass through the Scotland defence to Havertz, who worked it back towards Musiala, the Bayern Munich attacker creating himself space to crash a strike into the roof of the net.

Germany were initially awarded a penalty as Musiala went down in a heap after getting caught between Ryan Christie and Kieran Tierney, but referee Clement Turpin deemed the foul occurred outside the area after consulting the touchline monitor.

That merely delayed Germany's third goal, which did eventually come from the spot following another VAR review that led to Porteous being sent off for a crude challenge on Gundogan.

Havertz calmly sent Gunn the wrong way and any remaining optimism drained away from Scotland's once boisterous and sizeable travelling contingent of supporters.

Scotland tried to limit the damage in the second half, but there was no stopping Fuellkrug's thumping drive into the top corner within a few minutes of his introduction as a replacement for Havertz.

The only bright spot for Scotland came three minutes from time as Ruediger inadvertently diverted Scott McKenna's header past goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

And there was still more punishment to come as substitute Can curled home from 20 yards at the death to cap a glorious night for the Germans.

Reigning European champions Italy, who failed to qualify for the last World Cup, get their title defence under way on Saturday against Albania in Dortmund. Before that Spain take on Croatia in the opening Group B fixture in Berlin, but the day's first match is between Hungary and Switzerland in Cologne. — **AFP**







PHOTOGRAPHY

Eid vibes from Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, all Photos taken by the photographer Said al Rashdi.







Omani textile art a legacy woven in tradition

AHMED AL KAABI

The Sultanate of Oman is a country rich in cultural heritage, as is evident in the various arts and crafts that have been practiced by generations since ancient times. Among these arts, the art of textile decoration stands out as one of the most important manifestations of Omani creativity, adding a unique aesthetic touch to fashion and various occasions.

The history of textile decoration in the Sultanate of Oman dates back centuries when it was closely linked to the lives of nomadic Bedouins who relied on handicrafts to meet their daily needs. Omani women excelled in decorating the fabrics used in making tents, clothing, and household utensils, using various techniques such as embroidery, sequins and lace.

Thumnah al Wahaibi, the pioneer of the textile project, embodies a wonderful example of the ambitious Omani woman who transforms her passion for weaving into creations that amaze the eyes. Since childhood, Al Wahaibi was fascinated by her mother and sister's skills in designing and decorating fabrics, so she followed in their footsteps, making this passion a profession that provides her with a livelihood and allows her to showcase her creativity.

Textile decoration in the Sultanate of Oman is distinguished by its diverse techniques, as Omani craftswomen excel in using various materials such as cotton, linen, wool and silk to create stunning designs.

Al Wahaibi tells us about her journey with weaving, saying: "Since I was young, I used to watch my mother and older sister design and decorate fabrics and I admired their skills and tried to imitate them. I started designing large bags from fabrics such as the kharaj and bakhsha, and then my skills developed so I began designing clothing and accessory bags, decorating them with lace and thread weaving. This was a source of livelihood for me and my older sister, who used to weave wool yarn."

Al Wahaibi did not stop at that, but developed her skills even more, and began designing various accessories such as medals in different shapes, necklaces, bracelets and much more. She participated in many exhibitions and festivals and displayed her creations in various opera houses and associations.

A ROLE MODEL FOR ASPIRING WOMEN

Al Wahaibi's passion was not limited to design only, she also participated in craft excellence competitions, where she won second place in Al Wusta Governorate. She did not stop at this achievement, but continued her journey, establishing a home-based project where she began to design and implement her creations according to the customer's request and desires. This project resulted in her winning the first-place award at the Sultanate of Oman level as the best designer in the field of coordinating and integrating materials and modern innovations.





EID AL ADHA

Eid Al Adha symbolises obedience and faith

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EID AL ADHA falls on the 10th day of Dhul Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, corresponding to the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. The celebration begins with the Eid prayer either in an open space or in the mosque. After the prayers, families and friends come together to exchange greetings and share traditional meals.

Central to the observance of Eid Al Adha is the sacrifice of an animal, typically a sheep, goat, cow, or camel.

"Eid Al Adha encourages selflessness and generosity, as Muslims are encouraged to share their blessings with others, particularly those who are less fortunate by sacrificing an animal and distributing its meat to those in need," says Ronya Naboulsi, a wellness coach.

The meat from the sacrificed animal, she adds, "is divided into three parts: one-third is given to the needy and less fortunate, one-third is shared with relatives and friends, and the rest is kept for the family. This act of sharing emphasises the importance of charity and compassion towards others, especially those in need."

Eid Al Adha is also known as the feast of sacrifice. "It commemorates the willingness of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to Allah's command. However, before Prophet Ibrahim would sacrifice his son, Allah provided a ram to sacrifice instead. This event symbolises submission to the will of Allah and is celebrated with great reverence and joy by Muslims worldwide," she explained.

Eid Al Adha serves as a reminder of the values of sacrifice, obedience and faith. She mentions, "Eid Al Adha encourages Muslims to reflect on the story of Prophet Ibrahim and his unwavering devotion to Allah. The willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son demonstrates the ultimate test of faith and obedience, and his example inspires believers to prioritise their relationship with Allah above all else."

Eid Al Adha is celebrated with great enthusiasm by Muslims worldwide. Streets and homes are adorned with festive decorations, and markets bustle with activity as people shop for new clothes and special treats for the occasion. Families gather for elaborate feasts, exchanging gifts and enjoying traditional dishes.

She also shared that, "In addition to the religious observances, Eid Al Adha is also a time for social gatherings and reconnecting with loved ones. It provides an opportunity for Muslims to strengthen bonds within their families and communities, fostering a sense of unity and belonging."







Eid Al Adha holds a profound significance for Muslims. It is a reminder of the importance of sacrifice, obedience and compassion. It is a time for spiritual reflection, communal worship and acts of charity. By commemorating the story of Prophet Ibrahim's devotion to Allah, Muslims reaffirm their faith and commitment to living virtuous lives guided by the principles of Islam. Eid Al Adha celebrates not only a historical event, but also the enduring values of faith, generosity and solidarity that unite Muslims around the world."