

HM, Iran President hold talks



LEADERS DISCUSS THE HISTORICAL FRIENDSHIP BINDING TWO COUNTRIES

IRANIAN PRESIDENT HOSTS DINNER



Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, hosted an official dinner at Sadabad Palace in Tehran on Sunday in honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The dinner was attended by the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan. It was also attended from the Iranian side by some ministers and senior officials. – ONA

- HM, IRAN PRESIDENT DISCUSS ASPECTS OF BILATERAL COOPERATION
- TWO LEADERS EXCHANGE VIEWS ON A NUMBER OF CURRENT ISSUES
- HM AND IRAN PRESIDENT HOLD AN EXPANDED SESSION OF TALKS
- TWO LEADERS PURSUE DISCUSSION ON HISTORICAL FRIENDSHIP
- MEETING TOUCHES ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF COOPERATION

TEHRAN: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, held a session of talks at the Iranian presidential building in Tehran on Sunday.

The session dealt with various aspects of bilateral cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two leaders also exchanged views on a number of current issues of common concern in the backdrop of developments on the regional and international arenas.

The meeting was attended, on the Omani side, by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, and Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

The meeting was attended, on the Iranian side by Dr Hossein Amirabdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed Jamshidi, Deputy for Political Affairs at the President's Office, Ali Bagheri, Deputy Minister for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman.

After the private meeting, His Majesty the Sultan and the Iranian President held an expanded session of talks during which the

Deals to boost investments

TEHRAN: The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and two cooperation agreements in Saadabad Palace, Tehran, in a bid to enhance development and investments between the two countries.

The two Memoranda of Understanding deal with promoting investments, exchanging investment opportunities, boosting development and investments in economic zones and free zones. Meanwhile, the two agreements deal with exchanging oil information and the joint study on the Hengam-Bakha field project.

two leaders pursued discussion on the historical friendship binding the two countries.

The meeting touched on various aspects of cooperation and coordination with a view to realising the interests of the two friendly countries and peoples and achieving their common aspirations.

The expanded talks were attended by the official Omani and Iranian delegations.

Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the Islamic Republic of Iran on a two-day official visit.

An official reception ceremony was held in honour of His Majesty the Sultan. Upon the arrival of His Majesty the Sultan's motorcade at the presidential building of Saadabad Palace in Tehran, Dr

Ebrahim Raisi, the President of Iran, headed the welcoming party. The Iranian President wished His Majesty the Sultan and his accompanying delegation a happy stay.

Then, Dr Ebrahim Raisi accompanied His Majesty the Sultan to the dais of honour, where the Omani Royal Anthem and the Iranian national anthem were played. After that, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the Iranian President, inspected the guard of honour, which saluted His Majesty the Sultan.

After that, the two leaders headed to the reception building, where His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with senior members of the welcoming party, from the Iranian side. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2, 3 AND 4



Oman, Iran sign MoU, agreements to boost investments



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two countries. The two memoranda of understanding deal with promoting investments, exchanging investment opportunities, boosting development and investments in economic zones and free zones. Meanwhile, the two agreements deal with exchanging oil information and the joint study on the Hengam-Bakha field project. The first MoU was signed by Qais bin Mohammed al



Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Ehsan Khandozi, Iran's Minister of Economic and Financial Affairs. The second MoU was signed by Qais bin Mohammed al

Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Hojatollah Abdolmaleki, Iran's Adviser to the President and Secretary of the High Council for Free Zones. The two agreements were signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Ali Akbar Mehrabian, Iran's Minister of Energy. The signing ceremonies were attended by the official delegations from both sides. — ONA



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HIS MAJESTY BEGINS 2-DAY IRAN VISIT

TEHRAN: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Sunday arrived in the Islamic Republic of Iran on a two-day official visit.

An official reception ceremony was held in honour of His Majesty the Sultan. Upon the arrival of His Majesty the Sultan's motorcade at the presidential building of Saadabad Palace in Tehran, Dr Ebrahim Raisi, the President of Iran, headed the welcoming party. The Iranian President wished His Majesty the Sultan and his accompanying delegation a happy stay.

Dr Ebrahim Raisi accompanied His Majesty the Sultan to the dais of honour, where the Omani Royal Anthem and the Iranian National Anthem were played. After that, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the Iranian President, inspected the guard of honour, which saluted His Majesty the Sultan.

After that, the two leaders headed to the reception building, where His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with senior members of the welcoming party, from the Iranian side, who were Dr Hossein Amirabdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ehsan Khandozi, Minister of Economic and Financial Affairs (Head of the Mission of Honour), Brigadier Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani, Minister of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics, Javad Owji, Minister of Oil, Mehرداد Bazrpash, Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Gholam-Hossein Esmaeili, Head of the President's Office, Mahdi Niazi, Acting Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade, Mohammad-Reza Farzin, Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, Mohammed Jamshidi, Deputy for Political Affairs at the President's Office, Ali Bagheri, Deputy Minister for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mehdi Safari, Deputy Minister for Economic Diplomacy of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman. Then, Dr Raisi, shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan.

Earlier, His Majesty the Sultan arrived at Mehrabad International Airport in Tehran and was received by Mohammed Mokhber, First Vice- President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ehsan Khandozi, Minister of Economic and Financial Affairs (Head of the Mission of Honour), Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of Iran to Oman, Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran, several high-ranking Iranian officials and several members of Oman's Embassy in Iran.

Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq left for Iran on an official two-day visit. The visit, made in response to an invitation by the Iranian President, underscores the advanced relations between the two countries.

His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ashshura, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judiciary Council, Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Lt Gen Hasan bin

Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman and Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jaaboub Commander of the Sultan's Special Force.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan is accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, Ambassador at large Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran.

May Allah the Almighty guard His Majesty the Sultan in his travel and grant him good health, well-being and success in all his endeavours to realise the good of the nation. — ONA





Iranian President hosts dinner



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Oman and Iran join hands to activate bilateral agreements



TEHRAN: Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy and Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian on Sunday held a press conference in Tehran within the context of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Sayyid Badr said that the visit of His Majesty the Sultan to Iran constitutes an extension of the deep-rooted bilateral relations and will usher in a new era of concerted action aimed at achieving fruitful cooperation between the two friendly countries.

Sayyid Badr pointed out that the two countries will join hands in activating bilateral agreements that they signed with the prime objective of enhancing cooperation in various fields, including oil, gas, renewable energy, tourism, agriculture, industry, seafaring and establishing direct links between Omani and Iranian ports.

He underscored the two countries' keenness to continue to resolve and find peaceful solutions for issues and developments in the region.

For his part, Dr Hossein said that the meeting that took place between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Iranian President focused on various political, economic, commercial and cultural issues.

He added that the meeting also laid emphasis on consolidating bonds of cooperation on maritime transport, activating shipping lines between the two countries and reviewing agreements and memoranda of understanding signed between the two sides.

The Iranian minister commended the Omani foreign policy, its stands on regional and international issues and the positive role that the Sultanate of Oman undertakes in realising regional security and stability. — ONA

Joint Iranian-Omani film tackles women's, children's rights

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

A joint venture of Iranian and Omani film production has reached its final touches. This is the first joint venture of this kind. By next month the film is expected to hit the screens with Arabic subtitles.

The film, 'Exchange', is the first joint feature film, between Simorgh Khatereh Tara Film Institute in Iran and the Omani company Global Focus Foundation for Film Production and Distribution. Omani producer and director Mohammed al Kindi has collaborated with the producer and director Yasser Ahmadi of Iran.

The film was developed from a 20-minute short feature film entitled Saraleesh, which won international acclaim including the IIFT Festival in India, for the best director and best cinematography, at Al Batinah International Film Festival for the Special Jury Prize, the Bulgarian Festival, the Sofia Film Festival for the best film, and in the Muscat International

The film, 'Exchange', is the first joint feature film between Oman and Iran and is expected to hit the screens with Arabic subtitles next month.



Film Festival. The child won the best actress award. The film raises important humanitarian issues, of which are women's and children's rights. It is a social topic filmed in Isfahan Province, central Iran.

The idea of co-production in the development of the short narrative film came after the film won the Women and Children Festival in Oman and after the meeting that took place between the two directors in Oman, and came up with the idea of developing it from a short 20-minute film to an hour-long feature.

The duo have been working on shots previously filmed and processed artistically with precision and care.

The director, Mohammed al Kindi, visited the shooting sites and discussed with the director, Yasser Ahmadi, to agree on the amendments to the script first and then work on it in the montage unit to work on technical operations such as image and sound, audio and visual effects, as well as translating the film into Arabic.

"We expect participation in international festivals starting from next month, bringing with it the new name 'Mubadala' and with

a new vision in presenting humanitarian subjects, especially those of concern to the issues and rights of women and children," said Mohammed.

He added, "The concept and direction are lovely. My part has been in enhancing the film from 20 minutes to one hour and in the editing aspect. I have also been looking into the translation of the film. I have been looking forward to working in collaboration, and this has been an excellent opportunity. It is a good film that has been filmed well."

Iranian director, Ahmadi, says that he is happy about the joint cooperation, which will undoubtedly enhance the artistic and cultural relations between the two countries. The Omani-Iranian relations in the technical and cultural fields are strong due to the presence of common denominators in various fields.

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Oman is considered a tourist and commercial destination for the Iranian

people due to its excellent cinematic film production capabilities at the Gulf and Arab levels. Oman's diversity of archaeological sites, picturesque nature, mountains, sands, ancient and modern paintings and houses, as well as contemporary infrastructure while preserving the ancient architectural character. Wonderful with his commitment to the diverse national dress, male and female, in all locations, which serves the artwork to show Omani social life and address its issues with an Omani specificity. No matter how diverse global production is in Oman.

'Exchange', producers are Ahmadi, Mohammed al Kindi and Behrouz Bagheri, the writer. Ahmadi directs the film with Behrouz Bagheri, and the director's consultant is Zohre Kazemi. The cinematography is by Ali Hosseinzadeh, with the actors Hojat Najafpour, Fareed Salvati, Maryam Rezaei, Leila Sakhizadeh, Atna agha Alian, Yahya Yaqoubi, Mohsen Afghan, Atfeh Afghan and Parisa Hedayati. The project manager is Simorgh Khatereh Tara Film Institute.



SAYYID BADR RECEIVES PHILIPPINES AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy received here on Sunday Imelda Panolong, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the ambassador's efforts in consolidating relations between Oman and the Philippines. He wished her success in her upcoming assignments. The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Said al Jaradi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry, and Yousef bin Issa al Zedjali, Head of Asia and the Pacific Department at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Oman, Bangladesh hold political talks session



MUSCAT: The third political talks session was held here on Sunday between the foreign ministries of the Sultanate of Oman and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The session discussed several issues and regional and international developments of mutual interest. During the session, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations

and discussed means of enhancing cooperation in the fields of trade exchange, investment, food security and labour relations, as well as other areas that serve joint interests. The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Bangladeshi side was

headed by Masud Bin Momen, Foreign Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The talks session was attended by Mohammed Nazmul Islam, Ambassador of Bangladesh to Oman and Yousef bin Issa al Zedjali, Head of Asia and the Pacific Department and several officials from the two countries' foreign ministries. — ONA

37 per cent increase in public revenues

MUSCAT: In a recent Ministry of Finance report, the actual performance of the 2022 budget has been revealed, indicating a positive trajectory for the economy. The report highlights a surge in public revenue and expenditure, driven by remarkable oil price and production increases. This development showcases a favourable economic landscape and sets the stage for potential growth opportunities. The report unveils a significant boost in oil prices during 2022, surpassing expectations and resulting in a surge in revenue. The average oil price skyrocketed to \$94 per barrel, marking a substantial increase of \$44 from the projected amount of \$50. This uptick can be attributed to favourable global oil market conditions, reflecting an optimistic outlook for the energy sector. Daily oil production exceeded the targeted amount, reaching 1,060 thousand barrels, further bolstering the revenue stream. Public spending demonstrates growth and allocations. Public spending saw a noteworthy increase of 10 per cent compared to the approved budget, indicating a commitment to developmental initiatives and economic stability. The report reveals that current expenditure remained stable at RO 10,092 million, while development expenditure witnessed a significant rise to RO 1,306 million. This surge in development expenditure indicates a focused approach to investing in infrastructure, innovation, and sustainable growth. Furthermore, contributions and other expenses experienced an upward trend, amounting to RO 1,931 million, which highlights the government's dedication to covering essential expenses and driving public welfare. The Ministry of Finance report showcases an impressive 37 per cent increase in public revenue compared to the approved budget. This surge can be attributed to diverse revenue sources, including tax revenue, government investment returns, services fees, and capital repayments. Hydrocarbon revenue took the lead, constituting a significant 77 per cent of the total revenue. Net oil revenue witnessed an exceptional 70 per cent increase, reaching RO 7,625 million, while gas revenue rose by 29 per cent to RO 3,548 million. Though representing 23 per cent of the total revenue, non-hydrocarbon revenue experienced a slight 2 per cent decrease, amounting to RO 3,300 million. This highlights the need for diversification



efforts to reduce dependence on hydrocarbon resources and stimulate non-oil sectors for sustainable growth. The report provides a comparative analysis of financial performance between 2021 and 2022, revealing significant improvements. Revenue surged from RO 11,195 million in 2021 to RO 14,473 million in 2022, showcasing a substantial 29 per cent increase. Concurrently, spending rose from RO 12,418 million to RO 13,329 million, reflecting a 7.3 per cent increase. These figures indicate a promising fiscal performance and underscore the government's commitment to maintaining a balanced budget. The Ministry of Finance report demonstrates the positive economic trajectory of the country, driven by surging oil prices and production. The revenue surge provides an opportunity for increased public investments in key sectors, fostering economic growth, job creation, and overall prosperity. However, efforts to diversify revenue sources and reduce reliance on hydrocarbon income remain crucial for long-term sustainability.

TERMINATION OF WORK REALTIONSHIP AND DISCALIMER OF LIABILITY



Abu Khalil Al Riyami Trd. register at CR Number 5090156 announces that Mr. Hudaifah Sygir Pakistani Nationality and holder of Residence Card No. 120739935 was used to work as Travel Agent at the travel office in South Al Mawaleh. The aforementioned dose not represents our company from the date of this announcement in any case. He is therfore not authorised to receive sum of money or to perform any other business on behalf of the company and the company will not be responsible for this dealing.

