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WATKINS EXTENDS HOT STREAK AS VILLA OUTCLASS NEWCASTLE



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MEDIUM TERM FISCAL PLAN DRIVES OMAN'S FINANCIAL RECOVERY: MOF



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WASHINGTON

UN CHIEF PRAISE OMAN'S PEACE EFFORTS

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, hailed Oman's role in supporting international efforts aimed to settle and resolve differences in the Republic of Yemen and to arrive at convergence of views among the countries of the region. He stressed that the establishment of good relations between the countries of the region is one of the basics for achieving stability and development, adding that Muscat was and still is the gateway to peace.

SEE P3

SANAA

SAUDI POWS AMONG HUNDREDS FREED

Hundreds of prisoners of war, including Saudis, were freed on Saturday as part of a cross-border exchange between a military coalition and Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters, the International Committee of the Red Cross said. The flights connecting Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah-held territory in Yemen were part of a multi-day transfer involving nearly 900 detainees, and came amid peace talks which have raised hopes for an end to Yemen's eight-year-old war.

SEE P5



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HOW IMMIGRANTS ARE SAVING THE ECONOMY

P7



GERMANY QUILTS NUCLEAR POWER

P8



Heavy smoke bellows above buildings in the vicinity of the Khartoum airport on Saturday. – AFP

Oman urges restraint and dialogue in Sudan

SUDAN PARAMILITARIES EXCHANGE GUNFIRE WITH ARMY IN KHARTOUM AND OTHER CITIES

MUSCAT/KHARTOUM: Oman urged Sudan rivals maximum restraint and resort to dialogue to arrive at political settlement to protect the lives of Sudanese people and ensure peace as clashes broke out between Sudan's main paramilitary group and the regular armed forces in Khartoum and elsewhere in the country on Saturday in an apparent struggle for control.

The army rejected assertions by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that they had seized the presidential palace, the army chief's residence and airports in Khartoum and the northern city of Merowe.

In a statement, Oman's Foreign Ministry said that it is following with great concern the ongoing developments in Sudan after clashes broke out in the country.

Sudanese army chief General Abdel Fattah al Burhan's com-

ments to Al Jazeera TV followed a live phone interview the station aired with the commander of the RSF, who said his forces had seized the strategic sites.

The situation on the ground was unclear.

The RSF said the army had attacked it first, while the army said it was fighting the RSF at sites the paramilitaries said they had taken.

CONFRONTATION
A major confrontation between the RSF and the army could plunge Sudan into widespread conflict as it struggles with economic breakdown and tribal violence, and could also derail efforts to move towards elections.

The clashes follow rising tensions between the army and the RSF over the RSF's integration into the military. The disagreement has delayed the signing of

an internationally-backed agreement with political parties on a transition to democracy.

Civilian forces that signed a draft version of that agreement in December called on Saturday for an immediate halt to hostilities by both the army and the RSF. Brigadier General Nabil Abdallah said there was a heavy presence of RSF troops at the TV headquarters in Khartoum.

The rift between the forces came to the surface on Thursday when the army said recent movements by the RSF, particularly in Merowe, were illegal.

The RSF, which together with the army overthrew Bashir four years ago, began redeploying units in Khartoum and elsewhere amid talks last month on its integration into the military under a transition plan that would lead to new elections. — ONA/Reuters

JAPAN PM KISHIDA UNHURT IN 'SMOKE BOMB' SCARE

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was evacuated unhurt after a suspect threw what appeared to be a smoke bomb at an outdoor speech in western Japan on Saturday.

Kishida took cover after a loud explosion was heard while police subdued a man at the scene, Japanese media footage showed. A police officer suffered minor injuries in the incident, the Nikkei newspaper reported, citing Wakayama prefectural police.

"Police are investigating the details of the loud explosive sound at the previous speech venue," Kishida said when he resumed his campaign speeches. "I am sorry for causing many people to be concerned. We are in the middle of an important election for our country. We must carry this on together."

The incident echoed the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe, Japan's longest-serving modern leader, who was shot with a homemade gun last July while campaigning



for a parliamentary election. Abe's killing shocked the nation, where gun crimes are exceedingly rare, and prompted a review of security for politicians, who routinely press the flesh with the public.

Masato Kaburagi, a 35-year-old company worker who witnessed the incident, said security still seemed lax, as it appeared the suspect was first taken down by another bystander. "I never thought something like this would happen so soon after what happened to Abe," said Kaburagi, who attended the rally with his wife and mother. "I don't think I want to go to these political-related events anymore." — Reuters

Start-up's fishing line fixes two problems in one shot

MUSCAT: Two birds in one shot. That sums up a biodegradable fishing line designed by a student start-up with cellulose fibres from an invasive, thorny tree mesquite.

This environment-friendly fishing line is superior to conventional one, which once discarded are a threat to marine species like dolphins, whales and turtles. Husna bint Khalfan al Habsiyah, CEO of Hayyal, which operates under the University of Technology and Applied Sciences

in Muscat, said the team zeroed in on mesquite after extensive research and market studies. Instead of importing sustainable materials which are costly, the team could tap these trees which have no value and a threat to biodiversity. Thus it transformed a thorny challenge to an opportunity.

Another major challenge was making high-quality and durable fishing lines from mesquite fibres after striking a balance between strength and flexibility. **TURN TO P3**

Omani youth launches Holy Quran mobile application

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

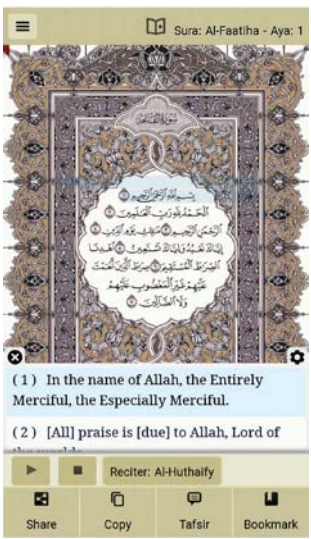
MUSCAT: An Omani youth has launched a mobile application for the Holy Quran.

The mobile app by Mohammed bin Ali al Maamari, a resident of Kahanat, in the Wilayat of Ibri, has become an instant hit with thousands of downloads in a few days. The app which can be downloaded from <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/m> took nearly three years to complete, according to Mohammed.

"It took nearly three years of research and hands-on work, at least 6 hours a day with no breaks on weekends to complete the Holy Quran that you see now on your phone," said Al Maamari.

EASILY FLIPPED THROUGH
All the 114 Suras of the Holy Quran are compiled in 604 pages, which can be easily flipped through, and one can listen to the whole book in the voice of nearly 50 globally acclaimed reciters.

They include Abdul Rahman al Sudais, Saad al Ghamdi, Saud



al Shuraim, Abdul Basit 'Abd us-Samad, Maher al Mu'aiqly, Mishary bin Rashid Alafasy, Muhammad Siddiq al Minhawry, Ahmad bin Ali al Ajmi, Mahmoud Khalil al Hussary, Ali ibn Abdur Rahman al Hudhaify, Qari Syed Sadaqat Ali, Abdullah Awad al Dosari, to Waheed Zafar Qasmi.

"The app offers complete Holy Quran with its interpretation in all 604 pages by touching the screen from left to right," Al Maamari said.

This one of its kind app, which

the Sultanate of Oman can be proud of hosting, facilitates voice activation as well as the translation/meaning in English below it.

"There is nothing more precious than a gift and sharing the Holy Quran is considered to be one of the best 'Sadaqa' (voluntary charity) deeds in the holy month of Ramadhan. Do not leave a relative, friend, or anyone you know without sharing the link of this Holy Quran app, as I have made great efforts in preparing it," said Al Maamari.

‘Life is a tour’

P H O T O E X H I B I T I O N

‘Broken Mirror’ by Dr Abdulmonem al Hasani and
‘Looking through Clear Glass’ by Dalia al Bassami



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Life is like being on a tour and that is why the joint photography exhibition looking through clear glass by Dr Abdulmonem al Hasani and Dalia al Bassami held at Bait Al Zubair is titled ‘The Tour’.

Both deal with abstract photography but with independent themes. Dr Abdulmonem chose to call his artwork ‘Broken Mirror’ and Dalia ‘Looking through Clear Glass’.

The work is about conceptual

photography. The exhibition will continue until the end of May. On May 13, a major event will be held as part of the mental health day.

“Our life is just a tour. Conceptual photography is a concept and here I took pictures while on a tour with the theme of broken mirror and Dalia took another focus but under the umbrella of The Tour. Therefore, there has to be coherence with the theme. Both of them had extensive talks for almost six years before they narrowed down the theme and exhibition taking almost six years,” Dalia



explained. “It is not easy because we must place the right art pieces in the right place and we had this invitation from Bait Al Zubair. My theme was to do with the shades and shadows of the travellers. We are always on a tour looking for ourselves, for happiness and chasing dreams. Travellers are busy chasing dreams rushing with their luggage amidst the sounds of vehicles. It always makes us wonder when this tour will end,” she added.

BROKEN MIRROR

Dr Abdulmonem said, “In this exhibition, you will find this big broken mirror. You can see yourself in front of this mirror. To me, this is the reality. Any one of us could be having this broken mirror in front of us from a young age until the end whether it is decisions, education or at his work. We face these challenges all the time, but I am arguing here with broken mirrors that we can go through life without the fear of what is broken inside us because we will continue by finding a new dream, another way of life. So at the end of the day this is our tour.” He said it is a journey but it is not a journey. He pointed out that when we face the challenges we cannot stop or freeze.



“We have to continue by rebuilding something within us,” he explained further.

Dalia added, “It is something like a healing process. I do believe that we all go through issues. Some people show it on the surface whereas for others it is deeper. It is the continuity in chasing dreams and having hope, believing in your goals, which makes it a journey. People are often strong not to show the scars, but the internal healing makes one continue. It is like the Japanese way of dealing with broken pots sealing them with gold instead of throwing it away and making them even more beautiful.”

STUCK IN LIFE

Dr Abdulmonem agreed that sometimes people do feel stuck but “Life is moving on. Life does not stop even if you do. The sun will rise tomorrow and we will have something to do. Maybe outsiders will say it is easy to handle the problems, but in the end, we have to find the solutions and move on. Stand in front of the broken mirror, accept it and move on. Do something and make yourself proud later as well as for others around you. You cannot freeze in your place and expect others to help you because nobody will help you. And one



should move from that place with happiness looking for your dreams all the time.” Lines are something both photographers do as they work with abstracts especially while featuring architecture.

“In abstract photography, we are far away from portraits and landscapes. And lines help in portraying what we want to express,” pointed out Dalia adding, “We are dividing and taking parts whatever we see in life and putting them in lines. Usually, I work in two lines and circles. The exhibition theme in my part of the exhibition is fog

and mist because a lot of times we do not know where we are heading. Those figures are seen through clear glass and not just broken glass because life is giving you constant choices,” Dalia reflected.

Our lives are lines, noted Dr Abdulmonem, “The lines are the path our lives are walking on. Maybe it is a straight line or zigzag or any different way of capturing the lines depending on the mood. It also depends on the concept you want to depict. All of these have these lines in front of us. It all depends on how you want to take your path.”

Fish constitutes traditional and healthy Ramadhan dish

TEXT & PHOTOS BY:
YAHYA AL SALMANI

There is a misconception that eating fish in the holy month of Ramadhan causes thirst during fasting. Many avoid eating fish during this period without doing a fact check, which suggests fish has health benefits proven by scientific studies.

Medical studies confirm fish contains high percentage of vitamins and minerals such as (vitamins A, D, and B). These elements help strengthen the nervous system and the heart muscle and help facilitate digestion. Thus, the fasting person will avoid the feeling of satiety, lethargy, and laziness.

Fish also contains a high percentage of proteins, so eating grilled or steam-cooked fish gives a feeling of satiety for a long time because it is rich in protein. It also helps to reduce weight because it is a healthy alternative to red meat and is rich in essential fatty acids.



Some nutritionists advise that you should eat two meals a week to get the amazing nutritional benefits of fish.

Markets have all kinds of fish. “All kinds are available in these

markets, where the shoppers can buy oily fish and fresh crustacean fish of all kinds. We are keen to buy these fish fresh, especially during the month of Ramadhan, because their nutritional value is better and



more beneficial to public health,” one of the visitors of the Muttrah fish market told the Observer.

“We only suffer from the high prices of local fish, so we call on the competent authorities to

activate the role of the monitoring and inspection apparatus in these markets, and in this way, the consumer will ensure that the price of local fish is moderate in the various wilayats of the Sultanate,” he added.

Official sources indicate that fish markets are considered one of the main tributaries in fish distribution and marketing. The total number of fish markets is 58 distributed in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The establishment of these markets aims at preserving the quality of fish and organising the fish marketing process. These markets also contribute to the permanent and continuous provision of fresh and various fish products to the local consumer.

The fishery is one of the most important economic activities in the Sultanate of Oman, and it is classified as one of the most important sources of national income, in addition to being a social profession that Omanis have practised for a long time. Omanis still depend on wealth as a primary

source of livelihood.

Statistics issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources indicate, “More than 1022 species of bony and cartilaginous fish, about 252 species of oysters and 60 species of sea crabs have been recorded,” and surveys are still ongoing to register new species of marine organisms in the Omani seas.” The ministry also confirms: “The number of fishing vessels and boats is approximately 14,942 vessels and boats.” Thus, the matter is not limited to considering fish wealth as a source of national income for the country but is also linked to a profession inherited through generations and an economic and social activity for many citizens around the Sultanate of Oman.

Omanis outrival in preparing fish dishes, and in the homes of Omanis, especially during Ramadhan breakfast meals, there are common dishes such as fried fish, grilled fish, and fish cooked with fresh vegetables. These are prepared by adding spices that are part of Ramadhan dishes.



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UN secretary-general values Oman's peace efforts

WASHINGTON: UN Secretary-General António Guterres, hailed the Sultanate of Oman's role in supporting international efforts aimed to settle and resolve differences in the Republic of Yemen and to arrive at convergence of views among the countries of the region.

He stressed that the establishment of good relations between the countries of the region is one of the basics for achieving stability and development, adding that Muscat was and still is the gateway to peace.



At the annual iftar party hosted by Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the

Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations at the headquarters of the Sultanate of Oman's mission to the UN and attended by

the ambassadors of the GCC countries to the UN, the UN secretary-general affirmed the positive changes in the Gulf

region and the Arabian Peninsula during this period noting that the international community praise the efforts of the Sultanate of

Oman aimed at achieving peace and co-existence.

The UN secretary-general expressed his regret for the humanitarian suffering experienced by the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). He reaffirmed commitment to supporting humanitarian and relief efforts to provide assistance for the Palestinian refugees by continuing to fund the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). — ONA

Expo 2025 to focus on ensuring sustainability



OSAKA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, took part in the official ceremony for laying the foundation for Expo 2025 Osaka Kansai, Japan, to

be held between April 13 to October 13, 2025 under the 'Designing Future Society for Our Lives'.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the event by Sayyid Said bin Sultan al



Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture who is also the Commissioner-General of the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at Expo 2025. Expo 2025 will focus on

ensuring the sustainability of life, improving life and enhancing life through communication. It will be the third expo hosted by Japan after hosting the event in 1970 and 1990. — ONA

Jabal Shams still a cool place for holiday makers

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

While temperatures in several wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman are rising, there are places, which are still cool and ideal for outdoor camping and picnic during the upcoming holidays.

