

HIS MAJESTY TO VISIT EGYPT ON SUNDAY

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will embark on an official visit to the Arab Republic of Egypt on Sunday, according to a statement issued by Diwan of Royal Court.

'Continuing the historical relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on an official two-day visit to Egypt on Sunday, May 21, 2023, in response to an invitation from President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of Egypt,' it stated.

The visit reflects the keenness of the two countries' leaderships to enhance ties.

The visit will explore areas of existing cooperation between the two countries in various spheres that serve joint interests. The two leaders will have a session of consultation and coordination on matters related to joint Arab action, in addition to discussing the latest developments regionally

and internationally.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation comprising Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin

Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin

Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Afi, Head of the Private Office, Abdussalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chair- man of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League. ONA

The visit reflects the keenness of the two countries' leaderships to enhance ties

Jeddah Summit: Arab unity for a prosperous future

Our Correspondent Muscat

Saudi Arabia will host leaders from across the Arab world who will gather in the city of Jeddah on Friday for an annual Arab Summit to tackle regional challenges.

The focus of the 32nd Arab Summit will be the readmission of Syria to the Arab League after 12 years of shunning Syrian President Bashar al Assad and the culmination of years of efforts to re-engage with him.

The league recently lifted the suspension of Syria's membership, imposed after the crackdown on street protests by Assad that led to the civil war in Syria in 2011.

The summit will also discuss the Palestinian issue and the current tensions in the Gaza Strip, focusing on the demolition of property, confiscation of land, deliberate killings, and the policies of collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

The meeting will shed light on the crises that Arab countries are facing, including the Sudanese conflict, the situation in Yemen and Somalia, and the political and security challenges plaguing Libya and Lebanon.

The summit comes in the aftermath of the China-mediated Saudi-Iranian rapprochement which the kingdom hopes will give a further push to regional peace.

The summit will discuss strengthening cooperation between Arab countries to combat



Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, attends a preparatory meeting for the 32nd Arab Summit with Arab foreign ministers on Wednesday (ONA)

The focus of the 32nd Arab Summit will be the readmission of Syria to the Arab League after 12 years of shunning Syrian President Bashar al Assad and the culmination of years of efforts to re-engage with him

Sayyid Asaad to lead Oman's delegation at Arab Summit

Muscat - Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, will leave on Thursday for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to lead the sultanate's delegation at the 32nd Arab Summit in Jeddah on Friday.

On Wednesday, Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, participated in a preparatory ministerial meeting of the 32nd Arab Summit



in Jeddah. The foreign ministers welcomed Syria backed to the Arab League.

Faisal Mekdad, Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, confirmed that President Bashar al Assad will attend the summit on Friday.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said that the region is at a crossroads, facing a host of challenges. He called for cooperation between Arab countries to achieve security, stability and economic prosperity.



Ahli Bank gets revised offer for merger with Bank Dhofar



Oman Exploration showcases sultanate

terrorism, exchanging information between security agencies on extremist groups, and protecting Arab national security in order to face serious economic and social challenges that have affected the region, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. The summit will also discuss the food security issue, activation

of free trade exchange between Arab countries, as well as the energy crisis and climate change.

Ahmed Rashid Khattabi, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of Media and Communications, Arab League, informed that the agenda of the summit will constitute a shift in the course of joint Arab action after Syria's return to the Arab League.

"The summit will focus on the Sudanese crisis, try to contain this conflict before it is too late and avoid a humanitarian and refugee crisis. The summit will invite the two parties in Sudan to take advantage of the ongoing dialogue hosted by Saudi Arabia to find a road map for reconciliation," Khattabi added. The summit will try to bring an

end to the Yemen conflict following the current negotiations opening doors for positive outcomes that will restore stability and security in the country, he said.

The summit will also appeal to the Lebanese leadership to shoulder their responsibility towards their country, uphold the national interest and elect a president.

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OMAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY (S.A.O.G)

Chairman's Report and unaudited Condensed Consolidated Interim Financial Results for the period ended 31 March 2023

Respected Shareholders,

We are pleased to present to you a summary of the results of the operations for the 3 months' period ended 31st March 2023.

Operating performance:

REVENUE:

Group Revenue for the ended March 2023 has reached RO 733.9 million compared to RO 634.8 million for the corresponding period 2022. The Group revenue include acquired business of Zain Group, which contributed revenues of RO 579.8 Mn.

Omantel (Domestic performance) Revenues reached RO 163.1 million compared to RO 133.3 million for the corresponding period 2022. Revenues growth mainly achieved in Mobile Postpaid and Fixed Broadband revenues.

EXPENSES:

Group's total Operating expenses increased to RO 616.7 Mn compared to RO 535.6 Mn for the corresponding period 2022, an increase of 15.1 %.

NET PROFIT:

The Group Net Profit after tax has grown by 50.2 % touching RO 93.9 Mn compared to RO 62.5 Mn in 2022. After adjusting for minority interest the net profit for the period is RO 21.2 Mn compared to RO 18.5 Mn in 2021, an increase of 14.6 %

Oman Domestic operation Net Profit for the three months ended March 2023 stands at RO 38.7 Mn compared to RO 34.7 Mn in the previous period an increase of 11.5 %. Increase in net profit is attributed to increase in gross margins in retail and wholesale segment, decrease in finance costs and increase in dividend income from Zain group. Revenue increase YOY is attributed predominantly to growth in transit voice revenue and device revenue. Core retail revenues also increased during the period contributed mainly by growth in Postpaid Mobile revenue (10.8 %) and Fixed broadband revenue (5.2 %). While gross margin in both retail and wholesale segment increase YOY, the fall in EBITDA is attributed to increase in Operating costs which increased by 18 % YOY.

Group Earning per Share (EPS) for the period ended March 2023 is RO 0.028 compared to RO 0.025 for the corresponding period of year 2022.

SUBSCRIBER BASE

The total domestic subscriber base as of March 2023 (including mobile and fixed businesses) was 3.251 Mn (excluding Mobile Resellers) compared to 3.170 Mn of the corresponding period of the previous year, a growth of 2.6 % over the last period. Total subscriber base with mobile resellers reached 3.815 Mn.

SUBSIDIARY COMPANIES:

1) Mobile Telecommunication Company (Zain):

For the three months ended March 2023, Zain group generated consolidated revenue of USD 1.53 bn, while consolidated net income reached USD 177 Mn. Total customer base of Zain Group increased by 4 % to 53 Mn compared to 50.8 Mn of the previous period.

Market Share: Omantel's Mobile market share (including Mobile Resellers) is 47.6 % with a revenue share of 61.5 %. The Fixed Telephone (post & pre-paid) market share is 72.0 % with a revenue market share of 83.2 %.

Thanks and appreciation

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our shareholders and loyal customers for their continued support that enabled us to achieve these excellent results. Also, we wholeheartedly appreciate the sincere contribution of the Executive Management and Employees for the performance in the challenging situation. With your support, we are confident that Omantel will continue its good performance and will be able to reach new heights of excellence.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the staff, we are honored to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for His visionary leadership. We pray to Almighty Allah to grant him long live, health and welfare to achieve more progress, prosperity and welfare for Oman and its people.

CHAIRMAN

Note:
1. The unaudited consolidated financial statement will be delivered to any shareholders or other interested party who requests them, within 5 days of the written request. The request must indicate preference for Arabic or English.
2. Request may be addressed to Secretary, Board of Directors, Omantel P.O. Box 789, P.O. 112, Ruw'ah Suburba of Oman, Fax: 242 40 586

Condensed Consolidated Interim Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2023		
	31 March 2023 Unaudited RO '000	31 December 2022 Audited RO '000
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Cash and bank balances	489,073	451,324
Trade and other receivables	1,199,968	1,122,000
Contract assets	114,908	108,940
Inventories	89,256	69,573
Investment securities at fair value through profit or loss	112,836	50,708
Investment securities at amortised cost	1,000	1,000
	2,007,041	1,803,545
Assets of disposal group classified as held for sale	219,891	322,956
Total Current assets	2,226,932	2,126,501
Non-current assets		
Contract assets	65,363	65,983
Investment securities at fair value through profit or loss	24,801	24,528
Investment securities at FVOCI	22,941	21,794
Investments in associates and joint venture	168,565	150,027
Other non-current assets	64,445	59,752
Deferred tax asset	31,752	29,269
Right of use of assets	233,030	206,539
Property and equipment	1,718,983	1,761,504
Intangible assets and goodwill	3,356,144	3,389,546
Total Non-current assets	5,686,024	5,708,942
Total Assets	7,912,956	7,835,443
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY		
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	1,677,833	1,466,164
Contract liabilities	126,512	122,772
Income tax payables	43,959	38,652
Borrowings	421,752	547,584
Lease liabilities	38,553	33,078
	2,308,609	2,208,250
Liabilities of disposal group classified as held for sale	36,197	109,318
Total Current liabilities	2,344,806	2,317,568
Non-current liabilities		
Borrowings	1,704,743	1,740,067
Lease liabilities	284,311	210,914
Other non-current liabilities	648,913	679,958
Total Non-current liabilities	2,637,967	2,630,939
Total Liabilities	4,982,773	4,948,507
Equity		
Share capital	75,000	75,000
Legal reserve	25,000	25,000
Voluntary reserve	49,875	49,875
Capital contribution	7,288	7,288
Capital reserve	36,893	36,893
Foreign currency translation reserve	(92,412)	(90,719)
Investment fair valuation reserve	(3,945)	(3,653)
Other reserves	1,425	5,204
Retained earnings	510,388	530,408
Attributable to the Company's shareholders	609,872	635,296
Non controlling interest	2,320,311	2,251,640
Total equity	2,930,183	2,886,936
Total Liabilities and Equity	7,912,956	7,835,443

Condensed Consolidated Interim Statement of Profit and Loss - 31 March 2023 (Unaudited)		
	Three months ended 31 March 2023 RO'000	2022 RO'000
Continuing operations		
Revenue	733,879	634,804
Cost of sales	(261,431)	(217,471)
Operating and administrative expenses	(211,053)	(170,688)
Depreciation and amortization	(131,874)	(136,777)
Expected credit loss on financial assets (ECL)	(12,360)	(10,687)
Interest income	5,830	1,590
Investment income	1,480	2,163
Share of results of associates and joint venture	336	1,951
Other (expense)/ income	(17,738)	(3,569)
Finance costs	(46,862)	(32,515)
Gain/ (loss) from currency revaluation	(921)	3,261
Profit before income taxes	59,286	72,062
Income tax expenses and other levies	(7,444)	(9,237)
Profit for the year from continuing operations	51,842	62,825
Discontinued operations		
Gain/(Loss) for the period from discontinued operations	42,076	(336)
Profit for the year	93,918	62,489
Attributable to:		
Shareholders of the Company	21,230	18,495
Non-controlling interests	72,688	43,994
	93,918	62,489
Earnings per share		
Basic and diluted from continuing and discontinued operations – RO	0.028	0.025

H M RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM UAE PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq received a written message from Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on Wednesday. The message was handed over to Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, when he received in his office Mohammed Nakhira al Dhaheri, UAE Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the distinguished relations between Oman and the UAE (ONA)

SQU inks pact with Chinese firm for AI project



Our Correspondent Muscat

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) signed an agreement on Wednesday with Star Vision, a Chinese satellite and artificial intelligence technology company, to launch the first Omani AI model into space.

Dr Ghazi Ali al Rawas, Dean of Scientific Research at SQU, informed that the agreement aims to localise advanced technologies in the sultanate and raise awareness about space technologies among Omani youth.

According to Rawas, the agreement will provide students of the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department of SQU a rare opportunity to gain practical experience in developing AI algorithms, which will be used in the latest AI satellite of Star Vision.

"The algorithm will work to identify shipping vessels in the

Sea of Oman for the purpose of protecting Oman's marine environment. The agreement is a milestone for SQU's cooperation efforts in research and development with China," Rawas said.

Represented by its Medical Research Centre, SQU also signed an agreement on Wednesday with Novartis, a leading international pharmaceutical company, for cooperation in combating cardiovascular diseases. Cardiovascular diseases are considered among the top health challenges globally.

The agreement aims to limit the spread of cardiovascular diseases and associated risk factors in Oman by focusing on treating high blood cholesterol cases.

The two sides target utilising advanced technologies and sharing best practices to develop innovative solutions related to improving the process of handling cardiovascular diseases.

Two arrested for posing as police officers, theft

Muscat - Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested two citizens on Wednesday on charges of impersonating police officers and theft in North Batinah.

An ROP official stated, 'North Batinah Governorate Police Command arrested two citizens for posing as police-

men and theft on Wednesday. The accused stopped farm workers and attempted to steal money in their possession.'

The accused have been referred to the judicial authorities to complete investigation of the case, the ROP official added.

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MOH No: 558/2023

2-week mosquito control campaign starts in Muscat

Our Correspondent Muscat

Muscat Municipality, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and other competent authorities, started a campaign on Wednesday to prevent the spread of mosquitoes, especially *Aedes Aegypti*, in the wilayats of Seeb, Muttrah and Bausher. The campaign will continue till May 28.

The municipality urged community members to allow task teams to enter homes, facilities and residential units so that they can conduct pest control operations.

'Muscat Municipality stresses the need to exert collective efforts to make this campaign a success, and calls on the public to join hands with work teams to achieve the ultimate goal of this campaign,' the civic body stated.

It added that these efforts stem from Muscat Municipality's obligation to maintain the health and safety of communities, combat sources of pathogens, and enhance awareness on preventing the spread of vector borne diseases.

The municipality called on all citizens and residents in North and South Mabelah, North and South Hail, South Mawaleh, Al Khoud, Sur al Hadid, and the wilayats of Muttrah and Bausher, to allow work teams into their



(Supplied photo)

homes from 7am to 11pm and 3pm to 6pm.

The campaign aims to prevent the spread of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito and its breeding sites through investigation and eradication programmes carried out on an ongoing basis.

Female *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes lay eggs in stagnant water, spreading diseases like dengue fever and yellow fever and the Zika virus.

The mosquito can be recognised by black and white markings on its legs and a marking in the form of a lyre on the upper surface of its thorax.

Dengue fever spreads through female *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes after they bite an infected person. The virus infects the mosquito's mid-gut and subsequently spreads to the salivary glands over a period of 8-12

days. After this incubation period, the virus can be transmitted to humans.

Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water, mostly in disposed containers left outdoors.

The Ministry of Health has urged people to take necessary steps to eliminate mosquito breeding sites by covering water tanks properly and cleaning these every five days. The ministry advised disposal of water from air conditioners, changing water of fountains and swimming pools every five days, and to monitor water reservoirs for agricultural purposes regularly.

It also advised changing water kept in containers for animals and birds every five days.

'Used tyres, empty cans and damaged household utensils should be disposed appropriately,' it further added.

Call for early midday break

Our Correspondent Muscat

With summer knocking on the door, the midday sun in the last few days has been unbearably hot. There is little relief for outdoor workers as the midday break hasn't officially started. Blue-collar workers, especially in the construction sector, say the mid-day break should start at least a month earlier.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, Oman's construction sector employs the largest number - 25 per cent - of expatriate workers. At the end of the first quarter of 2022, there were 373,184 workers.

On Tuesday, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) carried out a campaign to raise awareness on the policy of stopping work at construction sites and open areas during the midday break in summer months.

A statement issued by MoL said, 'The Directorate General of Labour in Muscat implemented an awareness campaign among



(Muscat Daily file photo)

I wish the midday break started earlier in May and is extended till the end of September

RAHUL KUMAR

business owners in the governorate on the policy of stopping work from 12.30pm until 3.30pm at construction sites in the months of June, July and August."

The three-month midday break for outdoor workers begins on June 1. Companies that do not comply face heavy fines.

Muscat Daily spoke with outdoor workers about the midday break starting a month earlier.

Firoz Khan, a construction worker currently engaged at a site in Mumtaz Area, said, "I have been in Oman for the last eight years and this year, I find the heat unbearable. Though it started a bit late - and we were lucky to have better and cool weather during Ramadan - the heat picked

up suddenly in the last few days this week. However, rather than an extra month by starting early, the midday break should be extended by one more hour."

Khan explained that most construction workers live far from their worksite. "Going and coming back will take up all the time. Also, it would be nice if there were more water taps in the city. The water we carry along becomes warm and it's expensive to buy water all the time from supermarkets."

Another worker Rahul Kumar said, "I wish the midday break started earlier in May and is extended till the end of September."

While thanking MoL for the midday break, Aslam Majid, who works at a construction site in Darsait, also said, "It should be extended by one more month because the last few weeks of summer are fierce. Also, can the government consider small rooms for us who cannot go home for the break? We just need a sitting room with AC and some water, like the taxi drivers' resting places."



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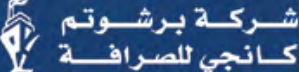
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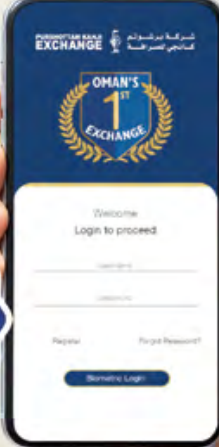
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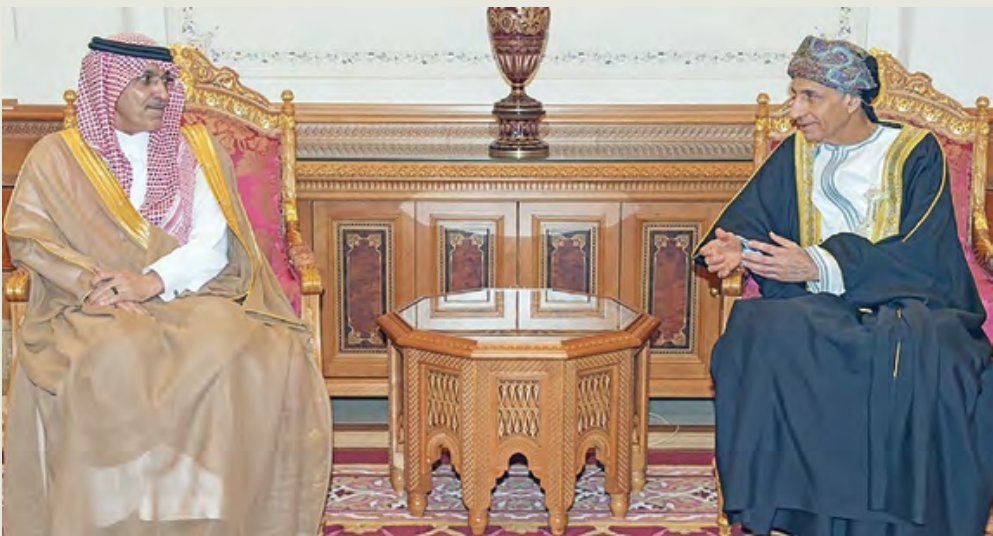
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Sayyid Fahd receives members leading GCC’s economic alliance

Muscat – H H Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received members of the GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee on Wednesday.

The members were in Muscat to take part in the committee’s 119th meeting hosted by Oman.

H H Sayyid Fahd expressed Oman’s appreciation for all efforts exerted in economic, investment and business fields that contribute to the march of joint GCC economic action. He



H H Sayyid Fahd expressed Oman’s appreciation for all efforts exerted in economic, investment and business fields that contribute to the march of joint GCC economic action

underscored the importance of issues addressed by the ministerial committee’s meeting and its role in enhancing joint GCC action to keep pace with developments of concern to the region.

The meeting reviewed the agenda of the committee’s meeting, including the process of completing the requirements for the GCC Customs Union and activating the GCC Common Market. It also discussed tackling challenges hindering the achievement of GCC unity and factors related to the programme of realising economic

unity among GCC states by 2025.

The members of the GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee thanked Oman for hosting the meeting and its sound preparation which resulted in reaching positive outcomes. They also lauded the constructive role of Oman in the GCC’s march to development.

The meeting was attended by H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and Jassim Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of GCC.

ONA

Dhofar governorate gearing up for khareef



Our Correspondent Muscat

With the khareef season around the corner, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has activated all its arms to prepare for the influx of tourists with all the necessary facilities in place.

The Directorate General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar governorate is taking the lead in making sure all preparations are complete before the onset of khareef, which officially starts from June 21 and lasts till September 21.

Jamal Abdullah al Hinai, Director General in Dhofar governorate, said that his department held an extensive meeting with a number of government agencies and concerned private sector institutions in the governorate to prepare in advance.

“Matters related to the provi-



Matters related to the provision of commodities, foodstuff, bank services, and raising the efficiency of fuel station services were discussed

JAMAL ABDULLAH AL HINAI

sion of commodities, foodstuff, bank services, and raising the efficiency of fuel station services were discussed.”

The directorate coordinated with commercial banks in the governorate to carry out necessary maintenance of automatic

teller machines (ATM) and deposit machines in markets, malls and commercial centres, to ensure their smooth and uninterrupted operations.

Salalah enjoys a massive influx of tourists during the khareef season, the most pleasing weather condition that no other region in the GCC and beyond experiences.

The number of tourists landing in Salalah Airport during the three months of khareef season in 2022 was 463,848, an increase of 46 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

“The airport saw flights, both incoming and outgoing, during khareef in 2022 increase to 3,385, up 49 per cent compared to 2021,” said an official at Salalah Airport, adding that the month of August witnessed the maximum flights operating to and from the airport. The number of flights per week averaged 352 during that month.

GCC meeting deliberates on joint action for economic integration

Muscat - The Gulf Cooperation Council’s (GCC) economic coordination team on Wednesday discussed the importance of having a joint action at the regional level to achieve the desired economic integration.

H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Oman’s Minister of Finance, underscored the importance of unifying efforts and boosting joint GCC economic action in a bid to achieve the desired economic integration.

He raised this agenda during the 119th GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee meeting held in Muscat under his chairmanship.

The meeting dealt with several issues related to joint financial and economic cooperation and the GCC Common Market.

H E Habsi prioritised the acti-



vation of financial and economic agreements between GCC states to press ahead with achieving the council’s common goals that may catapult economic and social growth of the region.

Jassim Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary General of the GCC, lauded the sultanate’s

“support to the march of joint GCC action”.

He also acknowledged with gratitude Oman’s efforts in promoting GCC’s cooperation for stronger integration of resources in different spheres.

The meeting also discussed a number of submitted proposals and took necessary decisions.

Over 15,000 citizens register for job rotation programme on Ejada platform

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced that 15,563 government employees have registered for the job rotation programme to date.

A statement issued by the ministry said that the job rotation scheme is open till May 25 for workers in government units through the Ejada platform. ‘Employees must complete their profile and include an updated

CV in order to be able to apply for the offered opportunities. For support and assistance, log on to www.ejada.om,’ it stated.

An MoL official informed that job rotation is a management strategy in which employees are shifted between departments on assignments at regular intervals to make them versatile within an organisation. It helps in testing employee skills to assign them tasks in line with competencies besides reducing monotony of job. According to the official, job ro-

tation is poised to be part of the future vision of the sultanate, which seeks to build an innovative administrative apparatus and be a generator of opportunities.

He said that the initiative has several benefits for society, including improving the quality of government services by raising efficiency of human capital, achieving administrative reforms, preparing empowered leaders, and raising institutional performance by exchanging government competencies.

RAFO MARKS GRADUATION OF NEW BATCH OF RECRUITS



The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) celebrated the graduation of a new batch of recruits at the military parade ground of Ghala Air base and Sultan Qaboos Air Academy on Wednesday after completion of their military training and qualification process. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Major General Matar bin Ali al Obaidani. The graduation ceremony was attended by a number of senior RAFO officers, commissioned and non-commissioned officers and the parents of the graduates

(ONA)

Ahli Bank gets revised offer for merger with BankDhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

BankDhofar, Oman's second-largest lender in terms of assets, has presented a revised non-binding merger offer to its smaller rival Ahli Bank just a day after an Ominvest-led consortium expressed its intentions to bid for Ahli Bank.

On April 10, the board of directors of BankDhofar initially submitted a non-binding offer to Ahli Bank's board to explore the possibility of a merger between the two banks. However, Ahli Bank's board promptly rejected the proposal from BankDhofar the following day.

In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Wednesday, BankDhofar said, "We believe that a combination of BankDhofar and Ahli Bank is a compelling opportunity for Ahli Bank shareholders."

Acknowledging the announcement made by the Ominvest-led consortium regarding its plan to make an offer for the entire issued share capital of Ahli Bank, BankDhofar said, "Our commitment to proceed with our



revised offer remains unchanged, and we look forward to further engagement with the Ahli Bank board."

BankDhofar added, "Any transaction, should it proceed, is subject to obtaining approvals from the relevant regulators and respective boards of directors and shareholders of BankDhofar and Ahli Bank. Further announcement will be made if and when appropriate."

Ahli Bank, in a separate disclosure, confirmed the receipt of BankDhofar's revised non-binding merger offer.

"The board of directors of the bank will study the revised non-binding offer, and any material developments in this regard will be announced in due course,"

Ahli Bank said.

Regarding the announcement made by the Ominvest-led consortium, Ahli Bank noted that its board of directors is considering the letter of intent received from Ominvest.

"The board will make the relevant disclosures in due course in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations. Further details will be disclosed by the bank upon its receipt of Ominvest's written formal offer," Ahli Bank added.

Ominvest on Tuesday announced that it is planning to lead a consortium that will make an offer to acquire the entire issued share capital of Ahli Bank. It said the offer will be made by certain entities separately con-

trolled by Ominvest and Arab Bank (consortium), adding that certain other investors have also expressed their desire to join the consortium.

Ominvest stated that the consortium would act as a committed anchor investor, supporting Ahli Bank's growth and providing strategic direction.

According to Ominvest's disclosure, the consortium will make a cash offer of 185bz per share (base offer price) for Ahli Bank. The base offer price represents a premium of approximately 28 per cent over Ahli Bank's average one-year market price of 144bz and an 8 per cent premium compared to the closing stock price for Ahli Bank as of March 31, 2023.

Omani fintech firm Mamun gets crowdfunding license

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Mamun, a leading Omani financial technology (fintech) firm, announced that it has received a full crowdfunding license from the Capital Market Authority (CMA). Mamun has also received pre-approval for a PSP (Payment Service Provider) license from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

These significant regulatory milestones reinforce Mamun's commitment to providing cutting-edge fintech infrastructure capabilities to a diverse range of third-party systems, the firm said in a statement.

As a fintech infrastructure-as-a-service provider, Mamun offers a proprietary technology platform that empowers telecom companies, banks, and large startups with the tools and capabilities necessary to roll out fintech services and products.

"We are thrilled to have been granted the full crowdfunding license by the CMA and a pre-approval for the PSP license by the CBO," said Mohammed al Tamami, co-founder and chief commercial officer of Mamun. He said, "These licenses from



Mohammed al Tamami

the regulators are a testament to our commitment to delivering state-of-the-art fintech infrastructure and comprehensive solutions. We are excited to expand our offerings and partner with industry leaders like Fasset to shape the future of finance."

Mamun is the first-of-its-kind home-grown tech company that has exported its technology beyond Oman. The company's technology is currently licensed by the likes of Foodics in Saudi Arabia, a unicorn valued at over a billion dollars.

According to Tamami, building on its success, Mamun now aims to leverage its comprehensive payment technology and

crowdfunding expertise to deliver holistic financial, investing, and payment products to businesses and investors. "By integrating these two powerful technologies, Mamun is poised to revolutionise the fintech landscape by offering seamless, end-to-end solutions," he said.

Mamun recently announced a strategic partnership with Fasset, a renowned innovator in the fintech field. This collaboration aims to co-create advanced products that further enhance Mamun's holistic approach to fintech services. By combining their respective strengths and expertise, Mamun and Fasset strive to drive innovation, accessibility, and convenience in the financial industry.

Tamami noted that Mamun continues to pioneer advancements in the fintech space, empowering businesses, investors, and end-users with secure, efficient, and transformative financial solutions.

"With the full crowdfunding license and pre-approval for the PSP license, Mamun is well-positioned to lead the industry's digital transformation and foster a thriving fintech ecosystem in Oman," he added.

NBO's Muzn Islamic Banking signs wakala agreement with Oman Air

Muscat - National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window, Muzn, has signed a term wakala agreement with national carrier Oman Air, providing long-term financing to secure assets with Shariah-compliant financial solutions.