MSX index drops 11 points

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index 30 on Sunday lost 11.3 points, comprising a drop by 0.24 per cent to close at 4630.45 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 4641.78 points. The trading value on Sunday stood at (RO 2,859,328), comprising a decline by 14.6 per cent, compared to the last session, which stood at RO 2,176,752. The report released by MSX pointed out that the market value went down by 0.076 per cent to reach about RO 23.64 billion. The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached RO 257,000, comprising 13.82 per cent. The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached RO 513,000, comprising 27.61 per cent. — ONA



RE-TENDER

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
Re-EHC/2023/15	PRIVATIZATION STRUCTURING SERVICES	04-June-2023	15- June-2023	OMR 100 Plus, VAT 5%

- Interested party may find the tender document through the company website (www.nama.om/ar/new-tenders). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded at the same page.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 3.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Thursday 15 June 2023.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre

TENDER ADVERTISEMENT

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Fees	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Site Visit Date	Bid Submission Closing
CCCCRC/ T/316/ 2023	Provision of Catering Services for SQCCRC Patients (2023 - 2025)	100 OMR	08/06/2023	08/06/2023 09:00AM Meeting Point: SQCCRC Main Lobby	29/06/2023

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement from the following address:
Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre – Purchase Department.
Biddings that meet the above requirements should be submitted in a sealed envelope (hardcopy & softcopy) and should be delivered and deposited in the tender box at SQCCRC.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than One week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



US, Saudi Arabia call for extended ceasefire in Sudan

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia and the United States called on Sunday for the extension of a ceasefire deal that has brought some let-up in a six-week war between military factions but little humanitarian relief for civilians.

Clashes could be heard overnight in the capital Khartoum, residents said, while human rights monitors reported deadly fighting in El Fashir, one of the principal cities in the western region of Darfur.

A week-long ceasefire brokered in Saudi and US-led talks in Jeddah is due to run until Monday evening. Both countries are remotely monitoring the truce, which has been repeatedly violated, and called on the army and the RSF “to continue discussions to reach agreement on extending the ceasefire”.

“While imperfect, an extension nonetheless will facilitate the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance to the Sudanese people,” Saudi Arabia and the US said in a joint statement.

The RSF has said it is ready to discuss the possibility of renewal and that it would continue to monitor the truce “to test the seriousness and commitment of the other party to proceed with the



Smoke billows in Sudan's capital Khartoum, five days into a one-week ceasefire. – AFP

renewal of the agreement or not”. The army said it was discussing the possibility of an extension.

More than 300,000 people have crossed Sudan's borders since the fighting erupted, with the largest

numbers heading north to Egypt from Khartoum or west to Chad from Darfur.

In Khartoum, factories, offices, homes and banks have been looted or destroyed. Power, water

and telecommunications are often cut, there are acute shortages of medicines and medical equipment. The truce deal has brought some respite from heavy fighting but sporadic clashes and

air strikes have carried on.

The United Nations and aid groups say that despite the truce they have struggled to get bureaucratic approvals and security guarantees to transport

While imperfect, an extension nonetheless will facilitate the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance to the Sudanese people

US AND SAUDI

aid and staff to Khartoum and other places of need.

Violence has flared in several parts of Darfur, already scarred by conflict and displacement, with hundreds of deaths recorded in El Geneina near the border with Chad during attacks that residents blamed on “Janjaweed” militias drawn from Arab nomadic tribes with links to the RSF.

The governor of Darfur, Minni Minawi, a former rebel whose faction fought against the militias in the Darfur conflict, said in a tweet that citizens should take up arms to defend their property.

In recent days there has also been fighting in El Fashir, capital of North Darfur State. — Reuters



India's PM Modi lights a lamp during the inauguration of new Parliament building in New Delhi. – Reuters

Indian PM Modi opens new parliament building

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated India's new parliament building on Sunday, a modern complex which is part of his government's grand plan to give a makeover.

The inauguration, and the ongoing revamp of the heart of New Delhi based on Indian culture, traditions, and symbols, comes a year before parliamentary elections in which Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will pitch its strong nationalist credentials, and its performance in office over the last decade, to seek a third term.

Early in the morning, Modi held traditional prayers outside the complex in a ceremony that was also attended by top cabinet ministers. He then lit a traditional lamp inside parliament.

Later, the prime minister entered parliament to loud cheers from guests, government officials and

lawmakers, with many welcoming him with chant of “Modi, Modi”.

“This new complex will be evidence of self-reliant India,” he said in an address.

During the inauguration ceremony, a parliament official read out a note written by President Droupadi Murmu in which she welcomed that Modi had inaugurated the complex.

The Modi government has rejected the opposition argument, saying no protocol has been violated and that the prime minister respects the constitutional head of the country.

The new parliament complex is the centrepiece of a \$2.4 billion project aimed at eclipsing the significance of colonial-era buildings in the capital's centre, paving the way for modern buildings with a distinct Indian identity. — Reuters

Results in: Erdogan gains victory in historic Türkiye runoff

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has gained victory on Sunday in a historic runoff that posed the biggest challenge to his 20 years of transformative but divisive rule.

The official Anadolu state news agency showed the leader ahead of his secular opposition rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

A separate count published by the pro-opposition Anka news agency showed Erdogan leading.

Nato member Türkiye's longest-serving leader was tested like never before in what was widely seen as the country's most consequential election in its 100-year history as a post-Ottoman republic.

Kilicdaroglu cobbled together a powerful coalition that grouped Erdogan's disenchanted former allies with secular nationalists and religious conservatives.

He pushed Erdogan into his first runoff on May 14 and narrowed the margin further in the second round.

“I invite all my citizens to cast



Supporters of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan wait for his address following early exit poll results for the second round of the presidential election in Istanbul, Türkiye. – Reuters

their ballot in order to get rid of this authoritarian regime and bring true freedom and democracy to this country,” Kilicdaroglu said after casting his ballot in Türkiye's first presidential runoff.

Erdogan voted with his wife Emine in a conservative district of Istanbul, telling citizens to “turn out and vote without complacency.”

Kilicdaroglu re-emerged a transformed man after the first round.

The former civil servant's message of social unity and freedoms gave way to desk-thumping speeches about the need to immediately expel migrants and fight terrorism.

His right-wing turn was targeted at nationalists who

emerged as the big winners of the parallel parliamentary elections.

The 74-year-old had always adhered to the firm nationalist principles of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk -- a revered military commander who formed Türkiye and Kilicdaroglu's secular CHP party.

But these had played a secondary role to his promotion of socially liberal values practised by younger voters and big-city residents.

Erdogan is lionised by poorer and more rural swathes of Türkiye's fractured society because of his promotion of religious freedoms and modernisation of once-dilapidated cities in the Anatolian heartland.

“It was important for me to keep what was gained over the past 20 years in Türkiye,” company director Mehmet Emin Ayaz said in Ankara.

“Türkiye isn't what it was in the old days. There is a new Türkiye today,” the 64-year-old said.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

SEOUL

Warrant issued for man who opened plane door

A South Korean court issued an arrest warrant on Sunday for a passenger who opened an Asiana Airlines plane door minutes before it landed in Daegu, South Korea, Yonhap News Agency reported.

The man, in his thirties, was detained on landing after opening the door when the A321-200 plane was about 700 feet above the ground, causing panic onboard.

The Daegu District Court issued the warrant for him on



charges of violating the Aviation Security Act, saying there was a risk he may try to flee before trial. The warrant allows police to keep him in custody longer.

Officials gave the man's surname as Lee but not his full name, as is usual custom.

— Reuters

KAMPALA

Uganda confirms casualties among country's soldiers

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni said there had been casualties during an attack by Somalia's group Al Shabaab on a military base manned by Ugandan peacekeepers in the Horn of African country. Museveni did not say how many soldiers were killed or wounded but it was the first official admission of losses in the attack among the Ugandan troops who are serving in the African Union Transition

Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). “Condolences to the coun-



try and the families of those who died,” Museveni said in a statement, adding the country's military had set up a panel to investigate what happened. Al Shabaab tends to give casualty figures in attacks that differ from those issued by the authorities.

— Reuters

JOHANNESBURG

S Africa to investigate allegations of arms shipment

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa has appointed a panel to investigate US allegations that a Russian ship had collected weapons from a naval base near Cape Town last year, the presidency said in a statement on Sunday.

The allegations have caused a diplomatic row between the US, South Africa and Russia and called into question South Africa's non-aligned position on the Ukraine conflict.

South Africa says it is impartial



and has abstained from voting on UN resolutions on the war.

“The President decided to establish the enquiry because of the seriousness of the allegations, the extent of public interest and the impact of this matter on South Africa's international relations,” said the statement. — Reuters



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7

In brief

■ LOS ANGELES



THREE KILLED, 5 WOUNDED IN RALLY SHOOTOUT

At least three people were killed and five others wounded in a shootout at a biker rally in the US state of New Mexico, local media reported. The shooting occurred around 5 pm as 20,000 bikers took part in an annual Memorial Day motorcycle rally in Red River, a small town near the ski destination of Taos.

In an interview, Red River Mayor Linda Calhoun confirmed the deaths and injuries, and said an unspecified number of suspects had been arrested.

“No law enforcement, no first responders were injured. No local people were injured... It was a gang-related incident,” she said. — AFP

■ ROME



DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS RESCUE OVER 600 MIGRANTS

A Doctors Without Borders (MSF) ship has rescued more than 600 migrants and refugees from a boat in distress in the Mediterranean Sea.

The crew of the Geo Barents brought the people aboard in a three-hour operation, the international organisation said.

Among the 602 people, 151 were minors and eleven women, MSF reported on Sunday.

The boat sent a distress call by radio off the coast of Sicily. The Italian authorities asked the nearby Geo Barents vessel to help.

Rome instructed the rescue ship to head for the port of Bari, Italy, where the migrants could be taken ashore. — dpa

■ VATICAN CITY



POPE URGES ACCESS FOR CYCLONE MOCHA RELIEF

Pope Francis on Sunday appealed for humanitarian organisations to be given access to areas hit by a deadly cyclone which tore through parts of Myanmar and Bangladesh two weeks ago.

“I appeal to those responsible to facilitate the access of humanitarian aid,” the pontiff said at the end of the Angelus prayer in the Vatican.

“And I appeal to the sense of human solidarity and ecclesial solidarity to come to the aid of these brothers and sisters of ours,” he added. Cyclone Mocha brought lashing rain and winds of 195 kilometres per hour to Myanmar and neighbouring Bangladesh on May 14, collapsing buildings and turning streets into rivers. — AFP

Zelensky thanks air defence after largest drone attack on Kyiv

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday praised his country's air defence forces, after the capital Kyiv saw the largest drone attack since the beginning of the war.

The overnight attack killed two people and wounded three others.

The latest drone attack came as Russia has intensified aerial strikes on the capital this month, and warned the West against escalating the conflict after the United States agreed to greenlight F-16 deliveries.

Ukraine said the latest attack in Kyiv was “the most important” of the war, with more than forty out of 54 drones targeting the capital.

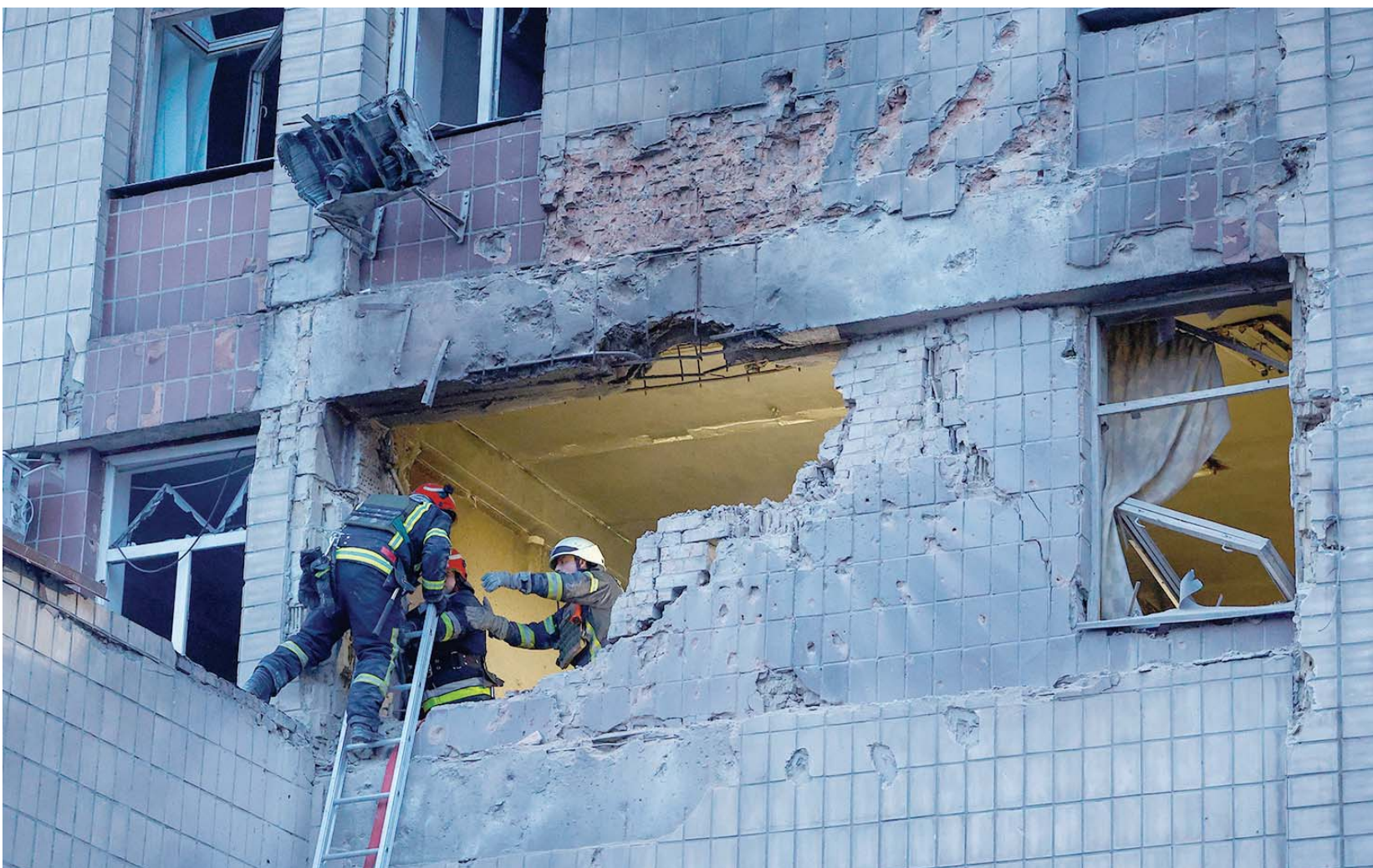
“Every time you shoot down enemy drones and missiles, lives are saved... you are heroes!” Zelensky told his air defence forces on Sunday morning, also thanking rescuers. This was the 14th drone attack on the Ukrainian capital by Russia this month.

Kyiv had been relatively spared since the beginning of the year, but in May its residents have had to live with almost nightly air raid sirens and thundering explosions.

In Kyiv the air raid alert lasted more than five hours as the attack was carried out in several waves.

Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko described the assault as “massive” with drones “arriving from several directions at once”.

The Kyiv military administration said that “more than 40 Russian drones were destroyed by air



Rescuers work at a site of a building damaged during a suicide drone strike in Kyiv, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine. — Reuters

defence” systems in the “most important drone attack against the capital since the start of the war” in February 2022.