Several places in the Sultanate of Oman registered temperatures near 40°C over the weekend, while Jabal Shams stayed cool at 8°C and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar at 20°C or a little higher.

The hottest places in the country during the weekend were Suhar and Liwa (39.9°C), Saham (39.6°C), Suwaiq (39.5°C), Fahud (39.4°C), and Al Rustaq (39.3°C).

According to Oman Meteorology, clouds flowing over most of the northern governorates may result in scattered rain in the Hajar Mountains and the adjacent areas.

While Jabal Shams is a popular destination, motorists have to a stretch of unpaved roads.

It may be noted that, unlike trips to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, visit to Jabel Shams do not require four-wheel vehicles at all times though it is advisable.

Jabal Shams road is part of road improvement projects the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is



working on along with Dhofar and South Al Batinah.

With 3,004 metres above sea level with several summits, Jabal Shams is the highest peak in the Sultanate of Oman.

It is said to be the first place where the sun sets in Oman and is popular with tourists for camping, low temperatures, stargazing, and hiking.

Jabal Shams attracted a number of foreign and domestic visitors who flocked to the area to experience the sub-zero temperatures that lasted for days.

Travellers had to negotiate a stretch of unpaved roads, which got muddier due to melting snow and Royal Oman Police (ROP) was forced to issue words of caution.

OCEC hosts 1,000 over Iftar

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC) has turned out to be the venue for iftars, while last week a large Iftar reception of 1,000 took place at the same venue. People from various walks of life took part in the Iftar reception.

Several ministerial representatives, executives, and their employees attended the Iftar, which continued till Suhour. The Iftar was organised by Nada



Happiness, a popular name in wholesale trading.

Several halls of the iconic exhibition centre were joined together to host the large gathering.

Vehicles were

controlled by volunteers and visitors were given proper directions for their convenience.

Event organising committee members included Abdul Salam,

Chairman; Abdul Asif, MD; and Abdul Saleem, Director. Ameer Ahmed, COO said it was the first time so many people broke fast together in the recent past.

"We have conducted Iftar gatherings in the past too. But this is the first time that an Iftar of this stature is conducted and many of the Omani as well as expatriate workforce being honoured," they said.

As many as 72 employees, comprising both Omanis and expatriates who have been working for over five years and more than a decade were honoured with mementoes and tokens of appreciation.

Fishing line fixes two problems in one shot

FROM P1

Husna said environmentally-friendly products can sometimes turn out to be more expensive than traditional products. So it is necessary to keep costs down while ensuring that products meet high standards and specifications.

She pointed out that despite the increasing demand for sustainable things, replacement of traditional products with eco-friendly products is still difficult for consumers, perhaps because of their fear that the latter will not meet all needs like the traditional ones.

Husna claimed that the new thread will reduce ocean pollution to a great extent as traditional fishing lines are made from synthetic materials that can take hundreds of years to decompose. The fishing line made of mesquite



trees will decompose within months. She said the company is working on the concept to make it commercially viable. It is also planning to test its strength, flexibility and durability in various conditions.

The company is also developing other environmentally-friendly fishing equipment such as cages and nets.

It will soon apply for patent

and trademark for the product and register it at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The company is planning to raise awareness about the harm of traditional fishing gear on the environment, which will help it add new customers for its eco-friendly products and contribute to a more sustainable fishing industry.

Husna said IT and artificial



intelligence play a crucial role in promoting innovation by enabling cooperation between innovators, promoting research and development, improving efficiency and enhancing customer experience.

Apart from Husna, other members of the company are Mohammed bin Saleem al Saeedi, Hana bint Saleem al Habsiyah, Hebat Allah bint Khamis al Balushiyah, Taif bint Mahmoud al Siyabiyah, Al Warith bin Amer al Hadidi, Ghaida bint Ali al Amriyah, Marwa bint Saleem al Subhiyah, Hawra bint Suleiman al Hinaiyah and Faisal bin Habib al Siyabi. — ONA

Tender



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'yn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
1/2023/PEIE/HQ-1	Consultancy Services for Feasibility Study to Develop Docking Infrastructure Facilities at Sur Industrial City	30-04-2023	15-05-2023	Consultancy Services	First	50

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening. Mada'yn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

mada'yn.om



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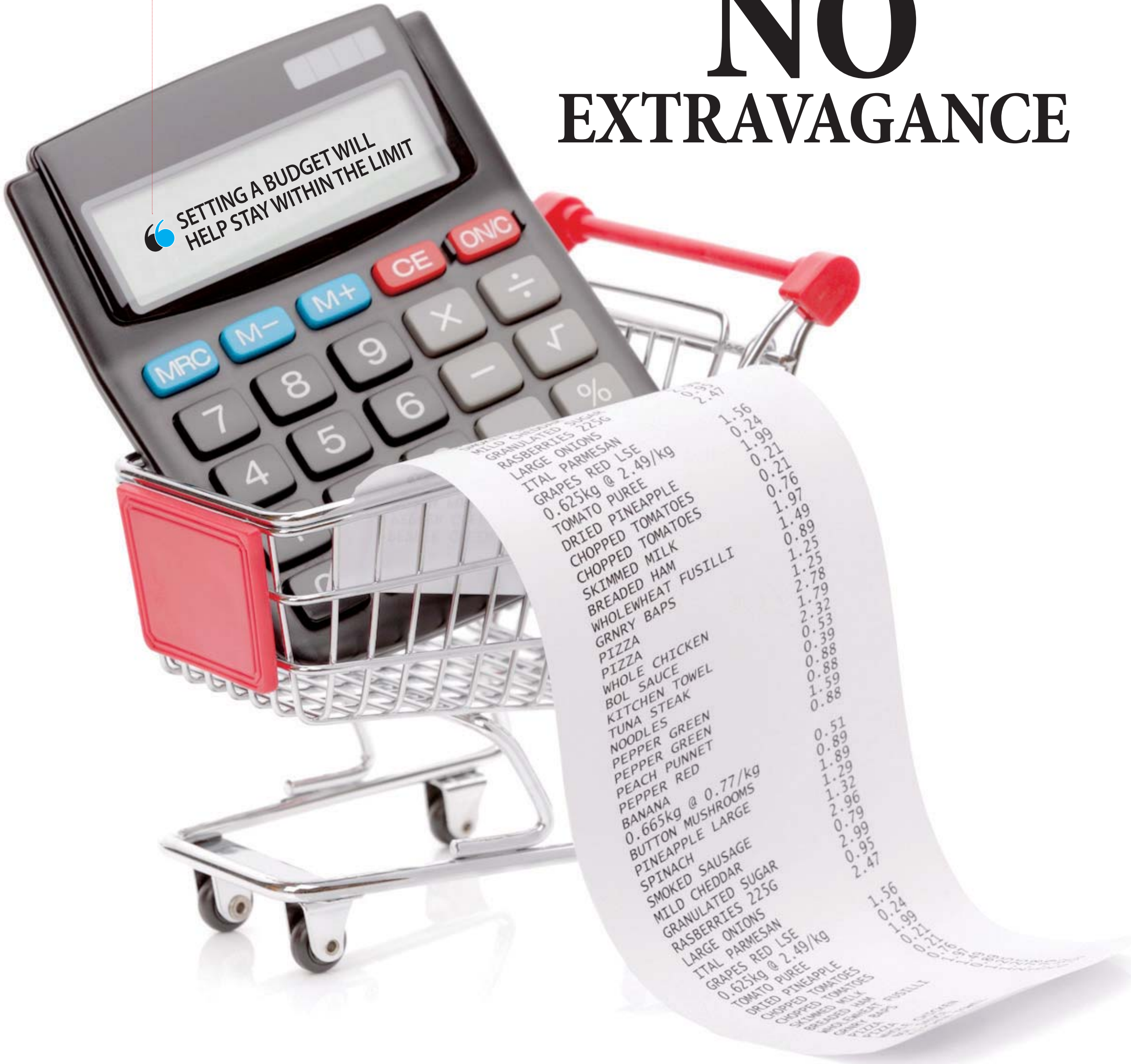




E I D
S H O P P I N G

NO EXTRAVAGANCE

CONSUMER
PROTECTION
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SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
[@shadadm](#)

While the rising cost of luxury items has forced many in the Sultanate of Oman to change their lifestyles, it may not be a reason for some Muslim families to do away with their tradition of Eid celebrations.

During the last few days of Ramadhan, shoppers are seen thronging the markets and malls to shop for Eid. People spend more on shopping, mainly clothes. This is also the time of the year when supermarkets are usually packed with customers shopping for special Eid meals too.

“Eid is the time when families get together and there is a need for us to be well prepared. In this regard, I have to buy my children new clothes, shoes and other items. But I have to admit that the cost of many items have gone up,” Mohammed al Balushi, who was seen shopping for Eid at one of Al Seeb shopping centres, said.

Even if spending on luxury items has reduced, food is always in demand no matter what the crisis. People will always buy more amounts of foodstuff during Eid.

“We just can’t scale down shopping and cooking because of the rising cost. Eid celebrations come twice a year and we have to prepare ourselves. We just need to be careful about extravagance,” Mubarak al Dhawi, Al Amerat resident, said.

While not having to worry about the increase in prices of foodstuff as authorities monitor markets during Ramadhan to ensure price stability, people must not go overboard when shopping. “Setting a budget will help stay within the limit,” suggested a Consumer Protection official.

Muslims around the world will end Ramadhan by celebrating Eid al Fitr and preparations for this holy day start weeks earlier, which involves shopping.

The Ministry of Labour has instructed payment of wages to workers no later than Tuesday, April 18.

Abdulwahab al Busaidy, head of the observatory at Oman Astronomical Society, earlier told Oman Observer that the first day of Eid al Fitr, in all likelihood, would fall on Saturday (April 22).



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RUSSIAN STRIKE KILLS 9 IN EASTERN UKRAINE

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine: Russia shelled a block of flats in the eastern Ukrainian city of Sloviansk, killing nine people, authorities said Saturday, including a two-year-old boy who was rescued from the rubble but died on his way to hospital.

Friday's strike on the quiet neighbourhood came as Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a bill that will make it easier to mobilise citizens into the army and block them from fleeing the country if drafted.

Russia also said it was pushing further into the hotspot of Bakhmut, 45 kilometres southeast of Sloviansk, which is one of the cities that will be at risk if Kyiv loses the longest and bloodiest battle of the war.

Sloviansk lies in a part of the Donetsk region that is under Ukrainian control. According to Kyiv, it was struck by seven missiles which hit five buildings, five homes, a school and an administrative building.

Vadim Lyakh, the head of Sloviansk's military administration, said Saturday that nine people died — including a woman whose body was recovered from the rubble overnight — and 21 were wounded.

Five people were still under the rubble and their identities were established, he said.

Journalists saw rescue workers digging for survivors on the top floor of the typical Soviet-era housing block, and black smoke billowing from homes on fire across the street.



Rescuers and volunteers look for survivors on the top of a partially destroyed residential building, after a shelling in Sloviansk. — AFP



a little when I heard this huge boom and I ran out from my flat," 59-year-old resident Larisa said.

"I was really scared and in a state of shock," she said, adding that the impact of the shelling had broken her windows and sent shards of glass flying throughout her home.

"I heard a woman screaming, 'there's a child here, there's a child here' — She was screaming so much."

A resident nearby, who declined to give her name, said the strikes had blown out her windows and dislodged her front door from its frame.

"No one from our side of the building was injured but maybe someone here was," she said, pointing to a pool of blood next to another entrance of her building. — AFP

"A child died in an ambulance after being pulled out from the rubble," Ukrainian police said on Twitter.

Ukraine's First Lady Olena Zelenska sent her condolences to the child's family during this "indescribable grief".

President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier denounced

Russia for "brutally shelling" residential buildings and "killing people in broad daylight". The street below — including a playground — was covered in concrete dust and debris, including torn pages from school books and children's drawings.

"I live on the opposite side of the street and I was sleeping

Thai PM lags rivals in opinion polls

BANGKOK: Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha is still lagging behind the main opposition party, latest opinion polls showed, ahead of the Southeast Asian country's general election next month.

The May 14 election will be a battle between parties aligned with the conservative pro-military establishment and the billionaire Shinawatra family-backed Pheu Thai party, led by

Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the 36-year-old daughter and niece of two ex-premiers.

The Pheu Thai party was ahead with 38.89 per cent in a nationwide survey by local media Matchon and Daily News conducted last week, followed by the Move Forward Party, headed by opposition politician Pita Limjaroenrat, on 32.37 per cent. Prayuth's United Thai Nation Party was in third place with 12.84 per cent. — **Reuters**

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces its International Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2023	Supply, Instillation, Testing and Commissioning a New Data Center Infrastructure in MOI Premises in Salalah	International Excellent Frist	1/5/2023	28/5/2023	25/-

- All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to the Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenderers which do not meet the required bond shall not accept. Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am . Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically
- The Ministry has the right to:
 - Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
 - Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone: 24943785, 24943177, Email: MOI.Tenders@omaninfo.om

Kenya launches first operational satellite into orbit

NAIROBI: Kenya's first operational satellite was launched into orbit on Saturday by a SpaceX rocket that took off from California, USA, according to images from the US space company.

The launch, originally scheduled for Monday night in the United States, was postponed several times this week due to bad weather.

On Saturday, a SpaceX Falcon-9 rocket took off at 0648 GMT from the base at Vandenberg, California, before deploying several dozen satellites an hour later, including the Kenyan Taifa-1 ('Nation-1', in the Swahili language).

Designed and developed by a team of Kenyan researchers, the satellite is intended to provide data for agriculture and environmental monitoring in Kenya, much needed in the East African country which is currently experiencing a historic drought.

In a joint statement last week, the Kenyan Ministry of Defence and the Kenya Space Agency (KSA) touted "an important milestone" that should boost Kenya's "budding space economy". — **AFP**

Pakistan School Muscat
ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER

PSM intends to offer **Annual Contract for the year 2023 - 2024**. The contractors with relevant experiences are invited for following bidding:

Tender No.	Tender's Name	Tender Collection Date & Time	Final Submission Date & Time
2023/001	Supply of School Books	April 16, 2023 to April 18, 2023 09:00 AM to 01:00 PM Working Days/Hours	Before and Until April 19, 2023

Experience contractor(s) having relevant experience of at least 3 years of similar nature jobs preferably in Oman, who wishes to participate in the bidding may collect the documents after payment of **RO. 20.000** (non-refundable) per Job.