Salima al Marzouqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said, "We are proud to support the development of Oman's national carrier, Oman Air, and provide the flexible financial options required in this rapidly changing market. This year Muzn marked its 10-year anniversary and we will continue unleashing new potential in Oman's corporate sec-



Salima al Marzouqi

tor by proactively making connections. We have made banking simple and easy, and built around the needs of our customers so that they can achieve

their goals while ensuring the financial solutions adhere to our ethical practices."

As the first Islamic banking window in Oman, Muzn Islamic Banking has been at the forefront of innovative solutions in Oman's Islamic finance sector for more than a decade.

By remaining true to their roots, Muzn has delivered the best banking experience without compromise by introducing a growing range of Islamic banking services based around the needs of customers and providing intuitive banking with convenient, Shari'a-compliant banking products that are accessible to all.

QatarEnergy awards \$10bn gas contract to Technip Energies, CCC

Doha, Qatar - QatarEnergy said it awarded a contract worth about US\$10bn to a joint venture of France's Technip Energies and Consolidated Contractors Company, in the Gulf emirate's latest major gas deal.

The state-owned hydrocarbon giant said the contract was for the engineering, procurement and construction of the North Field South (NFS) project.

It put the value of the deal at "around US\$10bn" and said its "scope covers the construction of two mega" liquefied natural gas trains with a combined capacity of 16 million tonnes per year.

"Technip holds a comfortable majority of the capital," a source close to the French company told AFP. Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC) is a global engineering and construction firm.

The LNG trains, together with further expansion of North Field East (NFE), would boost Qatar's total production 126mn tonnes per year from 77mn tonnes, QatarEnergy said.

NFS and NFE form the wider North Field Expansion project to increase Qatar's LNG production by 60 per cent to 126mn tonnes a year by 2027.

The North Field contains the world's biggest natural gas reserves and extends under the Gulf into Iranian territory.

QatarEnergy said it holds a 75



per cent interest in the NFS project and has already signed partnership agreements with TotalEnergies, Shell and ConocoPhillips for the remaining 25 per cent.

Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi, who is also QatarEnergy's chief, called the latest deal "another significant milestone in the world's largest LNG project".

He said the project would focus on carbon capture and storage (CCS) to minimise its overall carbon footprint.

"It includes one of the largest CO2 capture and sequestration facilities," Kaabi said.

It "constitutes an important step towards achieving QatarEnergy's target of more than 11 MTPA of CO2 capture and sequestration by 2035".

According to Technip, the

CCS facility would lead to "25 per cent-plus reduction of greenhouse gas emissions when compared to similar LNG facilities".

Asian countries led by China, Japan and South Korea have been the main market for Qatar's gas, but it has been increasingly targeted by European countries since Russia's war on Ukraine threw supplies into doubt.

In November, Qatar announced its first major deal to send liquefied natural gas to Germany.

Up to two million tonnes of gas a year would be sent for at least 15 years from 2026, Kaabi said at the time.

That same month, QatarEnergy announced a 27-year natural gas supply deal with China, calling it the "longest" ever seen.

The state energy company said it would send four million

tonnes of liquefied natural gas annually from the North Field East project to China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec).

Qatar is one of the world's top LNG producers, alongside the United States, Australia and Russia.

QatarEnergy estimates the North Field holds about 10 per cent of the world's known natural gas reserves.

The offshore reserves extend over the maritime border with Iran, whose efforts to exploit its adjacent South Pars field have been hindered by US sanctions.

Qatar's gas is among the cheapest to produce and has fuelled an economic boom in the tiny Gulf emirate, which is now one of the world's wealthiest countries.

AFP

Iran, Russia sign deal to complete major commercial transport network

Tehran, Iran - Iran and Russia agreed Wednesday to collaborate on the construction of the final part of a commercial transport network linking to the Gulf and India while avoiding Western sea lanes.

Iranian Transport Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash, who signed the agreement with his Russian counterpart in Tehran, said the 164km railway in Iran's north would be completed within three years.

It is the only missing link in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) from northeast Russia via Azerbaijan to Iran's southern coastline and on to India by sea.

Russia and Iran are both under international sanctions that restrict trade.

The freight network of ship, rail and road routes, which covers some 7,200 kilometres, avoids the Suez Canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea which would otherwise transport some Russian seaborne cargo.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who attended the signing ceremony, and Russia's Vladimir Putin, who spoke there via videoconference, both hailed the economic opportunities the agreement presents.

The planned railroad would



This photo shows Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (right) and Russian President Vladimir Putin attending via video conference the signing of an agreement (AFP)

connect Rasht, a city in northern Iran, and the Astara crossing on the border with Azerbaijan.

Bazrpash said the "process of construction" of the Rasht-Astara railway "has started and we will finalise it within the next three years". Raisi said that, once completed, the INSTC will boost regional trade and noted the "great potential" in ties with Russia.

The latest agreement is "an important strategic step on the path of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation", he said. Putin praised the "obvious economic benefits" for both Moscow and Tehran in the form of new jobs and investments.

"This unique north-south transport artery, of which the Rasht-Astara railway will be a

part, will help significantly diversify international transport flows," Putin said.

"The transportation of goods through the new corridor will have a significant competitive advantage," he argued.

"The delivery of goods from Saint Petersburg (in Russia) to Mumbai (in India) will take about 10 days, compared to the journey through traditional trade routes that takes 30 to 45 days."

Putin said Russia and Iran "attach paramount importance to strengthening their economic and trade ties" as well as their bilateral relations in general.

Moscow has come under punishing Western sanctions since its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

AFP

UBS sees \$35bn gain from Credit Suisse deal

Geneva, Switzerland - Switzerland's biggest bank, UBS, expects to get a nearly US\$35bn boost from its acquisition of fallen rival Credit Suisse, according to a regulatory filing with US authorities.

Under pressure from Swiss authorities concerned about the possible collapse of Credit Suisse, UBS agreed to buy the troubled lender for US\$3.25bn in the hastily-arranged deal in March.

UBS said in documents filed

with the US Securities and Exchange Commission that the purchase will result in "negative goodwill" - a term meaning that the price paid to buy a company is significantly lower than its fair market value, producing a gain for the buyer.

UBS put the figure at US\$34.8 billion, a gain that will be noted in the second-quarter books of the mega-bank that will emerge once the deal is completed.

AFP

إعلان تعديل الشكل القانوني

استناداً لأحكام المادة 31 مكرر من قانون الشركات 18/ 2019 وتعديلاته تعلن شركة (دار البراق للتجارة والمقيدة بأمانة السجل التجاري تحت رقم 1109431 أنها بصدد تعديل شكلها القانوني من شركة (تاجر فرد) الي شركة الشخص الواحد)

وكل من له اعتراض علي ذلك عليه ان يتقدم بأسباب اعتراضه لأمانة السجل التجاري بوزارة التجارة والصناعة وتنمية الاستثمار بمسقط خلال شهر (30يوما) من تاريخ نشر هذا الاعلاه

MoE training focuses on media dealing skills

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is organising a training programme on 'Official Spokesperson and Media Dealing Skills' for directors of the Directorates-General in the ministry's General Diwan and in the governorates.

The three-day programme, being organised by the Training and Qualification Department of the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs, began on Wednesday at W Hotel Muscat.

The programme includes practical training and intensive practical exercises that help participants develop their abilities in public communication and public speaking.

The ministry appointed concerned and responsible persons to familiarise themselves with the basics and rules of dealing with the media in real circumstances, and simulates the management of permits, conferences, television, radio, and press interviews.

In addition, the programme provides the participants with a lot of skills related to understanding media tools and the media in general and reviews the Omani experience in the media and local laws and compares them with international media. It also reviews various types of press events that involve official



spokespersons in the Sultanate of Oman.

"This programme comes to introduce many skills and mechanisms of official speaking in front of the public and the various media while making a media statement, so that a spokesperson's message reaches the public (the listener and the viewer) in a clearer, more accurate and credible way, drawn from their

true source," said Saif al Abdali, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in Buraimi governorate.

Talal al Adawi, Assistant Director-General of the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs for Human Resources Development, said that the 'spokesperson programme' comes within the professional development plan of the Ministry

of Education for administrative staff, which is supervised by the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs.

"The Ministry of Education contracted with Al Jazeera Media Corporation to implement this programme, which developed several themes that included providing the trainees with the basics and skills that distinguish the official

spokesperson in order to deliver the achievements and the institution's message to the public in a clear and precise matter."

Dr Salwa al Qasabi, Director of the Individual Performance Measurement System Office at the Ministry confirmed that this programme is "a qualitative experience for the official who is in a position of responsibility to help in the scope of dealings

with different groups of the public, and to enable the spokesperson to acquire the arts of dialogue with the public and the mechanism of dealing with it and with the various media means".

"The official needs to show the Ministry's efforts in the correct manner and in a way that befits the efforts of this ministry. The method of presenting the

topic differs qualitatively for those who possess these ingredients and capabilities in the presentation, the most important of which is the method of choosing vocabulary, the method of dealing with the camera, reactions, and questions."

Dr Intisar Ambosaidi, Director-General of the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers, said, "When making an official statement to the various media, whether through press statements, telephone interviews, or television interviews, the official spokesperson represents the institution and conveys its message to the public, so this programme came to enhance the skills of the official spokesperson by focusing on body language and choosing appropriate vocabulary and language for the audience.

"It has also been emphasized on that the spokesperson's argument is supported by evidence, statistics, results, and research studies, and seizes the appropriate opportunity to show the positive image and deliver the messages to reflect about the organization as it is an opportunity to promote the organisation and refute any misinformation or any incorrect ideas that may have spread."



Indian Ambassador inaugurates Lulu's Mango Mania Festival

The much-anticipated Lulu Hypermarket Mango Mania Festival began on Wednesday offering its customers to experience 'a journey down memory lane'.

The mango fest, which will continue till May 27, is organised every year for customers to indulge in 'a burst of juicy goodness in summer', a press release stated.

The festival was inaugurated by H E Amit Narang, the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, at Lulu Hypermarket Bausher, in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture, Lulu staff and customers.

"India with its extensive varieties of mangoes, is a food lovers delight. Mango Mania, Lulu's annual event has showcased not only mangoes but several other mango delicacies, which I am sure will delight the citizens of Oman," said H E Narang while inaugurating the event.

From the common to the

rarest, more than 60 varieties of the luscious tropical fruit from different parts of the world will be on display during the festival. Lulu has flown in mangoes from across the world, namely India, Yemen, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Kenya, Uganda, and, not to forget, local delicacies from Oman.

There will also be amazing deals and offers on freshly imported selection of mangoes. Customers will also be able to relish some of the special mango treats in the hot food, bakery, sweets and pickles section. Special mango preserves, smoothies, pulps, juices, and jams will also be available during the promotion.

"Lulu is happy to organise Mango Mania Fest, which has become a popular event among our customers over the years, especially for lovers of this exotic fruit," said Shabeer K A, regional director - Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman.

"It is a unique opportunity for

shoppers to experience the best varieties of the sweet, succulent, refreshing and mouth-watering mangoes and mango products flown in from different parts of the world. We hope this fest would be a treat for the customers looking for a burst of juicy goodness this summer."

"Like every year, we have stacked up our aisles with a wide range of delicious mangoes from countries all over the world for this year's fest. Each variety of mango has its own distinctive taste, texture, aroma, colour and size, making it suitable for consumers of all ages and nationalities," he added.

Lulu constantly brings in innovative strategies and ideas to keep up with customers' changing preferences and needs for every season and occasion. With a leading retail experience that includes the very best services, selection, quality, and value, shopping at Lulu has always been an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

MoH organises workshop on importance of health information management

The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Oman College of Health Sciences and government health institutions, organised a workshop on the 'Importance of Health Information Management in Health Care' at the Sultan Qaboos Great Mosque Workshop in Muscat on Wednesday.

The event was attended by Dr Abdullah al Muniri, advisor of the Ministry of Health for Public Health; director general and directors of hospitals, representatives and participants

from the military, governmental and private medical institutions.

Welcoming the guests and participants, Abdullah al Hinai, Director of the Health Data Registration and Management, said that the Department of Health Data Registration and Management in the General Directorate of Planning and Studies worked on conducting this workshop and ensuring broad participation from the health sector at the national level to raise awareness, share

developments and benefit from various experiences and successful initiatives in this field.

"The great leaps that are taking place in the field of health care and treatment services and their improvement in the Sultanate of Oman are a source of pride for medical personnel and qualified institutions in this sector.

Therefore, these efforts should be documented and highlighted through continuous training courses and work-

shops to develop this vital sector," he added.

The workshop aimed to introduce the developments related to health information management, promoting the scientific aspect of documenting the causes of death, and keep pace with regional and international trends in focusing on the quality of health information and its impact on care indicators, as well as to ensure the accuracy and realism of data collected from various health institutions.

Bank Muscat to participate in 32nd edition of COMEX

In line with its commitment to promote digitalisation, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its participation in the 32nd edition of COMEX to be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from May 22 to May 25.

As the largest Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation show in Oman, COMEX 2023 offers exhibitors and visitors a comprehensive and highly-specialised platform for industry-leading discussions, knowledge-sharing and B2B meetings and the bank's participation and support are in line with its role in strengthening national development and digitalisation of the economy.

Organised by Oman International Trade and Exhibitions (OITE) Group in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the implementation follow-up unit of Oman Vision 2040, COMEX 2023 aims to boost the concept of digital investments in Oman.

It encourages Omani companies to adapt the latest technological breakthroughs and advances in a manner that is consistent with Oman Vision 2040's goals supportive to digital transformation.

Bank Muscat has been witnessing a remarkable rise in e-channels usage over the past two years. Today, over 1.6mn retail banking customers are using various features like real-time bill payments for utilities in Oman, fund transfers within the bank and in Oman, fund transfers across the world via the SWIFT network; speed transfers to a number of countries including Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka; Zakat calculator and charity payments.

Bill payment facility is available for a variety of utility services such as electricity, water, telecom, mobile top ups, instant credit card bill payments, school payments etc. Internet banking and the mBanking app also allow customers to disable or enable their debit card for international usage adding an extra layer of security for the benefit of customers.



Customers can also update their KYC details online and benefit from the different services provided by the new Self-service Kiosks.