Authorities reported that two killed and three others wounded as debris of the downed drones fell in several districts.

Sunday was to be celebrated as

Kyiv's city day, usually marked by street concerts and celebrations.

“Today the enemy decided to ‘congratulate’ the population on Kyiv Day with the help of their killer drones,” the authorities said.

Congratulating residents on Kyiv Day, presidential chief of staff Andriy Yermak said the capital

had “stood up” to Russia.

“Kyiv, a city of free and brave people, has become a symbol of Ukraine's unbreakable spirit and the Kremlin's failed imperial ambitions,” Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said.

Ukraine's air force said that “a record” of 54 drones were launched

from the regions of Briansk and Krasnodar in Russia, adding that 52 were destroyed.

After Kyiv long asked for advanced warplanes, the United States said it would allow Kyiv to acquire F-16 fighter jets, the most sophisticated material yet supplied by the West. — AFP

Spain votes in local polls that up pressure on PM

MADRID: Spaniards were voting on Sunday in local and regional polls seen as a barometer for a year-end general election which surveys suggest Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will lose, heralding a return of the right.

The stakes are high for Sanchez, whose Socialist party governs the eurozone's fourth-largest economy in coalition with the far-left Podemos.

Voters are casting ballots for mayors in 8,131 municipalities while also electing leaders and assemblies in 12 of Spain's 17 regions — 10 of which are currently run by the Socialists.

In an update at 2:00 pm, five hours into voting, participation in the local elections stood at 36.54 per cent, or 1.59 percentage points higher than in the 2019 polls, official figures showed.

Some 35.5 million people are voting in the local elections while 18.3 million are eligible to cast ballots in the regional polls.

Balloting ends at 8:00 pm, with

initial results due out two hours later.

Sanchez has been in office since 2018, and Sunday's elections find him facing several obstacles: voter fatigue with his left-wing government, soaring inflation and falling purchasing power.

“I do think it's an important test. It's the only way we have of expressing our opinion about all these years they've been in government,” 61-year-old doctor Maria Alonso said after voting in Madrid, without saying who earned her vote.

Microbiologist Irene Diaz said the local and regional polls “were as important” as the upcoming general election.

Sanchez expressed confidence that voters would cast their ballots responsibly.

“Most of our citizens will vote positively... for what is important: for public healthcare, public education and housing policies for our young people,” he said after voting in Madrid. — AFP



Partido Popular (PP) party's Madrid regional president candidate for her re-election Isabel Diaz Ayuso arrives to cast her ballot in Madrid. — AFP

Republicans criticise McCarthy, Biden debt ceiling deal

WASHINGTON: After tough negotiations to reach a tentative deal with the White House on the US borrowing limit, the next challenge for House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is pushing it through the House, where hardline Republicans are already threatening to sink it.

As Democratic and Republican negotiators iron out the final details of an agreement to suspend the federal government's \$31.4 trillion debt ceiling in coming days, McCarthy may be forced to do some behind-the-scenes wrangling.

“We're going to try” to stop it from passing the House, Representative Chip Roy, a prominent member of the hardline House Freedom Caucus, said on Twitter. House and Senate Republicans were critical of the deal's time frame and emerging terms.

A failure by Congress to deal with its self-imposed debt ceiling before June 5 could trigger a default that would shake financial markets and send the United States into a deep recession.

Republicans control the House 222-213, while Democrats control the Senate 51-49. These margins mean that moderates from both sides will have to support the bill, as any compromise will almost definitely lose the support of the far left and far right wings of each party.

To win the speaker's gavel, McCarthy agreed to enable any



US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) is trailed by reporters after negotiations on the United States' debt ceiling at the US Capitol in Washington. — Reuters

single member to call for a vote to unseat him, which could lead to his ouster if he seeks to work with Democrats.

Roy complained on Sunday that the agreement would leave intact an expansion of the tax-collecting Internal Revenue Service set in place when Democrats controlled both chambers of Congress.

Senator Lindsey Graham also expressed concern about the deal's potential effect on US defence and Washington's support for Ukraine.

“Do not intend to default on debt, but will not support a deal that reduces the size of the Navy and prevents continued

technological and weapons assistance to Ukraine,” Graham tweeted.

The deal suspends the debt ceiling until January 2025, after the November 2024 presidential election, in exchange for caps on spending and cuts in government programmes.

Representative Dan Bishop and other hardline Republicans were sharply critical of early deal details that suggest Biden has pushed back successfully on several cost-cutting demands on Saturday, signalling that McCarthy may have an issue getting votes.

— Reuters

Reviving the art of letter writing for the digital age



Sandhya Rao Mehta
The writer is Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Literature, SQU

Facing a class of students, all in their early 20s, I was casually explaining a postcard in the context of a poem. Looking at their blank faces, I realised they didn't know what a postcard looked like and the closest we came to size and shape was the ubiquitous mobile phone in front of every student.

Ending a discussion of the poem for the time being, we went to talk about letters, red post boxes, and the postman.

That is when one student hesitantly told me she had been writing to a friend online for a while and, gradually, others joined in about writing long emails to friends they had met while in school or while on vacation.

Letter writing is a long-

treasured art. The oldest recorded handwritten letter is said to be from around 500 BCE, written by the Persian Queen Atossa. Until this millennium, letters were a common means of communication.

Recent surveys in the United States show that 64 per cent of respondents have never written a letter but 69 per cent would love to get a handwritten note, according to newsmagazine India Today.

Letters have been called 'windows to the soul' and a way to understand the human condition. Often, they were meant to be public statements, like the philosopher Seneca's 'moral letters' which instruct lessons on how to live a good life.

Poet John Keats wrote elaborate

LETTER WRITING IS
RELAXING AND A REMINDER
OF IMPORTANT MILESTONES
WHILE GIVING COMFORT,
HOPE, AND HAPPINESS TO
SOMEONE WE LOVE

letters on his idea of poetry: 'What the imagination seizes as beauty must be the truth' became the anthem for early Romantic poetry.

Letter writing may soon become a dying art, but there are many reasons why it should, and can be revived. Letters reveal life in all its domesticity – not the big historical

moments found in textbooks but the everyday realities of life. It is the way in which the ordinary becomes valued.

We do still write, but it's in the form of emails – more formatted, less spontaneous.

As Suzy Hazelwood says "they are infinitely revisable, deletable – as well as easily forwardable". They are probably less worthy of preservation and it is doubtful that they catch the unpredictable messiness of daily life.

Various organisations across the world are trying to revive this lost art: 'Daakroom' is an initiative by design students in India to host a letter-writing carnival that encourages people, especially youngsters, to participate in writing

a postcard that is anonymously sent. There are non-profit organisations around the world that encourage youngsters to write to elderly people in care homes, to children recovering in hospitals, and just to those looking for company.

Letter writing is proven to have many benefits: from improving mental health, and encouraging friendships to allowing time for self-reflection.

It is also relaxing and a reminder of important milestones while giving comfort, hope, and happiness to someone we love.

But most of all, who doesn't like the arrival of an anticipated, long-awaited message, packaged in a pretty envelope with pages of handwritten emotions?

Planet-friendly farming takes root in Tunisia

FRANCOISE KADRI

Saber Zouani lost his job as a waiter when the Covid pandemic ravaged the Tunisian tourism sector, so he decided to try something new and started a permaculture farm.

Now he grows all the food he needs and has become a pioneer of the style of ecological agriculture that is gaining fans worldwide, including in his North African country.

Many hope it will help Tunisia weather the impacts of climate change and wean it off its reliance on global supply chains, including grain and fertiliser imports from war-torn Ukraine and Russia.

In his western home town of Cap Negro, Zouani, 37, proudly showed off his three-hectare farm, set up to mimic natural ecosystems in line with ideas popularised in the 1970s by Australian ecologists.

Permaculture, as an alternative to industrial agriculture, aims to work in harmony with the environment, keep soil structures intact, and do without artificial inputs such as chemical fertilisers or pesticides.

"No, these are not weeds," said Zouani, a biotechnology graduate, pointing to nettles and dandelions growing wild all around his rows of onions, peppers and radishes.

When he harvests his vegetables, he said, he puts the excess green matter back onto the soil to slow evaporation — hoping to keep the ground as moist as a forest floor covered with fallen leaves.

Such methods are especially useful in Tunisia where an unprecedented drought has parched the countryside and left water reservoirs at dangerously low levels this spring.

At his farm, Zouani captures precious rainwater in a pond and only sparingly waters his plants, which are all grown from his own seeds.

Zouani also keeps cows, sheep, goats and chickens and composts their droppings to create soil enriched with the nitrogen-rich natural fertiliser.

"We need to create living soil, attract earthworms, fungi and all the nutrients for our plants and trees," said Zouani.

Permaculture, he said, draws on farming methods and wisdoms of centuries past — "returning to our roots, to the traditional methods used by our grandparents".

Zouani said he earns around 300 dinars (\$100) a month from selling farm produce, with enough left over to make him, his brother and their elderly parents self-sufficient.

In two or three years, he hopes to make "a decent income" and turn his farm, named "Om Hnia" in honour of his late grandmother, into an eatery and eventually a rural eco-lodge. — AFP

In this Swiss town, Tina Turner was a neighbour, not a star



Christopher F Schuetze
The writer joined the Berlin bureau of NYT in 2018 to help cover German politics, society and breaking news

Around the world Tina Turner, who died last week at 83, was known for her music, her powerful stage presence and her barrier-smashing career. But in the Swiss town where she lived for nearly three decades, she was known for living a low-key life — doing her own shopping, standing in line at the post office and exercising outdoors.

In front of the house where the rock star lived with her husband, Erwin Bach, and where on Wednesday night neighbours gathered to light candles and tell stories, a polished bronze sign asks (in English and in German) that visitors not ring the doorbell before noon.

After a lifetime in the public eye, Turner moved to the sleepy town of Küsnacht, Switzerland, with Bach, a German music executive whom she started dating in the 1980s. In 1995, Bach got a job running the Swiss offices of EMI Music in Zurich, and the two moved to the Alpine country. They married in 2013, the year she acquired Swiss citizenship and gave up her American passport.

Turner and Bach lived in a classic white peak-roofed mansion on the shore of Lake Zurich.

In a 1997 interview with Larry King, Turner explained why she left the United States.

"I left America because my success was in another country and my boyfriend was in another country," she said. Asked about her success in the United States as compared

‘WITH TINA
TURNER’S DEATH,
THE WORLD HAS
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ARE WITH THE
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A SECOND HOME
IN SWITZERLAND,’
SWITZERLAND’S
PRESIDENT ALAIN
BERSET’S TWITTER
POST

with Europe, she said: "Not as big as Madonna. I'm as big as Madonna in Europe; I'm as big as, in some places, the Rolling Stones."

But she didn't lord her fame over anyone, said Severin Silvestri, 30, the manager at Rico's, a high-end restaurant just up the road from her house.

"She was a cheerful, very open and kindhearted person," he said. Years ago, when she was in better health, Turner and Bach would eat at the Michelin-starred eatery from time to time. Silvestri, who once waited on Turner, said she did not put on airs. "She was

completely down to earth," he said. In addition to her international music career, her Swiss home celebrated her for the public Christmas light display (illuminated golden wreaths) she donated to the town on the occasion of her 75th birthday in 2014 and for the rescue boat "Tina" that she christened that year.

Neighbours said they were aware of Turner's fame, but did not bother her when they saw her in public, which was less and less in the past years as she struggled with her health.

"She seems to have lived a relatively normal life and seems to have enjoyed it," said Oliver Moritz, 46, the manager of a hotel several hundred yards up the lakeshore, noting that she was the kind of person you would run into while shopping.

Roland Roller Frei, 57, a Swiss music producer who worked with her on and off for more than a decade, said that it was this normal life, unbothered by fans, that seemed to draw Turner to a life in Switzerland.

"I think it was important for her to find a place where she would be left alone," he said, adding: "I think she appreciated the fact that she was not being pestered by fans every day, but that she could enjoy her retirement in peace."

The town's mayor, Markus Ernst, 50, said that some residents had become so used to her presence that they forgot what a big deal she was outside Küsnacht. "We became fully aware of her global star quality in 2013, when she got married and when camera teams descended on us from around the world," he said.

Ernst, who says he listened to Turner's music as a teenager on cassette tapes and records, said meeting her in real life was very special. "She had an incredible aura, was very approachable and interacted with you in such a positive way," he said.

And she also gave back to her community. "She was a great ambassador for our community, and she did it totally voluntarily," said Ernst, referring to Turner's habit of praising Switzerland and Küsnacht to the news media.

— *The New York Times*



Donnie Green touches a photograph of late singer Tina Turner placed near her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles.

Bringing on track misplaced authority

The Almighty Allah is the only one who bestows human beings their fates and fortunes in life whether it is pleasing or displeasing them! At the end it is part of one's experience; whatever people come across is always for their own good regardless how hard or enjoyable it is. The lesson behind every experience will be discovered sooner or later. This is how life is treating people and showing them the easy and hard way of learning things! However, some people pretend that life is unfair, though it is people who are unjust to one another.

Case in a point to people's unfairness is placing authority in incompetent ones, which is even beyond their control. Then, one wonders why that is happening; is it their luck or a responsibility being misplaced on them.

Thus, nobody can change anything in that, but to accept that fact as it is. Irony of fate; perhaps it is all part of a hidden secret that life usually brings to humans! It is all about everyone's chance in life as some are getting good fortunes while others are just a mean behind making others' dreams come true.

Human beings are paving each other's pathways to live their destiny, make a living and fulfil ambitions. This has been clearly highlighted in the Holy Quran, "We raise some of them above others in ranks, so that some may command work from others.

But the Mercy of the lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass". In this regard, whatever one gets is a blessing that works well for him even if that is not what one wants. Those who get superior and given the authority should be more responsible and competent in whatever they do.

As the saying goes "With authority comes responsibility", they are obliged to shoulder the responsibility of the given authority, team and job-related



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A LEADER IS ALWAYS THE ONE WHO SHOULDERS THE RESPONSIBILITY, BUT NOT WHO BECOMES A BURDEN! A BOSS SHOULD ALWAYS LEAD BY EXAMPLE

tasks. Otherwise, they don't deserve getting the power as they prove their inability to hold leadership position. Here comes the irresponsibility and incompetency of certain people who are uncommitted to the authority given to them.

Their recklessness comes in different forms, some of which are the unwillingness to take decisions, misleading their teams and disability to handle tasks or solve problems.

Unfortunately, today there are many of this kind who get such a position by fortune or otherwise. Though, they are unable to handle the position with such big authority and responsibility. That is why they could be challenged sometimes by their own team members who are more competent, responsible and trustworthy. This will be very irritating and frightening even to the boss.

Always a blind person is unable to guide others and show them the way. Instead his colleagues will be unsafe with him because they can't rely on him or even feel the sense of belonging to his leadership.

As Mother Teresa said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Although people's talents in different walks of life complement each other's needs, when it comes to leadership it should be given to a competent person.