Admin Office
Pakistan School Muscat
P.O. Box 987, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman; Tel: 24702489
In case of any query you may contact 00968 93690691
Email: tulaib@pakistanschool.edu.om, directorfinancebods@pakistanschool.edu.om

The tenders shall be submitted in Original and complete with all relevant documents. Tenders not in compliance with tender's requirements shall not be considered.
Tender Documents shall be submitted in sealed envelope with clearly mentioned Tender Number/name, Company Name and POC's Number/name. The sealed envelope shall be dropped in the Tender Box available at Admin Office on or before the date mentioned above and addressed to:

Pakistan School Muscat
(PSM is not bound to accept the lowest Tender or any Tender)

Job Vacancy

The Embassy of Japan in Muscat
is seeking to recruit

Secretary

Candidates should meet the following conditions:

- Excellent verbal and written communication skills in both English and Arabic
- Minimum 3 years of professional experience in a similar position
- Excellent Secretarial skills
- Computer skills in Word, Excel, Power Point and Outlook
- University Degree or Diploma in relevant subject
- The ability to work under pressure

Interested candidates are requested to forward their CV to the Embassy, No later than 20th April, 2023, By e-mail: recruitment@mc.mofa.go.jp

***ATTENTION: EMBASSY DOES NOT ACCEPT ANY INQUIRIES BY PHONE**

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)		
MOH/HQ-93/2023	Supply of Pharmaceuticals	27/April/2023	17/May/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 100.000 Per set		
MOH/HQ-94/2023	Supply of Pharmaceuticals		10/May/2023		R.O 135.000 Per set		
MOH/HQ-95/2023	Supply of Surgical Consumable Items (Sutures)	20/April/2023	26/April/2023		R.O 25.000 Per set		
MOH/HQ-96/2023	Supply & Installation of Medical Equipment for The Royal Hospital	27/April/2023	24/May/2023		R.O 37.500 Per set		
MOH/HQ-97/2023	Supply & Installation of Medical Equipment for The Royal Hospital		17/May/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent Grade	R.O 25.000 Per set		
MOH/HQ-98/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Al Mabela South Health Center at Muscat Governorate						
MOH/HQ-100/2023	Supply & Installation of Computer Equipment for the National Record of Government Assets Projects						
MOH/HQ-101/2023	Supply and Installation of CCTV IP System for Sohar Hospital in North Al Batinah Governorate		24/May/2023				
MOH/HQ-102/2023	Supply and Installation CCTV IP System for Nizwa Hospital at Al Dakhiliyah Governorate						
MOH/HQ-103/2023	Upgrading the Air-conditioning System in the Building of the Blood Services Department		17/May/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board			
MOH/HQ-104/2023	Supply of Computers for Directorate General of Information Technology						

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: **24402200**, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



In brief

HANOI



US, VIETNAM PLEDGE TO BOOST TIES DURING BLINKEN VISIT

The United States and Vietnam said on Saturday they hoped to upgrade diplomatic ties, days after a flare-up in tensions with China over Taiwan. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, passing through Hanoi on his way to a Group of Seven (G7) foreign ministers' meeting in Japan, met Vietnamese leaders on Saturday to pave the way for a potential diplomatic upgrade to a "strategic partnership". The two countries have increasingly close trade links, while both share concern over China's growing strength in the region. "We think this is an auspicious time to elevate our existing partnership," Blinken told reporters. — AFP

ERFURT



AFGHAN WOMEN'S ACTIVIST WINS GERMAN PRIZE

Women's rights activist Zarifa Ghafari has been awarded the Luther Prize for her work as the first female mayor of an Afghan province. Ghafari accepted the \$11,000 prize from the Association of German Luther Cities on Saturday at Wilhelmsburg Castle in Schmalkalden after the town nominated Ghafari for the award. The administration said Ghafari was the first female mayor in the Afghan province of Maidan Wardak from 2018 to 2021, where she worked primarily for the protection and rights of Afghan women. — dpa

FRENCH PENSION REFORM IS NOW LAW

PARIS: France's controversial pension reform is officially law, following the government's publication of the legal text in the official register on Saturday, but opponents aren't giving up and plan to continue to oppose the changes. The official publication followed approval on Friday from the Constitutional Council that declared the plan to gradually raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 years essentially in conformity with the constitution. The law is to take effect in September. A referendum, which opponents of the reform had hoped for, was declared inadmissible by the constitutional authorities. That news was greeted by protests in Paris, Nice, Nantes, Rennes and other cities. In Paris alone, 112 demonstrators were arrested on Friday evening and 30 rubbish bins were set alight, the television station "BFMTV" reported, citing the police. Photos showed burning bins in front of the Paris city hall. In several other cities such as Strasbourg, Lyon and Nantes there were also protests. In Rennes the door of a police station was set on



A protester uses fireworks towards French police officers during an action day, after France's Constitutional Council approved the key elements of a pension reform in Nantes, western France. — AFP



French gendarmes hold tear gas grenade launcher a demonstration after the French constitutional court approved the key elements of the controversial pension reform in Paris. — AFP

fire. There had already been rallies and roadblocks earlier in the day. Demonstrations are also expected on Saturday, while the trade unions called for new protest marches on May 1. "The struggle continues and we must join forces," said left-wing politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The Socialists announced a motion to repeal the law. Party member and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo warned that the reform is dividing French society. "I appeal to the president: He must hear the overwhelming majority that is speaking out all over France against this reform that is dividing the country," she said. France's right-wing

nationalist Marine Le Pen, buoyed by the pensions row, called for the government and Macron to be punished in the next election. "The people always have the last word." She wants to rollback the reform if she comes to power. Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne, on the other hand, said on Friday night that the pension reform had now reached the end of the democratic process. "Tonight there are no winners and no losers." With the reform, the pension fund would be balanced in 2030, the government announced. Currently, the retirement age in France is 62, but in fact, retirement starts later on average: those who have not paid in long enough for a full pension work longer. At 67, a pension is available without deductions, regardless of the length of time paid in - and this is to be maintained. The plan is extremely controversial in France. The trade unions consider it brutal and unfair. — dpa

US airman charged over Pentagon leaks



Relatives of Jack Teixeira, a member of the US Air Force National Guard suspected of leaking highly classified US documents, leave the federal courthouse in Boston, Massachusetts. — Reuters

BOSTON: A 21-year-old member of the US Air National Guard accused of leaking top secret military intelligence records online was charged on Friday with unlawfully copying and transmitting classified material.

Jack Douglas Teixeira of North Dighton, Massachusetts, who was arrested by heavily armed FBI agents at his home on Thursday, made his initial appearance in a crowded federal court wearing a brown khaki jumpsuit. At the hearing, Boston's top federal national security prosecutor, Nadine Pellegrini, requested that Teixeira be detained pending trial, and a detention hearing was set for Wednesday. During the brief proceeding, Teixeira said little, answering "yes" when asked whether he understood his right to remain silent. The judge said Teixeira's financial affidavit showed he qualified to be represented by a federal public defender, and he appointed one. After the hearing, three of Teixeira's family members left the courthouse, with a group of reporters trailing them for several blocks. They entered a car without making any comments. — Reuters

Saudis among hundreds of Yemen POWs freed



Ansar Allah prisoners board a plane of the ICRC from the government-held town of Mokha to Sanaa during a prisoner swap. — AFP

SANAA: Hundreds of prisoners of war, including Saudis, were freed on Saturday as part of a cross-border exchange between a military coalition and Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters, the International Committee of the Red Cross said. The flights connecting Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah-held territory in Yemen were part of a multi-day transfer involving nearly 900 detainees, and came amid peace talks which have raised hopes for an end to Yemen's eight-year-old war. Saturday's first flight left the southern Saudi city of Abha for Yemen's Ansar Allah-held capital Sanaa with 120 Ansar Allah prisoners, ICRC public affairs and media adviser Jessica Moussan said. It was followed by a flight from Sanaa to Riyadh carrying 20 former detainees, among them 16 Saudis and three Sudanese, according to the state-affiliated Al Ekhbariya channel. Sudan is part of the



A freed prisoner exiting an ICRC-chartered plane after it arrived at Sanaa Airport. — Reuters

coalition and has provided ground troops for the fighting. The Sanaa-Riyadh flight also included a brother and son of Tareq Saleh, a member of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council and nephew of ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh. Other flights on Saturday included a second Abha-Sanaa leg with 117 Ansar Allah on board, and three more carrying a combined 100 Ansar Allah to Sanaa from the government-held Yemeni town of Mokha. Detainee Abdullah Hashem, who spent seven and a half years in a Saudi prison, was

embraced at Sanaa airport by his mother. "I can finally taste freedom after imprisonment," Hashem said. On Friday, 318 prisoners were transported between government-controlled Aden and Sanaa, reuniting with their families ahead of next week's holiday of Eid al Fitr. The total number of prisoners of war on both sides is unknown. Coalition spokesman Turki al Maliki said the goal was to "get back all prisoners and detainees". The ongoing exchange is a confidence-building measure coinciding with an intense diplomatic push to end Yemen's war, which has left hundreds of thousands dead from the fighting and knock-on effects like hunger and a lack of access to health care. "We hope it's one step in a larger journey that will eventually lead to peace," said Mamadou Sow, ICRC's head for the Gulf Cooperation Council. — AFP

Tyre Campaign- HINO 500 Series vehicles (2022)

Date of campaign start: 16/04/2023
Recall segment: - Safety and Security
Recall type: - GCC Regulation- Workshop action

Production Year	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
2022	HINO	FG8JP7A-JG3	JHDFG8JP8N7712818 To JHDFG8JP4N7712864	4
		FM8JR7A-SG3	JHDFMBJR1N7710712 To JHDFMBJR1N7710787	6
		GD8JLSA-GD04	JHDDGBJL1N7516155 To JHDDGBJL7N7516189	4
		TOTAL		14

Description of defect:
The affected products are Model Year 2022 tyres installed in the above 14 vehicles of Hino Motors Limited that were manufactured in the year 2022. The affected tyres do not meet the rolling resistance specifications as per GSO standard

Procedure:
Inspection of the vehicle and replacement of Tyres as per the work procedure prescribed from Hino Motor Limited.

For More Information:
Customer of affected vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details/ booking appointment etc.

Contact Details:
Telephone: +968-24527350/ 24527352 on all working days from 08.30 Hrs to 17:00 Hrs.

C.R. 1703412

How immigrants are saving the economy



Paul Krugman

The writer is
an American
economist and a
columnist for NYT

The immigration surge has probably been a significant contributor to the economy's ability to continue rapid job growth without runaway inflation.

Although many politicians will never admit it, the US economy is currently performing far better than most analysts expected. We're still adding jobs at a rapid clip; while inflation remains unacceptably high, it's probably coming down.

How are we pulling this off?

There are surely multiple reasons.

But you may not have heard about one ingredient in the economy's special sauce: a sudden, salutary rebound in net immigration, which soared in 2022 to more than 1 million people, its highest level since 2017.

We don't know whether this rebound will last, but it has been really helpful. It's an exaggeration, but one with some truth, to say that immigrants are saving the US economy.

About that economy: Despite sharply rising interest rates, the labour market remains stubbornly strong, adding 236,000 jobs last month. Not only has employment bounced back with stunning speed from the Covid recession, it's actually running above pre-Covid projections. In its 2020 Budget and Economic Outlook, released just before Covid struck, the Congressional Budget Office predicted that the US economy would add 2 million jobs over the next three years. In fact, we've added more than 3 million.

In today's topsy-turvy policy environment, good news is often considered bad news.

The Fed is trying to slow the economy, maybe even generate a recession, to slow inflation. So strong employment numbers arguably should be worrisome, a harbinger of worse inflation to come.

But this doesn't seem to be happening. The debate among economists picking over the entrails of wage and price data, seeking auguries for the future, is mind-numbing even for those of us who are supposed to do this stuff for a living. Overall, however, it looks as if inflation is, if anything, subsiding despite torrid job creation.

How is this possible?

Let's take the 30,000-foot view of the US economy over the past three years.

The story goes like this: Faced with a pandemic that temporarily shut down a large part of the economy, the



Farm workers plant cantaloupe seedlings at Joe Del Bosques fields near Oro Loma, California.

federal government responded with huge aid programmes to help laid-off workers, troubled businesses, and more.

These programmes greatly alleviated what could have been severe economic hardship, but they also maintained or enhanced the public's ability to buy goods and services at a time when the economy's ability to supply these goods and services was reduced by pandemic-related disruptions.

The result was inflation.

Now, many of those pandemic disruptions have been resolved; the kinks in the supply chain have mostly been straightened out. And the big aid packages are receding in the rearview mirror.

But until very recently many people were arguing that the pandemic had done long-term damage to the US economy's productive capacity, largely by reducing potential labour supply.

For example, back in November Jerome Powell, the Fed chair, gave a speech in which he argued that there were still millions of “missing workers” relative to pre-Covid expectations. Covid had directly reduced labour supply, killing off around 400,000 potential workers; the symptoms of long Covid may be keeping many more from working.

Powell also argued that the pandemic had led to millions of early retirements by older workers who were unlikely to

Don't call it a 'Mood Board' — It's a 'world'



Eve Peyser

The writer is a journalist who mostly writes features about culture

At the beginning of her design career, when Robyn Kanner was working at an advertising agency, she wasn't a fan of making so-called mood boards — aka pinboards of images that marketers and designers use when conceiving of a new campaign.

Kanner, 35, a creative director who has done design work for President Joe Biden, the Democratic National Committee and Gov Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania, recalled how engaging in the process of swiping existing imagery didn't really help her create ideas. So when she rose through the ranks, she decided to try a different approach.

In fact, Kanner has forsaken the term “mood board” altogether. Instead, she makes “worlds.” And she’s pretty happy with the results. “A mood board is an idea. A world is a place that triggers all my senses,” she said. “How does a place smell? What sounds do I hear? What does it feel like when I touch it? A world is alive, versus a mood board, which is something that lives on a corkscrew board.”

Now, whenever Kanner takes on a new client, she first looks for a shared language.

"On Josh Shapiro's campaign, it was sports," she said.

"The governor really understood sports, and it was really authentic to his core. I grew up watching basketball, so I knew how to talk about basketball with him. We made a basketball jersey for his campaign and built a basketball court for his inaugural ball."

Mood boards have been a common brainstorming tool in

fashion and advertising since at least the 1980s. In a 1985 Chicago Tribune article, interior designer Raymond Waites explained his creative process: “I work in my head, then do thumbnail sketches that not another human being in the world can decipher. Then I do a ‘mood board.’ I’ll use fabric swatches, pull pictures of a chair out of publications, pictures out of people’s homes.”

In recent decades, making mood boards or “vision boards” has also become popular among young women, who cut and paste rousing images of the lives they want out of magazines and other sources.

"I use Pinterest for my mood boards," said Yun Gao, a 21-year-old Cooper Union student. "I go on the platform all the time to look at visual inspiration."

Among professionals, however, mood boards have become passé, a relic of a previous era where branding was defined much more narrowly.

“Twenty years ago, a brand was really just an icon and colours,” said Borzou Azabdaftari, 43, the founder and CEO of NickelBronx, a digital agency that focuses on branding.

“As the word ‘brand’ has evolved to include everything from the tone of your content to the kind of music you play at your store or restaurant to the kind of art you have up, creating a more comprehensive brand world has become much more important. They become living, breathing documents that can change and evolve.”





INVEST IN OMAN'S FUTURE

SAFE - FIXED AND ATTRACTIVE RETURNS - LIQUIDITY

Auction of Five-Year Development Bonds worth RO 75 million at 5.25% p.a.

Oman Development Bonds

On behalf of the Government of Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman announces an issue of Government Development Bonds to be sold by auction. The 68th Issue of Government Development Bonds will be issued on Thursday, 04/05/2023, carrying a coupon rate of 5.25% per annum for a maturity period of 5 years (maturing on 04/05/2028). These Bonds will be auctioned on Tuesday, 02/05/2023. Investors may apply for these Bonds through competitive bidding only.