Bank Muscat also has contactless payment options for shopping and payments through its various debit, credit and prepaid cards as well as contactless wearables. Today, customers are able to transact quickly and securely 24x7 via mobile banking, Internet banking, the contact centre and also the bank's large network of over 800 ATMs/CDMs and other devices across the country.

The bank is continuously working to bring the benefits of digitalisation to its corporate and government customers too through a number of initiatives. Its processes and technology are designed to drive prospective corporate transaction requirements and ensure future readiness of the corporates to adapt and become an agile, resilient and digitally mature organisation.

The bank is offering cutting edge digital solutions, which includes 'Integrated Transaction Banking Platform' that offers various digital solutions and a unified experience for the corporates, institutions and SMEs to ensure ease of operations.

Turkey's opposition plots fightback

Kilicdaroglu huddled with the heads of his alliance to plot a harder-edged strategy

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey's opposition tried on Wednesday to recover from a crushingly disappointing election performance and launch a new attack aimed at beating President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a May 28 runoff.

Secular leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu huddled with the other five heads of his alliance on Wednesday to plot a harder-edged strategy for ending Erdogan's two-decade domination of Turkey.

Media reports said he had fired his PR team and planned to tap Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu - a feisty figure with a history of bad blood with Erdogan - to spearhead his campaign.

The reported promotion of Imamoglu and the mayor's lauded strategist Canan Kaftancoglu marks a reversal for Turkey's grandfatherly opposition leader.

The 74-year-old former civil servant tried to run an inclusive campaign that addressed voters in chatty clips recorded from his kitchen and ignored Erdogan's personal barbs.

That approach worked - up to a point. The opposition deprived Erdogan of a first-round victory for the first time and collected more votes than in any point of



Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP) chairman and presidential candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu waves as he leaves after voting in the presidential and parliamentary elections, in Ankara, Turkey, on May 14 (AFP)

his rule.

But Kilicdaroglu's 44.9 per cent still trailed Erdogan's 49.5 per cent of the votes. Pre-election polls showed Kilicdaroglu leading and possibly even winning outright last Sunday.

Kilicdaroglu's fightback began with a video on Tuesday in which he stared straight into the camera and slapped his desk a few times after banging his heart with his fist.

"I am here! I am here!" he shouted. "I am here!"

'Slight deficiencies'

Erdogan looked far more relaxed as he assessed his performance on late-night television on Tuesday. The 69-year-old conceded that his Islamic-rooted party had lost a few seats in parliament and suffered from 'slight deficiencies'.

Provisional results showed his

conservative alliance's share falling from 333 to 322 in the 600-seat parliament.

"Unfortunately, my party suffered some declines, there is a slight deficiency," Erdogan said in the interview.

"We need to make our preparations to eliminate them. We will do our internal accounting and take the necessary steps."

It was a rare admission for Turkey's longest-serving leader.

But he spoke in measured tones befitting an incumbent who is entering the second round as the overwhelming favourite.

The remaining votes went to a little-known ultra-nationalist who has much more in common with the right-wing Erdogan than the leftist Kilicdaroglu.

Erdogan said he would visit

Imamoglu and Ankara mayor Mansur Yavas beat out Erdogan's allies in 2019 municipal polls. The campaign's second stage is being accompanied by Turkish market turmoil that has seen the lira near historic lows against the dollar.

Investors are starting to price in an Erdogan victory and the long-term continuation of his unconventional economic policies.

The cost of insuring exposure to Turkey's debt is rising out of fears that the country's once-vibrant banking sector could soon experience serious difficulties.

Erdogan's decision to force Turkey's central bank to fight historically high inflation with lower interest rates has put unprecedented pressure on the lira.

Analysts believe Erdogan tried to prop up the lira ahead of elections through indirect market interventions that drained Turkey's hard currency reserves.

His government also introduced rules that required banks to purchase more and more liras with their foreign currencies.

Some analysts warn Turkey might have to impose capital controls if Erdogan - who has pledged to keep interest rates low as long as he remains in office - does not reverse course.

AFP

My party suffered some declines, there is a slight deficiency. We need to make our preparations to eliminate them

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN

UN urges \$3bn urgent aid for Sudan, refugees



Smoke billows in Khartoum on Wednesday, as clashes continue in war-torn Sudan (AFP)

Geneva, Switzerland - The United Nations on Wednesday said US\$3.03bn would be needed to provide urgent aid in conflict-ravaged Sudan and for over one million expected to flee into neighbouring countries this year.

Needs have soared since a bloody conflict erupted in Sudan last month, the UN said, dramatically revising up its response plan.

"Today, 25mn people - more than half the population of Sudan - needs humanitarian aid and protection," Ramesh Rajasingham, head of the UN humanitarian agency's Geneva bureau, told reporters. "That is the highest number we have ever seen in the country."

Battles erupted on April 15 between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who leads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Around 1,000 people have been killed, in and around Khartoum and the ravaged state of West Darfur, according to medics.

More than 5,000 people have been injured and millions more remain confined to their homes, unable to access basic services and health care, Rajasingham said.

He also pointed to 'worrying reports of increased sexual violence', and warned 'children are especially vulnerable in this chaos that is unfolding'.

The fighting has deepened the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, where one in three already relied on assistance before the war.

'Regional crisis'

The UN said US\$2.56bn is now expected to be needed to provide assistance inside Sudan - up from US\$1.75bn estimated at the end of last year.

Those funds will allow aid agencies to reach 18mn of the most vulnerable people inside the country, Rajasingham said.

He lamented that the humanitarian community had suffered numerous attacks, with aid workers killed, offices and stockpiles looted.

He voiced hope that an agreement reached by the two sides last week to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure and to let in badly needed aid was having some effect. He said fighters had pulled back from some of the health facilities previously occupied and highlighted an uptick in aid deliveries, but added: "We do need much more."

"The crisis in Sudan is rapidly evolving into a regional crisis."

The UN refugee agency said US\$470.4mn would be needed to assist those fleeing the country and it was now planning for up to 1.1mn people to leave Sudan this year.

Just two weeks ago, UNHCR had said it would need US\$445mn through October to address the needs of as many as 860,000 people who might flee.

"So far, the crisis... resulted in massive outflows into neighbouring countries of about 220,000 refugees and returnees," Raouf Mazou, assistant chief of operations at the UN refugee agency UNHCR told reporters.

AFP

ALL SET FOR SUMMIT



A man rides a bicycle past an installation for the China-Central Asia Summit along a street in Xian, in central China's Shaanxi province on Wednesday, one day ahead of the summit (AFP)

Syria's Assad to end exile from Arab League

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is expected to end his 12-year exile from the Arab League this week at a summit in Saudi Arabia, which championed his return over the objections of other regional leaders.

Assad's invitation to Friday's summit in Jeddah signals his return to the fold after more than a decade of isolation since his government's brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests in 2011 triggered a war that has killed more than 500,000 people.

Analysts say it also shows the clout of Saudi Arabia, which is casting itself as a peacemaker and asserting itself in multiple crises across the Middle East.

Beyond rekindling ties with the Assad government, the summit is expected to devote energy to two conflicts: the month-old showdown between two generals in Sudan and the eight-year-old civil war in Yemen. It is taking place in the same city where representatives of the two Sudanese camps have been locked in negotiations for a week and a half brokered by Saudi and US officials.

In Yemen, meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is pushing for a peace deal with Iran-backed Huthis after



This file photo shows Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi meeting at the presidential palace in Damascus early this month (AFP)

eight years at the helm of a military coalition that failed to defeat them on the battlefield.

Neither initiative has yielded a major breakthrough so far, but Saudi op-ed writers and analysts are bullish. "The Jeddah summit is one of the most important summits for a long time because it will rebuild the Arab region in a way that relies on shared interests and turns challenges into opportunities," said Saudi political commentator Suleiman al-Aqili.

"If the summit is able to reintegrate Syria into the Arab system and take a strong position on the

conflict in Sudan and Yemen, it will be successful."

Wave of reconciliation

Recent diplomatic shifts were accelerated by a surprise Chinese-brokered normalisation deal with Iran announced on March 10.

Less than two weeks later, Saudi Arabia announced it had begun talks on resuming consular services with Iran ally Syria, the first public step in a rapprochement that has since seen the countries' foreign ministers exchange visits.

Yet Assad's presence in Jeddah

on Friday does not guarantee progress on resolving Syria's brutal war.

In areas of northwestern Syria that remain under rebel control, there have been repeated mass protests against Assad's return to the Arab fold. Nor is it clear that the pan-Arab body can extract concessions on issues like the fate of Syrian refugees or the surging captagon trade.

"It's important to remember that Assad's return to the Arab League is a symbolic measure to begin the process of ending his regional isolation," said Anna Ja-

IN BRIEF

Nine migrants found dead in Tunisia

Tunis, Tunisia - The bodies of nine migrants from sub-Saharan African countries have been found in western Tunisia, near the border with Algeria, in recent days, a judicial official told AFP on Wednesday.

Tunisia, whose coastline is less than 150km (90 miles) from the Italian island of Lampedusa, has long been a favoured stepping stone for migrants attempting the perilous sea journey from North Africa to Europe.

The bodies have been discovered in the mountains near Haidra, a town in Kasserine province, and authorities have launched an investigation that would include autopsies 'to determine the cause of death', said Riadh Nwiwi, spokesman for the Kasserine court.

Wanted Emirati extradited from Jordan

Dubai, UAE - An Emirati man has been extradited from Jordan to the UAE, state media said on Wednesday, 10 years after he was sentenced in absentia for alleged affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Khalaf Al Rumaithi, a joint Emirati-Turkish citizen according to rights groups, was described as a 'terrorist' by the United Arab Emirates' official WAM news agency, which said he was facing a retrial.

In 2013, Rumaithi was sentenced to 15 years' jail by the UAE's Federal Supreme Court for 'establishing a secret organisation affiliated with the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood', WAM said.

At least 30 killed in clashes in Nigeria

Jos, Nigeria - More than 30 people have been killed in clashes between herders and farmers in central Nigeria's Plateau State.

The region, on the dividing line between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and mainly Christian south, has for years struggled with ethnic and religious violence. "The incident has affected more than 30 people," said Plateau State Commissioner of Information and Communication Dan Manjang.

AFP

Kim inspects North Korea's first spy satellite: State media

Seoul, South Korea - Leader Kim Jong Un has inspected North Korea's first military spy satellite and gave the go-ahead for its 'future action plan', state media said on Wednesday.

Kim met with the Non-permanent Satellite Launch Preparatory Committee on Tuesday before viewing the satellite, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

A month ago, Kim said construction of the satellite was completed and gave the green light for its launch.

That report on April 18 came about a week after Pyongyang launched what it said was a new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile, marking a major breakthrough in its banned weapons programmes.

Analysts have said there is significant technological overlap between the development of ICBMs and space launch capabilities. On Tuesday, 'after acquainting himself in detail with the work of the committee, (Kim) inspected the military reconnaissance satellite No. 1, which is ready for loading after undergoing the final general assembly check and space environment test', KCNA said.

Kim accused the United States and South Korea of escalating what he called 'confrontational moves' against the North and said his country will exercise



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his daughter, presumed to be named Ju Ae, meeting with the Non-permanent Satellite Launch Preparatory Committee and inspecting a military reconnaissance satellite, at an undisclosed location in North Korea on Tuesday (AFP)

A month ago, Kim Jong Un said construction of the satellite was completed and gave the green light for its launch

its right to self-defence.

Kim then 'approved the future action plan of the preparatory committee', KCNA added.

The development of a military

reconnaissance satellite was one of the key defence projects outlined by Kim in 2021.

In December 2022, North Korea said it had carried out an 'important final-stage test' for the development of a spy satellite, which it said it would complete by April this year.

At the time, experts in South Korea quickly raised doubts about the results, saying the quality of black-and-white images released by North Korea - purportedly taken from a satellite - was poor.

Pyongyang has not provided a

launch date, though last month Kim said the satellite would be sent up 'at the planned date'.

North Korea declared itself an 'irreversible' nuclear power last year, effectively ending the possibility of denuclearisation talks.

Pyongyang would struggle to do satellite reconnaissance with its own technology and without high tech help from Russia or China, analysts say.

Still, 'since North Korea's reconnaissance satellites are an important factor in the event of a nuclear pre-emptive strike, they

pose a significant threat to the South', Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, told AFP last month.

Washington and Seoul have ramped up defence cooperation in response, staging joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and high-profile US strategic assets.

North Korea views such exercises as rehearsals for invasion and described them as 'frantic' drills 'simulating an all-out war against' Pyongyang.

AFP



A car is seen in a flooded supermarket area after heavy rains caused major floodings in Italy on Wednesday (AFP)

Five dead after flooding in northern Italy

Cesena, Italy - Five people died and thousands were evacuated from their homes after heavy rains caused devastation across Italy's northern Emilia Romagna region, while this weekend's Imola Grand Prix was cancelled, officials said on Wednesday.

"The city is on its knees, devastated and in pain," said Gian Luca Zattini, the mayor of Forlì, a city near Bologna where three people died. "It's the end of the world."

Two of the bodies in Forlì were recovered by divers on Wednesday morning, as part of a huge rescue effort involving emergency services and the armed forces.

"Overall in Forlì there were three victims, one in Cesena and one in Cesenatico," which could be a German man previously reported missing, a local authority official told AFP.

Emilia Romagna, which is one of Italy's richest regions, had already been hit by heavy rain just a fortnight ago, causing floods that left two dead.

This time, around 50 centimetres (20 inches) of rain fell within 36 hours in Forlì, Cesena and Ravenna - around half the normal annual rainfall, a situation 'with few precedents', Civil Protection Minister Nello Musumeci said.

"It is still a very critical situation," he told reporters, adding that while the rain was still falling, it was expected to lighten during the day.

The flooding caused the cancellation of the Formula One Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, which had been due to take place in Imola on Sunday.

Organisers said they could not guarantee the safety of fans, teams and staff.

"It would not be right to put further pressure on the local authorities and emergency services

at this difficult time," they said.

'We're scared'

Rescue workers had worked through the night to save children, the elderly and the disabled from the rising waters.

"We're scared, this time we're scared," said Simona Matassoni, the owner of the Hotel Savio in Cesena, which has so far escaped flooding.