A boss cannot be always a leader as he/she might be able to execute things alone, but unable to lead a team.

Thus, a leadership and authority should be given to people who are more responsible, reliable, wise, inspiring and self-confident.

Otherwise, the return will be only disappointment and distraction to the team instead! A leader is always the one who shoulders the responsibility, but not who becomes a burden! A boss should always lead by example.

AEROBATIC MANOEUVRES



Indonesian Air Force's Jupiter aerobatic team manoeuvre during a performance in Pekanbaru, Riau province, on Sunday. – AFP

Oman, Iran relish well-established ties

The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran have strong historical relations, based on good neighbourliness, mutual respect, and joint cooperation in many issues that bring the two friendly countries together.

Although trade was the only connection, the relations extend to ancient civilisations, when Omani merchants and travellers sailed through the Strait of Hormuz to the Iranian border.

The relations became very strong in the 1970s after the late Sultan Qaboos assumed power in Oman.

Oman views its non-interference foreign policy doctrine as critical to ensuring that the Sultanate of Oman has no enemies and is not perceived as a threatening actor by any foreign government.

Despite all the political changes that afflicted the region, the relationship between the two countries, based on reciprocal respect with conditions of non-interference in the internal affairs of both states, remained stable. This made it a unique example in the history of bilateral relations in the region.

The late Sultan Qaboos visited Iran in 1974, a visit that helped establish the principles of security cooperation in the Strait of Hormuz, and that both countries would respect each other's interest while implementing new strategies and would maintain the free movement of ships in the Strait.

Late Sultan Qaboos visited Iran in 2009, meeting Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei and former Iranian President Ahmadinejad. Many joint agreements, including economic cooperation and Iran gas export, were



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OMANI AND IRANIAN CULTURE AND CIVILISATION ARE HISTORICALLY ROOTED, AND IRANIAN CITIES HAVE HISTORICAL AND TOURIST ATTRACTIONS, IN ADDITION TO IRAN'S POSSESSION OF ADVANCED MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY

signed during the visit. The late Sultan Qaboos again visited Iran in 2013 to reaffirm cooperation and friendship between the two states.

In turn, Ahmadinejad visited Oman in 2007, followed by the visit of former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in 2014. In May 2022, President Ebrahim Raisi visited Muscat — a trip that saw the two countries sign a string of trade deals.

In February last the president confirmed that Iran has distinguished relations with Oman, and that there is room for further development of bilateral economic and trade relations, indicating that his government pursues a policy of expanding cooperation with other countries.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited the Sultanate of Oman last April, and confirmed that his talks with senior officials in Oman were positive and focused on improving regional and global cooperation.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

The Omani-Iranian understanding was not limited to the political and diplomatic arena only, but also extended to military cooperation, as the two countries signed several memorandums of understanding to enhance military cooperation between them, the last of which was in 2019.

In addition to the establishment of several joint naval manoeuvres in the Strait of Hormuz, which the two countries participate in managing by conducting Joint



patrols aimed at consolidating security and stability, according to a joint agreement in 1974.

The Strait of Hormuz is the most important oil artery in the world, through which more than 35 per cent of the world's oil supplies pass, due to the presence of the largest black gold exporting countries on both sides of the Gulf, which makes its security the focus of the world's attention.

In recent years, Oman has been a vital conduit for Iran in diplomatic affairs. Oman's positive stand towards Iran contributed to strengthening mutual trust, to the extent that Tehran saw itself as an honest and reliable mediator to keep the door open for dialogue with Arab and Western countries.

Oman played a prominent role in opening the door to nuclear talks and keeping the spectre of war away from the region by facilitating talks between Iran and America before officially announcing them, which led

to the international nuclear agreement in 2015. The agreement constituted a historic turning point, and cemented Oman's diplomatic role in resolving long-term international crises, as if it holds the key to solutions to international crises.

Through mediation, Oman succeeded in releasing Arab and Western prisoners held by Tehran.

In 2011, Muscat supervised the return to their country of three American prisoners in Tehran.

Oman also endeavoured to protect Iranian interests in countries in which it does not have diplomatic representation. After the storming of the British Embassy in Tehran in 2011, the UK reduced its diplomatic relations with Tehran, and Oman represented Iran's interests in London until the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2014.

The same applies to Canada after the closure of its embassy in

Tehran in 2012. Tourism between Iran and Oman flourished after Tehran unilaterally cancelled entry visas for Omanis in 2018, followed by Muscat two years later by allowing citizens of 103 countries, including Iran, to stay in Oman for 10 days without the need to obtain an entry visa.

The Iranian city of Shiraz is considered the first destination for Omanis due to its variety of low-priced medical services, such as eye surgery, plastic surgery, and hair transplantation, in addition to its historical places.

Omani and Iranian culture and civilisation are historically rooted, and Iranian cities have historical and tourist attractions, in addition to Iran's possession of advanced medical technology. These make Omani tourists go to Iran. The visit of the Omanis to Iran is also linked to religious tourism, as the Omanis go to visit the religious monuments in the Iranian city of Mashhad.

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SABALENKA SWEEPS PAST KOSTYUK

Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in action during her first round match against Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk. — Reuters



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas plays a backhand return to Czech Republic's Jiri Vesely during their match on day one of the French Open tournament at Roland Garros. — AFP



Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis celebrates winning his first round match against Britain's Daniel Evans. — Reuters

T S I T S I P A S E D G E S V E S E L Y , K O K K I N A K I S O U S T S E V A N S

PARIS: Aryna Sabalenka won a politically-charged French Open duel against Marta Kostyuk on Sunday as jeers rained down on the defeated Ukrainian who refused to shake hands with her Belarusian opponent.

World number two and Australian Open champion Sabalenka swept 10 of the last 12 games to win 6-3, 6-2 as she kick-started her push to reach the second week in Paris for the first time.

Kostyuk honoured her pledge not to shake hands with Sabalenka in protest at Russia's attack of Ukraine. Belarus is a key military ally of Moscow.

"It was a very tough match, tough emotionally. I didn't know if the booing was against me but thank you so much for your support, it's really important," said Sabalenka who apologised for her exaggerated, theatrical bow to the Court Philippe Chatrier crowd.

Kostyuk, 20, famously refused to shake hands with Sabalenka's Belarusian compatriot and former world number one

Victoria Azarenka at the US Open last year. She opted instead for a cursory touch of racquets at the net.

The 39th-ranked Kostyuk, who has been a vociferous critic of the decision to allow Russian and Belarusian players to keep competing on tour since the attack of her country, questioned the crowd's motives in booing her stance.

"I want to see people react to it in 10 years when the war is over. I think they will not feel really nice about what they did," she said.

'I DON'T HATE HER'

"I didn't expect it. People should be honestly embarrassed."

Sabalenka had admitted on the eve of the tournament that she could accept if Kostyuk had feelings of "hate" towards her.

"I never said publicly nor privately nor to anyone that I hate Aryna Sabalenka or any of the players. I just don't respect her because of her position in this situation,"

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS	
Men (first round)	
Sebastian Ofner (AUT) bt Maxime Cressy (USA) 6-4, 7-6 (8/6), 6-2; Tallon Griekspoor (NED) bt Pedro Martinez (ESP) 6-4, 2-6, 0-6, 7-5, 6-3; Hubert Hurkacz (POL x13) bt David Goffin (BEL) 6-3, 5-7, 6-4, 2-6, 6-4; Karen Khachanov (x11) bt Constant Lestienne (FRA) 3-6, 1-6, 6-2, 6-1, 6-3; Radu Albot (MDA) bt Patrick Kypson (USA) 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 6-1; Thanasi Kokkinakis (AUS) bt Dan Evans (GBR x20) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4	
Women (first round)	
Nadia Podoroska (ARG) bt Jessica Ponchet (FRA) 6-0, 6-2; Storm Sanders (AUS) bt Nuria Parrizas Diaz (ESP) 4-6, 6-2, 6-4; Magdalena Frech (POL) bt Zhang Shuai (CHN x29) 6-1, 6-1; Aryna Sabalenka (x2) bt Marta Kostyuk (UKR) 6-3, 6-2	

added Kostyuk, who wants Russian and Belarusian players to individually denounce the war which has raged on since February last year.

This year sees a new era at the French Open where for the first time since 2004 Rafael Nadal will not grace the famous red clay. Injured Nadal, the 14-time champion, sits out the 2023 edition of a tournament where he has lost just three of 115 matches.

In his absence, Novak Djokovic, a two-time winner, and the man responsible for two of Nadal's three losses, will look to edge ahead of the Spaniard with a record-setting 23rd major.

However, he faces serious threat from Carlos Alcaraz, the world number one aiming to add a Roland Garros title to his US Open triumph. Alcaraz and Djokovic begin their campaigns on Monday.

'SHOCKING'

Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who blew a two-set lead to lose the 2021 final to Djokovic, made the second round on Sunday with a 7-5, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) win over Jiri Vesely, the 455th-ranked Czech.

Vesely, who had previously only played

in two second-tier Challenger events this year, squandered four set points which would have forced a deciding set.

Britain's Dan Evans was the highest seed to fall in early action on Sunday, the 20th seed losing 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 to Australian wild card Thanasi Kokkinakis.

"It's shocking how I played today," said Evans. Andrey Rublev, the seventh seed and Monte Carlo champion in April, begins against Laslo Djere of Serbia.

Rublev has made the quarterfinals in Paris on two occasions while 57th-ranked Djere has twice made the third round.

Women's third seed Jessica Pegula and eighth-seeded Maria Sakkari are also in action on Sunday.

Pegula, a quarterfinalist in 2022, tackles American compatriot Danielle Collins.

Sakkari made the semifinals in 2021 where she was defeated in a three-set epic by eventual champion Barbora Krejickova. Another Czech player, Karolina Muchova, is her opponent on Sunday. — AFP

Six out of six for Red Bull



Red Bull's Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium after winning the Monaco GP as Prince Albert II of Monaco with his wife Princess Charlene applaud. – Reuters

MONACO: Double world champion Max Verstappen led a soggy and slippery Monaco Grand Prix from start to finish on Sunday to stretch his Formula One lead to 39 points and earn Red Bull a sixth win in as many races this season.

In a race livened up by a downpour after a processional 51 laps in dry conditions, Spaniard Fernando Alonso finished second for Aston Martin but a massive 27.9 seconds behind at the chequered flag.

Frenchman Esteban Ocon completed the podium in third place for Renault-owned Alpine, their first of the season, with Mercedes' seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton fourth and taking a bonus point for fastest lap. "That was a real Monaco," Verstappen said after a 78-lap race that lasted an hour and 48 minutes.

"It was incredibly slippery and when you are that far in the lead you don't want to push too hard but also you don't want to lose too much time so it's quite difficult in that scenario. "I clipped the wall a few times and it was super difficult out there. But that's Monaco."

CLOSEST RIVAL

The win was Verstappen's



● Verstappen wins in Monaco from pole position

● Alonso second for Aston Martin, Alpine's Ocon third

● Perez lapped and out of the points

● Verstappen leads the Mexican by 39 points

fourth of the season, second in Monaco and 39th of his career. Mexican team mate Sergio Perez, his closest title rival, started in last position after a qualifying crash

and finished two laps down in 16th.

Mercedes' George Russell was fifth and home hero Charles Leclerc finished sixth for Ferrari.

Alpine's Pierre Gasly, Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, McLaren's Lando Norris and team mate Oscar Piastri completed the points positions.

Verstappen led away cleanly from the start on the medium tyres, with Alonso opting for the harder compound and slotting in close behind with no change to the rest of the points positions.

If the podium ended up being the same top three as on the starting grid, the rain brought added excitement as drivers slid around the track, some getting too close to the barriers, before pitting for intermediate tyres and then full wets.

Verstappen delayed his pitstop to coincide with the rain while Alonso initially pitted for medium tyres and then had to come in again for intermediates, losing a possible chance to take the lead.

"We thought to play a long game with the strategy but Max drove super well on the medium tyres and extended that first stint. We didn't have any chance and then at the end the rain put things

a bit complicated out there," said Alonso. "It was not easy and I was surprised there were no safety cars from incidents, I think everyone was doing an amazing job today to keep the cars on track."

While Alonso celebrated his fifth podium of the season, and best result yet for Aston Martin, Canadian team mate Lance Stroll retired after repeated tangles with rivals.

The only other driver not running at the finish was Haas's Kevin Magnussen, whose teammate Nico Hulkenberg was 17th in the team's 150th race and collected a five-second penalty for causing a collision with Williams' Logan Sargeant.

Sargeant spent his afternoon showing that overtaking is possible on the world's most glamorous street circuit by allowing a string of drivers to get past him.

Perez pitted at the end of lap one for hard tyres to go the distance, jumping Alfa Romeo's Guanyu Zhou and Hulkenberg in the pits to move up to 18th but his race soon fell apart in a nightmare of five pitstops.

He was also lapped by Verstappen long before half way.

— Reuters

Prannoy claims maiden Malaysia Masters title

KUALA LUMPUR: India's shuttler HS Prannoy defeated China's Weng Hongyang in a close battle to win the men's singles final in the Malaysia Masters on Sunday, earning himself a major career success.

Prannoy beat Weng 21-19, 13-21, 21-18 in their first ever face off. In the thrilling 94-minute marathon match, Prannoy, 30, exhibited calmness and grit over the 23-year-old Weng to win crucial points and end his six-year hunt for a title.

Prannoy's physical endurance, capped by his instinct to unleash powerful crosscourt smashes was pivotal to his victory. "It is a great achievement for me, the draws were tough," he said afterwards.

Meanwhile, Japan's top seed and world number one Akane Yamaguchi clinched the women's singles title, overcoming Indonesia's Gregoria Mariska Tunjung 21-17, 21-7 to seal her third title of the year.

Yamaguchi has been a tournament standout as she demolished each of her opponents with relative ease without dropping a game.

"Malaysia seems to be a lucky place for me. It was fun to play in this venue, with so many fans cheering me on. It's important for me to play well with confidence

every time," she said.

The Japanese shuttler was a class above the Indonesian in the final, especially in the second game with her crisp all-round display.

Malaysia has become Yamaguchi's happy hunting ground after she also won the Malaysia Open in January, and followed that up by clinching the German Open.

Prannoy's triumph in the Malaysia Masters made him the first Indian men's singles shuttler to win this Super 500 event.

Prannoy gained a priceless lead on Sunday after he edged a tense opening game against Weng.

Weng, however, stormed back to win the second game. But a tough deciding match ensued, with Prannoy unleashing a powerful crosscourt smash that Weng could only push wide.

Thailand's top-ranked pair Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Sapsiree Taerattanachai won the mixed doubles, while South Koreans Baek Ha-na and Lee So-hee claimed the women's doubles title. South Korea's Kang Min-hyuk and Seo Seung-jae won the men's doubles.