Security of Capital

Total security is offered as the Bonds are registered and transferable only by means of a document evidencing the transaction between a buyer and a seller through Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The Bonds are direct and unconditional obligations of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

Fixed and Attractive Returns

Interest of 5.25% per annum is payable half-yearly throughout the tenure of the Bonds. The interest will be paid semi-annually on 4th November and 4th May, every year till maturity of the Bond on Thursday 04/05/2028.

Liquidity

The Bonds can be listed and traded before maturity in MSX at the prevailing market price.

Collateral Advantage

The Bonds can be used as a collateral security to obtain loans from any licensed commercial bank.

Who Can Invest?

Resident and Non-resident Investors, such as Banks, Financial Institutions, Companies, Individuals and any other entity of any nationality

How to buy the bonds?

Investor may obtain bonds through any licensed commercial bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman, upon the submission of eligible application form.

MSX Investor Code

The investor must provide the MSX Investor Code in his/her application.

Anyone who does not have MSX Investor Code, can obtain it from Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. (MCD) through their website at least one day prior to submitting the application to the commercial bank. (www.mcd.gov.om)

For any enquires:
Tel: +968 24822222 | 24822223 | 24822280 | 24822281
Fax: +968 24810555
E-mail: mcd.support@mcd.gov.om

Bank Account Details

An investor must provide the same Bank Account details registered with MCD.

68th
Issue

Opens on Sunday, April 16th, 2023 & closes on Monday, May 1st, 2023.

➔ **The minimum subscription amount is RO 500 and in multiples of RO 100**

To view the 68th issue of Government Development Bonds, please visit the following websites:

Ministry of Finance | www.mof.gov.om
Central Bank of Oman | www.cbo.gov.om

Contact the Central Bank of Oman (Monetary Operations Department) or any licensed commercial bank for details.

Tel: +968 24777145 / 24777635 / 24777837 E-mail: mod@cbo.gov.om

P.O Box 1161, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Fax: +968 24777772

Vegetarians, redheads, and lefties

Change is constant, or so we are told. First uttered by Heractclus, the Greek philosopher 2,500 years ago, it has been parodied through history by such diverse entities as Mother Teresa, Mahatma Ghandi, Albert Einstein, Malala Yousafzai, and Queen Elizabeth II, to name just a few.

A sobering reality too, is the fear of change. We like routine, and become comfortable in our ‘place,’ the unique little ways we do things, which make us feel like we are in control of our lives, and we don’t like to change. Our fear of change, our anxiety in the face of change can even become phobic.

Metathesiophobics are unable to rationalise, therefore accept change, and can suffer from depression. Seriously, there are many among us who would feel that way, maybe not to the full extent of a clinical diagnosis, but think about it, changing your hairdresser, your brand of coffee, your daily routine... you resist them all don’t you?

Change then, is the process by which things change, or evolve, or how things become different, and being different is the place we end up at.

Difference has been a fact for as long as man has walked the Earth, and has most of that time been celebrated, as we have been either bigger, faster, stronger, or better. We’ve not been quite so celebratory, or understanding however, of our differences in colour, in appearance, in faith or belief, in language, in culture, in prosperity and wealth.

We have sought, so unkindly, to establish superiority by perpetuating difference as being wrong. What if being ‘different’ is not a consequence of change, evolution, mutation, adjustment, innovation, metamorphosis, refinement, conversion, transition, modification, transformation, or adversity, and is simply... diversity?

I’m not talking about vegetarian difference... they are a special group that simply must tell you they are... every time you meet (meat maybe?), and how they can’t understand how we want to eat meat, and how there are never enough veg options, pointing to the meat, and making sarcastic comments. In their own way remarkably, if humorously, intolerant. I refer to my bumper sticker... ‘Save cows. Eat vegetarians.’ But seriously...



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

WE LIKE
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Albinism has always historically, especially on the African continent, been associated with witchcraft, as frequently reported by the respected BBC News Service, with a Nigerian study (Magna, 2014), finding that “they experienced alienation, avoided social interactions and were less emotionally stable. Furthermore, affected individuals were less likely to complete schooling, find employment, and find partners.” Strangely enough, they all have ten fingers, and ten toes.

During the Middle Ages it was dangerous to also have red hair, as they were sacrificed at the ancient Egyptian’s altars, were persecuted during the Spanish Inquisition, and in literature, Dicken’s ‘Fagan,’ and Shakespeare’s ‘Shylock’ cast as villainous redheads.

Not since Maureen O’Hara in fact, has a redhead caught common favour until Ed Sheeran came along. It is genetically possible among all ethnicities, yet less than 2 per cent of us do, although if you are Scottish, that figure rises dramatically to around 13 per cent. Though most have ten fingers and ten toes, in an ironic twist, redheads are genetically predisposed towards left-handedness.

There was a time too, when being left-handed was considered almost satanic, and during the European Middle Ages the young scholars in wealthy families would have their left hands, with five fingers, tied behind their backs, forcing them to use their right hands with a similar five fingers. In fact, as recent a monarch as King George VI (1895-1952) was so ‘adjusted.’ Further evidence of the ‘wrongness’ of left-handedness was in quill and nib pen writing from the left to the right, where the pen will simply not run, although of course, the reverse applied to writers of Arabic.

Oh, how fickle we all are, responding adversely to skin colour and hair colour. Heaven help us should our religion or our beliefs, which can’t be seen, should offend anyone. Or what if... where one’s heart or conscience leads them should draw the ire of their societies? Diversity today has so many connotations today of mistrust, fear, and anxiety, and their consequent effects upon those on both sides of the imaginary ‘fence.’ Love and affection, for many, are elusive, hard to find, and for some, harder to sustain. “Where are you from?” It rarely matters! Who you are, what you are, and what you do... do!

BULL’S EYE



■ A racegoer with a dartboard hat at the Grand National Horse race festival in Aintree Racecourse, Liverpool on Saturday. – Reuters

Lula’s historic visit to China

IMRAN KHALID

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has culminated his much-awaited trip to China, which is expected to significantly propel bilateral relations to a new echelon by fostering a more all-encompassing partnership in areas beyond conventional domains like trade and investment.

This includes collaboration in cutting-edge arenas like finance, anti-poverty measures, cooperation, and joint mediation to address the globally pressing issue of the Ukraine crisis. For various reasons, this is billed to be a historic visit. In South America, Brazil stands out as China’s foremost economic and political ally, and a significant member of the BRICS bloc. In terms of their global aspirations, China and Brazil have always shared a mutual disdain for the existing liberal international order, though their proposed solutions may differ.

Starting in 2005, China began to extend its foreign direct investment to other countries, and Brazil emerged as a significant destination for its capital. Initially, these investments were predominantly focused on the commodities sector, but they soon expanded to include a broader

CHINA HAS
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range of infrastructure projects. By 2017, over half of China’s investments in South America were being directed towards Brazil.

While Brazil has not been formally included in China’s Belt and Road Initiative, it is clear that China’s overseas investment programmes impact Brazil’s global interests and export markets, particularly as they tend to shift the world’s economic centre of gravity away from the United States, which is another major trading partner for Brazil.

In 2021, Brazil emerged as the top recipient of Chinese foreign investment, accounting for almost 13.6 per cent of China’s total foreign direct investment. The majority of this investment was directed towards bolstering Brazil’s electricity grid and oil extraction projects.

As global trade prospects become increasingly dismal and tensions with the United States continue to escalate, China is seeking to expand its network of economic and trade allies. Brazil, the biggest economy in South America, is also eager to enhance its exports of iron ore, farm produce, and oil, whilst

simultaneously revitalising its manufacturing sector, thus making itself an attractive trade and economic partner for China. China has maintained its position as Brazil’s primary trading partner for over a decade.

The two countries saw their trade volume surge by 8.1 per cent to reach a record \$171.5 billion in 2022. Brazil is the largest provider of soybeans, chicken, and sugar to China. The country also exports significant quantities of corn and beef. The large delegation accompanying

President Lula, which included over 240 business, industry and agriculture representatives, is a testimony to the ever-flourishing business ties between the two nations.

During the visit, over 15 deals were signed across a range of critical sectors, including health, agriculture, education, finance, industry, science, and technology. The agreements also include the building of a sixth satellite used to monitor the Amazon, and the development of technology for 5G telecommunications, the

Internet and cybersecurity.

China has emerged as Brazil’s top source of manufactured goods, benefiting from the vast market of the country’s 215 million people. Among the key exports from China to Brazil are mobile phones, steel, and increasingly, Chinese cars. But there is much more beyond trade and business that will be discussed between President Xi and President Lula. In contrast to his far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro, President Lula has taken a more cordial stance towards China.

The Workers’ Party, which Lula represents, has been known to have a congenial attitude towards the country.

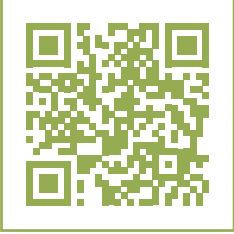
President Lula also wants to abandon the isolationist foreign policy of his predecessor. That is why he is quite active in the global arena after taking charge. In addition to his economic agenda, Lula is also interested in playing a role in global peace efforts. Lula also discussed his proposal about the creation of a “peace club” with China and India to mediate an end to the conflict in Ukraine when he met with President Xi Jinping.



Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and China’s President Xi Jinping attend a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Friday. – Reuters

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Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in action against Poland's Magda Linette. RIGHT: France's Caroline Garcia reacts during her singles match against Britain's Harriet Dart. – Reuters

France, Spain qualify for BJK Cup finals

PARIS: France and Spain qualified for the Billie Jean King Cup Finals on Saturday, both taking unassailable 3-0 leads against Britain and Mexico respectively.

World number five Caroline Garcia gave France the winning point indoors in Coventry with a 6-1, 6-7 (10/12), 6-1 win over Britain's Harriet Dart.

On Friday, Garcia and Alize Cornet had to play almost six hours to dominate Katie Boulter 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2) and Dart 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/3) respectively.

On clay in Marbella, Nuria Parrizas Diaz, ranked 80, sealed victory for hosts Spain with a 6-3, 6-0 win over 196th-ranked Marcela Zacarias. Parrizas Diaz also won her singles tie in straight sets on Saturday along with Sara Sorribes Tormo to ensure Spain's presence in the finals in November at a venue to be decided.

Britain, who reached the semifinals last year, were missing Emma Raducanu, leaving 117th-ranked Dart as their top singles player.

Record 18-time champions the United States, led by top-10 players Jessica Pegula and Coco Gauff are 2-0 up against Austria in Delray Beach.

On Friday, Gauff beat Julia Grabher 6-1, 6-3, before number three ranked Pegula defeated Sinja Kraus 6-0, 7-5.

The best-of-five-match contest continues on Saturday with up to two matches in singles and one in doubles.

Defending champions Switzerland and 2022 runners-up Australia received direct entrance to the November 7-12 finals, which will feature four groups of three.

KAZAKHSTAN THROUGH

Kazakhstan advanced to the Billie Jean King Cup finals for the second time after defeating Poland 3-1 in their qualifier on Saturday.

Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina had helped Kazakhstan build a 2-0 lead on Friday and the world number seven had no trouble dispatching Magda Linette 6-4, 6-2 to give her side an unassailable

lead in Astana.

The best-of-five qualifiers featured two singles matches on Friday and two reverse singles plus a doubles rubber on Saturday.

Rybakina's compatriot Yulia Putintseva was scheduled to play in the fourth singles rubber which was not played but she teamed up with Anna Danilina in the doubles.

Poland, without injured world number one Iga Swiatek, finally got on the board as Weronika Falkowska and Alicja Rosolska won 6-4, 6-4 in what was essentially a dead rubber.

Ukraine were 2-0 down to the Czech Republic after Friday's rubbers and Marta Kostyuk halved the deficit when she came from behind to beat former French Open champion Barbora Krejickova 3-6, 6-1, 6-4.

However, Marketa Vondrousova wrapped up the tie for the Czechs with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Katarina Zavatska as the teams opted not to play the doubles match. — Reuters



Kazakhstan players celebrate after beating Poland in Astana, Kazakhstan.

OBA launches new website, logo and visual identity

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 15

Under the auspices of Tahir bin Salem al Amri, CEO of Central Bank of Oman, the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) celebrated the launch of its new website, logo and visual identity. The event was held at the City Season Hotel in the presence of Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, OBA Chairman, and club officials and basketball fraternity.

The ceremony began with a film showing footage of the OBA's activities, including competitions and championships and a review of the Senior, Junior and Youth Leagues. The film also highlighted the participation of national teams and sports clubs in various tournaments, including the West Asian Championships.

Dr Ali bin Salam al Yarubi, OBA Vice-Chairman, delivered a

speech outlining the clear plan of the board of directors to develop the game. This includes creating a new logo and visual identity that reflects the sporting and Omani identity of the OBA and opens a point of communication with fans and external partners of the association.

The new logo consists of a set of colours and symbols that carry certain connotations, and through which the new visual identity adopted by the Oman Basketball Association can be identified. The letter (O) reflects the word Oman in the English language and also represents the basketball hoop. The second symbol represents the letter (B) on the word basketball in the English language and embodies the number (3) in the game of basketball trios. The letter (A) embodies the word 'Association' and represents the word 'Action', reflecting the



continuous collective movement, strength, activity, excitement and enthusiasm of the game of basketball. The red, white, and green colours reflect the Omani identity that distinguishes the country at the regional and international levels, Al Yarubi explained.

WEBSITE SERVICES

The OBA has also launched a website to facilitate the work tasks of its main partners, including clubs and provide a broader digital station to obtain data and forms for registering players electronically, thus reducing the inconvenience of coming to a building during official working hours only. The website provides many services to partners, including registering club players throughout the day during the specified registration period and knowing the status of each player, viewing the results

of matches directly by linking the website and social media channels and reviewing the most important competitions and events supervised by the OBA.

During the ceremony, chief guest Tahir al Omari pressed the inauguration button of the new logo, signalling the launch of the new visual identity of the Oman Basketball Association. The audience also watched a presentation of the old logo and the transition to the new logo of the federation. Then he pressed the launch button of the OBA's website, announcing the launch of the website via the Internet.

In conclusion, Eng Khalfan al Naabi, presented a souvenir to the chief guest. The launch of the new website, logo and visual identity represents a significant step forward for the Oman Basketball Association as it continues to develop the game in Oman.



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Harry Brook plays a shot against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens Stadium in Kolkata. — AFP

Brook finally delivers with first century of IPL

KOLKATA: England's Harry Brook rebounded from three failures with the bat in resounding fashion with the first century of the Indian Premier League (IPL) season as he guided the Sunrisers Hyderabad to a 23-run victory over the Kolkata Knight Riders on Friday.

Brook, 24, is one of England's most exciting talents and an all-format player who came with a whopping \$1.62 million price tag in the player auction.

But he had scored just 29 runs in three IPL innings prior to Friday's game against Kolkata where he finally found his groove and cut loose at the Eden Gardens, reaching an unbeaten 100 in just 55 balls. The opening batter targeted the fast bowlers and he smashed three sixes and 12 boundaries en route to his century, switching roles from attacking in the powerplay to anchoring the innings when skipper Aiden Markram came in and smashed 50 off 26 balls.