"I was born here, I've seen lots of full rivers, but never anything like this," she told AFP by telephone, adding that it was still raining.

"At the moment we're crossing our fingers... but another flood is expected, so who knows (what will happen)."

Musumeci said an estimated 4,000 people had been evacuated from their homes, while

We're scared, this time we're scared... I was born here, I've seen lots of full rivers, but never anything like this

SIMONA MATASSONI

around 50,000 people were without electricity.

All the rivers in the region had broken their banks between Tuesday and Wednesday, and 24 local authorities reported flooding.

The civil protection agency urged 'maximum caution', as mayors warned people to stay on high ground.

In Forlì, an AFP photographer saw people in a state of shock late on Tuesday, fleeing through floodwaters in the dark in their bare feet.

AFP

NZ police say arson suspected in deadly hostel fire

Wellington, New Zealand - An arsonist may have ignited the hostel blaze that killed at least six people in New Zealand's capital, police said on Wednesday, as they opened a homicide investigation.

Smoke and flames engulfed the 92-room, four-storey Loafers Lodge in Wellington in the early hours of Tuesday, sending residents fleeing for their lives.

Some survivors crawled through smoke to safety, while others were rescued from the rooftop by firefighters using ladder trucks.

Those who died still lie in the charred building.

"I can confirm that we are treating the fire as arson," police inspector and acting district com-



Firefighters inspect the Loafers Lodge hostel where a fire broke out a day earlier in the suburb of Newtown in Wellington on Wednesday (AFP)

mander Dion Bennett told reporters, declining to give the full reasons.

"It is being treated as a homicide investigation."

Police have a list of people they want to speak to, he added, but no one has been arrested so far.

Firefighters found six bodies

inside the hostel, but said they were unable to search everywhere because the roof had partially collapsed on the top floor.

Police have said the death toll may rise.

Two hours before the blaze broke out, a couch had caught fire inside the building without being reported to emergency services, police said earlier.

Investigators were looking into possible links between the two incidents, they said.

A police reconnaissance team entered the building on Wednesday for the first time since it was declared safe, to look for evidence and locate the dead.

"The scene examination will be extensive and methodical and we expect it to take some time,

likely several days given the large size of the building," Bennett said.

Extensive damage

Fire damage inside the building was 'extensive', Bennett said, with burnt debris reaching as high as one metre (three feet).

One of the survivors, Simon Hanify, said he heard a smoke alarm at the time of the couch fire but ignored it because it often went off without reason.

When the alarm rang again two hours later, however, he left the burning building.

The Loafers Lodge advertised itself as 'convenient and affordable' accommodation, with laundry, kitchen facilities, and a lock on each floor.

AFP

Singapore executes second prisoner in three weeks

Singapore - Singapore on Wednesday hanged a man for trafficking drugs, authorities said, in the city-state's second execution in three weeks.

The man was convicted in 2019 of trafficking around 1.5kg (3.3 pounds) of cannabis, Kokila Annamalai of local rights group Transformative Justice Collective told AFP.

Singapore has some of the world's toughest anti-narcotics laws: trafficking more than 500 grams of cannabis can result in the death penalty.

"A 36-year-old Singaporean man had his capital sentence carried out today at Changi Prison Complex," a spokesman for the city-state's prison service told AFP.

Singapore's Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) said in a separate statement that it would not release the name of the man to respect his family's wish for privacy.

"The person was accorded full due process under the law,

and had access to legal counsel throughout the process," CNB added. A last-ditch appeal to stay his execution was dismissed on Tuesday, Annamalai said.

Despite growing international calls to abolish the death penalty, Singapore insists that it is an effective deterrent against trafficking.

The Wednesday execution was the second in Singapore this year after Tangaraju Supiah, 46, was hanged on April 26 for conspiracy to smuggle a kilogram of cannabis.

Thirteen death row inmates have been hanged since Singapore resumed executions in March 2022 after a hiatus of more than two years.

Supiah's execution sparked an international outcry, with rights groups pointing to 'many flaws' in the case, but the Singapore government said his guilt was proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

AFP

Canada, S Korea to boost economic, security cooperation

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea and Canada agreed to boost cooperation on crucial supply chains and work more closely to counter North Korea's growing nuclear threats after their leaders met in Seoul on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau - on his first official visit to South Korea, and the first by a Canadian leader in nearly a decade - met President Yoon Suk Yeol for a summit on Wednesday afternoon. After the talks, Yoon said the pair had agreed to 'deepen cooperation' on supply chains, especially for critical minerals used in electric vehicle batteries, which Canada has reserves of and which are needed by South Korea's car manufacturers.

The two leaders also discussed regional security and condemned North Korea's banned nuclear programme, Yoon told a joint press briefing, following another record-breaking year of missile launches by Pyongyang's Kim Jong Un.

Trudeau offered Seoul support in its plans to 'achieve a denuclearised, peaceful, unified and



South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol speaks as Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau looks on during a joint news conference after their meeting at the Presidential Office in Seoul on Wednesday (AFP)

prosperous Korean Peninsula', as well as more cooperation on security, according to a statement released by both governments.

"This support includes the augmentation of Canada's naval presence and participation in multinational operations in the region," it said.

The two countries, which already have 'deeply rooted peo-

ple-to-people ties', also announced a new programme designed to give Korean and Canadian young people 'increased work and travel opportunities' in the other country.

Earlier, Trudeau had told South Korean lawmakers that the two countries needed stronger ties as the world was facing a moment of unprecedented un-

certainty, with lingering consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic, rising living costs, and the 'real and terrifying' effects of climate change and war.

"I'm here to tell you that it's no longer enough to be friends. We need to be the best of friends," Trudeau said during a speech to Seoul's National Assembly.

South Korea is Canada's sev-

enth largest trading partner, Seoul says, with the Asian country mostly selling cars and smartphones and buying raw materials including coal and copper ore.

The two countries signed a slew of memorandums of understanding, including one they said would contribute to 'strengthening and securing supply chains for clean energy and critical minerals'.

'This will support the development of clean technologies that will power green and sustainable economic growth', and help both countries' battery and electric vehicle industries, they said.

Canadian media outlets also reported on possible meetings between Trudeau and top executives from South Korean battery maker LG Energy Solution.

The company and its partner, auto manufacturer Stellantis, halted construction work this week on a massive EV battery plant in Canada, saying Trudeau's government 'has not delivered on what was agreed to'.

AFP

INDIA

Manipur violence: Apex court seeks status report

New Delhi - The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the State of Manipur to file a fresh status report on all the security, relief and rehabilitation efforts made for the people affected by the violence between Meitei and Kuki communities.

A bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud and Justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala said that maintaining law and order is a State subject and as the Supreme Court, it will ensure that the political executive does not turn a blind eye to the matter.

"We can't say who is responsible for this... law and order is a State subject. We as the apex court can ensure they don't turn a blind eye. We must as a court also understand that some matters are entrusted to the political arm," said the CJI.

Centre and the State government told the top court that a status report has been filed and the situation had improved in the State.

In its status report, the government said a total of 318 relief camps have been opened where more than 47,914 persons have been given relief. A total of 626 FIRs have been registered so far.

"The provision for ration, food, water and medical care and medicines are being arranged by the district magistrates with sub-divisional magistrates, executive magistrates



Indian Army and Assam Rifles personnel are seen deployed at a violence-hit area in Manipur, 'to instil the environment of peace and normalcy among the citizens', on Tuesday (ANI)

We can't say who is responsible for this... law and order is a State subject. We as the apex court can ensure they don't turn a blind eye

D Y CHANDRACHUD

and district level officers of concerned line departments by deputing responsible officers.

The state government had also sanctioned a contingent fund of Rs 3 crore for meeting exigencies in providing relief measures, it added. The state government had taken the decision to earmark 25 per cent of the MLA Local Area Development Fund for relief measures in respective assembly constituencies, the affidavit further stated.

The affidavit said: "State Home Department had issued instructions to DGP and all district SSP to register FIRS of all reported cases irrespective of jurisdiction and also to take up action on suo motu basis for in-

cidents within its jurisdiction. A total of 626 FIRs have been registered so far. The administration has also taken away fire arms from a large number of persons 1,070 arms, 27,110 ammunition and further recovered a large number of firearms 456 arms, 6,819 ammunition."

The bench also said it will not deal with the legal issues arising out of the Manipur High Court's decision, directing the state government to recommend to the Centre the inclusion of the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe list, as the pleas challenging the order were pending

in the larger division bench there.

The top court took into account the security apprehensions of Meitei and Kuki communities and ordered that the chief secretary and his security advisor will assess and take steps to ensure 'peace and tranquillity' in the State.

It said that tribals could move the division bench of the Manipur High Court with their grievances on the quota issue.

The bench further questioned Manipur High Court for its order asking the state government to recommend to the Centre the inclusion of Meitei in the ST list.

The CJI remarked: "We have to stay the order of the Manipur High Court. It is completely factually wrong and we gave time to Justice Muralidharan to remedy his error and he did not. We have to take a strong view against it now. It is clear if the High Court judges do not follow Constitution bench judgments then what should we do... it is very clear."

The bench did not impose any stay and took into note that an appeal has been filed before the division bench of the High Court against the judgment of the single judge and the next date of hearing is June 6 there. It said aggrieved parties can present their case before the division bench.

ANI



A woman shelters from the sun with an umbrella during a hot summer day in Chennai on Tuesday (AFP)

'Asia heatwaves made 30 times more likely by climate change'

New Delhi - Climate change made record-breaking deadly heatwaves in Bangladesh, India, Laos and Thailand last month at least 30 times more likely, according to a study published on Wednesday.

Parts of India saw temperatures above 44 degrees Celsius (111 Fahrenheit) in mid-April, with at least 11 deaths near Mumbai attributed to heat stroke on a single day. In Bangladesh, Dhaka suffered its hottest day in almost 60 years.

The city of Tak in Thailand saw its highest-ever temperature of 45.4 Celsius, while Sainyabuli province in Laos hit 42.9 Celsius, an all-time national temperature record, the study by the World Weather Attribution group said.

Two deaths were reported in Thailand, but the real toll was likely higher as the extreme heat caused widespread hospitalisations, with the poor and vulnerable the worst affected.

The new study by international climate scientists looked at the average maximum temperature and the maximum heat index, which includes humidity.

"In both regions, the researchers found that climate change made the humid heatwave at least 30 times more likely, with temperatures at least 2 degrees Celsius hotter than they would have been without climate change," WWA said in a statement.

"Until overall greenhouse gas emissions are halted,

global temperatures will continue to increase and events like this will become more frequent and severe," it added.

The analysis also found that such events in India and Bangladesh, previously once-a-century, can now be expected around once every five years because of human-caused climate change.

For Laos and Thailand, if global temperatures rise by two degrees Celsius - as will happen within around 30 years if emissions are not cut rapidly - such extreme events could happen every 20 years, compared to every two centuries now, the study said.

"We see again and again that climate change dramatically increases the frequency and intensity of heatwaves, one of the deadliest weather events there are," said Friederike Otto of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change and the Environment, who was involved in the study.

"Still, heat action plans are only being introduced very slowly across the globe. They need to be an absolute priority adaptation action everywhere, but in particular in places where high humidity enhances the impacts of heatwaves," she added.

Scientists were previously reluctant to directly link a particular event to climate change, but in recent years a new field of 'attribution science', like that done by the WWA, has emerged.

AFP

Kerala cabinet approves ordinance to ensure safety of health workers

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala - Following the brutal murder of a doctor in the State last week, the Kerala government on Wednesday has approved an ordinance that seeks to ensure workplace safety in healthcare facilities.

A Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan today decided to promulgate the Kerala Health Care Service Workers and Health Care Service Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Amendment Ordinance, 2012. According to

the ordinance any person who commits, attempts to commit, incites or inspires an act of violence at hospitals shall be punished with imprisonment for a term not less than 6 months and 5 years and with a fine not less than Rs 50,000 and upto Rs 2 lakh.

If the health care service worker is subjected to grievous bodily harm, the punishment will be imprisonment for not less than one year and upto 7 years and a fine of not less than Rs 1 lakh and upto Rs 5 lakh.

The existing Act covered

registered (including provisionally registered) medical practitioners, registered nurses, medical students, nursing students and paramedical staff working in healthcare institutions. Paramedical students will also be included in the revised ordinance.

It will include paramedical staff, security guards, managerial staff, ambulance drivers, helpers who are posted and working in health care institutions and health workers notified in the official government gazette from time to time.

Cases registered under the Act will be investigated by a police officer, not below the rank of Inspector. Case investigation shall be completed within 60 days from the date of registration of the First Information Report. Trial proceedings will be completed in a timely manner. A court in each district shall be designated as a special court for a speedy trial.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had ordered to amend the Act based on the assessment that those who commit violence against health workers are not

getting the punishment they deserve, said government sources.

After 23-year-old doctor, Vandana Das was fatally stabbed by a patient at the Kotarakkara Taluk hospital, a high-level official meeting was convened and a decision was taken to amend the Act and issue an ordinance.

A committee comprising representatives of health, home and law departments and health and science universities was tasked with preparing the draft ordinance.

ANI

Chinese ship capsizes in Indian Ocean, 39 missing

Beijing, China - A crew of 39 Chinese, Indonesian and Filipino sailors were missing at sea on Wednesday after a fishing vessel capsized in the Indian Ocean, officials said.

Multinational search efforts were underway after Chinese vessel Lu Peng Yuan Yu 028 overturned in the early hours of Tuesday with 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesians and five Filipinos on board.

"Chinese and foreign ships have arrived in the area where the incident occurred and the search and rescue work is ongoing," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a press briefing on Wednesday. "More rescue personnel are rushing to the scene," he added.

"We will continue to take all necessary measures with all parties to search for and rescue the missing persons."

Beijing has deployed two commercial vessels to the area

- the Lu Peng Yuan Yu 018 and Yuan Fu Hai - to help with the operation, state broadcaster CCTV reported. Philippine foreign ministry spokeswoman Teresita Daza said Manila was 'aware and is closely monitoring the situation.'

Indonesia's foreign ministry also confirmed the incident and said Beijing was coordinating the rescue efforts.

The capsized vessel is owned by Penglai Jinglu Fishery Company, one of China's major state-run fishing firms.