The Malaysia Masters is the first badminton event on the World Tour to offer Paris Olympics ranking points. — AFP



Fans response provides motivation in IPL season



Finally, after sixty-five articles with the Oman Observer through the months of late March, April and May, here comes a day when its time for us to bid adieu to all your wonderful people for all the love and support that you have showered upon us. And in return all that I have is loads and loads of gratitude towards each and every one of you all.

What a wonderful season of the best franchise cricket in the world did we have. I assure you that, this has been the best of season of IPL and its not just me, but the stats also state the same.

Talking about stats, through the IPL, we have received over

15,000 correspondences from people of different walks of life and we would like to appreciate each and everyone of them. Our success rate on predictions was over

80%, which is a number that any predictor or pundit would be extremely proud about.

For the last decade, I have been managing cricket teams, through which I understand the perspectives and expectations of the team owners and the management personnels. I have been involved in the field of media for the last half a decade and that's the area which I have enjoyed the most.

This space started with 500 words and after multiple increases had reached to a 1,000 words space and this is courtesy of all the love and engagement that we have received in the fan comments column. I wouldn't lie, over 2 months of break-free engagement was extremely



exhausting and half-way I was short of motivation, but

every time that I read the fan comments, which poured in large numbers every day, I would be more than excited to get back to writing every day.

TOUCHING LETTERS

I would also like to take a moment to thank all those people who kept on writing to us every

day. I do understand that, we had a limitation on occasion we could on publish 1% of the comments which were coming in. To be honest, we just didn't expect this kind of success and love from all you wonderful people and we were overwhelmed with the responses. I would certainly like to thank the entire team of Oman Observer for consistently backing and supporting me with all the

sudden changes that we came up with your suggestions.

There were a few comments which touched my heart and surely got me very emotional. I am glad to be an inspiration behind the Omani youngsters that have followed this column and even started this wonderful game of cricket. I was extremely touched when this column was able to get an Omani youngster out of depression and start this wonderful game. I couldn't have been more pumped than have inspired a mother to send both her daughters to an academy. One thing that I least expected was for a local to open a cricket academy during this span for the development and growth of local talents.

The instance of Dr Makarand and his son Arihan bonding through debate over their favourite cricket team almost every other evening did make me smile. I loved the involvement of

youngsters and one such instance was that of Jeet Shah, the junior national cricket captain. But if I have to pick just two best comments, it has to be of an Omani housewife complaining of how watching cricket has suddenly become a part of their daily activity.

Another one is on how the families unite together during the festive season of IPL.

There is a reason why *Oman Observer* is the national newspaper of Oman and it's the most read and followed print media news platform. I would like to once again thank each and everyone involved in this crazy roller-coaster ride and I hope to connect with all of you as soon as possible.

Oman is soon going to be travelling to Zimbabwe, for making its road to the world cup. Whether it can or not, only time will tell, but that's surely an opportunity for us to connect.

PSG win record 11th French title



Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi fights for the ball with Strasbourg's French defender Frederic Guilbert (L) and Strasbourg's French midfielder Morgan Sanson (R) during the French L1 match between RC Strasbourg Alsace and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at Stade de la Meinau in Strasbourg, eastern France. — AFP

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain clinched a French record 11th league title on Saturday as Lionel Messi scored in a 1-1 draw away at Strasbourg.

Messi's opener was cancelled out by a Kevin Gameiro equaliser, but the result gave PSG an unassailable four-point lead over second-placed Lens with one match of the season remaining.

PSG moved ahead of the previous record of 10 titles set by Saint-Etienne in 1981 and which they equalled a year ago under former coach Mauricio Pochettino.

It is PSG's ninth title in the last 11 seasons, a period in which they have dominated French football under Qatari ownership.

"This afternoon I watched the last day of the season in the Bundesliga and you can see that it is very difficult to win the league, any league," PSG coach Christophe Galtier told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"The reigning champions in all European leagues have often had problems this season, so we appreciate what this means.

"It is a title and we must not believe it is normal to win, even if we are Paris Saint-Germain."

PSG started the penultimate weekend of the season six points clear of nearest rivals Lens with just six points to play for, and with a far better goal difference.

A Lens slip-up would have seen the capital side crowned champions with a game to spare even in defeat, but in the end they needed the draw as their challengers eased to a 3-0 win over already-relegated Ajaccio.

Kylian Mbappe set up Messi to put PSG ahead just before the hour with his 16th Ligue 1 goal this season.

Ex-Paris striker Gameiro equalised with 11 minutes left, bundling in the rebound after Gianluigi Donnarumma had saved from Morgan Sanson.

The draw ultimately suited both teams as it enabled Strasbourg to guarantee their top-flight survival.

PSG started the season superbly and did not lose a game in any competition before the World Cup.

However, they lost six of their first 17 league games in 2023 and were eliminated from the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich and in the French Cup at the same stage.

Those results increased

speculation that Galtier — who also won the title with Lille two years ago — will be replaced in the close season.

Messi is expected to depart when his contract expires at the end of the campaign, meaning next weekend's match at home to Clermont is likely to be his last in a PSG shirt.

LENS CLINCH CL TICKET

Lens secured second place and a ticket for next season's Champions League group stage with their win against Ajaccio, which was sealed by first-half goals from Deiver Machado, Adrien Thomasson and Lois Openda.

Belgian striker Openda netted a penalty for his 20th goal in Ligue 1 this season.

Marseille, who lost 2-1 at home to Brest, must therefore settle for third place and will enter the Champions League in the third qualifying round.

Beneath them, Lille are in pole position to qualify for the Europa League after coming from behind to beat Nantes 2-1 and move up to fourth position.

Quentin Merlin put relegation-threatened Nantes in front in the far north, but two second-half

penalties from Canada's Jonathan David gave Lille the victory.

Lille are now a point above both Rennes and Monaco, who met on Saturday, with the Brittany side winning 2-0 thanks to second-half goals by Lovro Majer and Amine Gouiri.

Rennes are fifth, above Monaco on goal difference. Fifth place goes into next season's Europa Conference League while sixth will not qualify for Europe at all.

Lyon's European hopes were effectively ended despite a 3-0 win over Reims in which Alexandre Lacazette scored his 27th Ligue 1 goal this season, leaving him just one behind Mbappe, the division's top marksman.

Nantes will go into the final weekend having to win to stand a chance of avoiding relegation as they sit 17th, two points behind Auxerre, who drew 1-1 at Toulouse.

Angers, Ajaccio and Troyes have already been relegated. Four teams go down and only two come up from Ligue 2 as the top flight is reduced from 20 clubs to 18 for next season.

There were also wins on Saturday for Angers, Nice and Clermont. — AFP



Bayern seize title as Dortmund collapse

DORTMUND, Germany: Despite a record 11th straight Bundesliga title win, Bayern Munich's immediate future has been thrown into serious doubt after the shock sackings of CEO Oliver Kahn and sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic.

Manager Thomas Tuchel revealed the decision had been pre-meditated, regardless of the result of Saturday's matches.

"I've known since yesterday" Tuchel said, saying "the two of them were responsible for the journey we've been on together.

"I'm trying to process it now."

The drama continued after the sacking, with Kahn taking to Twitter and complaining he had been banned from the club's title celebration.

Kahn congratulated the team on their win, but said "I would love to celebrate with you, but unfortunately I can't because the club has prohibited me from doing so."

'FEEL THE PRESSURE'

Pre-match, Dortmund looked set for a memorable championship win, having closed the gap with Bayern from nine points at Christmas to take a two-point lead into the final round.

A veteran of now 12 Bundesliga titles, Bayern captain Thomas Mueller piled on the pressure on Friday, unleashing mind games via social media, saying he knew Dortmund's players would be nervous.

"I think 200,000 to 400,000 fans will be expected at the championship celebration," Mueller wrote, saying "if Dortmund want to win, you have

to stand up to (the pressure) as a player."

"I believe that the players will also feel this pressure and that's where my hope lies."

The side were 2-0 down after 25 minutes, with striker Sebastien Haller having missed a penalty. While Dortmund fought back to draw 2-2, the point was not enough as Bayern won the title — their 33rd Bundesliga crown — on goal difference.

Bayern and Dortmund finished the season on 71 points, the lowest points total for a champion in Germany in more than a decade.

Indeed, the failure to capitalise said a lot more about Dortmund's nerves than it did about Bayern's quality, with many of the Bavarians' European rivals less likely to be so accommodating.

While much of the post-match focus was aimed squarely at Dortmund's inability to take advantage of a golden opportunity, Tuchel indicated that the upcoming celebrations would be muted.

"Instead of celebrating, we now have another issue" the manager said in response to the sackings.

German football clubs give a greater degree of control to club officials than clubs in England and elsewhere, with the two seen as directly responsible for most aspects of management in recent seasons, including recruitment.

Kahn and Salihamidzic were behind the decision to sack coach Julian Nagelsmann and hire Tuchel in March, despite the manager having lost just three of 37 games in all competitions this season. — AFP

India, Pakistan share spoils; South Korea win

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 28

Favourite India and Pakistan settled for a 1-1 draw in their blockbuster Pool A match of the Men's Junior Asia Cup hockey championship in Salalah on Saturday night.

The result left Pakistan leading Pool A with seven points from three matches with a better goal difference (23) than India (20) who also have the same points.

India scored the first goal of the match when Sharda Nand Tiwari found the target from a penalty corner.

India led 1-0 at the half-time in the intensely-fought match.

Pakistan hit the equaliser in



the third quarter with a nice field goal from Basharat Ali in the 44th minute. Both the teams made efforts for a winning goal in front

of vociferous supporters who turned out in large numbers at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex hockey pitch in Salalah.



SOUTH KOREA SECOND

In Pool B, South Korea beat Bangladesh 3-1 to confirm their second position on Sunday.

South Korea led Bangladesh after the first half with a penalty corner goal by Dohyun Lim in the 11th minute. In the 36th minute,

Geonwoo Park extended the lead to 2-0 with a brilliant field goal.

When Bangladesh pressed for their first goal, the Koreans scored again in the last quarter.

Minkwon Kim was clinical in his finish from a penalty corner in the 54th minute to make it 3-0.

Two minutes to end the match, Mohammed Hasan netted for Bangladesh to make the final score as 3-1.

The win confirmed South Korea's second spot with nine points from four matches behind leaders Malaysia who have same points from three matches. Bangladesh are third with six points from four matches.

Oman, who posted their first win against Uzbekistan 3-2 on Saturday, were fourth while Uzbekistan remained last with no points.





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Drone air traffic management system to be launched soon



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 28

A new drone management system, due to be launched shortly, will offer a one-stop solution for drone users in the country. Omani tech startup, Serb, is launching a system that will allow drone owners to fly legally within designated areas.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Co-founder Malik al Nabhani shed some light upon the upcoming launch of the system. “Serb is a technology startup that is developing a UTM system (unmanned traffic management system) within civil aviation to enable safe drone flights.”

According to Al Nabhani, the startup emerged due to an urgent need to manage drone traffic amid legislative restrictions and increased drone use demand. Designed in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority, the app will provide a map showcasing the locations where flying drones is permissible.

Additionally, it will also allow users to acquire flying licences from the Authority

within the application. The system will offer its services to three types of users: recreational, commercial and enterprise.

Enterprises in various fields have adopted the use of drones within recent years. For example gas and oil companies use them to detect and monitor leaks, while telecommunication companies use them for tower inspections.

Furthermore, the system will allow for better air-traffic coordination, according to Al Nabhani.

He explained that the app will allow for better communication between all forms of aircrafts, while simultaneously prioritising important missions within the vicinity. The web and app based software is expected to launch within the next month.

Serb, formerly known as AirGo, was founded by CEO Anwar al Hinai, and COO Malik al Nabhani. The startup, which is part of the Omantel Innovation Lab accelerator, raised \$2.7 million in seed funding from Saudi venture capitalist firm Forming Future earlier this year.

Major tax cuts on electric vehicles, auto spares from July 1

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 28

In support of Oman’s goal of achieving net neutrality in transportation and promoting a sustainable and green economy, a number of government agencies are taking steps to enable the transition to zero-emission vehicles.

These efforts are aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and aim to balance development and environmental sustainability.

The Authority for Public Services Regulation has issued regulations for electric vehicle charging points, covering technical requirements, tariff specifications, and safety measures.

Electricity distributors must comply with these regulations, and non-compliant charging points cannot be connected to the electricity network.

The regulation also addresses the installation and operation of charging points in relation to real estate owners and tenants, ensuring maintenance for public safety. To



encourage the adoption of carbon-free vehicles, the Sultanate of Oman offers government facilities and incentives.

Electric cars are exempt from customs tax and registration fees, and the value-added tax rate for electric cars and spare parts is reduced to zero per cent for three years, starting from July 1, 2023.

These incentives aim to lower the initial cost of electric vehicles, diversify vehicle options, and attract investment in charging

buildings.

The ministry plans to install a significant number of public and general chargers, ensuring sufficient charging infrastructure.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion has implemented Ministerial Resolution No. (45/2023), establishing standard specifications and technical requirements for electric vehicles.

These specifications require manufacturers, factories, and importers to submit a certificate of conformity approved by the Gulf Standardization Organization.

The aim is to ensure compliance with technical regulations and standards while creating new economic opportunities, promoting renewable energy, enhancing safety, and reducing pollution.

Overall, these initiatives and regulations in Oman aim to facilitate the transition to electric vehicles, create a supportive infrastructure, and contribute to a sustainable and environmentally friendly transportation system.

Oman to have 33,000 hotel rooms by end-2025

MUSCAT: The Director of the Oman Vision 2040 Office at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) emphasised that the heritage and tourism sectors in the Sultanate of Oman achieved high rates in their annual plans, which are consistent with Oman Vision 2040 objectives, while the volume of the planned and ongoing investments till

the year of 2025 amounted to RO 2.7 billion, including RO 2.3 billion which are classified as confirmed investments.

Dr Rashid bin Saleh al Hinai, Director of Oman Vision 2040 Office at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that during Q1 2023, many indicators and targets of the heritage and tourism sectors were approved.

These include targeting the value of investments in the sector to reach RO 3 billion for 2021-2025, raising the number of hotel rooms to be not less than 33,000 by end-2025 and to raise the value of tourism sector’s contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) to RO 920 million by 2025 to represent 2.75 per cent to 3 per cent of GDP.

Oman’s Asyad Shipping enters Indonesian market

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 28

Wholly Omani-owned Asyad Shipping has announced plans to expand its shipping lines to Indonesia, a move that is expected to strengthen the company’s position in the global shipping industry. Last year, Asyad Shipping expands its presence in the Southeast Asian region by adding shipping routes to Singapore and Port Kelang in Malaysia.

Asyad’s expansion in Indonesia was marked by cooperation agreement between Asyad, PT IPC Container Terminal and KCA Global Maritime Company signed on May 23, Indonesian newspaper *Bisnis* reported over the weekend.

Kim Aksel Kristensen, Sr Vice-President at Asyad Shipping, said, “This collaboration aims to strengthen the bilateral relations



between Oman and Indonesia in terms of economy and distribution of goods.”