Such was Brook's contribution that even the home crowd of around 60,000 were on their feet to give him a standing ovation when

he got to his hundred with a single in the final over as he helped his team to a season-high total of 228-4.

"I've had a bit of trouble with spin, but I wanted to use the powerplay to my advantage. So (in the) middle overs I wanted to rotate strike and let the other boys do the hitting. It is a belter of a pitch," Brook said.

"I think I was putting pressure on myself after the first few games (because of the price tag). People on social media start to call you 'rubbish,' he added after he was named Man of the Match. "They were slagging me off a few days ago. Glad I could shut them up, to be honest."

In response, Kolkata were restricted to 205-7 despite captain Nitish Rana's knock of 75 while Rinku Singh was unbeaten on 58 off 31.

Rinku recorded his maiden IPL fifty but could not repeat his heroics when he smashed five consecutive sixes in the final over to lead Kolkata to victory over the Gujarat Titans earlier this week.

— Reuters

Pacer Rauf takes four wickets as Pakistan thump New Zealand

LAHORE, Pakistan: Pakistan celebrated skipper Babar Azam's 100th international match in the shortest format with a clinical 88-run win in the first Twenty20 against New Zealand in Lahore on Friday.

Azam failed with just nine runs but Fakhar Zaman and Saim Ayub scored 47 runs each and put on a 79-run partnership for the third wicket to anchor Pakistan to 182 all out in 19.5 overs.

Fast bowler Haris Rauf, one of five players who returned after being rested in Pakistan's last series against Afghanistan, took career best figures of 4-18 as New Zealand were 94 all out in 15.3 overs.

Left-arm spinner Imad Wasim finished with 2-2 in his only over — taking both his wickets off successive deliveries.

Mark Chapman top-scored with 27-ball 34 inclusive of four boundaries and a six while skipper Tom Latham made 24-ball 20. Rauf's previous best T20 figures of 4-22 had also come against New Zealand in Sharjah in 2021.

Earlier, Zaman and Ayub lifted Pakistan from a poor start after they won the toss and batted.

Pakistan lost both their openers — Mohammad Rizwan leg-before for eight and then Azam bowled — to pacer Adam Milne by the fifth over for just 30.

Ayub lifted the tempo with two boundaries each off Milne and Ben Lister before he and Zaman hit a six each off spinner Ish Sodhi in the tenth over.

Zaman struck four boundaries and two sixes in his 34-ball knock while Ayub's rapid 28-ball innings featured two sixes and six fours.

Ayub was run out while taking a second run before Zaman was caught at deep square-leg off Sodhi. Faheem Ashraf hit a 16-ball 22 while Wasim scored 16 off 13 balls to help Pakistan add 47 runs in the last five overs.

Henry was the pick of the New Zealand bowlers with 3-32, as Pakistan were bowled out on the penultimate ball. Lister had figures of 2-30 while Milne finished with 2-51. The remaining four matches are in Lahore (April 15, 17) and Rawalpindi (April 20 and 24).

— AFP



BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 182 all out in 19.5 overs (Fakhar Zaman 47, Saim Ayub 47; M Henry 3-32, B Lister 2-30, A Milne 2-51) v New Zealand 94 all out in 15.3 overs (M Chapman 34; Haris Rauf 4-17, Imad Wasim 2-2)

Super Sunday brings clash of table-toppers



MI VS KKR AT MUMBAI

• **TEAM INFO** - Mumbai finally found winning ways in a nail-biting close encounter against Delhi Capitals, after losing two on the trot. This win would have calmed the nerves as they look to face a team that they have always dominated. That crucial and confidence boosting knock from Rohit Sharma would have provided the captain a much-needed breather. On the other hand, KKR wouldn't be very upset by losing that encounter against Sunrisers from the act of brilliance from Harry Brooks. They look like a settled side and the only concern is with Mayank and Tripathi's form.

• **Head-to-Head - Played** - 31; Won by MI - 22; Won by KKR - 9

• **MI possible XI** - Rohit Sharma (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Cameron Green, Suryakumar

Yadav, Tilak Varma, Nehal Wadhwa, Hrithik Shokeen, Riley Meridith/Tim David, Arshad Khan, Piyush Chawla, Jason Behrendorff

• **KKR possible XI** - Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Jagadeesan, Nitish Rana, Rinku Singh, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Shardul Thakur, Umesh Yadav, Suyash Sharma/Venkatesh Iyer, Lockie Ferguson, Varun Chakravarthy

• **Pitch & Weather Report** - The pitch at the Wankhede Stadium is a wonderful track to bat on where batters can hit through the line right from the start of their innings. Bowlers are punished if they miss their mark even slightly and will have to hit the right areas to avoid damage. The temperature in Mumbai is expected to hover between 27 to 34 degrees Celsius. It will stay humid throughout the day.

• **Match Prediction** - Even though Mumbai are going to have home advantage, but it is Kolkata who are coming at the peak of their confidence by winning some unbelievable encounters and it all started with the act of brilliance of Lord Shardul Thakur and it was followed by Rinku Singh. Bowling is a little bit of concern, but with batting being in full flow, they would believe that any target is chaseable by them. So this one is going to be going down to Kolkata.

GT VS RR AT AHMEDABAD

• **TEAM INFO** - Two teams that have accumulated 3 wins from 4 games will be looking to continue their domination in the IPL 2023. Gujarat are coming on the back of a win against Punjab, where they unnecessarily took the game a little longer than what they would have wanted, that is something that they would like to work on.

Although overall, Gujarat are one of the most balanced sides of the IPL 2023. While, Rajasthan have won their back-to-back matches against Delhi and then Chennai. Talking about balance, Rajasthan are also a part of the top balanced sides of IPL 2023.

• **Head-to-Head - Played** - 3; Won by GT - 3; Won by RR - 0

• **GT possible XI** - Wriddhiman Saha, Shubman Gill, Sai Sudarshan, Hardik Pandya, David Miller, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, Alzarri Joseph, Mohammed Shami, Mohit Sharma, Joshua Little

• **RR possible XI** - Yashasvi Jaiswal, Jos Buttler, Sanju Samson, Devdutt Padikal, Shimron Hetmyer, Dhruv Jurel, Ravichandran Ashwin, Jason Holder, Kuldeep Sen, Sandeep Sharma, Yuzvendra Chahal

• **Pitch & Weather Report** - The pitch at Narendra Modi Stadium looks good for batting. The new ball bowlers may get some movement off the surface but if the batters manage to survive that period, they will be able to score big. Run-scoring becomes easier as the game progresses. Clear skies will greet both sides on Sunday, with the temperature expected to range between 26 and 40 degrees Celsius.

• **Match Prediction** - As on date, it is the Gujarat Titans that have always dominated the Rajasthan Royals and that will certainly be in the mind of the Rajasthani captain and team management. Gujarat are a very strong side and the defending champions have the capability to stay calm in difficult situation and that has been their secret to success. So, have to back Gujarat Titans.

FAN COMMENTS

"Gujarat are known for producing great people and I feel that captain Hardik Pandya is going to be one of them. Feel that he is going to be the next captain to lift an ICC trophy and I hope that it's later this year." - Viren Mandalia, 23, Computer Design Specialist, Indian.

"Although Chennai have been my team since the start, but I hope that Mumbai get back to

winning ways and find a slot in the play-offs, where we are able to kick them out of the tournament. Our banter have always been crazy and amazing." - Naveen Kotian, 51, Logistics/Raha, Indian.

"I loved that comment of Champions League in this column and that has inspired me to start a very special tenex ball domestic champions league in Oman after the massive success of MTCL." - Shaheer Ahamad, 38, Businessman, Indian.

"Kolkata are living on miracles and it will be interesting how they are going to survive further in the tournament." - Zain Raza, 31, Intelligent Network Engineer/Huawei Oman, Pakistan.

Send us your comment for the next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '00968 92470544' and the best comments will be included. 30 words on the team that you support, full name, age, designation and nationality.

You could post us your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, Twitter - @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman or Instagram - @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. Don't forget to use #OOIPL2023 for better reach.

WATKINS EXTENDS HOT STREAK AS VILLA OUTCLASS NEWCASTLE



Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins scores their second goal against Newcastle United at Villa Park, Birmingham, Britain. – Reuters

BIRMINGHAM, England: An early strike from Jacob Ramsey and two second-half goals from Ollie Watkins earned Aston Villa a 3-0 win over Newcastle United in the Premier League on Saturday to move Unai Emery's rejuvenated team to within six points of the top four.

Ramsey ran on to Watkins' cushioned header to give Villa the lead with an emphatic side-footed finish in the 11th minute, after an excellent cross by John McGinn.

Watkins added Villa's second with a sharp strike on the turn from point-blank range in the 64th minute and grabbed his 11th goal in his last 12 matches six minutes from time with a simple

finish at the back post.

"I think we are on a great run at the moment and playing good football," Watkins said. "There's real togetherness in the team and we're looking forward to games to come."

Villa came within a whisker of taking the lead with less than 30 seconds on the clock when Watkins hit the post after being played in by Ramsey.

Newcastle responded with Alexander Isak drawing a sharp save from Emiliano Martinez but that was as good as it got for Eddie Howe's men in the first half.

Emery set Villa up in a 4-4-2 formation, with Emiliano Buendia partnering Watkins up front and



the play worked perfectly.

Buendia's tendency to drop deep created space for Ramsey and John McGinn to run into and helped ensure Villa outnumbered Newcastle in midfield.

Ramsey hit the post for Villa in the 15th minute when he ran on to Alex Moreno's cut back and Newcastle keeper Nick Pope had to be quick off his line to head clear and deny the Villa midfielder late in the half.

The visitors' best chance came just before the hour mark when Isak drew an acrobatic one-handed save from Emiliano Martinez, but Watkins put the ball in the back of the net from Villa's next attack, only for the goal to be

ruled out for offside.

McGinn fired over from the edge of the box before Watkins collected Moreno's low cross and spun to seal Villa's fifth league win in a row.

"I think it's one of those performances that we need to analyse and move on quickly," Howe said. "We weren't there today. Villa did well but by our own standard we were off it and if that's the case you're never going to win."

Villa are sixth in the table on 50 points, three behind fifth-placed Tottenham Hotspur and six adrift of Manchester United in fourth and Newcastle in third.

— Reuters

Valladolid dent Villarreal's Champions League hopes



Selim Amallah



Jawad El Yamiq

VILARREAL, Spain: Villarreal stumbled to a 2-1 home defeat by relegation-battling Real Valladolid on Saturday in La Liga, denting their ambitions of qualifying for the Champions League.

Quique Setien's side, fifth, could have moved within a point of fourth place Real Sociedad, who visit Athletic Bilbao later on Saturday in a Basque derby.

Selim Amallah struck for the visitors in the second minute and Jawad El Yamiq doubled their lead after Villarreal's Samu Chukwueze had a goal disallowed for offside.

Etienne Capoue pulled one back for the Yellow Submarine but it was Valladolid, provisionally

14th and five points above the relegation zone, who came closer to scoring in the final stages.

Villarreal goalkeeper Pepe Reina made some fine saves to keep Valladolid at bay, after their new coach Paulo Pezzolano was sent off for complaining about Capoue's strike.

The hosts, who beat champions Real Madrid 3-2 last weekend in a thriller at the Santiago Bernabeu, felt they deserved more.

"The result does not show what happened in the 90 minutes, I think Villarreal were superior in every aspect to Valladolid," said Villarreal's Dani Parejo. "We leave sad and disappointed with the result, but we feel football has been unjust to us." — AFP



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Import of electric cars subject to new standard from May 1



MUSCAT: With effect from May 1, 2023, imports of Electric Vehicles (EV) and related parts and accessories will be governed by the technical standards and specifications set out by the Gulf Standardisation Organisation and ratified by Ministerial Decision 45/12023 issued by the Omani Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The measure seeks to entrench the adoption of the Gulf standard as an Omani standard to ensure that a future EV sector in the country stays abreast of global technological developments in the field.

Consequently, manufacturers

THE MEASURE SEEKS TO ENTRENCH THE ADOPTION OF THE GULF STANDARD AS AN OMANI STANDARD TO ENSURE THAT A FUTURE EV SECTOR IN THE COUNTRY STAYS ABREAST OF GLOBAL TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD

and importers of EV vehicles and parts are required to submit a certificate of conformity approved by the Gulf Standardisation Organisation, as a condition for the release of new electric vehicles, in order to verify that the companies that manufacture electric vehicles have applied the technical regulations for this product.

Engineer Yaqoub bin Saleh al Saadi, a mechanical engineer in the Compliance Department of the General Directorate of

Standards and Metrology at the ministry, said: “The application of this standard comes with the aim of creating a new sector for electric car spare parts and maintenance services workshops, skilled national labour, advanced technology, vehicle charging stations, and opportunities localising modern industries and strengthening supply chains”.

He added that the standard supports the shift from vehicles powered by fossil fuels to reliance on new and renewable energy, in a way that serves the trend towards a green economy and keeps pace with the country’s efforts and policies aimed at reducing carbon emissions resulting from fuel combustion to achieve zero carbon neutrality.

Engineer Yaqoub bin Saleh al Saadi pointed out that the societal objective of the standard is to determine the safety of the technical requirements for electric vehicles for the safety of the driver and passengers. By reducing accidents, deaths and electric shocks that can be caused by leakage of electricity from batteries, and leakage of battery components in the passenger compartment. — ONA

Banking sector credit climbs to RO 29.8bn

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 15

Credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks, collectively known as Other Depository Corporations (ODCs) grew by 6.8 per cent to RO 29.8 billion at the end of February 2023, with credit to the private sector demonstrating an increase of 5.3 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 24.8 billion, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) stated in its latest newsletter.

Non-financial corporations received the highest share of the total private sector credit at approximately 46.1 per cent at end-February 2023, followed by household sector at 44.7 per cent. The share of financial corporations was 5.6 per cent while other sectors received the remaining 3.7 per cent of total private sector credit as at end-February 2023, the apex bank said.

Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y significant growth of 2.9 per cent to reach RO 26.6 billion at the end of February 2023. Total private sector deposits increased by 0.53 per cent to RO 17.5 billion.

In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest contribution is from household deposits at 51.8 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 28.6 per



cent, financial corporations at 16.8 per cent and other sectors at 2.8 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 5.4 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-February 2023. Credit to the private sector increased by 2.9 per cent to reach RO 19.7 billion while their overall investments in securities witnessed a decline by 14.0 per cent to RO 4.5 billion at end- February 2023.

Investment in Government Development Bonds marginally increase by 1.7 per cent to RO 2.2 billion, while foreign securities increased by 31.7 per cent to RO 1.1 billion, at the end of February 2023.

On the liabilities side, aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 1.5 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 21.7 billion at end-February 2023.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 4.7 per cent at RO 5.1 billion, and deposits of public enterprises increased by 21 per cent to RO 1.6 billion.

Medium Term Fiscal Plan drives Oman’s financial recovery

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 15

Oman’s Ministry of Finance (MoF) has credited the government’s fiscal stability and sustainability programmes for the dramatic improvement in state finances beset until about a year ago by large deficits and public debt.