It was authorised to fish for neon flying squid and Pacific saury, according to the North Pacific Fisheries Commission.

It left Cape Town in South Africa on May 5 for Busan in South Korea, according to the MarineTraffic tracking website, which last located the vessel on May 10 southeast of Reunion, a tiny French island in the Indian Ocean.

AFP

Nepali mountaineer climbs Everest for 27th time

Kathmandu, Nepal - Nepali climber Kami Rita Sherpa reached the top of Mount Everest for the 27th time on Wednesday, reclaiming the record for the most summits of the world's highest mountain.

"He successfully reached the summit this morning guiding a Vietnamese climber," Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, his expedition organiser, told AFP.

Nepal is home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks, including the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) Everest, and welcomes hundreds of adventurers each spring, when temperatures are warm and winds are typically calm.

Earlier on Wednesday, British guide Kenton Cool reached the world's highest point for the 17th time, extending his own record for the most summits by a non-Nepali. Meanwhile, a 46-year-old Moldovan climber died on the mountain the same day - the fifth fatality of the season.

Authorities have issued 478 Everest permits to foreign



This file photo shows Kami Rita Sherpa posing for a picture during an interview with AFP at the Everest base camp on May 2, 2021 (AFP)

climbers this year, the US\$11,000 fee part of total costs for a summit ranging from US\$45,000 to US\$200,000.

Since most will need a guide - will try to summit this season, which runs until early June.

The 53-year-old Kami Rita Sherpa had held the overall title since 2018, when he ascended Everest for the 22nd time, passing the previous mark he shared

with two other Sherpa climbers, both of whom have since retired.

But on Sunday another climber, Pasang Dawa Sherpa, 46, tied the record by reaching the top for the 26th time.

A guide for more than two decades, Kami Rita Sherpa first summited in 1994 when working for a commercial expedition.

Since then, he has climbed Everest almost every year, several times leading the first rope-

fixing team to open the route to the top. "These records were made not with an intention to make them but during my work as a guide," Sherpa told AFP last month as he headed to base camp.

'Everest man'

Dubbed 'the Everest man', Sherpa was born in 1970 in Thame, a village in the Himalayas renowned as a breeding ground for successful mountaineers.

Growing up, Sherpa watched his father and then his brother don climbing gear to join expeditions as mountain guides, and was soon following in their footsteps.

In 2019, he reached the summit twice in the span of six days.

Sherpa's client on Wednesday was reportedly Chinh Chu, a Vietnamese billionaire who made his fortune in finance, while Cool guided Richard Walker, executive chairman of British supermarket chain Iceland Foods, to the top.

Nepali guides, usually ethnic

Sherpas from the valleys around Everest, are considered the backbone of the climbing industry and bear huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders.

Cool, 49, first climbed Everest in 2004, and his 16th ascent last year gave him the sole record for the most summits by a non-Nepali climber, but he told AFP then that he was 'surprised' by the attention.

"In reality, it's not that amazing," he said, pointing out that many Sherpa guides had stood on the peak more often than him.

"People go 'it's a world record', it's not a world record," he said. "It's just that I happen to hold the non-Sherpa record, for whatever that is worth, which in my mind, (is) not very much."

The Moldovan climber died at Camp 4, said Expedition Himalaya, which arranged his permit. "He felt unwell at South Col and despite many attempts to provide him aid he passed away," the company said.

AFP



Inter Milan's Argentinian forward Lautaro Martinez celebrates after scoring against AC Milan on Tuesday (AFP)

Inter will hope to thrive as underdogs in Istanbul title-clash

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan are dreaming of a shock Champions League triumph after upsetting the odds to reach this season's final.

"If you had said at the start of the season that we would reach the Champions League final, I would probably have found it hard to believe you," Inter president Steven Zhang admitted after his side beat Milan 1-0 thanks to a Lautaro Martinez goal in Tuesday's second leg to win the tie 3-0 on aggregate.

Tuesday's result was, remarkably, Inter's fourth win over Milan in four meetings in 2023, all of them without conceding a goal.

It allowed the blue and black

half of the city to avenge Champions League exits to their rivals in the 2003 semi-finals - on the now-scrapped away goals rule - and the 2005 quarter-finals.

"It's a dream come true. We always believed we could do it, we have had an extraordinary journey," coach Simone Inzaghi told broadcaster Mediaset.

Reaching the final in Istanbul is a huge moment for Italian football, with Inter aiming to become the first Champions League winners from the country since they lifted the trophy under Jose Mourinho in 2010.

This will be their sixth final altogether.

AFP

REIGN OF NERAZZURRI

Inter win Milan derby to reach Champions League final

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan reached their first Champions League final for 13 years as Lautaro Martinez's sole goal of the match gave them a 3-0 aggregate win against AC Milan on Tuesday.

Inter will undoubtedly be the underdogs against either Real Madrid or Manchester City in Istanbul on June 10, but the way they managed both legs of this all-Milan tie suggests they will be hard to beat.

The key moment of the night at the San Siro came when Argentinian Martinez exchanged passes with substitute Romelu Lukaku and drilled a shot from inside the penalty area that Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan allowed in at his near post.

Martinez, Inter's captain, hailed the cohesion of his team



Inter Milan players celebrate their victory against AC Milan in the Champions League semi-final (AFP)

over the two matches against their city rivals.

"What counts is the squad. I experienced it at the World Cup (with Argentina)," he said.

"It makes it easy if you have a united squad with everyone pulling in the same direction. It means you get to play these very important matches in the best

possible way."

He added: "After winning the World Cup and experiencing what is the pinnacle for a player I knew we could reach this final, and we did it."

His goal effectively killed off the tie.

Trailing 2-0 from the first leg, Milan had pushed hard in the

first half, spearheaded by Rafael Leao who shot across the goal and past the post with one of his side's best chances.

Maignan then superbly dropped to his knees to collect Edin Dzeko's glancing header from Hakan Calhanoglu's pacy free-kick.

AFP

Asian football probes 'acts of violence' after red cards mar final

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - The Asian Football Confederation said on Wednesday that it was investigating "acts of violence" after two mass brawls and four red cards marred the men's final of the Southeast Asian Games.

Indonesia defeated Thailand 5-2 in extra time on Tuesday in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh in a match that saw clashes between players and coaches of both sides.

Thailand, who have since apologised and launched their own investigation, ended the bad-tempered final with eight players on the field.

One of those sent off was goalkeeper Soponwit Rakyart after he ran half the length of the pitch to deliver a diving punch to an Indonesian opponent.

"The AFC is disappointed with the disorderly incidents at the SEA Games football final," a spokesperson for the governing body for football in Asia said.

Men's football at the biennial SEA Games is played between under-23 sides.

The final had been billed as a chance for Indonesia to restore some pride to its football following a deadly stadium disaster and the loss of hosting the Under-20 World Cup.

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RISE OF EN-NESYRI

Moroccan star has Sevilla on brink of Europa League final

Barcelona, Spain - Youssef En-Nesyri could easily have walked away from Sevilla's grim situation in January, but the Moroccan international stayed and his goals have fired the Andalusians to the brink of another Europa League final.

The striker pounced to score against Juventus in the semi-final first leg in Turin last week, before Federico Gatti's last-gasp header left the tie level ahead of Thursday's second leg at the Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan.

Sevilla were deep in a relegation battle at the start of the year, turfed out of the Champions League, and En-Nesyri had managed just two goals in that competition, and none in La Liga.

The 25-year-old returned from the Qatar World Cup with hero status in Morocco for his fine performances and three goals on the country's incredible run to the semi-finals.

En-Nesyri's soaring header against Portugal in the quarter-final was claimed to have broken Cristiano Ronaldo's record for highest headed goal, and soon Sevilla were on the rise too.

The forward turned down all approaches in the winter transfer window and set to work on a challenge set by then-Sevilla coach Jorge Sampaoli, that he would reach 20 goals by the end of the season.

"I thank all the clubs that have contacted my agent, but at the moment I just want to keep my mind on Sevilla," said En-Nesyri in a statement put out by his agent in January. "It's not a question of money. It's a sporting matter, of wanting to help the team in the worst moments."



Sevilla's Youssef En-Nesyri celebrates after scoring against Juventus in their UEFA Europa League semi-final first leg match last week (AFP)

I thank all the clubs that have contacted my agent, but at the moment I just want to keep my mind on Sevilla. It's not a question of money. It's a sporting matter

YOUSSEF EN-NESYRI

Revival

En-Nesyri netted eight league goals in a 12 game stretch between January and April to pull the team up the table and away from danger, even as Sampaoli was replaced by Jose Luis Mendilibar in March.

The Moroccan netted four goals in the Copa del Rey and four more in the Europa League to reach a total of 18 for the season, just two short of his target of 20, which Mendilibar maintained. The new coach was wary of En-Nesyri at first but, with ad-

vice from sporting director Monchi, slowly began to exchange with him and realised the striker enjoyed a challenge.

"He likes to be picked on, I picked on him, and he was scoring goals before we arrived -- 'I'm going to score 20 goals,' I think he said, and he's not far off," explained Mendilibar.

The forward's pace on the break and aerial ability fits the coach's approach nicely and it is paying dividends.

En-Nesyri struck twice against Manchester United in the Europa League quarter-final second leg,

propelling Sevilla into the semi-finals of a competition they have won a record six times.

"En-Nesyri, a rebel with a cause," ran a headline in Spanish newspaper AS.

Then the striker provided the cutting edge on a lethal counter attack against Juventus to give Sevilla a deserved lead in Turin, before they were pegged back late on. "I am very proud of Youssef, Youssef is a great person, and he has principles," his team-mate for club and country, Yassine Bounou, told UEFA.com ahead of the second leg.



Eddie Howe

Newcastle don't feel 'hunted', says coach Howe

London, United Kingdom - Newcastle boss Eddie Howe says he does not feel as if his team are being "hunted" as he seeks to fend off charging Liverpool and finish in the Premier League's top four.

The Magpies, seeking to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in two decades, host high-flying Brighton at St James' Park on Thursday.

Roberto De Zerbi's side, fresh from a 3-0 win at Arsenal, are chasing European football for the first time in their history.

Newcastle are currently third in the table -- behind Manchester City and Arsenal -- level on points with Manchester United. Both Newcastle and United have three games remaining.

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool are just one point behind, having played a game more, after their seventh straight league win at Leicester on Monday.

Howe said Newcastle still had matters in their own hands and

insisted he was not focusing on red-hot Liverpool.

"I don't feel like we're being hunted," he said at his pre-match press conference on Wednesday. "I don't feel that emotion. It's us against ourselves, really. That's how I see it. It's us trying to be the best we can be."

"I've not focused on any other team all season. In my experience, I knew Liverpool were never far away because they are a top team and they are capable of going on runs of wins. "They are very similar to Manchester City where they can win a group of games without blinking. They have got that experience."

Victory in Newcastle's last two home games, against Brighton and then Leicester on Monday, would guarantee a place in the Champions League.

Howe also said he hoped the security breach that left him in danger at Elland Road could help prevent a future "tragedy" on a football pitch.

Ominvest-led Consortium announces intention to make acquisition offer to Ahli Bank

Muscat, 17 May, 2023: Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), the leading investment company in the Sultanate, announced that the major shareholders of Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB) have formed a Consortium with a firm intention to make an offer for the entire issued share capital of Ahli Bank SAOG (Ahli Bank) under the Takeover and Acquisition Regulations issued by CMA.

Ominvest leads the Consortium, and the offer will be made by certain entities separately controlled by Ominvest and Arab Bank plc. Certain other investors have also expressed their intention to participate in the Consortium and offer at a later stage if required. As part of good governance and careful evaluation of material and price-sensitive information, Ominvest made appropriate disclosures on the Muscat Stock Exchange on 16 May 2023.

Commenting on the offer, AbdulAziz Al-Balushi, the Group CEO of Ominvest, said, "The Consortium sees Ahli Bank as one of the best-performing banks in the Sultanate of Oman, with a capable leadership team and leading operating and risk systems. The Consortium members will be strong and committed anchor shareholders of Ahli Bank, supporting its growth during the intervening period and preparing it for a potential merger with OAB in due course, under the guidance of the esteemed Board of Directors of both banks."

The Offer Price

The Consortium will put forward an attractive base offer price of 185 bz per share. This offer represents a premium of approximately 28% over Ahli Bank's average one-year market price, 20% over its net book value as of 31 March 2023, 13% over its average six-month market price, and an 8% premium compared to the closing stock exchange price as of 31 March 2023.

Commenting on the offer price, AbdulAziz



AbdulAziz Al-Balushi

Al-Balushi said, "We believe our offer price of 185 bz per share is fair and represents a strong return on investment for the shareholders of Ahli Bank who wish to participate in the offer."

Moreover, strategic long-term investors holding more than 25% shareholding and who provide strategic direction and assistance in the bank's transformation will be offered an additional 15 bz per share. Significant financial investors, holding between 10% and 25% shareholding and with considerable influence over Ahli Bank and participating in policy-making decisions, will receive an additional 7 bz per share.

The proposal for the premium being paid to strategic long-term and significant financial investors was taken after a thorough analysis of the market and value of large blocks of shareholding in Ahli Bank. The premium over the base price is based on the concept of a control premium paid for a large block of shares and is aimed at compensating strategic long-term and significant financial investors for the loss of their significant influence over Ahli Bank due to selling their shares.

"We have devised an offer price structure which is fair and rewarding to large, as well as



minority shareholders. Our proposed price mechanism will also encourage long-term strategic investors to invest in the Sultanate, with the comfort of knowing they can exit at attractive valuations reflective of their large shareholding and contribution made to grow the business," stated the Group CEO.

Funding and FDI

The proposed offer will be funded in its entirety by Consortium members, meaning there is no constraint on Ahli Bank or OAB's capital or lending ability as a result of the offer.

Commenting on Arab Bank and its long-standing contributions to the Sultanate, AbdulAziz Al-Balushi, said, "Arab Bank plc will support funding the transaction, which will result in positive foreign direct investment in Oman. Arab Bank plc currently has an investment valued at around OMR 172 million in the Sultanate of Oman, including their recent investment of around OMR 46 million at the time of the merger of Alizz Islamic Bank with OAB in 2020. Arab Bank intends to further invest a substantial amount in the Sultanate of Oman depending on the final outcome of this takeover offer."