The decision to expand the shipping lines to Indonesia comes as a result of the growing demand

for shipping services in the country. Indonesia is the world’s fourth most populous country and has a rapidly growing economy, which has led to an increase in trade and shipping activity in the region.

“Asyad Shipping relies on 3 units of ships with a capacity of 4,000-5,500 containers and Indonesia is deemed appropriate to become a hub for cargo circulation pattern, which has been mostly carried

out in Malaysia and Singapore,” Kristensen added.

Asyad Shipping — part of Asyad Group — selected Port of Tanjung Priok as a capable port both in terms of infrastructure and facilities. The Asyad Line ship is scheduled to arrive and sail for the first time in the third week of June 2023, the report added.

Asyad Shipping will cooperate with the KCA Global Maritime Company as the official representative in Indonesia to serve cargo routes from Indonesia to the Middle East, Red Sea and India Sub Continent, while also promoting the main export product of Indonesia — the coconut charcoal briquettes.

Bobby Asnani, CEO of PT KCA Global Maritime, hopes that export activities and Indonesian cooperation to the Middle East will progress with the Asyad Line

which provides shorter and more economical shipping services.

“This collaboration is also considered to further increase the selling power and competitiveness of Indonesian commodities in the world,” Asnani added.

The expansion of Asyad Shipping’s routes to Indonesia is expected to bring significant benefits to the company. It will enable Asyad Shipping to tap into a new market and expand its customer base, which will ultimately lead to increased revenue and profitability.

In addition, the expansion of shipping lines to Indonesia will help Asyad Shipping to diversify its business, reducing its reliance on the Middle East market. This will help the company to mitigate the risks associated with operating in a single market and ensure its long-term sustainability.

Omantel signs MoUs with government and large corporates portfolio at COMEX 2023

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has signed memoranda of understanding and contracts with several government and private institutions as part of its participation in COMEX 2023 in its 32nd edition.

This is aimed at offering a range of various digital solutions and technological advancements to these establishments, enhancing their digital transformation efforts, and leveraging from the services and solutions offered by Omantel in digitisation and information technology.

Omantel has signed MoU's with Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Mohammed al Naseeb, Chief Operating Officer at Oman LNG, Abdulaziz Jaafar, Chief Executive Officer at ETCO, Anson Kim, Chief Executive Officer at Hutchison Sohar ports, Abdullah al Badi, Chief Executive Officer at Tadoom, in addition to Cook Wang, Senior Vice President at Hytera on the side-lines of the 32nd edition of COMEX Oman.

The signings come as part of the company's strategy to support institutions in both the public and private sectors in their aspirations and directions towards digital transformation.

The main aim is to utilise the available modern technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, smart cities, and other innovative technologies and



solutions provided by Omantel.

In pursuit of achieving this direction and the goals of the digital transformation journey, Omantel has signed an MoU with Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, which includes cooperation in the field of telecommunications and exchange of expertise in various sectors.

This includes supporting and implementing the digital transformation programme in the governorate, in addition to a recently assigned contract for upgrading the infrastructure, which was awarded to Omantel.

Furthermore, Omantel has signed an agreement with Oman International Container Terminal for the 1st of its kind, real time solution by implementing 5G

enabled Smart Surveillance system in Port of Khasab.

Moreover, Omantel has signed an MoU with Oman LNG Company, aiming to accelerate the digital transformation process dedicated to the oil and gas sector. These solutions are unique and of great importance.

Furthermore, Omantel has also signed an MoU with the emerging global technology company ETCO, enabling Omantel to keep pace with the new global trend in using satellite imagery and analytics. This positions Omantel among the pioneering companies and first movers in the GCC region that implement this technology.

The fifth signed agreement was with Tadoom, to expand the

state-of-the-art IoT (Internet of Things) network system through LoRaWAN, that enables large scale IoT rollouts and serves as a robust communication infrastructure. This is to support smart city projects in the different areas across Sultanate of Oman.

Concluding the signings ceremonies in COMEX, Omantel has signed an MoU to sign with Hytera communications, to provide the push-to-talk service.

The service includes facilitating immediate communication between employees, by sending audio, video, or multi-media messages.

Speaking of the agreements, Omantel CEO Talal al Maamari said: "Omantel has been a major driving force behind

the digital transformation of some of the biggest institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. It is only fitting that more of the government key agencies and private sector companies engaged in the sustainable development of Oman turn to us to achieve rapid digital transformation.

These agreements reflect the growing confidence of the institutions in relying on Omantel for their digital transformation and connectivity needs."

"Signing these key contracts at COMEX is significant as this event supports Oman's Vision 2040 that encourages a transition to a knowledge-rich, ICT-friendly economy and society. It also drives home the point that Omantel leaves no stone unturned to offer government agencies and private sector companies best-of-breed technologies to achieve full digital transformation." Al Maamari added.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate said: "As a governorate that is working hard to preserve its rich historical, archaeological, and trading importance, Al Dakhiliyah is delighted to engage Omantel as our partner in our digital transformation, which covers many aspects including the full revamp of IP telephony. Omantel has proved to be a master in enabling organisations to achieve digital transformation goals in record time, by harnessing best-of-breed technologies."

IWG opens two new headquarters in Oman



MUSCAT: IWG, the largest and fastest growing flex and office space provider worldwide, is marking its presence in the Sultanate of Oman with the opening of a flagship HQ flex office in Al Khuwair, as demand for hybrid workspaces continue to rise steadily in the Omani capital. The company will also deliver a new HQ office in the commercial centre of Al Athaiba in the capital city.

Capitalising on the emerging signs of market stability in the real estate sector in Oman, IWG will occupy the ground, 1st and 2nd floor of the 7-storey Bait Eteen building in Al Khuwair.

Spread across 1,274 square metres, IWG's new centre in Oman, scheduled for August 2023 opening, will offer 76 fully serviced private offices in an inspiring environment to focus, connect and collaborate with colleagues, clients and other like-minded businesses.

Suitable for any size of team, these flexible, fully customisable office rentals are available for both short-term and long-term needs.

Opening in partnership with building owners, the HQ centre at Bait Eteen building in Al Khuwair will also have six coworking desks, designed with collaboration in mind in a shared working environment, and four fully equipped meeting rooms with IT and tech support.

An energy efficient building, the new centre will be light and spacious and provide for all client needs.

In a new deal announcement, IWG will also partner with Fahad al Dughaiishi, to deliver a new HQ location scheduled for December 2023 opening. Covering 1,269 square metres across the 5th, 6th and 7th floors of a centrally located building in Al Athaiba, the new centre is found in a prominent business, retail and banking area in the Omani capital.

Easily accessible from the highway, the flexspace will also provide ample parking facilities.

IWG's professional and sociable workspaces are designed for maximum productivity, collaboration and idea sharing, and are trusted by the world's largest companies including Microsoft, Disney, Uber, and Samsung, amongst a host of others.

OAB enhances customers' experience with new flagship branch in Ruwi



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank has opened its flagship Ruwi branch with state-of-the-art services offering an improved banking experience for customers. Shaikh Al Munthir bin Ahmed al Marhoon, Wali of Muttrah, inaugurated the event.

The expansion marks an important milestone in the bank's commitment to providing exceptional financial services and supporting the growing needs of its customers.

Khalid al Amri, Head of Branch Banking, said "Our new Ruwi branch will provide immense support to our customers living in the area

and will allow us to serve them more effectively. With a large consumer base in the CBD, we have designed a branch that caters to their needs and allows for more personalised services. We look forward to growing our relationship with consumers in the community and enhancing our financial services further."

Customers visiting the new branch can expect leading services and facilities including digital banking solutions, convenient access to accounts and transaction services and a team of knowledgeable staff that can support and provide personalised banking guidance to customers.

Vodafone invites everyone to experience Vodafone Black postpaid packages

MUSCAT: Vodafone Oman has launched Vodafone Black postpaid packages. The operator has made a major move to revolutionise the way telecom services are experienced and enjoyed.

Backed by their next-gen network, the postpaid packages are the first-of-their-kind in Oman to offer customers non-stop data, data rollover and access to Vodafone's international network across 28 countries in addition to the GCC without roaming charges.

It also makes Vodafone amongst the first in the world to offer postpaid packages that allow for full digital onboarding thanks to eSIM activation in less than two minutes via the My Vodafone App. Other unique benefits include special launch bonus data of up to 30GB per month.

Honouring ambitious development plans announced in early 2023, the four new packages — Explore, Elite, Pioneer and Prime — bring Oman's customers closer to the future than ever before. The only 100% digital operator, Vodafone is rolling out the latest cloud network technology called '5G



NEXT' across the country.

Customers using 5G-enabled devices in Muscat, Al Batinah, Dhofar and Duqm will have access to a transformational network that is built for future technological advancements.

Mohammed al Hakmani, Head of Product Management from Vodafone Oman, said: "From day one, we had pledged to do things differently, pushing the sector forward with our unique approach, drive for innovation and scalable 5G capabilities.

A year into our operations, the time came for us to address

a new market segment and after carefully assessing their needs, wants and aspirations, we are proud to be introducing such a value-added proposition through our Vodafone Black postpaid."

With heightened connectivity, lightning-fast speeds, low latency and more, Vodafone customers on '5G NEXT' can expect quicker online response times, real-time updates, seamless gaming experiences and smart-device communication that will change the way they communicate with each other and with their surroundings.



Oman to have 33,000 hotel rooms by end-2025

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 28

The Director of the Oman Vision 2040 Office at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) emphasised that the heritage and tourism sectors in the Sultanate of Oman achieved high rates in their annual plans, which are consistent with Oman Vision 2040 objectives, while the volume of the planned and ongoing investments till the year of 2025 amounted to RO 2.7 billion, including RO 2.3 billion which are classified as confirmed investments.

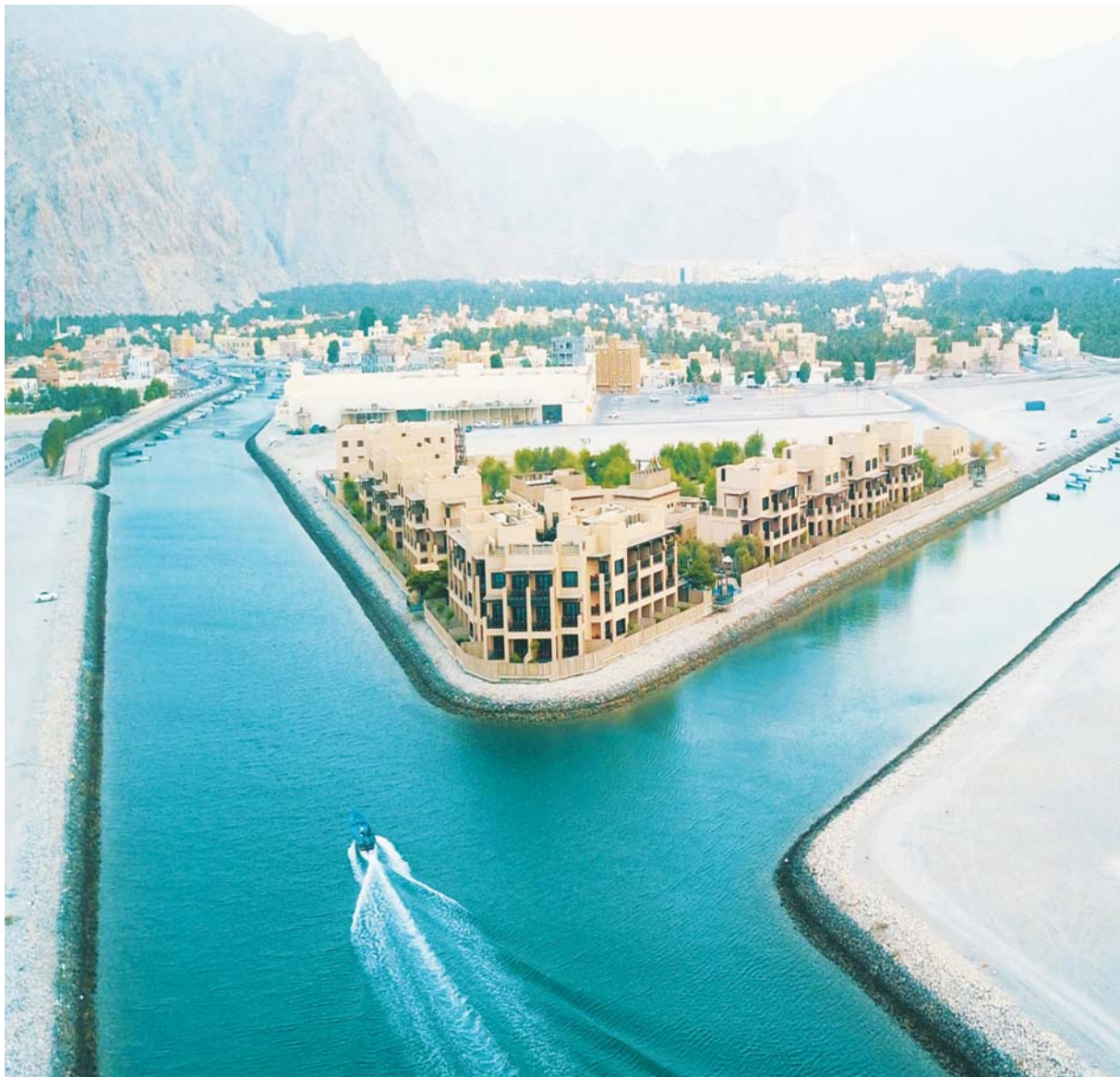
Dr Rashid bin Saleh al Hinai, Director of Oman Vision 2040 Office at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that during Q1 2023, many indicators and targets of the heritage and tourism sectors were approved.

These include targeting the value of investments in the sector to reach RO 3 billion for 2021-2025, raising the number of hotel rooms to be not less than 33,000 by end-2025 and to raise the value of tourism sector's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) to RO 920 million by 2025 to represent 2.75% to 3% of GDP.

The contribution percentage of the tourism sector to the GDP, at constant prices in 2021 reached 2.4%, according to the statistical data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

MoHT, in cooperation with The National Programme for Investment and Exports Development (Nazdaher) prepared the investment programme and was completed during this quarter.

The investment programme



includes more than 440 diversified investment projects, as the volume of investments in the implemented and planned projects for the period of 2021-2025 amounted to about RO 2.7 billion, of which RO 2.3 billion are confirmed investments.

In accordance with this programme, MoHT periodically follows up the projects based on their relative importance and on the size of investment, placing more focus on projects that cost RO 5 million or more, as well as

focusing on projects that support the local tourism.

Among the most important investments that are being monitored are the investments related to the integrated tourism complexes, as the value of the planned investments for the period 2021-2025 amounted to about RO 1.5 billion.

One of the most prominent integrated tourism complex agreements that were signed during this year is the agreement to develop the Mandarin Oriental

Project in Muscat.