It comes as the government settled RO 1.1 billion in loan repayments during the first quarter of this year, effectively paring outstanding public debt to RO 16.6 billion as of end-March 2023, down from a total of RO 17.7 billion as of end-2022.

That repayment, made possible by strong hydrocarbon export earnings and higher non-oil revenues, is also attributable to fiscal reform prioritising, among other things, rationalisation of expenditure to help reduce the annual deficit and progressively bring down the public debt as well.

“The National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development was launched



with the aim to continue to implement the measures of fiscal balance, in addition to developing the financial and banking sector by introducing initiatives and projects which help to ensure the achievement of objectives outlined by Oman Vision 2040,” the ministry said in a statement.

According to the ministry, fiscal reform has its genesis in the National Programme for Fiscal

Balance (Tawazun), which was first unveiled in 2020 to help the country tide over the damaging effects of the global energy crisis spanning the 2014 – 2020 period.

A sharp decline in energy export revenues during this period contributed to higher annual deficits, the accumulation of public debt and rising costs of debt servicing, it noted.

Compounding the already

challenging financial situation for the country was the outbreak of the pandemic, which worsened Oman’s fiscal position and eroded its credit ratings.

The Medium Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP) launched in October 2020 helped lay the foundations for fiscal sustainability. The goal was to achieve a “fiscal balance between revenue and spending and reducing public debt, in addition

to enhancing spending efficiency, diversifying sources of income, and reducing fiscal deficit,” the ministry said.

Three years on, the Medium Term Fiscal Plan has delivered “significant results”, the ministry noted.

Foremost is its role in slashing the public debt from 69.7 per cent of GDP in 2021 to 46.5 per cent in 2022. Moreover, the fiscal breakeven oil price has slumped to \$68 per barrel for the 2021 – 2025 timeframe compared with an average of \$80 per barrel during the preceding 2016 – 2020 period.

Additionally, non-hydrocarbon revenues have soared from RO 1.640 billion in 2021 to RO 2.120 billion last year, the ministry pointed out. Besides, the MTFP spawned a number of far-reaching initiatives that promise to further strengthen Oman’s fiscal position going forward.

They include the establishment of Energy Development Oman (EDO) and Integrated Gas Company (IGC) to oversee the

government’s interests in the oil and gas sectors respectively.

Likewise, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has been established from the consolidation of wealth funds, state-owned enterprises and government stakes in a number of local and international corporations. The goal is to enhance the performance of public investments.

In other initiatives, pension funds are being restructured while a new social protection system is being put in place. Furthermore, a National Register of Assets has been launched to inventory government-owned assets across all economic sectors.

Importantly, the reform measures have also driven a rapid improvement in Oman’s credit ratings by the three main rating agencies S&P Global Ratings, Moody’s and Fitch, the ministry noted. S&P Global recently revised Oman’s Outlook to positive and affirmed its ratings at “BB”, citing financial and economic reforms that have begun to strengthen the resilience of the national economy.

Apollo Hospitals partners with Zakat Committee in Muttrah



MUSCAT: Apollo Hospitals, Sultanate of Oman partnered in healthcare with Zakat Committee in Muttrah as they held activities for children at Lulu in Ruwi. Zakat committee of Muttrah is from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

“We look after the needy people in Muttrah starting from Riyam park until all the way till Qurum. This is a government committee,” explained Abdulzahraa bin Hassan al Lawati, Head of the Collection Committee, Zakat Committee in Muttrah. The Zakat committees for all the wilayats were created under the order of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Schoolchildren paraded through the mall dressed in traditional clothes chanting versus from the holy Quran and Hadheed.

Apollo Hospitals, Sultanate of Oman was the health partner and all the children gathered received a free dental check up and physical examination. This year Apollo has steered the regular corporate activities towards corporate social responsibility with a series of initiatives taking health care into the Society.

“Apollo Hospitals have been spear heading series of wellness programmed in different social clubs, corporate, schools and colleges contributing towards developing a healthy country.

We strongly believe that healthy children develop a healthy country and we are more than happy to cooperate with the initiative of Zakat Committee of Muttrah and especially this event for children,” said Shobha P K, COO Apollo Hospitals, Sultanate of Oman.

Dental surgeon from Apollo, Dr Praveen Gopalan Purushothaman said common

dental problems seen in children are tooth decay, Malocclusions, fluorosis and gum diseases with reasons varying from poor oral hygiene and high sugar and low fiber diet. These are the main causative factors of tooth decay.

The committee had also arranged goodies and food for the participating children and henna for visitors.

“This is a special day for children traditionally observed in the middle of Ramadhan — Qaranqasho. They are also getting free physical and dental screening from Apollo Hospitals, Sultanate of Oman. This event has become possible and made so colourful only because of so many hands that have come together,” said Abdulzahraa.

He said there are children who have lost their mothers or fathers and the message that is being conveyed is, “You are not alone, we are here.”

“We’re telling them not to worry as we are here as mothers and fathers to fulfil their needs. We are also there to help them in education,” he pointed out.

This was also an opportunity for the public to learn on ways to contribute and the impact their contribution can have.

“The public can contribute with how much ever they want to the committee to fulfil the needs of the children. I think we need them more than they need us because of the benefits of the prayers in return.

Because you can feel the happiness that comes from within you. We request everyone to use this once in a year opportunity,” he explained.

The bank account numbers are available, and the members are also visiting the company heads and chairpersons and the request is not to close the doors.

Omani, US firms sign pact to support wastewater management

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 15

Muscat Projects and Environmental Services LLC (MPES), a leading Omani water and wastewater treatment services company which provides service to public sector organisations such as Oman Water & Wastewater Services Co (OWWSC), Royal Oman Police (ROP) and PDO besides many private organisations, has signed a strategic partnership agreement with US-based Gradient International Overseas Pte, a global leader in the field of industrial wastewater treatment.

Through this partnership, the companies aim to leverage the increasing global demand for wastewater treatment services.

Gradient was founded in 2013 by Anurag Bajpai and Prakash Govindan, PhD holders



in mechanical engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, USA with an objective to offer wastewater treatment through sustainable and cost-effective methods.

What began as a start-up is now counted among the world’s leading companies offering the most innovative and cutting edge solutions to

water scarcity challenges posed by industrialisation, population growth and climate change.

Gradient’s global headquarters is in Boston, USA. The company’s global innovation centre is in Singapore and it has offices in 14 countries.

One of the earliest entrepreneurs in Oman, MPES, the brainchild of EM Badhrudeen

founded in 2008, has now grown into a 400-employee business establishment to be the nation’s leading wastewater treatment firms.

With a team of experienced staff, the company provides design, installation, commissioning, maintenance and operation of sewage treatment plants across the country.

“We hope that through cooperation with Gradient, we can expand our field of operation to West Asian countries besides the governorates of Oman,” EM Badhrudeen, MPES Managing Director told the *Observer*.

He added that the future activities of the company will contribute to Oman’s efforts in combating global warming and adopt environmentally friendly initiatives in key sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

Own a Ford Explorer now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The popular Ford Explorer is now available with Ford’s Season of Generosity campaign. Customers can now benefit with service 5 years / 100,000 kms and registration 1 year on a brand new Explorer. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.)

The Ford Explorer boasts impressive style, advanced capability and a list of driver and passenger-focused features and technology. Whatever the journey, the Explorer encourages you to go the distance with a powerful 2.3-litre turbocharged EcoBoost engine that produces 300 horsepower and 420Nm of torque.

The engine is paired to an all-new 10-speed transmission and Intelligent All-Wheel-Drive system. With its quick-shifting 10-speed automatic transmission, Intelligent Four-Wheel Drive plus a Terrain Management System featuring seven selectable drive modes, the Explorer is built to tackle virtually any adventure. Sand mode comes standard on all models.

The Ford Explorer now has improved off-road capability due to an intelligent four-wheel drive system and an available new Terrain Management System that features seven easy-to-engage drive modes.

Standard features include a power liftgate, 8-inch digital touch screen with SYNC 3, and a comprehensive package of driver assist and safety technologies.

In terms of safety, the Explorer offers some of the finest and safest journeys with the inclusion of the standard Ford Co-Pilot360, a suite of driver-assist technologies that includes Pre-Collision Assist with Automatic



Emergency Braking, Pedestrian Detection, Forward Collision Warning and Dynamic Brake Support; Blind Spot Information System with Cross-Traffic Alert; Lane-Keeping System; Rearview camera with built-in lens cleaner and Auto headlamps with auto high-beams.

Other available Ford Co-Pilot360 Assist+ technologies include Evasive Steering Assist, which provides steering support to help avoid a collision; and Post-Impact Braking provides braking after a collision to lessen injury and damage caused by a secondary crash event. Explorer also is available with Ford’s all-new Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control which automatically slows the vehicle down when traffic ahead slows.

It also helps keep the vehicle centred in its lane. The Explorer’s 8-inch touch screen mounted in the centre of the dash with navigation maps fills the entire screen for easy viewing, or split the space with audio information.

The screen provides a quicker, more responsive interaction with the updated SYNC 3 system. Standard SYNC 3’s more intuitive layout gives drivers compatibility with available Apple CarPlay feature.

A wireless charging pad is available that allows customers to recharge compatible mobile devices, and up to four USB ports, including new type-C outlets, charge next-generation mobile devices. Up to five 12-volt outlets and a 230-volt outlet are also available.

For music lovers, Explorer offers an available 980-watt, 12-speaker B&O premium audio system. In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to www.fordoman.com, or www.facebook.com/FordOman or www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

Bank Muscat updates remittance app, mobile and Internet banking with speed transfer to 16 Pakistan-based wallets

MUSCAT: In line with its vision “To serve you better, everyday” and commitment to innovation reflecting the latest technological trends in banking, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched a new feature whereby customers can easily use Speed Transfer services on Bank Muscat Remittance App, Internet or Mobile banking to transfer funds to 16 mobile wallet service providers in Pakistan.

With over 1.4 million active retail banking customers, the bank continues to upgrade its Internet and Mobile banking platforms

regularly based on global trends and customer feedback.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili (pictured), Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat said: “We are delighted to add the Speed Transfer to Mobile Wallets in Pakistan feature to the bank’s Internet and Mobile banking platform as well as BM Remit App, which will help a number of our customers in their fund transfers.

As the leading financial services provider in Oman, we are committed to offering the latest financial services and solutions,



which have been readily adopted by our large customer base. The consistent rise in active customers on our e-channels reflects the rising popularity of Mobile and Internet Banking as well as other

digital banking channels and going ahead we hope to continue adding the latest features and services.”

Today, the omnichannel Internet and Mobile banking platform offers as many as 180 services and features, including the Zakat calculator and charity payments, real-time bill payments for utilities in Oman, local and international fund transfers, speed transfers to a number of countries including Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Similarly, the BM Remit App offers a number of convenient

features like checking current and savings accounts balances, the ability to download or get via email account statements for select periods, mini statement with last 25 transactions, the ability to make Speed Transfers to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, and also perform mobile top ups for Friendi, Rennna, Omantel and Ooredoo numbers.

To enhance customer convenience, the BM Remit app has a number of language options including Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and Urdu.

At the same time, the bank’s contactless debit, credit and

prepaid cards and contactless wearables add to the range of e-payment options available for online shopping and PoS transactions.

As a result of this continuous improvement in services and features, Bank Muscat has been witnessing a remarkable rise in e-channels usage over recent years. Customers may download the latest version of the BM Remit app from Google Play or Huawei App Gallery or download the Bank Muscat Mobile Banking app from Apple Store, Google Play or Huawei App Gallery.

Oman seeks to broaden international collaboration in the field of green hydrogen production



MARYAM AL NOFLI

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The Sultanate of Oman is a country in the Middle East. It is known for its large oil and gas reserves, which have supported its economy for a long time. It is also known for its strategic location, which makes it an important hub for international trade and business, like many countries in the region.

With the country's growing concerns about climate change and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it has been exploring alternative energy sources; this is where green hydrogen comes in.

The Sultanate of Oman will be on the map of major investments made globally in the green hydrogen sector due to the clear process the country developed for handling previous projects under the regulatory framework and harmonising them with the approved regulatory framework.

According to the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) report, by the end of 2022, Oman will be at the forefront of Arab countries, ranking second after Egypt, with around 11 projects to produce green hydrogen and green ammonia.

The global shift towards clean and sustainable energy sources has recently led some countries to sign green hydrogen deals with the Sultanate of Oman.

According to information viewed by the specialised energy platform, the contracts were



signed with developers from roughly 9 nations, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, the Republic of India, Singapore, the State of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

The agreement lays out the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, including the government, private sector companies and international partners in developing the industry.

Moreover, it highlights the growing importance of green hydrogen as an alternative energy source and positions Oman as a key player in the local and global energy markets.

The agreements on binding commercial terms will see \$20 billion over the next seven years, with a production capacity to deliver a total of 15 GW of electricity over an estimated area of 1,500 km² in the governorates, on six land parcels in Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates.

These agreements included commercial terms of the contract

OMAN HAS ABUNDANT SOLAR AND WIND RESOURCES THAT CAN BE USED TO PRODUCE GREEN HYDROGEN. BY DEVELOPING THE GREEN HYDROGEN INDUSTRY, THE COUNTRY CAN HARNESS THESE RESOURCES AND REDUCE ITS RELIANCE ON FOSSIL FUELS, WHICH HAVE LED TO SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND AIR POLLUTION.

for a period of 47 years, including 7 years for the development and construction of projects and 40 years for an operation.

This signing is a result of the tireless efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to carry out the noble directives made during His Majesty's chairmanship of the Council of Ministers meeting on March 3, 2022.

The meeting's main goal was to speed up the creation of regulatory frameworks and policies that will help the green hydrogen sector grow. This first-of-its-kind step towards international cooperation and investment in the green hydrogen sector is good for both the environment and the economy.

Moreover, the increasing interest in green hydrogen

illustrates a global trend towards cleaner energy solutions and highlights the potential for new partnerships and collaborations in this emerging market, paving the way for a more sustainable future.

Also, the agreement encourages Oman to develop renewable energy sources, which is important for making green hydrogen.

Oman has abundant solar and wind resources that can be used to produce green hydrogen. By developing the green hydrogen industry, the country can harness these resources and reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, which have led to significant environmental degradation and air pollution.

Green hydrogen, on the other hand, is a clean energy source

that produces no emissions when used. This could help reduce the country's carbon footprint and mitigate the impact of climate change.

In addition, the investment in green hydrogen production will have a positive impact on the environment.

Oman has long been known for its pristine natural landscapes, and the shift towards renewable energy will help to preserve these important resources for future generations.

Another important aspect of the agreement is its potential to create jobs and boost economic growth in Oman. The country has a large population, and many people rely on traditional industries such as oil and gas for their livelihoods.

The shift towards green hydrogen and green ammonia production will create new jobs and opportunities for the Omani people, reducing the country's dependence on traditional industries.

It is expected that the growth of the green hydrogen industry will create a lot of new jobs,

especially in engineering, construction and operations.

This will provide much-needed employment opportunities for young people in the country and help address the issue of high unemployment rates, particularly in rural areas.

In addition, the development of the green hydrogen industry in Oman will also contribute to the country's economic growth.