"Arab Bank has been contributing to the development of Oman's economy for more than 50 years and remains committed to further driving the growth of the Omani banking sector and economy in accordance with Oman Vision 2040."

He added, "Ominvest has a strong track record of successfully executing large and complex transactions in excess of OMR 385 million in the recent past. We are thankful to the regulatory authorities for their continued support and guidance, without which these transactions would not have been possible."

"Given the combined track record and strength of Ominvest and Arab Bank, we are optimistic that this acquisition will be a success, and we look forward to working with all stakeholders of Ahli Bank and the concerned regulatory authorities to outline the next phase of the acquisition process."

The Proposed Merger

Members of the Consortium or their affiliates have a substantial stake in OAB and view the acquisition as a strategic opportunity to strengthen Ahli Bank and OAB in advance of a potential future merger. This merged entity

is expected to be a large and robust financial institution. Moreover, the Consortium has the capability and willingness to provide support to the merged entity as and when required.

Subject to regulatory approvals, the Consortium intends to merge OAB and Ahli Bank in due course by adopting a phased and structured approach. They will support the capable leadership teams of Ahli Bank and OAB during the intervening period to continue their transformation journey. This will be a merger of equals and stronger banks, resulting in a swap ratio to be derived based on the audited net book values post necessary due diligence.

"Following a successful merger, the new combined banking institution will gain size and scale as well as be better positioned to meaningfully contribute to the economic development of the Sultanate, supporting larger government projects of national interest," stated AbdulAziz Al-Balushi. "Furthermore, the Islamic window of Ahli Bank will be transferred to Alizz Islamic Bank, which is a fully owned subsidiary of OAB. This will provide additional scale and a significant boost to Alizz's operations."

The Group CEO added, "We look forward to the support of the regulatory bodies represented by the Central Bank of Oman and Capital Market Authority for the offer we have presented. Ominvest has a long history and extensive experience efficiently managing merger and acquisition operations. I am confident that the successful acquisition of Ahli Bank will mark another success story in our distinguished record spanning over 40 years."

Commenting on Bank Dhofar's offer, AbdulAziz Al-Balushi said, "We extend our well wishes to all parties involved. Our foremost commitment is to support the deal or initiative that serves the best interest of the country, the banking sector, and all stakeholders, not just ourselves. We firmly believe that Ahli Bank's shareholders should have the opportunity to make an informed decision about what is best for them".



LIVINGSTONE'S BLINDER IN VAIN AS ROSSOUW-INSPIRED DELHI BEAT PUNJAB

MATCH 64



Delhi Capitals' Rilee Rossouw celebrates after completing his half-century during their Indian Premier League match against Punjab Kings in Dharamsala on Wednesday. Rossouw made 82 off 37 balls to help Delhi beat Punjab by 15 runs. David Warner and Prithvi Shaw also shone with the bat for Delhi who made 213 for 2. Chasing a mammoth total, Punjab came back strongly after a sedate start and threatened for a while as Liam Livingstone played a blinder, scoring a 48-ball 94.

GIANT STRIDE

Stoinis, Mohsin help Lucknow edge Mumbai to boost last-four hopes

Lucknow, India - Marcus Stoinis' unbeaten 89 and last over heroics by Mohsin Khan helped Lucknow Super Giants bolster their play-off hopes with a five-run win over Mumbai Indians in IPL on Tuesday.

Mohsin, an up and coming left-arm quick who returned figures of 1-26, defended 11 off the final over as Mumbai fell short of their 178-run victory target in Lucknow.

Tim David gave Lucknow a scare with his unbeaten 19-ball 32 but he and fellow Australian Cameron Green could do little against Mohsin's yorkers and discipline at the death.

Impact player Yash Thakur and leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi took two wickets each to add to Lucknow's bowling attack.

Lucknow swapped places with five-time winners Mumbai to jump to third in their bid for a top-four finish in the group stage for a play-off berth.

"We just lost the game. We didn't play well enough to win," said Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma. "There were moments we didn't win. Unfortunately but we need to keep our heads high."



Mohsin Khan of Lucknow Super Giants celebrates after his team's win against Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League on Tuesday

Holders Gujarat Titans have already booked their spot and assured a top-two finish. Seven off the 10 teams are fighting for the three remaining play-off places.

Stoinis set up victory for Lucknow after he put on key partnerships including an 89-run stand with skipper Krunal Pandya, who retired hurt on 49, to guide Lucknow to 177-3.

The Australian all-rounder walked in at 35-3 and rebuild the Lucknow innings with the left-handed Pandya on a not-so-easy pitch to bat.

Pandya was cramping in his knock and retired one short of

fifty but Stoinis soon changed gears as he raised his fifty with a six and lay into Chris Jordan in a 24-run 18th over.

He put on an unbeaten 60-run stand off 24 balls with Nicholas Pooran, who made eight, and finished the innings with a six.

"We have shown that we are a real team, there no super stars, there are different people performing for us," said man of the match Stoinis.

In reply, Ishan Kishan smashed 59 and put on a 90-run opening stand with Rohit, who made 37.

AFP

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IPL giants Mumbai on shaky ground in play-off race

New Delhi, India - The IPL is hotting up with seven teams still in the hunt for play-off spots after five-time champions Mumbai Indians suffered a shock loss to Lucknow.

Defending champions Gujarat Titans are the only franchise to have booked one of the four play-off places, with the Delhi Capitals and Sunrisers Hyderabad now out of contention.

Mumbai's five-run loss on Tuesday at the hands of Marcus Stoinis and Mohsin Khan left them needing to win their remaining group fixture against Hyderabad, and they still need other results to go their way.

Rohit Sharma, who led Mumbai to titles in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020, said: "We have to come out and win that game (against Hyderabad on Sunday)."

The top two teams will play the first qualifier, with the winner

heading straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser playing the winner of the "eliminator" between teams three and four in the second qualifier.

Lucknow, who made their IPL debut alongside Hardik Pandya's Gujarat last year, have had a hot-and-cold season but a better run rate than Mumbai has kept them in contention for the top four even if they lose their final group game.

Four-time winners Chennai Super Kings, led by M.S. Dhoni - who is believed to be playing his final season - looked like sailing into the next round but a shock defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders kept them waiting.

They need to win their final match against the Delhi Capitals on Saturday to make the play-offs and possibly seal a top-two finish, but a loss will leave them at the mercy of other results.

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Weekend



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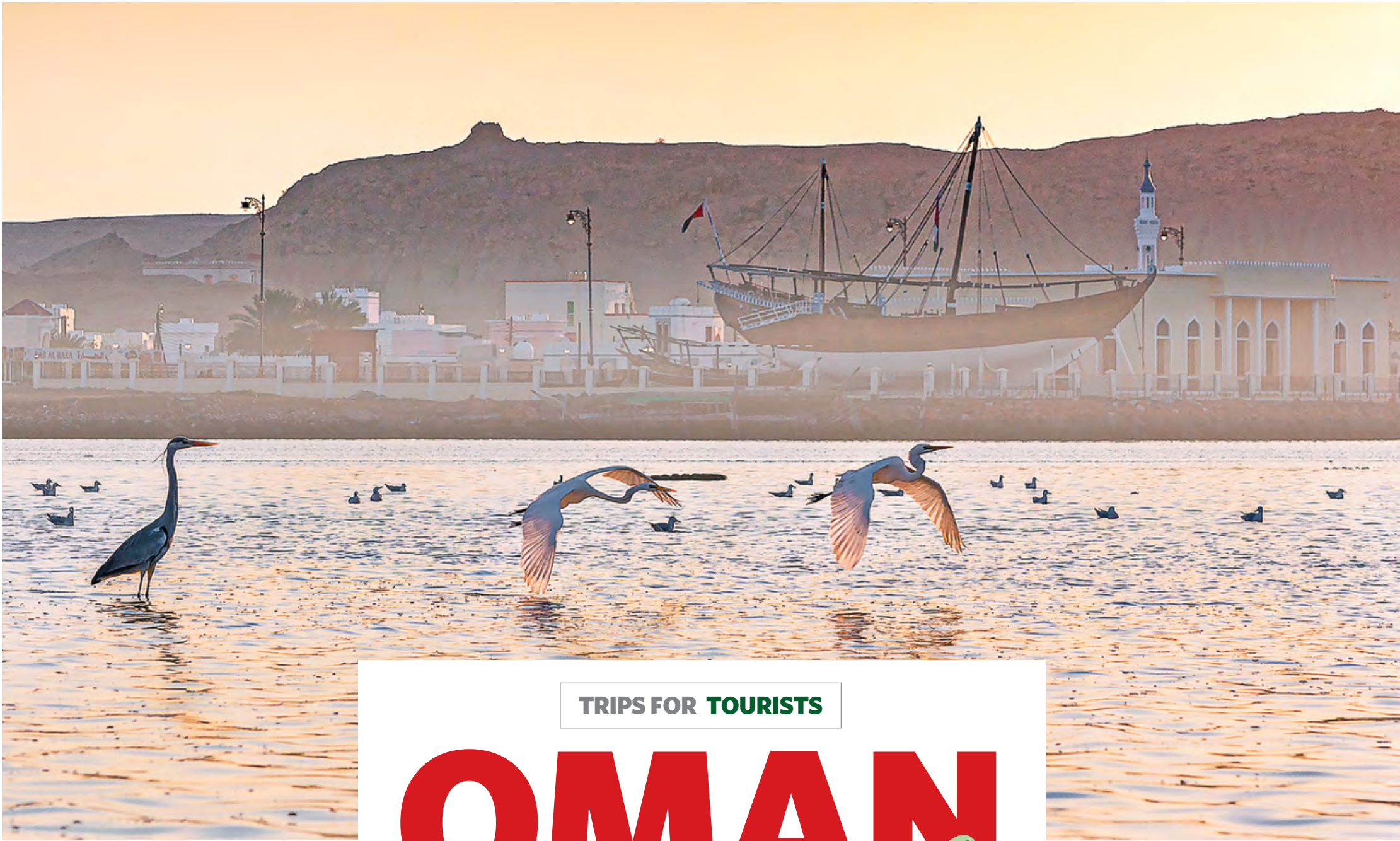
15

IN TOWN
Spanish Illustration Workshop and Indian Community Festival



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ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



TRIPS FOR TOURISTS

OMAN
on wheels

Mohammed Taha

With an aim to promote domestic tourism and showcase Oman's unique attractions to tourists, two enterprising youth - Abdullah Khamis al Farsi and his brother Mohammed - hailing from Sur, started a project called Oman Exploration two months ago. The aim of the project is to provide quick trips around Oman for tourists.

Abdullah and Mohammed, who have got quite a grip on what tourists seek during their trips to Oman, have devised concise trips with all the trappings of Arabia's lures, to give visitors a feel of the life, culture and pulse of the sultanate within a few days. Trips can be customised to suit the needs and time frame available to different tourist groups of various sizes.

The trips include activities like camping, hiking and swimming in picturesque locations such as Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve, visits to Al Ayjah Lighthouse, hiking to the highest spot above the popular Sur bridge and opportunities to watch colourful sunsets. Initially, all this is being offered in the wilayat of Sur.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Abdullah said, "We offer experienced drivers who take tourists to cities as well as

off-road adventures, camping outdoors facilitated by tents carried on the car roof, opportunities to savour local food and music, as well as the service of knowledgeable Omani guides who give visitors insights about places and events, besides hidden stories behind various cultural observances in Sur.

Abdullah disclosed, "We've shot films of the tourist trips and posted them on social media, such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, to which many tourists responded from different parts of the world." Hence, they succeed to facilitate trips of tourist groups from many countries, including UK, India and South Africa.

"We also organise visits to Bedouin settlements where tourists can experience their lifestyle, visit a camel farm, drink fresh milk, learn about Bedouin customs, and enjoy traditional food. At the end of the day, we organise a dinner and a simple outdoor party, which goes on be-

yond midnight," Mohammed said.

In March, the brothers had set off on a trip across the sultanate in their cars to promote tourism. Their plan was to drive through all the governorates of Oman and shoot films of the picturesque places and nature on the way.

"We are now camping in the wilayat of Sur, in South Sharqiyah," said Abdullah. "The trip aims to promote tourism and document traditions and customs, besides addressing the need to preserve the environment."

They carry along in their camper vehicle kitchen utensils, a small oven, a gas cylinder, a small refrigerator, and other necessities. They have also installed solar panels on the roof of the van for electricity at night.

The brothers camp at different spot for a few days, shooting videos of each place and documenting facts

regarding hiking, swimming, fishing, climbing mountains, discovering caves and valleys, which can facilitate tourists.

Giving details about the sites, they revealed, that 'Ezbah' is a name given to a place where the Badawi tribe keep their camels. It is a secluded place characterised by tranquility and provides a good environment for adventure tourists. The traditional 'Ezbah' is located within an open tent with Bedouin hospitality.

Also, Fatah Al Khair is an open-air museum dedicated to the shipbuilding traditions of the city of Sur. Built over 70 years ago, the wooden fishing vessel has strong historical significance about a bygone era. It was brought back to Yemen, restored and grounded on dry land, and said to be hand-built without any nails. Fatah Al Khair is located in Al Qanjah Boat Yard within the Sur Maritime Museum.

There are other destinations of interest in Sur, like the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve which is a big draw for tourists who wish to see the fascinating nesting turtles.

The Farsi brothers say they have experienced a lot during their trips around Oman and wish to share all that with tourists. Initially accepting small groups, since they can accommodate around three tourist in each car, they hope to soon expand their business to take bigger groups around Oman - those willing to tag on with their own four-wheel-drive vehicles.



cook-up

CABBAGE - the crunchy option



Crunchy Coleslaw

- Ingredients**
- | |
|---|
| 2 cups shredded cabbage, 1 cup shredded carrot |
| 1 onion – sliced thin (optional), 1-2 green chillies – slit |
| ½tsp freshly crushed black pepper |
| 1tbsp apple cider vinegar, a pinch of salt |
| 2tbsp honey, ½ cup mayonnaise |

Method

Take a large bowl and add the mayonnaise, honey, apple cider vinegar, salt and pepper. Whip up to get a smooth, flowy consistency. Now add the cabbage, carrot, onion and green chillies. Mix well till ingredients are evenly coated. Chill for an hour before serving.