In order to support the achievement of the targeted investment for 2025, MoHT also issues approvals for private projects, based on submission of feasibility study, where 10 new approvals were granted during Q1 2023.

Meanwhile, the number of hotel rooms in the country till end of Q1 2023 reached 30,559 rooms. As for the new projects on the lands belonging to MoHT, the targeted plan for 2023 is to sign



25 usufruct contracts through a direct contracting system and to offer a number of investment opportunities to compete for it among private sector companies.

The main requirements of the Ministry is the availability of financial capacity with the investors, employment plans, local content of the projects and entertainment and tourism components of the projects, in accordance with the nature of each project and its contribution to support the strategic direction of MoHT and the acceleration of the implementation of projects.

For SMEs, Al Hinai clarified the MoHT pays great attention to this category and work is underway to allocate a number of investment opportunities for SMEs, which will be presented in packages of opportunities during the coming period.

He stressed that the MoHT has adopted a local policy while all contracts costing less than RO 10,000 are awarded to small and medium enterprises.

Dr Al Hinai also clarified the total government revenues from the tourism sector by the end of 2021 reached RO 3.8 million, compared to RO 12.4 million by the end of 2022, with a growth

rate of 227% between 2021 and 2022, while the annual growth rate targeted to be achieved is not less than 5%.

He pointed out the decrease in the revenues during 2021 is attributed to the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, but due to the exemptions obtained by investors in the sector, and to the improvement of the situation in the tourism sector and also due to the flowing of more investments in the sector and as a result of financial collection efficiency by the ministry, a high growth rate has been achieved in the total government revenues from the tourism sector in the year of 2022.

On the index of preserving heritage and culture, Dr Rashid bin Saleh al Hinai said that the Sultanate of Oman is currently preparing a file to include the archaeological site of Bisya and Salut in the World Heritage List.

The target year in 2025 2025 is to enable the private sector and the civil companies to invest in 25 historical monuments. It should be noted that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism was able to sign a 12 investment contracts up to date, the most recent of which was the Bahla Fort investment contract.

EXIM Bank supports Oman businesses in buying US products

MUSCAT: Oman American Business Centre members, along with fellow Oman business leaders and senior government officials took part in an informative session with the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) last week at the Diplomatic Club.

This event was hosted in partnership with the Foreign Ministry under the auspices of Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of Oman Central Bank. The workshop discussed EXIM's financing tools, congressional mandates and special initiatives, while highlighting global best practices of companies that have benefited from EXIM.

EXIM is the official export credit agency of the United States and supports the purchases of US-made capital equipment and ancillary services by international buyers.

In more than 85 years of operation, EXIM has supported more than \$400 billion of US exports to international markets, and EXIM finance products are now able available to both the Oman private and public sector when procuring American goods and services.

EXIM can provide loan guarantees and medium to long-term direct financing at



attractive rates for those wanting to buy American products. Projects that are considered transformational such as biotech, AI, renewable energy, fintech, wireless communications and water treatment, may receive enhanced, competitive financing options. This opportunity for Oman businesses to utilise EXIM products further strengthens the long, strong business ties between the United States and Oman while stimulating economic growth.

Ali Daud, Founder and Chairman of the Oman American Business Centre commented "being able to import high-quality, innovative US products duty free (under the FTA) along with highly competitive financing options through EXIM presents a tremendous opportunity for Oman businesses".

He further goes onto say "As we look to achieve Oman's Vision 2040, agreements and programmes such as the FTA

and EXIM can help get us the necessary infrastructure and technology but it's essential businesses take advantage of these opportunities".

Companies wanting to learn more about the Oman-US Free Trade Agreement, EXIM finance products or be put into direct contact with an EXIM representative should contact the Oman American Business Centre at info@oabc.org or call 9418 9500.

Empowering businesses with technology can help in the long term

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT, MAY 28

Only those businesses powered by technology can thrive in the future and hence, businesses must consider empowering themselves with the latest in the techno world to stay in business. This was said by experts who attended the seminar on 'Technology Powered Business Growth-Importance of Latest Technology in Your Business' at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries hall recently.

Enabling businesses with most modern technology helps the entity increase the efficiency of systems, products and services while facilitating tracking and streamlining processes in the organisation.

Additionally, technologically-enabled companies help the promoters maintain data flow and manage contacts and employee records, resulting in reducing the costs and accelerating a steady growth.

Organised by the World Malayalee Council Middle East Region in association with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the conference that aimed at providing valuable insights into leveraging the latest technologies for business success,

witnessed experts in businesses and technology converging at the OCCI to share their expertise with their Omani counterparts.

Abdul Latheef Mohidheen Kunhi, Board Member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of Expats Foreign Investment Forum, TK Vijayan, Chairman, World Malayalee Council (Middle East), who is also the Founder and CEO of Gulf Trading & Contracting LLC, For World Malayalee Council - Oman Province, Ravindran MK Francis Thalachira, Sabu Kurian Jose KK, Chairman President General Secretary, Treasurer, Dr Nasser al Yahyaie, Assistant Rector for Administrative and Financial Affairs, Arab Open University, were present at the conference where the keynote address was delivered by Abdul Latheef, Board Member, OCCI.

"By and large, Business Technology Management is a next-gen programme and a fast progressing trans-disciplinary research area and a very crucial professional discipline in business administration. Learning business management technology will help the future generation to bridge the gap between Management and Information Technology and help the sailing a hassle-free one," Abdul Latheef said.

Going global: A guide to international expansion for entrepreneurs and start-ups



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

In today's globalised world, businesses of all sizes can benefit from expanding internationally. For entrepreneurs and small business owners, taking their businesses to the international level can be a key driver of growth and profitability.

However, navigating the challenges of international expansion can be daunting. That's why it's essential to have a solid understanding of the process and the potential risks and rewards. In this article, we'll explore the key considerations for international expansion and provide a guide to help entrepreneurs and start-ups make informed decisions.

The first step in international expansion is to assess your company's readiness. Before considering expansion, you should have a successful business model that is profitable and sustainable. You should also have a

clear understanding of your target market, your competition, and the potential risks and rewards of international expansion.

Once you've evaluated your company's readiness, you can begin to research potential markets and assess their potential.

When evaluating potential markets for international expansion, it's important to consider several factors.

First, you should evaluate the size and growth potential of the market. You should also consider the level of competition and the regulatory environment, as well as any cultural and language differences that may impact your ability to do business in the country.

Additionally, you should consider the costs and logistical challenges of doing business in the country, including taxes, tariffs, and shipping costs. Once you've identified potential

markets for expansion, you can begin to develop a market entry strategy.

This will involve identifying the best channels for reaching your target audience, such as online marketplaces or local distributors. You should also consider the level of investment required to enter the market, as well as any regulatory or legal requirements.

To minimise risks and maximise your chances of success, it's important to conduct thorough market research and develop a detailed market entry plan.

One of the biggest challenges of international expansion is managing the logistical and operational complexities of doing business in a foreign market.

This may include sourcing local suppliers, establishing local partnerships, and managing international supply chains. To ensure that your operations run smoothly, you may need to

invest in additional staffing or technology, such as translation services or international shipping software.

Another key consideration for international expansion is managing the financial risks and challenges of doing business in a foreign market. This may include currency fluctuations, regulatory compliance, and tax laws.

To minimise these risks, it's important to work with a trusted financial advisor and ensure that you have the appropriate legal and accounting resources in place.

In addition to these logistical and operational considerations, it's also important to consider the cultural and social differences that may impact your ability to do business in a foreign market.

This may include differences in language, communication styles, and business practices. To build strong relationships with local partners and customers, it's

important to invest in cultural awareness training and develop a deep understanding of the local market.

In conclusion, international expansion can be a challenging but rewarding process for entrepreneurs and start-ups.

By carefully evaluating your company's readiness and assessing potential markets, developing a detailed market entry plan, and investing in the necessary resources and support, you can position your business for growth and success in the global marketplace.

However, it's important to approach international expansion with a strategic mindset and a deep understanding of the potential risks and rewards.

What are the main challenges that entrepreneurs and start-ups face when expanding internationally, and how can these be addressed?

How risky bank debt makes customers safer

LIAM PROUD

Bank watchdogs are mulling changes to deposit insurance schemes after a string of lenders failed. Yet one of the most promising fixes has little to do with insurance, or even deposits.

Forcing more US banks to fund more of their loans and investments by issuing long-term debt, and relatively less with deposits, could offer an extra layer of protection for customers. The only question is who shoulders the cost of the extra safety.

Globally systemic US megabanks, like Jamie Dimon's JPMorgan, already issue oodles of loss-absorbing bonds – a product of post-2008 regulations designed to end government bailouts.

Yet unlike in Europe, where even small lenders fund themselves with this class of debt, the vast majority of US players don't have to.

That's a problem for depositors, since long-term debt acts as a buffer for customers too.

It works thus: if the asset side of a bank's balance sheet shrinks – say because loans or securities it holds fall in value – the liability side of the balance sheet must get crunched too by the same amount. First to take the hit is equity.

Once that has been vaporised, any unsecured debt the bank has issued will be next. And if even that isn't enough, depositors not covered by government insurance schemes are in line for the chop, giving them an incentive to rip out their money if they sense danger.

Something like that happened at Silicon Valley Bank, First Republic and Signature Bank, the three lenders that failed in March and April.

The trio had respectable capital ratios of about 8.5% of assets on average at the end of

2022, including common equity and preferred stock.

The extra layer of protection from loss-absorbing debt, however, was almost non-existent.

Compare that with behemoths JPMorgan and Bank of America, whose customers are shielded by a giant slab of long-term borrowings, which would get wiped out before deposits in a crisis.

The difference helps to explain why it was so expensive for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which backstops US bank accounts, to wind the three lenders down.

The agency chaired by Martin Gruenberg has tallied the total cost at \$31.5 billion – a chunky 6% of combined assets.

Partly in response to that thwack, Gruenberg and several US lawmakers floated various options for extending deposit insurance beyond the current \$250,000 limit, which might help to make bank runs less frequent.

Forcing the issuance of more long-term bank debt could make them cheaper too.

Imagine that SVB, First Republic and Signature had loss-absorbing debt equivalent to 4.5% of their total assets – roughly the required threshold for globally systemic lenders.

In this scenario, assuming the bondholders got wiped out completely, the overall losses to the FDIC would have been roughly halved to about \$15 billion.

The FDIC and other agencies are already considering introducing long-term debt requirements for banks with more than \$100 billion of assets, Gruenberg said in a recent speech.

Doing so could swell the number of lenders compelled to issue loss-absorbing bonds to about 30, from eight now. It would make it a lot less risky for Gruenberg and Congress to expand deposit insurance, since future hits would be lower.

— Reuters

Global freight cycle may have reached lowest point



JOHN KEMP

The author is a Reuters market analyst

Global freight volumes show signs of having bottomed out in the first quarter, signalling the industrial cycle may be near its trough, which could provide some support to oil prices later in 2023.

Global freight volumes fell 1.1% during the first three months of 2023 compared with a year earlier, according to the Netherlands Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis.

But volumes were up by 0.2% in March compared with the prior year, after declining 2.5% in February and 1.2% in January, providing tentative signs the cyclical trough may have been reached.

Singapore's maritime container throughput climbed to a record 3.26 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in April and was 7% higher than a year ago.

At London's Heathrow airport, cargo was still down 7% in the three months from February to April compared with a year earlier, but that was a much smaller decline than the 14% in October to December.

At Narita in Japan, air freight was down 22% in the three months from January to March, but that was a smaller decline than the 26% between November and January.

In the United States, there were fewer signs the manufacturing and freight cycle was nearing its trough, which given the size and centrality of the country in



A shipping container passes through the Suez Canal in Suez, Egypt. – Reuters

GLOBAL FREIGHT VOLUMES FELL 1.1% DURING THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF 2023 COMPARED WITH A YEAR EARLIER. BUT VOLUMES WERE UP BY 0.2% IN MARCH COMPARED WITH THE PRIOR YEAR, AFTER DECLINING 2.5% IN FEBRUARY AND 1.2% IN JANUARY, PROVIDING TENTATIVE SIGNS THE CYCLICAL TROUGH MAY HAVE BEEN REACHED.

the world economy makes the outlook less clear.

US railroads hauled 3.1 million shipping containers in the first three months of 2023 compared with 3.4 million in the same period in 2022.

US trucking firms reported activity levels were down by less than 1% in the first three months of 2023 but there was a noticeably weak end to the quarter with a decline of 5% in March.

At the nine largest US container ports, the number of

shipping containers handled was down 16% in April and 17% for the first four months of 2023 compared with the prior year.

Reflecting steadier demand, the cost of containerised ocean shipping has been stable since the middle of March after declining almost continuously for a year, according to the Freightos Baltic Exchange global container index

REACHING THE TROUGH?

Over the last year, global freight has been hit by excess inventories held all along the supply chain as consumer and business spending has reverted from merchandise to services after the pandemic.

Persistent inflation, rising interest rates and increased fears about an impending recession have also encouraged households and firms to be more cautious about spending.

The most recent data, albeit covering a small number of transport hubs, shows freight volumes may have stabilised or improved at the very end of the first quarter and into the start of the second.

A trough in manufacturing and freight activity would in turn help stabilise consumption of diesel and other distillate fuel oils across the major economies, providing some support to oil prices.

Lower prices for crude, gas and electricity compared with the middle of 2022 should ease some pressure on consumers' spending power and business investment, supporting a gradual recovery.

But the rebound in China after the coronavirus pandemic has been more muted than expected at the start of 2023, which has sapped some of the momentum from the global economy.

Business inventories remain high across North America and Europe and the delayed impact of interest rate rises, tighter credit conditions and rising unemployment will continue to squeeze households and firms for at least the next six months.

If this is to be a turning point for freight markets, inflation must subside soon to avert pressure for much higher interest rates and another downward lurch in industrial demand. — Reuters

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TRAVEL

A man walks inside one of the Cantallog aqueducts, built by people belonging to the Nazca culture, around 1600 years ago in Nazca, southern Peru. — AFP



FASHION

A woman (L) walks past as a girl poses for photographs outside a luxury store along a street in Hanoi. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

Ultima Generazione (Last Generation) climate change activists Ester Goffi (R) and Guido Viero(2nd-R) arrive at the Vatican to attend their second hearing for having glued themselves to the statue of “Laocoon and His Sons” at the Vatican Museums in August 2022. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actors Vicky Kaushal (L) and Sara Ali Khan attend a musical event during promotion of the Hindi-language movie ‘Zara Hatke Zara Bachke’ in Mumbai. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

People sell food at an open market in southern Khartoum. Sporadic artillery fire still echoed in Sudan’s capital but residents said fighting had calmed following a US and Saudi-brokered ceasefire, raising faint hopes in the embattled city. — AFP



art & life

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Omani Children from Muttrah Steal the Spotlight at Zawaya Exhibit

Titled Zawaya (or Corners in English), the exhibit features a stunning collection of paintings created entirely by young prodigies inaugurated under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Basma al Said



ENTERTAINMENT

Crime thriller steals best pic at Bollywood awards in UAE

CRIME THRILLER “DRISHYAM 2” was crowned best picture as Bollywood glossed over its recent struggles with a high-octane International Indian Film Academy Awards show in Abu Dhabi on Saturday.