The production and export of green hydrogen could potentially become a significant source of revenue for the country, particularly as global demand for clean energy sources continues to grow.

The development of a new industry could also attract foreign investment, which would further boost the country's economy.

But there are also problems that need to be solved for the green hydrogen industry in Oman to grow.

One of the biggest problems is that it costs a lot more to make green hydrogen than it does to make fossil fuels. This is partly due to the high cost of renewable energy sources such as solar power.

But the cost of making green hydrogen is expected to go down as technology gets better and economies of scale are reached.

Another problem is that there isn't enough infrastructure to make, move and store green hydrogen.

This needs a lot of money to be spent on infrastructure, which can slow down the growth of the industry.

The agreement, on the other hand, lays out a plan for building this kind of infrastructure, and international partners could also help with knowledge and money in this area.

In conclusion, the Sultanate of Oman's signing of legally binding commercial terms of agreement for projects that use green hydrogen is a big step towards the country's goal of diversifying its energy sources.

Oman leads the way: The rise of renewable energy in the GCC and beyond



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As the Middle East and North Africa region continues to grapple with the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic fallout, Oman's economy is showing signs of resilience and adaptability.

The country's innovative start-ups and renewable energy sector are positioning it for long-term growth and sustainability, even in the face of challenging global conditions.

One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic has been on the region's economies. Oman has not been immune to this, with the country experiencing a contraction in GDP in 2020.

However, the government's swift and decisive action to contain the virus and support businesses has helped to mitigate

some of the worst effects. In addition, Oman has taken steps to diversify its economy, with a focus on innovation and renewable energy.

In recent years, Oman has emerged as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship in the MENA region. The country's start-up ecosystem has seen a surge in activity, with new companies emerging in sectors ranging from fintech to healthcare.

Many of these start-ups have been able to adapt to the pandemic by shifting their operations online, allowing them to continue to grow and thrive even in challenging times. One particularly promising area of growth for Oman's economy is renewable energy. With its abundant sunshine and wind, the country has significant potential

for solar and wind power generation. The government has set ambitious targets for renewable energy production, with a goal of generating 10 per cent of the country's electricity from renewables by 2025.

This has attracted significant investment from both domestic and international companies, and Oman is now home to several large-scale renewable energy projects. Oman is not alone in its focus on renewable energy.

Across the GCC, countries are investing in clean energy as a means of reducing their dependence on fossil fuels and diversifying their economies.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the total installed capacity of renewable energy in the GCC increased by 56 per cent

between 2014 and 2019.

As of 2019, the UAE had the highest installed capacity of renewable energy in the region, with 2.3 gigawatts (GW) of solar and 1.2 GW of wind power.

Saudi Arabia is also investing heavily in renewable energy, with a goal of generating 50 per cent of its electricity from renewables by 2030.

While the GCC countries have made significant strides in developing their renewable energy sectors, there are still countries in the Middle East that have yet to fully embrace clean energy.

For example, Iran, Iraq and Kuwait still rely heavily on fossil fuels for their energy needs. However, this is beginning to change as these countries recognise the need to reduce their carbon footprint and diversify

their economies.

In the coming years, it is likely that we will see more countries in the Middle East and North Africa region following in Oman's footsteps and investing in renewable energy as a means of promoting sustainable growth and development.

The growth of Oman's renewable energy sector has significant benefits for the country's economy, as well as the environment.

Not only does it reduce Oman's dependence on fossil fuels, but it also creates jobs and economic opportunities for the country's citizens. Additionally, renewable energy can help to address some of the challenges facing Oman's economy, such as the need to diversify away from oil and gas production.

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Save this three-day itinerary for your visit to Oman during Eid holiday

In the last two years, the number of tourists has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. But now that the country has been more open and the pandemic has been kept at bay, it is expected that incoming foreign travel will also spike. Here's a three-day itinerary that will allow you to experience some of the best in Oman.... **P20**



QUR'AN VERSE OF THE DAY

[Yes [on the contrary], whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.]

Surah al Baqarah, 112

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Amr ibn Shu'ayb reported from his grandfather that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Anyone who does not show mercy to our children nor acknowledge the right of our old people is not one of us."

Sahih (Al-Albani)

HEALTH TIPS

Some young children begin fasting at an early age. To ease them into fasting habits, some families encourage their children to just fast for a certain portion of the day. For adolescents and children, it is important that they consume plenty of fluids and eat healthy, nutritious foods during predawn and evening meals and refrain from overexerting themselves during the day.



STORIES FROM THE QURAN

Prophet Ibrahim and the Fire

ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY SAYS: And We had certainly given Abraham his sound judgement before, and We were of him well-Knowing. When he said to his father and his people, "What are these statues to which you are devoted?" (53) They said, "We found our fathers worshippers of them." (54) He said, "You were certainly, you and your fathers, in manifest error." (55) They said, "Have you come to us with truth, or are you of those who jest?" (56) He said, "[No], rather, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth who created them, and I, to that, am of those who testify. (57) And [I swear] by Allāh, I will surely plan against your idols after you have turned and gone away. (58) So he made them into fragments,

except a large one among them, that they might return to it [and question]. (59) They said, "Who has done this to our gods? Indeed, he is of the wrongdoers. (60) They said, "We heard a young man mention them who is called Abraham. (61) They said, "Then bring him before the eyes of the people that they may testify. (62) They said, "Have you done this to our gods, O Abraham? (63) He said, "Rather, this - the largest of them - did it, so ask them, if they should [be able to] speak. (64) So they returned to [blaming] themselves and said [to each other], "Indeed, you are the wrongdoers." (65) Then they reversed themselves.[893] [saying], "You have already known that these do not speak! (66) He said, "Then do you worship instead

of Allāh that which does not benefit you at all or harm you? (67) Uff! [894] to you and to what you worship instead of Allāh. Then will you not use reason? (68) They said, "Burn him and support your gods - if you are to act. (69) We [i.e., Allāh] said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham. (70) And they intended for him a plan [i.e., harm], but We made them the greatest losers. (71)) 51-71 Surah Al-Anbiya

ALMIGHTY ALLAH RECOUNTED: And recite to them the story of Abraham. When he said to his father and his people: "What do you worship?" They said: "We worship idols, and to them we are ever devoted." He said: "Do they hear you, when you call [on them]? Or do they benefit you or do they harm [you]?" They said: "Nay, but we found our fathers doing so."

He said: "Do you observe that which you been worshipping, - You and your ancient fathers? - Verily! They are enemies to me, save the Lord of the Alamin [mankind, jinn, and all that exists]; Who has created me, and it is He Who guides me; and it is He Who feeds me and gives me to drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me; and Who

will cause me to die and then will bring me to life [again]; and Who, I hope will forgive me my faults on the Day of Recompense, [the Day of Resurrection!]" Quran Ayah 26:69-82

In another surah The Almighty revealed: And (remember) Abraham when he said to his people: "Worship Allah (Alone), and fear Him, that is better for you if you did but know. You worship besides Allah only idols, and you only invent falsehood. Verily, those whom you worship besides Allah have no power to give you provision, so seek your provision from Allah (Alone), and worship Him (Alone), and be grateful to Him. To Him (Alone) you will be brought back. And if you deny, then nations before you have denied (their Messengers). And the duty of the Messenger is only to convey (the Message) plainly."

His father's harsh treatment did not stop Abraham from delivering the message of truth. Angry and sad to see people prostrate before idols, he was determined to stamp out these practices and went to the town to debate with the people, knowing full well that he might suffer harm.

Like a wise doctor searching for the cause

of a sickness so as to prescribe the proper cure, or like a judge who questions the accused sharply so that he might detect the truth, Abraham asked them: "Do the idols see you when you prostrate before them? Do they benefit you in any way?" They quickly tried to defend their beliefs. They argued that they knew their idols were lifeless but that their forefathers had worshipped them; to them this was proof enough for their belief.

Abraham explained that their forefathers had been wrong. This angered them and they retorted: "Are you condemning our gods and our forefathers? Or are you just joking?"

Abraham showed no fear as he replied: "I am serious. I come to you with a true religion. I have been sent with guidance from our Lord Who alone is worthy of worship, Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and Who regulates all affairs of life, unlike the dumb idols which are just stone and wood."

To convince them that the idols could not harm him, he challenged: "I have already condemned them; if they had any power they would have harmed me by now!"



Nasa unveils ‘Mars’ habitat for year-long experiments on Earth

FOUR SMALL ROOMS, a gym and a lot of red sand — Nasa unveiled on Tuesday its new Mars-simulation habitat, in which volunteers will live for a year at a time to test what life will be like on future missions to Earth's neighbour.

The facility, created for three planned experiments called the Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog (CHAPEA), is located at the US space agency's massive research base in Houston, Texas.

Four volunteers will begin the first trial this summer, during which Nasa plans to monitor their physical and mental health to better understand humans' fortitude for such a long isolation.

With that data, Nasa will better understand astronauts' "resource use" on Mars, said Grace Douglas, lead researcher on the CHAPEA experiments.

"We can really start to understand how we're supporting them with what we're providing them, and that's going to be really important information to making those critical resource decisions," she said on a press tour of the habitat.

Such a distant mission comes with "very strict mass limitations," she added.

The volunteers will live inside a 1,700 square-foot (160 square-metre) home, dubbed "Mars Dune Alpha," which includes two bathrooms, a vertical farm to grow salad, a room dedicated to medical care, an area for relaxing and several workstations.

An airlock leads to an "outdoor" reconstruction of the Martian environment — though still located inside the hangar.

Several pieces of equipment astronauts would likely use are scattered around the red sand-covered floor, including a weather station, a brick-making machine and a small greenhouse.

There is also a treadmill on which the make-believe astronauts will walk suspended from straps to simulate the red planet's lesser gravity.

"We really can't have them just walking around in circles for six hours," joked Suzanne Bell, head of Nasa's Behavioural Health and Performance Laboratory.

Four volunteers will use the treadmill to simulate long trips outside to collect samples, gathering data or building infrastructure, she said.

The members of the first experiment team have yet to be named, but the agency stated that selection "will follow standard Nasa criteria for astronaut candidate applicants," with a heavy emphasis on



backgrounds in science, technology, engineering and math.

Researchers will regularly test the crew's response to stressful situations, such as restricting water availability or equipment failures.

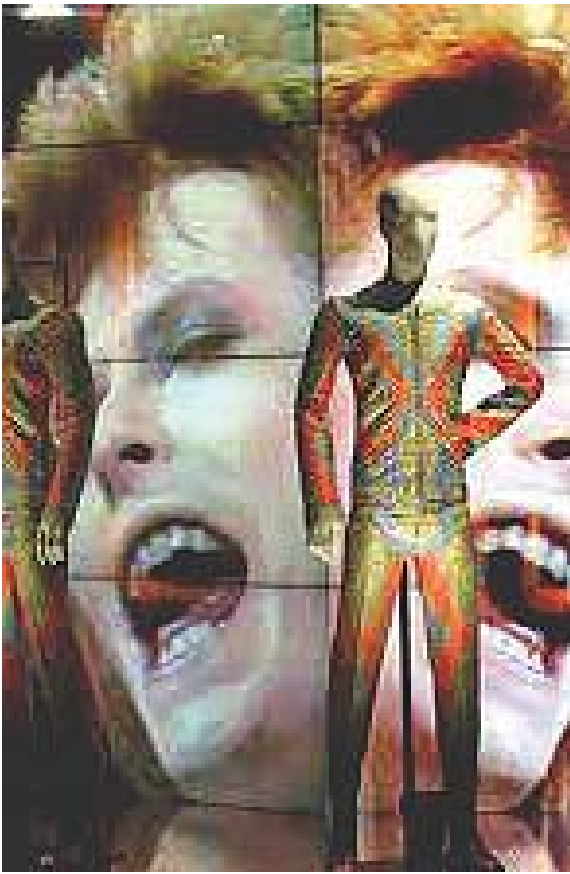
The habitat has another special feature: it was 3D-printed.

"That is one of the technologies that Nasa is looking at as a potential to build habitat on other planetary or lunar surfaces," Douglas said.

Nasa is in the early stages of preparation for a mission to Mars, though most of the agency's focus is on upcoming Artemis missions, which aim to return humans to the Moon for the first time in half a century. — AFP

MUSIC

Extensive archive of David Bowie's work to be made public in 2025



AN EXTENSIVE ARCHIVE of David Bowie's life, work and legacy will go on display to the public for the first time in 2025, it has been announced.

Acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum (V and A), the exhibition will include more than 80,000 items that span six decades of the cultural icon's career.

They will be made available to the public through the creation of The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performing Arts, which will open in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

It will allow fans and researchers alike to get up close and gain new insights into Bowie's creative process like never before, the V and A said.

The collection will feature handwritten lyrics, letters, sheet music, original costumes, fashion, photography, film, music videos, set designs, album artwork and awards.

It will also include instruments owned by the world-famous musician, as well as writings and unrealised projects never before seen in public.

Highlights include stage costumes such as Bowie's breakthrough Ziggy Stardust ensembles, designed by Freddie Burretti in 1972, Kansai Yamamoto's creations for the Aladdin Sane tour in 1973, and the UnionJack coat designed by Bowie and Alexander McQueen for the 1997 Earthling album cover.

The archive also includes over 70,000 photographs, prints, negatives, slides and contact sheets taken by some of the 20th century's leading photographers



from Terry O'Neill to Brian Duffy and Helmut Newton.

Its acquisition by the V and A and the creation of the centre was made possible thanks to the David Bowie Estate and £10 million (\$12.1million) donation from the Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group.

Dr Tristram Hunt, director of the V and A, said: "David Bowie was one of the greatest musicians and performers of all time.

"The V and A is thrilled to become custodians of his incredible archive, and to be able to open it up for the public.

"Bowie's radical innovations across music, theatre, film, fashion, and style — from Berlin to Tokyo to London — continue to influence design and visual culture and inspire creatives from Janelle Monáe to Lady Gaga to Tilda Swinton and Raf Simons.

"Our new collections centre, V&A East Storehouse, is the ideal place to put Bowie's work in dialogue with the V and A's collection spanning 5,000 years of art, design, and performance.