Note: Avoid adding onion to this dish, if you need to store it for a few days.

Omani cabbage is now available for just 90baisa/kg – it's time to make the most of it. Bring home some fresh cabbage and try out some refreshing dishes, loaded with antioxidants, low in calories, rich in fibre, and light on the tummy

Cabbage Chutney

- Ingredients**
- | |
|--|
| 1tbsp sesame oil, 1tsp urad dal,1tsp chana dal |
| 2½ cups chopped cabbage |
| 1 to 3 green chillies, 10 to 12 curry leaves |
| Salt, to taste, 1tsp tamarind |
| ½ cup water – for blending |
- For tempering**
- | |
|---|
| 1 – 2tsp sesame oil, ½tsp mustard seeds |
| 1 pinch asafoetida, 1 or 2 dried red chillies |

Method

Heat 1tbsp sesame oil in a frying pan. Add the urad dal and chana dal and fry the lentils on a low heat till they turn golden and fragrant. (Take care not to burn them.) Add chopped green chillies. Next, add the curry leaves. Stir and mix. Blanch the cabbage in hot boiling water for 5 minutes, drain and add to pan, and saute with the other ingredients. Season with salt as per taste.

Cover the pan with its lid and cook the cabbage on a low heat for 10 minutes. Stir in between to avoid cabbage getting burnt.

The cabbage should be half cooked with a slight crunch. Remove and cool. Then, add the cabbage mixture in a blender, add tamarind and ½ cup water, and blend to a smooth and fine chutney. Remove the chutney in a bowl.

For tempering, heat 1 to 2tsp sesame oil in the same pan. Add mustard seeds and let them crackle. When the mustard seeds finish crackling, add a pinch of asafoetida, curry leaves, and torn red chillies. Toss and add the tempering mixture to the ground chutney.

Cabbage and Shrimp Salad

- Ingredients**
- | |
|-----------------------------------|
| 400g cabbage - chopped |
| 2tbsp cooking oil |
| 3 cloves garlic - minced |
| 200g shrimp – peeled and deveined |
| 1tbsp oyster sauce |
| ½ cup water |
| Salt, to taste |

Method

Trim off the bottom part of the cabbage, remove the core and chop up into chunky pieces.

Add the cooking oil to a skillet on medium-high heat. Add the garlic and saute until they sizzle. Add the shrimp, stir fry with the garlic. Add the cabbage into the skillet, stir to mix well with the shrimp and garlic.

Add the oyster sauce and water. Stir and cook until the cabbage wilts, softens, and cooks through. Add salt to taste, toss and serve hot.



Veg Spring Rolls

- Ingredients**
- | |
|---|
| 15-16 spring roll wrappers |
| Vegetable oil for frying |
| 4 fresh shiitake mushrooms - sliced, 1 clove of garlic - minced |
| 2tsp minced ginger, 1 green onion - chopped |
| 2 cups shredded cabbage, ½ cup shredded carrot |
| 2tbsp soy sauce, 1tsp sesame oil |
| Small handful of cilantro |
| ½tbsp cornstarch, 2tbsp water |
- For the dipping sauce**
- | |
|--|
| ¼ cup soy sauce, 2tbsp rice vinegar, ½tsp sesame oil |
| ½tsp minced garlic, a pinch of sugar |

Method

Heat a wok or large pan over high heat. Add 1tbsp oil, then the garlic, ginger, and green onion, and fry, stirring constantly, for 5 seconds. Add the mushrooms, cabbage, and carrot and stir-fry until tender, yet crunchy. Add in the soy sauce and sesame oil and stir-fry for another minute. Add a sprinkling of salt and toss. Allow the filling to cool completely.

In a small bowl, mix cornstarch with 2tbsp water. Take one spring roll wrapper and lay it out in a diamond on your work surface. (Keep the remaining wrappers under a slightly damp towel.) Place about 2tbsp of filling in the bottom of the diamond and sprinkle a few cilantro leaves on top. Roll the corner of the wrapper up over the filling tightly. Continue rolling until reaching the middle, then fold in the two sides to make an envelope shape. Dab a little of the cornstarch slurry on the upper edges of the wrapper and continue rolling up. Press the edges down tightly to seal. Repeat with all the wrappers.

Now, heat oil for deep frying. When the oil begins to smoke, slide a few spring rolls into the oil. Fry them in batches so that the oil doesn't cool too much. Turn occasionally until they are golden brown on all sides. Remove and drain on a paper towel.

Combine all the ingredients for the dipping sauce in a small bowl. Serve with the hot spring rolls.

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take a break

IN TOWN

SPANISH ILLUSTRATION WORKSHOP



A Spanish Illustration Workshop was held in collaboration with the Scientific College of Design and Omani Society of Fine Arts

(Photos: VK Shafeer)



Indian Community Festival



Indian Social Club (Kerala Wing) organised an Indian Community Festival at Al Amerat Park last week

(Photos: VK Shafeer)



BOGGLER

R	G	U	O
K	G	E	S
F	A	E	Y
E	R	A	H

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

6	7	9	2				8	
					4			3
		3				5	7	6
5	4	8				3		
			7		5			
		1				2	5	8
3	9	6				7		
1			9					
	8				6	4	3	9

Weird but True...or False?

Can you spot the difference between a fun fact and a made-up tidbit? Take this 'Weird But 'True...or False' quiz to find out, based on facts from National Geographic Kids magazine.



Some lizards have green blood - True or False?

True - The green-blooded skink, a lizard that lives in the country of Papua New Guinea, has high levels of a greenish pigment called biliverdin in its blood, which is what gives its blood its color.

Interesting facts

Desert animals are tough - they have to be in order to survive in this extreme habitat. Discover some interesting facts about desert animals.

Desert tortoises stay cool by crowding together in underground burrows. True or False?

Answer - False: To beat the heat, desert tortoises use their strong forearms and tough claws to dig underground burrows that shade them from the sun. Some tortoise tunnels are up to 32 feet long—and the burrows can get pretty crowded. As many as 25 desert tortoises might bunk together in one shelter.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today, you will finally start to see signs that your latest business or career plans are finally coming together! Once again, your drive for success has not let you down. It's taken you to a really nice place in your life, and you have many options. Use this day as a sort of rest stop on the road to your goals, and kick back with your favourites.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today is likely to be very fairly quiet, which will enable you to feel a lot more grounded and positive than you've felt in quite a while. Nothing much is going to get to you. Even that annoying person won't be quite so annoying to you today. And so what if traffic's bad? You're not in any hurry, so why choose to be stressed out?



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today, an unforeseen event could make you feel like you're under the gun. But this dramatic change in your day will actually be quite invigorating. It will bring out your more competitive side and help you find a lot of excitement in beating the clock. This will be a fun day, full of twists and turns that pump up your energy level.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The Universe is giving you a power surge today, which could cause some problems at work While this isn't necessarily something to be too worried about, you should definitely be careful not to step on anyone's toes. Politics demand that you treat the leader like the leader even if you think you could do a better job.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Being concise is extremely important today, because the people you'll be dealing with won't have a lot of time to waste. Their impatience doesn't have to push you, though. If you don't feel like editing your requests or rushing through a juicy story, then don't. Just skip them and move on to the friends and coworkers who can afford to sit and chat for as long as you want.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Shocking news will serve as a wake-up call for you today, but in a totally positive way. Someone has beaten the odds, which only goes to show you that you can too! This inspiration might arrive too late in the day for you to be able to apply this revelation right away, but the value of the lesson will stay with you forever. You can see what you need to do in the coming weeks.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Don't worry if you start this day feeling a bit down. It won't last very long. To help speed up your good cheer, try to get outside as soon as you can for a brief stroll. The fresh air will help you think more clearly and see things in the proper perspective. Being in a blue funk is nothing to worry about anyway. You have to work through your feelings, and it's not a fun experience.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You have been thinking a lot about a person from your past whose wisdom could come in handy right now. Why not try to track them down? A few minutes online should get you a few leads, and you're probably already in contact with someone who's in contact with them. No matter how things were left between the two of you, they will be happy to hear from you.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Making choices can be tough, but today it could be delightful to examine your options and figure out the best one for you. From picking a project team to deciding where to go on your next big vacation, your brain is going to love weighing the pros and cons in order to come up with the perfect solution!



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today is a great day to try something that you have always wanted to try but been too scared to tackle! Your fears are vanishing right now, and your bold personality wants to come out to play. If you think about it, there is no point in holding back when it comes to what you really want. Push on! How else are you ever going to do it?



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

A friend or coworker you especially like is dealing with some heavy stuff right now, and you need to make exceptions for some of their potentially odd behavior. You might not be sure why things are happening the way they are with them, but you don't really need to. All you need to do is let this person know you're concerned and give them time to work things out on their own.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Are you being too easy on yourself right now? It's not wise to set your goals too low. Sure, it makes it easier to reach them, but doesn't the victory feel a bit hollow? You need to start making yourself work harder, especially today, when a truly great opportunity could practically land right in your lap. Of course, it will be a tough challenge for you.

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

6	3	4	9	1	5	7	8	2
2	9	8	7	3	6	4	5	1
5	1	7	8	2	4	9	6	3
8	5	2	6	4	3	1	9	7
1	4	9	5	8	7	2	3	6
7	6	9	1	6	2	5	4	8
4	2	8	6	3	8	1	5	7
8	1	5	6	7	4	9	2	3
3	7	9	2	5	3	1	8	4

entertainment



US actor Paul Dano, French actor Denis Menochet, US actress Brie Larson, Swedish film director and President of the Jury of the 76th Cannes Film Festival Ruben Ostlund, Argentinian film director Damian Szifron, French film director Julia Ducournau, French-Afghan writer and film director Atiq Rahimi, Moroccan film director Maryam Touzani and Zambian film director Rungano Nyoni pose as they arrive for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film *Jeanne du Barry* during the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, which began on May 16 and will continue till May 27.

76th CANNES FILM FESTIVAL BEGINS



JOHNNY DEPP'S COMEBACK DRAMA OPENS CANNES 2023

The Cannes Film Festival 2023 had a stormy start on Tuesday with Johnny Depp making his comeback in the opening film, showing off his French skills as King Louis XV in the French period drama *Jeanne du Barry*.
The 59-year-old's career has nosedived in Hollywood, despite his victory in a defamation trial against ex-wife Amber Heard last year that featured bitter domestic violence allegations.



Kate Winslet bags BAFTA for best leading actress

Kate Winslet has been adjudged as the best leading actress at BAFTV TV Awards 2023. Kate marked her first television BAFTA win with her performance in the popular drama series *I Am Ruth*.
The actor has three BAFTA awards in her career as an actor. The show for which Winslet took a BAFTA home this time round revolves around the story of a relationship between a mother and her daughter who is facing mental health issues due to the social media era of her life.



MICHAEL DOUGLAS RECEIVES HONORARY PALME D'OR

Michael Douglas received an honorary Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival opening on Tuesday.
Douglas described it as 'an incredible honour', adding, "This means so much to me because there are hundreds of festivals around the world but there's only one Cannes."
The 78-year-old has delivered many beloved films, from thrillers such as *Basic Instinct*, *The Game* and *Falling Down* to dramas such as *Wonder Boys* and superhero spectacles like *Ant-Man*.

COMING SOON



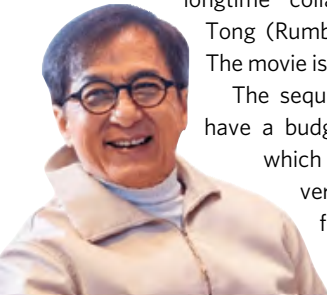
Genre: Fantasy, musical
Starring: Melissa McCarthy, Halle Bailey, Jonah Hauer-King
Language: English

THE LITTLE MERMAID

The Little Mermaid is the beloved story of Ariel, a beautiful and spirited young mermaid with a thirst for adventure. The youngest of King Triton's daughters and the most defiant, Ariel longs to find out more about the world beyond the sea.

JACKIE CHAN TO STAR IN ACTION SEQUEL 'A LEGEND'

Jackie Chan has come on board to act in a sequel to his 2005 martial arts fantasy-adventure hit *The Myth*. The movie will be directed by Chan's longtime collaborator Stanley Tong (*Rumble in the Bronx*).
The movie is titled *A Legend*.
The sequel is expected to have a budget of US\$50mn, which is considered a very large amount for the Chinese film industry.



Lupita Nyong'o wears a saree

Veteran director Mira Nair has adapted one of her best works *Monsoon Wedding* for the stage to great success. Among fans of the musical who attended the opening at St Ann's Warehouse in New York City, was Academy Award-winning actress Lupita Nyong'o. For the special occasion, Lupita Nyong'o chose to celebrate Indian culture by opting to step out in a saree, gold earrings, and an intricate henna tattoo on her bald head. Sharing a video of herself looking gorgeous in the Indian ensemble, she wrote, "When we are invited to an Indian wedding, we use what we got to honour and celebrate."

VENGEFUL ACTION



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW

FAST X
Genre: Action Starring: Vin Diesel, Michelle Rodriguez, Jason Statham, Tyrese Gibson

Early reactions on *Fast X*, the latest installment in the Fast & Furious franchise, are positive for the action and Jason Momoa's performance. However, pessimists have given it a thumbs down and dub it as a damp squib.

The film is the tenth installment in the action franchise and sees the past come back to haunt Dominic Toretto (Vin Diesel) when Dante Reyes (Momoa), the son of Fast Five's major villain Hernan Reyes (Joaquim de Almeida), show up over a decade later to avenge his father's death.

Over many missions and against impossible odds, Dom Toretto (Vin Diesel) and his family have outsmarted, out-nerved and outdriven every foe in their path. Now, they confront the most lethal opponent they've ever faced - A terrifying threat emerging from the shadows of the past who's fueled by blood revenge, and who is determined to shatter this family and destroy everything and everyone that Dom loves forever.

Rating ★★☆☆

Fast X is expected to see audiences satisfied with its action as the stunts and action sequences are one of the most defining features of the Fast & Furious franchise.
A majority of early viewers have praised the action but said the movie did not outdo the previous films in any way.
Fast X premiered at The Space Cinema Roma Moderno in Rome on May 12 and was released in Europe yesterday. It comes to US screens on Friday.



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