Director Abhishek Pathak's gritty remake of a Malayalam film took the top honour at the end of a four-hour ceremony of pumping dance routines that showcased the Hindi-language movie industry.

Best director went to Ranganathan Madhavan for “Rocketry: The Nambi Effect”.

Hrithik Roshan won best actor for his role in “Vikram Vedha” and Alia Bhatt took best actress for “Gangubai Kathiawadi”.

“Brahmastra: Part One - Shiva” picked up a number of prizes including best supporting actress for Mouni Roy and best female playback singer for star vocalist Shreya Ghoshal.

The IIFA awards, intended to reach an international audience, were held for the second year running in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates where more than a third of the 10 million popula-



tion is Indian. The Hindi-language film industry was worth \$2.5 billion in 2019. India also releases hundreds of films in its 21 other official languages, churning out about 1,600 each year total.

But Mumbai-based Bollywood, the world's most prolific producer of movies, has been mired in crisis since the pandemic with ticket sales remaining low since cinemas reopened. The rise in streaming services, competition from other parts of India and demand for meatier fare than Bollywood's trademark song-and-dance routines have all contributed to the slump, experts say.

However, superstar Shah Rukh Khan's “Pathaan” smashed Indian box office records in January, in a positive sign for the industry.

song, a first for a film from the country.

“What does IIFA mean for (Indian) cinema? I think opening up to the global stage and also bringing us to the global stage as well, so it's exciting both ways,” said actress Jacqueline Fernandez, wearing an Arab-inspired head covering.

Among the highlights, heart-throb Varun Dhawan, wearing a shiny gold shirt, rode onto the stage on a mini-dune buggy, and ceremony host Vicky Kaushal drew screams from the audience when he launched into a dance number.

Actor and eco-activist Dia Mirza reminded the crowd about pressing environmental concerns months before the UAE, one of the world's biggest oil producers, hosts the COP28 United Nations climate talks in November and December.

Veteran actor Kamal Haasan was awarded for his outstanding achievement in Indian cinema and Anil Kapoor won best supporting actor for his role in “Jugjugg Jeeyo”.

“Darlings” took best original story, and best female debut was Khushali Kumar in “Dhokha: Round D Corner”.

The IIFA show, one of a number of Indian awards ceremonies, has been held in several countries since its debut in London in 2000. Voting is done online by fans. — AFP



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By Balqees Al Oraiimi

In a city known for its vibrant cultural tapestry, an extraordinary art exhibit is captivating art enthusiasts and philanthropists alike. Nestled amidst the winding alleys and bustling streets of Muttrah, a group of young Omani children from the heart of this ancient port town are showcasing their remarkable artistic talents, shedding light on the importance of supporting their creative development.

Titled *Zawaya* (or *Corners* in English), the exhibit features a stunning collection of paintings created entirely by these young prodigies. Inaugurated under the auspices of HH Sayyida Basma al Said, this initiative not only offers a platform for these budding artists to express themselves but also serves as a testament to the power of artistic education in shaping their futures.

The exhibit is currently taking centre-stage at the Saffron Cafe in Bait Al Zubair with over 50 paintings on display.

Visitors to the exhibition are immediately struck by the vivid colours and imaginative motifs that adorn the gallery walls. Each artwork reveals a unique perspective, blending traditional Omani themes with contemporary expressions.

At the heart of this exhibition are works of young prodigies like Idris who took inspiration from international artists and created his own version of popular artworks; Moez, whose artwork tells a vivid and beautiful story about life in general; and Sakina and Kawthar who drew faces that have dominated their minds.

The exhibitors were all students from the first cycle of schools from Muttrah supervised and curated by art teacher Bushra al Zahimiyah working closely with representatives from the Albasayer School for Basic Education.

"The growth of a child's talent is like the growth of flowers in a field. For a child's talent to develop and get enhanced, it needs fostering and support and when he gets the proper nurturing, the child will thrive in his creativity and will have a beautiful future as an artist,"shared Bushra.

Bushra explained that programmes like this art exhibit will give budding



artist the needed boost in order to become better artists.

The significance of this exhibit extends beyond the captivating artwork itself. It symbolises the transformative impact that creative development can have on a community, especially when nurtured from a young

age. By providing these children with the necessary tools, resources, and guidance, art education programmes in Muttrah are empowering them to dream bigger, reach farther, and explore uncharted territories through their artistic endeavours.

Supporters of the exhibit are quick



to acknowledge the broader benefits of investing in the creative growth of young minds. Research shows that engagement in the arts promotes cognitive development, nurtures critical thinking skills, and enhances emotional well-being. By fostering artistic expression among children, this initiative contributes not only to their personal growth but also to the cultural fabric of Oman as a whole.

Opening on May 24, the exhibit will be available to visitors until June 1,

2023. The gallery can be visited from 9am to 5pm daily except Fridays.

In a world often preoccupied with the pressures of modern life, the "Zawaya" art exhibit stands as a gentle reminder of the importance of nurturing young talents and fostering creativity. It serves as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path for the next generation of artists, dreamers, and innovators, and showcasing the power of art to transcend boundaries and transform lives.

ART

Louise Bourgeois spider sculpture fetches record \$32.8m at auction

A GIANT SPINDLY sculpture of a spider done by French-American artist Louise Bourgeois fetched \$32.8 million on Thursday, setting a record for a work by a woman sculptor at auction, Sotheby's said.

The work — which soars over 10 feet tall and spans 18 feet across — was finished by Bourgeoise in 1996 and is one of just four monumental spiders to appear at auction.

Sotheby's did not identify the buyer.

The seller, it said, was the Fundacao Itau of Brazil, which acquired the work more than 25 years ago.



Bourgeois, who died in 2010 at age 98, was born in Paris but spent much of her adult life in New York City, where she became known for her iconic installation art.

She was a prolific painter and printmaker but became best known for her large-scale sculptures, particularly of nimble, spindly spiders, which she said evoked memories of

her mother, both as a sinister threat and an industrious repairer and weaver.

Bourgeois's monumental spiders have appeared in public spaces such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain, the Tate Modern in London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the National Gallery of Art in Washington. — AFP

SCIENCE

Red Sea epidemic kills off sea urchins, imperilling coral

A DEADLY EPIDEMIC that is spreading through the Red Sea has killed off an entire species of sea urchin in the Gulf of Aqaba, imperilling the region's uniquely resilient coral reefs, an Israeli research team has found.

The whole population of black sea urchins, a species known for helping keep coral reefs healthy in the waters also known as the Gulf of Eilat, was wiped out over a couple months, according to a team from Tel Aviv University. Their findings, published in two peer-reviewed journals, cite mass mortality in other countries in the region, including Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The probable culprit is a disease-causing ciliate parasite that brings with it a fast death — perhaps the same one that has wreaked havoc on



sea urchin populations in the Caribbean. In just two days, a healthy *Diadema setosum* — a long-spined black sea urchin — becomes a skeleton with massive tissue loss, said lead researcher Omri Bronstein, from Tel Aviv University's Steinhardt Museum of Natural History and School of Zoology.

Some wash ashore dead. Others are eaten by fish, likely speeding up contagion. The first signs of trouble appeared in the Mediterranean Sea, where the sea urchins have over the

years invaded, probably through the Suez Canal, and made their home. Bronstein said there were reports several months ago from Greece and Turkiye of sea urchin deaths.

While that was less concerning at first since they were an invasive species, the pathogen has now crossed back into the natural population in the Red Sea.

"There is nothing that can be done to stop this at the moment," Bronstein said. But there is a "very narrow window", he said, to create an isolated population, or broodstock, of the sea urchins remaining elsewhere that could hopefully be reintroduced later on. The researchers say a report to Israeli environmental authorities has been submitted and that emergency steps to protect the coral reefs are being examined.

Eilat, an Israeli resort town on the Red Sea's northern shore, is a popular spot for scuba diving. Scientists studying the area consider it a coral refuge.

The corals that settled thousands of years ago had to pass through a narrow strait to the south that acted as a thermal barrier, ensuring they are more resistant to temperature increases that are threatening reefs globally. The sea urchins play an important role in maintaining balance by feeding on algae that would otherwise block sunshine and smother the reefs. — Reuters



CULTURE

Against the stream: Iraq artist battles to save boating tradition

YOUNG IRAQIS ROW a flotilla of traditional wooden boats down the Tigris river in Baghdad, celebrating an ancient nautical heritage in the now drought-stricken country.

Once a common sight across Iraq's southern streams and marshlands, the elongated boats with tapered bows and sterns known as meshhouf have been around "since the time of the Sumerians", said event organiser Rashad Salim.

But the elegant water craft have long been vastly outnumbered by modern, motorised vessels and are threatened further as Iraq's waterways suffer from droughts linked to climate change.

Iraq must save "from extinction an essential facet of our civilisation which has existed for four or five millennia", said Salim, co-founder of Safina Projects, which works to preserve Iraq's traditional boating culture.

Salim, 62, is a painter, sculptor and eco-artist with a taste for adventure who in his youth joined the famed Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl on a long sea voyage in a traditional Iraqi reed vessel.

Five years ago, Salim set out to find Iraq's last meshhouf makers, locating them in Huweir on the edge of Iraq's famed Mesopotamian marshes, where eventually he would place orders for the construction of new vessels.

Salim then went to nautical clubs and helped create teams that would teach young people how to navigate the gondola-like vessels.

The flotilla on the Tigris in Baghdad was a landmark event in Salim's efforts – 18 of the boats took to the water on a spring afternoon as part of a cultural festival.

Connect with environment

The youthful pilots alternated paddle strokes on the left and right. Some, with only a few weeks' practice in the lead-up to the event, struggled to hold the course.

The meshhouf is part of "the history and heritage of the country", said one of them, Omar Youssef, 21, who has previous experience with sailing and windsurfing.

Those sports "depend on the wind, you have to keep the balance with your body", he said, whereas powering the meshhouf works the "shoulders and arms".

Seven meshhouf clubs have been founded in Baghdad, the central province of Babylon and parts of southern Iraq, with funding from Britain and the Aliph Foundation, which works to protect cultural heritage in conflict zones.

Iraq is still recovering from decades of dictatorship and war, but it faces an additional peril. The United Nations ranks it as one of the world's five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change.

Iraq endures blistering summer heat and frequent dust storms. Declining rain as well as upstream dams have reduced the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers where ancient civilisations flourished.

Salim bemoaned the "terrifying" state of the rivers which suffer from rising "water salinity and pollution". A major aim for him, he said, is to enable young Iraqis to "connect with the environment".

REVIVE THE HERITAGE

Salim hails from a prominent family of artists and diplomats – being the son of artist Nazar Salim and the nephew of famous sculptor and painter Jawad Salim.

His love for traditional Iraqi boats



dates back to 1977, when he was the youngest crew member aboard the Tigris, a ship constructed of river reeds by Heyerdahl, the Norwegian adventurer.

To prove that the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley were in contact across the seas, they embarked on a 143-day voyage spanning 6,800 kilometres (4,225 miles), from Iraq through the Gulf and the Arabian Sea to Pakistan and on to Djibouti.

In 2013, Salim took part in another expedition of traditional boats, organised by the group Nature Iraq, that sailed 1,200 kilometres along the Tigris from southern Türkiye to Iraq's far south.

Salim would also love to revive Iraq's traditional round boat made of woven reeds, the guffa, which resembles a wicker basket that spans more than two metres (six feet).

But his ambition is also to find a

"business plan" to make his challenging project financially viable and create jobs.

One of Iraq's traditional boat builders is Zouheir Raisan, 40, who lives by the marshes in Huweir, 400 kilometres south of Baghdad.

Business had stopped in the 1990s but was slowly revived four years ago, a change the father of eight welcomes to supplement his main job as a truck driver.

Under the shade of a mudhif reed structure, he was sawing boards and helping his cousin nail them to a boat frame.

He said he remembers helping his father and brothers make meshhoufs, some measuring up to 11 metres long.

Other countries, he said, are sending experts "in search of this heritage, to encourage its rebirth," he said.

"Why don't we bring it back to life ourselves?" — **AFP**

LIFESTYLE



Netflix expands password-sharing crackdown worldwide

NETFLIX ON TUESDAY expanded its crackdown on users sharing passwords with people beyond their immediate family as it seeks to shore up revenue at the leading streaming television service.

"A Netflix account is for use by one household," the company said in a statement.

Netflix said early this year that more than 100 million households were sharing accounts at the service, "impacting our ability to invest in great new TV and films."

Netflix has experimented in a few markets with "borrower" or "shared" accounts, in which subscribers can add extra users for a higher price or transfer viewing profiles to separate accounts.

On Tuesday, it announced it was expanding the policy to more than 100 countries.



As growth at Netflix cooled last year, the Silicon Valley-based streaming giant set out to nudge people watching for free with shared passwords to begin paying for the service without alienating subscribers.

"This account sharing initiative helps us have a larger base of potential paying members and grow Netflix long term," co-chief executive Ted Sarandos said on an earnings call.

ENTICED BY ADS?

The company told financial analysts recently that it had delayed a broad crackdown on password sharing "to improve the experience for members."

Netflix said it made sure subscribers have seamless access to the service away from home or on various devices such as tablets, TVs or smartphones.

"They are just trying to reduce theft of their service," independent tech analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group said.

He reasoned that Netflix likely pays royalties when subscribers watch some shows or films on the platform, so non-paying viewers could add to the service's expenses while not contributing to revenue.

"In theory, Netflix loses money because they are paying royalties and people are getting the shows for free," Enderle said.

"It makes no sense for Netflix to allow that to continue."

Netflix in April said its subscriber numbers hit a record high 232.5 million in the first quarter of the year and that its nascent ad-supported tier was faring well.

The company said in a recent presentation to advertisers that it had more than five million subscribers to its ad-support tier.

The launch of an ad-subsidised offering around the same time as a crackdown on password sharing is no coincidence, reasoned Insider Intelligence senior analyst Ross Benes.

"People who freeloader, as well as those who choose cheaper advertising tiers, tend to be price-sensitive customers," Benes said.

"For the freeloaders who get booted, the cheaper ad tier will be an attractive option."

Getting people viewing for free to sign up for the Netflix ad tier would improve its appeal to advertisers, Benes added.

But there is also the risk that people no longer getting Netflix free will opt to "glom onto their friends' and families' Prime Video, Disney+, or Max instead," Benes said, referring to rival streaming services.

For the first time ever, US adults will spend more time this year watching digital video on platforms such as Netflix, TikTok and YouTube than viewing traditional television, Insider Intelligence has forecast. — **AFP**