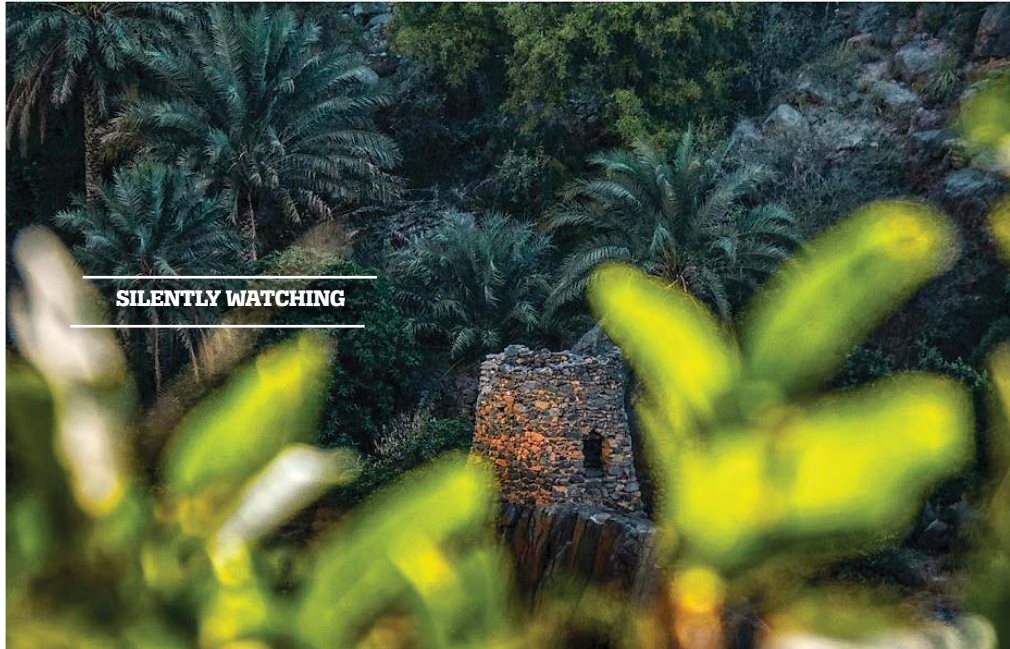
"My deepest thanks go to the David Bowie Estate, Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group for helping make this a reality and for providing a new source book for the Bowies of tomorrow."

A spokesperson from the David Bowie Estate, added: "With David's life's work becoming part of the UK's national collections, he takes his rightful place amongst many other cultural icons and artistic geniuses.

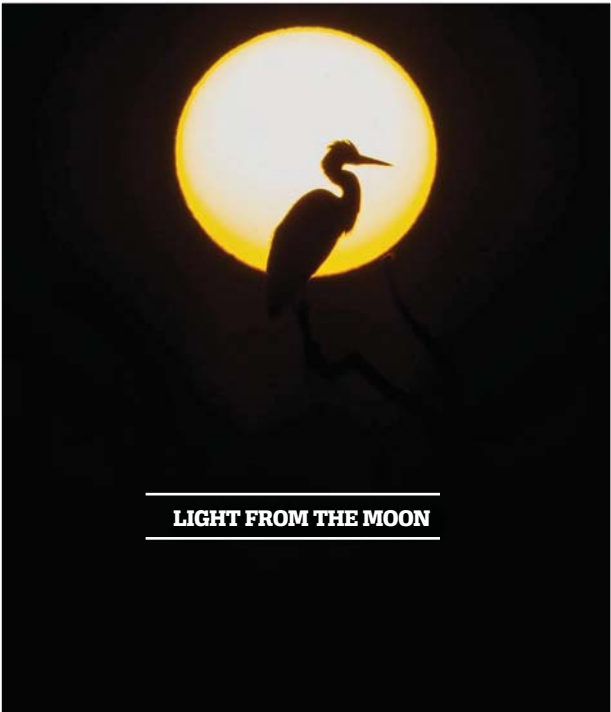
"The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performance — and the behind the scenes access that V and A East Storehouse offers — will mean David's work can be shared with the public in ways that haven't been possible before.

"We're so pleased to be working closely with the V and A to continue to commemorate David's enduring cultural influence." — PA Media/dpa

theimagegrapher
Misfat Al-Abriyeen



drsreejith
Somewhere on Earth



khalidalmawali_
ادم



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



AROUND THE WORLD

CULTURE

World's oldest machine printed book on show in Paris



THE OLDEST KNOWN work printed on a mechanical press — a Korean book that predates the first European example by several decades — went on display in Paris for the first time in 50 years on Wednesday.

The "Jikji", a collection of Buddhist teachings, was printed in 1377 — some 78 years before Johannes Gutenberg produced his famous Bible using his printing press in Germany.

The Korean treasure is being shown as part of a new exhibition at the National Library of France (BnF), running until July.

Since no examples of the Korean machinery have survived and the technique did not become widely used at the time, it did not have the revolutionary impact of the Gutenberg press — and the exhibition mostly focuses on European history.

But it marks the first time the "Jikji" has been shown publicly since 1973, according to reports in the Korean press — reigniting hopes of its return.

"With this exhibition as an occasion, if we collaborate and build a good relationship based on trust, I think we could have a valuable opportunity to see Jikji in person in Korea in the future," said Kim Jung-hee, chair of the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation.

The BnF says Gutenberg was probably not aware of the Korean invention, and was combining various forms of reproduction using wood and copper engravings that had been in use in Europe since around 1400, though they themselves were influenced by techniques imported from East Asia.



The "Jikji" was brought to France by Victor Collin de Plancy, who became the first French diplomat to Korea in 1887.

A collector of ancient texts, he bought it from an unknown source and "was emotionally moved to discover that the work dated back to the Xuanguang era (1371-1378)," says the BnF.

It was shown at the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1900 and Collin de Plancy sold it at auction in 1911 for 180 francs, equivalent to more than 60,000 euros today, according to France's national statistics bureau.

It was bequeathed to the national library in 1950, and rediscovered a decade later by a Korean historian who was cataloguing her country's treasures in Paris.

She helped repatriate other items to South Korea, such as royal manuscripts from the Joseon dynasty which had been taken during a French military campaign in 1866.

The exhibition at the BnF also includes a copy of the famous 1455 typographic press designed by Gutenberg and loaned by the museum dedicated to him in Mainz, Germany, as well as two Bibles printed on it, and the oldest known Western woodcut, the Bois Protat, dated to around 1400. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

Japanese fans snap up first Murakami novel in six years



DOZENS OF EXCITED Haruki Murakami fans queued outside a bookstore in Tokyo on Thursday for the midnight release of the world-renowned author's first novel in six years.

Copies of "The City and Its Uncertain Walls", so far only available in Japanese, were piled up on tables at the entrance to Kinokuniya store in central Shinjuku district.

Shunsuke Mitsumoto was among the first to get his hands on the latest title by Murakami, who has a cult following for his surreal works peppered with references to pop culture.

"I want to read it as soon as I get home. As much as I want to savour each sentence, I will probably read the whole thing in one go," the 39-year-old said.

"I'm excited to think that this book will take us to a new world again," added Mitsumoto, a member of a Murakami reading group.

Murakami's previous novel, "Killing Commendatore", was published in February 2017.

The bestselling author is known for his intricate tales of the absurdity and loneliness of modern life, which have been translated into about 50 languages.

In a message released by publisher Shinchosha ahead of the new book's release, Murakami said he had produced the novel in self-isolation during the coronavirus pandemic.

The 74-year-old described his work process in typically enigmatic style, saying it had been "just like a 'dream reader'



reads an 'old dream' at a library".

Perennially tipped for a Nobel prize, Murakami — whose most famous novels include "Norwegian Wood" and "Kafka on the Shore" — is a reclusive figure.

At the early-hours event on Thursday, 28-year-old fan Chikako Muramatsu said the author was "loved by a wide range of people".

"Many fans seem to be in my

parents' generation, but there are some big Haruki fans in my generation too," she said.

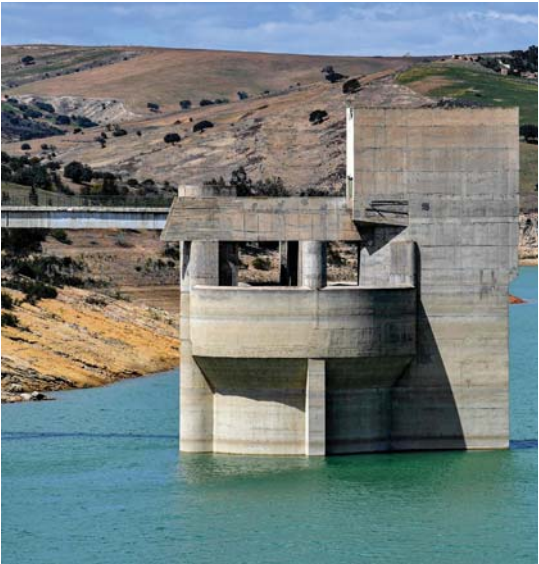
Yuji Katayama, 54, said he was a long-time fan.

"I feel like I am growing older with the characters in his books. I feel empathy for them," he said.

"I consider his novels as my textbooks. By reading his books, I am exposed to new things, like his knowledge of foreign novels." — AFP

CONSERVATION

Tunisia drought threatens 'catastrophic' grain harvest



A SEVERE DROUGHT in North Africa has left Tunisian farmers bracing for a catastrophically poor harvest, imperilling food security in the cash-strapped country.

At a time when the global cereals market has been disrupted by the Ukraine war, Tunisia's domestic grain production has also withered under a lack of rainfall that has killed off crops.

Even before the roasting summer months, the soil is dry and dusty in the small Mediterranean country, whose water resources are steadily depleting as climate change intensifies.

"We've never seen a drought this bad," said wheat farmer Tahar Chaouachi, walking despondently through his field, 55 kilometres (35 miles) inland from the capital Tunis.

"It's been dry for the last four years but we expected some rain this season. Instead, it's become worse."

With some Tunisian water reservoirs almost completely dry, authorities imposed emergency measures last month, rationing household supplies and banning water use for washing cars — as well as for irrigating fields.

"Production is at zero," said Chaouachi, whose farmland lies in Beja province, a key grain production area since the days of the Roman Empire.

"The situation is unsustainable. We're losing everything we spend on seeds, fertiliser, pesticides and wages," he said. "There's no telling where things are heading."

The shortages come at a critical time for Tunisia, a net importer of wheat that has been hit hard by price hikes since Russia's attack of Ukraine, both huge cereals exporters.

A painful cost-of-living crisis is compounding woes as the government is in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout package.

SEEDS JUST DIED

Tunisia — a country of 12 million where almost every meal involves bread, couscous or other cereals-based food — needs three million tonnes of wheat and barley a year.

Normally around two-thirds of this comes from overseas, but with the Ukraine war showing no signs of abating, that option looks expensive or even impossible.

The lack of rain has left reservoirs at historic lows of less than a third of capacity nationwide.

The biggest, located at Sidi Salem, a short drive from Chaouachi's farm, is filled to just 16 per cent of capacity.

The area has seen less than 10 centimetres (four inches) of rain since the autumn, pushing farmers either to plough withered crops back into the soil or harvest the stalks for animal feed.

Chaouachi said that in December, "we sowed wheat here, but the seeds have just died because it's too dry".

Of the 600 hectares (1,482 acres) he planted, he was able to harvest from just 70.

Last year Chaouachi managed to grow 1,000 tonnes of cereals, but this year he believes he won't break even, having spent 600,000 dinars (\$198,000) on the season's cereal crop.

"This year's harvest will be catastrophic," warned Anis Kharbeche, spokesman for the farming and fishing union UTAP, predicting a fall in output of two-thirds from last year.

"We'll only be able to harvest seeds for the next season, and the country will have to import all of its needs for domestic consumption" of two types of wheat and barley, Kharbeche said. — AFP

ramadhan

Local Scene

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Save this three-day itinerary for your visit to Oman during the Eid holiday

ACCORDING TO DATA FROM the National Center for Statistics and Information, more than 3 million tourists visited Oman in 2019, with a significant number arriving during the Eid holiday season.

In the last two years, the number of tourists has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. But now that the country has been more open and the pandemic has been kept at bay, it is expected that incoming foreign travel will also spike. As seen in previous seasons, popular tourist destinations in Oman, such as Muscat, Salalah, and Nizwa, are likely to be crowded during the Eid holiday season.

If you're headed for the wadis, the popular ones will most likely also be frequented by families and big groups, so prepare and go early to get a good spot.

Here's a three-day itinerary that will allow you to experience some of the best of Oman.

DAY 1: EXPLORE THE CAPITAL

Start your day in Muscat, Oman's capital city. While Muscat is a popular destination, there are still plenty of off-the-beaten-path places to explore. Begin with a visit to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, a stunning example of Islamic architecture that can accommodate up to 20,000 worshippers. Next, head to the Muttrah Souq, a traditional Arab market where you can haggle for spices, textiles, and other souvenirs.

After the market, take a walk along the Sea Road, a seaside promenade that offers beautiful views of the city and the Gulf of Oman. For lunch, head to Bait Al Luban, a restaurant that serves traditional Omani cuisine such as machboos (spiced rice with meat or fish) and shuwa (slow-cooked lamb).

In the afternoon, venture out of the city to visit the Bimmah Sinkhole, a natural wonder located about an hour's drive from Muscat. This sinkhole, which is 20 metres deep and filled with clear turquoise water, is a popular swimming spot for locals but is still relatively unknown to tourists.

DAY 2: EXPLORE HISTORIC PLACES AROUND NIZWA

On your second day in Oman, head to the city of Nizwa, located about two hours' drive from Muscat. Nizwa is known for its historic fort, which dates back to the 17th century and offers stunning views of the surrounding mountains.

After exploring the fort, head to the Nizwa Souq, a bustling market that sells everything from dates and spices to silver jewellery and pottery. Don't miss the chance to see the goat market, held every Friday morning, where locals come to buy and sell livestock.

For lunch, stop at Al Areesha Restaurant, which serves traditional Omani dishes such as shuwa and madhbi (grilled meat).

In the afternoon, head to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, a mountain range located about an hour's drive from Nizwa. Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is known for its stunning scenery, including terraced farms and orchards that produce pomegranates, apricots, and peaches. Take a leisurely walk through the mountains before heading back to Muscat.

You might want to make a quick stop over at Birkat al Mouz and grab coffee from a coffee shop on top of a renovated ancient house with a good view of the whole traditional neighbourhood.

DAY 3: ENJOY THE BEAUTY OF WADIS

Start your day early and head to Wadi Shab, which is located about 2 hours from Muscat. Once

you arrive, you can park your car and take a small boat to cross to the other side. Hike through the rugged terrain and stunning landscapes of Wadi Shab, and take a dip in the clear, cool pools. Be sure to bring comfortable shoes, sunscreen, and plenty of water.

After exploring Wadi Shab, you can also visit the nearby Wadi Mibam, which is located about 45 minutes away. This wadi is known for its crystal-clear pools, lush greenery, and beautiful gardens. Take a swim in the pools, relax on the beach, and enjoy a picnic lunch in the stunning natural surroundings.

Please be advised that each of these wadis requires hiking, and one wadi in a day would already be very exhausting for you. If you're in an adventurous mood and hope to cover two amazing spots at once, then this is definitely doable.

Also consider other wadis. Since it's definitely peak season for tourists and visitors, you can head out to Wadi Hawir, which is not frequented by visitors because of the challenging and longer hike, but the beauty of this place makes it worth it.

ALTERNATIVE OPTION

Dhofar is always neglected as an alternative destination during Eid holidays, but the place is a giant playground for those who love nature, rugged terrain, beaches, and historic cities. When in Salalah, start your day by visiting the Al Baleed Archaeological Site, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site that showcases the rich history of the region. Then head to the nearby Al Mughsail Beach, where you can relax on the white sand beaches and take a dip in the crystal-clear waters. In the evening, visit the Frankincense Land Museum, which showcases the history and importance of frankincense in Oman's culture and economy. It is important to collect the timing hours for these different locations, as some of them may change their hours due to the holiday season.

While Oman is a popular destination for tourists during the Eid holiday season, there are still plenty of places to visit that are off the beaten path. By exploring some of the lesser-known destinations in the country, you can experience the beauty and culture of Oman without being overwhelmed by crowds of other tourists.

